

STATEMENT OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION CONSORTIUM

Submitted to the U.S. House of Representatives

Committee on Appropriations

Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

Regarding the Oversight Hearing: Indian Education convened February 27, 2013

On behalf of the nation's 37 tribally and federally chartered colleges and universities, which collectively are the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, we are writing to discuss the relationship of the Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Education, and *Tribal* Higher Education and to offer some recommendations for the future.

Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) are an essential component of American Indian/Alaska Native education – cradle to career and beyond. The 37 TCUs operate more than 75 campuses and sites in 15 states, within whose geographic boundaries 80 percent of American Indian reservations and federal Indian trust land lie. They serve students from well over 250 federally recognized tribes, more than 75 percent of whom are eligible to receive federal financial aid. In total, the TCUs annually serve about 88,000 American Indians/Alaska Natives (AI/AN) through a wide variety of academic and community-based programs. TCUs are accredited by independent, regional accreditation agencies and like all U.S. institutions of higher education must undergo stringent performance reviews on a periodic basis to retain their accreditation status.

TCUs provide critical access to vital postsecondary education opportunities. Tribal Colleges and Universities provide access to higher education for American Indians and others living in some of the nation's most rural and economically depressed areas. In fact, seven of the nation's 10 poorest counties are home to a TCU. The U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey indicates the annual per capita income of the U.S. population is \$27,100. However, the annual per capita income of AI/ANs is just \$13,300, about half that of the general population.

TCUs are producing a new generation of highly trained Native teachers, tribal government leaders, entrepreneurs, engineers, nurses, computer programmers, and other much-needed professionals. By teaching the job skills most in demand on their reservations, TCUs are laying a solid foundation for tribal economic growth, with benefits for surrounding communities and regions. In contrast to the high rates of unemployment on so many reservations, graduates of TCUs are employed in "high need" occupational areas such as Head Start teachers, elementary and secondary school teachers, and nurses/health care providers. Just as important, the vast majority of tribal college graduates remain in or near their tribal communities, applying their newly acquired skills and knowledge where they are most needed.

For example, in 2002, Oglala Lakota College (OLC), on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, established a Master's degree in Lakota Leadership and Management with an emphasis in Education Administration, to prepare state-endorsed school principals. Since then, the college has graduated 49 principals, 90 percent of whom are employed in schools with a majority of Indian students on North and South Dakota reservations. As of January 2013, there were 136 Native teachers of a total of 322 teachers teaching in elementary schools on the Pine Ridge

Reservation. Of those Native teachers, 123 or 90 percent are OLC graduates. The college has also graduated 123 Associates in Elementary or Early Childhood Education who work as paraprofessionals in the local schools and as Head Start teachers.

OLC, together with Salish Kootenai College, another TCU - located on the Flathead Reservation in Montana, lead the nation in producing American Indian/Alaska Native nurses, with more than 90 percent of their nursing graduates certified as RNs and working in local communities. Of the 70 nurses currently working on the Pine Ridge Reservation, 50 are Indian nurses and of these nurses, 80 percent are OLC graduates.

In addition to providing strong and responsive academic and career programs, TCUs are training the next generation of American Indian entrepreneurs, engaging in international outreach, providing training for tribal, federal, and regional employers and governments, working with tribal judicial systems, operating day care and Head Start centers, and in some cases, even running the bus service for the entire reservation. They are building and providing housing for tribal communities, constructing “green” buildings, and helping to bring the promise of renewable energy to Indian reservations.

Despite a proven track record of success, TCUs still face serious disparities in institutional operations funding. We are living in very difficult economic times and everyone must do their share to address the nation’s budget deficit and to make the most of every dollar invested and spent. Discretionary programs have already shouldered the lion’s share of this balancing effort. As a result of the Budget Control Act of 2011, non-defense discretionary funding has already been reduced to its lowest level on record as a share of GDP since the mid-1960s. It would be counterproductive to indiscriminately cut programs that have proven to be a solid investment. With that in mind, AIHEC would like to take this opportunity to offer the following four recommendations that could greatly help the TCUs to continue to provide high quality, culturally relevant higher education opportunities to their various communities:

(1) Address the Longstanding TCU Inequalities in Federal Programs: The Administration requests and Congress appropriates over \$200 million annually to operate Howard University (exclusive of its medical school), *the only other MSI that receives its institutional operating funds from the federal government*. Howard University’s current federal operating support exceeds \$19,000/student. In contrast, most TCUs receive just \$5,665 per Indian Student (ISC). TCUs have proven that they deserve an investment equal to at least the congressionally authorized level of \$8,000 per ISC, or 42 percent of the federal share now appropriated for operating Howard University.

We respectfully ask that the Committee hold the Administration accountable for its unwillingness to address the disparities in federal investments in tribal higher education. Specifically, the BIE should be directed to articulate a process for achieving the Congressionally authorized level of federal investment in TCUs by a date certain.

(2) Transition the remaining education institutions, funded by the Department of the Interior, to forward funding: In FY 2010, the 26 TCUs funded under Titles I and II of the Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Assistance Act of 1978 received a one-time

appropriation necessary to transition their Department of the Interior institutional operating grants to being forward funded. However, the five remaining TCUs that receive institutional operating funds under Interior authorities are not yet forward funded. These TCUs must begin each academic year without sufficient operations funding because of delays in the Federal appropriations process and the lengthy internal BIE process of disseminating the operating funds. They often do not receive their full appropriation until well into the second half of the academic year. Having the necessary resources at the beginning of an academic year is critical to effective and innovative planning for any institution of higher education; yet, these five TCUs are currently not afforded that opportunity. Securing a one-time additional payment of approximately \$26 million to transition the institutional operating grants of all five of these TCUs to a forward funded program would correct this unfortunate cycle. It is important to note that this appropriation, in the long run, will not add to the federal budget deficit, as it would simply appropriate the funding *sooner*, but not at a higher level.

- (3) **Enter into more cost effective contracts for professional development:** The BIE preK-12 school system spends millions of dollars annually contracting with outside for-profit sources to provide professional development for the educators and other professionals who work in BIE schools. A more cost effective and culturally appropriate process would be for the BIE schools to contract with TCUs to provide in-service teacher training and other professional development services for their employees.
- (4) **Dual Credit:** Nearly all of the TCUs currently engage in dual credit programs, designed to keep American Indian/Alaska Native high school students engaged in school, graduate, and pursue higher education goals. Some of the programs are quite extensive. Nearly all of them are free for the students and high schools. TCUs – without any compensation in most cases – offer this service at their expense because they know it is one of the most effective ways for improving the dismal AI/AN high school graduation rates.

TCUs will continue to offer these life-changing (and often life-saving) programs, but we want to encourage the BIE and Department of Education to work with us to expand these programs and level the playing field. Currently, states reimburse tuition costs for dual credit high school students attending state public institutions of higher education. Although TCUs are public institutions and the state colleges/universities accept the TCU credit on transcripts, several **states do not reimburse TCUs for the tuition costs** of public high school students attending TCUs. This is the case even where there is no other public institution of higher education within a hundred miles or more for the high school student to attend.

The same holds true for the BIE. Some BIE high school students earn dual credit at TCUs, but TCUs are not reimbursed the tuition and book costs, and of course the students cannot be factored into the TCUs' "Indian Student Count" for determining a college's share of operations funding.

We recommend: (1) The BIE should be directed to reimburse TCUs for the cost of dual credits earned by BIE high school students; (2) the BIE should be directed to work with TCUs to expand this proven-successful program, which could significantly improve BIE high

school graduation rates; and (3) the BIE and the Department of Education should be encouraged to join the TCUs' effort to gain state reimbursement for dual credits provided to state resident high school students, just as the states currently reimburse other public institutions of higher education.

Once again, thank you for this opportunity to discuss our concerns and offer our recommendations for strengthening our collective efforts to continue to provide high-quality, culturally-relevant education opportunities – cradle-to-career– to the nation's American Indians and Alaska Natives.