

A Tribal College Land Grant Perspective: Changing the Conversation



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With the passing of The Equity in Educational Land-Grant Status Act of 1994, Tribal Colleges and Universities joined an ongoing land grant conversation that has been taking place since 1862. This paper proposes a framework of guiding principles for a tribal college land grant perspective that begins to shift the 140-year-old conversation to one of cultural sensitivity and mutual understanding. The author draws upon six years of tribal college land grant experience to suggest a new discourse centered on culture that incorporates tribal concepts of holism, sacredness, cultural identity, and cultural viability. The author argues that a fundamental shift in the land grant dialog is vital before the full potential of a tribal college land grant vision can be realized.

Land grant status is a relatively recent development in the history of Tribal Colleges and Universities. The Equity in Educational Land-Grant Status Act of 1994 holds significant promise for tribal peoples in areas such as natural resources, agriculture, health, and youth development. Since the passage of this legislation, the 31 Tribal Colleges and Universities known as the 1994 land grant institutions have developed many innovative and successful educational programs under the most austere organizational conditions. Yet, after eight years of land grant status, funding remains wholly inadequate, and efforts in collaboration within the land grant system have met with mixed success.

To date, the conversation between the 1994 land grant institutions and their established 1862 land grant counterparts has focused primarily on how the Tribal Colleges and Universities can adapt to, and utilize, the dominant land grant paradigm. This article suggests that, before the full potential of a tribal college land grant vision can be realized, a fundamental shift in the conversation needs to take place. Rather than asking what the 1994 land grant institutions can learn from the 1862 universities, the question should also be raised, “What can the 1862 land grant institutions learn from the 1994 colleges and universities?”

Background of the 1994 Land Grant Institutions

The original land grant legislation, The First Morrill Act of July 2, 1862, specified that grants of federal land were to be used by each State

to the endowment, support, and maintenance of at least one college where the leading object shall be, without excluding other scientific and classical studies and including military tactics, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts, in such manner as the legislatures of the States may respectively prescribe, in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes on the several pursuits and professions in life. (Act of July 2, 1862, ch.130, 12 Stat.503, 7 U.S.C.301 et. seq.)

The term *land grant* came from the fact that federal land was granted to the states on a formula basis, specified at 30,000 acres for each senator and congressional representative, for education in the agricultural and mechanical arts. Universities are known as 1862 land grant institutions if their land grant status was awarded under the First Morrill Act.

Where did the American Indian stand in relation to this land grant policy? At the time of the First Morrill Act, American agricultural policy vis-à-vis Native America is best summarized by the remarks of Secretary of Interior Caleb B. Smith in 1862:

The rapid progress of civilization upon this continent will not permit the lands which are required for cultivation to be surrendered to savage tribes for hunting. . . . Indeed, whatever may be the theory, the Government has always demanded the removal of the Indians when their lands were required for agricultural purposes . . . although the consent of the Indians has been obtained in the form of treaties, it is well known that they have yielded to a necessity to which they could not resist. . . . Instead of being treated as independent nations [as in the past] they should be regarded as wards of the Government. (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1956, p. 6)

Calling it a “history of mis-education,” Boyer (1997, p. 7) surveyed Indian education from colonial America through federal boarding school policies, to the era of tribal self-determination when the first tribal college, Navajo Community College, was founded in 1968. Throughout that time, education was a tool for assimilation against which tribal nations struggled to maintain their cultural integrity. Given that background, participation in higher education by American Indians was almost nonexistent by the 1960s. In 1961, only 66 American Indians graduated from a four-year institution (Szaz, 1974). A decade later, the post-secondary attrition rates for American Indian students reached 75% (Fuchs & Havinghurst, 1973). Other estimates put the dropout rate for Indian students as approaching 90% or more at many institutions (Boyer, 1997). Tribal leaders, recognizing the lack of educational opportunity and success, responded with the tribal college movement.

Some 25 years after the founding of Navajo Community College, 29 Tribal Colleges and Universities were providing unparalleled access for, and successful retention of, American Indian students. Working collectively as the American

Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), the Tribal Colleges and Universities sought to secure land grant status in the early 1990s. Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) introduced legislation in August 1993, and AIHEC gained the key endorsement of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, and the sponsorship of a bipartisan group of 20 senators and congressional representatives. In the fall of 1994, the Equity in Educational Land-Grant Status Act of 1994 was attached to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization as a rider. When President Clinton signed the ESEA reauthorization on October 20, 1994, tribal college land grant status was secured by law (Bigart, 1997).

The Equity in Educational Land-Grant Status Act of 1994 established an endowment fund and annual appropriations in lieu of actual grants of land. Authorization of \$4.6 million of endowment funds was specified for each of fiscal years 1996 through 2000. Furthermore, \$50,000 per 1994 land grant institution per year was authorized for the enhancement of education in the agricultural sciences and related areas. An additional \$5 million per year was authorized to establish extension programming pursuant to the 1917 Smith-Lever Act. Finally, \$1.7 million was authorized per year to fund buildings, laboratories, and other capital facilities.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) administered the first programs authorized by the 1994 legislation in fiscal year 1996. The Tribal College Endowment Fund distributed interest earned by the endowment. Specifically, endowment funds could be used to build educational capacity in a number of areas, including curricular design, teaching materials development, faculty development, distance education systems, equipment and instrumentation, and student recruitment and retention. The Tribal Colleges Education Equity Grants Program, a formula program, was designed to strengthen higher education instruction in the food and agricultural sciences at 1994 land grant institutions. Projects could focus on undergraduate and/or graduate studies in the same manner as eligible endowment fund activities.

The following year, in 1997, the 1994 Land-Grant/Tribal Colleges Extension Program began providing competitive funding for non-formal community education and outreach activities. These community programs were intended to supplement 1862 extension programs by focusing on the specific needs of American Indian people and their communities. In that first year of extension programming, the 1994 land grant institutions were required to work through their in-state 1862 land grant counterpart. First-time extension proposals required the 1862 institution's consultation and approval, and the first year's funds were administered and disbursed through the 1862 institution. Amidst loud outcry, some 1862 partners sought fit to deduct their own overhead costs to that year's \$60,000 award. The 1862 consultation and administrative requirements were relaxed in the second year and removed the following year.

In 1999, the Tribal Colleges Research Grants Program instituted a competitive grants program intended to assist the Tribal Colleges and

Universities in conducting agricultural research that addressed the priority needs of tribal, national, or multi-state constituents. The cooperation of an 1862 institution or 1890 land grant partner (Historically Black Colleges and Universities authorized under the Second Morrill Act of 1890) was encouraged through funding incentives, but not required. The research program's objectives included attracting more underrepresented students into the food and agricultural sciences, strengthening the research capacity of tribal colleges, and promoting research networks among the tribal colleges, and with 1862 and 1890 land grant institutions.

In 2002, the endowment fund stood at \$37.2 million, generating about \$1 million in interest disbursements to the 31 1994 land grant institutions annually. This represents an average of approximately \$32,250 per college per year. With the exceptions of the endowment fund and the Education Equity Grants Program, appropriations for the other 1994 land grant programs have never reached authorized levels. The \$1.7 million buildings and facilities authorization has never been funded. In total, the three combined education, extension, and research appropriations have reached approximately \$28.7 million since 1994, representing an average of less than \$1 million per college over the eight-year period, or about \$12,000 per college per year. These calculations represent rough approximations because not every tribal college participated, or was eligible, in every year for each of the four available 1994 land grant programs. The competitive nature of the extension and research programs also meant that some grant proposals could not or were not funded. Yet the fact remains that, after eight years of land grant status, overall funding for 1994 land grant programs remains inadequate.

Guiding Principles

When the Equity in Educational Land-Grant Status Act of 1994 passed, it bestowed to tribal colleges a status already shared by a community of 50 state land grant universities, 18 Historically Black Colleges and Universities, six universities of the U.S. territories, and the University of the District of Columbia. Since then, in many tribal college land grant conferences and workshops, I have listened as the larger land grant community explained how the 1994 land grant institutions could utilize available resources, collaborative opportunities, technical assistance, and strategic planning to catch up to the rest of the land grant system. Simultaneously, the tribal college discourse has stressed their history, culture, values, and community. As pressing grant deadlines have come and gone, this disconnect in the conversation has frequently caused frustration, misunderstanding, and lost opportunities.

I believe it is time to reframe the dialog. But to do so, one must first begin to understand a different cultural perspective. How might a tribal college land grant perspective differ from an 1862 perspective? If one adopted a tribal college perspective, how might the conversation change? And how would such a fundamental shift in the conversation affect current and future collaborative activities?

Before continuing though, I must pause and warn of the dangers of generalizing tribal characteristics. Tribal nations are numerous; their societies, cultures, and environments are diverse and deserve to be addressed independently. Yet I believe there exists common notions that revolve around the centrality of culture: holism, sacredness, identity, and viability, which could provide a set of guiding principles with which a tribal college land grant vision could be framed. Such a framework could provide the 1994 land grant institutions with the kernel of a unified message, helping potential collaborators understand a different perspective, a tribal perspective, that could lead toward a dialog of cultural sensitivity and mutual understanding.

I offer Figure 1 as a framework for a discussion of a tribal college land grant perspective. This modest proposal is by no means meant to represent a complete rendering of a tribal college land grant paradigm. Indeed, no one person has the legitimacy to make such a proposition. Rather my hope is that this framework can serve as a starting point for continued dialog with the ongoing input of committed 1994, 1862, and 1890 land grant representatives.

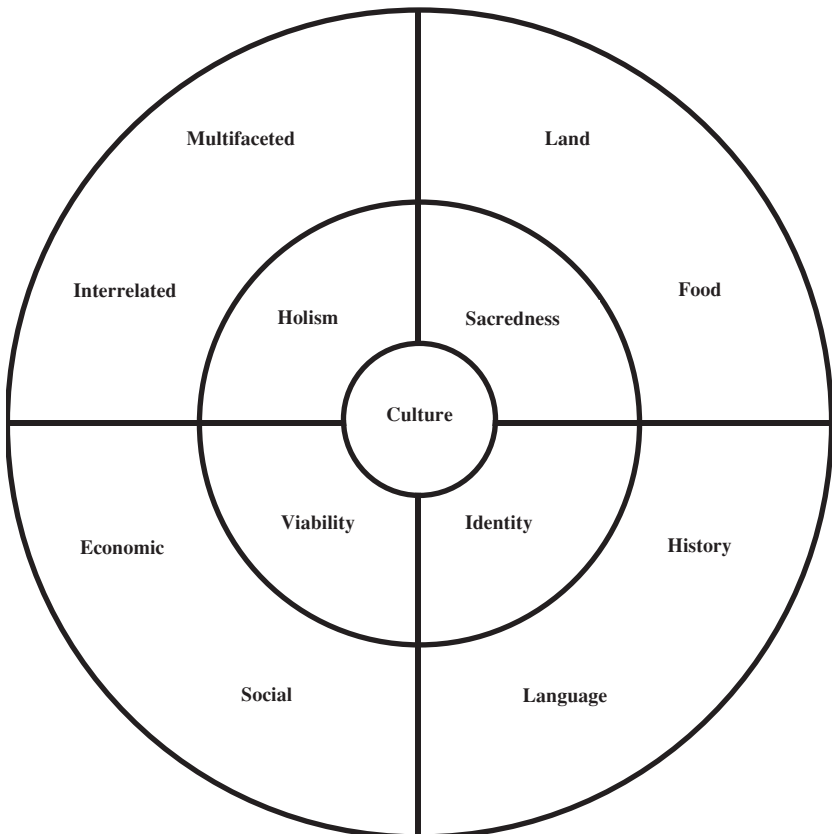


Figure 1. A framework of guiding principles for a tribal college land grant perspective.

I depict a circle with culture at its center. I use the term *culture* as is often used within the American Indian community, that is, as “the whole body of practices, beliefs, institutions, customs, habits, myths . . . built up by humans and passed on from generation to generation” (Sewell, 1999, p. 40). In this sense, culture is at the heart of the tribal college; it is its very essence. The genesis of tribal colleges was cultural; their loyalty continues to be to the members and culture of their tribal nations. Culture permeates the entire tribal college campus and “it fully shapes each institution and its philosophy of education” (Boyer, 1997, p. 64). The centrality of culture in the mission of the 1994 land grant institutions cannot be understated.

Culture provides the foundation for a tribal college land grant perspective. The upper-half of the circle represents cosmological notions of holism and sacredness, while the lower half represents social concepts of cultural identity and viability. Moving outwards from the center, abstract ideas evolve into more concrete terms. The discussion continues, starting with holism, and then moving around the circle clockwise.

Holism

One of the best descriptions of the American Indian concept of holism that I have found was from an Oglala Lakota man named Tyon sometime before 1917:

The Oglala believe the circle to be sacred because the Great Spirit caused everything in nature to be round. . . . The sun and sky, the earth and moon are round like this shield, though the sky is deep like a bowl. Everything that breathes is round like the body of man. Everything that grows from the ground is round like the stem of a tree. Since the Great Spirit has caused everything to be round, mankind should look upon the circle as sacred for it is the symbol of all things in nature. . . . It is also the symbol of the circle that marks the edge of the world and therefore the four winds that travel there. Consequently, it is also the symbol of a year. The day, the night, and the moon go in a circle above the sky. Therefore the circle is a symbol of these divisions of time and hence the symbol of all time. (Walker, 1971, p. 160)

This holistic worldview has many practical considerations in how one might approach collaboration and program development. A holistic approach means that life is multifaceted; the whole cannot simply be deconstructed into its separate parts. Program development and problem-solving is therefore approached as integrated, multidisciplinary, and multi-institutional.

Holism also implies interrelatedness. When Black Elk told his story in 1931, he said:

It is the story of life that is holy and is good to tell, and of us two-leggeds sharing in it with the four-leggeds and the wings of the air and all green things; for these are children of one mother and their father is one Spirit. (Neihardt, 1932, p. 1)

Being interrelated in a holistic cosmos means that notions of networking, cooperation, collaboration, sharing, trust, and reciprocity are entirely appropriate.

Indeed, American Indian tribes have a rich history of forging alliances and other collective action. Moreover, as siblings living together under a common creator, the equality of all living things is implied.

The Woodlands Wisdom Confederation is a partnership of six 1994 land grant institutions and one 1862 land grant institution that addresses diet-related health problems through integrating for-credit education, extension service, and applied research. Drawing upon their common Algonquian cultural heritage, the Woodlands Wisdom Confederation brings together Leech Lake Tribal College (Cass Lake, MN), Turtle Mountain Community College (Belcourt, ND), White Earth Tribal & Community College (Mahnomen, MN), Fond du Lac Tribal & Community College (Cloquet, MN), College of Menominee Nation (Keshena, WI), and Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa Community College (Hayward, WI). These colleges work with The University of Minnesota to promote traditional diets of wild rice and game as a way to combat diabetes, heart disease, and other diet-related ailments.

Woodlands Wisdom approaches health issues from a holistic perspective by understanding that one cannot treat the physical body without also addressing emotional and spiritual well-being. Hence, Woodlands Wisdom's objectives include, not only training students about nutrition or developing research models for health, but also include promoting general community well-being (Hassel et al., 2001). Its approach focuses on all segments of tribal populations, and uses multidisciplinary strategies within the regional partnership. Through continued collaboration over time, Woodlands Wisdom cultivates trust and reciprocity among its tribal colleges and with their 1862 land grant partner. Common goals, power sharing, resource sharing, and cooperative project management have built a powerful partnership that has become recognized nationwide as a model for 1994/1862 collaboration with USDA support.

Stated another way, one recent study found that individuals or organizations in State University-Tribal College partnerships whose collaboration was based on self-interests, instead of mutual goals, were less likely to succeed and more prone to produce negative feelings. Individuals or organizations that were not responsive to their partner's needs, who did not respect their partners, who did not share resources, and who did not jointly agree on a common agenda were also less likely to succeed. Collaboration that did not empower, indicated by the monopolization of power, was less likely to succeed (Nichols, Baird, & Kayongo-Male, p. 20).

Sacredness

In 1854, Chief Seattle responded to a federal request to purchase lands:

Every part of this country is sacred to my people. Every hillside, every valley, every plain and grove has been hallowed by some fond memory or some sad experience of my tribe. Even the rocks, which seem to lie dumb as they swelter in the sun along the silent sea shore in solemn grandeur thrill with memories of past events connected with the lives of people.

The very dust under your feet responds more lovingly to our footsteps than to yours, because it is the ashes of our ancestors, and our bare feet are conscious of the sympathetic touch, for the soil is rich with the life of our kindred. (Rich, 1970, pp. 32-41)

The sacredness of land is universal in Native America. N. Scott Momaday (1997) tells us:

Very old in the Native American worldview is the conviction that the earth is vital, that there is a spiritual dimension to it, a dimension in which man rightly exists. It follows logically that there are ethical imperatives in this matter. I think. Inasmuch as I am in the land, it is appropriate that I should affirm myself in the spirit of the land. I shall celebrate my life in the world and the world in my life. In the natural order man invests himself in the landscape into his own most fundamental experience. This trust is sacred. (p. 39)

Environmental stewardship and sustainability, or in other words caring for the Mother Earth for seven generations hence, expresses itself in programs of natural resource conservation. Natural resource use will tend to be low impact, environmentally sensitive, and non-extractive. For example, in native communities gardens that approach organic standards are more likely than large-scale mono-cultural agriculture. Tribal college students take personal responsibility for preserving and conserving their environment. As one student at Fort Belknap Community College (2002), Harlem, MT, aptly wrote:

As you read further into the Natural Resource program, all the projects and integrated activities would be meaningless unless conducted from the spirit of the heart with the realization that we as Native American students are responsible for restoring and maintaining our “place” here on Mother Earth. We have joined hands, heart and minds with the local Tribal Colleges and others in this endeavor; may we all help to develop a new paradigm to ensure the circle of life is never broken.

In the field, The St. Louis River-River Watch Project at Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College monitors the water quality of the St. Louis River in northeastern Minnesota by involving students from some 26 local schools located along the river. Since 1998, water samples have been collected twice each school year and the data has been entered into a public access environmental database. Students also participate in a Spring Congress, held at the tribal college campus each year, which gives students from along 179 miles of the river a chance to share their ideas of water and water quality. The University of Minnesota Extension Service works with Fond du Lac Tribal & Community College, with support from USDA land grant funds.

The sacredness of food as providing life, and integrating with life, is a further extension of the sacred concept of land. Greg Cajete (2000) writes:

Since all food that people ate came from the land or animals, it had a direct symbolic relationship to the way they viewed themselves vis-à-vis nature. The place of food in ceremonies integrated their life experiences—

intellectual, spiritual, and environmental. For instance, peoples of the Great Lakes domesticated and learned how to use the pond lily, wild rice, and other marsh-growing plants. These plants provided them not only with food but also a frame of reference for their existence and relationship to their place. Their knowledge and relationship with marshes was incorporated and reflected in their ability to make a living from their environment. (p. 115)

I found that the use of traditional foods on the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation incorporated these themes of interconnectedness. Household food purchasers would not consider buying traditional Lakota foods unless they knew specifically who prepared the food, where the ingredients were obtained, and in what context the food was prepared. Traditional foods were used almost exclusively in cultural or social settings, as part of ceremonies, celebrations, and family or community gatherings (Phillips & Finn, 1999). Food not only represents a connection of people to nature, but of people to people.

For all of the above-mentioned reasons, genetically modified foods are often treated with great suspicion, if not outright opposition. Although Native America has not weighed in collectively on the subject, there is widespread sentiment throughout Indian Country that genetic engineering of foods and medicines presents unnecessary risks and is culturally wrong. Clayton Brascoupe, Director of the Traditional Native American Farmers Association, represented such sentiment at a recent news conference:

Corn is our Mother. She nourishes us and takes care of us. Our Creator gave it to us as a gift and instructed us on how to care for the corn so that it will care for us. It is our first medicine, and our people and corn are one and the same. Our mother is being corrupted by scientists and corporations, and if we don't stop it, she won't have the ability to heal us any longer. (Taliman, 2002)

The sacredness of food and land in a tribal college land grant perspective will inform the collaborator that maximum economic utility may not be the appropriate goal if its consequences degrade sacred relationships. "Getting by" in a sustainable way might be more important than "getting ahead" in an exploitative manner. Likewise, technological innovations may not be acceptable if they ignore important cultural connections.

Identity

I use identity in both a collective and an individual sense. By promoting and preserving tribal history, arts, and language, 1994 land grant institutions help protect the cultural identity of their tribes. Individually, as one learns her culture, she is helped to build her own personal identity and self-esteem. Wayne Stein (1997) put it like this:

Each tribal college has articulated clearly in its mission statement that it will work to help preserve, promote, and teach its tribe's culture and language. This important goal brings to students opportunities to learn more about their respective tribe's history and culture, which, in turn, helps them to build a

sense of identity and pride in themselves—elements which are crucial to American Indian students as they struggle to overcome poverty, lack of self-esteem, and poor education in their quest for a higher education. (p. 85)

The Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) in Santa Fe, New Mexico, has an innovative program that promotes leadership development in young people via cultural activities. Funded with USDA land grant awards, IAIA uses traditional southwestern Pueblo basket-weaving art, drum-making, songs, and dances to inculcate important life-skills to youth at six local pueblos. But older people benefit too. At one pueblo, tribal members no longer knew how to make willow baskets in the traditional way, so the IAIA program conducted a basket-weaving program in the people's native language. As it turned out, half of the program's participants were tribal leaders. IAIA has also used distance education and web-based technologies to provide training on native plants as traditional foods and medicines (S. Suina, personal communication, March 7, 2002).

Cultural identity is also central to the Northern Plains Bison Education & Research Project, a network of seven tribal colleges and an 1862 land grant partner that seeks to revitalize buffalo herds and to develop culturally-based education. Members include Fort Berthold Community College (New Town, ND), Lower Brule Community College (Lower Brule, SD), Oglala Lakota College (Kyle, SD), Sinte Gleska University (Rosebud, SD), Sisseton Wahpeton College (Sisseton, SD), Sitting Bull College (Fort Yates, ND), United Tribes Technical College (Bismarck, ND), and South Dakota State University (Brookings, SD). The network's first goal is to nurture a "tribal land ethic" by promoting cultural and socioeconomic relationships between American Indians and their indigenous environments. The project recognizes that educational programs addressing Indian needs must integrate the cultural values that are important to Native people. With culture at its core, the project's educational curriculum integrates agriculture, natural resources, and sustainable economic development, which are shared via distance education technology (United Tribes Technical College, 2003a).

For the tribal college collaborator, respect for cultural identity means first acknowledging the historical injustices that American Indians have experienced in this country. Cultural understanding comes from opening one's mind to different perceptions of the world and one's human relations. Tribal languages, protocols, and ceremonies must be honored and respected. Differences in cultural perspectives should be embraced rather than judged. By accepting a tribal worldview, one can begin to truly appreciate the cultural approaches in tribal college land grant programming that preserve and strengthen identity.

Viability

By definition, Tribal Colleges and Universities are community-driven: chartered by their tribes, governed by local American Indian trustees, and supported by tribal student enrollments (P.L. 95-471, Tribally-Controlled College or University Assistance Act). Their charters enable them to respond quickly to community

needs: developing or refining curriculum, creating special extension projects, or researching critical topics. But underneath the college charters lies a driving motivation that relates to tribes' historical struggle for survival, that is, to ensure the continued viability of their respective societies and cultures.

Diabetes, hauntingly referred to as the “new smallpox,” is threatening the very existence of some tribes. Hence many 1994 land grant institutions have focused on preventing the disease with vigor. Promoting healthful diets drives programs in home and community gardening, cooking and food preservation training, and nutrition education. Traditional diets of wild rice, corn, fruits, berries, wild game, or fish are promoted in culturally appropriate ways to improve health.

United Tribes Technical College has created a Diabetes Education Center that provides theory and practice in wellness, food science, food safety, and community nutrition. Note the notions of cultural holism and viability in their course catalog (United Tribes Technical College, 2003b):

NF 110 Diabetes and Mother Earth - 3 Credits: Basic Type 2 Diabetes information and relationship of the disease to psychological and physical health risks of Native Americans. The course will be divided into three components. The first component titled “Strong in Body and Spirit” addresses the nutrition, exercise, and psychosocial components of the disease “through the eyes of the Eagle.” The second component emphasizes the benefits of exercise and food production through gardening. The final component focuses on exercise and nutritional benefits of hunting and fishing and low-fat cooking methods of wild game, including buffalo.

Sisseton Wahpeton College has integrated education, extension, and research projects into a nutrition and dietetics program. The extension component delivers training to 8 to 13 year-old youth in basic nutrition, horticulture, food preservation, and food safety. Youngsters experience the complete food cycle: cultivation, planting, harvesting, processing, preservation, and consumption. USDA endowment funds have been used to construct a food science laboratory and a demonstration kitchen on campus. Research activities include analyzing the nutrient content of traditional foods to determine optimum dietary strategies.

Because children represent the future of the tribe, youth development programs respond aggressively to gang activity with 4-H or similar after-school programs. Dance, drums, beadwork, or other cultural activities help to develop life-skills, often linking young ones with elderly mentors. Young people participate in summer camps, fun-runs, midnight basketball, sobriety dances, newsletter publishing, and even radio broadcasting. Lac Courte Orielles Ojibwa Community College provides home-based education in positive parenting and their partners, the University of Wisconsin Extension, help with their 4-H youth development education. Haskell Indian Nations University (Lawrence, KS) works with Kansas State University Extension to support native youth programs in eight Indian communities throughout the state of Kansas.

Economic development programs include value-added product development, such as retail meat cuts, jerky, and home-processed preserves. Fort Peck

Community College's (Poplar, MT) extension projects emphasize alternative crops, commodities marketing, and export marketing. Workforce development training is offered, such as the pre-veterinarian program at Crownpoint Institute of Technology (Crownpoint, NM) or commercial driver's license training at Si Tanka University (Eagle Butte, SD).

All of these programs seek to address serious societal or economic issues that threaten the continued viability of rural reservation communities. This is why education, extension, and research programs are applied directly to known community needs. Reflecting this trend, some tribal nations' research review boards have curtailed, or even stopped outright, research that is irrelevant to tribal needs. Given critical needs and limited resources, esoteric or theoretical endeavors are a luxury that the 1994 land grant institutions and their tribal people cannot afford.

Parallel concerns of viability are present at the organizational level for the 1994 land grant institutions. Many tribal colleges are in the early stages of establishment or maturation, and face problems securing stable funding, maintaining student enrollments, and recruiting and retaining qualified faculty and staff. This should not prompt some to critical judgment. For several decades after their land grant status, 1862 land grant enrollments grew slowly; student attrition was high. Professors endured low salaries, heavy workloads, and primitive facilities. State support was slim, if at all (Williams, 1991). Recognizing these organizational factors will sensitize the collaborator to unrealistic assumptions and expectations in their relationships with the 1994 land grant institutions.

Conclusion

I started this discussion in search of some guiding principles for a tribal college land grant perspective that could reshape the current discourse into more common and productive language. I asked, how might the discourse change? I proposed a framework of guiding principles such as holism, the sacredness of land and food, cultural identity, and cultural viability, all evolving from the central concept of culture. Being culturally sensitive will remind the collaborator of the need for integrated, multidisciplinary, and team-orientated approaches that foster trust, sharing, and equality. Cultural awareness will help inform the prospective tribal college partner that environmental stewardship and sustainability needs to be incorporated into the discussion. Respect for the unique cultural identity of the indigenous peoples of North America will help promote understanding and appreciation of our special differences and common strengths. And, finally, knowledge of the critical nature of the social and economic challenges that American Indians face today will spur the collaborator to focus on problem-orientated solutions with direct benefits to people in the community.

With a newfound appreciation for a tribal college perspective, one might then ask what they could learn from the 1994 land grant institutions. In 1999, the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities called

on all land grant “institutions . . . to become even more sympathetically and productively involved in their communities” (p. 9). I wonder: do the 1994 land grant institutions represent models of community engagement that have implications for mainstream universities, foundations, and governmental agencies? This outlook would represent a vital and fundamental shift in the prevailing discourse within the land grant community. Until this shift occurs, partnerships with the 1994 land grant institutions will continue with paternalistic overtones that do little to empower a true tribal college land grant vision. Until this change in discourse occurs, I fear that financial and material support for 1994 land grant programs will continue to be inadequate. Unless we find a new way to communicate with each other, the hope and promise of The Equity in Educational Land-Grant Status Act of 1994 will remain an unfulfilled promise for some distant future rather than a true success right now.

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