



Celebrating Tribal Colleges and Universities

American Indian Higher Education Consortium

SPECIAL ISSUE

The *Journal of American Indian Education* is pleased to publish this second of two special issues celebrating the advances and innovations in American Indian Higher Education of the past 30 years.

This second special issue honors the founding of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), the national advocacy organization for Tribal Colleges and Universities. Most appropriately, our guest editor for this second issue is Dr. Susan Faircloth, Director of Policy Analysis and Research at AIHEC. She has gathered together and worked closely with the authors of six invited examples of current research and innovation in Tribal Colleges and Universities. While they individually provide insight into the history, evolution and current programs at Tribal Colleges and Universities, their composite story provides an excellent year 2003 snapshot of the issues, challenges, and promising practices of tribally controlled community colleges and universities. The composite also suggests to our readers an outline of the future directions of these innovative institutions of higher education.

Tribal Colleges and Universities: A Tradition of Innovation



Gerald E. Gipp and Susan C. Faircloth

With this special issue of the *Journal of American Indian Education*, we commemorate a milestone in the history of Tribal Colleges and Universities and the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC). Since 1972, AIHEC has served as the collective spirit and voice of the nation's tribal colleges. The leadership of the six original tribal colleges—Hehaka Sapa College of D-Q University (Davis, California), Navajo Community College (Tsaile, Arizona), Oglala Sioux Community College (Pine Ridge, South Dakota), Sinte Gleska College (Rosebud, South Dakota), Standing Rock Community College (Fort Yates, North Dakota), and Turtle Mountain Community College (Belcourt, North Dakota)—established AIHEC to serve as their advocate at the national level. This movement has resulted in the development of the American Indian College Fund, the AIHEC Student Congress, the *Tribal College Journal*, and the Alliance for Equity in Higher Education, all of which have contributed to the advancement of the colleges.

Since the early 1970s, TCUs have proliferated through their tenacity and unwillingness to fail, despite confronting many barriers. During the past three decades, 34 Tribal Colleges and Universities in the United States have become members of the Consortium, with the promise of more to follow. In recent years, new colleges have been established in Arizona, Michigan, Washington State, and Wyoming. Other colleges are being developed in Alaska, New York, and Oklahoma, and there is interest among Native Hawaiians to join and expand the circle of the higher education movement among native people.

Many accomplishments have been realized since the first tribal college. Navajo Community College, now known as Diné College, was established in the 1960s. Since that time, the number of colleges has grown exponentially from 6 to 34. The number and quality of academic programs and degrees has increased. A number of the colleges have expanded into four-year and graduate degree granting programs. The number of students attending tribal colleges has continued to increase. The 34 existing colleges currently serve approximately 30,000 full and part-time students. These students represent more than 250 federally recognized tribes. In addition to the impact that these colleges have had on the education of American Indian students, tribal colleges have also played an increasingly significant role within their respective communities and tribal

governments at the local, regional, and national levels, in such diverse areas as health and economic development.

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to each of the authors who have been invited to contribute to this special issue. They have given of their time and expertise to demonstrate the innovative programs and practices that have been characteristic of the tribal college movement since its inception. The first contributor, Dr. Janine Pease-Pretty on Top, provides an overview of the events leading up to the enactment of the Tribally Controlled Community Colleges Act of 1978. As she notes, it was through the organizing mechanism of AIHEC that a small nucleus of individuals worked tirelessly in the halls of Congress, advocating for the Tribal College Act, which was enacted in 1978. The Act paved the way for the continued existence of these colleges by providing much needed funding for institutional operations. Although the current level of funding is much lower than is needed to operate these colleges—the 2002 level of funding was \$3,916 per Indian student, less than 75% of the authorized amount—we are hopeful that through the continued advocacy of the Consortium and its member institutions, this amount will increase to a level that is comparable to other colleges and universities across the nation.

The second contributor, USDA Tribal College Liaison, John Phillips, describes the tribal colleges' journey toward recognition as land grant institutions. This status, which was granted in 1994, provided tribal colleges with an opportunity to receive funding and assistance in a number of areas including:

- the **Educational Equity Grant Program** which provides funding to assist with the establishment of agriculturally focused academic programs;
- the **Extension Program** which is a competitive program specifically designed to complement, *not duplicate*, the small existing reservation extension agent program;
- the **Endowment fund** which is used by the colleges to assist in establishing and strengthening academic programs, including agriculture curricula development, faculty preparation, instructional delivery systems, equipment and instrumentation for teaching, and experiential learning; to enhance student recruitment and retention in the food and agricultural sciences; and to address the critical need for improved facilities;
- the **Research Program** spanning areas in which tribal colleges have made significant contributions include: (a) land use patterns, preservation, and renewable use of the land; (b) nutrition and health; (c) native plants and horticulture; (d) water quality assessment; and (e) bison production and management; and
- the **Rural Community Advancement Program (RCAP)** whose funds are used for facilities construction and improvements.

The third contributor, Dr. Donna Brown of the University of North Dakota, highlights the importance of tribal colleges as a vehicle for access to higher education. The participants in Dr. Brown's study, who are all graduates of tribal colleges in the state of North Dakota, recommend that other American Indian students attend Tribal Colleges and Universities before entering a mainstream institution. Overall, the participants indicated that their experiences in tribal colleges were excellent. The findings of this study were consistent with the literature, which cites the convenience of being able to remain close to home and family, the cultural components of the tribal college curriculum, and the strong sense of community, as benefits of attending tribal colleges.

The fourth contribution was authored by Dr. J. Anne Calhoon, Daniel Wildcat, Dr. Cynthia Annett, Dr. Raymond Pierotti, and Wendy Griswold. The authors describe a study abroad program between Haskell Indian Nations University and Gorno-Altai State University, in the Altai Republic of Siberia. Haskell Indian Nations University is owned and operated by the Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and serves a national Indian population. In 1999, faculty from Gorno-Altai State University, Haskell Indian Nations University, Kansas State University, and Kansas University formed a partnership to address water quality issues. With initial funding from the United States Agency for International Development/Association Liaison Office, these institutions developed a model program for the monitoring of community-based drinking water quality in remote villages in the Altai Republic. The primary focus of this initiative was to develop a study abroad program that would be culturally relevant to American Indian populations, particularly those living in remote areas. Through the authors' discussion of this collaborative initiative, we are shown one of the many ways in which tribal colleges have made an impact outside their local communities.

The fifth contribution, authored by Dr. Gigi Berardi, Dr. Lynn Robbins, Dan Burns, Phillip Duran, Dr. Roberto Gonzalez-Plaza, Sharon Kinley, Lynn Robbins, Ted Williams, and Wayne Woods, describes the Tribal Environmental and Natural Resources Management (TENRM) Approach to Indian Education and Student Assessment. The TENRM program was established in 1997 at the Northwest Indian College, which was chartered in 1983 by the Lummi Indian Business Council. The TENRM project was funded by the National Science Foundation as a national model of tribal and regional college partnering. This is evidenced by the ongoing collaboration between Northwest Indian College and Western Washington University. The TENRM program is a pilot project intended to provide an education in environmental science that is grounded in native perspectives and traditions critical to tribal survival.

Finally, Dr. Richard Littlebear, President of Chief Dull Knife College, chartered by the Northern Cheyenne Tribal Council in 1975, reflects on his college's efforts to strengthen the Cheyenne language. According to Dr. Littlebear, native languages are in danger of becoming extinct. Chief Dull Knife College is actively engaged in a number of language strengthening activities

including curriculum development, as part of its efforts to teach the Cheyenne language. Chief Dull Knife College emphasizes the use of an oral based language methodology, Total Physical Response (TPR). Through his writing, Dr. Littlebear illustrates the impact that tribal colleges can and do have on the strengthening and preservation of native languages.

We are honored to have been given the privilege of working with these authors in developing this special issue of the *Journal of American Indian Education* commemorating the 30th anniversary of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium. Tribal Colleges and Universities have made great strides during the past 30 years. They are a young, yet integral part of the higher education community. We are confident that they will continue to contribute much to the education of the nation's American Indian students. As we celebrate 30 years of dedication, diligence, perseverance, and success, we look forward to a future marked by innovative programs and practices, growth in student enrollment, increased retention and graduation, and the emergence of new colleges. Again, we would like to thank those who have contributed to this special issue. We also give honor to those who have given so tirelessly of themselves to ensure the development and continued existence of the nation's Tribal Colleges and Universities.

Dr. Gerald Gipp (Hunkpapa Lakota), Executive Director of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, is a member of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe from Fort Yates, North Dakota. Dr. Gipp has an extensive background in the field of American Indian education and federal policy development. He is a graduate of Standing Rock Community College and Ellendale State Teachers College (ND). He also earned a Ph.D. in Educational Administration from The Pennsylvania State University where he was the first graduate as well as the first American Indian Director of the American Indian Leadership Program. He comes to the Consortium from the National Science Foundation where he was a Program Director in the Division of Educational System Reform, Directorate for Education and Human Resources.

Dr. Susan Faircloth (Coharie) is Director of Policy Analysis and Research, the American Indian Higher Education Consortium. She earned a Ph.D. in Educational Administration with a concentration in Special Education, from The Pennsylvania State University (Penn State) where she was a member of the American Indian Leadership Program. Dr. Faircloth is also a graduate of Penn State's American Indian Special Education Teacher Training Program, where she earned a Master's Degree in Special Education, and Appalachian State University where she earned a B.A. in History.