



BUILDING THE FOUNDATION FOR SUCCESS

CASE STUDIES OF BREAKING THROUGH TRIBAL COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

- COMANCHE NATION COLLEGE • LEECH LAKE TRIBAL COLLEGE • LITTLE BIG HORN COLLEGE •
- NORTHWEST INDIAN COLLEGE • SALISH KOOTENAI COLLEGE • SITTING BULL COLLEGE •

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BreakingThrough

HELPING LOW-SKILLED ADULTS ENTER AND SUCCEED IN COLLEGE AND CAREERS



JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

APRIL 2013



The American Indian Higher Education

Consortium was established to serve a unique community of tribally and federally chartered colleges working to strengthen tribal nations and make a lasting difference in the lives of American Indians and Alaska Natives. Tribal Colleges and Universities were created in response to the higher education needs of American Indians and generally serve geographically isolated populations that have no other means accessing education beyond the high school level. Tribal Colleges and Universities have become increasingly important to educational opportunity for American Indian students and are unique institutions that combine personal attention with cultural relevance to encourage American Indians—especially those living on reservations—to overcome the barriers they face to higher education. AIHEC joined in this partnership to introduce the Breaking Through strategies to six tribal colleges.

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Breaking Through

HELPING LOW-SKILLED ADULTS ENTER AND SUCCEED IN COLLEGE AND CAREERS

Breaking Through promotes and strengthens the efforts of more than 50 community colleges in 22 states to help low-skilled adults prepare for and succeed in occupational and technical degree programs. Counteracting high attrition rates in Adult Basic Education and developmental education programs, Breaking Through colleges improve outcomes by focusing on strategies that create effective pathways through pre-college and degree-level programs and result in college completion. The initiative is proving that low-skilled adults can advance through remediation and credential programs within a reasonable time and with reasonable success. Most recently, Breaking Through, collaborating with the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, established programs at six tribal colleges. Breaking Through provides technical assistance to each campus, integrates the new colleges into the national network, and establishes a peer-learning network among them.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Tribal Colleges Breaking Through, a partnership of Jobs for the Future, the National Council for Workforce Education, and the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, was an eighteen-month initiative focused on piloting workforce and education strategies to better serve low-skilled students at tribal colleges and universities. Six institutions participated—Comanche Nation College, Leech Lake Tribal College, Little Big Horn College, Northwest Indian College, Salish Kootenai College, and Sitting Bull College—with each establishing two or more cohorts of GED or workforce students and incorporating the four Breaking Through core strategies. The colleges also joined the national Breaking Through network of colleges and attended semiannual peer learning meetings designed to further promote effective approaches for academically underprepared students.

Data from the participating colleges suggest that Tribal Colleges Breaking Through has had a significant impact. TCBT institutions piloted Breaking Through with roughly 400 students and awarded more than 450 industry-recognized credentials and GEDs during the 18-month initiative. Most of the colleges reported improved student outcomes (e.g., college readiness, transitions to college, retention rates, credential attainment rates, and job placement) relative to their traditional, non-Breaking Through programs. Surveys and other qualitative data collection efforts tended to support improved student, faculty, and staff satisfaction as well.

As a result of experimenting with the implementation of Breaking Through in a tribal college context, a number of key themes emerged during the initiative:

Peer Learning Network: The six TCBT colleges met twice a year as part of their own peer learning community and integrated into the broader Breaking Through network of community colleges across the country. This diverse group of colleagues, both experienced and new, enabled initiative staff

to identify a wealth of strategies, resources, and expertise to enhance their Breaking Through projects. The end result was a much stronger approach than might ever have been developed by a single institution. Even now, many of the TCBT staff continue to work directly with one another as a result of this process.

Alignment with Employer Demand: The emphasis on workforce programs designed around employer demand, while not new to many of the colleges, was nevertheless a greater focus of TCBT than it was in most previous initiatives. A great deal of learning took place as a result. Colleges experimented with a number of related strategies, including contextualization, employability skill development, the use of labor market data, and stackable certificates. The result was a deeper appreciation for linking local labor markets to college programs, with the goal of improving student retention, completion, and job placement rates.

Senior Leadership Engagement: In most Breaking Through colleges, the initiative is isolated in adult education or workforce departments that are removed from the regular college classes. In TCBT, there was a strong level of senior-level engagement. Presidents and chief academic officers attended national meetings, led the TCBT project personally, and interacted directly with students in their cohorts. This level of engagement allowed for a higher degree of institutionalization of the initiative, enabling the colleges to make the Breaking Through core strategies the norm and increasing the visibility on campus of low-skilled adult learners.

Culturally Contextualized Instruction: A useful strategy employed by many TCBT participants, and one that is specific to tribal colleges, was the employment of Native-American instructors with industry experience to culturally contextualize instruction. These individuals served as mentors and tutors and assisted students in the transition to working in non-tribal environments.

Community Partnerships: The TCBT colleges recognized that community partnerships had the potential to serve as the backbone of a number of strategies to support low-skilled adult learners. In some cases, this meant financial or in-kind service support, such as that provided by Tribal Employment Rights Offices, tribal or state Workforce Investment Act offices, TANF agencies, and state adult education providers. In other cases, it meant critical feedback for the college, including labor market information from workforce agencies on upcoming job openings and in-demand skills from regional employers.

Tribal Colleges Breaking Through was an extended pilot, but one that demonstrated convincingly that Breaking Through strategies and principles can be adapted to work at tribal colleges and universities. The three lead partner organizations hope to expand the initiative to serve a greater number of tribal colleges in the near future, and to use the extensive information gathered during the pilot stage to further refine the model so that it better serves Native-American students across the country.

INTRODUCTION

Breaking Through seeks to promote and strengthen the efforts of community and tribal colleges to help low-skilled adults prepare for and succeed in occupational and technical postsecondary programs. Counteracting high attrition rates in Adult Basic Education and developmental education programs, colleges in this national initiative are working to improve outcomes by focusing on strategies that create effective pathways through pre-college and degree-level programs, resulting in college completion and workforce development. Since 2005, Breaking Through has pioneered and demonstrated the success of these pathways in moving academically unprepared adults into postsecondary occupational and technical programs in community colleges nationwide.

Managed by Jobs for the Future, in partnership with the National Council for Workforce Education, Breaking Through has now been adopted as a broad framework for occupational/technical pathway implementation in more than 50 institutions of postsecondary education across 22 states. This evidenced-based initiative has proven that low-skilled adults can advance through developmental and credential programs within a reasonable time and with reasonable success.

With generous support from the Walmart Foundation, Jobs for the Future and the National Council for Workforce Education, along with the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, which works closely with all 37 tribal colleges and universities, introduced Tribal Colleges Breaking Through, an expansion of the original Breaking Through initiative. This 18-month project, launched in February 2010, sought to determine the effectiveness of Breaking Through strategies with predominantly American-Indian students. Six tribal colleges—Comanche Nation College, Leech Lake Tribal College, Little Big Horn College, Northwest Indian College, Salish Kootenai College, and Sitting Bull College—took part in the project. *Building the Foundation of Success* describes the colleges, their experience in piloting Breaking Through strategies,

the key lessons learned at each institution, and plans to continue expanding their programs in the future.

BREAKING THROUGH STRATEGIES

Breaking Through creates transparent postsecondary pathways, beginning with Adult Basic Education, GED programs, and/or developmental education courses and ending with workforce education. These pathways lead to both noncredit and credit-bearing credentials, but they always have a labor market payoff. Projects focus on adults with limited reading and math skills, providing the necessary education and training to succeed in postsecondary education and earn a job with a better-than-minimum wage.

The Breaking Through framework is based on four high-leverage strategies:

- > **Accelerated Learning:** To enable students to meet their educational and occupational goals faster, colleges change delivery methods and content through the innovative use of assessment tools, restructured curricula, targeted instruction, contextualization, and other approaches.
- > **Comprehensive Support Services:** For students whose life challenges put them at risk of not completing their education, colleges make academic, economic, and social support services easily accessible.
- > **Labor Market Payoffs:** To connect course content with the workplace and connect students with actual employers and workplaces, colleges restructure both precollege and college-level instruction.
- > **Aligning Programs for Low-skilled Adults:** To provide students with a better understanding of how they can move into and through college and to provide clear pathways that enable them to do so, reorganize college programs and link them with external programs.

During the 18-month pilot stage, each of the participating tribal colleges began implementing these strategies and established two or more cohorts of Breaking Through students. In the future, each college plans to expand the scope of its programs to include more students and, if not yet attempted, all four strategies.

TRIBAL COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

In 1968, Dine College (formerly Navajo Community College) established the first tribally chartered college in the United States, with five other Indian communities quickly following with their own tribal colleges. Today, the 37 tribally chartered colleges serve some of the country's most geographically isolated regions and impoverished communities. In addition to providing postsecondary education, they work to preserve tribal languages and reinforce tribal culture. They are located primarily in the western half of the United States, with 15 in Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

In 1978, the federal Tribal Controlled Community College Assistance Act essentially provided for basic funding for these institutions. This act, amended in 2008 (PL 110-315), is now referred to as the Tribal College Act. For the most part, tribal colleges and universities receive no tax-supported funding from the states. They rely heavily on federal and private grants to supplement the funding provided by the Tribal Colleges Act, yet they remain chronically underfunded. TCUs are chartered by their respective federally recognized tribes and therefore have a unique relationship with the federal government, making funding comparisons with other public institutions of higher education difficult.

The only other minority-serving higher education institution with congressionally appropriated base funding is Howard University, which receives approximately \$230 million annually from the federal government. This allocation exceeds \$19,000 per student compared with the \$5,665 per Indian student that TCUs currently receive from Congress. Also important to note, Congress appropriates basic operations funds based solely on Indian student

counts (i.e., members of a federally recognized tribe or the biological child of a tribal member). TCUs' collective enrollments include approximately 18 percent non-Indian students.

Open enrollment policies result in a significant number of students who enter college underprepared for college-level work. According to the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 66 percent of TCU students require some developmental education. At least one college reports that approximately 95 percent of entering students require remediation in at least one basic skill area.

A number of factors, including federal government policy and inadequate educational practices in general, have had a negative impact on American Indians' education attainment. The result is evident in the high K-12 dropout rates and low attainment levels, conditions that leave American Indians underprepared for postsecondary education or the workforce. Given the high demand on already limited resources across TCUs, leading tribal colleges are increasingly seeking high-impact, effective strategies such as those in the Breaking Through initiative.

TRIBAL COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES BREAKING THROUGH

In 2009, Walmart Foundation recognized that Breaking Through had strong potential to serve tribal colleges and universities. At the foundation's request, the American Indian Higher Education Consortium joined in partnership with Jobs for the Future and the National Council for Workforce Education to pilot a Breaking Through project specifically for these institutions. JFF, NCWE, and AIHEC managed a competitive selection process to identify colleges to participate. Six colleges received planning grants: Comanche Nation College (Oklahoma), Leech Lake Tribal College (Minnesota), Little Big Horn College (Montana), Northwest Indian College (Washington), Salish Kootenai College (Montana), and Sitting Bull College (North and South Dakota).

Each tribal college serves a large number of nontraditional adult learners, many of whom desire short-term training programs leading directly to jobs. Over the years, the tribal colleges had implemented various strategies targeting this goal, but they often met with limited success with those students who were not yet ready for college. Tribal Colleges Breaking Through sought to improve the success rates of these underprepared learners by challenging the colleges to implement one or more Breaking Through strategies. It was up to each TCBT college to determine which, if not all, strategies it would pilot.

JFF and NCWE, with support from AIHEC, orchestrated professional development and technical assistance strategies for Tribal Colleges Breaking Through:

- > **Site visits.** In support of the pilot phase, JFF and NCWE conducted a site visit to each college to build relationships with the college staff and assess the environmental and college conditions with respect to workforce development and programming for low-skilled adult students.
- > **Ongoing technical assistance.** Throughout the pilot year, colleges received technical assistance from JFF and NCWE as they planned for and implemented their first cohort of Breaking Through students. JFF, NCWE, and AIHEC conducted regular check-in phone calls with each college. JFF and NCWE developed *The TCBT Implementation Plan Guide*, a tool for colleges as they develop comprehensive, three-year plans for scaling up and sustaining the Breaking Through model.
- > **Monitoring of college progress.** In addition to check-in calls, JFF required other routine reports to monitor progress and assess challenges. Colleges submitted semiannual written progress reports, as did the partner organizations.
- > **Structured peer learning gatherings.** Peer learning promotes the rapid exchange of knowledge about promising practices and exposes participants to new and different ideas. JFF sponsored several key peer learning opportunities for the TCBT college coordinators and other staff to engage with one another and hear presentations on effective educational models and practices. In October 2011, each college sent two representatives to a two-day Advisor Training Workshop conducted at Salish Kootenai College. College representatives also attended two one-day tribal colleges' peer-learning meetings and two national Breaking Through conferences in May 2011 and October 2011.
- > **Tribal College Peer Learning Network.** The TCBT peer learning meetings provided the opportunity across colleges—and the tribes they served—to engage in discussion, exchange ideas and strategies, and share promising practices with professional colleagues and peers. A natural synergy developed. As the colleges worked to effect institutional change through their Breaking Through projects, their collective experiences shortened the learning curve for program development and strategy implementation.

THE CASE STUDIES

The pilot work of the six TCBT colleges serves as a strong foundation upon which to continue building efforts aimed at improving outcomes for academically underprepared students. Furthermore, these efforts serve as examples and inspiration for the other 31 tribal colleges as well as non-Native rural colleges that serve Indian students.

Note that all data included in these case studies are self-reported.

SIX CASE STUDIES

- > Comanche Nation College
- > Leech Lake Tribal College
- > Little Big Horn College
- > Northwest Indian College
- > Salish Kootenai College
- > Sitting Bull College



COMANCHE NATION COLLEGE

Comanche Nation College, chartered by the Comanche Nation in 2002, was awarded Initial Candidacy status by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association in November 2012. Prior to that, the college offered academic programs through a 2005 memorandum of agreement with Cameron University, located nearby in Lawton, Oklahoma.

According to its 2011-12 catalog, Comanche Nation College's mission is to "serve the citizens of Comanche Nation with the expressed purpose to provide educational opportunities in higher education combined with the traditions and customs of the Comanche Nation and other American Indian perspectives." Comanche-centered education emphasizes tribal culture, language, and history, as well four cultural values: relationship, responsibility, reciprocity, and redistribution. CNC provides for general education in the areas of arts and science, leading to Associate's degrees, and career and technical education to enable students to seek employment in various fields culminating in Associate of Arts, Associate of Science, Associate of Applied Science, and Associate of General Studies degrees.

Located in the city of Lawton, with a population of about 120,000 people, Comanche Nation College serves many small rural tribal communities in southwestern Oklahoma.

THE COMANCHE NATION COLLEGE BREAKING THROUGH PILOT

For Breaking Through, Comanche Nation College started the *Tatsinupi* ("Star" in the Comanche language) GED program. The college chose to implement two Breaking Through strategies: acceleration and comprehensive student support services. Focusing on utilizing wraparound student services and financial incentive awards to improve student retention and completion rates, the college infused targeted career counseling into *Tatsinupi* in order to encourage students to complete the GED and transition into postsecondary degree programs. CNC also utilized flexible scheduling, dedicated student mentors, GED tutors, and career counseling to improve student persistence rates and the rates at which students complete GED subject tests.

To determine each student's levels of workplace readiness and basic skills and to accelerate learning, CNC restructured its traditional GED

SNAPSHOT: BREAKING THROUGH AT COMANCHE NATION COLLEGE

- > Created the *Tatsinupi* program, a contextualized GED course, integrated with developmental math and English
- > Assigned a permanent full-time faculty member to the GED program, with the current instructor providing structured classes
- > Integrated the *Tatsinupi* GED program with career and academic advising, WorkKeys, and TABE software
- > Gave every student the opportunity to meet one-on-one with the college president
- > Began a process of establishing a dedicated GED testing site to shorten wait times for tests
- > Served 72 students; by the end of the grant period, 15 had earned their GEDs and 40 remained enrolled

curricula to use the WorkKeys program, a part of the American College Testing service's Work Readiness Curriculum. WorkKeys is a system for assessing job skills, designed to assist educators in determining the workplace readiness of students and assist employers in selecting and employing a high-performance workforce. WorkKeys assesses individual students in relation to specific career areas and assists with the development of foundational skills (e.g., reading, mathematics, English, working as a team member, career exploration) and other skills needed to be an effective employee. The program is designed to identify specific skills the student needs to address, rather than a body of general skills. CNC used WorkKeys as a pre-test to determine basic skills, including "employability skills" (sometimes referred to as soft skills), and a post-test to determine the level of skills attained.

Unique among the TCBT colleges, CNC chose to offer its Breaking Through program to very low-skilled students in its *Taat Tatsinupi* GED program or Little Stars: 39 of the 72 students tested at the ninth-grade level or below. Despite this, student retention and progression rates were above those generally experienced in the college's traditional GED programs. The low GED attainment rate likely reflects the low starting skill levels of many of the students, rather than a problematic program design. It simply takes longer for students starting at below ninth-grade levels to earn a GED.

A key aspect of CNC's Breaking Through project was the active engagement of the college president, Dr. Consuelo Lopez. Serving as project lead, Dr. Lopez took the time to meet one on one with each learner enrolled in the *Taat Tatsinupi* and *Tatsinupi* GED program at least twice per month. She worked closely with the faculty and staff in the restructuring of the college's GED program. Because she considered this project important to her college and community, she ensured that the *Tatsinupi* program and the utilization of Breaking Through strategies were infused in the college's strategic planning process. Under Dr. Lopez' leadership, the college has committed to finding the resources to continue expanding Breaking Through beyond the pilot period.

PROJECT OUTCOMES/LESSONS LEARNED

CNC staff believe their Breaking Through project had five successful components: cultural contextualization; developing a postsecondary environment for GED students; rewarding student success; using technology and software to supplement instruction and measure incoming grade level and post-program attainment; and leadership engagement.

Cultural Contextualization

From the outset, Comanche Nation College postulated that placing low-skilled American-Indian adults in a college environment that reflected their tribal culture would increase their opportunities for success. To this end, the staff implemented a number of cultural contextualization strategies: utilizing traditional Comanche teaching styles; organizing job talks by highly successful tribal members; and hosting community events celebrating student success. These were designed to help students feel like their GED experience was relevant and familiar.

Developing a Postsecondary Environment for GED students

Hosting GED classes on a college campus helped to create a stronger sense that GED students can be college students, as does giving students access to student services and other perks generally designated for traditional college students. Before Breaking Through, the GED program was located off campus in the offices of the tribal housing administration. Moving the students to the college acclimated the project participants to the college environment, and their familiarity with it helped prepare them to transition from GED studies to college-level coursework. CNC also provided access to college services, including academic advising and career counseling. Students also could participate in on-campus activities and functions.

Rewarding Student Success

CNC used incentives to focus students on their studies and motivate them. Through the Breaking

Through grant, students received certificates of completion and the minimum wage for up to 20 hours per week in student stipends. By partnering with the Comanche Tribal Workforce Investment Act office, the college secured a small amount of funding per week to assist students with gas, bus tickets, and general needs.

Using Technology to Supplement Instruction

Comanche Nation College found that WorkKeys was a valuable tool both for assessing workplace readiness and for providing basic skills development to *Tatsinupi* learners. However, the software proved more difficult for students coming into the program below ninth-grade level. Thus, the college purchased and began using TABE (Test of Adult Basic Education) software to alleviate the gaps in skills and knowledge. For students placing above the ninth-grade level, the college also used specific teaching modules through WIN courseware, also part of the ACT Work Readiness Curriculum Program. CNC administrators and faculty members closely monitored each student's progress through the training modules, including tracking time spent on each task and completion rates. Students who did not progress fast enough were flagged for academic or other "early alert" interventions.

Some students experienced barriers that kept them from managing technology effectively. Low rates of computer literacy and a lack of access to computers at home were both common issues. The college recognized early on that it would need to provide greater training in computer skills up front, as well as find ways to support students with distance learning options. CNC provided a homebound student with a laptop and air card to ensure access to the Internet and the software.

Leadership Engagement

It is very unusual for college presidents to spend one-on-one time with GED students. The kind of engagement provided by Dr. Lopez was a rare

opportunity to reinforce the concept that GED students are college students. In addition, the president is an active member of the TCBT team and regularly engages with JFF and NCWE staff during check-ins, and she submits reports herself. An added benefit of this engagement is that CNC can better identify policy barriers to student success, and then act to change these policies in a timely manner.

NEXT STEPS

Comanche Nation College has developed a strong technology-assisted GED program that not only builds the learners' basic skills but also prepares them for work. Nonetheless, Breaking Through is about more than GED completion. The next step for the college is to develop transition programs to move students from basic skills programs into college, and to further develop and expand all four Breaking Through strategies. However, one of CNC's first GED graduates did begin college-level classes immediately after completion and another moved to his preferred career, smoke jumper.

Part of this process will include the development of career pathways that include stackable, industry-validated, short-term certificates leading to Associate's degrees. To develop such programs, the college plans to develop partnerships with local workforce agencies and employers. These partners will play a critical role in helping CNC better understand the local labor market and assist in the development of curricula that prepare learners for living-wage jobs. Connecting course content with the workplace connects students with actual employers, and it also helps students make the connection between learning and work. CNC also plans to increase the number of students who complete the GED program and enter into the science, technology, engineering, or math disciplines, all areas of need identified by the college. To meet the Comanche Nation's need, it currently offers programs in tribal management, gaming management, and tribal business administration.



LEECH LAKE TRIBAL COLLEGE

Leech Lake Tribal College, located in Cass Lake, Minnesota, is situated on a reservation encompassing 864,185 acres of lakes, wetlands, and forests in the north central part of the state. It is the largest Indian reservation in Minnesota by number of residents and second in size based on land area. In 1990, the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe established the college by tribal resolution and established an independent board of trustees. In 2003, Leech Lake Tribal College separated from the LLBO, and it was accredited by the Higher Learning Commission in 2006. Leech Lake Tribal College still enjoys a vital relationship with the LLBO, which provides about 11 percent of its annual funding.

Leech Lake Tribal College has about 70 faculty, staff, and administrators. It offers nine programs of study, leading to an Associate's degree in arts, science, or applied science, as well as diplomas and certificates. The college serves a very low-income community. The poverty rate in the Leech Lake tribal community is 70 percent, with an unemployment rate of 38 percent. About 250 students who live in the surrounding area attend the college. It is estimated that 90 percent of them are tribal members or descendants of tribal members.

THE LEECH LAKE TRIBAL COLLEGE BREAKING THROUGH PILOT

Leech Lake Tribal College piloted three Breaking Through strategies: realignment of programs; comprehensive student support services; and labor market payoffs. Focusing much of its pilot efforts on

systemic changes to several workforce development programs, LLTC modified two certificate programs: residential carpentry and construction electricity. Although most of the students in these programs already had a high school diploma or GED, few were fully college ready.

To begin developing career pathways, the college reviewed its career technical programs, a process that led to the creation of stackable certificates and degrees that incorporated the Breaking Through strategies. To accelerate learning, the college piloted an effort to integrate developmental instruction into the technical course curriculum, and it used developmental education instructors to co-teach classes with technical faculty.

Two models of team teaching emerged. The first model, targeting higher-level students, used co-taught basic skills instruction for just the first third of the course. In the second model, the developmental instructor was in the classroom with the content instruction throughout the course. This strategy allowed the infusion of developmental instruction within the context of the applied courses. In spring 2012, the college added a similar co-taught course, technical writing, which incorporated developmental English.

To connect course content with the workplace and connect students with actual employers, the head of the Professional Studies Division conducted an "environmental scan" to determine regional job demands and opportunity. This process helped

SNAPSHOT: BREAKING THROUGH AT LEECH LAKE TRIBAL COLLEGE

- > Enrolled 31 students in two certificate programs—residential carpentry and construction electricity—built around Breaking Through strategies, as well as a course in business technical writing
- > Integrated remediation content into the curriculum and used technical instructors and developmental education instructors to co-teach classes
- > Redesigned student services and advising to increase the use of career counseling

the college understand local employer needs and bring labor market data into the classroom and the advising process.

Building on lessons learned in a student advisor training provided by JFF, the college developed a new advising system, incorporating a team-based case management strategy. All full-time faculty members were assigned advisees, provided academic advice and career information about their respective disciplines, and served as mentors to their advisees. The college also developed a wellness center to enhance the overall well-being of the student body by providing peer and professional counseling services.

PROJECT OUTCOMES/LESSONS LEARNED

LLTC staff believe that three successful components from the pilot phase led to significant system changes at the college: team-taught paired courses; stackable degree programs linked to labor market data; and workforce partnerships.

Team-taught Paired Courses

By restructuring the curriculum to pair developmental education instructors with the instructors of the content classes, LLTC improved college readiness even as students earned workforce credentials. In addition, instructors contextualized basic skills content to make it more relevant to their students' career aspirations. For example, the developmental math co-taught as part of the carpentry course focused on the types of calculations a carpenter might have to make on the job (e.g., measurement conversion, budgets, ratios, project estimates). Given the success of this effort, LLTC has fully integrated two classes into one course in two of its programs in order to accelerate the learning process.

Stackable Degree Programs Linked to Labor Market Data

At the start of TCBT, college staff realized that stackable certificates (i.e., certificates that make up the components of a career pathway) facilitate student achievement by developing an ongoing

sense of accomplishment among students as they progress through their studies. LLTC committed itself to evaluating its short-term certificate programs to see if it could align them better, ultimately leading to Associate's degrees. In addition, the college reached out to community partners, in particular local employers and workforce agencies, to test the labor market value of the certificates that made up its career pathways.

Workforce Partnerships

A side effect of the effort to infuse labor market data into the curriculum was the development of new working relationships with area employers, Workforce Investment Boards, Tribal Employment Rights Offices, and other state and tribal agencies. While still evolving, these partnerships have already provided valuable resources to the college. For example, in addition to enabling the college to test the viability of its credentials, community partners have provided direct funding, student scholarships, wraparound services, and career navigation and internship opportunities. The head of the Professional Studies Department believes that one of the great values to Breaking Through was forcing the college to become more engaged in workforce development initiatives both on and off the reservation, thus improving employment opportunities for graduates.

NEXT STEPS

One of the biggest challenges faced by Leech Lake Tribal College was arranging with Minnesota State Adult Basic Education to move its basic skills courses from a nearby high school to the college campus. Before this change, the college's ability to work with low-skilled adults who do not have a high school diploma was limited because those learners were exclusively served by the area's K-12 ABE provider when they chose to return to school. The college entered into negotiations with the local provider, and as of fall 2012, the basic skills program was relocated onto LLTC's campus. This is a critical accomplishment. Rather than forcing adult students to return to a high school setting to earn the GED, they can now experience a college environment,

better facilitating their transition into college classes.

Because of the success of the pilot program, LLTC intends to continue developing stackable degrees and certificates throughout the construction program. Feedback from local employers focused on infusing entrepreneurship training into the curriculum. Thus, the college has begun an entrepreneurship program to assist learners in improving their ability to create their own jobs. The idea is that the development of construction entrepreneurs will lead to more job opportunities on the reservation.

Finally, the college plans to infuse the Breaking Through strategies of acceleration and labor market payoffs into other academic programs (e.g., business, law enforcement). It has begun a process to incorporate a career pathway module into the developmental education courses for each program in the Professional Studies Department.



LITTLE BIG HORN COLLEGE

Little Big Horn College was chartered by the Crow Tribe of Indians in 1980 and accredited at the Associate's degree level in 1990. The Crow Indian Reservation, the largest of the seven Indian reservations in Montana, comprises nearly 2.3 million acres, with over 12,000 tribal members living on these tribal lands. The Crow Reservation includes 64 percent of Big Horn County, which was designated one of the fifty poorest counties in the nation, with a per capita income of \$10,793. The reported unemployment rate of 47 percent and poverty rate at 31 percent are reinforced with a secondary school dropout rate of 14 percent.

The college shares a fundamental obligation with the Crow Tribe: to prepare adolescents and young adults to lead productive, prosperous lives. This obligation means that the college must provide people with a solid educational foundation in the literacy, numeracy, and thinking skills needed for responsible citizenship, career development, and lifelong learning. The college does not have a GED program on campus, which was a factor in the design of this project.

Little Big Horn College serves approximately 400 students per semester and offers nine Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degree programs. It employs approximately 75 faculty, staff, and administrators, the majority of whom are members of the Crow Tribe of Indians.

THE LITTLE BIG HORN COLLEGE BREAKING THROUGH PILOT

Sitting on an estimated 17.1 billion tons of coal and other natural resources (e.g., oil, gas, timber, limestone, bentonite, sand, and gravel), the Crow Nation has significant potential to improve its economic base through economic development efforts focused around the mining industries. A project is underway on the reservation to develop a coal gasification plant. However, such efforts are hampered by the lack of a skilled workforce, in particular in the skilled trades, including shortages of mechanics, electricians, heavy equipment operators, and welders.

To develop a labor-ready workforce, Little Big Horn College infused the Breaking Through strategies of accelerated learning and labor market payoffs into the new Work Readiness program. This program engages learners in a hands-on environment to develop their technical skills in a curriculum that contextualizes basic skills. Of all of the colleges engaged in Tribal Colleges Breaking Through, LBHC focused most heavily on integrating work-ready skills into the curriculum and creating a classroom environment that mirrors that of the workplace. The Work Readiness curriculum is designed around the National Center for Construction Education's certification programs, as well as Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)-10 and

SNAPSHOT: BREAKING THROUGH AT LITTLE BIG HORN COLLEGE

- > Created the Work Readiness program, a contextualized training program offering graduates 10 modules of credit in the National Center for Construction Education's certification program as well as OSHA-10 and MSHA New Mine certifications
- > The Work Readiness program combined hands-on experience, high standards for student performance, and a focus on being prepared to work off the reservation as a means to ensure that graduates would succeed in the workplace.
- > Across four cohorts, a completion rate of 79 percent, an employment rate of 83 percent, and a six-month work-retention rate of 79 percent, all higher than achieved in the college's traditional workforce development programs

Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) New Mine certifications. Students received 80 hours of general introductory coursework, 120 hours of applied trades work, and 32 hours of safety review and training.

Because the college already had been preparing to develop a program to meet the potential job opportunities afforded by the mining and coal gasification industries, the college could start its Breaking Through project quickly and thus served four cohorts of learners during the pilot. Little Big Horn College discovered that demand was even higher than expected: when the college received 89 applications for just 15 slots for the first cohort, it expanded enrollment to 20 students. The second and third cohorts each had 15 participants, while the fourth had 23.

To prepare learners for work, the six-week program was designed like a traditional work schedule. Training sessions took place from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Attendance was mandatory, with only two excused absences allowed. Thus, the college set high expectations for the students from the initial point of contact, through orientation, and throughout the program. Of the 68 students enrolled in the four cohorts, 79 percent graduated and 83 percent of those graduates either gained employment or enrolled in further college-level courses. Program graduates earned a total of 75 industry-recognized credentials and 50 Certificates of Work Readiness. To gauge the project's effectiveness, the college interviewed program graduates, who reported high levels of work retention, improved work prospects, and interest in specialized training if offered in the future by LBHC.

Another goal of the project was to increase the educational and skill levels of men on the reservation. On the Crow Nation, young males suffer chronically high unemployment rates but make up just 35 percent of the LBHC student body. The Work Readiness program had an unprecedented affect on males in the community: they comprised 95 percent of the participants.

Dr. David Yarlott, president of Little Big Horn College, played a direct role in developing and leading the Work Readiness program. Dr. Yarlott reached out to members of the community, including tribal leaders, to recruit students. Once students were enrolled, he pushed college staff to maintain a "culture of success" that combined strong student and academic support with high expectations for professionalism. He also ensured that financial resources were available to support subsequent iterations of the program.

PROJECT OUTCOMES/LESSONS LEARNED

LBHC staff believe that five factors in the pilot phase led to the success of the Work Readiness program: creating a culture of success; incentives for student progression; use of nationally recognized certifications; using tribal members as faculty and mentors; and employer partnerships.

Creating a Culture of Success

By instituting selective enrollment and strict attendance rules, the college created an environment aimed at ensuring that students who completed the program were workplace ready. Classes were designed to: simulate a workplace environment and foster strong work ethic; provide apprenticeship-like training that mirrors on-site environments found in the coal and gas industries; upgrade skills for immediate employment; and accelerate the credentialing process. The college believes these four components were a large part of why the program had such high rates of progression and completion.

Incentives for Progression

Participants were assigned tools for each trade studied, and they were rewarded with more equipment as they progressed through trade courses. A small stipend was also awarded upon graduation from the program for those students who met all course expectations. Incremental reward systems are common among Breaking Through colleges, and even a small financial investment can serve as a powerful way to improve student outcomes.

Use of Nationally Recognized Certifications

Recognizing that many of the energy companies surrounding the Crow Reservation were conducting national searches to fill their job vacancies, LBHC believed that its graduates would need to earn nationally recognized credentials to be competitive. After interviewing employers and reviewing labor market information, the college chose to award students ten modules of credit from the NCCER as well as OSHA-10 and MSHA New Mines certification.

Using Tribal Members as Faculty and Mentors

LBHC believes that employing tribal members as instructors had a positive impact on the students. Drawing from lessons learned while working off the reservation, the faculty could mentor students and prepare them for the work expectations of mainstream employers. Class promptness and attendance were strongly reinforced throughout the training and related directly to the job expectations. The message was clear: "If you are absent on the job, you will be fired." The Crow instructors also served as mentors for students after they graduated from the program, enabling them to get further advice as they began living and working off the reservation.

Employer Partnerships

In the pilot phase, Little Big Horn College relied very heavily on the plans of a multinational energy development company to serve as the primary employer. When these employment opportunities did not materialize, the college reached out to other regional employers. LBHC now collaborates with an array of potential employers: Many Stars CTL LLC (an energy development company); Westmoreland Resources, Inc. (which operates the Absaloka coal mine inside the boundaries of the Crow Reservation); and Cloud Peak Energy (which operates a coal mine close to the reservation). These partnerships illuminated the need to focus on specific trade areas (e.g., heavy equipment operation, electrical, carpentry welding, diesel

mechanics). The college has also developed an advisory committee to assist in sustaining and growing the program, working with these employers and other key stakeholders in the community (Crow Tribal Education, the Crow Tribal Employment Rights Office, and the Montana Department of Labor and Industry, as well as program graduates).

NEXT STEPS

The biggest challenge for LBHC is space. Its ability to move to a more comprehensive program with a number of trade-specific career pathways is dependent on obtaining the necessary funding to build the planned Educational and Technical Training Center. While the Work Readiness program succeeded, the college needs space to develop comprehensive construction career pathways utilizing stackable credentials leading to industry-recognized credentials. The anticipated design of the ETTC will enable the college to target training in five technical pathways: electrical, welding, carpentry, diesel mechanics, and heavy equipment. The goal is for Breaking Through to transition into a full-time accelerated program that leads to a Certificate of Applied Science and potentially to an Associate of Applied Science degree.

TCBT has had a profound impact on Little Big Horn College. Dr. Yarlott feels that TCBT added a new dimension by bringing in students who often did not see themselves as college learners, in particular older and male students. A positive yet challenging outcome has been that college staff have begun rethinking how to serve adult learners, and Breaking Through has stimulated discussions about shifting resources to support this effort. For example, student services staff are talking about creating a student success/career center and changing their focus from working with traditional college-age students to offering more services for adult learners. Additionally, the college will continue to encourage program participants to complete the GED when necessary and move through stackable credentials to the Certificate of Applied Science or Associate of Applied Science degree.



NORTHWEST INDIAN COLLEGE
X w l e m i E l h > T a l > N e x w S q u l



NORTHWEST INDIAN COLLEGE

In 1973, the Lummi Tribe chartered Northwest Indian College as the Lummi Indian School of Aquaculture. Located in Bellingham, Washington, on the Lummi Indian Reservation, the college serves tribes throughout Washington, Oregon, and Idaho at six campuses. The college received accreditation as a two-year-degree-granting institution in 1993 and to award Bachelor's degrees in 2010. According to its handbook, "Through education, Northwest Indian College promotes indigenous self-determination and knowledge."

Northwest Indian College's educational philosophy is based on two principles: that the opportunity of postsecondary education must be provided within the American-Indian community; and that self-awareness is a basic element upon which students achieve confidence, esteem, and a sense of pride, build careers, and create a self-sufficient lifestyle, including a commitment to lifelong learning. According to former President Cheryl Crazy Bull, "What makes NWIC unique is the ability to deliver an education that is grounded in tribal values and knowledge, yet provides a solid education."

Northwest Indian College offers a Bachelor's degree in native environmental science, three Associate of Arts and Science degrees, one Associate of Applied Science degree, three Associate of Technical

Arts degrees, one Associate of Science Transfer, and eight certificate programs. It enrolled an unduplicated head count of 1,313 students in 2011-12, with a 40 percent retention rate. In addition to the main Lummi campus, the college has extended campuses on five Indian Reservations in Washington (Swinomish, Muckleshoot, Port Gamble S'Klallam, Tulalip, and Nisqually) and one extended campus in Idaho on the Nez Perce Indian Reservation. In addition, NWIC provides courses to members of any of the two dozen other tribes in Washington.

THE NORTHWEST INDIAN COLLEGE BREAKING THROUGH PILOT

Northwest Indian College combined Breaking Through with I-BEST (Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training), a Washington state integrated pathways model designed to improve student outcomes for basic skills, developmental education, and ESL. Similar to Breaking Through in many respects, I-BEST includes a stronger emphasis on courses in which technical and basic skills content is delivered via co-instruction. Six years of data demonstrate that, like Breaking Through, I-BEST can substantially improve retention and credential attainment for low-skilled learners.

SNAPSHOT: BREAKING THROUGH AT NORTHWEST INDIAN COLLEGE

- > Combined elements of two national models—I-BEST and Breaking Through—into two workforce programs, industrial entry/construction trades and certified nursing assistant
- > Experimented with team-taught courses combining technical faculty with Adult Basic Education faculty
- > In I-BEST team-taught courses, a 24 percent increase in "significant level gain" over the ABE students not in I-BEST classes during the same time period
- > Bundled a number of shorter, stackable certificates embedded within each stage of career pathways
- > Enrolled 189 students who earned 350 industry-recognized credentials

The Northwest Indian College TCBT staff focused on creating an I-BEST/Breaking Through hybrid with a cohort of students in the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program, as well as integrating Breaking Through strategies (but not co-instruction) into an industrial entry/construction trades program. NWIC provided case management, employer engagement, and work readiness as key features of both programs.

As part of Breaking Through, the college consolidated a number of federal funding streams and recruitment pipelines (Basic Food Employment and Training, Tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Welfare to Work) under a central Workforce Employment Resource Center. This process improved efficiency in recruiting and paying for I-BEST/TCBT students and made it possible to coordinate the support services provided by these agencies and develop an opportunity to expand partnerships with community agencies responsible for managing these funds. Once enrolled, the CNA and Breaking Through trades students were tested using the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) test and introduced to their instructors and important college staff members who would support them at the college (e.g., the financial aid director, the admissions director, the registrar).

NWIC believes that the structure of its programs were key to ensuring positive student outcomes. For the I-BEST CNA course, this meant team teaching (including giving instructors time outside of the classroom to prepare for this new approach) and offering for-credit courses to students without requiring them to have a GED or high school diploma to enroll. Many of the CNA students worked toward a GED while enrolled in their nursing courses. The college built the trades course around a condensed five-day, forty-hour “work week” format that emphasized the value each competency taught had for local employers and regularly brought employers to the class to address the students.

The content in both courses was heavily contextualized, utilizing employer feedback to tailor it to the students’ career interests. The college also emphasized cultural contextualization, most notably by infusing traditional Lummi plants and

foods knowledge into the CNA diabetic nutrition curriculum, as well as through a focus on integrating traditional Native-American medicine with Western medical care.

NWIC also offered a service learning project for credit as part of the pilot, with employability skills infused into the project curriculum.

A notable component of NWIC’s Breaking Through programs was the inclusion of mandatory, wraparound services for all students. Whenever possible, the college provided each student with a single-point-of-contact support staff member (a bridge coach), team-based case management, and incentives for attendance and completion. Also, by consolidating federal funding streams, the college could also offer a greater diversity of fully funded wraparound services. For example, a single student might receive academic counseling from the college, career counseling from the tribal TANF agency, and job placement support from the local Workforce Investment Board. Some students qualified for gas vouchers, bus passes, or interview clothing as allowable supportive services from their respective funding programs. NWIC also offered cash incentives for students who hit milestones in their career pathways.

PROJECT OUTCOMES/LESSONS LEARNED

NWIC staff believe that four successful components from the pilot phase led to significant system changes at the college: aligning training with labor markets; aligning innovation with the college strategic plan; I-BEST and Breaking Through; and institutional change.

Aligning Training with Labor Markets

Northwest Indian College made use of a number of labor market information resources to ensure that its Breaking Through programs would produce credentials leading to jobs. For example, the college based its efforts toward this goal for the CNA program in part on developments at the national level: reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act and passage of the Affordable Care Act made more American Indians eligible

for health care benefits. In addition, college staff reached out to an extensive network of contacts among TANF, Workforce Investment Act, and tribal employment agencies, as well as employers, in demonstrating strong demand for CNAs both on and off the reservation. Institutional research staff also utilized labor market information from national and state databases to reinforce the message that demand was growing in this field and linked to career pathways.

Aligning Innovation with the College Strategic Plan

Northwest Indian College's strategic plan for 2010 to 2017 makes strong commitments to expanding and improving workforce development programs. To ensure that Breaking Through had strong support from senior administration and was sustainable beyond the grant period, NWIC staff tied Breaking Through strategies to the goals established in the strategic plan. A critical component of this effort was tying the project to an undeveloped goal of the plan: establishing career pathways. Staff focused on creating stackable certificates that started with Breaking Through programs and continued onto Associate's degrees or beyond.

I-BEST and Breaking Through

Recognizing the significant similarity between I-BEST and Breaking Through, NWIC chose to combine the two, and it experimented with different ways to apply a hybrid model over the course of the pilot. This "learning phase" enabled the college to discover a great deal about approaches—successful and unsuccessful—to working with low-skilled adult learners. Most important, the hybrid model succeeded: it led to higher persistence, completion, degree attainment, and job placement rates than most of the college's traditional GED/workforce programs. NWIC is now committed to finding new ways to expand its I-BEST/Breaking Through approach to additional career pathways.

Institutional Change

One Breaking Through goal is the long-term transformation of institutions in order to better align workforce programs with developmental and basic skills education. At NWIC, this process is underway as a result of strong support from college leadership, including a commitment to building a workforce development division of the college that incorporated the latest strategies for improving the success rates of low-skilled students. This commitment is institutionalized from the board to college leadership and through to the staff, and not dependent on any one person, as evidenced by its strong continuation even during the transition of one college president to the next.

NEXT STEPS

The project director noted a challenge to incorporating the I-BEST model further—finding the right combination of instructors to co-teach courses—and compared the I-BEST instructors to marriage partners: the right chemistry leads to wonderful results; the wrong chemistry can be disastrous.

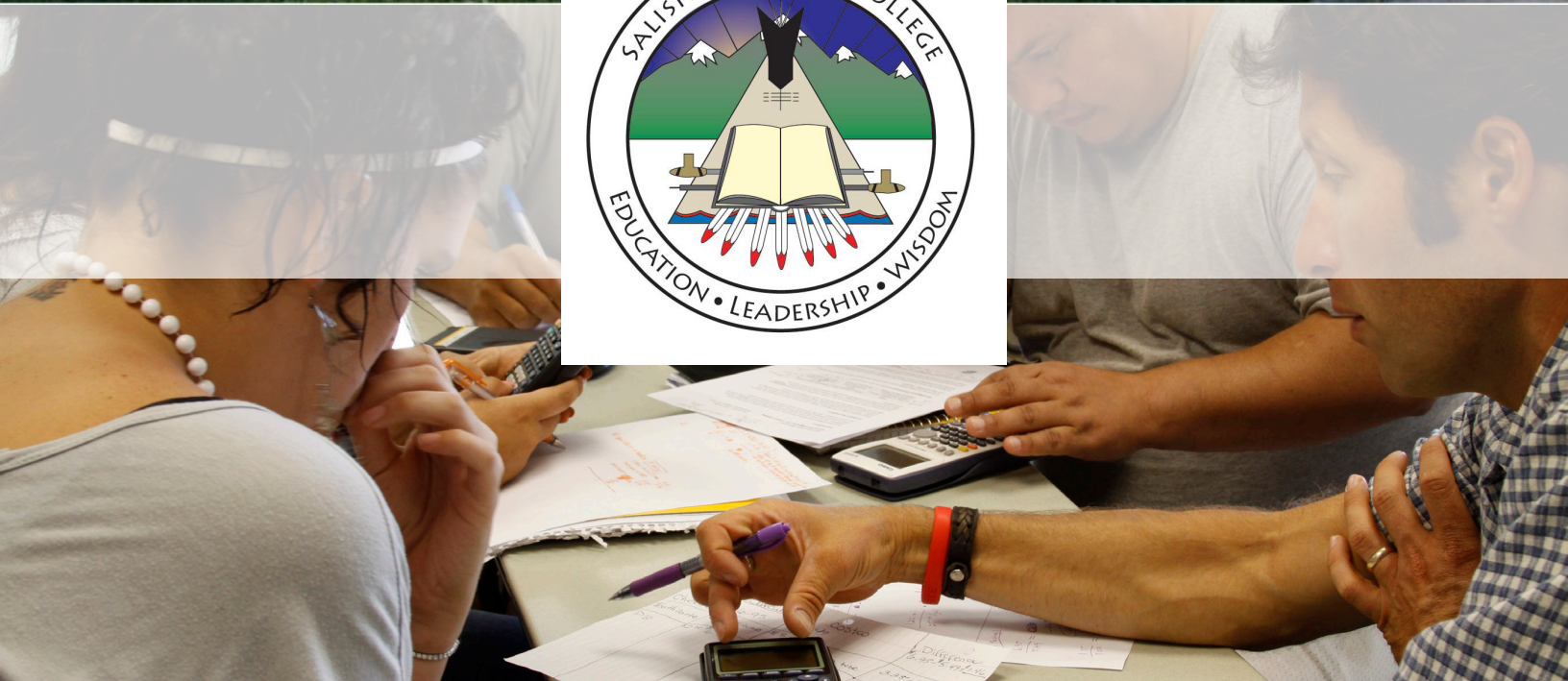
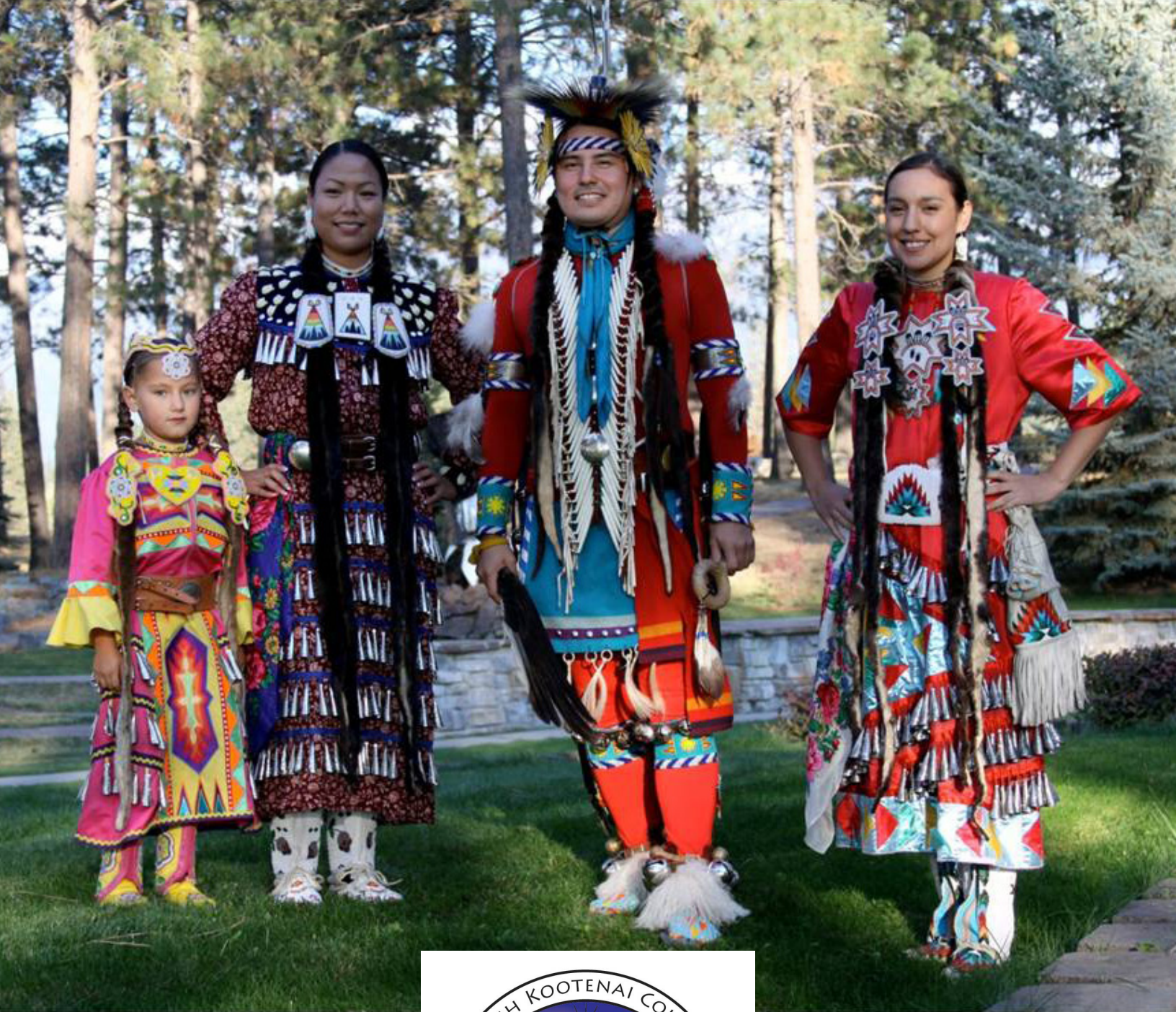
Likewise, because the college designed and implemented its new workforce programs quickly, a number of early design components and college policies need to be changed to support future expansion of the model. Based on the pilot experience, Northwest Indian College has identified a number of ways to improve its model. These include creating mandatory attendance policies, changing the way data are collected and analyzed, and implementing new assessments focused on reading skills and vision.

The college plans on expanding its Breaking Through model beyond the main Lummi campus, starting with offering the CNA program at the other six sites through a combination of distance learning technology and on-site instruction. Additionally,

NWIC is exploring the integration of I-BEST/Breaking Through into other career pathways in the medical field (community health representatives, child care health advocates, medical receptionist, medical billers, medical coders, phlebotomists, medical assistants, diabetic technicians, and licensed practical nurses).

The college also has expanded into programs that lead to entry into the construction trades, beginning with a National Center for Construction Education Trades Pathway. This would include the development of short-term, for-credit certificates that articulate into a two-year certificate or degree program, as well as the development of new “green” construction certificates.

A major goal is to bring all workforce programs under the umbrella of the Workforce Education Program. This would include early childhood education, casino gaming technician, chemical dependency, office professions, information technology, and other short-term workforce development programs.



SALISH KOOTENAI COLLEGE

Salish Kootenai College, established in 1977, serves the Bitterroot Salish, Kootenai, and Upper Pend d'Oreille tribes, commonly known as the Confederated Tribes of the Flathead Nation. The campus is on the Flathead Indian Reservation at Pablo, Montana, in mountains of northwestern Montana. The reservation is comprised of 1.317 million acres, and the tribal enrollment of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes is over 7,000.

Salish Kootenai College received accreditation as a two-year-degree-granting institution in 1984 and to award Bachelor's degrees in 1998. Its mission is to "provide quality postsecondary educational opportunities for Native Americans, locally and from throughout the United States" and "to promote community and individual development and perpetuate the cultures of the Confederated Tribes of the Flathead Nation." SKC offers fourteen Bachelor's degrees, fifteen Associate's degrees, three Associate of Applied Science degrees, and five Certificates of Completion. In 2011, the college enrolled 1,135 students.

THE SALISH KOOTENAI COLLEGE BREAKING THROUGH PILOT

Salish Kootenai College piloted the *Es Xcimi* bridge program, which focused on college readiness and accelerated developmental education for recent GED graduates and students with a high school diploma who were testing just below college ready. It built this two-week bridge program around an intensive "boot camp" model. Students received basic skills instruction half of the day, then attended sessions focused on such topics as career counseling, college readiness, study skills development, financial aid, and an introduction to other campus services. The Breaking Through pilot included career counseling and incentives for students to enroll in college-level classes once they demonstrated preparedness.

SKC's Breaking Through pilot aimed to accelerate learning, introduce students to the college's comprehensive support services, and align and link programs from the GED program to other college programs leading to career pathways. Through the *Es Xcimi* program, SKC strengthened its connections with the local Montana Job Service Department

SNAPSHOT: BREAKING THROUGH AT SALISH KOOTENAI COLLEGE

- > Developed *Es Xcimi*, an accelerated bridge program that utilized career counseling, contextualized instruction, and comprehensive student services to improve college transition rates among near-college-ready students and recent GED graduates
- > Engaged local employers, workforce agencies, and college faculty to begin chunking A.A.S. programs into stackable certificates
- > Redesigned the developmental studies department to incorporate Breaking Through core strategies
- > Enrolled 40 students in the *Es Xcimi* program, with 95 percent of them transitioning into credit-bearing programs

and improved interdepartmental communication across student support services areas. Bridge facilitators learned more about the importance of embedding career counseling, college-readiness skills, and contextualized coursework into student-readiness courses. The administration also engaged in discussions with local employers and reviewed workforce needs projections by the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and the state of Montana.

The *Es Xcimi* program encouraged faculty members to talk with their students about employment opportunities and career possibilities. It also encouraged faculty to facilitate discussions about stackable credentials that directly lead from the completion of one credential to the beginning of the next, and ultimately to an industry-recognized certificate or degree. These discussions led to a strong sense of career awareness among the faculty and staff.

As a result of the success of the *Es Xcimi* program, SKC separated its Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) program from that of the state. Further, it redesigned ABLE to include all four Breaking Through strategies. This new approach, dubbed the Springboard Education Program, has four goals:

- > Eliminate barriers or delays to student success.
- > Provide comprehensive student supports, both on and off campus.
- > Align programs with student career interests and local labor markets.
- > Improve transition to college rates.

In its first semester, spring 2012, the Springboard Education Program enrolled 43 students, producing 10 GEDs, 9 college-ready students, and 4 students who transitioned to postsecondary programs. Over the next year, the college expects to enroll 200 students and produce 75 GEDs.

PROJECT OUTCOMES/LESSONS LEARNED

SKC staff believe that five successful components from the pilot phase led to significant system changes at the college: building to scale;

including stackable certificates; revising student orientation and assessment; bypassing unnecessary developmental education; and considering labor market data.

Building to Scale

SKC believes that “best practices” should not be confined to a handful of experimental pilot programs. Instead, the college took lessons learned from a number of recent grants and combined them into the new Springboard Education Program, a comprehensive redesign of the developmental studies department targeting improved outcomes for academically underprepared learners. In the case of Breaking Through, SKC believed that the initiative’s four strategies had applicability beyond basic skills students and made them core components of how the college works with all academically underprepared students.

Stackable Certificates

Based on evidence provided at national peer learning meetings by the other colleges in the Breaking Through network, SKC staff began converting some A.A.S. degrees into a series of shorter, stacked certificates. This process can be complicated, especially given that the new certificates need to be developed with the support of a significant group of college staff, college faculty, and local employers. Ultimately, though, stackable certificates offer critical “stop out” and reentry points for students who routinely have to interrupt their studies to deal with changes in their home lives.

Orientation and Student Assessment

The Breaking Through pilot enabled Salish Kootenai College to examine its orientation and student assessment processes. This increased administrators’ awareness of the need to provide a different kind of orientation experience for students who are underprepared for college, especially to strengthen the emphasis on career goals. The working theory behind the Bridge program was that many students who are underprepared for college-

level math or English are also underprepared in terms of other college-ready skills. This highlighted the importance of uncovering each student's deficiencies when they enrolled.

Bypassing Developmental Education

Data from the Department of Academic Success suggested that students who are “almost ready” for college-level coursework are frustrated at spending an entire quarter focused on unnecessary developmental work. Yet these same students tend to have low success rates if placed directly into college-level math or English. The *Es Xcimi* program delivered customized course content that directly addressed the few college-readiness deficiencies remaining for each student, enabling them to move out of remediation within two weeks, while ensuring that they were ready for college-level work.

Considering Labor Market Data

Breaking Through emphasizes the use of labor market data to assist students with career exploration and ensure that stackable certificates have value in the labor market. SKC embraced this concept, working to develop a more holistic approach to collecting data that included state and federal databases and reports, partnerships with state and tribal workforce agencies, and outreach to regional employers. In addition to utilizing this information to inform pathway development and creating stackable certificates, the college used it to help provide career counseling to students enrolled in the *Es Xcimi* program. The college felt this was particularly important for making potential jobs feel real for students and helping ensure they had tangible goals to their education.

NEXT STEPS

In addition to expanding Breaking Through strategies through the Springboard Education Program, SKC is exploring the development of structured career pathways. Three proposed pathways—health information management, allied health/community health technician, and a building trades certificate emphasizing “green construction”—would target subpopulations of unemployed or underemployed young adults on the Flathead and other Montana reservations.

The pathway in health information management would meet the need for individuals prepared to manage electronic health records within the Indian Health Service and other health entities. It would consist of a one-year certificate leading to a two-year Associate's degree, with potential embedded short-term certifications.

The allied health/community health technician pathway would be designed to meet the needs of tribal health departments, which employ community health technicians but provide little or no actual training. The community health technician pathway would be an entry-level step to a number of allied health options, including a 2 + 2 degree in community health being explored with the University of Montana, Missoula.

Employment data suggest the need for construction workers trained in elements of “green construction,” including weatherproofing and energy auditing, as well as OSHA, hazardous material, and other short-term certifications. Preliminary discussions with several local contractors, as well as the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribal Economic Development Plan, indicate a need for individuals with this training for jobs in tribal housing departments on Indian reservations and with other regional contractors. The college plans on adding a pathway in this sector as soon as possible.



SITTING BULL COLLEGE

Sitting Bull College, established in 1973, was one of the nation's first six tribal colleges. Chartered by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, it is located on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation in North and South Dakota. The 2.4 million acre reservation is home to 6,000 tribal members, who make up 75 percent of the reservation's residents. The reservation economy is among the region's poorest, with a poverty rate of 64 percent and an unemployment rate of 72 percent.

The college was initially accredited as a community college and received accreditation for its Bachelor's degree programs in 2004. It offers seven Bachelor's degree programs in addition to programs leading to five Associate of Arts degrees, ten Associate of Science degrees, six Associate of Applied Science degrees, and ten certificates of completion. According to its mission statement, "Sitting Bull College is an academic and technical institution committed to improving the levels of education and training, economic and social development of the people it serves while promoting responsible behavior consistent with the Lakota/Dakota culture and language."

Sitting Bull College enrolls about 330 students of whom 91 percent are American Indians; 78 percent of incoming students in fall 2011 were first-generation college students. Women represent 62 percent of the student body. For the spring 2012 semester, 61 percent of the student body received Pell Grants.

A small community of houses provides accommodations for students with families, and the college recently opened several apartments for single students. A child care center, located adjacent to family housing, provides affordable services for infants to pre-school age children. Two off-site locations, at McLaughlin and Mobridge, South Dakota, serve students who cannot travel the 50- to 100-mile round trip to attend classes at the main campus. A public transportation system operated by the college offers affordable travel from the districts/communities on the reservation to the main campus in Fort Yates.

In 2011, the U.S. Department of Education recognized Sitting Bull College as one of the most affordable colleges in the United States.

SNAPSHOT: BREAKING THROUGH AT SITTING BULL COLLEGE

- > Developed two Breaking Through programs, an accelerated GED course and a contextualized "roughneck" oil drilling credential
- > Included financial and other incentives for progression and completion in the GED course, as well as offering incentives to the instructors based on student performance
- > Included financial and other incentives for progression and completion of the oil drilling course, as well as requiring students to sign a contract upon enrollment stipulating they would apply for jobs within 30 days of graduation in exchange for free tuition and equipment
- > Overhauled the GED program in response to a 100 percent stop-out rate for the first cohort, leading to much better results for later cohorts—no dropouts for the final GED cohort in summer 2012 and two students one test away from a GED
- > Enrolled 22 students in the oil drilling credential program, of whom 21 completed

SITTING BULL COLLEGE BREAKING THROUGH PILOT

Sitting Bull College focused its pilot efforts on cohorts of GED students. It developed an accelerated learning program by creating cohorts of 12 to 14 students, with timelines and closer supervision than was typical for at-risk students. As a result, SBC students were better prepared to meet career pathway requirements and complete programs efficiently.

The strategy to provide comprehensive support was implemented by keeping the cohorts small, hiring tutors specifically assigned to each cohort, and helping students move as seamlessly as possible through difficult transition points, from GED to college. The college also began to align and link programs to create clear pathways from basic skills to developmental education and workforce education and into and through college.

Every student selected to be in a cohort was required to complete 20 hours of GED tutoring, with the goal of completing the GED within six weeks. After earning that credential, each student received support services to move seamlessly into academic or career and technical education programs. Breaking Through participants were selected based on pre-test scores and the ability to complete the GED within six weeks. Each student completed an intake form and signed a contract indicating a commitment to completing the 29 hours per week.

Sitting Bull College developed an accelerated GED program that incorporated financial incentives for students. Participants received additional assistance for bus passes, food tickets from the college bookstore, and a \$100 stipend per week for completing 20 or more hours. Participants received a \$500 bonus if they completed the GED within six weeks. In addition, GED students receiving public assistance through the TANF program received tuition assistance. SBC also instituted new strategies to support Breaking Through students, including mandatory attendance policies and free college tuition (up to eight credits) for college enrollment.

To further enhance the pilot, SBC provided monetary incentives to the two tutors: \$1,000 bonuses if 75 percent of the participants completed the GED within six weeks. Unfortunately, neither tutor hit this mark, leading the college to speculate that the time period was too short. In the future, it plans to lengthen it.

In summer 2012, SBC expanded its Breaking Through pilot to include a 12-day training for students seeking employment in the booming oil and gas industries of North and South Dakota. SBC partnered with the Standing Rock Tribal Employment Rights Office to provide funds and equipment to support the training. Heavily contextualized, this “roughneck credential” course focused on preparing students for jobs off the reservation in non-Native-American environments, and it included a focus on soft skills (e.g., financial literacy, resume writing, drug and alcohol awareness). Students had to sign a contract requiring them to seek employment within 30 days of completing the course. Failure to complete this requirement made students ineligible to enroll in SBC programs.

PROJECT OUTCOMES/LESSONS LEARNED

Sitting Bull College staff believe that three successful components in the pilot phase led to significant system changes at the college: paying for success; finding the right department; and “if at first you don’t succeed . . .”

Paying for Success

SBC found that monetary incentives had a positive impact on motivation among students and instructors. With high unemployment and low family incomes, even small financial or other assistance can make the difference in whether students can attend class consistently. However, college staff stressed, it was important to provide financial incentives as part of a robust student support strategy. Incentives alone are not enough to ensure success.

Finding the Right Department

Changes in the college's upper administration led to moving the Breaking Through pilot from student support services to the office of the vice president of academic affairs. This had a significant impact: the vice president had greater responsibility for internal programs addressing student needs. In this capacity, she ensured that the appropriate types of support (e.g., tutoring) were available, and that multiple support elements could be "braided" to support Breaking Through students. Finding a better fit for the program within the college structure improved results.

"If at First You Don't Succeed . . ."

Due to staffing changes, the first Breaking Through GED cohort was only partially implemented and received almost no administrative oversight; all of the students eventually dropped out. Undaunted, SBC reorganized the program leadership, implemented new strategies to test with its GED programs, and added a financial incentive structure. The results included significantly higher persistence rates and grade level gains compared with the college's traditional GED students.

NEXT STEPS

Sitting Bull College seeks to continue expanding and improving its accelerated GED program. The population it serves is affected by new federal and state laws mandating that anyone receiving TANF program assistance must work toward a GED, as well as by a tribal mandate that anyone who wants to work on the reservation has to have a GED or high school diploma. This has increased the number of participants seeking assistance toward earning a GED.

SBC also wants to develop a workforce advisory board to assist in further developing career and technical training programs and career pathways. The college anticipates that the board would include the directors of ABE/GED, the Tribal Employments Rights Office, the job training and placement office, the workforce investment office, and tribal higher education, as well as SBC's outreach coordinator and representative of the local school district, Job Service of North Dakota, and local employers. In addition to biannual meetings, the group will meet as needed to determine the reservation's workforce and training needs and schedule industry-specific trainings.

Most of the anticipated workforce training will focus on the labor force needs in North Dakota but outside the reservation. SBC is interested in expanding the Breaking Through strategies into other discipline areas, such as those preparing students for jobs in the exploding North Dakota oil industry, commercial driver's license truck-driving certification, welding, and brownfields environmental cleanups.

MOVING FORWARD

A number of common themes emerged during Tribal Colleges Breaking Through. First, many of the colleges discovered that they could better align their workforce programs with employer needs and improve student job readiness by accessing multiple sources of labor market information. This also enabled staff to engage students in detailed career advising that included discussions on salary, job openings, and long-term career trajectories. More broadly, TCBT has led to an institutionalization of workforce development, leading to changes in policies and practices regarding developing workforce programs and accommodating nontraditional teaching pedagogies and nontraditional scheduling.

A second theme was the expansion of existing and new college partnerships with tribal government agencies, area employers, Tribal Employment Rights Offices, state agencies, unions, Workforce Investment Boards, and other state and tribal agencies. Many of these relationships provide new resources for the college, including access to services and funding support.

Breaking Through also increased the visibility of an often-overlooked population of students at these colleges: adult learners who often did not see themselves as college students. A positive yet challenging outcome has been that college staff have begun to rethink how to serve adult learners, including an ongoing dialogue about shifting institutional resources to support this effort. Many of the colleges also discovered that rewarding student success through incentives serves as an effective retention strategy for low-skilled adult learners.

Cultural contextualization and utilizing tribal members as faculty and mentors proved hugely successful for most of the TCBT programs. Not only did students get direct access to strong role models, but they also learned ways to meet the challenges of off-reservation employment in terms and concepts that were familiar to them.

Another key factor leading to the success of this initiative was its engagement of college leadership, reflecting a strong sense of alignment between Breaking Through and the institutions' missions. Many of the TCBT college leaders have infused Breaking Through strategies into their colleges' strategic plans and committed to finding the resources to continue expanding the initiative. This high level of engagement of senior staff makes it much easier to promote lasting systemic change.

As demonstrated by this pilot, Breaking Through holds significant promise for tribal colleges. By experimenting with a wide range of Breaking Through strategies and sub-strategies customized to their unique institutional environments, each of the six institutions demonstrated positive impacts on student success and made transformational changes in the way they served adult learners. According to Justin Guillory, Northwest Indian College's new president:

Breaking Through is aptly named, because it forced us to rethink our approach to workforce education. We had to make space available. Curriculum Committee procedures had to be amended. New policies had to be developed. And so on. To start something new like this was eye-opening in that we identified many barriers that took a lot of time in meetings and conversations to address. If our system doesn't support the workforce education needs, we need to change the system. We've broken through to new ground, and this will make it easier to add new workforce education courses and programs in the future.

A number of approaches piloted by the TCBT colleges deserve further attention moving forward. For example, a more standardized model for culture contextualization, including supporting tools and resources, could be implemented at any tribal college. Additionally, more exploration is needed around strengthening the ties of college workforce development efforts to include employers

and agencies on and off the reservation. Similar investigation is in order around incorporating tribal economic development plans into workforce development. The colleges would also be well served by finding ways to continue the type of peer learning network around student success and workforce development begun by TCBT. Future iterations of TCBT and similar workforce development programs would do well to focus on building on the successes of the first six colleges.

Juxtaposed against the positive changes that occurred, the challenge remains of addressing the workforce development needs of high-poverty, high-unemployment, rural communities. This challenge requires strategies that go beyond those implemented in typical Breaking Through colleges. To move forward, the initiative will need to draw on expertise specific to economic development on American-Indian reservations. It will be critical to focus greater attention on forging strong partnerships with tribal government, Tribal Employment Rights Offices, employers, and individual entrepreneurship development organizations.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS TO SUPPORT SUCCESS

Student success initiatives improve exponentially with greater levels of cooperation and coordination among participants. This is particularly true in initiatives where the participants are new to the educational model, new to one another, and new to the organizations leading the effort. All three conditions were true of Tribal Colleges Breaking Through. With this in mind, JFF, NCWE, and AIHEC agreed to develop intentional strategies to promote connections and trust among the initiative participants, technical assistance providers, and the broader Breaking Through network.

The first strategy focused on developing a strong working relationship between college staff and coaches from the lead organizations. This effort began with a site visit to every college in the initiative. During the visit, the coaches aimed to meet with a wide range of college administrators and leaders, community partners, and faculty; take time to explain the details of the Breaking Through model; and establish personal relationships with the college implementation leads. This was done at the very beginning of the project, prior to any cohort development, and was followed by customized follow-up memos, regular check in calls, and follow-up visits at different points in the initiative.

The second strategy aimed to build connections among the six colleges engaged in the project. These six formed the Tribal Colleges Breaking Through network, a distinct group within the broader national Breaking Through community. The TCBT network met regularly, both during daylong peer-learning meetings and workshops that took place twice a year, via webinars/conference calls, and during standalone professional development sessions for the entire group. JFF, NCWE, and AIHEC intentionally structured these meetings to highlight strengths and innovation among the participants, and to forge direct working relationships between colleges working on similar strategies.

The third strategy was intended to integrate the TCBT network into the national network of more than 40 Breaking Through community colleges and related national student success/workforce development efforts. To accomplish this, TCBT colleges were encouraged to use their grant funding to attend semi-annual Breaking Through conferences, as well as the national NCWE conference. The national leads also attempted to use experts from Breaking Through and other leading community colleges for TCBT professional development trainings.

JFF, NCWE, and AIHEC believe that these three strategies helped establish an effective and lasting partnership between participating colleges, initiative leads, and the broader Breaking Through network. Future education and workforce development efforts involving tribal colleges and universities consortiums could benefit from a similar approach.



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