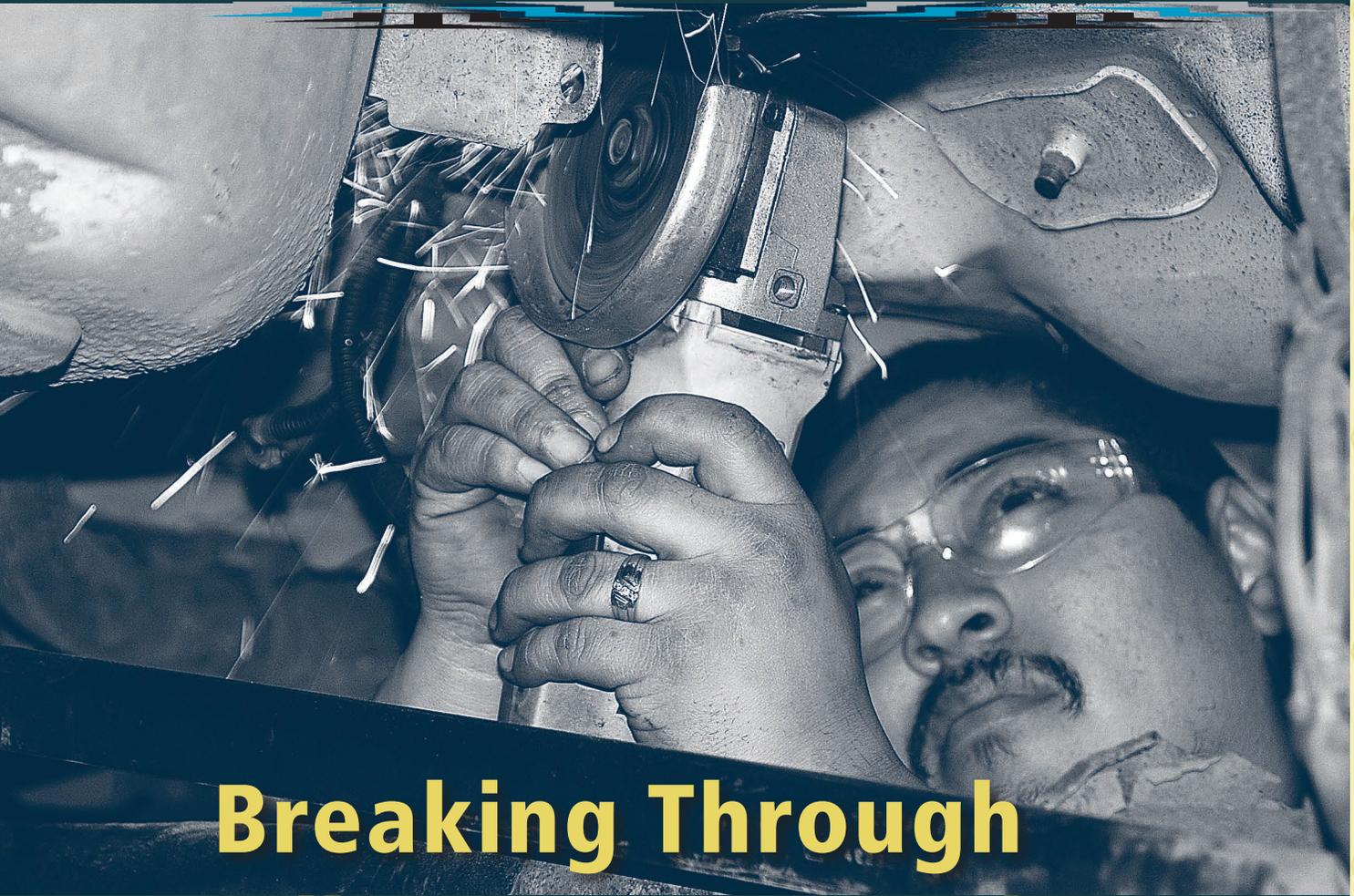


BREAKING THROUGH INITIATIVE



Breaking Through Tribal Colleges and Universities

A Briefing Paper prepared for
American Indian Higher Education Consortium
by Deborah His Horse is Thunder

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The American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) is the collective spirit and unifying voice of our nation's Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs). AIHEC provides leadership and influences public policy on American Indian higher education issues through advocacy, research, and program initiatives; promotes and strengthens Indigenous languages, cultures, communities, and tribal nations; and through its unique position, serves member institutions and emerging TCUs.

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For more information on *Breaking Through*, go to: www.breakingthroughcc.org.

Front Cover: United Tribes Automotive Service Technology student Mikell Starr Jr. (UTTC, Easter Shoshone) applying skill and tenacity with a metal grinder to fix a stubborn exhaust pipe on a car up on a hoist in the automotive shop of the college's Skill Center Building. Photo courtesy of Dennis J. Neumann, *United Tribes News*.

Breaking Through Tribal Colleges and Universities

INTRODUCTION

Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) were created to strengthen and serve the American Indian Tribal Nations that charter them. This paper examines the prospects for TCUs to enhance services to tribal people through implementation of the *Breaking Through* model for accelerated learning and career preparation. This model has proven successful for 40 other community colleges in 18 states. *Breaking Through* was initiated by Jobs for the Future (JFF) in partnership with the National Council on Workforce Education (NCWE).

This paper discusses some factors that impact the education of American Indian students, the role of the nation's TCUs, the cultural uniqueness of American Indian communities, and the *Breaking Through* strategies within the context of challenges faced by TCUs. Given the economic realities of many American Indian reservations, these challenges are significant, particularly with respect to local career exploration and job market opportunities. This paper is written from the perspective of a tribal member with experience working as the Chief Academic Officer at several TCUs.

Background

BREAKING THROUGH

The *Breaking Through* model focuses on adults with limited reading and math skills and provides them with the education and training needed to become successfully employed. Four *Breaking Through* strategies that have proven effective at 40 mainstream community colleges hold great promise for TCUs:

1. **Accelerated Learning**, which includes compressing course materials, customizing content and delivery to meet students' needs, and contextualizing content for specific jobs or industries of interest.
2. **Comprehensive Support Services** for students, including academic and non-academic support. Coaches who are trained to work effectively with low-skilled students are an important element of this strategy.
3. **Labor Market Payoffs**, in which students are offered career exploration opportunities that are designed to lead to sound career choices. An essential aspect of this strategy is to provide students with up-to-date information about local labor markets. This strategy also offers "chunk" training programs that divide training programs into shorter sections that meet employer needs. Students can participate in regional efforts that include industries offering advancement opportunities for this targeted group.
4. **Aligning Programs** for low-skilled adult college students, including aligning the content and aspirations of adult education with the prerequisites of college, linking non-credit workforce training with college level work, and infusing career content into developmental education.

Through an initiative supported by the Walmart Foundation, six TCUs are now exploring and testing these four strategies for potential adoption at more TCUs.

AMERICAN INDIAN SELF-GOVERNANCE

There are 565 federally recognized Indian tribes in the United States. These tribal nations each have a unique political relationship with the federal government based on binding treaties signed by tribal leaders and U.S. government officials in the 1800s. In terms of self-governance, tribal nations are comparable to individual states and sovereign nations. Each tribal government is responsible for preserving and protecting the rights of its citizens and for maintaining the social and physical infrastructure necessary for their well-being.

Although tribal governments have the right to levy taxes, few do so because of the extreme poverty on their reservations. Most tribal governments provide police protection, social services, economic development, and educational services. If the tribe does not have the capacity to offer these services directly, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which is ultimately responsible for the provision of these services through the federal government's treaty obligation, is required to provide them. In exercising their rights as sovereign governments, tribes have established TCUs to provide their tribal members access to postsecondary education opportunities founded on tribal values, culture, and language.

AMERICAN INDIAN ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

American Indians are among the most impoverished citizens in this country. Tribal homelands, now for the most part limited to reservations, are located in some of the most geographically isolated areas in the nation. For example, the Standing Rock Sioux Indian Reservation, located along the borders of North Dakota and South Dakota, is approximately the size of the state of Connecticut and has a population of 8,208 (75 percent of whom are tribal members), for a population density of 0.4 persons per square mile. The tribe reports an unemployment rate of 79 percent (www.standingrock.org). The average income on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation is \$11,759 per year as compared to the average of \$24,212 for the general population of North Dakota and South Dakota (<http://quickfacts.censu.gov>).

The Standing Rock economy relies primarily on ranching, farming, health and educational services, and tribal government services. Like a number of other tribes, the Standing Rock tribal government has established a casino and uses the revenue to support critical infrastructure needs. However, the needs of the tribal communities far exceed available resources for the vast majority of American Indians. Most tribes share this story of extreme poverty, high unemployment, and the lack of near-term prospects for economic development.

EDUCATION IN INDIAN COUNTRY

The historical context of the European model of formal education and its impact on American Indians is essential for understanding the role of education in Indian country today. Racism and ethnocentrism are recurring themes throughout the history of the American Indian experience with the Euro-American education system. The predominate beliefs expressed by educators early on, and reflected in established education policies, were that American Indians needed to be assimilated into Euro-American society as soon as possible and that removal from their homes and tribal cultures was the most effective means of achieving this.

Beginning in 1879 with the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania, thousands of American Indian children were forcibly removed from their homes and sent to military-style boarding schools or mission schools operated by various Christian religious denominations (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Reyhner & Eder, 1989; Szasz, 1999). The Bureau of Indian Affairs, charged with the trust responsibility for American Indians, operated several boarding schools, including Haskell Indian Industrial Training School (now Haskell Indian Nations University). Haskell was initially a trade school that evolved into a high school where students spent their summers as servants and laborers in the homes and on the farms of White families in the Lawrence, Kansas, area rather than being allowed to return to their families (Szasz, 1999). This practice provided free labor to the White community and reinforced assimilation to the norms and expectations of Euro-American culture. Education for American Indians was simply a vehicle for indoctrination into Euro-American society.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the federal government implemented the policy of relocating American Indians and their families into urban communities for vocational training and jobs. This so-called “relocation program” was, like the boarding schools, a strategy for assimilating American Indian people. Families were moved to Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit, and other cities to receive short term training in trades like welding and auto mechanics. Upon completion of the training, they were assisted with finding jobs and housing. The program was discontinued because many of the participants went home to the reservation after completing their training. The relocation experiment provides lessons for today. Students who seek postsecondary education prefer to be employed within or near their home communities. One of the challenges facing TCUs is to find a way to facilitate tribal economic development that can bring job and career opportunities closer to home. This is a daunting task in communities with a social and physical infrastructure that does not invite significant private sector investment.

On Indian reservations today, American Indian communities are served by state public schools, tribally controlled schools, Bureau of Indian Education schools, and Christian mission schools. Off-reservation boarding schools continue to operate on a smaller scale, and a number of American Indian parents continue to send their children to them. However, the negative historical experience with education extends to the current generation of American Indians. Far too many Indian youth leave the education system too early. According to a national study by Faircloth and Tippeconnic (2010), more than 50 percent of American Indian/Alaska Native high school students drop out of high school. This report was based on the U.S. Census data from 12 states with high American Indian/Alaska Native populations and was compared to non-Native graduation rates. Overall, American Indian graduation rates (46.6 percent) were found to be lower than Asian (77.9 percent), White (69.8 percent), Black (54.7 percent), and Hispanic (50.8 percent) graduation rates.

American Indians continue to be underrepresented at all levels of education. According to the U. S. Census Bureau (2007), 77 percent of American Indians over the age of 25 years are high school graduates, as compared to 89 percent of non-Hispanic Whites in this age group. Fourteen percent of American Indians have completed a bachelor’s degree or higher, compared 30 percent for non-Hispanic Whites.

Faircloth and Tippeconnic (2010) identified the following factors as being associated with high dropout rates: lack of student engagement, perceived lack of empathy among teachers, passive teaching methods, and a lack of parent involvement. However, these factors need to be understood in context. As has been noted, American Indian communities are generally located on Indian reservations that are geographically isolated and culturally distinct from mainstream society. Most educators, including teachers, administrators, counselors and other ancillary personnel, do not tend to consider working in a tribal education system as a long-term career goal. Unless the educator is raised in the local area, working at on-reservation schools is generally considered a career stepping stone. Educators tend to be transitory without a strong commitment to—or understanding of—the communities in which they teach. The lack of personal investment impacts the curriculum and pedagogy, contributing even further to students’ dissociation from the educational system.

Further, non-Indian educators generally reflect and reinforce Euro-American values and culture. Some of these values conflict with those held by American Indian communities. For example, the standard school curriculum tends to encourage aggressiveness, competition, verbal ability, and emphasis on individual performance. This is in contrast to American Indian cultural values of cooperation, humility, learning through observation, compassion for all life, and not embarrassing others for personal advantage.

TRIBAL COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

In 1968, Diné College (formerly Navajo Community College) was chartered by the Navajo Nation, leading the way to providing higher education in American Indian communities. Five other tribal governments soon followed, establishing their own tribal colleges in California, North Dakota, and South Dakota. All of the first six tribally-chartered colleges were established to address local postsecondary needs, and like Diné College, have within their core missions the preservation of their traditional language and culture. In 1978, the U.S. Congress enacted the Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act, legislation that would provide a base of operating funding for these institutions.

The legislation (P.L. 95-471) currently authorizes funding at \$8,000 per American Indian student, but despite a clearly identified and justified need, the Congress actually funds TCUs far below the authorized amount. In fiscal year 2011, TCU operating funds amounted to \$5,235 per full-time Indian student, with no funding for the non-Indian students that compose about 20 percent of all TCU students. In the 35 year history of the Act, TCUs have never been funded at the fully authorized level. This chronically low operating funding severely limits the TCUs' ability to address the challenges facing our Tribal nations and communities.

Over the past 40 years, 32 tribal governments have chartered 34 TCUs. Combined with the three colleges chartered by the U.S. government, there are currently 37 TCUs in the United States. The federal definition for "tribal colleges and universities" has been established in federal statutory law (P.L. 95-471). Under the law, TCUs are institutions of higher education that: (1) are chartered by the governing body of a federally recognized Indian tribe or tribes, or the federal government; (2) have a governing board composed of a majority of American Indians; (3) demonstrate adherence to stated goals, a philosophy, or a plan of operation which is directed to meeting the needs of American Indians; (4) are accredited, or have achieved candidacy status, by a nationally recognized accreditation agency or association; or (5) are included in the list of TCU Land-Grant Institutions in the Equity in Educational Land-Grant Status Act of 1994 (7 U.S.C. 301 note). Thirty-three TCUs have been designated by the U.S. Congress as land-grant colleges through the Equity in Educational Land-Grant Status Act of 1994.

Bad Wound and Tierney (1988) found that although TCUs as degree granting institutions are similar to other colleges, significant differences between mainstream colleges and tribal colleges arise from the dual mission of TCUs. TCUs are charged with reinforcing and promoting traditional culture, in large part through curriculum that is developed and implemented from a uniquely tribal perspective. The cultural mission must be accomplished while remaining consistent with Euro-American standards of higher education by offering programs of study in disciplines that are accepted by mainstream colleges (Bad Wound and Tierney, 1988).

Little Big Horn College's mission statement encapsulates the uniqueness of TCUs:

Little Big Horn College (LBHC), a 1994 Land Grant Institution, is the Crow higher education and cultural center that grants Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees and certificates in areas that reflect the developing economic opportunities and social needs of the Crow Indian Reservation and surrounding communities, offering instruction by traditional and distance education methods. The College is dedicated to the professional, vocational and personal development of individual students for their advancement in higher education or the workplace and inspiring Crow and American Indian Scholarship. The College is committed to the preservation, perpetuation and protection of Crow culture and language, and respects the distinct bilingual and bicultural aspects of the Crow Indian community. LBHC is committed to the advancement of the Crow Indian family and community building. (www.lbhc.edu/about).

Currently, TCUs serve more than 18,000 academic students each year, with the largest TCU being Diné College (Tsaile, AZ) which has more than 1,870 students, followed by Oglala Lakota College (Kyle, SD) with more than 1,830 students. Keweenaw Bay Ojibwa Community College (Baraga, MI) is the newest and smallest accredited TCU with approximately 60 students. The average TCU enrolls about 530 full-time students, but together they serve many thousands more annually—roughly 65,000 collectively—in community based programs.

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics categories, four TCUs (11 percent) are located in urban areas, including Santa Fe, NM, and Lawrence, KS; six (16 percent) TCUs are in semi-urban locations, including Cloquet, MN, and Bellingham, WA; and the remaining 27 (73 percent) TCUs are located in rural communities. The majority (65 percent) of the TCUs were established to serve one tribe, although students from other tribes attend as well. For example, the Institute of American Indian Arts, Santa Fe, NM, has students from more than 150 different Indian tribes. Overall, more than 250 Indian tribes are represented at TCUs. Sixteen (20 percent) of the students attending TCUs are non-Native.

One of the greatest challenges facing TCUs today is the high number of students who enter these open admission institutions unprepared for the rigors of college level coursework. Data provided by TCUs to AIHEC reveal that 66 percent of students who register at TCUs require some developmental education. Recently, one TCU reported that

nearly 95 percent of entering freshmen required developmental education in at least one of the basic skill areas. The commitment to addressing the needs of all students comes at a cost to these institutions. TCUs are public institutions, and all but two have open admission policies, accepting all who apply. Committing resources to addressing extensive developmental education needs requires a significant financial commitment, straining already severely limited annual TCU budgets. Compounding the situation, grant funding to conduct developmental education is very limited.

As discussed earlier, operational funding for TCUs comes from the federal government due to treaty obligations and the federal trust responsibility. However, the federal commitment is inadequate to meet the need and excludes non-Indian students entirely. Further, TCUs receive no operational funding from the states in which they are located, except in a few cases where limited state funding is provided based on the enrollment of non-Native state residents. The only other minority-serving institution in the nation that receives its basic institutional operating funds from the federal government is Howard University. Congress funds Howard University at more than \$200 million to operate annually (exclusive of its medical school) which is approximately \$19,000 per student. In fiscal year 2011, the TCUs received \$5,235 per student.

Facing serious challenges such as geographic isolation, chronic underfunding, and underprepared students, these higher education institutions are continually exploring strategies to promote success, employment and hope for their students and communities.



Computer engineering student Kody Ensley shakes hands with R2 D2 during NASA internship, Salish Kootenai College.
Photo courtesy of Kody Ensley.

Discussion



Culturally Based Learning: James Poitra parching rice, Leech Lake Tribal College.
Photo courtesy of Mark Lewer, LLTC.

For most American Indians, before the establishment of TCUs, access to college did not exist. Tribal cultures, which are embedded in the extended family system, made leaving home and the familial support network for long periods very difficult. The notion of having curriculum relevant to the American Indian students' tribal culture and not physically and culturally remote from their homes and communities has been discussed in the literature since John Collier's Bureau of Indian Affairs administration in the 1930s (Szasz, 1977). American Indian author, Vine Deloria, Jr. (1999) observed that the Euro-American education "resembles indoctrination more than it does other forms of teaching, because it insists on implanting a particular body of knowledge and a specific view of the world that often does not correspond to the life experiences that people have or might be expected to encounter." Deloria stressed the importance of cultural connection in making education relevant for many American Indian students. TCUs were established specifically to provide higher education programs from the cultural world view of the tribal community they serve. Ideally, American Indian students would not have to travel far for an education that resonated with their cultural values and traditions.

It is highly likely that a majority of TCU students would not attend college if the TCUs did not exist. A comparison of students attending all TCUs indicates that they are similar in age (median age is approximately 30 years old), predominately female, first generation, low income, with dependents. The students' barriers to success include poverty, lack of resources (e.g. child care, reliable transportation, housing, money for basic necessities), and lack of understanding of what is expected in terms of performance at the college level. Student absenteeism among American Indian students is reported at high levels as early as Grade 8 (i.e. 28 percent absent for three days or more in a month) (Aud, Fox, and KewalRamani, 2010). This pattern of behavior often continues at the postsecondary level.

While TCUs and their students face many difficult challenges, it is important to note that they represent an important resource to each other. While not constituting one system, as with state-controlled university systems, collectively the TCUs compose the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC). At the national policy level, AIHEC is similar to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC); however, it differs in that it is a member-based organization, created, chartered, and governed directly by each of the accredited TCUs in the country. Through AIHEC, the TCUs are able to have a seat at the table in national policy and resource allocation discussions, and most important, they are able to share strategies and best practices in addressing the higher education needs of their students and the communities they serve.

BREAKING THROUGH STRATEGIES AT TRIBAL COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Breaking Through offers some important strategies for serving the unique needs of students that should resonate with all of the nation's TCUs.

Research indicates that American Indian students respond positively to applied learning pedagogies (Sanders, 2011; Swisher, 1991), suggesting that accelerated learning that is contextualized by students' jobs of interest could be effective at TCUs. The required curriculum restructuring is likely to be less of a challenge for small, locally controlled TCUs unburdened by the bureaucratic structure of the typical state college system.

Comprehensive student support is a *Breaking Through* strategy that is already an established strength among TCUs, which are well aware of and build upon the role of the extended family network in tribal culture. Among traditional American Indians, the success of the individual is viewed as a family and community success. The graduation of a student is recognized by many traditional families with a gift-giving ceremony in which elders and community members receive gifts, recognizing and honoring their role in the graduating student's achievement.

The role of the extended family in tribal culture is an essential aspect of a successful intervention model targeting American Indian students. Dr. Iris Pretty Paint's "Family Education Model" is based on research at four TCUs, including Salish Kootenai College, Pablo, MT, which is currently developing plans for a *Breaking Through* implementation. "One of the greatest strengths of Native American society is that the individual and the tribe are intimately intertwined," says Dr. Pretty Paint. "In this relationship, the individual does not stand apart from the larger group, but is fundamentally defined by membership in the group." (2001, P. 2).

The Family Education Model identifies nine basic principles that, if incorporated into an education program, have been demonstrated to significantly improve the likelihood of student success. One principle is the inclusion of the student's family members as partners in the educational process. Empowerment and cultural resilience are major themes of the model.

The Family Education Model begins with an assessment of the student's academic, and personal situation, from which an intervention plan is developed that includes participation in workshops, seminars, Learning Center assistance, and individual interventions. Participation of family members in program-sponsored events extends the network of support for the student's success and reinforces the student's commitment to continue and complete the program.

The coaching component of *Breaking Through* is another aspect of the model that should fit well within the TCU context. Training existing student services staff to be *Breaking Through* coaches augments their skills-set, making them more effective in

their work with students. As with the other components of the model, intrusive advising techniques employed by *Breaking Through* coaches must be consistent with the cultural sensibilities of the TCU and tribal community, and relevant to local work environments and the challenges faced by both staff and students.

Adequate staffing is challenging for many TCUs, which as noted earlier are chronically underfunded. These resource-challenged institutions often ask their faculty and staff to serve in multiple roles, including instructor, advisor, and career counselor. Being asked to serve as a *Breaking Through* coach may add one more set of responsibilities to an already overcommitted staff member.

One of the keystone features of the *Breaking Through* strategy is labor market payoffs, in which students are provided career exploration opportunities that will help them make career choices. Informing and providing TCU advisors with existing third-party career ladder information in ready-to-use or adaptable formats would be helpful for TCU advisors who may not have time to research this information on their own. For example, the U.S. Department of Labor (*Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2010-11*) provides excellent information about the requirements for Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA) and how this certificate is an important step toward moving to the next career level of Licensed Practical Nurse. Having this type of career information available in easy to read brochure format would help facilitate the career advisement process. When unemployment is at 70 percent or more, TCUs—as must be the case for other post-secondary programs in impoverished areas—have difficulty making the case to prospective students of a direct connection between training and certificate programs and real jobs. Local and regional career and employment trend information would be very helpful in making that case.

The “chunk” training program structure—courses divided into shorter mini-course increments—would be fairly straightforward to implement at TCUs, which can be relatively flexible and adaptable when revising curriculum and implementing short-term training programs. Many TCUs work closely with the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families programs in their communities, which are in relatively high demand given the high unemployment and poverty rates on reservations. This program requires

participants to attend a short-term training program to prepare for employment. Typical short-term training programs include Commercial Driver's License for commercial truck or bus drivers, CNAs, allied health professions, and building construction trades. These training programs can fit the "career ladder model" in which entry level jobs lead to opportunities for increasingly more responsible and higher paying positions that require additional postsecondary education and training.

Opportunities to use the *Breaking Through* model for certification training are increasing. A policy brief by the AACC (2011), reported on the growth of post-secondary certificates and degrees over the past 20 years. AACC found a 258 percent increase in earned long-term certificates by American Indian and Alaska Native students, as compared to a 37 percent increase for White students. It also reports a 757 percent increase in short-term certificates; 190 percent increase in moderate-term certificates; and a 182 percent increase in associate degrees earned for American Indian students over this same time period. TCUs played a pivotal role in the increase in earned credentials for American Indian students.

Without question, American Indian students want to work. But like most Americans, they will not subject themselves to substandard working conditions. For example, several years ago a newspaper in a small western city reported that a meat packing plant was unable to find local workers and that it was flying workers in from Mexico. The article reported that the company had to make arrangements to relocate the families of these employees. As it happens, this facility is located 60 miles from a reservation with 80 percent unemployment. A letter to the local newspaper and to the company pointed out the close proximity of this largely unemployed workforce. The company responded by contacting the tribe's human resources department. A number of tribal members were hired, but because of the poor working conditions, all of the tribal members soon left their jobs and returned to their home community. This story is a reminder that in some cases it is not only job seekers who need to be prepared for the workplace. Employers need to understand the importance of providing a work environment consistent with the requirements of the local population from which they are to draw their workforce. The *Breaking Through* initiative could provide an important resource to local and regional employers who need to more fully understand and respect issues, including cultural differences, when working with diverse populations.

Recommendations



Applied Learning: Environmental Science students participate in a research immersion program on reptile projects in the Palo Verde National Park Tropical Dry Forest of Costa Rica, Sitting Bull College. Photo courtesy of SBC.

Breaking Through has developed four strategies that are proving to be highly effective in 40 mainstream community colleges. These strategies hold tremendous potential for success within TCUs, which serve communities that have high percentages of adults requiring developmental education before entering the workforce. The contextualization of developmental education curriculum to incorporate job readiness skills and career information and the provision of comprehensive student support services is already happening at many TCUs. The *Breaking Through* initiative provides important focus, methods, and tactics that could help TCUs more effectively implement and assess these strategies. The following recommendations can further enhance the *Breaking Through* success at TCUs.

It is essential to understand that to be effective, the significant differences between the situation of a community colleges within the cultural mainstream and that of a TCU within its unique tribal community must be taken into account. It is in this light that the following recommendations are offered.

Cultural Uniqueness

It is essential for a TCU *Breaking Through* initiative to be responsive to the culturally defined priorities and expectations of the tribal communities served by these institutions. As discussed earlier, American Indians have lived through educational policies and programs that removed their children from their homes, relocated families to urban areas, and exert strong pressure on American Indians to assimilate into Euro-American culture. Cultural values exist at a very deep, and to some degree unconscious, level and become evident from the strong emotions that can be stirred when the values of one culture come into conflict with those of another. Successful education programs serving American Indian populations do not disregard the cultural resources; rather, they build their programs on the foundation of the cultural resources and traditions that are unique to tribes and tribal communities.

AIHEC, through support from the National Science Foundation, recently developed the Indigenous Evaluation Framework (IEF) in partnership with Native evaluators Joan LaFrance and Richard Nichols. IEF is a model for evaluating education programs in a way that focuses directly on the culture and community within which a program is being implemented. The evaluation framework is designed to help ensure that a program is consistent with and reinforces local values and cultural sensibilities. An effective *Breaking Through* implementation must take the same perspective as the IEF, beginning with a participatory design process in which the community defines how the four *Breaking Through* strategies can best be adapted to the local context.¹

While there are a number of similarities, the cultural context for each TCU is unique and adaptations of the *Breaking Through* model must be decided at the local level. It is essential that local tribal cultural experts and elders be consulted when questions about cultural appropriateness arise. For successful meetings and gatherings, it is always important to invite the participation of a tribal elder who is recognized locally for his or her cultural knowledge and oratorical skills. It is important for those responsible for a meeting or training event to confer with elders to ensure that local protocols of the community are respected.

¹For more on AIHEC's Indigenous Evaluation Framework, go to www.AIHEC.org.

TCU Strengths

A TCU *Breaking Through* initiative must draw upon the strengths of the TCU, such as the ability to provide personalized attention to students (Cunningham, Parker, and Parker, 1998). Most TCU faculty and staff members know each student and his or her family personally. The *Breaking Through* coaching and advisor training should emphasize this strength in working with TCU staff and students.

The Family Education Model provides a strategy for capitalizing on strong relationships that include both students and their families. In this model, students' families become key participants in activities that help solidify the student commitment to the program. These "extra-curricular" activities, such as honoring dinners and storytelling evenings, engage the family in reinforcing the perception on the part of the student that the program is valuable and worthy of completion. The Family Education Model also incorporates life skills training such as problem solving and stress management, both of which can be significant obstacles to completion. The model provides a range of strategies to support student success in a culturally appropriate manner.

Job Skills/Workplace Culture

The *Breaking Through* model calls for training and curriculum to be contextualized to a specific job or career opportunity, targeting specific workforce skills and habits required for success in the workplace.

The curriculum developed for TCU-based developmental education, certification, and other short-term training must also focus on basic job skills such as timeliness, which may seem apparent (and therefore not worth covering) in some community-based programs but are less intuitive in communities suffering from generational poverty and unemployment or where cultural values may differ from mainstream society. For example, many tribal cultures do not place a high level of importance on activities starting and concluding at an exact time, so the importance of arriving for work at the same time every day is a habit that often must be understood and internalized. General work relevant problem-solving skills should also be a focus in the curriculum so that

students can apply an appropriate problem solving approach, whether they are in a team work situation or working independently.

Failing to incorporate good work habits should lead to consequences similar to those typical of the real-world work environment. Of the six TCU planning projects, the *Breaking Through* initiative at LBHC has placed the most emphasis on promoting habits that transfer directly to the workplace. At LBHC, student absenteeism and late arrival to class are addressed just as they would be by future employers, with disciplinary measures that progress to termination.

Family-Like Atmosphere

Tribal communities are based on an extended family system. The Lakota term *mitakuye oyasin* is especially appropriate. Literally translated as “to all my relations,” it extends the concept of relationship beyond the human world to the natural world, including land, place, animals, plants, wind, thunder, lightning and the elements. This powerful concept encapsulates the central place of relationships in the life of the Lakota and American Indians generally.

A TCU *Breaking Through* initiative must foster a familial atmosphere on and off campus that facilitates strong personal relationships among and between students and faculty (Tierney, 1992). Of course, as with any structured program, clear boundaries with regard to the role of advisors and coaches in relation to students and other staff and faculty must be upheld. While it is important for faculty and staff (i.e. advisors and coaches) to foster a personal relationship with students, they must clearly convey to the student that the relationship is a professional one. Boundaries between professional and personal relationships must be articulated early on for students who may have no prior experience with workplace relationships. For example, in many tribal communities, one is expected to readily loan money to a relative; however, a loan request of a co-worker or supervisor should be understood as inappropriate. It is important to ensure that students understand that although a professional relationship can, and within a tribal community should, bear significant resemblance to an extended family relationship, important differences exist and must be respected.

The advisors'/coaches' roles should include providing resources and information, educating, advocating, and making intervention referrals. The advisors/coaches should also assist students with a wide range of planning, including information on the next steps in the education process and strategies for accessing essential services such as childcare and transportation.

TCU *Breaking Through* programs should be encouraged to include family members in the education experience whenever feasible, including inviting them to social events.

Economic Development

The *Breaking Through* initiative should revisit the labor market payoff strategy and adapt it to the realities of American Indian communities with extremely high unemployment and government structures and policies that may discourage industry and private infrastructure investment. The core motivation of the *Breaking Through* model is to provide a mechanism for moving under-skilled adults quickly into the job market. Where jobs do not exist, there can be no market payoff.

The TCUs must work with their tribal governments and regional employers to cultivate business and job opportunities for which the TCU can guarantee a skilled and job-ready local workforce.

As an important first step, TCUs should work with the local and regional economic development stakeholders to convene a conference or a series of forums to explore economy-building strategies appropriate for rural, economically-depressed, high unemployment regions, which are characteristic of many American Indian reservations. With the *Breaking Through* model, TCUs can help make their communities and tribal nations responsive to emerging economic opportunities. However, these opportunities can only be effectively pursued through a partnership involving the tribal government, the TCU, and other development stakeholders that empowers the partners to work together in a coordinated fashion.

Another important step would be to convene a conference on the data collection challenges within the reservation communities. Economic development data (e.g.

workforce trends) is critically important for developing a coordinated action plan for economic growth. The sources of data used by mainstream colleges may not be resources for TCUs. For example, tribal governments are major employers on the reservations, but because they are sovereign nations, they are not required to report their employment data to state governments. Consequently, this data may not be readily accessible.

In closing, it is important to note that these observations and remarks are being made very early in the exploratory process toward adaptation of the *Breaking Through* model at TCUs. However, indications are that significant and positive areas of resonance exist. Working together, the existing *Breaking Through* and TCU stakeholder communities can develop a *Breaking Through* implementation plan that reinforces and strengthens both tribal and national efforts to build the workforce necessary for strong and sustainable tribal nations through robust tribal economic and social development.

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Julianna Sullivan, at Northwest Indian College's Port Gamble S'Klallam extended campus site during August 2010, recording data during a tow-netting event as part of the Port Gamble tribe's juvenile salmon migration study. Photo courtesy of Joel Green, NWIC.



Back Cover: Navajo Technical College Energy System student working on a wind generator. Photo courtesy of NTC.

BREAKING THROUGH INITIATIVE

