

STATEMENT OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION CONSORTIUM
SUBMITTED TO THE UNITED STATES SENATE - COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON LABOR, HHS, EDUCATION, AND RELATED AGENCIES
April 15, 2016

This statement includes the Fiscal Year 2017 (FY 2017) requests of the nation's Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs). The following is a summary of our requests including Department, program, and amount requested:

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Office of Postsecondary Education

- HEA Title III-A, Sec. 316: \$60,000,000 (discretionary and mandatory)
- Perkins Career and Technical Education Programs (Sec. 117): \$10,000,000

Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education

- American Indian Adult and Basic Education: \$8,000,000, from existing funds

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

- Administration for Children and Families/Office of Head Start: \$8,000,000, from existing funds
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA): \$10,000,000

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

I. Higher Education Act Programs

Strengthening Developing Institutions, Title III-A Sec. 316: *TCUs urge the Subcommittee to restore the discretionary and mandatory funding for HEA Title III-A, Sec. 316 to \$60,000,000 in FY 2017.* Titles III and V of the Higher Education Act support institutions that enroll large proportions of financially disadvantaged students. The TCUs, which are *truly* developing institutions, are funded under Title III-A Sec. 316 and provide quality higher education opportunities to some of the most rural, impoverished, and historically underserved people in the country. In fact, more than 50 percent of our students are first generation. Average family income is \$15,260; local unemployment rates often exceed 50 percent. The goal of HEA-Titles III/V programs is "to improve the academic quality, institutional management and fiscal stability of eligible institutions... to increase their self-sufficiency and strengthen their capacity to make a substantial contribution to the higher education resources of the Nation." The TCU Title III-A program is specifically designed to address the critical, unmet needs of American Indian students and their communities, to effectively prepare them to succeed in a globally competitive workforce. Yet, in FY 2011 this program was cut by over 11 percent and received subsequent cuts, including sequestration, until last year. Despite a small increase in FY 2016, TCUs still have not recovered from the earlier cuts to this vitally important program. In FY 2016, the TCU section (Sec.316) was the *only* Title III/V program that emerged from Conference with a funding level **BELOW** the level passed by either the House or Senate in their respective appropriations bills.

TRIO: Retention and support services are vital to achieving the national goal of having the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020. TRIO programs were created out of a recognition that college access is not enough to ensure advancement and that multiple factors work to prevent successful completion by many low-income and first-generation students and students with disabilities. In addition to providing the maximum Pell Grant award level, it is critical that Congress sustain and increase support for TRIO programs so that low-income and minority students have the support they need to access and complete postsecondary education programs.

Pell Grants: The importance of Pell Grants to TCU students cannot be overstated. Eighty-five percent of TCU students receive Pell Grants, primarily because student income levels are so low and they have far less access to other sources of financial aid than students at state-funded and other mainstream institutions. At TCUs, Pell Grants are doing exactly what they were intended to do: they are serving the needs of the lowest income students by helping them gain access to quality postsecondary education, an essential step toward becoming active, productive members of the workforce.

II. Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Programs

Tribally Controlled Postsecondary Career and Technical Institutions: AIHEC requests

\$10,000,000 to fund grants under Sec. 117 of the Perkins Act. Section 117 of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act provides a competitively awarded grant opportunity for tribally chartered and controlled career and technical institutions, which are providing vitally needed workforce development and job creation education and training programs to American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) from tribes and communities with some of the highest unemployment rates in the nation. Jayvion Chee of Rabbitbrush, NM is an example of a young Native student benefiting from this modest program. In March, Jayvion was named as Navajo Technical University's (NTU) Student of the Year. Jayvion spent much of last year working on a geographic information technology (GIT) degree project that assessed the potential impacts on water resources posed by hydraulic fracturing in San Juan County, NM. Jayvion used his education in NTU's Associate of Applied Science-GIT degree program to map current natural gas fracking wells to better understand the potential risks associated with the fracking process. Through his research, he found that 87 documented wells within the San Juan region could possibly lead to adverse impacts on local communities - including the land of which his grandfather resides. He has now presented the results of his research at national STEM and education conferences around the country.

Native American Career and Technical Education Program (NACTEP): NACTEP (Sec. 116) reserves 1.25 percent of appropriated funding to support American Indian career and technical programs. The TCUs strongly urge the Subcommittee to continue to support NACTEP, which is vital to the continuation of career and technical education programs offered at TCUs that provide job training and certifications to remote reservation communities.

III. Adult Education and Family Literacy Act – Adult Education, Basic Grants to States

American Indian Adult and Basic Education: AIHEC requests the Subcommittee to direct that ***\$8,000,000 of the approximately \$582,000,000 appropriated for Adult Education & Literacy State Formula Grants be made available to make competitive awards to TCUs to help meet the growing demand for adult basic education and GED training services in tribal communities.*** This program, which Congress stopped funding in the mid-1990s, was designed to support much-needed adult basic education (ABE) and GED training for AI/ANs through federally recognized Indian Tribes and TCUs. (A specific Tribal/TCU set-aside within any federal-to-state block grant program is necessary, because states generally do not provide funding to Indian tribes or TCUs for programs on federal trust land, even when there is no comparable federal program for tribes.) In the absence of dedicated funding for American Indians and a severe constraint on – and in many cases, a complete lack of – funding allocated from state programs to TCUs, our colleges must find a way, often using already insufficient institutional operating funds, to provide ABE and GED classes for AI/ANs that the present K-12 Indian education system has failed. TCUs, like most community colleges, are open door institutions. More than 71 percent of all TCU students need developmental education in at least one subject (math, science, or reading/composition) before beginning college-level coursework and 15 percent of all first-time entering

TCU students must first prepare for and pass a high school equivalency test, yet little or no funding is available for these critical programs. Challenges have intensified since the GED test was revamped in January 2014. The new computer-based and more rigorous test has posed difficulties for many TCUs to implement (with little or no funding for staff professional development or technical assistance) and much more difficult for American Indians to pass. One TCU, Oglala Lakota College, reports that prior to the new GED test, an average of 29 students successfully passed the GED test each year and enrolled in the college. Often, these students became some of the OLC's most successful graduates. However, since the new GED was implemented, only seven students passed in 2014 and two in 2015. OLC and all of the TCUs are in critical need of adequate and stable funding to provide rural AI/ANs the preparation and testing they need to move from victims of generational poverty and unemployment to productive and tax-paying members the U.S. workforce.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH and HUMAN SERVICES PROGRAMS

I. Administration for Children and Families – Office of Head Start

Tribal Colleges and Universities Head Start Partnership Program: AIHEC requests that \$8 million of the \$9.6 billion proposed for making payments under the Head Start Act be designated for the TCU-Head Start Partnership program, as reauthorized in PL 110-134, so that TCUs can provide high-quality, culturally appropriate training for teachers and workers in Indian Head Start programs. With the reauthorization of the Head Start program in the mid-1990s, Congress mandated that by 2013, 50 percent of Head Start teachers nationwide must have at least a baccalaureate degree in Early Childhood Education and all teacher assistants must have a child development associate credential or be enrolled in an associate's degree program. Today, 73 percent of Head Start teachers nationwide hold the required bachelor's degree; but only 39 percent of Head Start teachers in Indian Country (Region 11) meet the requirement, and only 38 percent of workers met the associate-level requirements. This disparity in preparation and teaching demands our attention: AI/AN children deserve – and desperately need -- qualified teachers. TCUs are ideal catalysts for filling this inexcusable gap. From 2000 to 2007, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services provided modest funding for the TCU-Head Start Program, which helped TCUs build capacity in early childhood education by providing scholarships and stipends for Indian Head Start teachers and teacher's aides to enroll in TCU early childhood programs. Before the program ended in 2007 (ironically, the same year that Congress specifically authorized the program in the Head Start Act), TCUs had trained more than 400 Head Start workers and teachers, many of whom have since left for higher paying jobs in elementary schools. Today, Tribal Colleges such as Salish Kootenai College in Pablo, Montana are providing culturally based early childhood education free of charge to local Head Start workers. With restoration of this modestly funded program, similar programs could be available to the teachers and aides throughout Indian Country.

II. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

New TCU Opioid/Substance Abuse Research and Prevention Program: AIHEC requests that as part of the ongoing national opioid/prescription drug initiative, \$10 million be appropriated to establish a Tribal Colleges and Universities Substance Abuse/Behavioral Health Research and Prevention Initiative within SAMHSA to strategically identify and address the drug abuse and behavioral health issues impacting Native youth. The most at-risk population in the United States is American Indian and Alaska Native college-aged youth (ages 15-24). Suicide of friends, classmates, and relatives; alcohol and substance abuse; domestic violence and abuse; bullying and extreme

poverty are all too common to Tribal College students. In fact, a seminal behavior health survey of TCU students¹, revealed that 50.4 percent of TCU students surveyed reported being physically intimidated, assaulted, or bullied/excessively teased by a peer. Twenty-four percent – one-quarter – reported having used opioids, compared to less than 9 percent of mainstream college students (in a 2013 national survey, which is the only comparable data available). Of the TCU students who had used opioids, 25 percent reported feeling signs of addiction, and nearly 34 percent had taken opioids without a prescription in the last three months. AIHEC and partnering entities are on the leading edge nationally in collecting data of this type due in large part to modest grants from the under-funded “Native American Research Centers on Health” program operated by the National Institutes of Health and the Indian Health Service (and in need of increased funding). Data of this type has never been collected nationally among college students, but the TCUs know that we must get a handle on this problem before it spirals out of control. Without serious, sustained, and community-based intervention, it will rapidly spiral out of control. Already, the death rates among American Indians from heroin overdose has increased 236 percent between 2010 and 2014. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that in 2014, American Indians were dying at *double or triple* the rates of African-Americans and Latinos from opioid, including heroin, addiction.

“Administrators at Fort Peck Community College estimate that our decreasing enrollment of degree seeking students is attributed to the increasing number of community members who are addicted to meth, heroin and prescription drugs,” stated Fort Peck Community College (Poplar, MT) president, Haven Gourneau. “[N]o one wants to be an addict, and if asked every addict would willingly take a ‘magic’ pill that would cure them if they could. With that said, we know there is no ‘magic’ pill and so we will continue to see a decline in our community socially and economically unless we can beat addictions that are sucking the life out of our communities.”

As engaged, place-based institutions, Tribal Colleges are committed to addressing the many challenges facing our communities, including the growing opioid epidemic. TCUs are leading the way through student-based participatory research to identify the specific needs of tribal communities (youth and students), so that community-relevant solutions can be identified and culturally adapted, tested, and then shared with others. SAMHSA, which has modest tribal drug abuse prevention programs and an ongoing effort with Historically Black Colleges and Universities, seems an appropriate agency to administer a TCU Behavioral Health Research and Prevention Initiative to assist TCUs, working with local communities and researchers, in taking strategic steps to identify the behavioral health challenges, develop or adapt innovative and community-practiced intervention strategies, forge relationships with local and regional non-profit providers, and create and test models that can be replicated and adapted at other TCUs and tribal communities. This targeted approach will help ensure that tribal youth have the same chance as others to become healthy, productive adults who will greatly benefit their local communities and the nation as a whole.

We respectfully request that the Members of the Subcommittee recognize the significant contribution of the Tribal Colleges and Universities to our students, their communities, and the nation as a whole by continuing and expanding the federal investment our institutions and careful consideration our FY 2017 appropriations needs and requests.

¹ TCU-CCC Baseline Survey Conducted in 22 TCUs Nationally between March 2015 and Feb 2016. Preliminary Data. This research is supported by grants from the NIAAA, 1R01AA022068 and the NIMHD, 5P60-MD006909 through the National Institutes of Health.