HASKELL INDIAN NATIONS UNIVERSITY
Accredited by Higher Learning Commission

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Haskell Indian Nations University: *TCU Ongoing Challenges During COVID-19 Pandemic*
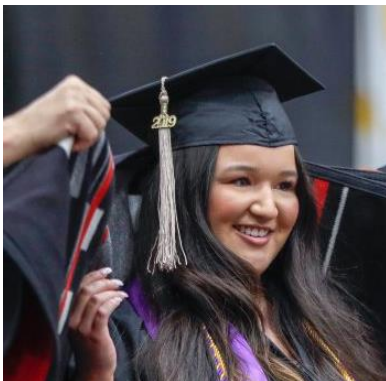117th Congress – February 2021

Through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA), **Haskell Indian Nations University** received urgently needed funding to move classes online to the extent possible and begin to address tremendous digital divide challenges. We were also able to provide emergency grants, equipment, and tuition assistance to our students to help them stay enrolled in classes. As we continue to support students during this difficult time and plan for onsite classes, our needs are growing. To address current pandemic-related challenges and plan for an uncertain future, TCUs need your ongoing support.

CARES and CRRSAA Funds at Haskell Indian Nations University
- Direct aid to students
- Safety/Sanitation
- IT refresh and upgrades
- Classroom changes to accommodate distance learning
- Faculty professional development for distance learning
- Ongoing student support

Haskell used CARES Act funds to upgrade distance learning platforms, to modify classrooms and labs, and to train and certify faculty for distance learning. CARES Act funding provided direct aid to students, which they used for fee payments, childcare, laptops, and internet service – all of which lessened the adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on continuous student learning.

Ongoing Challenges at Haskell Indian Nations University
- Students continue to deal with emotional, mental, and behavioral health issues due to the pandemic
- Student academic success during the pandemic requires additional university support for students struggling with issues related to the pandemic; this additional support includes academic advising, tutoring, and student outreach and support
- Future CARES Act funding should be used to expand student access to broadband to accommodate distance learning.

CARES Act funds have been helpful in addressing students' emergency needs during the COVID-19 pandemic; however, many of the students' challenges are systemic. The pandemic exposed higher education's equity issues. Native students need more resources to continue their education during a national crisis and post-pandemic. Broadband access and adequate technology resources must be made available to Native American students to ensure continuous learning during a pandemic and to provide equitable access to Native American students, because many of Haskell's students reside in rural areas where internet access is limited or unavailable.

REQUEST: **$24 million TCU IT Service Fund: USDA – Rural Utility Service**

The ongoing pandemic has exacerbated the digital divide and homework gap and underscored the lack of broadband access across Indian Country. To address these deficiencies, Congress should establish a *permanent* **TCU IT Service Fund** within the existing (and previously under-used) **USDA-Rural Utilities Service Program**. An annual $24 million set-aside for TCUs, which are the 1994 Land-grant institutions, is needed to cover ongoing equipment costs, maintenance and upkeep, infrastructure expansion, and IT staffing. If TCUs had adequate funding for IT service and infrastructure support, they would have already put in place many of the community-based mobile hot spots needed to address the "homework gap" on many reservations.

Haskell Indian Nations University Broadband and IT Challenges

- Many Haskell students and prospective students have either limited access to broadband or no access to broadband, which limits their ability to participate in distance learning courses and degree programs.
- Many Haskell students do not own or have access to a personal laptop or a computer workstation, which are required to participate in courses delivered via distance learning.
- Many Haskell student students do not have a quiet study area within their homes where they can participate in distance learning.

REQUEST: **$500 million TCU Construction Fund: DOI – Bureau of Indian Education**

A recent AIHEC survey of TCUs revealed a list of chronic facilities-related maintenance and rehabilitation needs, including student and faculty housing, classrooms, libraries, and laboratories. The TCUs have an estimated total need of $489.75 million in deferred maintenance and rehabilitation and need $837 million to fully implement existing master plans. A dedicated TCU deferred construction and maintenance/rehabilitation fund through the DOI-BIE would help meet the 21st century needs of *all* TCUs, including technology-enabled facilities; campus renovations; IT infrastructure; and facilities necessary for career, technical, and pipeline programs.

Haskell Indian Nations University Facilities Needs -- Construction, Maintenance, Rehabilitation

Haskell facilities and infrastructure need upgrades and improvements. Much of the university's facilities are aged and require improvements or upgrades to accommodate student and faculty needs. Haskell students deserve contemporary technology-equipped learning spaces to achieve higher education opportunities and resources on par with other institutions of higher learning. If Haskell had sufficient facilities, labs, and housing, it could achieve the following improvements:

- Improvements in student retention and graduation rates
- More indigenous graduates in STEM fields
- Improved employment opportunities upon graduation as a result of improved experiential learning opportunities
- More scholarly research and publication opportunities for faculty