

American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 121 Oronoco Street, Alexandria, VA

**TRIBAL COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES: EDUCATING, SUSTAINING, INNOVATING, ENGAGING**

**American Indian Higher Education Consortium**

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Over the past 45 years, Tribal Colleges and Universities have emerged onto the U.S. higher education landscape – nurtured by and in turn, nurturing, the land, language, culture, and people who created them. The first Tribal College, like all that followed, was established for two reasons: (1) the near complete failure of the U.S. higher education system to address the needs of – or even include – American Indians; and (2) the need to preserve our culture, our language, our lands, our sovereignty – our past and our future. The goal: to build our own education system founded on our ways of knowing, traditional knowledge, and spirituality. The vision: *Strong Sovereign Nations Through Excellence in TRIBAL Higher Education.*

Located in some of the most impoverished regions of this country – in fact, seven of the 10 poorest counties in the nation have tribal colleges – Tribal Colleges (TCUs) are thriving today, planting resilient seeds of hope; sustaining Native languages; and helping to rebuild tribal economies and governments. We have grown from one institution in 1968 to 37 TCUs today, operating 75 campuses in 16 states, within whose geographic boundaries 80 percent of all American Indian reservations and federal Indian trust land lie. We serve students from well over 250 federally recognized tribes. In Montana, for example, 50 percent of all American Indians enrolled in higher education attend one of seven TCUs in the state. In fact, according to all available statistics on American Indians enrolled in federally recognized Indian tribes and currently engaged in higher education nationally, more than 50 percent attend TCUs.<sup>1</sup> In total, TCUs serve 88,000 American Indians each year in academic and community based programs.

TCUs are public institutions accredited by independent, regional accreditation agencies and like all U.S. institutions of higher education must periodically undergo stringent performance reviews to retain their accreditation status. Currently, all TCUs offer associate degrees; 13 TCUs offer multiple bachelor's degrees, and five TCUs offer master's degrees. Each TCU is committed to improving the lives of its students through higher education and to moving American Indians toward self-sufficiency.

Yet, TCUs often face tenuous financial situations – inconsistent and inadequate funding – which seriously threatens TCU efforts to attract and retain American Indian students and high quality faculty, to hire grant writers with the ability to compete against Research 1 institutions (as we are required to do), and to learn about and adopt the latest teaching, data collection, and management strategies required to maintain accreditation with regional accrediting bodies. These are issues TCUs grapple with on a daily basis, even as they work to rebuild self-esteem and instill hope, a strong work ethic, and purposeful engagement within our students, many of whom have known little except lives of extreme poverty, unemployment, violence, abuse, and neglect. TCUs are doing all of this work and more in conditions that rival third world countries – amidst often dysfunctional governments and failing social systems, broken families, and oppression from

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<sup>1</sup>This statistic excludes self-reporting, which despite having been shown in studies to be unreliable, is the measure used by the Department of Education's White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education.

both without and within. Yet, TCUs are resilient, and they are succeeding. TCUs are changing the lives and futures of students and their families for generations to come through a holistic and supportive educational environment that is culturally-based and relevant to our students and their families. They are building stronger and more prosperous Tribal nations through the restoration of our languages, community outreach programs and applied research on issues relevant to our land and our people, workforce training in fields critical to our reservation communities, and community-centered economic development and entrepreneurial programs.

TCUs are transforming our education systems – training early childhood educators, successfully managing once failing Head Start programs, rebuilding schoolhouses and children’s lives; reforming K-12 science and math programs and providing summer and Saturday enrichment alternatives; preparing an American Indian K-12 teacher workforce; and transforming Native language instruction at all levels. TCUs are growing a Native health care workforce – from behavioral health to emergency room nursing, to serve our people and provide care in our language and according to our customs. In fact, two Tribal Colleges lead the nation in preparing and graduating American Indian nurses. Before Oglala Lakota College in South Dakota launched its nursing program, none of the nurses employed by the Indian Health Service to work on the Oglala reservation were American Indian. Today, more than 50 percent of the nurses on our reservation are American Indian and 85 percent of them are graduates of Oglala Lakota College.

Perhaps most important, TCUs are actively and aggressively working to preserve and sustain their own tribal language and culture. All TCUs offer Native language courses. In some cases, the tribal language would have been completely lost if not for the local Tribal College. Turtle Mountain Community College in Belcourt, North Dakota, was established primarily for this purpose, and over the years, its success in writing and revitalizing the Turtle Mountain Chippewa language has been remarkable. Aaniiih Nakoda College in Montana runs a K-6 language immersion school, right on campus. At the White Clay Immersion School, children learn the White Clay language and culture in addition to subjects they would routinely study at any other school.

True to their mission, TCUs work tirelessly on all facets of tribal Nation Building, from helping to restore tribal identity and self-esteem within students through educational environments that are culturally-based and uniquely relevant to our students, to building stronger and more prosperous Tribal nations through community education and outreach programs and applied research on issues relevant to our land and our people, workforce training in fields critical to our reservation communities, and community-centered economic development and entrepreneurial programs.

In short, TCUs are transforming families, communities, and tribal nations, one student at time.

All too often, however, mainstream America hears only of the tremendous challenges facing Indian Country: high unemployment, tremendously high school drop-out rates<sup>2</sup>, poverty, alcoholism, suicide,

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<sup>2</sup> American Indians have the highest high school drop-out rate in the country: a 2010 study of 12 states with high Indian populations found that more than 50 percent of all Native high school students drop-out before graduation. In Montana, where we have seven TCUs, 83 percent of Anglo high school students complete high school, but less than 60 percent of all Native students graduate. On some reservations, the high school drop-out rate can be as high as 80 percent.

abuse, and more. These challenges are real and serious. But they are not insurmountable, and they do not define us.

Hope defines us: it's in our ability to reach back and draw from our history, our respective cultures, and our languages, to shape a foundation for a better world on our own land and place on this earth. Tribal Colleges are the catalysts that are transforming this vision into reality.

Tribal Colleges take hope and a pitifully few dollars (they are among the most poorly funded institutions of higher education in the country), and shape them into opportunity. Opportunity to complete high school and succeed in higher education, opportunities for a healthier life, a more stable and prosperous community, a revitalized language and culture, an engaged citizenry, a safer and more secure environment, and more.

### **TRIBAL COLLEGES AS INNOVATORS**

Tribal Colleges are implementing a number of programs designed to address the challenges facing our children, youth, and communities. At TCUs, students find the nurturing, understanding, and holistically supportive environment they need to rebuild a strong belief in their ability to accomplish their goals and to rekindle a love of learning. We are the people of Crazy Horse, Manuelito, Sitting Bull, Dull Knife, Seattle, and Mankiller. We are people of a place – of land, rivers, sacred mountains and oceans. We are people with our own languages, our own songs, stories and histories. This is what keeps our students strong. Our language and culture, and our sacred places are the core of our support systems and academic programs. They are the foundation of every service a Tribal College provides.

TCUs, more than any other institutions, welcome students with open doors, regardless of where those students are from, and wherever they are on the continuum of learning. The reality is that about two-thirds of all TCU students – the majority of whom have high school degrees -- test into at least one remedial education course, while many of these students face significant deficiencies in *both* math and reading. Yet, within one or two years, many students who come to the Tribal College at a sixth or even fourth grade academic level are ready to take on college-level courses. They are intelligent and capable and the TCUs understand how to capitalize on their strengths, while also helping to address the social and economic challenges the students face.

### **Native Workforce-Native Role Models**

By teaching the job skills most in demand on their reservations, TCUs are giving their students real hope and success. They are laying a solid foundation for tribal economic growth, breaking the cycle of generational unemployment and poverty, with benefits for surrounding communities and regions. In contrast to the high rates of unemployment on so many reservations, graduates of TCUs are employed in "high need" occupational areas such as Head Start teachers, elementary and secondary school teachers, and nurses/health care providers. Just as important, the vast majority of tribal college graduates remain in or near their tribal communities, applying their newly acquired skills and knowledge where they are most needed and where they can have a lasting impact on tribal youth who might otherwise fall through the cracks, drop-out of school, or worse. This impact will last for generations.

In 2002, Oglala Lakota College, on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, established a Master's degree in Lakota Leadership and Management with an emphasis in Education Administration, to prepare state-endorsed school principals. Since then, the college has graduated 49 principals, 90 percent of whom are employed in schools with a majority of Indian students on North and South Dakota reservations. As of January 2013, there were 136 Native teachers of a total of 322 teachers teaching in elementary schools on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Of those Native teachers, 123 or 90 percent are OLC graduates. The college has also graduated 123 Associates in Elementary or Early Childhood Education who work as paraprofessionals in the local schools and as Head Start teachers.

Oglala Lakota College, together with Salish Kootenai College, another TCU, lead the nation in producing AI/AN nurses, with more than 90 percent of their nursing graduates certified as RNs and working in local communities. Of the 70 nurses currently working on the Pine Ridge Reservation, 50 are Indian nurses and of these nurses, 80 percent are OLC graduates.

Northwest Indian College in Bellingham, WA recently earned approval of a bachelor's degree program in Native studies leadership focuses on combining traditional tribal knowledge and values with the contemporary skills necessary for students to lead tribal nations. Courses focus on how to live as a tribal person in a contemporary tribal society and incorporate the use of deep knowledge to inform student learning and assessment.

In addition to providing strong and responsive academic and career programs, TCUs are training the next generation of American Indian entrepreneurs, engaging in international outreach, providing training for tribal, federal, and regional employers and governments, working with tribal judicial systems, operating day care and Head Start centers, and in some cases, even running the bus service for the entire reservation. They are building and providing housing for tribal communities, constructing "green" buildings, and helping to bring the promise of renewable energy to Indian reservations.

### **Place-based Research**

We are people of a Place. Place defines who we are. Our stories, songs, and language come from the land, waters, mountains, and wind. Most of our land, the remaining tribal land in North America, is forest or agricultural land. In fact, of the nearly 73 million acres that compose American Indians reservations, more than 75 percent are agricultural and forestry holdings. Through modestly funded land-grant programs, TCUs offer place-based resource management programs that are, for the first time, training significant numbers of tribal natural resource management professionals. However, it must be noted that the \$1.8 million that the Obama Administration requests and the Congress appropriates for 1994 land-grant research programs is, by any measure, grossly inadequate to develop capacity and conduct necessary research at TCUs, which are charged with protecting and helping to manage several forests, wilderness areas, natural waterways, and two of the largest lakes in the U.S. The 33 TCU land-grants receive \$1.8 million. In contrast, the 50 state, or 1862, institutions receive \$236 annually, at minimum; and the eighteen 1890 institutions receive \$51 million.

Despite funding challenges, Salish Kootenai College in Montana was committed to developing an accredited bachelor's degree program in Hydrology to address a dearth of American Indian water management experts. This is particularly important as tribal resource managers face increasing challenges

from drought, flooding, and other climate change-related threats. SKC also recently established the first accredited Bachelor's degree program in Forestry. SKC students are currently conducting important basic and applied genetics research on Flowering Rush, an invasive species impacting the nation's largest freshwater lake west of the Mississippi, Flathead Lake, which is at the center of the Salish and Kootenai reservation. SKC students are also conducting research on native infestations, such as Mountain Pine beetles that are destroying the reservation's forests (as well as forests throughout the western U.S.).

College of Menominee Nation in Wisconsin offers the only sustainable forestry undergraduate degree program in the United States, and students at CMN are engaged in a wide variety of research, from the impact of climate change on the Menominee Forest, a pristine ancient forest, to new rocket development. (At a national competition, CMN students finishing ahead of students from MIT and other mainstream universities.) At CMN, as with many TCUs, professors are taking student involvement one step further, engaging students at Oneida High School in the research to help encourage them to complete high school.

Ilisagvik College, where "the sea is the way of life," offers a unique Marine Mammal Observer Stewardship degree that combines Inupiaq traditional knowledge with Western scientific practices, which is critical to tribal sovereignty and identity.

Priority issue areas that are currently being studied at other TCUs include: sustainable agriculture, including Blackfeet Community College's research on traditional plants that may be a key in fighting Type 2 diabetes; biotechnology and bioprocessing; agribusiness management and marketing; plant propagation, including native plant preservation for medicinal and economic purposes; animal breeding; aquaculture; consequences of human nutrition (including health, obesity, and diabetes); and family, community, and rural development. For example, on the Navajo Nation in Arizona and New Mexico, students at Diné College conducted research on drought resistant forage crops that had been proven effective in desert environments around the world, along with Native plants, as alternatives to a single crop alfalfa system that has been almost exclusively used by Navajo farmers and ranchers for decades. Alfalfa, the students determined, was contributing to severe soil surface erosion and high water use on the reservation. By exploring alternative crops, the students hoped to improve hay security for Navajo farmers, increase production of native plants, and preserve dwindling water resources in the southwest. The research was quite successful: students identified drought tolerant native plants that could be effectively rotated into a small farmer's cropping system as well as a highly nutritious drought resistant/low water use grass grown in Ethiopia that could be tremendously valuable to Navajo and other desert farmers and ranchers in the Southwest. Based on the research, Diné College student-interns are now working with their 1994 extension program to educate Navajo farmers about the benefits of multi-cropping systems, including the introduction of the drought-tolerant Teff Grass, as an alternative to thirsty alfalfa. According to the students, greater use of Teff Grass, particular in rotation with native plants, could make a tremendous positive impact on water use and soil stability on the Navajo Nation for generations to come. Their sole challenge now is developing and implementing new strategies for spreading the word about these potentially transformative crops, over a reservation that is larger than 10 of the 50 states, with such abysmally low funding for extension and research services.

## **Problem-based Learning**

In 2006, Navajo Technical College (NTC) had an enrollment of 333 students. A small TCU located in the eastern portion of the Navajo Nation in New Mexico, NTC had a total Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math enrollment of 30 students in the 2006-07 academic year. Beginning in 2007-08, (after the first year of implementation of the college's NSF Tribal Colleges and Universities Program grant project), STEM enrollment climbed to 56 students. By 2010-11 enrollment had risen to 132 students. In the 2012-13 academic year the total STEM enrollment had climbed to 210. Total enrollment at the college in the spring semester of 2013 was 1,815 students. Equally impressive as the enrollment growth was the retention and graduation rates at the college. In 2012, NTC became Navajo Technical University (NTU).

An analysis on dropout numbers versus enrollment growth shows just how well NTU has handled its dramatic growth while holding on to high retention and graduation rates that exceed 80 percent, based upon a 150 percent of ideal graduation time for entering cohorts analysis. Further, the dramatic increase in student enrollment has led to significant growth in STEM programming at Navajo Technical College. Since 2006, NTU has added six new Baccalaureate degrees:

- Information Technology: Computer Science, Digital Manufacturing, and New Media
- Environmental Science and Natural Resources
- Industrial Engineering
- Electronic and Computer Engineering (pending HLC approval)
- Creative Writing and New Media (pending HLC approval)
- Associate in Science degree in Mathematics under development

The college has received national recognition for its achievements in STEM recruitment and retention, as well as for their innovative use of state of the art technologies to support local research, economic development, and K-12 education.

At the core of NTU's successes in STEM student recruitment and retention has been a purposeful effort to engage students in STEM through projects. Since 2006, NTU has promoted a problem-based learning culture throughout the campus, encouraging faculty to incorporate projects into their courses, supporting student participation in research, and encouraging students to participate in regional and national STEM competitions. In addition, NTU faculty members are encouraged to develop research and technology transfer projects that provide their students with experiential learning opportunities. NTU faculty and staff have worked on major initiatives such as the "Internet to the Hogan" project which is designed to provide wireless Internet access to the entire New Mexico portion of the Navajo Nation. The college has developed a digital manufacturing facility, similar to a "fab lab" and a laser-scanning consulting business, among other initiatives that have led to research, contracting opportunities, and even a digital technologies start-up venture by two graduates of the computer-aided design certificate program. The focus on meaningful projects has been a key factor in the large growth in student interest in STEM, and consequently the sharp increases in student recruitment and retention.

Last year, AIHEC launched the "TCU STEM Student Success Collaborative project which is working with NTC to disseminate the key components of the college's student centered approach to STEM to other TCUs. The project is establishing a TCU-wide dissemination process through which best practices in STEM education are effectively identified and shared, significantly improving the effectiveness of STEM

instruction at all TCUs, and leading to documented improvements in recruiting, retaining, and graduating STEM students. The nation's TCUs are poised to make a significantly greater contribution toward preparing American Indian professionals for participation in the national STEM workforce. This can best be accomplished through a unified effort to identify, share, and support the adoption of strategies that help all TCU students succeed.

### **Native Language & Immersion Programs**

When Christopher Columbus and other Europeans first came to Indian Country, more than 300 different languages were spoken here. Today, well less than half remain. Most of these are spoken only by a handful of elders and are in serious danger of disappearing -- in fact, all but 15 or 20 of our Native languages are spoken only by adults who are not teaching their younger generations the language. When these languages leave us, they take with them a living connection to the history, philosophy, ceremonies, culture, and traditional environmental and scientific knowledge of the people who spoke it. The full impact of this form of impoverishment on our children and youth -- who have already lost so much to generational poverty and oppression, violence, and abuse -- is inconceivable.

Language revitalization is the core mission of all TCUs, and to date, no single group has done more to protect and restore Native language use than the nation's TCUs. TCUs currently operate complex and innovative language restoration programs on shoestring budgets, including K-8 language immersion schools on campus, distance education programming, and elder/child after school programs.

Some might wonder why Tribal Colleges, as academic institutions of higher education, would be focusing on language revitalization, running Head Start and day care programs, and establishing our own elementary immersion schools. It is because TCUs are holistic institutions. TCUs focus on the whole student -- mind, body, spirit, *family*, and community. TCUs know that just as they are succeeding in higher education, they can implement strategies of success for our children. Where others might fail, TCUs have the commitment and the stability to succeed.

In 2003, the first immersion school was established at a TCU: the White Clay Immersion School, on the campus of Aaniiih Nakoda College, in Montana. The goals of the school are to: (1) promote the survival and vitality of the White Clay language; (2) provide culturally based educational opportunities that build cognitive skills and foster academic success; (3) instill self-esteem and positive cultural identity; and (4) prepare students to become productive members of society.

White Clay Immersion School is even more important today than when it was first conceived over 10 years ago: today, no fluent elder Aaniiih speaker lives on the Fort Belknap Reservation, and there are few adults who speak the language well. Now, the students of WCIS represent the next generation of Aaniiih speakers. In fact, they compose the largest group of Aaniiih speakers. Since WCIS began, the number of child Aaniiih speakers has grown from none to 30. Students at WCIS attend a full day of classes in an immersion setting. Teaching and learning focus on the White Clay language and rely heavily on Native knowledge and Native ways of knowing and being. Non-Native ways of learning are incorporated to offer students a firm foundation in both worlds and to help them become positive and successful members of the larger community. WCIS's curriculum emphasizes the interconnections between physical, mental and spiritual well-being through cross-disciplinary integration, intergenerational learning, and field-based

learning experiences. Students participate in community projects, public events, and international exchanges.

The White Clay Immersion School is the first, and now one of two, full day Native language immersion schools operating within a Tribal College. Oglala Lakota College in Kyle, South Dakota operates the other TCU-based immersion school, through grade 5.

Several years ago, faculty and staff at Oglala Lakota College began to notice that every year, fewer of their entering students were fluent in -- or could even speak -- the Lakota language. The vast majority of these students had attended schools in the local area, some of them taking Lakota language courses for eight, 10, or even 12 years. Yet, their mastery of the Lakota language was missing. They could recite a few words, *ina – ahte (mother – father)* and some simple phrases, sing a few Lakota songs, and count *wáŋčĭ – wikčémna (1-10)*; but tragically, on Pine Ridge, language instruction in the K-12 schools has not produced any language speakers over the last 40 years. Even more troubling, an OLC survey found that within its local communities, while 70-80 percent of elders could speak Lakota, only about 5 percent of the tribe's 4- to 6-year-olds could speak the language.

Oglala Lakota College knew that if its people had any hope for reversing this trend, it was up to the college to take action: it was time for OLC to open its own elementary school. Because of the depth and complexity of the language issues facing its people, OLC spent most of the first three years of the initiative researching different methods for achieving greater Lakota language proficiency. The college opened the Lakota School teaching about one-half of the curricula in Lakota and the other half in English. However, after studying other elementary education programs, including highly successful Maori and Native Hawaiian programs, as well as monitoring the progress of students, OLC realized that to maximize our effectiveness and make systemic change, an immersion program is the solution. Last fall, the OLC Lakota Immersion School provided Lakota language immersion instruction to our K-5 students.

Beginning in the AY 2013-14, the Northwest Indian College-Coast Salish Institute (CSI) was asked to work with staff of the Lummi Nation Tribal schools to create a curriculum framework that would provide daily language instruction for all students attending Lummi Nation Elementary Schools, including a plan to transition from weekly language instruction to the daily model, for each grade level.

The goals of the project include developing K-12 standards for teaching language, culture, and history; create lesson plans using the place based scope and order of the Lummi people; develop appropriate classroom materials engaging native high school student; develop a student assessment plan applicable to native students learning a native language classroom; Training K-12 teachers and paraprofessionals to teach Lummi Nation language, culture and history; Review, revise, and update the Lummi Native Curriculum teacher certification process developed by Lummi Nation over ten years ago, and incorporate rigorous benchmarks for professional development and evaluation. Once all of this work is completed a community gathering of interested students, parents, and grandparents will be convened to present the implementation and evaluation of the plan and activities, as developed. This extensive new project has been taken on by NWIC, without benefit of any supplemental funding to support the considerable extra work involved – because this is so very important.



Not all programs are conducted as part of a formal classroom activity. Sitting Bull College began a new immersion program in 2012 with 11 three year olds. The program is an interesting and promising hybrid of specialized day care and language immersion.

In addition to the language programs, including immersion programs, and critically needed but tragically underfunded Native language research, many TCUs offer unique associate and bachelor degree programs that include Native language instruction, as well as in-service teacher training in language and culture. At the TCUs, teacher education programs follow cultural protocols and stress the use of Native language in everyday instruction.

To help address these critical needs, AIHEC is hoping to pull together foundations, Native linguists at the TCUs, and federal agencies to develop stable funding streams for critically needed research in effective pedagogy.

### **Dual Credit**

Nearly all of the TCUs currently engage in dual credit programs, designed to keep American Indian high school students engaged in school, graduate, and continue on to pursue higher education goals. Some of the programs are quite extensive. Nearly all of them are free for the students and high schools. The TCUs – without any compensation whatsoever – offer this service at their expense because they know it is one very effective way to help save our American Indian children. It keeps them on a path to a better future and a world of opportunity.

TCUs will continue to offer these life-changing and life-saving programs, but we are working to encourage the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) and states to work with us to expand these programs and level the playing field. Currently, states reimburse tuition costs for dual credit high school students attending state public institutions of higher education. Although TCUs are public institutions and the state colleges/universities accept the TCU credit on transcripts, the states do not reimburse TCUs for the tuition costs of public high school students attending TCUs. This is the case even where there is no other public institution of higher education within a hundred miles or more for the high school student to attend.

The same holds true for the BIE: some BIE high school students earn dual credit at TCUs, but the colleges are not reimbursed the tuition costs and of course, the students do not factor in the TCUs' "Indian Student Count" for formula funding.

### **Community-wide Partnerships: Tribal Education Coordination**

The social, economic, health, academic, and historic challenges facing our communities, schools, and children require comprehensive, inclusive, and holistic solutions – all sectors of the community must come together and work together. The Standing Rock Sioux reservations provide an excellent model, where Sitting Bull College and all of the pre-K/12 school systems meet monthly to work together on common challenges and to celebrate recent successes. The group develops and implements new strategies for success, discusses challenges, coordinates professional development and more.

### **Social Entrepreneurship**

AIHEC is establishing a youth social entrepreneurship initiative called “Shaping our Future.” Individual students or student teams organized around a project idea that addresses a community need will develop and submit a specific project plan of work, including a mission statement, project goals, a communication plan, a list of organizations and other community resources that have agreed to partner on the project. Projects with a viable plan of work and strong partners will be funded with modest seed grants. With a well-forged plan, seed money, and mentors recruited by AIHEC these students will be prepared to implement projects intended to address their identified issue while acquiring invaluable leadership skills that will serve them throughout their future careers.

The initiative is intended to foster a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship throughout the community of TCUs. It will motivate students to see issues in their community – economic hardship, environmental degradation, public health challenges – as opportunities for taking concrete action. We expect a ripple effect as student engage their peers and community members through their projects, motivating others to participate in their project or to explore ways of addressing other local issues.

### **Research & Data Driven Decision-making**

The TCUs represent a largely untapped resource to the national educational research community, yet they are positioned like no other institutions of higher education to coordinate and conduct research initiatives that investigate Indian education issues systemically. The nation’s 37 TCUs collectively are forming a community of transformative research practice through a dynamic multi-institutional network of TCU education practitioners (faculty and student support personnel), researchers, and administrators working together to increase postsecondary access and completion for reservation-based American Indians. This TCU improvement community will focus on increasing student success and lowering the cost of education to students and institutions by building action research teams that will work across the community of TCUs to test evidence-based developmental education and other student success initiatives, revise them based on the TCU research, institutionalize them at the TCU level, and disseminate them across the TCU network. The TCU improvement community will promote a culture of innovation and generate intervention best practices in student success that can be shared with the wider higher education community.

Located throughout Indian Country -- where they provide their community a critical component of the educational pipeline and prepare teachers for positions at their feeder K-12 schools – TCUs have cultivated close working relationships with local and regional schools with high percentages of Indian students and they have already developed and implemented valuable tribally-based research and data collections tools, including the AIHEC AIMS annual data collection instrument and the Indigenous Evaluation Framework.

- ***AIHEC AIMS.*** Developed with funding from the Lumina Foundation for Education, AIHEC AIMS allows the TCUs to collect qualitative and quantitative data (116 indicators) annually, ensuring their accountability to their tribes and funders. For the first time ever, AIHEC AIMS has given us a longitudinal mechanism for measuring American Indian higher education success in ways that are meaningful to the tribal people and communities we serve. We believe it could be a useful model for the K-12 education systems.
- ***Indigenous Evaluation Framework.*** With support from the National Science Foundation, AIHEC launched a comprehensive effort eight years ago to develop the Indigenous Framework for Evaluation, which synthesizes Indigenous ways of knowing and Western evaluation practice. This community-

based work resulted in a comprehensive training curriculum and manual: *Indigenous Evaluation Framework: Telling Our Story in Our Place and Time*. The curriculum incorporates Indigenous epistemology and core tribal values into a framework that honors place, community, individual gifts and tribal sovereignty with Western evaluation practice.

### **Wal-Mart Student Success Collaborative – a TCU/HBCU/HSI Partnership**

In 2010, the Wal-Mart Foundation funded an innovative partnership between AIHEC, the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) and the National Association for Educational Opportunity (NAFEO) to improve student success by learning from one another, sharing best practices and experiences and developing our own strategies for improvement. Through this multi-year initiative, TCUs and AIHEC identified a set of key practices to support student retention and completion: freshman advising; collaborative, culturally-relevant learning opportunities; skill building academies; aggressive counseling interventions where the students are; college success workshops with relevant role models; student feedback sessions; and most important, culturally-based activities, educational experiences, and support. Through funding from the Wal-Mart Foundation, each of these interventions is being implemented now at six TCUs – along with six Historically Black Colleges and Universities and six Hispanic Serving Institutions -- by dedicated teams of student services personnel. The result has been increased retention and completion rates at these 18 schools. But it is just the beginning. There are 37 TCUs, 106 HBCUs, and 450 HSIs.

We need to work together to give our children hope for a better and more prosperous future: institutions of higher education, the private sector, and state and tribal governments, as well as the federal government can best achieve our common goals by coordinating our strategies and resources. To borrow from the Lakota, we collectively can best move forward by drawing on the strength and support of “all our relations.”

