

Athabasca University  Master of Arts - Integrated Studies

EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF CERTIFICATION
ON MANITOBA MUNICIPAL ADMINISTRATORS

By

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Abstract

This qualitative study describes eight adult learners' experiences as a result of their participation in a sector-specific, continuing education certificate program. Data was collected through structured interviews from graduates of the Certificate Program in Manitoba Municipal Administration (MMA) from the years 2001 to 2005 who were working as either a municipal Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) or Assistant CAO at the time of their interview. The research participants reported the professional and personal impact received as a direct result of their participation in, and graduation from, the certificate program.

The results of the study indicate that students in the MMA certificate program, which is comprised of courses offered by distance delivery, may benefit from having access to opportunities to network with other students and a formal, group orientation to the program. The research participants report having entered the certificate program to either obtain, or advance, a career within the municipal administration field and all participants subsequently achieved their stated goal. Completing the certificate program resulted in several personal and professional benefits to the research participants including learning job specific skills that could be applied at their workplace, improved employability with the municipal administration field, the potential to earn a higher salary, and personal satisfaction.

This report is presented in three parts: review of the relevant literature; description of the research methods used to collect the data; and the analysis of the data and a discussion of the results including recommendations for future research and for possible revisions to the delivery of the certificate program.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Acknowledgements	2
Introduction	4
Literature Review	
Introduction	9
The Development of Continuing Education Practices	11
Partnering with the Manitoba Municipal Administrators' Association	18
Learning for Work	22
Self Directed Learning Through Independent Study	26
Conclusion	33
Research Methods and Process	35
Data Analysis and Discussion of Results	
Introduction	43
Participants' Profile	45
Motivation for Entering the Certificate Program	50
Benefits of Certification	53
Impact of Self-Directed Learning	60
Participants' Recommendations for the Program and Advice for Future Students	66
Conclusions and Recommendations	76
References	80
Appendices	84

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the impact of participation in the Certificate Program in Manitoba Municipal Administration (MMA) on graduates from the years 2001 to 2005. The research investigates the personal and professional impact, including an examination of the learning experiences and career outcomes, resulting from the subjects' participation in this distance education, sector-specific certificate program. This paper reports the results of the examination of the impact of certification on a small number of graduates of the MMA certificate program.

Continuing Education, a unit of the Extended Education Division, University of Manitoba offers a certificate program in Manitoba Municipal Administration (MMA). The program is designed for individuals working in, or wishing to enter, the field of municipal administration within Manitoba's rural municipalities and the coursework focuses on the skills needed to prepare individuals for the positions of Chief Administrative Office (CAO), Assistant CAO and Chief Financial Officer (CFO) (University of Manitoba, 2005). This research project examines the impact of certification on eight municipal administrators who were employed within a Manitoba municipality as either a CAO or Assistant CAO at the time of their interview and who graduated from the certificate program between the years 2001 to 2005.

The Municipal Act specifies the duties and responsibilities of a municipal administrator in Manitoba which include: overseeing all administrative functions of the municipality; developing policies and program; supervising municipal employees; recording, or ensuring the recording of, the minutes of all council meetings; ensuring that revenues are collected; and financial management of the municipality (Government of Manitoba, 2010, section 127(1) & 127(2)). There are 201 municipalities in Manitoba which vary in population with the largest municipality

home to 6,571 residents, a half-dozen municipalities having fewer than 400 residents, and 96 municipalities with populations of less than 1,000 residents (Manitoba Local Government, Municipal Finance and Advisory Services (n.d.)). Municipal administrators are required to perform the duties established by *The Municipal Act* but their work is impacted by the size of their municipality as that influences the scope of their duties including, for example, the number of municipal employees who require supervision by the municipal administrator.

The Municipal Act requires that the elected council of every rural municipality, “must establish by by-law the position of chief administrative officer and must appoint a person to the position” (Government of Manitoba, 2010, section 125(1)). When seeking to hire a Chief Administrative Officer, municipalities will often include within an advertisement (Appendix A) the requirement that candidates must be, “graduates of, enrolled in or willing to enroll in, the certificate program for Manitoba Municipal Administration” (Winnipeg Free Press, 2010, I2).

The Department of Local Government (formerly the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs) Government of Manitoba, and the Manitoba Municipal Administrators’ Association (MMAA) are co-sponsors of the MMA certificate program. Continuing Education works particularly closely with the MMAA to coordinate some of the program’s administrative requirements such as the promotion of the certificate program to MMAA members, the recruitment of qualified and experienced municipal administrators to fill instructor positions, and the organization of the annual graduation ceremonies.

Continuing Education regularly reviews certificate programs and adjusts program requirements to meet the needs of students and to match the coursework to the skills and knowledge identified by employers as necessary for a municipal administrator. This research project examines the impact of certification on graduates from the certificate program between

the years 2001 to 2005 during which time the certificate program requirements were consistent. During that time, students were required to complete five courses: Using Accounting for Municipal Managers; Municipal Accounting; Municipal Law; Municipal Administration; Essentials of Management and attend two, one-day skill building seminars (University of Manitoba, 2005). As the MMA certificate program serves the province's current and future rural municipal administrators, the coursework is offered exclusively by distance learning in order to accommodate students who live in Manitoba's rural communities.

The MMAA is a non-profit association formed in 1931 and its purpose is "to promote Municipal Administration as a career, increase the professional growth of [our] members, and to be the voice on issues affecting Municipal Administration." (MMAA, 2009). The Association identified three key goals for 2009-2010:

- Leadership development: create a leadership training and development program for membership;
- Succession planning: recommend a succession planning format; and
- Visibility and impact: elevate the prestige and public perception of the profession by continuing the marketing initiative. (MMAA, 2009)

The MMA certificate program is designed to provide the professional skill development required by municipal administrators, and as leadership development and succession planning have been identified as key components of the MMAA strategy, the results of this research project may be useful to the MMAA as the changes recommended by the participants may help the Association to better meet its goals.

This project is presented in three parts as follows:

- 1) Literature review: encompassing the development of continuing education practices in Canada; an examination of the partnership between the MMAA and Continuing Education, University of Manitoba to deliver the certificate program in Manitoba Municipal Administration; the processes and factors associated with learning for employment; and self-directed learning.
- 2) Research methods: an overview of the theories and processes used to collect, collate, analyse and discuss the data, and a report of the ethical considerations.
- 3) Data analysis and discussion of results: including the participants' profile; their motivation for entering the certificate program; the benefits they received as a result of achieving certification; the participants' comments relating to self-directed learning; the participants' recommendations for the program and the advice they would give to future students; a brief summary of the findings and specific recommendations to Continuing Education and the MMAA; and suggestions for further research.

The results of the research project contribute to greater understanding of the experiences of adult learners involved in a distance education certificate program. Percival notes that university continuing education, as a field of practice, is largely undocumented (2001, p. 133) and the results of this project provide a record of a small group of students' experiences within a specific university continuing education certificate program. The results may be useful to the partners who collaborate to offer the certificate program, the Manitoba Municipal Administrators' Association (MMAA) and Continuing Education, University of Manitoba, as the results of the data analysis identify several recommendations for changes that could be made to enhance the delivery of the certificate program and improve the learning experiences of future

students. The results also provide the MMAA and Continuing Education, University of Manitoba with an important, historical snapshot of some students' experiences from the late 1990's to mid 2000's.

Literature Review

Introduction

The literature review was completed prior to the data collection phase of this project and resulted in the selection of the concepts and theories considered during the data analysis phase of the research. The review examines the writings of experts in the field of adult continuing education and focuses on the current practices used to develop and deliver university adult continuing education programs, the relationships between university continuing education (CE) units and professional associations or employers, credentialism, and self-directed learning. It is important to examine the historical development of continuing education to understand how the current practices and interdependency of the relationships between CE units and employers or professional associations impact students who enter certificate programs in order to earn a credential. The partnership between the Continuing Education, University of Manitoba and the Manitoba Municipal Administrators' Association (MMAA) to deliver the Certificate Program in Manitoba Municipal Administration (MMA) provides an excellent example of an interdependent program development and delivery model.

There is a close relationship between employers, or professional associations acting upon behalf of employers, and CE units that result in external organizations influencing the development and delivery of continuing education programs (Selman, M, 2005, Sork & Newman, 2004). There is concern that this partnership between CE units and industry has resulted in the primary focus of CE units evolving into one of developing employers' human capital as this is a digression from its historical community related activities (Bouchard, 1998, Einsiedel, 1998, Selman, M., 2005). However there is also evidence that a close relationship with business and employers is required for CE units to maintain their financial viability as

universities have withdrawn base funding to CE units and require them to be either self-supporting or, in some cases, generate surplus revenue for the institution (Einsiedel, 1998). It is therefore critical for CE units to maintain their relationships with employers to ensure that continuing education retains its place as a provider of post-secondary certification as adult learners increasingly require certification to advance their careers (Bouchard, 1998, Walters, 2004).

Continuing education certificate programs that are offered in partnership with an association, such as the MMA certificate program, are tri-party relationships involving the CE unit, the professional association, and the students seeking certification. Students seeking a credential are often either voluntarily undertaking studies in order to gain employment or advance their career (Statistics Canada, 2007) or may be required to participate by their employer as a condition of employment (Walters, 2004). In either of these cases, students are learning for work-related reasons and it is important to investigate if their participation in a certificate program achieves the desired professional impact.

As the MMA certificate program engages students in some self-directed learning through required independent study courses, the independent nature of the learning process itself may result in personal development which can be recorded as an outcome of participation. While students may not intend to gain personal development through participation in a continuing education certification program, investigating if personal development occurred, and if so, the effect the development has had on the learner, will contribute to a better understanding of the impact of continuing education participation on adult learners.

Examining students' learning experiences through their reflection on their studies may provide insight regarding the services or supports that students may need in order to be

successful in their studies or indicate changes that could be made to current course delivery practices. Potter notes that research into assessing students' needs for support services in distance learning programs is sparse, particularly studies that examine the delivery of services from the learner's point of view (1998, p. 62). Gathering the opinions of graduates of the MMA program regarding the challenges they faced during their participation in the program will provide insights that could lead to the development of support services to assist students to address and resolve these challenges.

The development of continuing education practices

Continuing education (CE) units provide courses and certificate programs designed for adult learners. Mark Selman (2005) observes that Canadian university continuing education units have progressed through three very specific phases of organizational development. The first phase was a social movement orientation illustrated by education programs that focused on social purpose and a distinct modernist approach to program development. This phase occurred between the 1920's to the early 1960's and included programs designed to bring adult education into the community. Selman notes that this period in Canada is marked by socially oriented education programs such as the well known Antigonish Movement in which educators and priests taught Atlantic fishermen both about basic business practices and economics, in order for the fishermen to be able to improve their prosperity, while also offering spiritual guidance and the Extension Movement which brought access to information on agriculture practices to prairie farmers (Selman, M., 2005).

Selman describes the next phase of continuing education as occurring between the 1960's and 1980's and associated with education programs being designed in order to meet the credentialing requirements of the increasing number of professional associations. This period

was a time of significant post-secondary institution support of CE units as exemplified by universities providing budget funds for CE units to expand programs and the entrenchment of CE units as permanent components of universities (Selman, M., 2005).

The current phase, which began in the 1980's and continues today, is exemplified by core values of cost-recovery programs; the elimination of fully subsidized programs; a renewed focus on vocationally oriented programs; and an increased focus on credentialism, partnerships, and other means to enhance value or capture markets (Selman, M., 2005). Einsiedel (1998) notes that, during this third phase, the expectation is that CE units will perform as revenue generating components of their universities. The CE unit is required to operate like a small business with a product of education being sold to consumers and must ensure that the business is profitable so that the revenue generated can be shared with the university that houses the unit. While the concept of cost-recovery is palatable to many adult educators, there is concern that the "university's organizational culture has changed. Pragmatism, entrepreneurial values, business jargon (e.g., business plan, quality assurance), and management concepts (e.g., strategic planning, systems thinking) have become widespread among extension practitioners" (Einsiedel, 1998, 19-20).

It is apparent that the organizational development of CE units has followed the path of industrial organizations and has shifted from a humanist approach to revenue-generating businesses. The phases described by Selman illustrate three distinct focuses for continuing adult education with phase one directed at student development through education for social purpose; phase two directed towards professionalism of the professional and increased credentialism through CE units partnering with professional associations; and the current phase which adheres to a revenue-generating business model. Einsiedel describes the shift in perspective of CE

practices from service to business orientation and notes that they are a result of changing and conflicting values and beliefs within society that is reflected within education institutions and their CE units (1998, p. 11). Einsiedel notes that, from an organizational perspective, CE or extension units that have not adapted to, or otherwise learned to accommodate, new values and beliefs have either had their mandate changed by their institution or have been eliminated altogether (1998, p. 11).

There is concern that the current entrepreneurial direction focus of CE units results in resources being directed towards strategic planning, market analysis, environmental scans and program development with a primary focus on revenue generation for the institution rather than directing resources towards providing service to students. Einsiedel describes this transition as escalating saying that “extension units are expected not only to be self-supporting but also to generate surplus revenue for the institution is not a new trend. However, the intensity of the expectation has increased in recent times, especially in government-funded institutions” (Einsiedel, 1998, p. 19). This is evidenced in current practices by the increased attention being paid by CE units to follow a pattern of finding a market demand of students, creating an educational product to meet the demand and then selling the product either directly to student clients or to their employer sponsors.

CE units have become partners with industry and professional associations to develop their human capital through the provision of market-identified credentials. Numerous Canadian CE units offer certificate programs designed to provide students with theoretical competencies that are specified and required by designation-granting bodies. Examples include Human Resource Management certificate programs which meet standards set by the Canadian Council of Human Resources Associations to qualify students to write the examination leading to the CHRP

(Certified Human Resources Professional) designation or the accounting certificate programs which prepare students to write the CMA (Certified Management Accountants) entrance examination.

Certificate programs are often developed by CE units in partnership with advisory committees comprised of course developers, program administrators and employers or professional association representatives. The advisory committees provide input regarding the instructional content of the program's courses including the topics that will be covered, the learning objectives and outcomes, learning resources to be utilized and the assessment criteria. Inviting employers to participate in program and course development provides a direct opportunity for them to identify the workplace practices that they want to have taught to their current, or potential, workers (Sork & Newman, 2004). Through this process of designing certificate programs that includes course content and performance standards established by employers, CE units are representative of the functionalist perspective. Barakett and Cleghorn describe the sociologists who endorse the functionalist perspective of education as viewing:

the classroom as a social system, socializing and allocating individuals on the basis of the criteria, beliefs, and values accepted by the dominant group in society. The school's function was seen as dictated by and central to the economic and occupational structure of a developing modern industrial society. [Sociologists with the functionalist perspective] were concerned with how differentiation of status occurs on the basis of achievement. The assignment of differential rewards to various positions in the status hierarchy is seen as a necessary technique to motivate talented individuals to achieve high status positions. From this perspective,

education offers greater opportunities for attaining higher social status for those who can master the system. (2000, p. 28).

This is an instrumental approach to education which focuses on the technical or practical aspects of learning in order to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to perform a task or to solve problems (Mezirow, 1991).

By inviting employers' participation on program advisory committees, the standards and performance requirements of the employer then become the certificate program's performance requirements. Employers' opinions influence the academic quality of programs as they are solicited in the design, development and evaluation phases. At the evaluation phase, with the "key stakeholders of the program being evaluated, such as sponsoring agencies, the agency delivering the program, program participants, and community members benefiting from the program" (Wiesenberg, 2000, p. 84), all having input into the content, instructional methods, instructor selection and participant screening, the influence of these sponsoring agencies is significant. This involvement of employers in each aspect of certificate program design, delivery and evaluation results in CE units validating the job-related requirements of employers by requiring students to attain them, and to a level of satisfaction prescribed by the employer, in order to receive their academic credential.

Apps (as cited in Einsiedel) has identified five aims of continuing education including personal development; remedial education; religious education; cultural criticism and social action education; and education for career development, and notes that each aim has held a position of prominence in the history of adult and continuing education (1998, p. 10). The aspect of *education for career development* is currently prominent in CE programming largely in response to the layoffs of the 1990's. One result of the widespread job loss was an increase

in individuals seeking continuing education in order to train themselves for alternative employment opportunities. At the same time, employers sought re-training for some workers in order to avoid additional layoffs by re-structuring and re-engineering their workforce (Cruikshank, 1998). The convergence of more individuals seeking training for job preparation, employers sponsoring re-training for workers, and shrinking resources at universities resulted in CE units shifting their focus to the financially rewarding practice of serving the needs of industry (instrumental perspective) which has further removed them from more traditional social education programming (Einsiedel, 1998).

Adult education as a field of practice is, at least in part, culpable for the current interdependent relationship between employers and adult continuing education. During the 1970's there were two movements underway; one was to develop adult education as distinct from traditional school and the other the professionalization of adult education as a field of practice (Collins, 1998). As professional adult educators continued to develop educational practices and research that would achieve professional status for the field, they needed to organize. Pressured by their institutions to become revenue generating profit centres and by their peers to enhance the success of adult continuing education, it is no surprise that continuing education program developers sought out financially lucrative relationships with professional associations and business.

Einsiedel notes that “partnerships and alliances are becoming the norm. Cooperation, collaboration, and partnerships are still the operative terms for institutions that accept the premise that no single organization, no matter how vertically integrated, can go it alone in an increasingly competitive and global environment. The dominant type of partnership that is emerging is one between the university and corporations” (1998, p. 17). Continuing partnerships

with employers and professional associations may be necessary if continuing education certificate programs are going to remain a feature on the adult education landscape. Consider the results of the program review of the University of Calgary's Human Resource Management certificate program which was triggered by concern over declining enrollment as enrollment in the certificate program had fallen from 305 to 173 during a four year window from 1991 to 1995, without any apparent cause (Hutton, 1997).

Hutton's two-year research project exposed several reasons for the certificate program's faltering registrations including that potential students were seeking alternative Human Resource Management certificate programs because the University of Calgary's certificate program outcomes were no longer aligned with the provincial Human Resource Association's criteria of professional competencies (1997). The committee tasked with conducting the certificate program review was comprised of 15 individuals and included employers representing companies which sponsored students to take the certificate program and executives of professional organizations. The results of Hutton's research include that maintaining a positive relationship with the province's Human Resource Association, including inviting the Association's input into the program design and course content; receiving the Association's approval for all changes made to the certificate program; and obtaining an expressed statement of support for the certificate program from the Association, were key to keeping the human resource certificate program viable as students were seeking certification that was directly aligned with the criteria standards set by the Association (1997). Einsiedel advises CE units to "be resilient, adaptable, and progressive; [and that] one way they indicate these qualities is by making the necessary modification in their goals" (1998, p. 12). It is evident that if CE units wish to continue to exist,

they may have no alternative but to continue to adapt their strategic directions to maintain alignment with industry goals and standards.

The processes followed by The University of Manitoba Continuing Education (CE) unit, which is housed in the Extended Education Division, reflects the practice of aligning CE unit goals with the goals and needs of the business community. As noted, new certificate programs are most often developed in consultation with program advisory committees which include representatives of the business community. The goal is for the business community's input into the certificate program design and development to result in a program that will attract businesses and organizations to send their staff to the university to obtain certification. In rare cases, a professional association enters into a partnership with a CE unit to deliver a certification program on the association's behalf. In these cases, the association prescribes the course content and holds the authority to make decisions regarding the certificate program's delivery and administration such as establishing the minimum qualifications required of instructors who teach in the certificate program. The partnership between the University of Manitoba Continuing Education (CE) unit and the Manitoba Municipal Administrators' Association (MMAA) to deliver the Certificate in Manitoba Municipal Administration program is an example of the latter relationship.

Partnering with the Manitoba Municipal Administrators' Association

The Manitoba Municipal Administrators' Association (MMAA) was founded in 1931 and is a non-profit organization. The organization's mission statement notes that "the purpose of the MMAA is to promote Municipal Administration as a career, increase the professional growth of our members, and to be the voice on issues affecting Municipal Administration" (MMAA, 2009, p. 2). Members of the association include individuals working in the field of municipal

government administration and membership is largely comprised of office administrative staff, Chief Financial Officers, and Chief Administrative Officers rather than elected officials.

The MMAA strategic plan for 2009-2010 includes the identification of trends that will impact members within the next five years. One trend which concerns the Association is the aging workforce and the potential to have significant numbers of retirements in the profession in the next five to ten years. As a result of an analysis conducted on the trends, the MMAA identified three key goals for 2009-2010 which include leadership development for current members, succession planning to respond to impending retirements, and increasing the visibility of municipal administration as a profession in order to recruit individuals to the field (MMAA, 2009).

The Continuing Education (CE) unit of the University of Manitoba, through a partnership with the MMAA, assists the MMAA to implement their plan through the development and delivery of the formal training required by new workers or those who may be interested in entering the profession. To this end, the university offers the Certificate Program in Manitoba Municipal Administration. The provision of the MMA certificate program in partnership with the professional association is an example of the third phase of university continuing education described by Selman and noted above: the MMA certificate program is vocationally oriented, focused on providing a credential, and relies upon a partnership between the CE unit and the professional association. In this case, both parties benefit from the partnership with the MMAA maintaining a provincially standardized credential that is housed in a recognized post-secondary institution and the CE unit contributing to its financial viability through the regular referral of students to the MMA certificate program from the MMAA and its members.

The Manitoba Municipal Administrators Association Inc. Act (the Act) is a statute enacted by the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba and was assented to on March 15, 1990 (Government of Manitoba, 1990, Manitoba Laws). The Act incorporates the Manitoba Municipal Administrators' Association (MMAA) as an association and states the MMAA's objectives which include a goal "to promote and increase the knowledge, skill and proficiency of its members relating to municipal administration and public finance" (Government of Manitoba, 1990). The Act stipulates that the executive council of the MMAA may introduce by-laws which include, in part, the following:

- a) prescribe a curriculum and a course of studies in municipal administration and public finance;
- b) provide for the establishment of a board of certification which may prescribe the subjects on which students shall be examined and the conditions upon which certificates may be granted to students;
- c) provide for the establishment of a course in municipal administration and public finance, to be known as the "Certified Manitoba Municipal Administrators Course";
- d) provide for a certificate, to be awarded to any person who successfully completes the course established under clause (c), certifying that the person is entitled to be known as and to use the title of a "Certified Manitoba Municipal Administrator"; and
- e) authorize the making of an agreement between the Association and The University of Manitoba or any college or school for such lectures and classes

or correspondence courses as may come within the course of studies prescribed. (Government of Manitoba, 1990)

The Act grants authority to the MMAA for the prescription of the course curriculum and topics to be taught within the certificate program. This results in the University of Manitoba playing the role of a provider of educational services to the MMAA and its members. It is in the best interests, from a financial or business model perspective, for the university to maintain a positive relationship between itself and the MMAA in order to retain the certificate program and the resultant revenue. The Act also grants the MMAA the right to make an agreement with any academic institution to provide the courses leading to certification. The lessons learned from the University of Calgary's experiences with their Human Resource Management certificate program apply to the University of Manitoba and its delivery of the MMA certificate program. As the MMAA can choose to enter into a partnership with any post-secondary institution to deliver the certificate program, the University of Manitoba, if wanting to retain the certificate program, should ensure that the MMAA retains input into all facets of course design and delivery, approves any changes made to the program and publicly endorses the certificate program in order to ensure that the certificate program maintains its alignment with the MMAA's standards for learner outcomes and competencies.

The influence of the MMAA's endorsement and promotion of the certification program is perhaps best illustrated in the advertisements for employment in Manitoba municipal offices which regularly indicate that applicants are required to be a, "graduate of, enrolled in or willing to enroll in, the certificate program for Manitoba Municipal Administration" (Winnipeg Free Press, January 16, 2010, p. I2). While the positions are advertised by individual municipalities, they consistently include the condition of employment noted above exemplifying the significant

regard held for the MMA certificate program. Adults reading these job advertisements will observe that certification is a requirement of employment in a Manitoba municipal office. This may lead individuals to pursue certification in order to enter the profession and informs those applying for employment within a municipal office that certification will be a condition of their employment.

Learning for work

The students who participate in continuing education programs are adults pursuing a credential for the primary purposes of improving their employment opportunities or to obtain career advancement with their current employer (Bos, 2001, Potter, 1998). Adults who participate in continuing education certificate programs can be described as non-traditional students who are over the age of twenty-five and may have been absent from formal academic study for a lengthy period of time while developing a career (Bos, 2001, Potter, 1998). The students who participate in distance learning courses, such as those offered through the Certificate Program in Manitoba Municipal Administration (MMA), are predominantly female, and reside in a community at least 50 km from a university with almost half living more than 200 km from a campus (Potter, 1998). The students who participate in the MMA certificate program may hold several of the above characteristics and it is important to investigate if they do in order to determine if these characteristics represent challenges for students that impact their ability to successfully complete the certificate program. For example, if students experience difficulties transitioning into the role of adult learner, struggle to manage family, work and school responsibilities, or if a lack of access to a university campus impacts their ability to be successful in their studies, identifying these challenges may inform program developers of changes that

could be made to either the program delivery or materials that could assist students to overcome them.

Adult learners' ability to fully participate in learning opportunities is affected by sociocultural factors such as being able to sustain the financial cost of participating in a continuing education program or holding the required educational prerequisites of a certificate program. The University of Manitoba has attempted to make the MMA certificate program accessible to adult learners by not requiring any academic prerequisites for admission however it is not known if employers provide funding or other support, such as release time from work, to employees who participate in the program. As the MMAA strategic plan indicates that the professional development of municipal administrators is a strategic priority, it would be interesting to know if, in practice, municipal offices are implementing the strategic direction through providing support to their workers.

Human capital encompasses the knowledge, skills and abilities that an organization's workers hold (Bouchard, 1998). Human capital theory applies a measure to workers in terms of the value they provide to their employer where value is interpreted to be revenue-generating productivity (Bouchard, 1998, McConnell, Schwind, Das & Wagar, 2005) and describes how an investment in developing workers' knowledge will result in a return on the investment such as through increased productivity, more efficient work practices, or a higher skilled workforce that can adapt to changing work requirements.

CE units contribute to the development of human capital through providing certificate programs that lead to individuals achieving the credential required by employers (instrumental view of education). Einsiedel describes the link between credentialism and employment saying that "the unemployment situation, competition for students, commodification of knowledge, and

demand for professional training programs, particularly by emerging professions, have all contributed to the more central role continuing education units have played in providing citizens with learning experiences and credentials that enhance their employability” (1998, p. 18).

Walters has examined the relationship between credentialism and human capital theory and explains that “proponents of human capital theory assert that schools were developed to prepare people for modern roles that are not addressed by the more traditional agents of socialization, such as the family or the church. Education is assumed to provide students with skills they can bring to their jobs, and it also allows them to be more productive and functional members of society” (2004, p. 100). Walters’ position is indicative of the functionalist perspective, as he indicates that education provides knowledge of the course subject materials but also socializes students to the mores practiced within the sector-specific community that employs the graduates. This is illustrated in continuing education certificate programs where the instructors are recruited from those who are employed within the sector.

Wotherspoon makes an important point regarding the opinion that society has developed regarding the value of obtaining a credential saying that,

one of the central functions of schooling is to bestow diplomas, certificates, degrees, and other credentials upon successful completion of particular educational programs and levels of study. Many hiring and promotion decisions, as well as eligibility requirements for certain jobs, are based on specified types of educational achievement or credentials earned through education and training programs.

Educational credentials become relevant to employment decisions in different ways. In some instances, possession of a credential implies that the individual has acquired particular kinds of knowledge or met standards of rigour deemed to be essential for a

job. In many other cases, educational achievement is used as a screening mechanism to limit the number of qualified applicants seeking particular jobs, regardless of whether the education or training is directly relevant to the work positions. (1998, p. 134).

In the case of the MMA certificate, the course content is designed to directly relate to the functions that graduates will perform when on the job. The program advisory committee, which includes employer representatives, and the partnering association, which is comprised of individuals who work within the municipal administration field, advise the university on the current standards of practice and competencies required by graduates, and requires that the program's content and learner outcomes meet the current standards. This ensures that students who undertake the certificate program obtain a credential that illustrates that they hold a recognized level of subject knowledge and have met competency standards.

Organizations view having workers who hold a recognized credential as part of their human capital and will develop this capital by investing in training their staff in order to gain workers who can “effectively use resources, through their knowledge and skills, [to] create value and enhances results” (Schwind, Das & Wagar, 2005, p. 42). By ensuring that staff obtain the minimum competency standards required by certification, organizations can ensure that their workers have the necessary theoretical skills to create value for the organization. On an ongoing basis, human capital, “grows two ways: when the organization uses more of what people know and when more people know more stuff that is useful to the organization” (Schwind et al, 2005, p. 154). Therefore, the continuing development of human capital requires an organization to either provide opportunities for workers to use the knowledge they have obtained or to

continually invest in ongoing professional development to ensure that staff continue to learning new knowledge or skills that could benefit the organization.

While an organization can invest in training and encourage workers to become certified, such as the efforts exemplified by Manitoba municipal offices, the responsibility to undertake learning and to successfully complete a program rests with the individual. In the case of the MMA certificate, the courses are delivered by correspondence which requires students to be able to learn independently and to use self-direction to successfully complete their coursework.

Self-directed learning through independent study

Candy describes self-directed learning as a multi-faceted concept that is used as a term to describe learners' motivation towards learning or any process whereby an individual independently acquires new knowledge or understanding which can be obtained through either a formal or informal learning process and notes that theoretical debate on self-directed learning is often confusing as authors use the term to both describe a characteristic of adult learners and as a course delivery method (Candy, 1991). Brookfield and Collins support a perspective that self-directed learning is an integral component of adult education as it provides adult learners with some control over their learning which raises the needs of the individual above the interests of the institution (Brookfield, 1993). This perspective is reminiscent of the earliest phase of continuing education during which the needs of the learner were central to course design and delivery. Brookfield and Collins may endorse self-directed learning as a mode of course delivery in order to direct attention towards shifting adult continuing education practices from the current entrepreneurial model and return it to a more humanistic form.

Brookfield recognizes that educators who support self-directed learning programs do so “because they sense that there is something about this form of practice that dignifies and respects

people and their experience and that tries to break with authoritarian forms of education. They sense that if self-direction means anything, it means that control over definitions, processes, and evaluations of learning rests with the people who are struggling to learn and not with external authorities” (Brookfield, 1993, p. 229). Brookfield understands learners’ need for control however his argument ignores the responsibility of the institution to ensure that prescribed course learning objectives are met. As noted before, the very existence of a certificate program can be threatened if the course content and student learning outcomes vary from the standards and competencies defined by the program’s partners. It is therefore imperative that the results of any self-directed learning which is included in assignments submitted for course credit meets the parameters established by the program’s advisory committee.

The Certificate Program in Manitoba Municipal Administration (MMA) is designed to meet the needs of rural students and is offered exclusively by independent study. Moore divides independent study into four categories: correspondence courses; individualized, programmed instruction in a school setting; supervised reading programs in schools; and out-of-school, part-time degree programs for adults (Candy, 1991). The courses that comprise the MMA certificate program are best described as correspondence courses. Students receive a package of materials, or access to a course website, containing the course manual, instructor information, necessary forms, assignment information, and so on. Students are then able to work through the materials independently and submit assignments according to a pre-set schedule. As the course schedule is prescribed, all students registered for a term will begin a course on the same date, submit assignments as per the common due dates, and write the same final exam on the same date throughout the province. Students are working independently, with the assistance of the instructor and any networking they conduct with other peers, but don’t have true independence,

as a form of control, in their study as the course materials and content are prescribed to them rather than negotiated with them or mutually developed and agreed upon.

There is an opportunity within the prescribed coursework for students to apply theoretical knowledge to practical situations in their workplace. As students must complete assignments that include questions that require real-life examples, students are able to select situations within their professional life, critically examine them by applying the course theory, and then report their responses to the instructor. This provides students with the opportunity to self-direct a portion of their learning experience as they are able to select situational examples to use in the assignment's problem-solving questions. Through completing these exercises, students may develop a greater understanding of the workplace problem, create new solutions, and examine their personal role within the problem situation and through this process create new knowledge. As noted above, it is important for students to demonstrate knowledge that meets the competency standards required for certification however the self-directed learning component of the certificate program may encourage and motivate learners to apply their newly acquired theoretical knowledge to their workplace. It is important, then, to examine if students in the MMA certificate program create new knowledge through self-directed learning and, if so, to determine if this learning experience impacts their professional development or assists them to perform their work. The results of this examination could assist CE units to evaluate current delivery practices, including the design of the assignments and related coursework, and consider revising them to include more or less opportunities for self-directed learning.

Theorist Jack Mezirow's transformation learning theory holds that the interpretation of a prior experience can provide a new perspective, both of the current experience, which can result in new expectations, or of a previous experience which leaves the learner with a new

interpretation of the experience (Mezirow, 1991). Transformation learning theory contends that individuals: be aware of how they arrive at their knowledge, beyond knowing that something is understood; examine how it came to be understood; and be as aware as possible of the values that lead to their perceptions (Mezirow, 2000). This involves a willingness to examine one's own viewpoints to determine how they were developed and to change one's beliefs. This is a difficult and challenging process but one that can result in the individual developing a greater awareness of their own perspective and to be better able to understand others' points of view.

Transformation learning theory describes the way that adults learn to make meaning, to reflect upon their own way of understanding or creating their own meaning, and to critically reflect upon their own understanding (Mezirow, 1991). Brookfield cautions that students engaged in self-directed learning should be encouraged to examine how they obtained their beliefs and customs in order to be able to critically reflect upon their practices during the learning process (1993). Mezirow argues that adult educators must facilitate and encourage learners to find their own meanings without an instructor's own perspectives interfering with this process (1991). Instructors can encourage learners to examine not only their understanding of the material but to also try to understand how they came to that point of view of the material, a process that may lead to transformational learning. In order to provide an atmosphere that encourages and supports adults to undertake this transformational learning, the instruction provider, either the instructor or the course developer, must ensure that there is accurate and complete information available and coursework that encourages learners to apply their learning to their own experiences so that learners can explore, evaluate and challenge the material freely (Mezirow, 1991). Investigating the impact that completing the MMA certificate program has had on some of the graduates may provide examples of transformational learning.

Garrison proposes that a self-directed learning model is comprised of three components including self-management, self-monitoring and motivation (1997). Self management includes the activities associated with the learning process itself and includes the institution's learning requirements, resources available, and the agreement between the institution and the learner that results in a successfully completed learning outcome (Garrison, 1997). Self-monitoring relates the learning strategies practiced by the learner including planning tasks, integrating new ideas with existing knowledge, meeting the learning objectives and even developing strategies that could lead to new learning activities (Garrison, 1997).

Garrison's third component, learner motivation, "plays a very significant role in the initiation and maintenance of effort toward learning and the achievement of cognitive goals" (1997, p. 24). There are two key motivation types needed for successful self-directed learning: entering motivation, the level of commitment made by the student in deciding to participate in a self-directed learning program, and task motivation, the effort required by the student to persist through the tasks required to successfully complete the program (Garrison, 1997). Students who are required to undertake a certificate program as a requirement for employment may have low entering motivation. As the MMAA encourages municipal workers to obtain certification, their entering motivation may be low resulting in students being unsuccessful in completing the certificate program. This is a concern because it may lead to either their loss of employment or impede their ability to gain employment within the municipal administration field.

The advancements in modern technology and its increasing use in course delivery have focused course developers' attention on the issues of increasing availability and access of distance courses rather than on ensuring students' learning needs are met. Potter (1998) notes that it is only recently that researchers have begun to critically reflect upon the processes used in

distance learning and how the processes impact the learners. She contends that while distance learning opportunities have steadily increased, research that examines learners' needs and experiences regarding the format is sparse (1998).

Potter conducted a study, involving 224 students from three Canadian universities, to examine their experiences while learning by distance and to obtain their perspectives on the student services that were available. The students identified a need for increased availability of information and orientation prior to the start of courses and the desire to communicate with the course instructor (Potter, 1998). They reported that the universities provided good general and administrative information, such as how to order textbooks, but that information on other services was poor or unavailable (Potter, 1998). Students found the accessibility of support services such as writing assistance, personal counseling, and help with understanding the potential effects that participating in a distance study program could have on their family, friends, employer, or themselves, were lacking (Potter, 1998).

Potter's research indicates that increased support services are required by, and should be provided to, distance education students (1998). She identifies five factors that sustain her position that increased support services are needed by students undertaking courses delivered by distance education.

1. Completion rates in distance learning courses are low, as low as 25% at some institutions, and there is evidence that increased student support may aid in course completion.
2. Adult learners already face challenges in attending continuing education and mastering new technology is an additional stressor that may interfere with their ability to transition to their new role as a student.

3. The majority of distance learners are women and women are more likely to utilize support services when they are made available.
4. There are a number of factors facing distance learning students, such as orientation to learning, self-perception and institutional variables that require students to make choices and decisions and additional academic advising assistance may be able to guide students through the decision making processes.
5. More individuals are eligible and well suited for distance learning, specifically Canadian adults who are employed, motivated and have a high level of income and previous education, than are choosing to take advantage of the opportunities that distance learning provides and increased support could raise awareness and increase access to this type of learning. (1998)

Research is needed to determine if the current practices used by CE units for distance course delivery adequately meets the needs of adult learners. If the factors identified by Potter are evident in the delivery of the MMA certificate program, it would suggest that additional student support systems should be created and implemented. Through investigating the challenges that students faced while participating in the certificate program, it may be possible to identify the types of support or assistance that students require. Inviting graduates to share the advice that they would provide to newly admitted students will illustrate the type of information or guidance that the graduates perceive students would need. Examining these opinions may provide insights that the program developers or advisory committee members can use to adapt the program to better meet students' needs.

Conclusion

CE units and the programs they offer have significantly evolved over the past several decades. CE units currently operate as entrepreneurial businesses creating a product to meet students' certification requirements. The partnerships that have formed between CE units and employers or professional associations representing employers have benefited both parties: employers develop a workforce with the skills and competencies needed to perform their jobs and CE units earn the revenue required to maintain their presence within the post-secondary landscape.

The students who enroll in continuing education certificate programs are seeking a credential in order to either increase their employment opportunities or to obtain career advancement with their current employer. The University of Manitoba has entered into a partnership with the Manitoba Municipal Administrators' Association (MMAA) to deliver the Certificate Program in Manitoba Municipal Administration (MMA). It follows then that the students who successfully complete the MMA certificate program should experience career advancement as a result of their certification.

Adult learners face challenges when entering a post-secondary certificate program and it is important to investigate these challenges to determine if CE units should develop and provide additional supports to students. The MMA certificate program is offered exclusively by distance education through independent study. Some self-directed learning opportunities are available to students through course assignment exercises which invite students to use real life and workplace based problems when completing the exercises. Through this process, students examine their personal role within the problem situations. It is important to examine if students in the MMA

certificate program create new knowledge through the self-directed learning component of their study and to determine if this learning experience impacts their professional or personal life.

Research Methods and Processes

The determination of the research question for this project was made after a consideration of literature relating to adult continuing education, and in particular the evolution of adult continuing education from a social movement to the current focus on credentialism and partnerships with employers (Bouchard, 1998, Einsiedel, 1998, Selman, M., 2005) and the effect that participating in, and graduating from, a continuing education certificate program has upon adult learners. There is a partnership between Continuing Education, University of Manitoba and the Manitoba Municipal Administrators' Association (MMAA) to deliver the Certificate Program in Manitoba Municipal Administration (MMA). The program's graduates are sought by employers who hire staff for municipal offices throughout Manitoba. Students in the MMA certificate program complete specific required courses which results in a pool of graduates who have fulfilled identical academic requirements. It was determined that through investigating and comparing the experiences of some graduates of the MMA certificate program currently employed at Chief Administrative Officers (CAO's) or Assistant CAO's , it would be possible to examine the impact of certification on these graduates.

In this study, the research was performed using qualitative research. Merriam and Simpson note that qualitative research is "interested in how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, what meaning they attribute to their experiences. The overall purposes of qualitative research are to achieve an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives, to delineate the process (rather than the outcome or product) of meaning-making, and to describe how people interpret what they experience" (1995, p. 98). Qualitative research is appropriate for this study as the project's purpose is to accurately record the participants' perceptions and recollections of their experiences so that the data can be examined and analyzed

to achieve an understanding of these experiences. Qualitative descriptive research lends itself to an interpretive inquiry of an exploratory nature and is suitable for research using a small sample size.

Once the research question was determined and the research method selected, the Executive Director of the MMAA was contacted and provided with an outline of the project, including the research purpose and potential benefit of the project's results to the MMAA, and asked to consider providing support to the project. The Association was also asked to provide material support to the project through utilizing the Association's resources to distribute a call to its members inviting potential research participants to volunteer for the study. The Executive Director agreed to both requests and provided a letter of support for the project (Appendix B). The MMAA will receive a printed copy of the final report.

An Application for Ethical Review of this final research project was submitted to the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board (REB) on March 30, 2010. Assurances were made regarding the protection of the confidentiality of the research participants, the secure storage of participants' data, and the appropriate disposal of records upon the conclusion of the research project. All documentation received from the MMAA, including the lists of certificate graduates' names and their contact information, and any printed communication or other printed information received from, or relating to, the research participants was stored in a locked filing cabinet. The researcher is the only key holder to this cabinet. The locked cabinet was also used to store original source data recorded on digital files as well as the printed transcripts and the researcher's original field notes. The data files were stored on a password protected, non-shared computer within a non-networked local drive. The researcher is the only person with the

password to access this computer. Approval to proceed with the data collection was granted on April 4, 2010 (Appendix C).

Participation in the study was voluntary and solicited through an electronic bulletin distributed by the MMAA to those Association members with e-mail addresses on file within the MMAA database (Appendix D). The e-bulletin included an explanation of the purpose of the research project and an invitation for current MMAA members who were working in a municipal office to contact the researcher for more information about the project. The e-bulletin included the researcher's contact information and e-mail address. Once a response from a potential participant was received, the potential participant was either e-mailed or telephoned and asked to supply a mailing address in order to receive further information about the project. All of the responses to the initial e-bulletin were received by e-mail. The initial plans for the recruitment of research participants included a direct mailed letter to be sent to MMAA members, however, as the MMAA's primary method of communication is by e-mail, it was determined that the researcher would follow the same process and use e-mail as a primary mode of communication.

All MMAA members who responded to the e-bulletin were sent an information letter explaining the research project (Appendix E) which included an informed consent form (Appendix F). A self-addressed, stamped envelope with the researcher's contact information was included in the mailing and participants were asked to sign and return the consent form if they were interested in participating in the research. All participants received a copy of their informed consent form once it was signed by both the participant and the researcher. All documentation that included participants' contact information was securely stored.

As this project seeks to collect participants' personal stories and experiences for analysis, it was determined that conducting one-on-one interviews was an appropriate method to use to

acquire the necessary data. Consideration was given to conducting face-to-face interviews, however, as the participants live in rural Manitoba, the time and costs associated with conducting in-person interviews was prohibitive and it was determined that data collection would be conducted through telephone interviews. Participants were asked to schedule a maximum one-hour telephone interview at a date and time of their convenience. Participants were assured that their time commitment would be limited to the time spent reading the information materials, reviewing and completing the informed consent documents, and the time spent on the telephone for the interview. In order to ensure that research participants would not incur any expense due to participating in the project, the researcher initiated all telephone calls. The telephone interviews were recorded on a digital voice recorder and the recordings were later transcribed into MSWord documents by the researcher.

Valentine notes that data collection interviews are purposely not representative, rather they are useful “to understand how individual people experience and make sense of their own lives. The emphasis is on considering the meanings people attribute to their lives and the processes which operate in particular social context. The fluid and individual nature of conversational-style interviews means that they can never be replicated, only corroborated by similar studies or complementary techniques” (2005, p. 111). Other researchers wishing to conduct research pertaining to the impact of certification on municipal managers may elect to collect data by face-to-face interviews, rather than over the telephone, to further take advantage of a conversation-style atmosphere.

At the start of each telephone interview, participants were reminded of the purpose of the project; that they could take a break at any point during the interview; that they could refuse to answer any question; and that they could withdraw from the research project at any time during

the interview. The researcher described how the data would be collected, stored and disposed of once the research project was completed. During the interviews, the participants were monitored for any changes in behavior such as a hesitation in responding to questions. When behaviour changes occurred, participants were asked if they would like to take a short break or if they would like to suspend the interview and be called at a later time and date to re-schedule. No participants requested to take a break during the data collection interviews nor withdrew from the research project.

The interviews were conducted using primarily open-ended questions (Appendix G) in order to provide research participants with the opportunity to reflect upon their learning and then respond with any descriptions or stories that they wished to share. The interviews were structured whereby “specific questions and the order in which they are asked are determined ahead of time” (Merriam and Simpson, 1995, p. 100). An advantage of using a structured interview process is that “clarification, restatement, and explanation are all available for use in eliciting responses from participants” (Merriam & Simpson, 1995, p. 150).

The interviews were conducted in two parts with one section comprised of short answer questions and the other part consisting of the open-ended questions. After the first interview it was apparent that beginning the interview with short answer questions had led the research participant to provide short answers to all subsequent questions and resulted in a briefer than expected interview with little time used for reflection. For the ensuing interviews, the two parts were reversed which resulted in the participants providing longer and more complete responses to the questions. This process contradicts the advice of experienced researchers who suggest that “the interview starts with simple and interesting questions to engage the interviewee and to obtain a good response. If the interview entails several subsections or topics, each section or

topic should flow from the simple to the more complex” (Merriam & Simpson, 1995, p. 151) however changing the process in this study was successful as it resulted in more extensive and complete data.

Once the data was collected, it was collated and examined to analyze the impact of certification on the research participants. This process follows a constructivist perspective which “argues that multiple realities exist that are inherently unique because they are constructed by individuals who experience the world from their own vantage points” (Hatch, 2002, p. 15). Participants were invited to share their personal stories and recollections in response to the interview questions, rather than asked to select answers from a list provided to them, and therefore were able to choose their own viewpoint and utilize their personal perspective in creating their responses which illustrates a constructivist perspective.

Once collected, the data was examined by question for patterns of responses that could be divided into groups so that the responses could be analyzed and interpreted by grouping. Crang notes that qualitative data is best analyzed when it is divided into groups of responses (2005, p. 223-224). The data analysis was conducted using Hatch’s typological approach which prescribes the following steps: identification of typologies; identification of data relating to the typologies; recognition of patterns, relationships, and themes within each typology; sorting of entries according to identified patterns; and the selection of data excerpts that both exemplify and contradict the patterns (2002, p. 153). The patterns identified in this research project include similarities in responses, the frequency of a particular response, and causation in cases where similar responses are given whereby the causes or prompts of the associated responses are tabulated and compared. The patterns were then interpreted and a descriptive account produced (Seale, 2004, p. 313-315).

Some participants' responses are included in full within the data analysis section of this report to reveal the participants' opinions in their own words. When a participant's story or a direct quotation is used in the report, the commentary was first assessed to ensure that it did not inadvertently identify the speaker. For example, one research participant provided a detailed recollection of an event that occurred within a municipal office to illustrate an example shared in response to an interview question. The participant commented that the example was a well known story within the local community and that the municipality, and the identity of the research participant, would be recognized if the example was used in the final report. In this case, and several other cases, specific references to examples and comments that would identify municipalities, research participants, or other municipal office staff members, were removed from the final report.

Participants' names were recorded on a master list and each participant was assigned an identification number. The master list of names and identification numbers was stored securely and separately from the other data files in a locked file cabinet to which the researcher holds the only key. The master list will be destroyed as per the conditions outlined in the REB application and detailed below. In order to ensure that the original data and the files containing participants' personal information is properly disposed of, the following items will be shredded within ninety days of the completion of the research project:

- lists of graduates' names provided by the MMAA;
- graduates' contact information received from the MMAA;
- consent letters and any other correspondence submitted by participants;
- printed transcripts of the telephone interviews;
- master list of participant names and codes; and

- all printed draft versions of the data analysis and any draft versions or draft chapters of this final report.

The following digital records will be disposed of as follows:

- recordings of the data collection telephone interviews will be deleted from computer files and from the handheld digital voice recorder;
- e-mail communications between the researcher and research participants will be deleted from the computer files and from webmail;
- transcripts of the telephone interviews, saved in (MSWord files) will be deleted from the computer; and
- all draft versions of the data analysis, and any draft chapters or draft versions of this final report (MSWord files) will be deleted from the computer.

Data Analysis and Discussion of Results

Introduction

Participants in this research study were asked to recall and describe any impact that participating in, and graduating from, the Certificate Program in Manitoba Municipal Administration (MMA) had on their personal or professional life. In order to collect the participants' personal stories and opinions, one-on-one telephone interviews were held with eight individuals who graduated between the years of 2001 and 2005 and who were employed as municipal administrators at the time of their interview. Their responses are discussed and summarized in this section of the report.

During the interviews, a few, simple demographic questions were asked and the results used to create a profile of the research participants which appears below. Participants were then asked to explain their reasons for entering the MMA certificate program and to describe the impact completing the program had on their personal and professional life. As much of the literature relating to adult education suggests that adults enter continuing education programs in order to obtain employment or advance their career (Bos, 2001, & Potter, 1998) the results of the data gathered in this research project were assessed and it was determined that the motivations of the participants in this study reflect this perspective.

Participants were asked to specify the personal or professional benefits received related to their obtaining certification. These results were then tabulated and examined to further investigate the impact resulting from certification. The results were then examined to identify if the participants' involvement in an independent study, distance education program contributed to their personal or professional development. The participants reported acquiring several personal and professional benefits including having the opportunity to learn job specific skills that could

be applied at their workplace, improved employability with the municipal administration field, the potential to earn a higher salary, and personal satisfaction. Their responses are summarized and discussed in this section of the report.

One of the goals of this research project is to examine if the research study participants experienced transformative learning as a result of their self-directed study or through their reflection on their learning experiences. Transformative learning encompasses both the process of self-directed learning, whereby learners are able to draw their own conclusions and create their own understanding (Brookfield, 1993) and the process of individuals reflecting upon their prior learning experiences to gain a new understanding of how they obtained their new knowledge or perspectives (Mezirow, 1991). As the research questions required students to reflect upon their learning experiences while formulating their answers, the opportunity was available for participants to consider and then describe any transformation of their perspectives that could be attributed to their participation in the certificate program. The participants' responses did not include any specific references to having experienced transformative learning. However, several participants included descriptions of how they created new processes and developed new skills within their answers to the interview questions. These comments illustrate that self-directed learning took place as a result of participation in the certificate program and are included and discussed in this section of the report.

Participants were then invited to share any recommendations they may have for future changes or improvements to the certificate program or advice that could be provided to new students to assist them to be successful in the program. The research participants recommended changes to the course delivery model, and the examination and analysis of the data identified several new opportunities for increased communication, networking and mentorship which could

be developed by the program partners and areas where further research could be conducted. These comments were collected and collated for report to the University of Manitoba Continuing Education unit and to the Manitoba Municipal Administrators' Association for their information and appear in the conclusion of this section of the report.

Participants' profile

Eight individuals who graduated from the certificate program within the selected five-year period, and who were employed within a municipality as either a Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) or Assistant CAO at the time of the research project, volunteered to participate in the research project. The invitation to participate in this research project was distributed to graduates of the Certificate program in Manitoba Municipal Administration (MMA) who graduated between the years 2001 to 2005. The selection criteria included this limit to ensure that all research study participants would have completed the same iteration of the certificate program. As certificate programs are regularly reviewed and revised, this limit of a five-year graduation period ensured that all participants in the study would have been required to fulfil the same program requirements, have taken the same courses, used the same assignment submission process and would have been able to access similar student support services and university resources during their tenure as students.

The request for volunteers to participate in the research project was distributed through the Manitoba Municipal Administrators' Association (MMAA) via their membership e-mail address database. This further limited the participant pool to only those who held a current membership with the Association. This limit was established as it was expected that MMAA members would hold an affinity to the Association and would therefore be more likely to contribute their time to a research project focussed on their professional field.

Distributing the invitation via the MMAA also increased the chance that participants would be currently working in the municipal administration field as the MMAA recruits current municipal administrators for membership to the Association. The participant group is a purposive sample to gather and examine the responses to the research questions of those individuals who both met the criteria for participation in the study and who volunteered to be interviewed, rather than a representative sample, as the participants were selected for invitation based on their date of graduation and membership in the MMAA (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). The sample is not reflective of all graduates of the MMA certificate program nor is it a representative sample of the graduating classes of 2001-2005.

Each participant had accumulated essentially the same amount of employment experience in a municipal office with each participant reporting having either nine or 10 years of employment experience within the municipal administration field at the time of their interview. Six women and two men participated in the research study. The tables below describe the participants' characteristics by gender including their age, year of graduation and highest level of education both at the time of admission to the MMA certificate program and at the time they were interviewed.

Table 1 <i>Participants by age and gender</i>		
Age	Women	Men
31-40	1	2
41-50	4	
51-60	1	

The participants' age, as illustrated in Table 1, combined with their similar accumulated employment experience within the municipal field, indicates that three of the participants entered the municipal administration field are in the earlier stage of their working life, four are mid-career aged and one is in the later years of her career. Both male participants are in the younger age range and this may indicate that women are not entering the municipal administration field until later in their careers. However, as the participant pool in this research is too small to be representative of all municipal administrators, no conclusions can be drawn from this data.

Year of graduation	Women	Men
2001	1	
2002		
2003		
2004	1	
2005	4	2

There is an uneven distribution of participants across the graduation years as indicated in Table 2. While invitations to participate were sent to all MMAA members within the MMAA's e-mail address database, almost all of the individuals who volunteered to participate in the study graduated in the latter part of the selected time period. This may indicate that recent graduates are more willing to participate in a research study than individuals who graduated more than five or six years ago. As participants received their invitation to volunteer for the study by e-mail

from the MMAA, those who volunteered for the study are individuals who open and read mass e-mails received from the MMAA and who are comfortable responding to such messages.

If either the university or the MMAA wish to conduct further research involving alumni of the MMA certificate program or the Association's membership, it would be useful to investigate how the Continuing Education alumni or Association members would like to be contacted and how they would like to share their opinions. For example, the MMAA may have greater response from its members if it mails a printed survey rather than distributes an e-mail invitation. Members may also be more comfortable participating in a survey, either in printed or online form, than having to schedule a personal interview with a researcher as was required for participation in this study. Alternatively, graduates of the certificate program may feel more comfortable participating in a research project which relates to their student experiences if the invitation is distributed by the university rather than by the MMAA.

Table 3 <i>Participants' education at time of admission</i>		
Highest level of education	Women	Men
High school diploma	2	
College diploma	3	1
University certificate		
Undergraduate degree	1	1

Table 4 <i>Participants' education at time of interview</i>		
Highest level of education	Women	Men
High school diploma		
College diploma		
University certificate	4	1
Undergraduate degree	2	1

All but one of the participants who held college diplomas upon their admission to the certificate program reported that their current highest level of education, at the time of their interview, was their university MMA certificate. The other participant who held a college diploma upon admission to the certificate program subsequently obtained a university degree after graduating from the MMA certificate program and reported the degree as the current highest level of education. The certificate program has no academic prerequisites for admission although, as illustrated in Table 3, all participants in the research project held at minimum a high school diploma.

Several participants emphasized during their interviews that the MMA certificate is *university level* post secondary education. The MMA certificate program is offered by Continuing Education, Extended Education, University of Manitoba in partnership with the MMAA and with the support of the department of Manitoba Local Government, Province of Manitoba. The certificate parchment includes representation from all three as signatories: the Minister, Manitoba Local Government, the President of the MMAA and the Dean of Extended Education, University of Manitoba. The participants' emphasis of the certificate program being

their highest level of education, as indicated in Table 4, due to the certificate being granted by a university, rather than another type of post secondary institution, suggests that there is a perception amongst the participants that a university certificate is a more advanced level of post secondary education than a college diploma.

The perception that receiving municipal certification from a university, as opposed to receiving certification from another post secondary institution such as a college, is a higher level of post secondary achievement is a distinction that the university and MMAA may wish to utilize in their promotion and recruitment materials. Selman notes that the current phase of university continuing education is one of commercialization and competition as evidenced by continuing education units' "focus on credentialism, partnerships, and other means to enhance value or capture markets" (2004, p. 23). The university and the MMAA could also highlight the provincial government's endorsement of the program in the program's marketing materials. While the certificate program's information website mentions the partnership between the university and the MMAA and notes that the program is supported by a provincial government department, this aspect of the program could be emphasized in the program's marketing and recruitment materials as it may make the program more appealing to potential students.

Motivation for entering the certificate program

Participants in the study were asked to describe their reason(s) for applying for admission to the certificate program and if participating in the program had any direct impact on their personal or professional life. Six of the participants were already working in a municipal office at the time of their admission to the certificate program and the other two participants were hired to work in a municipal office while enrolled as students in the MMA certificate program. Of the six who were already working for a municipal office, three reported that their goal was

to become a Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) and they explained that obtaining the MMA certificate would help them to achieve that goal. One participant described the entering motivation as:

Career development. I was already working with a municipality [as a clerk] and in order to move up the ladder in that municipal office, it was a requirement that I needed and even after working in that municipality for a year or so before I started the courses, I could tell that it was something that I liked to do and wanted to pursue and keep going and that's why I took them.

Of these three individuals, one was promoted to Assistant CAO while a student in the certificate program, another was promoted to CAO while a student in the program and the third received a promotion to CAO upon graduation.

Two participants reported that their employers required certification as a condition of employment. One described the entering motivation as being based upon:

Job requirement was the main thing. I had just started a job as a CAO [Chief Administrative Officer]... one of the requirements was that, since I didn't have it, I had to get it as soon as possible. Its valuable when you're in this field so I would have taken it anyways.

Of these two individuals, one was already employed as a CAO prior to entering the certificate program, as noted above, and did not experience a job change as a direct result of completing the certificate program. The other individual did receive a promotion from office assistant to Assistant CAO as a direct result of completing the certificate program. Both participants met the condition of employment required by their employers and became achieved certification in municipal management.

One participant reported that the CAO of the municipal office where the participant was employed encouraged all staff in the office to enrol in the program, particularly if they wished to be considered for advancement opportunities. After hearing this, the participant reviewed the MMA certificate information and course descriptions online and decided to enrol. All of the

students who were already employed by a rural municipality at the time of their admission to the certificate program achieved their stated goal of either maintaining their employment status or received a career advancement as a direct result of their participation in the certificate program.

Two participants were not employed in a municipal office when they entered the certificate program. One participant was working within a rural community and learned of a potential retirement within the local municipal office and decided to obtain the certificate in order to prepare to be an applicant for the position. The other participant reported being interested in entering the municipal administration field and investigated education opportunities related to the field. Each of these individuals was hired by a municipal office while a student in the program and one received a promotion to CAO upon graduation. These individuals also achieved their goal of obtaining employment within their field of choice as a direct result of undertaking the certificate program.

Much of the adult education literature suggests that adults enter continuing education programs in order to obtain new employment or to advance their existing professional career (Einsiedel, 1998, Walters, 2004, & Wotherspoon, 1998). The responses of the participants in this study echo that of the literature as all of the participants related their decision to enrol in the certification program directly to their career plans to either obtain new employment or to advance their current career. Wotherspoon contends that there is widespread acceptance that increased education will increase opportunities for employment (1998, p. 131). Einsiedel agrees and points to unemployment and a demand by employers that individuals prepare themselves for their profession as reasons for students seeking career specific training programs (1998, p. 18). While the sample population interviewed for this research project is small and not representative of all MMA graduates, the motivation of the participants to enter the certificate program, and

their resulting achievement of their goals, support the perspective that continuing education for either entry into a profession, or advancement within a profession, continues to be a primary motivation for some adult learners.

Benefits of certification

The research participants were asked to identify, in their opinion, any benefit(s) they received after graduating from the certificate program that were attributable to their achieving certification. As the purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of certification, the question was purposely non-specific to allow respondents to express the benefits, either personal or professional, that were most significant to them. The participants' responses fell into five distinct categories: learning employment-specific skills; improving their employability within the municipal administration field; increased salary (as a result of a promotion); networking opportunities; and personal achievement.

The participants reported that an important attribute of this certificate program is the inclusion of Manitoba-specific, municipal-related content in all but one of the required courses. The MMA certificate program is comprised of five required courses and attendance at two skill-building seminars. Of the five required courses, one is a course in general management principles and the other four are considered *core courses* and are comprised of content specific to Manitoba municipal administration. These core courses were developed specifically for the certificate program by content specialists, several of whom were working as CAO's or Chief Financial Officers (CFO's) in rural municipal offices, and have subsequently been regularly revised to ensure that the content remains current to meet the educational requirements and practical skills development needed by municipal administrators. The research participants expressed feeling

grateful that that the course content is directly applicable to the workplace. One noted that the coursework:

Deals so much with municipal stuff. I mean, a person can take a business administration course, or something like that, and learn the basics of accounting or the basics of how an office works but because this course deals so much specifically with municipal issues and how to deal with certain municipal issues and because municipal accounting is a little bit different than other accounting that it just, I think it prepares you a lot more for what's going to be expected of you and also give you a lot more of the knowledge that you're going to need to be able to do your job and do your job well.

and another explained that the program, "gives you a really good understanding of the day-to-day operations of a municipal office. It gives you a really good base to start with, base to go on to get more education or more experience. Its a really good program to get your foot in the door, to get you started". The participants highly valued the employment-specific content of the coursework and expressed feelings of satisfaction associated with being able to use the knowledge obtained through their certificate program at their workplace. This perspective concurs with Walters' research which found evidence that when an employer requires employees to obtain specific education qualifications, the employee is more likely to apply the knowledge acquired through academic study to their work (2004, p. 116).

Wooterspoon argues that requiring a credential as a condition of employment can either be an arbitrary tool used in the hiring process to separate applicants and reduce the number of candidates for a position or the requirement can be used to ensure that candidates considered for hiring have acquired the skills necessary to successfully perform a specific job (1998, p. 134). The responses of the participants in this research study indicate that the requirement for certification as a condition of employment is justified as the participants report applying the knowledge gained through their certificate program to their work.

Five participants reported that the opportunity for employment or career advancement within the municipal field was a benefit of certification and noted that employment postings often require that applicants must be certified, or willing to enrol, in the certificate program. One described certified applicants as having “an edge” over other applicants when competing for the same job if the other applicants are not certified.

If municipalities are requiring their employees to become certified in order to be considered for promotion to the position of CAO, then the municipalities are contributing to what Cruikshank describes as the polarization of the workforce whereby employers assist individuals who already hold the knowledge and skills required for employment by promoting these individuals into higher level positions (2001, p. 68). Alternatively, as two of the participants reported that their municipality required them to obtain certification as a condition of being hired to work for a municipal office, municipalities may be attempting to raise the value of their human capital by assuring that their workers have the skills needed to be more productive on the job (Walter, 2004, p. 100). Further research should be conducted to determine if municipalities are providing financial support or tuition reimbursement to their workers who enter the certificate program as a condition of employment or if they pay higher salaries to workers who enter the profession having already achieved certification. It would be interesting to know if municipalities are divesting themselves of the cost of supplying job-specific training for their employees while at the same time requiring employees to obtain this training as a condition of employment. If municipalities are not providing financial support to their employees who pursue certification then the municipal offices are offloading the cost of job-specific training onto their workers while benefiting from any increased value of their workers' human capital that may occur as a result of certification.

When asked to describe the benefits of completing the certificate program, all except for one of the participants related the outcome of certification to their potential to receive an increase in salary. However, their responses and opinions differed greatly. Of the seven participants who mentioned *salary* as a benefit of certification, four received an increase in pay upon graduation and three did not. One respondent offered an opinion saying that:

I think, I'm not sure, but I'm going to speak for the majority of municipalities do not give you more money based on your certification. I know in my municipality here, they don't think [municipal certification], even though they want it when they're hiring a CAO, they don't think that its the same as becoming certified for a utilities. Its something that, with utilities, you have to be certified to be a water treatment plant operator, you have to be certified to do that, its regulated

and noted that it is not regulated within Manitoba for CAO's to be required to achieve certification as a condition of holding the CAO position in a municipal office. As some municipal offices require certification as a condition of employment, the MMAA may want to investigate recommending mandatory certification for all Manitoba municipal CAO's. This would ensure a minimum standard of education throughout the province.

One participant noted that, although there was no specific financial incentive to obtain certification, it was *professionally important* to have the, "recognition that I am certified to be an administrator and it might have had some impact on my employer and my colleagues but I was doing the job before so just getting the certificate, after getting it, was recognition that I knew what I was doing". This sentiment is echoed by another participant who explained that:

I did have some staff people under me who had the course already because they had been here way longer than I was here, and they ... maybe would have thought in their mind, well I've got the course and you don't ... but you've got the senior position in the municipality being the CAO. And I'm sure, in their heads, they would have thought about it but having the certification just made them ... I guess *they knew* that *I knew* what I was doing.

This suggests that there is a perception amongst those who work in municipal offices that knowledge gained through workplace experience alone is not sufficient and that a CAO is expected, by their staff members, to be certified. The municipal office staff may believe that a CAO who is certified will be more knowledgeable about municipal administration than those who are not certified, regardless of the experience level of the uncertified CAO.

As the municipal-specific course content was cited by several participants as a benefit of the program, it is understandable that certification would imply that an individual holds a greater breadth or scope of knowledge than an individual who has not taken the formal training. If the MMAA is interested in encouraging all municipalities to require certification for all CAO's and Assistant CAO's, this pre-existing perception that certification is valued, as it provides knowledge that is directly applicable to the workplace, could be utilized in their argument.

Three participants reported experiencing personal satisfaction or the sense of personal accomplishment as the primary benefit of completing the certificate program. One participant explained that they felt a sense of, "accomplishment and there's a certain ... in my mind ... a certain element of prestige maybe, for taking, for having a university designation or taking university courses ... pride in having done that". This comment is reflective of the opinion that achieving the MMA certificate is a significant academic accomplishment. This comment also exemplifies the previously noted emphasis that many of the participants placed on the MMA certificate being particularly valuable because it is granted by a university.

Another participant described the feeling of accomplishment that accompanied completing the certificate program as:

Self satisfaction, because it was a grind, and it was hard, and it was five years of your life and weekends. And I was oh so happy that, as an adult, I had done that, and that I am entitled to put those initials behind my name. And that I've got that course behind me and all that it brings with it and that you're prepared. You think you know

it and as you go through working you gain the knowledge, but you've got the *why*, you've got the *structure* of what the course teaches you. And then you get the real life experience in the job. And so that I found helpful. It gave you the structure, the framework and then you're filling it in as you go with your experience.

Another participant explained that there is a level of prestige held by those who have achieved certification by explaining that graduates are:

In a select group now, that you've completed that and we all know what each other has gone through and the camaraderie that that brings when you're at a function and you talk about the courses together or you know what did you think about this part or that. And I am really enjoying ... there's two new staff at [municipality name] and they are going through the course and I know where they struggle ... and I tell, like if you want to bounce stuff off me come do it. And to be able to give back. That part I enjoy. The nurturing, having taken the course, and working in the municipal environment and giving back in training. I find that very rewarding.

The sentiment expressed by this participant regarding becoming a member of a *special group* through completing the certificate program was echoed by two other participants who identified the opportunity to network with others working in the municipal field as a benefit of participating in the certificate program. It is understandable that students who begin a program of study developed specifically for those working, or intending to work, in the municipal administration field would create a network amongst themselves since they likely have common career goals.

As all students are advised, upon their admission to the program, to take the introductory course Municipal Administration as the first course in their program, the course provides a structure for students new to the certificate program to communicate with other newly admitted students. The opportunity exists for the university to assist students to network by offering the certificate program in a formal cohort model. In a cohort format, all students who are admitted to a program follow the same schedule of courses. As each MMA certificate course is offered in a single section, where all students are in the same class or group, a cohort model could be easily

implemented. As Potter's research indicates that adult learners taking courses by distance delivery identify the need to communicate with other learners as a critical student support service (1998, p. 67), the university or the MMAA may wish to investigate if there are benefits that could be achieved from creating a more formal cohort structure that could lead to increased networking amongst students. For example, students could be required, rather than advised, to take Municipal Administration as the first course in their program. This would ensure that all newly admitted students were in the same class.

The university could formalize a cohort structure for the certificate program and develop an information sharing tool, such as a discussion board, for each year's newly admitted cohort that could be maintained throughout the students' tenure in the program. Students would then have a tool to help them to develop relationships with their classmates that could carry over to their professional careers. The MMAA may benefit from a cohort student model by helping students to maintain their affiliation with each other after graduating and becoming members of the Association. Similarly to how university alumni associations capitalize on graduates' affinity for their institution by organizing events or activities targeted to members' year of graduation or their membership in a particular class or program, the MMAA could organize communication and events targeted to the certificate's cohort groups. The MMAA already maintains a database of members that can be sorted by members' year of graduation that could be used to send event invitations to graduates specific years. As the Association is a membership-driven organization, the benefit of maintaining the affinity formed amongst classmates after graduation could be Association members who are more engaged with their peers and, by extension, more engaged with their Association.

Impact of self-directed learning

The courses in the MMA certificate program are available exclusively by distance learning and are offered in a traditional correspondence format whereby students receive a printed course manual, assignment package, and instructions on how to work their way independently through the course materials. Students are expected to complete the courses using independent study whereby they read the course manual and complete assignments which are then submitted to the instructor for grading. The courses are offered annually with a September start date, have specific due dates for assignment submission and end with a final examination at a location convenient to the student. The examination is supervised by an invigilator and students are responsible for arranging for their own invigilator who must be approved by the university.

Self-directed learning is required when students complete their assignments as the assignment questions ask students to apply the course theory to real-life situations. By utilizing their personal experiences as the foundation for answering their assignment questions, students have the opportunity to engage in some self-directed learning as students must draw their own conclusions and create their own understanding by applying their personal experience to the theoretical concepts (Brookfield, 1993). As students work independently through the course materials, the opportunity exists for self-directed learning to take place through the *process* of completing the coursework as students may learn time management skills, improve their reading comprehension skills or writing skills while completing their coursework.

Transformation learning theory holds that the act of reflecting upon an experience can provide a learner with a new perspective of the initial experience (Mezirow, 1991, p. 11). One of the important aspects of this theory is that an experience must be considered in hindsight. In this research project, attention was paid to responses to questions, or voluntary comments made by

participants, that related to any of the participants identifying having experienced a change in perspective regarding their initial learning experiences in the certificate program.

In order to encourage participants to remember and reflect upon their learning experiences, a series of three questions were asked:

- a) was taking courses by distance learning and self-directed study any different than you were expecting it to be;
- b) can you explain the impact that being a student had on your personal life; and
- c) can you list three challenges that you faced while you were a student.

The questions were designed to encourage participants to recall their initial expectations regarding participating in an independent study program and to assess if, and how, their expectations differed from their experiences; describe any personal impact relating to participation in the certificate program; and to collect information regarding the personal challenges participants experienced while students in the program.

All of the participants reported that they felt prepared to take courses by independent study. Six participants noted that they felt comfortable with the format and experienced no difficulty taking courses by correspondence learning. This may indicate that the information provided to students upon their admission to the program fully informs students of the course delivery format or that newly admitted students are receiving advice and information about the program from co-workers who are already certified. One participant described missing the personal contact that accompanies classroom style courses and another participant reported feeling that taking courses by independent study requires students to dedicate more time to a course than a traditional in-class or face-to-face course. The participant explained that arranging the family schedule to accommodate one evening class per week, in order for the student to

attend a traditional evening class, is more convenient than having to find time to study wherever and whenever possible. In this participant's case, finding time to dedicate to coursework often meant reading the course manual while a passenger in the family vehicle when travelling to social or family events. Two other participants reported appreciating the flexibility of taking courses by the distance learning format noting that they could work at their own pace and fit the time needed for study into their personal schedule. While there is disagreement amongst the participants regarding their personal preference for course delivery format, none of the participants expressed concern with the independent study format.

When asked to explain the impact that taking courses had on their personal life, all but one participant mentioned the *time* that their studies took, with four relating that their studies took time away from their family commitments and three reporting that finding time to complete their studies resulted in personal stress. As most of the participants in the study entered the certificate program while already working full time, and all participants worked full time for at least some of the years they spent as students in the program, the participants were required to balance work and school commitments. Those participants with additional family responsibilities expressed having difficulty balancing all of their commitments.

One of the participants who reported feeling a lack of adequate time to study caused personal stress noted that, "my employer was pretty good about giving me time if I needed some. Like, to work on an assignment that had to be done, I could spend an afternoon working on it to get it done". It is surprising that this participant would report feeling stressed due to having a lack of time to complete coursework when they were the only participant to report receiving time off from work to study or prepare assignments.

The only participant who did not mention *time* in response to personal impact explained that;

My answers are going to be a little bit different because no, the courses were not difficult for me at all. Its not like they weren't challenging. They were challenging. But I had just been a student so I knew what to expect and I was familiar with completing projects and writing exams and reading, so I, it wasn't a big challenge for me or a balance with my life because I had been so familiar with that before. It would have been for other folks that hadn't taken as many courses as I had.

This participant had recently completed an undergraduate degree prior to entering the certificate program and therefore had significant prior experience with post secondary study and was accustomed to allocating time within their personal schedule for coursework. It may be useful for the university to investigate the number of hours that students spend on their coursework each week and to provide this information to newly admitted students. Knowing how much time others have used to complete their coursework may help new students to plan their schedules accordingly.

When asked to list the challenges that they faced while a student in the certificate program, several participants reported similar factors:

- the issue of developing personal time management skills and finding enough time to complete the assignments and prepare for examinations (five participants mentioned this);
- developing the personal discipline needed to manage the workload;
- managing the conflicting priorities of work, home and school.
- feeling isolated due to not knowing anyone in the course until the first tutorial took place;
- needing a support network of peers with whom they could communicate on a regular basis (four participants mentioned this);

In order to encourage participants to share their personal learning experiences and to elicit comments that may help to ascertain if the participants had achieved any transformative learning through their experiences, participants were asked to reflect upon their answers and to suggest ways that the challenges could have been avoided or resolved. Participants did not report any suggestions regarding the challenges that relate to *time* and *time management* other than to recommend that students set aside enough time to work on their assignments and course readings. One participant recommended avoiding doing housework until the homework was done and another remarked that students should be emotionally prepared to spend less time with their family. The participants in the study appear to have been aware of the amount of time necessary to complete the coursework but may have appreciated information and advice on how to develop the time management skills required to manage the coursework alongside their other work and family obligations.

With regard to resolving the issues of students feeling isolated from each other and needing a support network of peers, two participants suggested that the university offer an orientation workshop for newly admitted students that would provide an opportunity to network with other students, share personal contact information and develop peer groups. One participant noted that student-to-student communication often occurs naturally in a face-to-face classroom setting and that processes should be developed to support similar communication opportunities within the certificate program:

It would have been nice to have a more formal network of the other students or having their e-mails so that you could talk to them, not necessarily get questions answered but at least talk to them so that you would, you didn't feel quite so alone because you didn't see them except twice during the tutorials.

The other participant commented that it could be difficult for students to attend an on-site orientation as employers may be unwilling to provide time off from work for an orientation session if it is perceived that the orientation is a social event and that no course-specific learning will take place. The university could consider making an orientation session mandatory for all students and to offer it in a format accessible to all students such as providing the means for students who cannot attend an on-site orientation to participate online instead.

Four participants mentioned that the *course tutorials* were one of the solutions to their challenge of needing to create a support network of peers with whom they could communicate on a regular basis. Although the tutorials offered by the certificate program are not designed as networking opportunities, they do, by nature of their face-to-face, classroom style format, fulfil that role. The four core courses in the certificate program each include two optional tutorials which are held in the cities of Winnipeg and Brandon. The course tutorials are free to registered students and are led by the course instructor. As not all students are able to attend the course tutorials, usually due to the difficulties associated with travelling from the most rural municipalities in Manitoba to the tutorial location, no new instructional material is presented at the tutorials. Instead, the tutorials are an opportunity for instructors to review areas where students are having difficulty and to explain important course topics. As the research participants noted that students who attend the tutorials use them as an opportunity to meet other students and that the tutorials support networking amongst the students, the university may want to consider utilizing technology that would allow students who cannot attend the on-site tutorial to participate online.

The recommendation that an orientation be held at the start of the program appears to be based on the positive experiences that students acquired while attending the course tutorials and

students' desire to create a network. There has been discussion in recent years regarding cancelling the tutorials as not all students have equal access to them due to students' geographic locations. However, the positive impact that tutorials have in engaging students with each other and providing them with the foundation upon which to build a support network may indicate that tutorials are a vital component of student success and may contribute to their overall positive learning experience.

Participants' recommendations for the program and advice for future students

The research participants were asked three, open-ended questions to encourage the free sharing of their ideas and opinions.

- a) If you were invited to speak to the university about the certificate program, what recommendations would you make?
- b) If you were invited to speak to students who were newly admitted to the certificate program, what advice would you give them? and
- c) Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experience and how completing the MMA certificate program has affected you?

Recommendations to the university

The participants overwhelmingly suggested that the university should take specific steps to facilitate networking amongst students including the introduction of an orientation for newly admitted students, maintaining the course tutorials and developing a mentor program that would connect new students to experienced municipal administrators. An orientation to the program was described as an opportunity for newly admitted students to meet each other, exchange contact information, and receive general information about the certificate program such as

minimum grades required for graduation and the process of arranging for an examination invigilator.

An orientation to the program would provide students with an introduction to their peers as the orientation would be attended by students beginning the program in the same term. As many newly hired municipal administrators are advised to begin the certificate program as soon as possible after being hired by a municipal office, an orientation to the certificate program could also provide an opportunity to orient participants to the profession of municipal administration and specifically any challenges or issues that a CAO new to the field may need to address. The university and the MMAA could jointly host an orientation that could cover topics related to the certificate program requirements, such as an overview of the course content, delivery systems, assignment and exam processes and the amount of time that students typically spend completing their coursework. The orientation could include an introduction to the field of municipal administration led by representatives of the MMAA as an optional workshop for students who do not already have experience working for a municipality. In order to accommodate students who cannot easily travel to Winnipeg for an on-site orientation, the orientation session could either be offered on-site with an option available for students to participate online or it could be offered exclusively online.

Some of the networking recommendations made by the research participants were as simple as suggesting that the university create and distribute an e-mail list of all students registered in a particular course to facilitate direct student-to-student communication.

Participants also provided detailed feedback including that:

The only thing that I would have changed, because for the most part I liked the way it worked, it was good, and the thing that I liked most, the thing you seemed to learn most from was, during each of the courses, most of it you worked at home, but then they also had, I forget what they called them, it wasn't a training session, I don't

remember what they called it now, .. (prompted by researcher, “tutorials?”) Right, the tutorials. In the Essentials of Management course there weren’t any tutorials and I would have liked to have seen the tutorial in that course because the tutorials seem to be where you learned the most information and I think that that course could have used a tutorial but that would be the only thing that I would have changed.

While networking among students was identified as a priority, another participant expressed concern regarding the lack of professional networking and mentoring which could occur between municipal administrators saying that:

One of my disappointments with this whole, these positions, we’re all doing the same thing, we’re all reinventing the wheel over and over again and I wish we’d share more. We don’t. There’s too much competition. Its, there’s very few administrators, maybe at the lower levels like the clerks and the staff, but in the administration part, the administrators, there’s just no sharing, because its too competitive. Like I’ve often phoned other people and talked to them and they really don’t want to help you. Its like you’ve got to learn it all on your own and figure it out all on your own. I’ve often wanted to start a group for new administrators to say ‘what do you do about this’ and ‘what do you do about that’, but then you just get so overwhelmed with the day to day stuff that there isn’t the time to do that. And its not that the province is not really helpful and there for that information, they are, but sometimes its just nice to talk to another one and to figure out how they’re doing the day to day stuff that just comes with time and experience. And I know I’ve contacted one of our neighbours because this person was an administrator for a long, long time and didn’t get any real help from them so I would defiantly say that they’re not helpful and they are competitive.

If the university adopts a cohort model and introduces an orientation to the program for newly admitted students, the affinity that students share during their student days may transfer to ongoing peer-to-peer collegial relationships upon graduation. The participant’s comment above suggests that, even if the MMAA were to provide opportunities for current administrators to connect to share information and to build a network, some administrators may not wish to participate. Even if the university and the MMAA take steps to create a sense of community amongst students and municipal administrators, the decision to participate in such a community rests with each student or administrator. As indicated by the participant who identified the lack

of information sharing amongst municipal administrators in the comment above, some administrators will choose to not share their time or knowledge with others. If the MMAA wishes to build a community of administrators who are willing to freely share advice and experiences amongst each other or to mentor each other, the Association may wish to create a volunteer-driven mentorship program that would connect experienced administrators, who are willing and interested in sharing their knowledge, to a recently hired administrator. If the MMAA launches such a program, it could be promoted to students at the certificate program orientation.

Three participants suggested that the university consider revising the Municipal Accounting course so that the certificate graduates would be better prepared to meet the accounting requirements of the municipal administration role. One participant explained the unique financial aspects of the job by saying that:

We have specific regulations in budgeting that you can only budget a certain percentage of your balance of your reserves, you can only budget a certain percentage overall of those figures to come into a one-year operating budget for a capital project. So outside of the Municipal Act you have a regulation and do you know that I couldn't have told you that those regulations existed at the end of my municipal accounting course? And to me that's atrocious, that there wasn't a whole section on those regulations, when it regulates how you budget. I didn't find out about that until after I was employed for a few years and was actually starting to get involved in the budgeting process. I had no idea that those regulations existed because in your accounting or in your administration program I can't remember them even touching on that ... those regulations are instrumental when you're budgeting. It can be rejected by the Province of Manitoba and by Intergovernmental Affairs if you budget higher than the allowable percentage of reserve for a capital project in one year. Like, let's say I had this huge capital project and I didn't want to take out a debenture for it and I didn't want to tax my citizens for it because I've got a huge general reserve that I can use for that. So okay, our debt load is already X, I don't want to make it any higher so I'm going to take it out of these reserves that we've been saving up but you know if its over that percentage, legally I can't do that. And so, if you're sending out graduates to be CAO's and they don't have that information, they're already lame ducks.

The university may want to conduct a survey of recent certificate program graduates to inquire about changes that could, or should, be made to course content to ensure that the courses cover the material necessary for administrators to be successful in their positions. While the certificate program advisory committee includes representation from the MMAA membership and instructors who teach the program's core courses, the comment of this participant suggests that the course content may need to be reviewed more closely and evaluated to ensure that it is current.

Three participants proposed that the university move course materials, and particularly assignment submission, online. These recommendations have already been implemented and, since the fall of 2009, the core courses of the program have begun to increasingly utilize technology in the delivery of coursework including modifying the course manuals from print format to online, opening online discussion boards for students and implementing the option for students to submit assignments online.

One participant reminisced about the pressure that students felt when trying to fax an assignment by the deadline, particularly when many other students were also trying to fax their submissions at the same time, and the fax telephone line would ring busy for hours. This problem has been significantly reduced with the implementation of online assignment submission. Another participant said that having to submit assignments by fax, rather than sending them directly to the instructor via e-mail, prevented student-to-instructor communication and explained feeling, "that the instructors were the ivory tower and you weren't supposed to contact them, you had to go through the university in order to contact them". This participant may have believed that Continuing Education, by requiring assignments to be submitted through the Continuing Education office, was placing a barrier between students and their instructors.

However, the option for students to fax their assignments was simply the best use of the technology available at the time.

The supplementary material provided with each course package includes a letter of introduction from the instructor with the instructor's direct contact information. The participant who noted feeling that they couldn't contact their instructor should have felt free to do so. With the increasing use of technology in course communication, including use of an online learning management system to provide a website for each course, current students are able to contact their instructors directly by e-mail or through the course website communication tools. This modification to the course delivery structure has removed the perceived barrier of the university standing between students and their instructors.

Advice for newly admitted students

The issues of time management and balancing the time required for the coursework with life's other priorities were the items most cited by participants. Three participants recommended that new students be prepared to practice good time management skills in order to successfully balance schoolwork with other priorities. One participant described wishing that they had invested more time in reading the course materials rather than just doing the minimum work needed to successfully complete the assignments. Another participant advised that new students should be prepared to;

Bare down. That is, at times you're going to feel like its not worth it, and you'll want to pull your hair out and you'll want to cry, and you'll want to slam every door you have in the house but in the end it is worth it. It will take all of your planning skills, and your coordination skills, time management skills, that's what I want to say, your time management skills to do it, but it is worth it in the end.

The university may wish to develop an information sheet for newly admitted students advising them of the amount of time previous students have spent on their coursework and post in on the

certificate program's information website. As Potter's research reveals that adults in distance education programs rate having access to information among the most important services in the early stages of students' participation in a course or program (1998), testimonials could be solicited from graduates and shared with new students to inform them of the experiences of previous students. Graduates could be asked to provide advice or recommendations on topics of interest to new students such as time management strategies. The university may also want to develop a workshop on time management skills and offer it as part of the certificate program orientation.

One participant offered advice to new students in the form of a warning saying that the municipal administration field is:

Challenging, its becoming more and more challenging as the days go by due to, a lot of it is due to, there's less apathy out there in the rate payers. People today are more willing to complain about things than people 15 or 20 years ago were and municipalities are required to do a lot more now than they were 20 years ago. For instance, it used to be all about roads and gravel, and making sure that the gravel roads are in good shape and the streets are paved and the sidewalks are looked after and we have the equipment to do these things. Now we have to worry about environmental concerns, and sewer concerns, dealing with Manitoba Conservation, Agriculture, the Freedom of Information Act and its so much more now than it was years ago. [New students shouldn't] be scared. You're getting into a field that's very challenging and very rewarding at the same time but you need to open your mind and open your eyes to the contacts that are out there and make them and don't be scared to ask questions because there's lots of great people out there that will be resourceful and helpful for you.

This opinion contradicts the previously noted response of another participant who discovered that other municipal administrators were unwilling to provide advice or share their best practices when asked. The MMAA may wish to create a vehicle, in addition to the previously mentioned mentorship program, such as a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section on their website targeted towards new municipal administrators that would include answers to questions common amongst new municipal administrators. The information included in the FAQ could be prepared

by those experienced administrators willing to share their advice and opinions. Even though the information included in the FAQ would be directed towards new administrators, it could be made accessible to the entire MMAA membership. As one of the purposes of the MMAA is to increase the professional growth of its members (MMAA Strategic Plan 2009-2010) the development of an FAQ fits within the Association's identified mandate.

Four participants suggested that students should actively engage in networking and create their own personal support system that includes other students, instructors and alumni currently working in the field. One participant offered the following advice to students currently undertaking the certificate program:

It may be tough at times, but stick with it. There are resources available. Don't be afraid to ask questions, definitely, of your instructor or find other students that are taking the program with you and ask them. Throw the question out there, and say 'hey, has anybody ever come across this' or 'can somebody help me?'. Talk to other people, if you're employed in the field already ... talk to other people in the office. Don't be scared if you're not to go into your local municipal office and say, 'hey, I'm a student taking the CMMA program. Is there somebody here that could maybe help me with this question? I don't understand municipal administration. I don't understand this part of it because I'm not working with it. Is there somebody who could tell me how this works so that maybe it makes more sense?'. That would be probably the advice that I would give [new students] because I think most, most municipal administrators around the province would be more than willing to help a new student, to give them a bit of advice, to give them, you know, to sit down with them for 20 minutes and explain, this is what this means or how that works. At least, I would hope they would. That's something that we're certainly trying to do at the Board level right now, is expand on getting the CAO or the municipal administrator field more known to the local kids as a career option.

The creation of an MMAA facilitated mentor program as well as the development of an FAQ section on the MMAA website may provide the foundation for students to obtain answers to these types of questions.

Participants' comments

An open-ended question inviting research participants to share any comments that they had regarding their learning experience and the impact of certification was asked near the end of the telephone interviews. Only two of the participants provided additional commentary with the rest indicating that they either had said all that they needed to say or reiterating a previous comment to emphasize its importance. One of the two participants who provided a response chose to explain the importance of obtaining professional certification, saying that:

Participating in a certificate program, especially at the university level, is very important because this is a very important job that we do here and taking the university courses helps bring that home to you. That this isn't just something that like working at a grocery store or whatever. There is much more responsibility and you have to be much more prepared and the courses that we take help us do that and help give us an understanding of the administration aspect, and the law aspect and even some of the accounting aspect so it does have a big impact and as a student as your going through it your learning things and you realize just how important it is to know the municipal act because that's what we're governed by and that was stressed quite often, know your act, read your act and I don't know that if you didn't have to take the courses if you would really place much importance on it. And it affected me in that as a single working mom and my kids seeing me work harder to take these courses, not only was I proud of myself for graduating and doing it but they were very proud of me as well and I think it kind of brought home to them how important school is.

The other participant who provided an additional comment expressed concern regarding succession planning in municipal offices saying that:

The one thing that I would like to comment on is the lack of education for municipal, future municipal employees. There is a big concern I think across the country that once we, the veterans, start to leave and retire that there is no interest of younger people coming in to fill those positions. And I'm not sure how to educate the young of this kind of occupation. For me, I'm liking the fact that maybe when I'm 60 and I want to retire part time that I will be able to continue working because there's just nobody else filling those positions and that's a scary proposition as a taxpayer. Who's going to run the municipalities in the future?"

This participant has identified succession planning as an important, current issue for Manitoba municipalities. The MMAA also identified succession planning within its 2009-2010 strategic plan document as one of the three key goals for the Association to address (MMAA, 2009, p. 3).

The same participant who discussed succession planning above then expressed concern that municipalities may not be able to attract young, educated talent to the field due to the low salaries paid to municipal administrators and posed a question asking, “Why would some young person who could get double, 20% more, maybe 50% more in the city, why would they want to come and work in a municipal environment? That’s the big conundrum and I hope that, maybe provincially, they have to amalgamate some of these little rural communities to allow for more pay. I don’t know”. The participant expressed frustration that there is a general sense of disrespect within rural communities of municipal administration as a profession and said that:

In our community, it is interpreted that you can just walk in and start working in the municipal environment and that simply is not the case. It takes a lot of training, you need a year under your belt to actually know what its like to be in a municipal environment, and there’s that perception among some counsellors that that’s all that’s required, that you don’t need to be trained, that you can just walk in and do it. And you can, but its a strain on all the staff that’s there and the position will take at least a year to two years to actually fully comprehend what’s involved through municipal work.

As the MMAA mission statement identifies, “the purpose of the MMAA is to promote Municipal Administration as a career” (MMAA, 2009, p. 2), the Association has a vested interest in ensuring that municipal administrators are perceived as highly trained professionals performing an important role in local government. The MMAA has already identified raising the public perception of the profession as one of the three key goals in its strategic plan.

Recruiting new workers to the professional may require the MMAA to undertake targeted marketing directed towards a specific demographic group. For example, the MMAA may wish to participate in the co-operative education option offered to students of the University of

Manitoba's I.H. Asper School of Business (Asper School) in order to recruit new business graduates to the profession of municipal administration. The Asper School describes its co-operative education program as "an educational partnership, bridging the employment and academic needs of students, the University, and the business community. Co-op formally enables student to integrate academic studies with on-the-job experience while meeting the recruitment needs of employers. Each work term students are employed full-time for a minimum period of four months and are actively engaged in productive work" (Asper School of Business, 2009). Students in the Asper School major in one of 13 different specializations including business administration, accounting, human resource management, and management of organizations (Asper School of Business, 2009) and their academic knowledge could be applicable to municipal administration. Students attending the Asper School may not be aware of the career opportunities available to them within the municipal administration field and could become informed about the field through the co-operative education program information.

Conclusions and recommendations

The participants in this research study reported achieving their stated goals of either obtaining employment as a municipal administrator, maintaining their employment status, which in some cases was conditional upon their achieving certification, or received a promotion as a direct result of their participation in the certificate program. While the sample population interviewed for this research project is small and not representative of all MMA graduates, the results of this study support the theory that continuing education serves the purpose of assisting adults to either enter a profession or to advance their career within a profession.

While all of the research participants completed the same coursework during their tenure as students, they report significant variances in the professional and personal impact of achieving

certification. Several of the participants emphasized the importance of completing a university certificate program and reported feeling proud of the achievement of obtaining certification. The participants identified several benefits of completing the certificate coursework with the most often responses being the opportunity to learn employment-specific skills and improved employability with the municipal administration field.

Participants did not report any specific examples of transformative learning acquired through their participation in the certificate program or during their reflection upon their experiences as students in the program. However, several participants reported developing new time management skills as a direct result of their participation in the certificate program. The development of these time management skills and the creation of the participants' personal processes to manage the multiple priorities of academic study, work and family commitments are examples of self-directed learning.

Based on the opinions shared by the research participants, the following recommendations are made to Continuing Education, University of Manitoba and the Executive Director of the MMAA.

- The university consider offering the MMA certificate in a cohort model and implement a formal orientation session for the certificate program. The orientation session should include information on the number of hours per week previous students spent on their coursework, a workshop on time management skills and be a required component of the program. Students who are unable to attend the orientation session on-site should be able to participate online or the orientation could be designed to be delivered solely in an online format.

- The university continue to offer tutorials in the program's core courses as they are valued by students. The university work towards making the tutorials accessible, perhaps by increasing the use of technology, to all registered students.
- The university may want to survey recent graduates of the certificate program to determine if the course content is current and if it meets the needs of graduates. The results of the survey may indicate if the courses need more frequent or more extensive revision than is currently occurring.
- The MMAA may wish to create a mentor program linking new students to experienced municipal administrators who are willing to share their expertise. The university can promote the mentorship program to students.
- The MMAA may wish to create a forum for students and recent graduates to access helpful information such as a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section on their website.
- The MMAA may want to investigate if there is widespread perception within municipal employees that certified municipal administrators or CAO's are more knowledgeable than non-certified administrators. If the result is positive, then the MMAA may wish to pursue the implementation of mandatory certification for Manitoba municipal administrators with the provincial government. This would ensure a minimum standard of knowledge for all municipal administrators in the province.
- The MMAA could implement targeted marketing including focussing on university students taking degrees in management and management-related programs. This could include encouraging and facilitating municipal offices' participation in the university's Asper School of Business co-operative education program.

- If either the university or the MMAA wish to conduct further research involving graduates of the certificate program and/or the Association's membership, investigate alternative ways of contacting and recruiting participants in order to solicit a larger, and perhaps representative, sample population from which to gather data.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Advertisement for position of Chief Administrative Officer of a Manitoba Municipality

Appendix B: Letter of Support from the Manitoba Municipal Administrators' Association (MMAA)

Appendix C: Memorandum from the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board (REB) granting approval to proceed

Appendix D: Bulletin inviting MMAA members to participate in the research project

Appendix E: Information letter sent to all potential participants

Appendix F: Informed consent document

Appendix G: Script for telephone interviews

Appendix A: Advertisement for Chief Administrative Officer of a Manitoba Municipality

**THE RURAL MUNICIPALITY OF LORNE
CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER**

The Rural Municipality of Lorne invites written applications for the full time position of Chief Administrative Officer.

The R.M. of Lorne is located in south central Manitoba and presently has the only wind farm in Manitoba located within its boundaries. The R.M. of Lorne is comprised mainly of farming and has many small residential communities within its boundaries.

Qualifications required:

- Graduate of, enrolled in or willing to enroll in, the certificate program for Manitoba Municipal Administration.
- Experience in municipal administration preferred
- Strong financial background
- Computer experience and knowledge of the municipal Asyst program an asset
- Strong communication, organizational and management skills are necessary
- Ability to develop, interpret and administer agreements, statutes and by-law

Salary range is dependent upon qualifications and experience. Expected start date is April 1, 2010.

Envelope should be marked "CAO Application" and should contain a full resume with three references. Application to be submitted to the undersigned no later than 4:00 p.m., February 8, 2010.

Personnel Committee, R.M. of Lorne, Box 10, Somerset, Mb. R0G 2L0, PH: 744-2133, E-mail: rmlorne@inetlink.ca

Winnipeg Free Press, January 16, 2010, p. I2.

Appendix B: Letter of support*Manitoba Municipal Administrators' Association*

January 15, 2010

Sandra Woloschuk

<address>

<address>

<address>

Dear Sandra:

The Manitoba Municipal Administrators Association (MMAA) confirms its support of your research project investigating the impact of certification on municipal administrators. The MMAA is an incorporated body whose membership includes primarily individuals who are employed in an administrative or leadership position by a municipal corporation or local government.

The Association's purpose includes serving its membership by promoting municipal administration as a career, increasing the professional growth of our members, and acting as the voice on issues affecting Municipal Administration. As such, the results of an inquiry that examines the impact of certification on our members may be useful to our Association and its members.

We maintain contact with our membership, which includes graduates of the University of Manitoba's Certificate in Manitoba Municipal Administration (MMA) program, and through this can assist you to identify and locate the potential participants in your project.

Sincerely,



Mel Nott
Executive Director

533 Buckingham Road Winnipeg, MB R3R 1B9
ph: (204) 255-4883 e-mail: mmaa@mts.net
website: www.mmaa.mb.ca

Appendix C: Research ethics approval to proceed



MEMORANDUM

DATE: 4 April 2010

TO: Sandra Woloschuk

COPY: Pat Rasmussen (Supervisor)
Janice Green, Secretary, Athabasca University Research Ethics Board
Dr. Simon Nuttgens, Chair, Athabasca University Research Ethics Board

FROM: Dr. Raphael Foshay, Chair, CIS Research Ethics Review Committee

SUBJECT: **Ethics Proposal #CIS-10-12:** *“Managing Manitoba’s Municipalities: Graduates’ reflections on the impact of obtaining certification”*

The Centre for Integrated Studies (CIS) Research Ethics Review Committee, acting under authority of the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board to provide an expedited process of review for minimal risk student researcher projects, has reviewed the above-noted proposal and supporting documentation.

I am pleased to advise that this project has been awarded interim **APPROVAL TO PROCEED**. You may begin your research immediately; **HOWEVER, prior to contacting participants** the following documents are required to be submitted to rebsec@athabascau.ca **for file purposes only**:

- inclusion of information items #'s 14 & 15 in your letter of information and consent, as outlined in the accompanying REB document “basics-checklist”

This approval of your application will be reported to the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board (REB) at their next monthly meeting. The REB retains the right to request further information, or to revoke the interim approval, at any time.

The approval for the study “as presented” is valid for a period of one year from the date of this memo. If required, an extension must be sought in writing prior to the expiry of the existing approval. **A Final Report is to be submitted when the research project is completed.** The reporting form can be found online at <http://www.athabascau.ca/research/ethics/>.

As implementation of the proposal progresses, if you need to make any significant changes or modifications, please forward this information immediately to the CIS Research Ethics Review Committee via Dr. Raphael Foshay rfoshay@athabascau.ca for further review.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact rfoshay@athabascau.ca.

Appendix D: Invitation to participate in research project from the MMAA to its members

Dear members

A Master's student from Athabasca University, Sandra Woloschuk, is conducting a research project to meet the requirements of her program. She is looking for individuals who graduated between 2001 and 2005 from the Certificate Program in Manitoba Municipal Administration (MMA) to participate in her study.

Sandra is inviting volunteers to tell her about their experiences while a student in the program and to share any impact that completing the MMA certificate may have had on your personal or professional life. She will be conducting one-on-one telephone interviews with volunteers inviting them share their opinions and is interested in hearing about how completing the certificate may have made a difference in your life. She will collect about a dozen stories and then prepare a summary report that will be submitted to the university. Your name and other personal information will not be used in the report. This is an important project because it will provide a valuable historical snapshot of students' experiences in the certificate program. The report may also indicate some areas of improvement that could be made to the certificate program.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to schedule a telephone interview of between 30 to 60 minutes long at a mutually agreed upon time during the months of September and October, 2010. The interview will follow some general guidelines but questions will be open-ended so that each participant can speak to their own unique experience. Sandra will send you a detailed letter about the project and a consent form. Participation is voluntary and all information gathered will be kept anonymous and confidential.

If you are interested in participating in the study, or if you would like more information about the research project, please contact Sandra at <e-mail> or by phone at ###-####.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board

Appendix E: Project information for potential participants

Research Project Title: Managing Manitoba's Municipalities: A Study on the Impact of Manitoba Municipal Certification

Researcher: Sandra Woloschuk

I am a Master's student at Athabasca University and am conducting this research study as part of the requirements of my degree in Integrated Studies (Adult Education). This research project will examine the learning experience of individuals who completed the Certificate Program in Manitoba Municipal Administration (MMA) between the years 2001 and 2005 and the impact that obtaining certification may have had on their lives and careers. The purpose of this study is to gather the experiences of students who participated in this program during a common period of time, and then to compare the experiences and any career advancement or personal development that resulted from certification.

The results of the study will be combined into a summary report that will be submitted to Athabasca University. My hope is that the results will contribute to greater understanding of the experiences and issues faced by adult learners involved in a rural focussed and sector-specific certificate program. The Manitoba Municipal Administrators' Association (MMAA) has provided their support of this project and will benefit from the important, historical snapshot of students' experiences in the late 1990's to early 2000's. The report may also indicate some areas of improvement that could be made to the certificate program.

If you agree to participate in this study, I will call you to arrange a mutually agreeable time for a telephone interview which will take place in September or October, 2010. The questions will relate to your experiences while a student in the certificate program and the impact that completing the certificate may have had on your personal and professional life. While the interview will follow some general guidelines, the questions are open-ended to allow us to follow conversation topics as they arise during the interview.

The telephone interview will be between 30 to 60 minutes long and your confidentiality and anonymity is assured. The data that I collect will be coded and your personal information will not be revealed in the research report. I will record the telephone interview so that that I can accurately reflect upon your responses. I will be the only person with access to the recording and will personally transcribe them. The original recording and the transcriptions will be destroyed within three months of the project's submission for grading.

Participation is confidential. The recordings, transcriptions and project report will be kept in a secure office. The results of the study may be published or presented at a professional conference but your identity will never be revealed. Participation is anonymous which means that your name will not appear anywhere in the report and no one will be able identify you by your answers as all personally identifying information will be removed from the report. You have the right to refuse to answer any questions and to withdraw from the interview at any time.

I would be happy to answer any questions you have about this project. If you would like more information, or if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact:

Researcher: Sandra Woloschuk
Telephone: ###-####
E-mail: <e-mail address>

Research Supervisor: Pat Rasmussen, Ph.D.
Graduate Instructor
Telephone: ###-####
E-mail: <e-mail address>

If you would like to take part in this research study, please read and sign the consent form on the next page. Your completion and return of the attached consent form indicates that you understand the information provided to you about your participation in this research project and that you agree to participate.

The Athabasca University Research ethics Board has reviewed this research study and may be reached by e-mailing rebsec@athabascau.ca or calling 1-780-675-6718 if you have questions or comments about your treatment as a participant.

Sincerely,

Sandra Woloschuk

Appendix F: Informed consent form for research participants**Consent Form**

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and that you agree to participate by taking part in a telephone interview of between 30 to 60 minutes long that will be scheduled for a mutually agreeable time. In no way does this waive your rights nor release the researcher, Sandra Woloschuk, from her professional responsibilities. You remain free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you wish. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or information throughout the project. A copy of this form will be sent to you for your records and reference.

I, _____ (print name) hereby consent to participate
in a 30 to 60 minute telephone interview.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher's Signature _____ Date _____

Please return this form in the attached self-addressed, stamped envelope to:
Sandra Woloschuk
<address and contact information>

Appendix G: Script for telephone interviews

Good (morning/afternoon/evening), its Sandra calling for our interview. How are you?

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in my research project.

I'm looking forward to hearing your stories and learning more about your experiences with the municipal certificate program.

Before we begin, I want to remind you that the purpose of today's interview is to gather data for my research regarding the impact of certification on Manitoba's municipal managers.

This project is part of the requirements of my master's program at Athabasca University.

Remember that your participation is completely voluntary, so if there is any question that you want to skip, or if you want to take a break or end the interview, just let me know.

Everything that we discuss will be kept confidential and you will remain anonymous.

If I quote an example you give in my report, your name will be changed to protect your confidentiality. I will not include any information in my report that could identify you.

This interview should take between 30 and 60 minutes and is in two parts.

Part one includes some brief demographic questions that will help me create your profile and make comparisons to other graduates. This part will take just about five minutes.

Part two is questions that ask you to share your learning experiences and the effect that obtaining certification has had on your career and personal life.

What questions do you have before we start?

Part one

Demographic questions:

1. Please tell me which of the following age ranges best describes you:

20-30 31-40 41-50 50-60 61+

2. Are you male or female (*if known, do not ask*).

3. Where was your place of residence while you were a student? (name of town and municipality) _____

4a. Were you working in a municipal office while you were a student?

No Yes *If answer is yes, which municipality did you work for?*

If respondent replies "for part of the time", make note of for how long and where

5. What year did you graduate from the certificate program

2001 2002 2003 2004 2005

6. How many years have you worked, in total, for a municipal office? (*any municipal office, not just current employer*) _____

7. When you started the certificate program, what was your highest level of education at the time?

high school college diploma university certificate undergraduate degree

other _____

8. What is your current level of education?

high school college diploma university certificate undergraduate degree

other _____

9. Did you change jobs while you were a student taking the certificate program?

no yes *if yes, what was the job change:* _____

10. Did you change jobs or get a new position once you **completed** the certificate program.

no yes: *if yes, what was the job change:* _____

That's it for the profile questions.

Now we're going to move onto some open ended questions.

Please feel free to let me know if you want to take a break at any point in our conversation.

Part two

1. What were your reasons for enrolling in the MMA certificate program?
(Probe for requirement for job, advancement of career, personal interest)
2. Was being a student different than you had expected it to be?
(*Listen for comments that identify the **gap** between expectations and actuality* - probe for issues regarding time needed for homework or assignments, difficulty of coursework, work/school/family balance etc.)
3. How did being a student affect your personal life?
(Probe for work/study/family balance issues, time management struggles, learning to learn as an adult, learning by independent study)
4. What were the three biggest challenges that you faced while you were a student?

We're about halfway done now.

Let's move from talking about your time as a student to life after graduation.

5. How did graduating from the certificate program affect your professional life?
(probe for a promotion, increased job opportunities, pay)
6. In your opinion, what are the top three benefits of completing the MMA certificate?
7. If you were asked to speak to a new student just starting the certificate, what advice would you give them?
8. If you were invited to speak to the university about the certificate program, what recommendations would you make?
(probe for changes to courses, delivery, student service)
9. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about your experience and how completing the MMA certificate program has affected you?

I want to thank you very much for your time. It has been a pleasure to hear about your experience and I appreciate you sharing your story with me.