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Redefining Success: How Tribal Colleges and Universities Build Nations, Strengthen Sovereignty, and Persevere Through Challenges

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Disciplines

Education | Higher Education



Redefining Success: How Tribal Colleges and Universities Build Nations, Strengthen Sovereignty, and Persevere Through Challenges

After enduring nearly 400 years of higher education efforts driven by religious indoctrination and forced assimilation, in 1968 Diné College opened its doors as the first Tribally controlled post-secondary institution, marking a new era of self-determination for Native American students. Since then, Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) have grown to include 37 institutions, serving over 28,000¹ students and are actively working to revitalize Native languages and culture, promote Tribal sovereignty and further economic growth aligned with Tribal values in the communities they serve. These remarkable institutions often go unrecognized for their achievements, and most remain unjustly underfunded in spite of the fact that their work redefines the valuable impact that higher institutions can have within their local communities.

“The Penn Center for MSIs presents the important story of the Tribal Colleges in this succinct, factual report that includes recommendations that can be readily supported by anyone concerned about educational access and achievement among the least-served peoples of the United States: its first citizens, the American Indian and Alaska Native people. Tribal Colleges matter and this report shares why supporting them is critical to the prosperity and well-being of Tribal nations.”

—CHERYL CRAZY BULL,
President & CEO, American Indian College Fund

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Center for
MSIs

PHOTO CREDITS: DARRYL MORAN AND
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We hope to support the Tribal Colleges and Universities, their membership association, the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), and their non-profit support organization, the American Indian College Fund (College Fund), by reframing the conversation and reminding critics that TCUs were not created to serve the same purpose as other higher education institutions. Rather, TCUs were created for the purpose of supporting Tribal Nation-building after Indigenous cultures endured generations of cultural and economic deterioration. This report offers an alternative story of success that looks beyond quantifiable measures to focus more deeply on how these schools meet this mission. We hope to draw additional attention to the many challenges that TCUs face, such as underfunding and operating in geographically remote areas, and outline the strategies they have employed to find success in spite of these challenges. Lastly, we make recommendations to help policy makers and institutional leaders support and strengthen these institutions and the students they serve.

A HISTORY OF PURPOSE

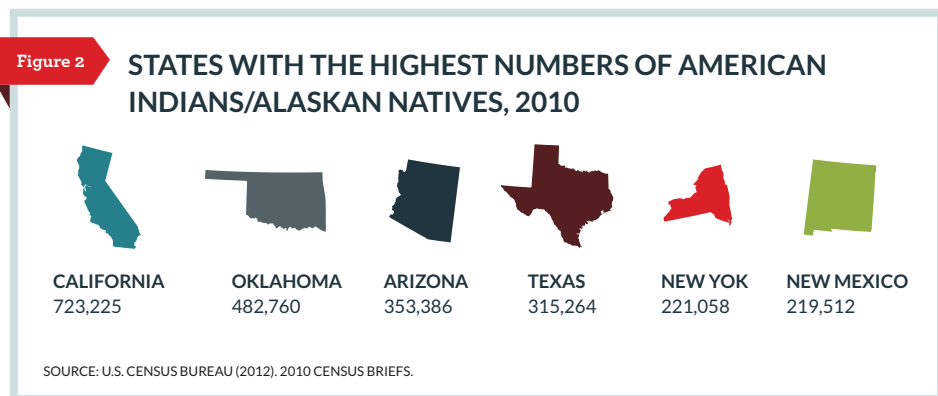
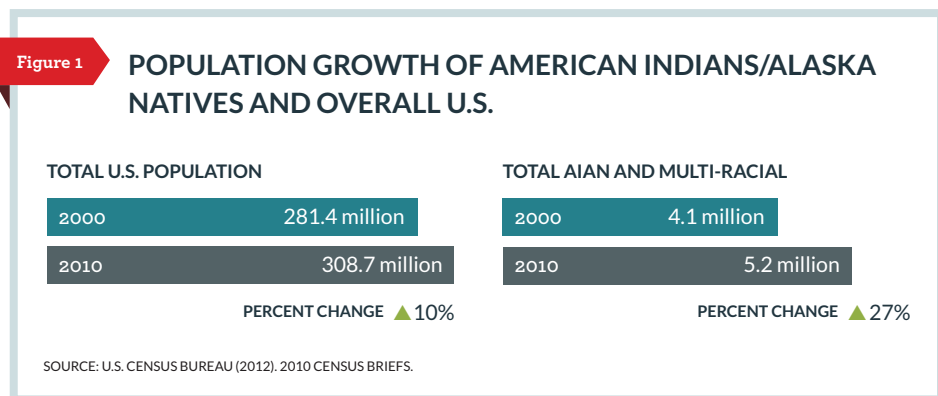
Any discussion on American Indian education in the United States must mention the shameful history of forced education and assimilation at the hands of European colonists and later the U.S. government. Throughout the colonization of the U.S., millions of Indigenous people perished, and with them Indigenous languages and traditions. Missionary-run boarding schools aimed at forcing students away from a traditional culture toward a more Eurocentric lifestyle were also common. In the first half of the 20th century, the Federal government controlled Tribal education, with schools focused on assimilation practices. Recognizing the importance of preserving and growing the Nation's Indigenous heritage, Tribal leaders demanded an end to curricula driven by an unnecessary need to indoctrinate Native Americans into white middle class values, and began a political movement of self-determination (Oppelt, 1990). Tribally controlled colleges and universities first emerged in the 1960s as part of this “self-determination” era of Native American education (Carney, 1999; Oppelt, 1990), and from the onset were established to serve a unique mission of sustaining and growing Tribal culture.

¹Derived from the 12-month unduplicated headcount (2012-2013) for all TCUs (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013).

As noted, the first Tribal college, built in 1968 by the Navajo nation of Arizona, was Navajo Community College, now named Diné College (Diné College, 2014a). This began a proliferation of Tribally controlled institutions, each representing the unique culture of the founding tribe and aimed at meeting the unique needs of the Tribal community. In 1972 the American Indian Higher Education Consortium was formed as a collaboration between TCUs to represent their interests in Washington, D.C., and has successfully aided the Tribal College Movement throughout its existence. The consortium established the American Indian College Fund in 1989 and was instrumental in working with Congress to authorize TCUs as land-grant institutions in 1994 (AIHEC, 2014b). TCUs are situated either on or very close to reservations; in addition to offering culturally relevant curricula, they often provide other services such as childcare, health centers, libraries, GED tutoring and testing, and computer centers (2013). Today there are 37 Tribal Colleges and Universities in the United States, 34 of which are accredited by mainstream accrediting bodies.²

TCUs serve a small but quickly growing population of students. The 2010 Census estimates that there are 5.2 million American Indians and Alaska Natives (AIAN), including both single and mixed-race individuals. During the past 10 years, this population grew by over 25%, much more quickly than the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011a). (See Figures 1 and 2.) According to projections of the Census, the total population of both single and mixed-raced American Indian and Alaska Natives will be 8.6 million in the year 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011b).

This population growth is matched by the remarkable enrollment growth found at many TCUs. During a time when most institutions across the U.S. were experiencing an enrollment crisis, most TCUs experienced enrollment growth. In fact, many TCUs were listed among the fastest-growing community colleges in the country (*Community College Week*, 2014), indicating the importance of TCUs will continue to grow.



²This report does not report on data from the following institutions: Comanche Nation College, Red Crow Community College, Red Lake Nation College, and Wind River Tribal College.

Presidents of the first six TCUs joined together to establish the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) in 1972. Today AIHEC is the collective spirit and unifying voice of our nation's Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs). AIHEC provides leadership and influences public policy on American Indian higher education issues through advocacy, research and program initiatives; promotes and strengthens Indigenous languages, cultures, communities and Tribal nations; and through its unique position, serves member institutions and emerging TCUs.

SOURCE, AMERICAN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION CONSORTIUM, 2015

TCUs have become a powerful force for educating AIAN students and preserving Tribal culture. Out of the 34 Title IV-participating TCUs, 12 conferred bachelor's degrees in 2012. These 12 institutions awarded 252 (88.4% of their total bachelor's degrees) to American Indian or Alaska Native peoples (National Center for Education Statistics 2014). In 2012, TCUs awarded 1,292 (78.5% of their total) associate's degrees to American Indian or Alaska Native peoples (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). Degrees awarded at TCUs include those focused on Indigenous culture, history, language and art, as well as programs of Western disciplines taught from an Indigenous perspective, such as business, resource management, health, engineering and education.

TODAY'S TRIBAL COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

TRIBAL COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY	STATE
Aaniih Nakoda College	MONTANA
Bay Mills Community College	MICHIGAN
Blackfeet Community College	MONTANA
Cankdeska Cikana Community College	NORTH DAKOTA
Chief Dull Knife College	MONTANA
College of Menominee Nation	WISCONSIN
College of the Muscogee Nation	OKLAHOMA
Comanche Nation College	OKLAHOMA
Diné College	ARIZONA
Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College	MINNESOTA
Fort Berthold Community College	NORTH DAKOTA
Fort Peck Community College	MONTANA
Haskell Indian Nations University	KANSAS
Ilisagvik College	ALASKA
Institute of American Indian Arts	NEW MEXICO
Keweenaw Bay Ojibwa Community College	MICHIGAN
Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa Community College	WISCONSIN
Leech Lake Tribal College	MINNESOTA
Little Big Horn College	MONTANA
Little Priest Tribal College	NEBRASKA
Navajo Technical University	NEW MEXICO
Nebraska Indian Community College	NEBRASKA
Northwest Indian College	WASHINGTON
Oglala Lakota College	SOUTH DAKOTA
Red Lake Nation College	MINNESOTA
Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College	MICHIGAN
Salish Kootenai College	MONTANA
Sinte Gleska University	SOUTH DAKOTA
Sisseton Wahpeton College	SOUTH DAKOTA
Sitting Bull College	NORTH DAKOTA
Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute	NEW MEXICO
Stone Child College	MONTANA
Tohono O'odham Community College	ARIZONA
Turtle Mountain Community College	NORTH DAKOTA
United Tribes Technical College	NORTH DAKOTA
White Earth Tribal and Community College	MINNESOTA
Wind River Tribal College	WYOMING

“Northwest Indian College takes our traditions, culture, stories, procedures and ceremonies, and incorporates them into the degree program to figure out ways to better our environment.”

—AISSA YAZZIE,
Student, Northwest Indian College

PRESERVATION, IMPACT AND EMPOWERMENT

Like many institutions, TCUs are often scrutinized for their low first-time, full-time graduation rates. However these institutions do so much more than simply award degrees. TCUs often serve geographically remote areas where no other post-secondary educational opportunities exist, and become pillars to the communities they serve. There are countless ways these institutions contribute to communities, academia and student success. For example:

- TCUs contribute to Nation Building and Indigenous Knowledge Systems.
- TCUs keep college affordable for low-income students.
- TCUs foster economic development and workforce training.
- TCUs hire more diverse faculty than Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs).
- TCUs produce research on American Indian issues from an AIAN perspective.

NATION BUILDING: Throughout their history, TCUs have remained true to their mission of maintaining and growing Tribal cultures and communities, and have become centers of Nation Building for the communities they serve. Nation Building can be thought of as a focus of energy, resources and knowledge on ensuring that the future identity and independence of a community are uniquely their own (Akoto, 1992). Nation Building is supported by TCUs, and often Tribal elders and leaders serve as faculty members, and libraries as Tribal archives, making the TCU campus an essential repository for Tribal knowledge and culture.

TCUs offer four master’s degree programs, 46 bachelor’s degree programs, 193 associate’s degree programs and 119 certificate programs in a variety of fields (College Fund, 2013). Curriculum and academic programs at TCUs are expansive, varied, and most importantly, focused on skills and knowledge needed to promote Native Nation Building and strengthen Tribal sovereignty. Course offerings and degree programs cover everything from building trades to business fields, to Native American studies and resource management, among many others (College Fund, 2013). American Indian Studies degree programs are offered at 28 TCUs and enrollment in these programs doubled between 2003 and 2010 (AIHEC, 2012). Through these offerings students can learn vocational skills needed to improve Tribal infrastructure, health professions needed to improve community wellbeing, and cultural courses to maintain the Tribal legacy.

TCUs also collaborate with regional mainstream institutions through distance education and articulation agreements, offering students access to additional courses and advanced degrees (Brayboy, et al., 2012). Although accreditation is still dictated by Western conceptions of learning outcomes, student learning at TCUs should be assessed from a point of view that values Tribal traditions and indigenous ways of knowing. Accrediting agencies such as the Higher Learning Commission are making efforts to assess student outcomes from a more culturally aware position, and TCU leaders are working to educate accrediting bodies on what are culturally appropriate learning outcomes (AIHEC, 2010; HLC, 2013; Karlberg, 2007). Although these efforts have been made, many in the TCU community are calling for their own Tribally controlled accrediting body that is able to assess student outcomes from a Tribal perspective.

In addition to the degree-seeking students they serve, it is estimated that TCUs reach an additional 47,000 individuals each year through community-based education and support programs (AIHEC, 2012). Programs such as Upward Bound, language and reading instruction, computer literacy courses, health and wellness classes, leadership development programs, and entrepreneurship courses, to name a few, all contribute to Tribal sovereignty, and participation in these programs grew by 84% between 2003 and 2010 (AIHEC, 2012). Tribal philosophies also tend to value the whole over the individual, and the education of one is seen as the education of all, meaning that knowledge obtained by one student quickly spreads through the community becoming knowledge from which all community members draw. For these reasons, it is clear that TCUs provide education for far more Tribal members than just their 18,000 credit-seeking undergraduate students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013).



TCUs also contribute to Nation Building by honoring Indigenous Knowledge Systems, a practice that Predominantly White Institutions have yet to adopt. Although Indigenous Knowledge Systems vary across the world, they can broadly be thought of as ways of being and thinking that show respect for personal autonomy while recognizing the interdependence of all living things, and the importance of striving for peace and coexistence between people and the world around them (Akoto, 1992). Native North American Indigenous Knowledge Systems are enacted through a valuing of the needs of the community over the needs of the self, a thoughtfulness for how human consumption affects natural resources, and a preference for collaboration and shared governance over competition and dominance (Brayboy, et al., 2012). TCUs have been successful at creating learning atmospheres that support Tribal students' values such as reciprocity, community, sincere listening, and collaboration—values that are often underappreciated at PWIs, which often value individualism and competition above all else.

COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY: TCUs also show success in their strong commitment to access, and have kept tuition rates low to better serve their students. The average net price of a TCU in 2012-13 was \$7,016 per year, while the average net price at community colleges nationwide was \$9,574 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Unfortunately, 28% of American Indians live below the poverty line, compared to the national poverty rate of 15.3% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010) and these rates are even higher on most reservations. The average per capita income for reservations is \$15,671 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), making it difficult for many students to afford their already low tuition. At TCUs, 58 percent of students qualify for a Pell grant, compared to 39 percent of students nationwide.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND WORKFORCE TRAINING: TCUs successfully contribute to Tribal and local economies and play an increasing role in job creation through entrepreneurial and small business programs. One example of the important role Tribal Colleges play in local economic development efforts can be found in North Dakota. The Bakken Formation, one of the largest single deposits of oil and natural gas found in the US lies partially under Tribal lands. It is estimated that there are approximately 17,000 unfilled jobs near the Bakken Formation, and TCUs are rising to meet the challenge of filling these positions with workers who not only possess the technical knowledge of resource extraction, but also knowledge and appreciation for Tribal philosophies regarding nature and environmental protection (Hu, 2014). To meet this challenge, TCUs and two state schools formed a coalition and are expanding their energy programs and career services with the help of a 14.6 million dollar grant from the U.S. Department of Labor (Hu, 2014). All TCUs contribute to their local economy by adding jobs and tax revenues, for example the College of Menominee Nation added \$37 million to the local economy, provided 404 jobs, and in 2011 generated \$833,000 in tax revenues (College Fund, 2013).

DIVERSE FACULTY: TCUs have done an exceptional job of creating and employing positive Tribal role models through creating a diverse faculty body. Nationwide, American Indians and Alaska Natives comprise less than 1 percent of faculty members. However, at TCUs 46% of all faculty are American Indian and Alaska Native, and this percentage doubled between 2003 and 2010, showing promise of future growth (AIHEC, 2012). Faculty members often double as academic and career advisors, and lead community events and outreach activities (AIHEC, 2012). Providing additional support as Tribal role models, 71 percent of TCU administrators are American Indians (AIHEC, 2012).

Indigenous faculty members have a profound impact on the educational development of students. American Indian faculty are important because:

Native faculty serve as activists, advocates, and change agents in postsecondary institutions and in their disciplines by challenging dominant, racist, and discriminatory scholarship, practices, and perceptions; by stimulating research in Indigenous issues; by developing and infusing curricula that is inclusive of Native perspectives and scholarship; by assisting colleges and universities in recruiting and retaining Native students; and through networking with Native organizations (Brayboy, et al., 2012, p. 93).

“I love a lot of things here. I love how there’s a diversity of Native students who come here, how we share culture with other students, and don’t feel like the minority in a huge university. We are the majority here.”

—JENNIFER CORDOVA,
Student, Northwest Indian College

Indigenous faculty members can also help motivate students who have faced a crisis of confidence. The academic success of AIAN students can be attributed in large part to their support system, and AIAN faculty can serve as role models and mentors that AIAN students relate to and feel supported by (Shotton, 2008).

TRIBAL SCHOLARSHIP: In addition to their vital role as educational institutions, many TCUs have become hubs of Tribal scholarship and continually generate new and innovative research that benefits American Indian economic, educational, environmental and legal interests. For example, the Diné Policy Institute at Diné College produces research to inform Navajo Nation leaders and policy makers on diverse topics, from food sovereignty to the impact of uranium mining (Diné College, 2014c). Diné College also has a press that publishes research on Navajo culture, leadership and philosophy. Similar research efforts exist at many TCUs, and AIAN faculty at these institutions typically position their research to benefit American Indian communities and students and record and recover Indigenous forms of knowledge (Dana-Sacco, 2010).

RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF CHALLENGES

Any discussion of American Indian education must recognize the deeply disturbing history of the mistreatment of Indigenous Americans, including genocide, boarding schools, forced assimilation, and treaty breaking. These past atrocities continue to have an impact on contemporary educational institutions, both Tribal and mainstream, as well as AIAN student access and success.³ Because of this history, TCUs must confront short-sighted expectations of what higher education institutions should be and often operate under cultural and fiscal constraints placed on them by mainstream political forces. TCUs are finding success in the face of these challenges; the most significant of them are the following:

- TCUs do not receive the federal funding they have been repeatedly promised.
- TCUs serve geographically remote areas with high poverty and unemployment rates and often little access to healthcare and other social services.
- TCUs are subjected to narrowly defined, mainstream definitions of success that often overlook their true purpose and accomplishments.

CHRONIC UNDERFUNDING: Tribal leaders indicate that the federal government’s failure to honor its legal and moral trust obligations to American Indian and Alaskan Native peoples is the most detrimental challenge facing Tribal educators (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Over the centuries, American Indians signed over 350 treaties with the Federal Government, relinquishing one billion acres of land. These treaties were intended to secure the wellbeing of American Indian people, including access to healthcare and education. Unfortunately the U.S. has rarely honored these treaties, and Tribal schools remain some of the most underfunded institutions in the country.

Further complicating the problem, when the U.S. has tried to fulfill its trust duties without significant input from the Tribal community, the efforts have done more harm than good (Executive Office of the President, 2014). In most instances, Tribal colleges and universities are not recipients of state tax financial support, and most tribes do not levy taxes because their populations have such high poverty rates. So, TCUs depend primarily on this promised federal funding. The Tribally Controlled Community College Assistant Act (1978) is the legislation that provides the base operating funding for TCUs. The legislation currently authorizes funding of \$8,000 per Native American student; however in FY 2011, operating funds equaled \$5,235 per Native American student, with no funding awarded to non-native students, who compose about 20% of all TCU students (Higher Learning Commission, 2013).

³For a more complete discussion of the factors that impact AIAN student access and success, see Brayboy et. al, 2012.

In February 2014, the U.S. Senate passed The Native Adult Education and Literacy Act. This Act seeks to rectify the challenges that American Indians and Alaska Natives (AIAN) face with regard to adult education and literacy by providing necessary financial support. Along with TCUs, the Act will devote energy into attempting to improve graduation outcomes for AIANs.

The White House Initiative on AIAN Education may help to strengthen TCUs, and has been implemented through an executive order signed by President Obama in 2011. The purposes of this initiative are the following:

- *expand education opportunities and improve education outcomes for all AIAN students;*
- *further Tribal self-determination; and*
- *ensure AIAN students at all levels of education have an opportunity to learn their Native languages and histories, and receive complete and competitive educations, preparing them for college, careers, and productive and satisfying lives.*

“Tribal Colleges matter in all the ways that are the intended outcomes of higher education: building skills and abilities of students, reinforcing cultural and social strengths in communities, supporting economic development, and fostering the entrepreneurial spirit and ability of Tribal nations to serve their citizens.”

—CHERYL CRAZY BULL,
President & CEO, American Indian College Fund

Further complicating this funding crisis is the rapid growth of Native American enrollment, as this growth vastly outpaces growth in funding. In this regard TCUs have become victims of their own success. Ensuring that TCUs receive the \$8,000 per year, per Native American student that they have been promised, and ensuring that this funding grows with inflation, would go a long way in improving the economic stability of many of these institutions.

TCUs also rely more heavily on competitive grants for their operating budgets than other higher education institutions do, creating a funding environment that is not conducive to long-term planning and growth (Higher Learning Commission, 2013). Continuously applying for grants puts strain on human resources, as institutions often do not have the resources for dedicated grant-writing staff, but rather rely on staff members in other roles to take on the task of writing grant proposals (Higher Learning Commission, 2013).

In the face of these fiscal challenges, TCUs have found success and strength through building coalitions to improve their fiscal wellbeing. Because of the efforts of the AIHEC, TCUs were awarded land-grant status in 1994, increasing their visibility and connection to mainstream institutions. Through sharing projects, resources, and information with other land-grant institutions, TCUs have been able to expand professional and research opportunities for Native American students.

Another successful coalition aimed at improving funding for Native students is The American Indian College Fund, the most established private funding source for Native American students. The College Fund was formed in 1989 for the purpose of offering scholarships to students enrolled at TCUs and has provided nearly 100,000 scholarships and fellowships to Native American students (College Fund, 2014). The College Fund raises more money for indigenous students than any other existing AIAN organization in the United States. The organization cites various ways in which donations can help assist AIAN communities, including providing scholarships and fellowships for Native students in every level of postsecondary education, providing capital support for TCUs, preparing Native students to become faculty, and supporting cultural and language preservation courses (College Fund, 2014).

SERVE GEOGRAPHICALLY REMOTE AREAS: Tied to the historic proclivity of treaty breaking and resource exploitation, Tribal nations are often located in geographically remote areas with little infrastructure or healthcare services and high poverty rates, often with remarkably high unemployment rates and low formal educational attainment. It is important to note that many AIAN people were relocated from their native lands to reservations, often with few natural resources, placing them at an economic disadvantage that has continued and worsened through discrimination and exploitation. The unemployment rate of American Indians and Alaska Natives in 2012 was 12.3% compared to 7.2% for Whites (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013, p. 6). However, unemployment rates can be much higher on and near Tribal lands, with many tribes suffering unemployment rates up to 34.8% (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2014).

Isolation from urban areas can also mean a shortage of health professionals, as they are not provided with enough incentive to travel far distances to Tribal lands. And, as of 2013, 27% of AIAN lacked health insurance, compared to 15.5% nationally (U.S. Census, 2013). Further shaping Tribal communities is a high rate of youth suicides, as the overall number of American Indian and Alaska Native suicides exceed every existing individual racial and ethnic group within the United States. TCUs play an important role in combating these issues, as many bring jobs, workforce training and healthcare centers, and they train students in medical professions.





GET INVOLVED!

- Donate to the [American Indian College Fund](#).
- Subscribe to the [Tribal College Journal](#).
- Follow the work of the [American Indian Higher Education Consortium](#).
- Write to your State Representative or U.S. Congressional Representative asking him or her to ensure stable federal funding for TCUs.

CONFINED TO NARROW DEFINITIONS OF SUCCESS: TCUs face the challenge of being held to narrowly defined, mainstream measures of success that are often at odds with their unique institutional missions (Brayboy, et al., 2012). Mainstream discussions of institutional success often focus on enrollment numbers, four- or six-year graduation rates, standardized test scores, rankings, faculty research output, and so on. However, TCUs find success in Nation Building, language revitalization, personal student growth, and increasing sovereignty (Brayboy, et al., 2012). Accreditation for TCUs is governed by Western, non-Native agencies that do not always recognize the uniqueness of Tribal institutions (Willeto, 2014). Accreditation can also be costly and time consuming for small, under-resourced institutions (Randall, 2014). Although some progress has been made by accrediting agencies to recognize the unique position of TCUs (Higher Learning Commission, 2013), and attempts at culturally relevant assessment strategies have been made (Karlberg, 2007), a Tribally governed accrediting body would best serve the unique mission of Nation Building and sovereignty at the heart of TCUs.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE GROWTH

There are many actions that policymakers, institutions and AIAN stakeholders can take to further strengthen TCUs:

- TCUs should receive the federal funding they are promised, and growth in this funding should match enrollment and inflation. As noted, the Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act (1978) promises \$8,000 per year per Native American student; however, in FY 2011, funds equaled \$5,235 per Native American student. Providing the full \$8,000 per student could dramatically improve the fiscal stability of many institutions, and guaranteed growth in this funding to match inflation would assist in the long-term planning efforts of these students.
- TCUs should not be expected to rely on grants for their base-operating budget. This inhibits long-term planning and growth. Most TCUs do not have the resources to hire professional grant writers, so this task falls on already overcommitted staff. Funding for TCUs should be stable and predictable.
- K-12 to higher education pathways should be strengthened. Special funding should be devoted to TCUs to create more dual-credit programs for high school students, and to strengthen early outreach to even younger students.
- Partnerships such as student pipelines and articulation agreements between TCUs, and other institutions should be strengthened. These partnerships must be built on cultural sensitivity and sincere listening on the part of the non-Tribal institutions. Previous research has shown that listening and respect for Tribal sovereignty is essential in building relationships with American Indian communities (Clare & Sampsel, 2013).
- Public research institutions should work with TCUs to align transfer agreements and create pathways to four-year and graduate degrees.
- TCUs should have their own accrediting body that focuses on Native values and Indigenous ways of knowing. If the U.S. is to respect Tribal sovereignty and self-determination, then TCUs should be able to accredit themselves to standards they deem culturally appropriate (Willeto, 2014).
- Private-sector organizations should increase their investment in scholarships and capacity building at TCUs to help strengthen local and Tribal economies.

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