

# **Emergence, Alliances, and Vision: The Tribal College and Beyond**

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## *Abstract*

The tribal college movement shows no signs of slowing, yet there are significant issues that need examination. Growing from a handful of community colleges to almost three dozen in 12 states and Canada, tribal colleges now offer advanced academic degrees. This paper examines the current status of the tribal college “movement” by looking at the origins of tribal colleges, their statistics and demographics including enrollments, funding, programs, and accreditation. Discussion of issues related to distance learning and appropriate pedagogy, vital to tribal college success, are described in this article. Using historical data and the critical observations of contemporary Indigenous education theorists, this study points to areas for ongoing discussion by supporters of tribal colleges and universities.

## **Introduction**

Having and supporting structures and processes for education is generally recognized as an important marker of culture. The Indigenous peoples of America have long viewed education, so long as it was appropriate education, as a key component of being healthy as a people. For the most part they viewed education pragmatically and philosophically, seeing it as a mechanism for cultural survival and as a natural means by which power is understood, communicated, and gained.<sup>1</sup>

From the colonial period forward, tribes also have recognized the transformative power of higher education and its practical connection to leadership in the non-Indian world. Despite concerns that this transformative power changed their young people in ways that made them less fit for living as Indians, and despite the regularly dismal results of American higher education for American Indian people, tribes continued to support and encourage the enrollment of their children in colleges and universities.<sup>2</sup>

Certainly, the problems incurred by American Indian students enrolling in colleges and universities are not unique to Indian people—similar histories exist for minority populations in the U.S. and elsewhere. The problems are reported to be much the same in Canada for First Nations people: problems associated with poverty and high unemployment, discrimination, low self-esteem, and inadequate academic preparation in secondary schools.<sup>3</sup> The problems in Canada are sparking a tribally-controlled college movement there also; currently there is one Canadian tribal college, Red Crow Community College, Cardston, Alberta, and a member of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC).

### **What Are Tribal Colleges?**

Public radio's McNeil News Hour reporter, Tom Bearden described tribal colleges in 1998: "Tribal colleges were the dreams of Indian leaders more than 40 years ago. They were established to provide a nurturing atmosphere on the reservation that Indian students were not receiving when they left go to state and private schools. The physical plants at most of the tribal colleges are more like a nightmare, a rag tag assortment of decrepit buildings and old trailers. Dorm rooms are scarce or non-existent. Athletic facilities are often nothing more than a basketball hoop. The faculty, who have mainly been educated at non-tribal colleges, are paid far less than their colleagues at other schools. The average teacher's salary at a tribal school is just over \$24,000. The federal government provides all of the tribal colleges with a core amount of about \$30 million a year. That averages out to about \$3,000 per full-time student. Additional money comes from special government grants and from private organizations...."<sup>4</sup>

Two years later, the White House Initiative on Tribal Colleges and Universities Report (2000) expanded on this description with more detail about their missions and demographics. "Tribal Colleges are culturally based; they focus on local economic needs and address the whole person: mind, body, spirit, and family. More than 26,000 students from 250 federally recognized tribes now attend these institutions created by American Indians for American Indians. On reservations, where unemployment rates often exceed 50 percent, these schools often provide the only hope for gaining the education and skills needed to enter the modern workplace. At the same time, Tribal Colleges offer more than 350 degrees and 180 vocational programs. While all give students the opportunity to earn two-year degrees, 75 to 85 percent of Tribal College graduates go on to earn a four-year

degree or become employed in the local community.”<sup>5</sup>

The Fall 2003 Tribal College and University Program (TCUP) newsletter included a front-page article, *Tribal Colleges Build Opportunities and Preserve Culture*, which declared that more students were enrolling in tribal colleges. “Since 1982 the enrollment in tribal colleges and universities increased from roughly 2,000 to more than 24,500 undergraduate and graduate students. The average number of students per school is 840, but student population ranges from 200 to several thousand. Tribal colleges provide a unique approach that combines small class size and personal attention with a cultural relevance that encourages and assists students and tribal members to overcome the barriers they face to higher education.”<sup>6</sup>

Finally, at the July 2003 meeting of AIHEC, Dr. William Lone Fight, president of Sisseton Wahpeton College, returned attention to tribal college mission by asserting: “We need to think of transmission of culture as the only truly unique service we provide in the next 30 years. This is where we began, and this is where we should return.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Brief Overview and History of Tribal Colleges**

Paul Boyer, founder and former editor of the *Tribal College Journal*, wrote a report for the Carnegie Foundation in 1997 on the current condition of tribal colleges and their prospects for the future. In this important report, Boyer examined what he referred to as the “history of mis-education”<sup>8</sup> of American Indians from colonial times through to the founding of the first tribal college, Navajo Community College, in 1968. As he described it, education was regularly used as a weapon—a tool for assimilation against which tribal nations struggled to maintain cultural integrity.

It is not surprising that over time few public colleges attracted Indian students. As noted by Phillips in his report on tribal college land grant status, “In 1961, only 66 American Indians graduated from a four-year institution. A decade later, the post-secondary attrition rates for American Indian students reached 75 percent. Other estimates put the dropout rate for Indian students as approaching 90 percent or more at many institutions. Tribal leaders, recognizing the lack of educational opportunity and success, responded with the tribal college movement.”<sup>9</sup>

While recognized for its alluring power, higher education has long been problematic for Indian people. A profound sense of isolation, a lack of Indian role models, and endemic localized poverty are but a few of the reasons why few attempted to attend colleges and universities.<sup>10</sup> Yet, as noted by Wayne Stein in 1990, “. . . major historical events such as World War II and the American civil rights movement set the stage for Indian people to begin questioning the federal authority which had controlled their lives. All of this, combined with the chronic failure of Indian youth in mainstream higher education during the 1950s and 60s, led Navajo leaders to ask the question, “Why do we not have our own college controlled by the Navajo people?”<sup>11</sup> This questioning eventually led to the chartering of a tribal

college by the Navajo Nation, whose leaders successfully lobbied Congressional members to sponsor federal legislation funding Navajo Community College in 1968.<sup>12</sup>

Other tribes quickly worked to emulate this success, chartering additional colleges, nearly all of which were founded as community colleges—this was a period of expansionism in higher education generally, and in the community college movement especially. Among the reasons why these early efforts resulted in community colleges were (1) lower start up costs, (2) missions that focused on economic development and educating students for a first job in local or regional businesses, and (3) an increased likelihood for local community control.<sup>13</sup> These aspects of community colleges fit within the post-secondary education conceptual model for tribal colleges framed by many Indian leaders during the 1970s.

The leaders of several tribal colleges came together in 1972 to share information, to examine the status of the movement, to create reservation-based colleges, and to consider planning for strengthening their futures. This meeting led to the founding of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC). From this group, a shared vision of tribal colleges developed, including five characteristics of tribal colleges: (a) the institution should be located on a reservation or near populations of Indian people; (b) the institution should be controlled by administrators and faculty, a majority of whom being Indian; (c) the institution should enroll Indian students; (d) the college curriculum should be culturally-derived and appropriate for the Indian population being served; and (e) the learning methods and experiences should be informed by Indian culture.<sup>14</sup>

Explicit in the emerging vision of tribal leaders was the intended role of tribal colleges in fighting local poverty, while also enabling tribes to strengthen their ability to survive as distinct entities and cultures. The agenda for AIHEC, as an organizing body representing the tribal colleges and the tribal leaders, included lobbying for improved funding and other resources for tribal colleges. In order for AIHEC and the individual colleges to pursue this ambitious agenda successfully, it was vital for the college leaders to personally contact state and federal legislators, members of charitable foundation boards, corporate leaders, representatives from regional, private and public universities—anyone who could provide financial and other support for their struggling institutions.<sup>15</sup>

Yet, tribal college presidents seemed to spend so much time talking with politicians at all levels, including tribal councils, that some members of their tribal college communities complained that there was insufficient leadership locally for the colleges. All too often, tribal factionalism led to attempts to control the tribal college. Few leaders lasted as presidents of tribal colleges for very long, none as impressively as the founding president of Sinte Gleska University, Lionel Bordeaux, who has been president there since 1970. Several college leaders faced regular challenges from groups within their sponsoring tribal councils; some were fired and, a few, rehired. This instability made it more difficult for several tribal colleges to gain external recognition and accreditation. Others found that the turmoil around

the college made it more difficult to garner broad political and financial support.<sup>16</sup>

Due to the effective work of AIHEC, tribal college presidents, and the tribes themselves, the Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act, Public Law: 95-471, title I (25 U.S.C. 1801 et seq.) was passed in 1978, including the Navajo Community College Assistance Act of 1978, Public Law 95-471, title II (25 U.S.C. 640a note). This legislation funded all tribal colleges under Title I and Navajo Community College under Title II. The impact of this was to provide federal recognition and support for tribal colleges. It encouraged federal agencies to give tribal colleges access to federal agency grant funding and provided a financial basis for tribal colleges to seek accreditation.

Janine Pease, founding president of Little Big Horn College and of AIHEC, currently Vice President for Native American Affairs at Rocky Mountain College, wrote her doctoral dissertation chronicling the legislative history of the tribal college movement. The leadership of individuals, acting in their roles as college presidents and collectively as AIHEC, was central to the success in achieving broad recognition for the missions and activities of tribal colleges. In this work, Dr. Pease reminds us that, beyond being places that award credits for academic courses, tribal colleges are intended as institutions that would help to ensure the survival of tribal peoples and enable their cultures to flourish.<sup>17</sup>

Even so, tribal colleges continued to struggle with issues of identity, stability, and funding. Efforts to improve base funding sources continued, resulting in the passage of additional federal legislation: the Equity in Educational Land-Grant Status Act of 1994, which provided additional funding to support activities consistent with the original First Morrill Act of 1862. The intent of this legislation, combining liberal arts and sciences academic coursework with job-oriented training, was seen as entirely consistent with the expressed missions of tribal colleges.<sup>18</sup> The additional funding also provided important support for research, in addition to useful outreach to tribal communities. Further, moving beyond the initial expectation that tribal colleges see themselves as restricted to the mould of the generic community college, nearly all are expressing a desire to move toward granting higher-level degrees. Several colleges offer degrees through the master's level.

Paul Boyer, in an article in the *Tribal College Journal*, indicated six criteria for evaluating tribal colleges,

[First,]...the good tribal college must encourage a smooth transition for students entering their institutions. ... Colleges should respond to [students'] personal needs, from the simple to the profound, not simply by 'giving students a break,' but by having ways to recognize why a student is having trouble and having the flexibility to respond. ... [Second,] tribal colleges should also support student achievement through an emphasis on traditional culture. ... Third, a tribal college must offer to all students a general education that provides skills for life... an emphasis

on job preparation should not diminish the importance of a strong general education program.... Tribal colleges should require the courses that allow students to understand who they are and [how they may] contribute to society. Fourth, a tribal college should emphasize good teaching and reward good teachers. Fifth, a college of quality must clearly define its relationship with the tribal government. Finally, the sixth goal for a good tribal college is to evaluate student outcomes. This information should be used to improve the college's curriculum and programs.<sup>19</sup>

In her introduction to the fall 2003 issue of the *Tribal College Journal*, editor Marjane Ambler noted that "...tribal colleges and universities understand the value of two worldviews; they serve students ... who seek respect for and a deeper knowledge of tribal traditions. They also serve students who know little about their tribes' language, spiritual beliefs, scientific knowledge, or leadership traditions."<sup>20</sup>

### **Demographics, Enrollments, Programs, Funding, and Accreditation**

Today, the number of tribal colleges is stable or growing, consistent with the increasing population base of those attending tribal colleges. While the constant threat of low funding levels is stressful, since the founding of Navajo Community College (now Diné College) in 1968, with but two exceptions (College of Ganado in 1986 and Flaming Rainbow University in 1992), tribal colleges have survived and begun to thrive. Student enrollment is increasing, but there remains much to improve.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 84 percent of all Americans over the age of 25 have completed high school and 26 percent have completed a baccalaureate degree. This percentage is increasing. In 2003, 88 percent of all U.S. high school students completed high school, with about 60 percent of those going on to college. Yet, in the same year, only 51 percent of American Indians graduated from high school, and 17 percent of them are attempting college.<sup>21</sup> Clearly the U.S. public school system is failing our Indian students.

This low percentage of American Indian high school graduates continuing on to college comes despite the overall success story of having 34 U.S. tribal colleges and universities enrolling over 32,000 students (80 percent of whom are Indian). This number of tribal college and university enrolled college students is an all-time high and compares to 2,100 American Indians enrolled in tribal colleges 20 years ago.<sup>22</sup>

In most tribal colleges, enrollments have been growing rapidly. Enrollment at Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College, for example, grew by more than 25 percent last year. Similar double-digit increases at other tribal colleges have been common. Even so, the enrollments at tribal colleges remain relatively small—from a high of about 2,000 students at Diné College to a low of around 100 at several

colleges, with an average enrollment of about 850 students. This relatively small number makes it financially and academically challenging to offer the breadth of student services and academic programs needed by tribal communities.

Who is attending tribal colleges? The students at tribal colleges have distinctly similar characteristics of age—they are older than the typical American community college student, there is a high level of connection to family and community, most lack sufficient academic preparedness for college level work, and nearly all come from low-income families and communities.

Members of tribal communities are younger than the typical U.S. community: the median age of all American Indians is 27, while the U.S. median is nearly 36. Forty-two percent of Indians are younger than 20 years of age, compared to a U.S. average of 27 percent.<sup>23</sup> Yet, despite this difference and younger population, the average age of a tribal college student is 34, compared to the U.S. average age of 25, and more than two-thirds are single parents. More than two-thirds of tribal college students attend part-time. It is common to have individual classes in tribal colleges in which there are several students directly from high school, several who have been out of school for some years and who may have earned a GED, as well as other adults in their 50s, 60s, and 70s.<sup>24</sup>

For most tribal colleges, the majority of their students come from primarily rural service areas, typical of most American Indian reservation lands. The fact that there are more American Indians living in urban than in rural areas suggests that there are additional markets for existing tribal colleges. This distant group, that is, Indians living away from tribal reservations in urban areas, is one reason why a number of tribal colleges are considering or are building residential living environments, are looking toward community partnerships, and are building a capacity for offering higher levels of coursework beyond the associate degree.<sup>25</sup> It is the fact that the urban Indians are not enrolling in large numbers in tribal colleges, nor non-tribal colleges, that accounts for the overall low number of American Indians enrolled in higher education.

When an American Indian student enrolls in college, especially a tribal college, it is a matter for the entire family and community. It is not uncommon for multiple family members to attend at once. Tribal college events are family and community events and emphasize the role of the tribal college as an engaged institution. Community programming is common at tribal colleges, with programs offered ranging from cultural programming, such as language and traditional crafts, to health programming, such as high blood pressure and diabetes awareness and intervention programs.<sup>26</sup>

Many tribal college students come unprepared for college level academic work. A large percentage of the students require pre-college coursework and academic support. It is common to find extensive developmental course structures, tutoring centers, and other student academic support services at tribal colleges. However, this is not that different from other community colleges located in underserved communities across the United States. What may be different is the

extent of these academic support programs and how they have been configured in connection to instilling cultural values and traditional understandings about knowledge. In other words, the student support services at tribal colleges incorporate socialization skills, culture, and tribal epistemology along with skills for writing and reading English and working with numbers.

Like all other sectors of American higher education, the population of students at tribal colleges is predominantly female. While the number of women attending college nationally is about 56 percent of all students attending, at tribal colleges this average is closer to 63 percent and at some tribal colleges the percentage is nearly 70 percent.<sup>27</sup> While it is vital for all people to extend their learning as much as possible, this disparity suggests that one critical issue for the future is how to understand and respond to these differences in enrollment patterns.

About 85 percent of tribal college students live at or below the poverty level. The communities served by tribal colleges and those whose students attend are communities with economic challenges that are invisible to many outside their communities.<sup>28</sup> Most have unemployment rates greater than 50 percent, some higher than 75 percent, rates that would cause other Americans to march in the streets and picket their congressional leaders.

The funding from all sources to support the increasing demand for higher education at tribal colleges has not kept pace. Using Montana, with its seven tribal colleges, as an example: since 1996 the annual state funds appropriated to help support tribal colleges has ranged from zero dollars, in three of the last eight years, to a high of \$1,456 per FTE, an average of \$729 per FTE over that eight year time frame. The low level of support and the unpredictability of the funding make it difficult for colleges to plan and manage their resources effectively. The situation in other states is comparable.<sup>29</sup>

Funding for tribal colleges tends to come from a variety of "soft money" sources, including students (tuition and fees paid through personal funds, private loans, scholarships, and grants), tribal governments, foundations and charitable organizations, and federal funding sources. The problem of chronic underfunding and the continual scrambling for operational funding, as exemplified by the low public financial support for tribal colleges is well-recognized by the colleges and their supporters. A press release from 2002 noted, "The most critical issue for the nation's tribal colleges is to correct serious funding disparities in fundamental institutional operations support. Under the Tribally Controlled College or University Assistance Act (P.L. 95-471), AIHEC seeks to increase the actual funding from the present \$3,916 per Indian student to the Congressionally authorized \$6,000 per Indian student."<sup>30</sup> While this amount of actual funding (\$3,916) is an increase of almost a thousand dollars in the past three years (\$2,964 per student in 1999), this remains almost 40 percent less than what the typical community college receives in per-student funding from federal, state, and local government revenues. If you factor in that this amount is an average across all institutions and levels, that is, including tribal colleges and universities that offer baccalaureates and master's

degrees, the disparity of funding is even more serious.

Nearly all of the tribal colleges and universities are regionally accredited, with 25 of the 35 AIHEC-member tribal colleges and universities located in the 19-state region of the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association (20 of the 25 are fully accredited, four are candidates for accreditation, and one is unaccredited), eight in the region of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, one in the Western Association of Schools and Colleges region, and one in Canada. Despite the apparent success in achieving accredited status, tribal colleges regularly struggle with meeting the expectations for outside accreditors who frequently do not understand or have familiarity with tribal cultures or the economic conditions, demographics, or missions of tribal colleges. While the tribal college or university may look something like any other community college or university, their core mission of cultural survival and vitality separates them in many ways from other institutions of higher learning.

### **Projections: What Does The Future Hold?**

Despite the gains in curricular maturity, enrollment, recognition from external agencies (including higher education accreditors), a number of factors continue to act as barriers to American Indians' access to higher education. These include isolation, poverty, poor academic preparation, unsupportive educational environment, institutional racism, and cultural discontinuity between Native communities and mainstream (some prefer Sandy Grande's: *whitestream*<sup>31</sup>) higher education institutions.<sup>32</sup> As a result, American Indians have the lowest educational attainment levels of any ethnic minority group in the United States.<sup>33</sup>

Further, there is concern about the relative success of tribal colleges in incorporating specific tribal culture, language, and values into their curricular and pedagogical structures. These concerns fall into two, somewhat contradictory or competing, directions: (a) a sense that more needs to be done to create models of knowledge and epistemologies that reflect the vast history of specific tribes, and, (b) a worry that the success of tribal colleges in accommodating Western intellectual traditions and requirements may threaten their identity.

On the one side are those who recognize that the educational failures of the past can only be addressed by new solutions that come directly from the culture and history of the people, incorporating cultural values and pedagogies appropriate to those being taught.<sup>34</sup> Others suggest that accommodation leads to continued assimilation and appropriation.<sup>35</sup> Others want to reap the benefits of some of Western intellectual traditions, perhaps replacing them with components of native traditions, particularly in the areas of sustainable ecology, the use of distance learning technologies, and multiculturalism.<sup>36</sup> As a result, there is a growing concern about direction of Indian intellectualism and the role of tribal colleges.

In last fall's *Tribal College Journal*, Lori Lambert approvingly quotes G. Cajete who spoke at a science conference earlier in 2003:

This kind of indigenous science education isn't just for indigenous people. It's for everyone, and it must become part of science education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Indigenous science education has the kind of meaning and context necessary to address the problems of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, including our relationships to the earth and to each other, the ability to understand and deal with 'other.' We are just at the beginning of seeing how these two ways—Indigenous and Western science—can come together to make a new world. ... A tribal college education is the kind of education that is needed by everyone if we want to solve the problems of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>37</sup>

Thomas Davis and Martha McLeod see both the benefits and cautions regarding the increasing use of technology in delivering coursework to Indian populations. Online courses are increasingly common at tribal colleges and may shape many of the issues of the future. "Most of the tribal colleges have either started developing online courses or are exploring new educational technologies. Several tribal colleges, such as Bay Mills Community College in Michigan and Salish Kootenai College in Montana, have taken national leadership roles in developing online education opportunities."<sup>38</sup> Using graphics, sounds, words, linking, and other tools supported by the Internet, tribal colleges are building courses where ideas and information about subjects are integrated into stories designed to breathe life into the learning process. Yet this comes with some risk: "Dr. Carty Monette, President of Turtle Mountain Community College, says tribal colleges must develop their Internet-based programs with care. He noted that tribal college mission statements focus on tribal communities and service to Native American people. The Internet, by its very nature, decreases the importance of geographic place in the delivery of education."<sup>39</sup>

One possible and important benefit of distance educational technologies in the decreasing importance of geographic place is the potential for tribal colleges and rural reservation communities to link more effectively and re-unite their urban families with the tribe's ongoing development and culture. The disconnection of urban populations of American Indians from their tribes places the future of cultural continuity and language survival in jeopardy. Academic courses originating at the tribal college, and offered using the most up-to-date interactive technology, could enable tribal members living in distant cities access to cultural knowledge and help build the all-important sense of community.

An additional concern about distance technologies is that it becomes possible to deliver information, decontextualized from its origins and to unintended populations. Tribal colleges have received requests to deliver cultural and language courses to non-Indian groups in Germany, for example. While possible, the wisdom of providing this kind of information may need additional discussion among the people. This type of information dissemination also raises questions about the nature of such information: who owns it, how is cultural information to

be provided and to whom, and when it is appropriate to extend services beyond the boundaries of the tribal college service area.

While not specifically about the knowledge base of American Indians, Douglas Morgan writes about what he sees as a dangerous co-existence between Indigenous knowledges and Western higher education.

Despite the growing support for the principles and practice of equal opportunity and multiculturalism, and the growing appreciation and apparent accommodation of Indigenous knowledges in Western institutions, higher education is still dominated by a Western worldview that appropriates the views of other cultures. ... Western science, ontology and epistemology are underpinned by concepts of universality. Important principles include objectivity, true/false dichotomies, and notions of Cartesian-Newtonian science that the nature of 'reality' is mechanistic. ... "[On the other hand] Indigenous thinking is mostly holistic and contextual. Identity, place, time, knowledge, spirituality, learning and assessment are all inseparable aspects of each other.... What appears to be an accommodation of Indigenous knowledges is arguably a continuation of practices of appropriation... rather than Indigenous scholarship being pursued through Indigenous methodologies in higher education institutions, it is still Western methodologies which are perpetuated.<sup>40</sup>

Sandy Grande argues that one resolution to these concerns is the development of a new kind of teaching and learning experience, one that features what she calls Red Pedagogy.

"... I propose a working definition of Red Pedagogy as that which maintains: (1) the quest for sovereignty and the dismantling of global capitalism as its political focus; (2) Indigenous knowledge as its epistemological foundation; (3) the Earth as its spiritual center; and (4) tribal and traditional ways of life as its Sociocultural frame of reference."<sup>41</sup>

John Phillips's recent article in the *Journal of American Indian Education* described a model for tribal college curricula that builds on the tribal colleges as land grant institutions. Phillips suggested a model centered on culture incorporating tribal concepts of holism, sacredness, cultural identity, and cultural viability as four sectors radiating out from tribal culture. Each of these four sectors connects to specific academic content areas important to native people.<sup>42</sup> Other models abound at tribal colleges themselves. Indeed, it would be presumptuous for anyone to suggest in exact detail the curricular content and structure for all tribal colleges. It would be constructive, however, to suggest that one abiding factor for ensuring the vitality of tribal colleges and universities is a regular examination of the institutional curriculum to see if there are more appropriate ways to embody tribal epistemologies and bodies of knowledge than the existing one.

Finally, in recent years, tribal college leaders have returned to an issue that

was part of the initial agenda for the tribal college movement, that of creating a separate national or international accreditation body controlled by and for Indigenous People. This work, done in conjunction with institutions in Canada and New Zealand (Massey University, *Te Kunenga ki Purehuroa*), intends to establish educational systems by and for Indigenous Peoples, validated by their own history, epistemologies, and values for learning.

Accreditation is often defined in generic academic language as a process of quality assurance, determining whether an institution or program meets established standards for function, structure, and performance. For the most part these standards are external criteria that validate the purposes and mission of the institution and guide the ongoing processes for improvement. Should not tribal colleges and universities work to establish their own guidelines for assuring quality in their educational processes? Should not they create their own criteria for who should teach and with what kinds of community-recognized credentials, what should be taught, and within what kinds of learning environments or experiences the learning should take place?

Education and educational structures like tribal colleges and universities are expressions of hope. They indicate that the community for whom and by whom they were created has continued expectations for improved conditions, greater self-awareness, for cultural renewal and growth. The ongoing development and strengthening of tribal colleges and universities builds on that foundation of hope to ensure continued academic vitality and success for students. This is the future of tribal colleges.

### Notes

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