

# **The Path of Many** **JOURNEYS**

## **The Benefits of Higher Education for Native People and Communities**

A report by the  
**Institute for Higher Education Policy**  
in collaboration with the  
**American Indian Higher Education Consortium**  
and the  
**American Indian College Fund**

Funding for this project was made possible  
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February 2007

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# Foreword

The path of educational attainment for American Indians is one of many journeys, reflecting the complex challenges that face people who have been underserved by America's educational system for more than two centuries. That path may take students on an array of journeys through the postsecondary educational system: tribal colleges and universities (TCUs); mainstream institutions of higher education; adult education programs; associate's, bachelor's, and master's degrees; outreach and support programs; financial aid programs; and many others. Yet for many Native people, those journeys represent the best and most important opportunities available for cultural preservation and growth, social mobility, and economic prosperity.

This report makes a compelling case for the importance of investing in higher education for American Indians. Low college access and degree achievement rates have been a persistent problem for American Indians, the result of decades of neglect, marginalization, and discrimination. The report outlines both the challenges of college access as well as the benefits of investing in higher education for American Indians and argues that higher education is one of the main drivers of economic and social development for all American Indian communities. It is a powerful story that must be told to those who can help make higher education a reality for American Indians: government policymakers (at the federal, tribal, and state levels), corporations and philanthropic organizations, education leaders, and the American public at large.

Together, our organizations have worked over the last decade to educate all who will listen about the imperative of investing in educational strategies that have shown the greatest payoff for American Indians, including tribal colleges and universities, targeted grant assistance for students, outreach and support programs for American Indians, and stronger linkages with K-12 schools. These strategies offer the greatest hope that the path of educational attainment for Native Americans ultimately will lead to the destination of personal achievement and success. If this can be accomplished, our nation will be strengthened and sustained for many generations to come.

Gerald E. Gipp (Hunkpapa Lakota), *Executive Director*  
American Indian Higher Education Consortium

Jamie P. Merisotis, *President*  
Institute for Higher Education Policy

Richard B. Williams (Oglala Lakota), *President*  
American Indian College Fund



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At IHEP, Alisa F. Cunningham, managing director of research and evaluation; Courtney McSwain, research analyst; and former Research Analyst Yuliya Keselman contributed to the research and writing of the report. Jamie P. Merisotis, president; Tia T. Gordon, managing director of communications and marketing; Ryan Hahn, research analyst; and Melissa Del Rios, program associate, BEAMS, were integral in the editing, reviewing, and fact checking processes.

At AIHEC, Robyn Hiestand, former data collection and policy support analyst, played an important role in the research, writing, and editing of the report. Carrie Billy, deputy director, and Gerry Gipp, executive director, provided overall guidance and suggestions for the project. Members of the AIHEC board of directors and the American Indian Measures for Success (AIMS) project's advisory panel also contributed feedback and input on the report. Special thanks go to the tribal college students who agreed to be profiled in the report through the AIHEC-AIMS data collection effort.

Additional assistance for this project was provided by current and former American Indian College Fund staff, especially Nicole Adams, former director of public education and communications and Richard Williams, president and CEO.

Finally, we thank Henry Fernandez, executive director of scholarships, outreach, and philanthropy at USA Funds, and the entire USA Funds executive team, for making this project possible and providing ongoing support for efforts to describe the numerous benefits of higher education to society. From conception to final design, USA Funds has been an outstanding partner and supporter of the project.

We acknowledge the assistance and support of USA Funds and other organizations that provided data and feedback and recognize that they are not responsible for any errors of omission or interpretation contained herein.

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# Executive Summary

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The economic and cultural plight of American Indians began when the first White settlers landed on the shores of North America. For American Indians, the “discovery” of America was the beginning of cultural and physical destruction, marginalization, discrimination, and impoverishment. The resulting gap between American Indians and mainstream society is immense. The reduction and eventual elimination of these disparities are vitally important not only to ensure the prosperity of American Indian communities but for American society overall.

Access to quality education in general, and higher education in particular, is key to closing the economic and social gap. Historically, higher education has been the main driver of improved social mobility, personal welfare, and economic prosperity. However, traditional forms of western higher education have often been unsuccessful with American Indian populations owing to the striking differences in western and American Indian traditions, pedagogical approaches, and measures of success. Investment in higher education, especially in higher education suitable for the American Indian context, is crucial to bridge the divide between American Indians and the rest of the nation.

Currently, American Indians who choose to pursue higher education in the United States have two main options: mainstream two- or four-year postsecondary institutions or tribally controlled educational institutions, known as Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and based primarily on reservations. The challenges of mainstream institutions in providing higher education to American Indians are similar to the challenges of providing higher education for all students of color. Success often depends on the institution’s ability and commitment to provide access to those who aspire to enter college; provide financial, social, and academic support while the students are enrolled; and help provide opportunities to those who have finished their degrees. TCUs have an additional mission: They serve as a venue for educational attainment for American Indian students and are committed to the preservation and resuscitation of native cultures and traditions.

A combination of historical, economic, social, demographic, and educational forces have shaped the challenges and constraints that American Indians face.

- 1 Historical forces:** U.S. federal policy toward the Indian tribes was made without knowledge or consideration of the values of the native people themselves. In addition, educational curricula and teaching came from a Eurocentric-White perspective and completely neglected any mention of tribal ways of life.
- 2 Economic and social forces:** American Indians, especially those who live on reservations, are among the poorest groups in the country. In 1999, 26 percent of the American Indian/Alaska Native population lived below the official poverty

level, compared with 12 percent of the total population. Factors such as geographic isolation, limited opportunities for upward mobility in rural areas and on reservations, and low labor force participation rates contribute to a continuous poverty cycle among American Indians. This poverty is often accompanied by a range of social problems—injuries and violence, depression, substance abuse, inadequate health care and prenatal health care, unhealthy or insufficient diets, and high rates of diabetes—that can greatly affect the ability and desire to pursue education.

- 3 **Demographic forces:** The American Indian population has experienced tremendous growth, from 237,000 in 1900 to 4.3 million in 2000. An estimated 33 percent of this population is under the age of 18, compared with 26 percent of the total U.S. population. American Indians reside primarily in the Western part of the United States: 48 percent, compared with 22 percent of the total U.S. population. Currently, more than a third of American Indians live on reservations or in other American Indian Areas (AIAs), with the remainder living in other communities. This population tends to be more rural, geographically isolated, and be younger than the U.S. population as a whole.
- 4 **Educational forces:** American Indian college enrollment more than doubled, from 76,100 in 1976 to 165,900 in 2002. However, American Indians continue to have lower educational attainment rates than persons from other racial/ethnic backgrounds. Almost 28 percent of American Indians age 25 and over in 2004 had not graduated from high school, compared with the national average of 15 percent. Further, only 42 percent of American Indians pursued any form of higher education and 13 percent attained a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 53 percent and 28 percent nationally. Among those living in AIAs, in 2000, a third of the population 25 years and older had not graduated from high school, and only 35 percent had attended college.

In this report, we examine the challenges of access and the benefits of investing in higher education for American Indians, and argue that higher education is one of the main drivers of economic and social development for all American Indian communities, regardless of their geographic location. The report also discusses the role of TCUs on reservations and their contribution to the well-being of tribal communities.

## Highlights

**The characteristics of American Indian students who are able to enroll in college differ from those of all undergraduate students.**

- More than a third of all American Indian students are 30 years or older, which puts them at risk for dropping out prior to earning a degree. Most (65 percent) are financially independent, compared to a national average of 50 percent. Almost 20 percent of American Indian undergraduates are independent students with incomes lower than \$20,000.
- At TCUs, entering students have family incomes that average \$13,998, or 27 percent below the poverty threshold.
- About 77 percent of all American Indian students attend public postsecondary institutions, compared with 71 percent of all undergraduates, and almost half

are enrolled in two-year public institutions. Only 6 percent of American Indian undergraduates attend private not-for-profit four-year institutions, compared to 14 percent of all undergraduates.

- American Indian students may need certain supports to complete a degree, such as access to child care services, flexibility in scheduling classes and exams, and access to public or private transportation, especially for students who live in rural areas.

**Investing in higher education results in widespread, dramatic benefits to both individual American Indians and the nation as a whole, including higher rates of employment, less reliance on public assistance, increased levels of health, and a greater sense of civic responsibility.**

- A person with a bachelor's degree or higher earns almost four times as much as a person who did not graduate from high school, and more than twice as much as a person who holds a high school diploma; this is true for American Indians and the U.S. population in general. In addition, more opportunities for private well-being (for instance, ability and opportunity to obtain employment) tend to lower the level of reliance on public assistance.
- A number of social benefits also correlate with postsecondary education attainment. For example, 88 percent of American Indians with a bachelor's degree or higher said they were in "excellent, very good, or good" health, compared with 73 percent of those without a high school diploma. Only about a third of American Indians who did not graduate from high school voted in the November 2004 presidential election, compared with over half of those with a bachelor's or higher degree.

**Certain benefits address the specific historical, economic, and cultural background of Native Americans, especially those who live on reservations.**

- TCUs and other nearby colleges contribute to the economic development of reservations. Despite persistent unemployment in reservation communities, graduates from TCUs are employed at encouraging levels—for example, in one survey, 60 percent of alumni were employed outside the home, in the military, or self-employed. TCUs also play an important role in workforce and skills development, and they emphasize areas that are of particular importance to the development of reservation communities, such as health services, primary and secondary education, and rural farm and business development.
- Students at TCUs, as well as the colleges themselves, contribute to the social health of reservation communities. The goals and activities of the colleges and their students translate into direct benefits to communities, such as the provision of social services, the preservation of language and tradition, and the encouragement of educational opportunities. TCUs offer a variety of social services for students and community members, such as family life and parenting courses and domestic and community violence prevention programs. In addition, the very presence of TCUs and college graduates on reservations encourages postsecondary educational attainment in these communities. Data from 2005 suggest that about half of graduates continued their education after graduating from TCUs, and of those, over 86 percent pursued a bachelor's degree.

**Despite the clear benefits of postsecondary education, many American Indians still cannot afford to go to college or to attend the college of their choice.**

- American Indians, just like other college students in the United States, are facing unprecedented increases in tuition rates. On average, American Indian students faced tuitions of \$2,840, not including other expenses. These fees may seem low when compared to mainstream four-year institutions, but many American Indians are located in poverty-stricken areas where even these fees might constitute an entrance barrier.
- In addition, it is important to take into account the opportunity costs of going to college. Many American Indians must work to support themselves and their families, and may be expected to give back to their communities as well. Attending college often means that students must either decrease the time they spend at work or attempt to do both, which increases the likelihood that they will drop out.

**Financial aid, particularly grants, is crucial to enable American Indian students to pursue a degree.**

- The overwhelming majority of American Indian students apply for any financial aid (80 percent in 2003–04) and for federal financial aid (60 percent). Almost 70 percent of American Indian students received some form of aid in 2003–04, with an average award amount of \$6,400. Of the three main types of aid (federal, state, and institutional), American Indian students were most likely to receive federal aid (around 50 percent) and were more likely to receive grants (59 percent) than loans (32 percent). The average total grant award was \$3,700, and the average loan amount was \$6,000.<sup>1</sup>
- Nonetheless the financial aid received by American Indian students usually does not cover the full price of attending college. On average, in 2003–04, more than half of American Indian students had remaining financial need, with an average amount of \$4,200.

**Trends in federal and state financial aid suggest that underinvestment in the types of programs that support American Indian students is likely to persist.**

- American Indian students who attend mainstream postsecondary educational institutions are affected by the same trends in federal financial aid as other American students. In the past decade, Pell grants (on which American Indian students are highly dependent) have increased; however, the amount per recipient increased by only 21 percent over the past decade. Meanwhile, the volume of federal loans grew by 86 percent in constant dollars between 1995–96 and 2005–06, along with increases in the number of borrowers.
- Across the Southwestern states (where 39 percent of all American Indian students are located), the funding for both need-based and non-need-based grants has increased, but non-need grants have been increasing at a faster rate. In Arizona and New Mexico, need-based grant aid decreased in real terms. In addition, state tax

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<sup>1</sup>Tribal colleges do not currently administer federal student loan programs. Student loan data is from mainstream institutions.

appropriations of funds as a percentage of higher education operating expenditures in the Southwest were lower than the 11 percent national average.

- The main source of funding for TCUs is the federal government, which is required to provide funding for American Indian tribes for higher education. TCUs receive funds from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) through the Tribally Controlled College or University Assistance Act of 1978 (TCCUAA), which allocates funding to 26 colleges through a formula based on the number of Indian students enrolled (called the Indian Student Count, or ISC). In 2005, the total funding provided was \$4,447 per student, far below the authorized level of \$6,000. Despite increases in total appropriations, Title I funding per Indian student has decreased by almost 30 percent since 1981 when inflation is considered.

## Recommendations

Higher education is one of the main drivers for economic and social development in American Indian communities. The enrollment of more American Indian students in postsecondary education, and their achievement of certificates and degrees, will not only help in their personal development but will contribute to the economic and social welfare of the nation as a whole. However, it will be difficult to reach the goal of reducing gaps in enrollment unless more resources are directed to support systems and other resources that have proved effective in the past.

Each part of the higher education system can play a role in these efforts:

### Federal government agencies

- Increase funding for the TCCUAA of 1978, the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Improvement of 2006, and other federal programs that are relevant to health, environmental issues, economic development, and other issues that impact American Indians on their path to higher education.
- Increase funding for need-based financial aid programs such as Pell grants.
- Support formula-funded institutional development programs such as Title III, which help higher education institutions (such as TCUs) that serve primarily disadvantaged populations build their technological, facilities, and other capacities.
- Support and expand the American Indian Higher Education Consortium–American Indian Measures for Success (AIHEC-AIMS) comprehensive data collection initiative at TCUs to include student learning outcomes.
- Increase funding for federal student support services programs that help disadvantaged students while they are enrolled in school.
- Increase funding for early intervention programs such as the TCU–Head Start partnership, Gear Up, Talent Search, and Upward Bound to help increase the academic preparation of American Indian children.

### State and tribal governments

- Establish and increase state funding for each non-Indian state resident enrolled at a tribal college. Because TCUs are located on federal trust lands, states have no

obligation to fund them, even for the non-Indian resident students who account for 20 percent of enrollments across all TCUs.

- Improve outreach to high schools regarding the availability of need-based state grant aid, particularly in states with high concentrations of American Indian students.
- Facilitate transfer between community colleges and four-year institutions.

### **Mainstream colleges and universities**

- Improve outreach efforts to tribal college students and their parents.
- Conduct local seminars on issues such as the admissions process, transferring credits, and financial aid resources.
- Coordinate with TCUs and other colleges to facilitate transfers and coordinate programs for American Indian students, and foster faculty development and exchange.
- Increase participation in diversity training for faculty and staff.
- Facilitate the establishment and integration of American Indian support organizations on campus.
- Encourage American Indian students to pursue formal advanced education and lifelong learning.

### **Elementary and secondary systems**

- Ensure that K–12 guidance counselors and other staff are aware of admissions practices at TCUs and other colleges, as well as the availability of state, tribal, and federal financial aid.
- Encourage American Indian students to participate in college preparatory curricula, and provide tutoring when necessary.
- Train teachers and staff regarding the cultural differences in pedagogy, especially in geographic areas that serve many American Indian students.
- Work with local TCUs to jointly address the challenges of remediation and student retention.

### **Community and philanthropic organizations**

- Provide scholarships and support services to American Indian students who plan to attend college.
- Support community programs that are successful in reaching low-income, first-generation American Indian college students.
- Fund and promote evaluations of program models and best practices that have been successful in supporting American Indian students on their path toward college and graduate degrees.
- Strengthen TCUs with grants that improve capacity in areas such as administrative infrastructure and faculty recruitment.

# Introduction

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*“My grandchild, education is the ladder. Tell our people to take it.”*

*—The great chief of Navajos, Hastinn Ch'il Haajin (Manuelito), in 1893<sup>2</sup>*

The economic and cultural plight of American Indians started when the first White settlers landed on the shores of North America. For many people around the world, the word “America” came to mean freedom, prosperity, and opportunities. For American Indians, the “discovery” of the New World was the beginning of cultural and physical destruction, marginalization, discrimination, and impoverishment. The resulting gap between American Indians and mainstream society is immense. Its reduction and eventual elimination is vitally important not only for American Indian communities but for American society overall.

Access to quality education in general, and higher education in particular, is key to closing the economic and social gaps. Historically, higher education has been the main driver of upward social mobility and enhanced personal welfare, and has helped societies thrive. However, traditional forms of western higher education have not been successful with American Indian populations because of the striking differences in western and American Indian traditions, pedagogical approaches, and measures of success. Investment in higher education—especially higher education that is suitable for American Indians—is integral to bridging the divide between American Indians and the rest of the nation.

Currently, American Indians who choose to pursue higher education in the United States have several options, including: mainstream two- or four-year postsecondary institutions or tribally controlled educational institutions, known as Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), which are based primarily on reservations.<sup>3</sup> The challenges mainstream institutions encounter in seeking to provide higher education to American Indians are similar to the challenges of providing higher education for all students of color. Success often depends on the institution’s ability and commitment to provide access to those who are aspiring to enter higher education; financial, social, and academic support while they are enrolled in college; and opportunities to those who have earned their degrees.

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<sup>2</sup>Quoted on the Diné College website (<https://www.dinecollege.edu/ics/>).

<sup>3</sup>Generally, an Indian reservation is land reserved for a tribe when its other land areas were taken over by the United States through treaties. Congressional acts, administrative acts, and executive orders have created additional reservations. Approximately 275 Indian land areas in the United States are administered as Indian reservations. The local governing authority on the reservation is the tribal government (federal agencies may use more specific definitions; for example, see USDOE 2006). A broader category, American Indian Areas, include reservations plus a number of other designated federal and state lands, such as off-reservations trust lands, Oklahoma tribal statistical areas, state reservations, and state designated American Indian statistical areas (Ogunwole 2006).

Only a small percentage of institutions enroll a significant proportion (25 percent or higher) of students who designate themselves as American Indian. (USDE 2004d). A substantial proportion of those are TCUs; the others are primarily colleges located in the Southwest and Great Plains regions. These colleges and universities tend to have special programs in place to support American Indian students. The majority of American Indian students at mainstream colleges are spread widely among a large number of institutions, most of which enroll only a small number of American Indians.<sup>4</sup>

TCUs have a special place in the American higher education system as institutions of higher learning created by American Indians for American Indians. The history of TCUs is closely intertwined with American Indian history over the past 30 years. Their appearance and evolution has paralleled that of the self-determination movement; thus, in addition to serving as venues for educational attainment, they are also committed to the preservation and resuscitation of native cultures and traditions. TCUs are devoted to providing educational opportunities for remote and geographically isolated tribal communities that would not otherwise be able to access educational opportunities. They are also committed to increasing the economic, social, and cultural prosperity of these communities.

In this report we examine the challenges of access and the benefits of investing in higher education for American Indians, and argue that higher education is one of the main drivers for economic and social development in American Indian communities, regardless of their geographic location. The report also considers the role of TCUs in the context of the reservation and their contribution to the well-being of tribal communities.

The first section lays out the circumstances that affect present-day American Indian education. It briefly outlines the historical background, looks at current trends affecting the American Indian population in the United States, analyzes socioeconomic conditions over the past 30 years, and examines the shortcomings of traditional teaching methods in the American Indian context. Subsequent sections analyze the benefits of higher education for American Indians in general and especially for those who live in tribal communities. The report examines current trends in costs to individuals and to state and federal governments, including tuition and fees, financial aid available to American Indian students, and changes in federal funding for TCUs. The report concludes with recommendations for higher education policy for American Indians in general and specifically for those who attend TCUs.

## Framework of the Study

This report was inspired in part by a nationally acclaimed 2004 study by the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) and Scholarship America entitled *Investing in America's Future: Why Student Aid Pays Off for Individuals and Society*. The study documented widespread and dramatic benefits to the nation from investing in higher education, as well as the critical role of student financial aid. IHEP issued two more reports—one discussing college access, affordability and the impact of investment in need-based financial aid in Arizona (IHEP 2005a), and the other outlining the

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<sup>4</sup>Note: For colleges that are not TCUs, the data on race/ethnicity are self reported, and students may not be members of federally recognized tribes or have ties to a reservation. For TCUs, race/ethnicity data is not self reported. Only enrolled tribal members are included in TCU and American Indian data sets.

**Figure 1: Benefits resulting from higher education**

	<b>PUBLIC</b>	<b>PRIVATE</b>
<b>Economic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased Tax Revenues</li> <li>• Greater Productivity</li> <li>• Increased Consumption</li> <li>• Increased Workforce Flexibility</li> <li>• Decreased Reliance on Government Financial Support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher Salaries and Benefits</li> <li>• Employment</li> <li>• Higher Savings Levels</li> <li>• Improved Working Conditions</li> <li>• Personal/Professional Mobility</li> </ul>
<b>Social</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced Crime Rates</li> <li>• Increased Charitable Giving/Community Service</li> <li>• Increased Quality of Civic Life</li> <li>• Social Cohesion/Appreciation of Diversity</li> <li>• Improved Ability to Adapt and Use Technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved Health/Life Expectancy</li> <li>• Improved Quality of Life for Offspring</li> <li>• Better Consumer Decision Making</li> <li>• Increased Personal Status</li> <li>• More Hobbies and Leisure Activities</li> </ul>

Source: Institute for Higher Education Policy 1998.

importance of investment in both prebaccalaureate and postsecondary education in Mississippi (Phipps et al. 2006).

All reports are based on the framework of the Higher Education Benefits Matrix, devised by IHEP and presented in figure 1. The benefits are classified according to the following categories (IHEP 1998):

- **Private economic benefits:** Most discussions about the value of education concentrate on private economic benefits. Individual gains from education are much more salient because of the clear correlation between employment opportunities/earning potential and level of educational attainment.
- **Public economic benefits:** Education also is a catalyst for greater well-being of the whole society. Increasing income of individual citizens is often associated with greater spending and tax revenues, and eventual economic growth.
- **Private social benefits:** Private social benefits accrue to individuals or groups and are not directly related to economic, fiscal, or labor market effects. They can range from personal and professional fulfillment to good health to the ability to engage in hobbies and leisure activities.
- **Public social benefits:** Public discussions about benefits of education often overlook one of the major goals of education (apart from transferring knowledge and skills): Education is instrumental in instilling civic values and behavioral norms. For instance, educated people tend to be more active members of their society and have greater trust in its institutions.

For this report, the benefits matrix has been modified to reflect the specific historical, economic, and cultural background of Native Americans, especially those who live on reservations. The modified matrix includes employment and workforce development on reservations, provision of community programs, and preservation of language and tradition, among other factors. The modified matrix is described later in the report.

## Methodology

A variety of data sources are used for this report, including data from the U.S. Census Bureau, a recently commissioned survey of students who graduated from TCUs, and

several datasets available from the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center of Education Statistics (NCES)—the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), and the Beginning Postsecondary Students (BPS) Longitudinal Study. Note that most of these data sources combine American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Data from the 2000 U.S. Census and the Current Population Survey (CPS) are used to create a snapshot of the demographic trends of the whole U.S. population compared with all American Indians, on reservations and elsewhere, by level of educational attainment. However, because the methods of data collection were geared more toward general demographic trends rather than education-specific categories, some of the data may not accurately reflect the reality. Furthermore, because American Indians make up only about 1 percent of the U.S. population (USDE 2005a),<sup>5</sup> comparison with aggregate averages may not be precise.

The NPSAS is the only comprehensive, nationally representative study of financial aid among postsecondary students in the United States and Puerto Rico. NPSAS provides information on trends in federal, state, institutional, and private financial aid, and describes how families and independent students finance postsecondary education. NPSAS also provides demographic data such as ethnic background, gender, parental level of educational attainment, and family size. NPSAS collects its data through a multitude of sources, including institutional records, government databases, and student telephone interviews. Most of the NPSAS data presented in this report are for the 2003–04 academic year.

In this report, the NPSAS data is used to present a profile of a typical Native American student compared with an average American undergraduate. The profile shows where these students are enrolled and what kind of financial aid they receive. The NPSAS analysis gives a general overview of Native Americans in higher education. According to NPSAS (USDE 2004c), American Indians make up about 1 percent of all postsecondary students in the United States.

The IPEDS was established as the core postsecondary education data collection program for NCES; it is a system of surveys designed to collect data from all institutions and educational organizations whose primary purpose is to provide postsecondary education. IPEDS is built around a series of interrelated survey components to collect institution-level data in such areas as enrollment, program completion, faculty, staff, finances, and academic libraries. In this report, IPEDS data were used for American Indian college enrollment and completion, including at TCUs. The main advantage of using IPEDS is that it represents a census rather than a sample.

The BPS follows students identified by the NPSAS surveys as being first-time undergraduates. These students are asked about their experiences in transitioning through postsecondary education and into the labor force or graduate school, as well as family formation. Students who remain in college, transfer, stopout or dropout are

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<sup>5</sup>Note: The 1 percent figure includes only those who chose one ethnicity; an additional 0.5 percent chose American Indian/Alaska Native in combination with another racial/ethnic category.

included in the studies. This report relies on the second cohort of beginning students, first identified in NPSAS 1996, with follow-ups in 1998 and 2001. The main limitation of using BPS for the purposes of our report is the small sample size for American Indian students.

In 2005, the American Indian College Fund commissioned IHEP to survey graduating scholarship recipients about their educational experiences at TCUs, as well as employment and further education. The results are presented in *Championing Success: A Report on the Progress of Tribal College and University Alumni* (IHEP 2006). The survey population was derived from a list of scholarship recipients provided by the American Indian College Fund; 247 valid responses were received, for an overall response rate of 11 percent. Although the IHEP survey has some limitations (such as the lack of a comparison group and the self-selection bias), it is useful in providing information on the activities of American Indian students after college.

Through a grant from the Lumina Foundation, the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) developed a collaborative process through which tribal colleges and their communities defined indicators of success on their own terms. The result is American Indian Measures for Success (AIMS), indicator data developed by American Indians and relevant to American Indian student success. Participating colleges have access to data that are meaningful to their institutions and communities. The tribal colleges complete annual quantitative and qualitative reports.

## Structure of the Report

This report first lays out the circumstances that affect American Indian education. It briefly outlines the historical background, looks at current trends affecting the American Indian population in the United States, analyzes socioeconomic conditions for American Indians over the past 30 years, and examines the shortfalls of traditional teaching methods in the American Indian context.

Subsequent sections use the framework of the benefits matrix to analyze the benefits of higher education for American Indians in general and for those who live in tribal communities in particular; and examine current trends in costs, such as tuition and fees, financial aid, and federal funding for TCUs.



# American Indians and Higher Education

To understand the importance of creating, nurturing, and strengthening educational opportunities for American Indians, one must first understand the historical, socioeconomic, and pedagogical conditions behind the challenges and constraints American Indians face. In this section we examine those conditions and show how they influenced the emergence of TCUs, and how these unique institutions—created by the tribes—are well suited to serve the needs of American Indians, especially those who live in tribal communities.

## Historical Background

The history of American Indian education is closely intertwined with the history of U.S. policy toward Indian tribes. Almost three centuries of American Indian “mis-education” (Boyer 1997) began with the appearance of the first White settlers in the 17th century. Decisions have often been made and implemented without the knowledge or consideration of the values of the native peoples themselves. European colonizers—and later the federal government—regarded education as a necessary bridge to Christianize<sup>6</sup> and assimilate Native Americans into the mainstream White culture. The curriculum and teaching came from a White, Eurocentric perspective and completely ignored tribal ways. Not surprisingly, a majority of Native American students did not complete their schooling, and those who did found it difficult to obtain employment either on or off the reservation (Boyer 1997). Indian students who returned home from school encountered a conflict between tribal values and the White ways they had learned, while those who chose to stay off-reservation were never completely accepted into White society (Reyhner and Eder 2004).

Policy changed in the 1930s, after the release of the report *The Problem of Indian Administration* (Meriam, Brown, Cloud et al. 1928). The report described the deplorable conditions of Indian people on reservations and condemned the government-run boarding schools for their emphasis on vocational training and their failure to provide skills relevant to Indian youth. The report was a catalyst for the reexamination of the Indian question and set the stage for some initial reforms (Boyer 1997). The 1934 Wheeler-Howard Indian Reorganization Act was the first law to include limited self-governance and Indian sovereignty as part of federal policy toward Native Americans. Education was the centerpiece of the legislation, and its purpose was to provide Native Americans with the skills they needed to earn a living. However, despite the legislative impetus for Indian empowerment, White administrators still determined policy and controlled reservations and schools (Boyer 1997).

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<sup>6</sup>Until the 1870s, American religious denominations and missionaries primarily provided education to American Indians (Cross 1999).

During the 1940s, federal policy shifted again. This time, the purpose was to force assimilation through relocation, termination, and state subjugation, including a whole-scale movement of American Indians to cities. With House Concurrent Resolution 108 (1953)—the so-called “termination policy”—Native Americans stopped being special wards of the federal government; a significant number of reservations were eliminated by distributing the land to individual tribal members; and many Indian programs were transferred to the states (Boyer 1997). The effects of the termination policy were culturally and economically devastating.

During the 1960s, the termination policy was finally reversed with the emergence of the self-determination movement in the Native American community. The movement held that Indian people should be in charge of their own policymaking through their own tribal governments (Reyhner and Eder 2004) and aimed to resuscitate awareness of and pride in the Indian culture. The Self-Determination Act of 1975 “funded technical training [and] the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) staff support, and required the government to contract federal programs to tribes wanting to assume greater control” (Boyer 1997, p. 22). Yet education for American Indians was still underemphasized.

As the self-determination movement became a prominent political force, dynamic leaders in tribal communities began to conceive of an educational system that would meet the needs of their communities and provide an education based on cultural traditions. With the formation of Navajo Community College (now known as Diné College) in 1968, American Indians finally started to make their own educational decisions. Diné College was the first institution that provided Native Americans with culturally suitable means of instruction and was the pioneer TCU.

**Figure 2: Map of TCUs**



Currently, more than 30 TCUs operate in the United States, offering accredited programs in a variety of fields ranging from business management to environmental sciences (figure 2). While the majority of TCUs are two-year institutions, 9 offer a bachelor's degree, and two offer a master's degree. Additionally, many TCUs have transfer agreements with four-year institutions. Most of the TCUs are located on reservations in the Midwest and Southwest.

TCUs have a twofold mission. Like other educational institutions, they are committed to educating their students to help them enter the workforce or continue their studies elsewhere. They are also committed to preserving their tribes' unique cultures, traditions, and languages, so they offer academic and community classes with culturally relevant content. TCUs are also a catalyst for economic and community development, and most center their mission and curriculum around the specific needs of the tribe. For example, course offerings are often geared toward local industries or businesses, and social services are offered for family members of the students, to help overcome the barriers to higher education.

### **Poverty: Economic and Social Context**

Federal policy has had a tremendous impact on the economic and social fabric of the American Indian society. Many economic decisions were made without much concern for American Indians' well-being; needless to say, the results were disastrous. American Indians, especially those who live on reservations, are still among the poorest groups in the country, with high rates of unemployment (Cunningham 2000). In 1999, 26 percent of the American Indian/Alaska Native population lived below the official poverty level, compared with 12 percent of the total population (Ogunwole 2006). Residents of reservations experience deep poverty (less than 75 percent of the poverty level) at about twice the rate of the total U.S. population (Taylor and Kalt 2005).

In addition to faulty government policies, structural factors such as geographic isolation have contributed to the ongoing poverty cycle among American Indians. A much greater percentage of American Indians live in rural areas or on reservations compared with Americans in general. These areas often have little or no diversity of economic sectors and limited access to consumer and labor markets, and they must struggle with low levels of investment and lack of understanding of the concept of sovereignty by those outside the reservation (Cunningham 2000). Employment opportunities on reservations are generally limited to professions such as teaching, social work, and government, which offer limited opportunity for earning potential or upward mobility. Labor force participation rates for American Indian men (67 percent) in 2000 were lower than those for the total U.S. male population (71 percent), and American Indians were less likely to be employed in management, professional, and related occupations (Ogunwole 2006).

Lack of transportation is closely connected to the cycle of poverty. On many reservations, cars and repair shops are sparse, the price of gasoline is high, and residents must cannibalize junked cars for parts. Transportation is a basic need in order to get to work, or to school. Yet without a job or an education, it is almost impossible to buy a car.

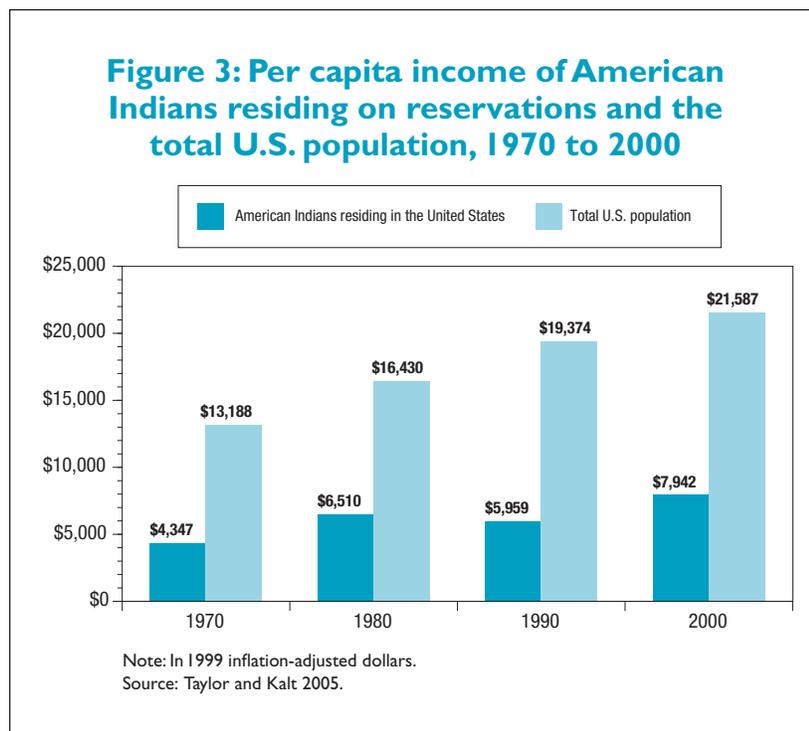


Figure 3 shows the trend in per capita income for American Indians on and off the reservation compared with that of the overall U.S. population. In 2000, the ratio of per capita earnings of American Indians to earnings of all racial/ethnic groups was around 60 percent; about 37 percent for those who live on reservations.

Not surprisingly, the family poverty rate for American Indians is three times the U.S. average (Taylor and Kalt 2005). Per capita income has risen over the past 30 years—the inflation-adjusted per capita income of Indians living on reservations grew by 83 percent from 1970 to 2000, compared with 64 percent for the U.S. population as a whole (Taylor and Kalt 2005). However, despite the improvements in economic conditions on reservations, one study estimates that the income gap between Indians and the overall American population will not close for more than 50 years even if the relative gain of the 1990s continued at the same pace (Taylor and Kalt 2005).

Poverty is not just an economic phenomenon; it is a cyclical condition that affects multiple generations and is often accompanied by a range of social problems—such as substance abuse, health problems, domestic violence, and high mortality rates—which greatly affect a person’s ability and desire to pursue education. For American Indians, poverty has a number of disastrous side effects. One is the high rate of violent deaths, not only among adults but among children and teenagers. According to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC), injuries and violence account for 75 percent of all deaths among American Indians ages 1–19 years (NCIPC 2006). Compared with Black and White Americans, this group had the highest injury-related death rates for motor vehicle crashes, pedestrian events, and suicide. Between 1989 and 1998, these rates were two to three times higher than rates for White Americans of the same age. Also during this period, injuries and violence caused the deaths of 3,314 Native American children living in 12 Indian Health Service (IHS) areas (NCIPC 2006). An experience such as the death of a close relative or a classmate can adversely affect a young person’s desire to pursue education.

Health-related side effects of poverty are numerous, such as alcoholism and drug abuse; lack of adequate health care, including prenatal care; unhealthy or inadequate diet; and high rates of diabetes.

Poverty also affects the psychological health of both children and parents. Poverty is associated with increased levels of parental depression. For example, in 1998, a study showed that 27 percent of children in kindergarten who were living in poverty had a parent at risk for depression, compared with 14 percent for other children (Dahl and Lohner 2005). It is obvious that children who live healthy lives, both psychologically and physically, will be better able to concentrate in class, do their homework, succeed in school, and go on to higher education than those who lack a healthy environment.

Children who grow up in poverty also may lack role models and a societal and familial culture that encourages and supports educational aspirations. Research suggests that students from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds have lower educational aspirations, persistence in college, and educational attainment than their peers from high SES backgrounds both before and during college (Walpole 2003). Parental expectations and definitions of success are particularly important for pursuing or continuing education, and these expectations vary with SES. Low SES parents are more likely to view a high school diploma as the norm for their children, while high SES parents are likely to consider a bachelor's or advanced degree to be the norm (Walpole 2003). American Indian children growing up on reservations might face a lack of encouragement, a lack of role models, and a lack of appreciation of the value of a degree.

Thus, the dynamic aspects of poverty for American Indian communities—failed government policies, lack of employment and low per capita incomes, high rates of violence and injury, poor health, and a low perception of the value of education—create a culture of poverty that repeats itself, generation after generation.

## **Failures of Mainstream Education**

The rates of pursuing, continuing, and completing higher education are lower for American Indians than for other racial/ethnic minorities in the United States (USDE 2005a). In addition to the difficulties all disadvantaged students face in higher education—such as the ability to pay for it—American Indians face greater sociological and pedagogical obstacles stemming from the nature of mainstream western-style teaching and the special status of American Indians in U.S. history.

In sociological terms, American Indians are an “involuntary minority”—they were coercively incorporated into the fabric of American society. Voluntary minorities—such as immigrants who choose to come to the United States and willingly assume American values—tend to regard education as the best path to success in their new society. Education provides them with upward mobility and a better standard of living (Cross 1999). In contrast, American Indians may perceive an exogenous, Eurocentric education system that was forced on them with total disregard for their values (Reyhner 2006).

Before the Europeans arrived, North American Indian education taught children how to thrive. Social education taught responsibilities to the extended family and the clan, band, or tribe. Vocational education taught about child rearing, home management, farming, hunting, gathering, fishing, and so forth. Each tribe had its own religion, and children learned about their place in the cosmos through stories and ceremonies. Members of the extended family taught by example, and children

copied adult activities as they played. Traditional Indian education emphasized learning by application and imitation, not by memorizing information, which is the basis of pedagogy in western systems. American Indians viewed learning as sharing and cooperation, compared with the competition and individualism of mainstream American education. Etiquette, including an abiding respect for elders, was also a central part of an Indian child's traditional education (Cross 1999).

American Indian students found it extremely difficult to adjust to mainstream schooling in the United States. Moreover, throughout almost three centuries of colonial and federal control of American Indian education, the main goal of the policies for students could be summarized by a phrase attributed to Army Captain Richard Henry Pratt, a key architect of federal Indian education in the late 19th century: “to kill the Indian so as to save the man within” (quoted in Cross 1999, p. 944). It is not surprising that federal policy has not achieved positive outcomes for American Indian students. Because of the disastrous effects of three centuries of wrongful policies, American Indians still lag behind the general U.S. population in high school and postsecondary education.

## Demographic Trends

In recent years, a number of trends have affected American Indians, with ramifications for their current and future educational attainment. The most important trend is population growth, especially among youth who may soon attend college. In examining these trends, it is important to note that much of the data on American Indians does not differentiate between those who live on reservations and those who do not. As of 2000, approximately 34 percent of American Indians lived on reservations or in other American Indian Areas (AIAs) (Ogunwole 2006). The average income and average age are lower on reservations.

### Population

Over the past century, the American Indian population has experienced tremendous growth, from 237,000 in 1900 to 4.3 million in 2000, including 2.4 million who identified *only* as American Indian or Alaska Native (Pavel, Skinner, Farris et al. 2006; Ogunwole 2006). Some of this growth can be attributed to increasing self-identification—especially among people of partial or distant ancestry, as opposed to those who are current tribal members—although it is difficult to know the extent of this phenomenon.<sup>7</sup> Other factors are reductions in mortality and relatively high birth rates (Passel 1996). An estimated 33 percent of the American Indian population is under the age of 18, compared with 26 percent of the total U.S. population (Ogunwole 2006).

American Indians reside primarily in the western part of the United States: 48 percent of all American Indians compared with only 22 percent of the total U.S. population (USDE 2005a; U.S. Census Bureau 2001).<sup>8</sup> Almost half (46 percent) of American Indian households are married couples, while 28 percent are single-parent households (Ogunwole 2006).

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<sup>7</sup>Increased self-identification has resulted from a number of changes, including changes in Census Bureau data collection methods and definitions (i.e., the ability to choose more than one race), as well as a greater freedom to identify with American Indian roots as American Indian social status has increased (Passel 1996; Snipp 2002).

<sup>8</sup>Western states include Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

Between 1990 and 2002, the American Indian population increased dramatically—by 25 percent for reservation-based Indians and 21 percent for off-reservation Indians (Taylor and Kalt 2005). As of 2000, more than a third (34 percent) of American Indians lived on reservations or in other American Indian Areas (AIAs) (Ogunwole 2006). Indians who live on reservations and other AIAs are more likely to live in remote, geographically isolated rural areas (71 percent–79 percent) than the U.S. population as a whole (21 percent) (Taylor and Kalt 2005). The average median age of reservation-based American Indians is 25 years, compared with 29 years for the total American Indian population and 35 years for the U.S. population (Ogunwole 2006).

### **Projected High School Graduation Rates**

There are strong signs of improvement in academic attainment among American Indians. High school graduation rates appear to be increasing by some measures (Pavel, Skinner, Farris et al. 2006). Although the number of high school graduates in any given year is low, it is increasing, and the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education (WICHE) predicts that in 2013–14 approximately 31,000 American Indians will graduate from high school, especially in the West and South (WICHE 2003). Given the population growth and increasing numbers of high school graduates, the demand for higher education for American Indian students should continue to grow over the next decade.

### **Trends in Higher Education Enrollment and Attainment**

American Indian enrollment in higher education more than doubled between 76,100 in 1976 and 165,900 in 2002. However, enrollment rates of students with other racial and ethnic backgrounds also increased, and the gap between American Indians and other racial/ethnic groups remains. In 2003, 18 percent of American Indian 18- to 24-year-olds were enrolled in college, compared to 42 percent of Whites (USDE 2005a).

As American Indian enrollment has increased, other changes have occurred. For example, the enrollment of female American Indians has surpassed that of males. In addition, although traditionally American Indian college students were concentrated in two-year institutions, more recently the number enrolled in four-year institutions became the majority (USDE 2005a).

Educational attainment of American Indians remains low. Figure 4 shows the highest level of educational attainment for American Indians 25 years and older in 2004 (U.S. Census Bureau 2004a). Almost 28 percent of American Indians in this age group did not graduate from high school, compared with the national figure of 15 percent; and only 42 percent of American Indians pursued any form of higher education (including any college courses or degrees), compared with 53 percent nationally. Only 13 percent of American Indians attained a bachelor's degree or higher, half the national figure of 28 percent. The percentage of American Indians who have at least a bachelor's degree is the lowest of all racial/ethnic groups. The numbers are even lower for those who live on reservations and other AIAs—in 2000, a third of this population 25 years and older had not graduated from high school, and only 35 percent had attended college (Ogunwole 2006).

**Figure 4: Highest level of educational attainment among various racial/ethnic groups for population over age 25 in the United States, 2004**

	All race/ ethnic Groups	American Indian	White	Black	Asian	Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	Mixed and Other
Less than 9th grade	6%	<b>11%</b>	6%	6%	8%	5%	7%
Less than high school	9%	<b>16%</b>	8%	14%	5%	7%	10%
High school	32%	<b>30%</b>	32%	36%	20%	30%	29%
Some college but no degree	17%	<b>20%</b>	17%	19%	10%	17%	23%
Associate's degree	8%	<b>10%</b>	9%	8%	7%	8%	11%
Bachelor's degree	18%	<b>9%</b>	18%	12%	30%	24%	13%
Advanced degree	10%	<b>4%</b>	10%	5%	20%	9%	7%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2004a.

## Context of American Indians Enrolled in Higher Education

Despite the barriers, many American Indians do attend college. To understand the challenges they face in accessing higher education and earning a degree, it is important to understand how these students differ from typical undergraduates in the United States. Unless otherwise indicated, the following profile is based on the NPSAS of undergraduate students for 2003–04 (USDE 2004c).<sup>9</sup>

### Profile of Undergraduates

American Indian students are somewhat different from the average undergraduate (see figure 5). The majority (63 percent) are women, compared with 58 percent of all undergraduates. On average, they are older: Only 44 percent of American Indian students are in the typical college age bracket (15–23 years), compared with 59 percent of White students, 57 percent of Hispanic students, and 46 percent of African American students. More than a third of Native American undergraduates are age 30 years and older), compared with 26 percent of total undergraduates. Forty-one percent of Native American undergraduates are first-generation students (neither parent attended college). This percentage is similar to the national average of 39 percent but higher than the first-generation status of 34 percent among White students. About 50 percent of tribal college students are first-generation (AIHEC-AIMS 2005b).

The majority of American Indian students (65 percent) are financially independent, compared with the national average of slightly over 50 percent. Almost 20 percent of American Indian undergraduates were independent students with incomes lower than \$20,000, compared with 14 percent of all undergraduates. Only 9 percent of American

<sup>9</sup>Note: This data are for students who indicated being American Indian/Alaska Native, not those who indicated more than one race.

**Figure 5: Distribution of American Indian undergraduates, 2003–04**

	All undergraduates	American Indians
<b>INSTITUTIONAL TYPE</b>		
Public 2-year and less	40.7%	45.8%
Public 4-year	30.0%	31.1%
Private not-for-profit 4-year	13.5%	6.0%
Private for profit	7.8%	5.3%
Other	8.0%	11.8%
<b>REGION</b>		
Southwest	12.4%	39.6%
Far West	18.7%	20.2%
South East	22.6%	11.6%
Great Lakes	15.7%	8.9%
Plains	6.8%	8.2%
Mid East	13.3%	5.0%
Rocky Mountains	4.6%	4.9%
New England	5.0%	1.5%
Outlying Areas	1.0%	0.1%
<b>GENDER</b>		
Male	42.4%	37.1%
Female	57.6%	62.9%
<b>AGE</b>		
15–23	56.8%	43.5%
24–29	17.3%	22.0%
30 or above	25.9%	34.4%
<b>PARENTS' HIGHEST EDUCATION LEVEL</b>		
Did not complete high school	6.7%	6.8%
High school diploma or equivalent	28.0%	30.3%
Vocational or technical training	4.1%	4.1%
Less than two years of college	7.3%	7.0%
Associate's degree	7.8%	11.2%
2 or more years of college but no degree	5.1%	5.3%
Bachelor's degree	22.0%	18.4%
Advanced degree	19.1%	17.0%
<b>INCOME BY DEPENDENCY STATUS</b>		
Dependent: Less than \$20,000	6.5%	5.9%
Dependent: \$20,000–\$39,999	9.6%	7.4%
Dependent: \$40,000–\$59,999	9.0%	6.9%
Dependent: \$60,000–\$79,999	8.4%	5.4%
Dependent: \$80,000 or more	16.3%	9.4%
Independent: Less than \$20,000	14.1%	19.3%
Independent: \$20,000–\$49,999	9.5%	12.4%
Independent: \$50,000 or more	12.4%	13.9%
<b>FAMILY SIZE (dependent and independent)</b>		
1	15.8%	20.8%
2	18.2%	21.5%
3	22.2%	21.7%
4+	43.9%	36.1%

**Figure 5 continued**

<b>DEPENDENCY STATUS</b>		
Dependent	49.7%	35.0%
Independent without children	23.2%	29.8%
Independent with children	27.1%	35.3%
<b>HOUSING</b>		
On campus	13.8%	8.9%
Off campus	55.2%	64.6%
Living with parents	23.5%	17.0%
Attended more than one institution	7.5%	9.5%
<b>INSTITUTION DISTANCE FROM HOME</b>		
1 to 5 miles	22.2%	26.9%
6 to 10 miles	17.0%	16.3%
11 to 50 miles	37.9%	36.3%
51 to 100 miles	7.3%	6.6%
101 to 500 miles	11.4%	9.3%
> 500 miles	4.3%	4.7%
<b>WORK INTENSITY WHILE ENROLLED (including work-study/assistantship)</b>		
No job	22.3%	25.5%
Part-time	43.5%	37.1%
Full-time	34.2%	37.4%

Source: USDE 2004c.

Note: The following regions include: New England: CT ME MA NH RIVT Mid East: DE DC MD NJ NY PA Great Lakes: IL IN MI OH WI Plains: IA KS MN MO NE ND SD South East: AL AR FL GA KY LA MS NC SC TN VA WV South West: AZ NM OK TX Rocky Mountains: CO ID MT UT WY Far West: AK CA HI NV OR WA Outlying Areas: PR.

Indian students were dependents from families with incomes greater than \$80,000, compared with over 16 percent across all racial/ethnic backgrounds. At TCUs, the average family income of first-time students is \$13,998, or 27 percent below the U.S. poverty threshold (AIHEC-AIMS 2005b).

American Indian students are the second most likely racial/ethnic group after Black, non-Hispanic students to have dependent children while enrolled in higher education (32 percent). Almost 8 percent of American Indian undergraduates have dependents other than children, compared with 3 percent of Whites, 11 percent of Black, non-Hispanic, and 7 percent of Hispanic students.

The majority (65 percent) of American Indian students lives off campus, compared with 55 percent of all students; fewer than 9 percent live on campus, compared with 14 percent of all students.<sup>10</sup> A substantial proportion (40 percent) of American Indian students lives in the Southwest, compared with only 12 percent of all students.

In 2003–04, about 77 percent of American Indian students attended public postsecondary institutions,<sup>11</sup> compared with 71 percent of all undergraduates (figure 6). Almost half of American Indian students were enrolled in public two-year

<sup>10</sup>The remainder for both groups were either living with their parents, or attended more than one institution and had a mixed housing pattern.

<sup>11</sup>The other/multiple category may include an additional proportion enrolled in public institutions at some point.

**Figure 6: Distribution of American Indian and all undergraduates by institutional type, 1995–96 and 2003–04**

	1995–96		2003–04	
	American Indian	All	American Indian	All
Public 2-year and less	59.1%	44.0%	45.8%	40.8%
Public 4-year	24.8%	29.9%	31.0%	30.0%
Private not-for-profit 4-year	3.9%	14.0%	6.1%	13.5%
Private for profit	4.7%	5.2%	5.3%	7.8%
Other/multiple	7.5%	6.9%	11.8%	7.9%

Source: USDE 1996 and 2004c.

**Figure 7: Cumulative persistence outcome for 1995–96 beginning freshmen 6 years later**

	Attained degree/certificate	Never attained, still enrolled	Never attained, left without return
All undergraduates	51%	15%	35%
White, non-Hispanic	53%	14%	33%
Black, non-Hispanic	41%	14%	45%
Hispanic	45%	16%	38%
Asian/Pacific Islander	59%	16%	25%
American Indian/Alaska Native	44%	14%	42%

Source: USDE 2001.

institutions, and another third at public four-year institutions. Only 6 percent of American Indian undergraduates attended private not-for-profit four-year institutions, compared with 14 percent for all undergraduates. The distribution has changed since 1995–96, when 59 percent of American Indian undergraduates attended public two-year institutions and 25 percent attended public four-year institutions.

This profile of American Indian students suggests that they have particular needs in higher education. A relatively high percentage of these students are older. Many of them have dependents, including children and grandparents, and the majority are women. Thus, most American Indian students have completely different needs than 19-year-olds living in a dormitory; for example, these students might require child care services to complete their education. More American Indian students have full-time jobs; tackling work, school, and home lives requires a much greater level of flexibility in scheduling classes and exams. Living off campus can also be an impediment to success—many American Indian students live in rural areas and require access to public or private transportation. These challenges can affect a student’s ability to persist through college and earn a degree.

### Completion Rates Among American Indians

Many American Indians who pursue higher education drop out. Historically, the degree completion rates for American Indians at all institutions are rather low. Figure 7 shows that American Indians are the second least likely (after Blacks, non-Hispanic) to have obtained a postsecondary education degree, with a rate of 44 percent, and

the second most likely (again, after Blacks, non-Hispanic) to have left school without a degree and not returned. The relatively low rates of attainment and persistence in college may arise from the special challenges American Indian students face. Students living in reservations and other AIAs have lower rates of postsecondary educational attainment than American Indians and Alaska Natives as a whole; 35 percent of AIA residents aged 25 years or above had at least some postsecondary education, compared to 42 percent of all American Indians (Ogunwole 2006).

## **Summary**

American Indian students face many barriers and challenges to postsecondary education, which are reflected in the relatively low rates of degree attainment and in the profile of American Indians who do enroll in college. In the next section, we describe the potential benefits that would accrue to individuals and communities if more American Indian students were able to pursue postsecondary education and obtain a degree.

# Benefits of Higher Education for American Indians and Their Communities

In this section we examine the benefits of higher education for American Indians. Their communities—whether on or off the reservation—benefit as well. Given that current enrollment and completion rates for American Indians are rather low, this chapter argues that increasing access to higher education for American Indians is essential in light of the immense impact it can have on individual lives and communities.

Four categories of private and public benefits are mentioned in the introduction: (1) higher rates of employment; (2) less reliance on public assistance; (3) increased levels of health; and (4) a greater sense of civic responsibility. These benefits accrue to all American Indians who attend college. There also are benefits specific to American Indians living on reservations. For the most part, higher education on reservations is delivered through TCUs. Figure 8 is a benefits matrix; the final column lists the benefits that TCUs can bring to reservations. These benefits include the following:

- **Economic benefits** such as growth and development on the reservation and employment for graduates.
- **Social benefits** such as the preservation and strengthening of tribal language, culture, and traditions.

**Figure 8: Benefits resulting from higher education in general and from TCUs on reservations**

	Private	Public	Particular to Reservations
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher Salaries and Benefits</li> <li>• Employment</li> <li>• Higher Savings Levels</li> <li>• Improved Working Conditions</li> <li>• Personal/Professional Mobility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased Tax Revenues</li> <li>• Greater Productivity</li> <li>• Increased Consumption</li> <li>• Increased Workforce Flexibility</li> <li>• Decreased Reliance on Government Financial Support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workforce and Skills Development</li> <li>• Greater Opportunities for Leadership and Small Businesses</li> <li>• Economic Growth and Development</li> <li>• Employment for Graduates on Reservations</li> <li>• Agriculture and Land Development</li> </ul>
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved Health/Life Expectancy</li> <li>• Improved Quality of Life for Offspring</li> <li>• Better Consumer Decision Making</li> <li>• Increased Personal Status</li> <li>• More Hobbies and Leisure Activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced Crime Rates</li> <li>• Increased Charitable Giving/Community Service</li> <li>• Increased Quality of Civic Life</li> <li>• Social Cohesion/Appreciation of Diversity</li> <li>• Improved Ability to Adapt and Use Technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mitigation of Social Problems</li> <li>• Centers for Preservation of Culture, Language and Traditions</li> <li>• Provision of Further Educational Opportunities</li> <li>• Technology Transfer</li> <li>• Community Programs</li> </ul>

Source: Adapted from IHEP 1998.

**Figure 9: Average income for U.S. population and American Indians age 25 and older by educational attainment, 2005**

	U.S. Population	American Indians
All educational levels	<b>\$35,187</b>	<b>\$22,856</b>
Less than a high school diploma	\$14,640	\$10,534
High school graduates, no college	\$24,811	\$20,721
Some college, no degree	\$31,726	\$25,966
Bachelor's degree or higher	\$57,330	\$45,214

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2006a.  
 Note: Figures include individuals who had no earnings.

## The Benefits Matrix and American Indians in General

### Private Economic Benefits

The most easily measured private economic benefit from education for all American Indians is the ability to find better paid employment. Figure 9 shows that a person who has a bachelor's degree or higher earns almost four times as much as one who did not graduate from high school and more than twice as much as a person who has only a high school diploma. This is true for both American Indians and the U.S. population in general, although the averages for Indians lag behind those for the general population in every category (U.S. Census Bureau 2006).

### Public Economic Benefits

Education not only creates individual gains but also serves as a catalyst for greater prosperity of the society. The ability to levy taxes is one of the key functions of a government, whether large or small. Sufficient tax revenue in a society guarantees the government's ability to finance itself and its programs for education, science, defense, the environment, and so on. Government investment and regulation in these fundamental areas is essential for the security and well-being of the society. This is true for nonreservation communities and reservation-based communities alike. Even though American Indian tribes technically do not collect state taxes on reservations, some levy tribal taxes. Tribal leaders decide how to invest these funds for the benefit of the tribe.

Public assistance is a quantifiable example of the relationship between public benefits and education: The greater the opportunities in a particular society for private well-being (e.g., obtaining employment), the lower the level of reliance on public assistance. Figure 10 shows the relationship between level of educational attainment and likelihood of receiving public assistance for Americans overall. The sample size for American Indians is small, but the relationship proves true within every state, and for most other racial/ethnic groups<sup>12</sup> (U.S. Census Bureau 2004a; IHEP 2005b), so we can assume it is true for American Indians as well.

### Private Social Benefits

In addition to economic benefits, a number of social benefits are correlated with postsecondary educational attainment. One quantifiable indicator is personal health. The general level of a person's health depends on the ability to pay for preventive and

<sup>12</sup>The exception is Asian Americans.

**Figure 10: Percentage of total U.S. population between age 25 and 60 who received public assistance in the year 2003, by educational attainment**

All educational levels	1.1%
Less than high school	3.2%
High school	1.3%
Some college	1.0%
Bachelor's degree	0.3%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2004a.

Note: The percentages for bachelor's degree holders may not be indicative because of the relatively small size of the sample.

**Figure 11: Percentage of population between age 25 and 85 who described their health as good, very good, or excellent in March 2004, by educational attainment**

	U.S. population	American Indians
All educational levels	84.1%	80.8%
Less than high school	67.3%	73.1%
High school diploma/GED	82.0%	78.8%
Some college but no degree	87.2%	86.8%
Bachelors degree and higher	92.6%	87.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2004a.

health (knowledge about proper diets, better medicinal choices). In figure 11, 88 percent of American Indians with a bachelor's degree or higher reported that they were in "excellent, very good, or good health" compared with 73 percent of those with less than a high school diploma (U.S. Census Bureau 2004a).

### Public Social Benefits

Discussions about the benefits of education often overlook one of the major goals of education, apart from being the mechanism for knowledge and skills transfer. Education is instrumental in instilling civic values and behavioral norms. Educated people tend to be active members of their society and to have greater trust in its institutions. Education can also work as a unifying force in societies divided along ethnic and religious lines, allowing cross-cultural interaction and better understanding among ethnic groups (Gradstein and Justman 2002). In short, education promotes social cohesion.

Civic engagement and volunteerism are quantifiable aspects of social cohesion. Figure 12 shows the difference in voting rates by level of educational attainment. Only about a third of American Indians who did not graduate from high school voted in the November 2004 presidential election, compared with over half of those who had a bachelor's or higher degree (U.S. Census Bureau 2004b). Figure 13 shows a similar pattern for volunteering. Only 1 out of 10 American Indians age 25 years and older

remedial health care, as well as the person's "behavioral attitude" toward health. The ability to pay for health care (or health care insurance coverage) often depends on a person's ability to obtain higher paid employment, which is partially dependent on one's level of educational attainment.

Behavioral aspects of health also depend to some extent on income and education. For example, wealthier and more educated people tend to spend more money on fruits and vegetables at the grocery store. They are more likely to drive a car and to fasten their seat belts. A portion of the social benefit is directly attributable to education. The relationship between health and education is recursive: more health contributes to better education (healthier children have more energy to study and are less likely to skip school), and more education contributes to better

**Figure 12: Percentage of population between age 25 and 90 who voted in the November 2004 election, by educational attainment**

	U.S. POPULATION	AMERICAN INDIANS
All educational levels	<b>66.3%</b>	<b>49.1%</b>
Less than a high school diploma	42.2%	32.4%
High school graduates, no college	59.0%	49.5%
Some college	71.6%	59.7%
Bachelor's degree and higher	80.3%	54.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2004b.

**Figure 13: Percentage of population between age 25 and 90 who indicated ever volunteering by September 2004, by educational attainment**

	U.S. POPULATION	AMERICAN INDIANS
All educational levels	<b>24.6%</b>	<b>17.8%</b>
Less than a high school diploma	11.6%	11.4%
High school graduates, no college	20.6%	15.8%
Some college, no degree	30.8%	26.6%
Bachelor's degree or higher	35.8%	21.4%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2004c.

who did not graduate from high school reported volunteering, while 2 out of 10 with a bachelor's degree did so (U.S. Census Bureau 2004c).

## The Benefits Matrix and the Economic and Social Life of Reservations

American Indians who live on reservations face distinct social and economic challenges compared with those who live in urban or suburban areas. Many reservations are located in remote rural areas, where economic hardships are particularly acute. Traditional institutions of higher education have not adequately addressed the needs of students from tribal communities; in fact, it was the return of so many of these students to the reservations that led tribal leaders to establish colleges in their own territories.

In discussing the benefits of higher education for reservation communities, it is important not to rely on traditional measures of economic and social progress but to understand the unique ways in which Native American communities define these concepts. In this section, we use data from a survey of TCU alumni (IHEP 2006), the American Indian Measures of Success (AIHEC-AIMS) data initiative, and other sources related specifically to TCUs to explore the specific impacts of higher education on reservation communities.

### Economic Benefits for Reservations

While American Indians in general experience economic hardships, those who live on reservations are particularly vulnerable. In the examples of Salish Kootenai College and Oglala Lakota College (see boxes) we describe some of the ways in which a TCU can contribute to the economic development of a reservation, including increased

# Salish Kootenai College

## PABLO, MT

**Salish Kootenai College (SKC)** is a tribally controlled college chartered in 1977 under the sovereign government authority of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. SKC started in an abandoned public school building in Pablo; today it occupies 160,000 square feet in 25 modern buildings worth over \$20 million. Under the leadership of founding president Joseph F. McDonald, the college is a four-year land grant institution accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities.

In winter 2005, the college participated in the national Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE 2005). According to survey results, 97 percent of SKC students would recommend their college to family members or peers. Moreover, 85 percent rated instructors as available, helpful, and sympathetic, and 80 percent rated other students as friendly, supportive, and giving them a sense of belonging.

Since 1977, the college has conferred 2,342 bachelor's degrees, associate's degrees, and certificates of completion. During the past seven years, SKC's job placement and transfer/continuing education rate averaged 86 percent and graduates' combined wages were approximately \$2 million per year. Considering that a dollar turns over four to seven times before it leaves the local economy, this means an annual economic turnover of \$7–\$14 million a year. The estimated economic turnover during the seven-year period is \$49–\$98 million. These wages and the dollar turnover contribute significantly to tribal, local, and state economies, including federal, state, and local tax coffers.

Source: Adapted from AIHEC 2006a. Photo: SKC, Path and Eagle Spirit, Frank Finley



# Oglala Lakota College

## KYLE, SD

On March 4, 1971, the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council chartered the Lakota Higher Education Center, which became **Oglala Lakota College (OLC)** in 1983. OLC is unique in its decentralized campus system, which features college centers in each of the nine districts of the Pine Ridge Reservation. Piya Wiconi, the college's administrative center, is the most visible symbol of the college, but classes are held—and the mission of the college fulfilled—in the nine district centers.

OLC offers associate's, bachelor's, and master's degrees. Education graduates are certified by the South Dakota Division of Education. Nursing graduates are certified by the South Dakota State Board of Nursing and are eligible to sit for the registered nurse examination.

In 2004, OLC surveyed the 12 largest employers on the Pine Ridge Reservation to determine how many positions are filled by American Indians and how many by OLC graduates.

Among the 250 elementary education teachers, 102 are American Indian and 71 percent (73) are OLC graduates. Pine Ridge has approximately 62 registered nursing positions; 29 are filled by Indian nurses and 76 percent (22) are OLC graduates.

Oglala Lakota College is committed to providing exceptional educational opportunities for its students and assisting in the economic and community development of the reservation. Through continuous improvement and outstanding teaching, research, community services, and assessment, the school is moving toward the creation of Oglala Lakota University.

Source: Adapted from AIHEC 2006a.

Photo: Oglala Lakota Nursing Students, 2005 Graduation, Jason Kim, Systemic Research



salaries and less unemployment, workforce and skills development, and opportunities for businesses and entrepreneurship.

### Private Economic Benefits

Private economic benefits on reservations assume a different form and shape than such benefits elsewhere. The value of a college degree, as well as the benefits it can offer individuals and society, is measured not only in money but also in commonly shared perceptions and opportunities. Unlike in much of the United States, a bachelor’s degree does not guarantee finding a better paid job on a reservation. The opportunity for upward mobility is constrained by the limited job market on many reservations. On the other hand, an associate’s or bachelor’s degree on a reservation may enable a person to create jobs by starting a business, foster the spirit of leadership and entrepreneurship, and alter negative cultural perceptions of education for future generations.

**Figure 14: Rates of unemployment on selected reservations with TCUs**

Reservation name	State	Tribal college	Unemployed as % of labor force	Percentage employed but below poverty guidelines
			2000	2000
White Earth Reservation	MN	White Earth Tribal and Community College	8.2%	20.0%
Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Reservation	MN	Fond du Lac Tribal College	8.8%	14.0%
Leech Lake Indian Reservation	MN	Leech Lake Tribal College	10.7%	21.7%
Fort Peck Indian Reservation	MT	Fort Peck Community College	17.5%	35.3%
Blackfeet Indian Reservation	MT	Blackfeet Community College	22.6%	33.8%
Crow Indian Reservation	MT	Little Big Horn Community College	17.1%	26.6%
Fort Belknap Indian Reservation	MT	Fort Belknap Community College	23.0%	38.9%
Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation	MT	Chief Dull Knife College	19.5%	46.1%
Rocky Boy’s Indian Reservation	MT	Stone Child College	17.6%	--
Flathead Indian Reservation	MT	Salish Kootenai College	4.7%	--
Fort Berthold Indian Reservation	ND	Fort Berthold Community College	11.1%	28.1%
Spirit Lake Indian Reservation	ND	Cankdeska Cikana Community College	17.6%	38.6%
Standing Rock Sioux Reservation	ND	Sitting Bull College	18.3%	40.0%
Turtle Mountain Chippewa Indian Reservation	ND	Turtle Mountain Community College	19.5%	35.1%
Pine Ridge Indian Reservation	SD	Oglala Lakota College	33.0%	53.4%
Rosebud Sioux Indian Reservation	SD	Sinte Gleska University	20.1%	50.5%
Lake Traverse Reservation	ND	Sisseton Wahpeton College	4.4%-	--
Lummi Indian Reservation	WA	Northwest Indian College	11.9%	18.3%
<b>Unweighted Average</b>			<b>15.9%</b>	<b>33.4%</b>

-- Not available

Note: Figures include all reservation residents.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2000.

Even with college degrees, American Indians face acute employment barriers on reservations. Unemployment in reservations may be several times the national average of 6 percent; figure 14 lists the unemployment rates for some reservations with TCUs.

Only 56 percent of the reservation-based population 16 years and older is in the labor force (working or available to work), compared with 64 percent of American Indians in the United States (Taylor and Kalt 2005). However, evidence from the IHEP alumni survey of scholarship recipients (IHEP 2006) suggests that graduates from TCUs are employed at encouraging levels: 60 percent of respondents were employed outside the home, in the military, or self-employed. Previous surveys of TCU alumni found similar results. For instance, in 2001, 74 percent of alumni surveyed by IHEP were employed (Cunningham and Redd 2000) as were 64 percent of graduating scholarship recipients surveyed by Harder+Company for the American Indian College Fund (2002). In critical areas of tribal need, such as American Indian teachers, graduates enjoyed high rates of employment. According to AIHEC-AIMS (2005b), 100 percent of graduates in the professional education program were employed.

Graduates believe that their education is a good preparation for employment. A majority (71 percent) of graduating scholarship recipients who responded to the IHEP alumni survey (IHEP 2006) said their education was good or excellent preparation for employment. Earning a degree from a TCU helped many respondents obtain a new job or their first job. These results highlight the important role TCUs play in preparing American Indians for employment, especially in reservation communities.

### **Public Economic Benefits**

#### *Tribal workforce training and skills development*

TCUs play an important role in workforce and skills development for local members of tribal communities. They provide access to higher education for many students who are able to attend only because of the close proximity to home. The overwhelming majority (82 percent) of graduating scholarship recipients (IHEP 2006) lived less than 50 miles from their tribal college; half lived less than 10 miles from school. Almost half of the survey respondents said they chose the TCU because it was near their home.

Tribal colleges play a significant role in emphasizing areas that are of particular importance to the development of reservation communities, which is a central part of their mission. Cunningham (2000) matched the array of local needs and employers with majors offered in 22 of the TCUs. For example, the College of Menominee Nation in Wisconsin offers a timber harvesting program that corresponds to the presence of the lumber industry in the area. At Sitting Bull College in North Dakota, the nonprofit SBC Construction Company provides students with employment opportunities. The college program works closely with the tribe and has completed several projects, including housing, garages, and a day care center (“On Campus: Sitting Bull Starts Construction,” 1997).

In 2003, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights chronicled some of the critical areas of need in native communities in *A Quiet Crisis: Federal Funding and Unmet Needs in Indian Country* (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 2003). These areas include health services, primary and secondary education, and rural farm and business development. Enrollment and completion data show that TCUs are making progress in training students to focus on these critical needs. According to the IHEP alumni survey (IHEP 2006), many graduates are completing degrees in areas such as business management, education, nursing and health care, social work and human services, and computer technology.

Similarly, according to 2005 data from the AIHEC-AIMS project (AIHEC-AIMS 2005b), the largest enrollment at TCUs was in areas of community need: vocational/career programs, hospitality programs, business and accounting, education, social sciences, law enforcement, and human services. Degree and certificate completions correspond with these major program areas. Nationally, American Indian students are more likely than the general pool of students to major in disciplines such as social/behavioral work, education, and computer/informational science, which are most helpful to the needs of reservations (figure 15) (USDE 2001).

Data from the tribal colleges also reflect this trend at the associate’s degree level: 16 percent of TCU associate’s degrees are in social science programs such as social work and law enforcement; 13 percent are in education; and 13 percent are in business. (AIHEC-AIMS 2005b). At the graduate level, the most popular subject for all American Indian students is education (USDE 2005a). Two TCUs—Oglala Lakota College and Sinte Gleska University—offer master’s degree programs in education. Master’s degrees in education accounted for the majority of all master’s degrees awarded in 2004 (USDE 2005b).

**Figure 15: Percentage distribution of majors in 2001 for freshmen who began in 1995–96**

	AMERICAN INDIANS	TOTAL
Social/behavioral sciences	16.8%	11.4%
Business/management	15.5%	18.8%
Education	14.9%	7.9%
Humanities	12.9%	11.0%
Life sciences and health	10.3%	16.1%
Computer/information science	8.3%	5.5%
Vocational/technical	8.3%	7.6%
Engineering	5.2%	6.6%
Other technical/professional	5.0%	13.6%
Physical sciences and mathematics	2.8%	1.7%

Note: Major when last enrolled.  
Source: USDE 2001.

Through their instruction, TCUs increase the skills of local workers, which in turn increases employment and earnings opportunities on the reservation and attracts business investment (Cunningham 2000).

#### *Greater opportunities for leadership and small businesses*

Many TCUs offer business and entrepreneurship classes. Business and entrepreneurship is a popular course of study at the tribal colleges: In 2004–05, approximately 13 percent of associate’s degrees and 25 percent of bachelor’s degrees were in this course of study (AIHEC-AIMS 2005b). A considerable number of graduates go on to start their own businesses. About 20 percent of all American Indian students major in business (USDE 2005a), but 25 percent of TCU scholarship recipients received degrees in business (IHEP 2006).

Moreover, TCUs often serve as centers of leadership and take the initiative in establishing and managing collaborative efforts for economic growth on a regional level. Graduates of tribal colleges are often expected to become future tribal leaders (Boyer 2003).

#### *Employment of faculty and staff*

TCUs directly affect the welfare of a particular reservation by providing jobs and attracting human capital, such as professors and instructors. Figure 16 shows that average faculty salaries in TCUs are substantially lower than those at mainstream two- and four-year institutions, in most cases by at least \$15,000 (USDE 2004b). However, TCU staff spend money in the local economies. If professors and staff are recruited from outside the reservation, even the modest salaries they receive represent an input to the economy that would not exist without the tribal college.

**Figure 16: Average salaries of full-time instructional faculty at TCUs and mainstream institutions, 2003**

	Tribal college	4-year or above (public and private)	Public 2-year or less	Private not-for-profit 2-year or less
Average salary equated to 9-month contracts of full-time instructional faculty				
Professors-Men	\$45,000	\$67,353	\$60,954	\$38,196
Professors-Women	\$41,125	\$65,649	\$58,166	\$39,508
Associate Professors-Men	\$32,500	\$54,860	\$51,448	\$39,007
Associate Professors-Women	\$33,250	\$53,694	\$49,526	\$41,925
Assistant Professors-Men	‡	\$46,925	\$44,128	\$36,552
Assistant Professors-Women	\$25,690	\$45,596	\$42,972	\$35,265
Instructors-Men	\$32,391	\$38,500	\$43,684	\$31,933
Instructors-Women	\$31,668	\$37,384	\$42,364	\$32,395
Average number of full-time instructional faculty	78	1,616	1,121	83

‡ Not enough cases for a reliable estimate.

Source: USDE 2004b.

## Social Benefits for Reservations

In addition to economic benefits, both the students who attend TCUs and the colleges themselves contribute to the social health of reservation communities. Many of the students at tribal colleges come from families that have experienced unemployment and poverty. The economic context of poverty provides fertile ground for additional social challenges—lack of employment and low per capita incomes, poor physical health, high rates of violence, and a low perceived value of education—that create a cycle of poverty. The tribal colleges in these communities are the agents of change. Students and graduates of TCUs can help break the cycle of poverty by being role models for the younger generation and giving back to their communities. TCU students demonstrate

### PROFILE

## Sara Yazzie



**Sara Yazzie** has worn many hats in her extraordinary life: She is a 50-year-old single mother and grandmother, a student leader, a law student; a domestic violence advocate, and a Coca-Cola scholar.

After many years in an abusive relationship, Sara sought to advance herself by enrolling at Crownpoint Institute of Technology (CIT) in New Mexico. She initially thought she would get her associate's degree and, perhaps, a job. But with the encouragement and support of faculty, staff, and students at CIT, she ran

for student body secretary and won. Eventually, she rose to become student body president. In this position, Sara opened the student senate office every morning to listen to student concerns and was instrumental in scheduling student events: basketball tournaments, ice cream socials, and an honors banquet. Her hard work was recognized: She was named a CIT Student of the Year and was also awarded a \$5,000 Coca-Cola scholarship. Sara wrote letters of thanks to all those who had supported her throughout her time at CIT.

Sara graduated in December 2005 with an associate of arts degree in the law advocate program. She is currently studying for the Navajo bar exam with the career goal of becoming a Navajo Nation tribal judge. In her free time, Sara enjoys music, running, and quilting.

Source: Adapted from AIHEC-AIMS 2005b.  
Photo: Sara Yazzie from Crownpoint Institute of Technology

## PROFILE

# Nikki Smoker



**Nikki Smoker** is in her early 40s and has dealt with personal tragedies that would crush most people. In the past few years, Nikki has lost a 16-year-old daughter to heart failure, a 20-year-old son to a car accident, and her husband of many years to cancer.

Nikki is her family's "Ina" (grandmother), and she has raised many foster children and children of extended family members who either could not or would not raise them. When her son was killed, his wife and new baby lived with Nikki. At one point, Nikki and her husband had 15 people living in their four-bedroom home. They managed on an income from her husband's job that was below the federal poverty level. Nikki responded in every instance where she was

needed. Her home is always open to those in need.

Even as she cared for others, Nikki attended college and fulfilled her dream of completing the tribal law and justice program; in 2003, she received a certificate in tribal law and justice from Fort Peck Community College in Montana. She plans to attend a four-year university after graduation.

Nikki also ran for Tribal Council. Although she has many supporters, she was not elected in her first attempt, but she may try again. To be healthy and thrive, the tribe needs leaders, parents, and grandparents like Nikki Smoker.

Source: Adapted from AIHEC-AIMS 2005b.  
Photo: Nikki Smoker of Fort Peck Community College

## PROFILE

# Joey Awonohopay



In 2005, the College of Menominee Nation (CMN) named **Joey Awonohopay** Student of the Year. Joey had been a federal Student Support Services program participant since he started at CMN in 2003.

Joey comes from a Menominee family that has remained rooted in their language, culture, and beliefs. When other religious practices were brought onto the Menominee Indian Reservation, some families, including the Awonohopays, chose to move deep into the woods to maintain their tribal ways. Joey has chosen to remain in the small village of Zoar, where his ancestors lived. He and his

brothers were traditionally raised by their grandparents, and he is carrying out their wishes to keep the Menominee language and culture alive. Many Menominee people and people from other local tribes look to Joey and his family for spiritual guidance and direction on cultural practices and traditional beliefs.

Each year the tribe loses elders. It is extremely important to make every effort to learn their teachings so they can be passed down to future generations. Joey is a vehicle for this knowledge because of the precious lessons he has learned from his grandparents, aunts, and uncles. He has a wealth of knowledge about the Menominee culture and is always willing to share this with anyone who seeks his assistance. Joey is pursuing a degree in education so he can become a certified teacher in a reservation school. The number of male Menominee teachers can be counted on one hand, so his goal of becoming a role model is highly commendable and meets a great need.

In addition, Joey has volunteered much time to work with local schools—teaching singing, drumming, fishing, and sap collecting, and generally sharing of his knowledge. He believes that the community needs someone to teach the children about their language and culture; he has always done whatever he can for the children and the community. Very appropriately, Joey was named 2006 Father of the Year and Wisconsin Indian Education Student of the Year.

Source: Adapted from AIHEC-AIMS 2005b.  
Photo: Joey Awonohopay of the College of Menominee Nation

## PROFILE

# Corey Yellow Boy



**Corey Yellow Boy** has traveled the world and served his country in the U.S. Army; he is now working hard to complete a degree in Lakota studies and education at Oglala Lakota College in South Dakota. Corey is a fluent Lakota speaker whose passion is evident regarding the need to pass the Lakota culture on to children in positive ways. Corey is an outstanding example of how OLC students are embracing their culture with the goal of serving their own reservation community.

Source: Adapted from AIHEC-AIMS 2005b.  
Photo: Corey Yellow Boy from Oglala Lakota College

the unique role of tribal colleges in the community in educating and nurturing members of society to help them be productive and break the cycle of poverty.

The goals and activities of students translate into other direct benefits to communities, such as the provision of social services, the preservation of language and tradition, and the encouragement of further educational opportunities.

### *Mitigation of social problems*

Tribal Colleges and Universities provide vital services to their communities, including social support and community education programs that help meet the needs of American Indians who live on reservations. For example, Fort Peck Community College in Montana sees the family as the center of its educational program. It offers a variety of courses on traditional parenting, as well as family literacy programs. The college helps students address issues related to transportation, child care, alcohol and substance abuse, counseling, and finding money to attend and pay for funerals (Mainor 2001). According to the AIHEC-AIMS Fact Book, counseling and transportation services are the most frequently used student support services (AIHEC-AIMS 2005a).

TCUs offer a variety of social services to help students and community members deal with social problems. American Indian youth are exposed to violence and have the highest injury-related death rates in the nation according to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (2006). Tribal colleges offer family life and parenting courses as well as domestic and community violence prevention programs. High

rates of diabetes and of alcohol and substance abuse are ongoing challenges on the reservation. To address the community's wellness needs, many schools open their athletic facilities for health and fitness programs as well as drug prevention and awareness programs. Tribal colleges also serve their communities by offering adult basic education courses and by allowing community members to use their libraries (AIHEC-AIMS 2005b).

In addition to offering services and courses to community members, many TCUs employ an education model that results in the sharing of benefits for students, their families, and community members. For example, the Family Education Model was developed and implemented at TCUs in Montana; it is based on social work principles that consider family members as important partners in the education process (Ortiz and HeavyRunner 2003). This model allows students and their families to share in cultural activities sponsored by the schools, and it integrates families into the education process.

#### *Preservation of language and traditions*

Tribal colleges are the citadels of tribal languages and cultures. American Indian languages are an integral part of the curriculum at TCUs, and they are taught with a particular regard for tradition and teaching methodology. In fact, it is the orientation toward traditional teaching methods that distinguishes the TCU experience for many students. Cultural traditions are integrated into various aspects of the curriculum, and the community is invited to participate in the cultural education of TCU students.

For example, Chief Dull Knife College in Lame Deer, Montana, holds Native American Week every September. Community members participate with tribal college students and staff in a variety of activities, such as a bow and arrow shoot; a tipi-raising class and contest; a "handgame" tournament; and cultural mini-courses that demonstrate cutting dry meat, making frybread, and sculpting arrowheads. In addition to the educational curriculum and community activities, tribal colleges preserve their heritage and culture through tribal archives housed in the college libraries (AIHEC-AIMS 2005b).

#### *Leadership development*

TCUs often serve as centers of leadership, taking the initiative to create "faucets" for economic growth by establishing collaborative efforts on a regional level. Many of these institutions offer small business development workshops, and many are leaders in promoting economic development in their states.

Tribal colleges are expected to produce future tribal leaders (Ambler 2002). Recently, tribal colleges have achieved this objective through the Leadership Fellows program funded by the Kellogg Foundation and in partnership with the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education, which represents Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities. Over three years, 28 tribal college faculty and staff were mentored by tribal college presidents and participated in seminars to address the needs of tribal colleges and their communities. Most of the Leadership Fellows advanced their careers by continuing their postgraduate education; many were promoted within their college, including two who serve as president (AIHEC 2006b).

# Little Big Horn College

## A Leader in Regional Economic Development



The Crow Indian Reservation covers approximately 2 million acres of remote land in south-central Montana; it suffers the highest poverty and unemployment rates in the state. **Little Big Horn College (LBHC)** promotes economic development on the reservation through two important community assets: agriculture and tourism. Agriculture is a major industry

in Montana, and tourism is one of the state's fastest growing sectors. LBHC spearheaded the development of the Crow Chamber of Commerce, which has brought local agribusinesses together to create a comprehensive economic development plan for the reservation. A member of the Montana Tourism Alliance, LBHC enhances tourism opportunities by training local artisans in marketing, e-commerce, and small business management. In 2003, the tourism project generated 25 summer jobs for students and drew 152 participants to a performing arts workshop. Local artisans learned how to showcase their products via the Internet to a global marketplace, while tourists experienced the richness of Crow culture.

Source: Adapted from AIHEC 2004.

Photo: Little Big Horn Battlefield and Monument, Little Big Horn College website

### *Provision of additional educational opportunities*

One of the collective goals of TCUs is to prepare students for further education. American Indians earn about 1 percent of all bachelor's degrees conferred in the United States (USDE 2004). Most of the TCUs are two-year institutions that grant associate's degrees; seven offer bachelor's degree programs, and many others have established agreements with mainstream institutions that allow students to work toward a bachelor's degree from the TCU or to easily transfer into baccalaureate programs. The mere presence of TCUs on reservations and the role models of students who graduate encourage postsecondary education in reservation communities.

TCUs help students continue their education, as indicated in the numbers that go on from the tribal college to pursue bachelor's and master's degrees. About half the percent of TCU graduates who responded to the IHEP alumni survey (IHEP 2006) continued

their education; of these, 86 percent pursued a bachelor's degree. Thus, TCUs serve as links between the reservation and mainstream society; they offer students a chance to explore opportunities with outside organizations and provide them with the skills to succeed. For example, the natural and life sciences programs at tribal colleges have an 83 percent and 71 percent transfer rate, respectively, to four-year programs (AIHEC-AIMS 2005b).

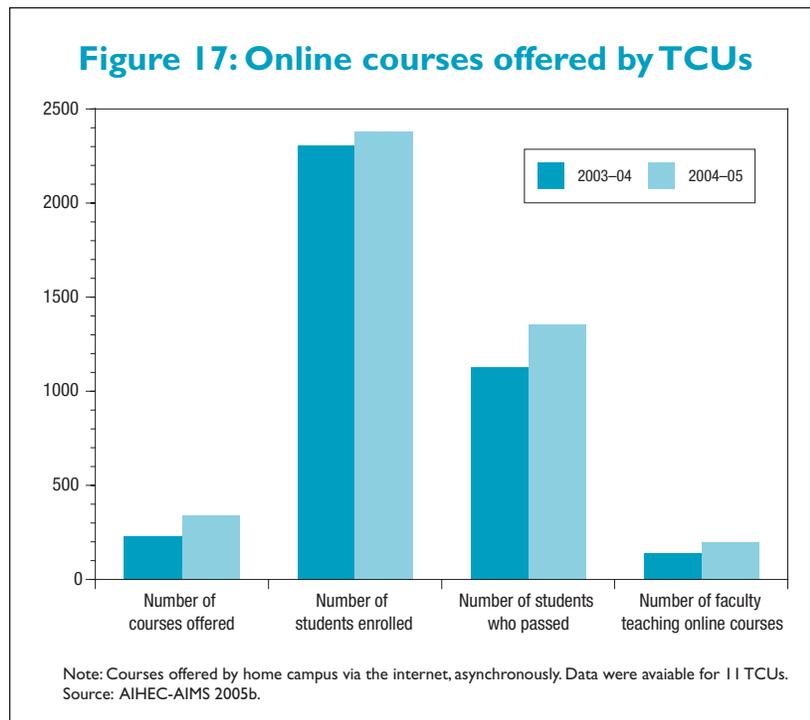
### *Technology transfer*

Geographically isolated reservations often lack basic infrastructure resources such as adequate information and communication capabilities, so it is not surprising that for the most part tribal college information technology and communication capacity has lagged behind that of mainstream institutions. During the 1990s, Chief Dull Knife College in Montana had two computers to provide Internet access for approximately 200 students. Many tribal colleges depended on surplus federal computers and accessed the Internet through a dial-up connection.

In the late 1990s, bridging the digital divide in Indian Country became an important focus for tribal college stakeholders. In 2000, the White House Initiative on Tribal Colleges and Universities co-sponsored a "Prosperity Game" conference to develop strategies to bridge the divide. The conference brought together more than 100 diverse representatives—including tribal, state, and federal government leaders and staff, as well as executives from the information technology (IT) industry and nonprofit organizations—and developed a framework for creating opportunities for tribal colleges and their communities through information technology. This strategy has yielded long-term results: Tribal colleges have ongoing partnerships with the National Science Foundation, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and the Department of Education to build and sustain their IT infrastructure.

Today, tribal colleges have T-1 Internet access and state-of-the-art computer labs. They have emerged as leaders in the application and acquisition of new communication technologies. For example, Salish Kootenai College in Montana provides wireless Internet access to the entire reservation; similar projects are under way at Turtle Mountain Community College in North Dakota and Crownpoint Institute of Technology in New Mexico. Like mainstream institutions, TCUs face the challenge of staying current with emerging information technologies and processes. In the 2004–05 academic year, TCUs implemented a variety of IT upgrades, the most common being server upgrades, new computers, and new enterprise management software systems (AIHEC-AIMS 2005b).

Tribal colleges use their IT infrastructure in several ways. Over half of the colleges open their libraries and computer labs for community use. Often, the tribal college is the only place on a reservation that can provide access to computers and the Internet. Sharing these resources affects the reservation both economically and socially—not only does the college link the reservation to the outside world for business purposes, it fosters the formation of critical links between the school and the community. A major component of IT infrastructure at tribal colleges is distance education. Many potential students live far away from the main campus and do not have



reliable support services, such as transportation, to allow them to attend classes. Distance education is critical to provide educational access to such students. Eleven tribal colleges provide online distance education and many more offer courses through satellite or interactive TV. According to the AIHEC-AIMS survey (2005b),

the number of students, number of classes offered, and number of faculty teaching online courses increased from the 2003–04 academic year to 2004–05 (figure 17).

## Summary

In this section, we described the potential benefits of higher education for American Indians as a group and for students attending TCUs in particular. If more American Indian students attended college, more of these benefits would be realized. However, as we will see in the next section, the costs of higher education are quite high, and investment in access of American Indians to education is not sufficient.

# Investing in Higher Education for American Indians

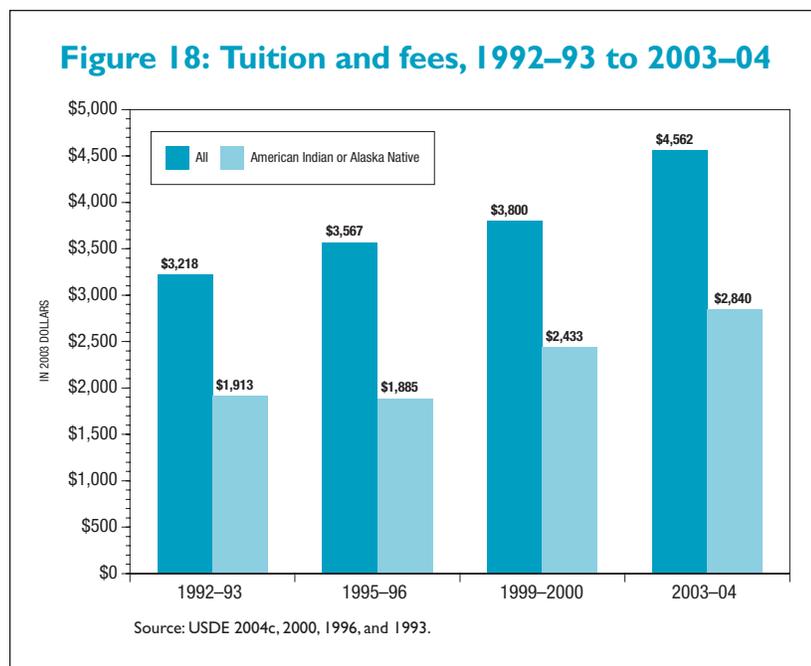
To receive the benefits of education, American Indians must be able to enroll in college. One of the most important aspects of providing access to higher education is ensuring that those who want a postsecondary education can afford it. This issue is especially important in light of the ever-increasing tuition rates and the increasing number of American Indian high school graduates, in both absolute and percentage terms. The costs of paying for higher education are primarily spread among family and student contributions, federal and state financial aid, and government appropriations. In this section we look at the prices (tuition and fees) American Indian students face, their ability to pay for college, student aid, and the funds available for TCUs and American Indian higher education from state and federal governments.

## Trends: Rising Tuition and Ability to Pay

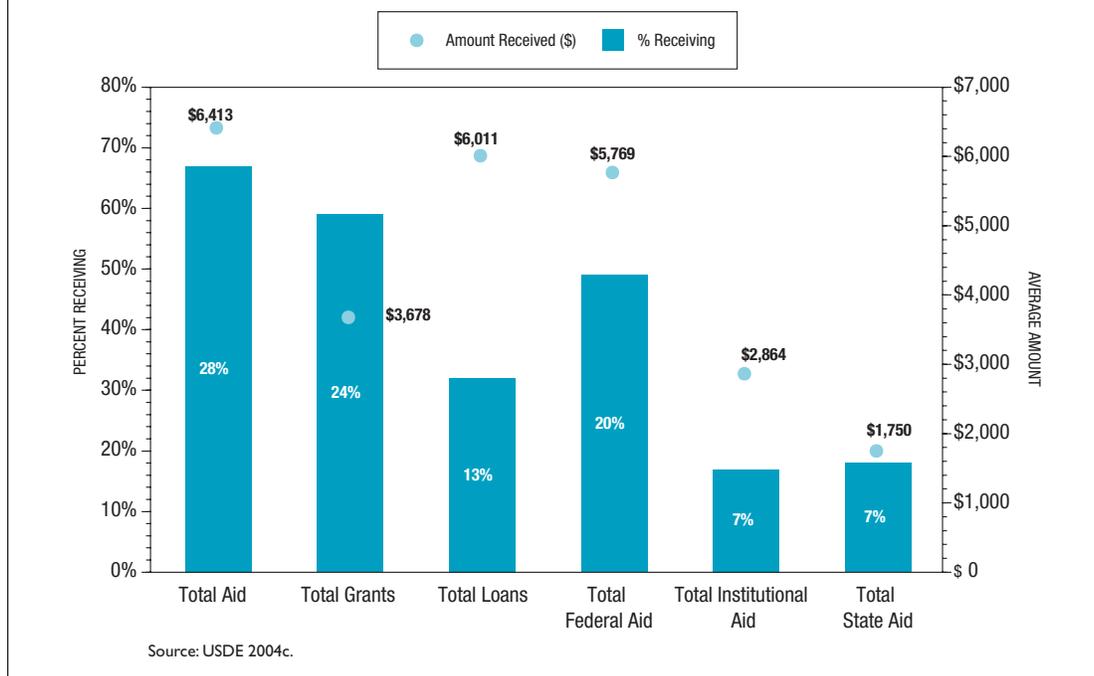
All college students have been facing rising tuition prices. For example, between 2001–02 to 2006–07, published tuition rates in constant 2006 dollars increased by an average of \$1,510 (35 percent) at four-year public institutions; \$2,256 (11 percent) at four-year private institutions; and \$425 (23 percent) at two-year public institutions (College Board 2006a). Meanwhile, average per capita income over the period 2000 to 2005 fell slightly for the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau 2006a).

American Indians similarly are facing increases in tuition rates across all types of

institutions, especially in recent years (figure 18). In 2003–04, American Indian students faced an average tuition of \$2,840 overall (USDE 2004c). Average tuition and fees for full-time beginning students at TCUs are similar, at \$2,298 in 2004–05 (USDE 2004d). These fees may seem low (especially when



**Figure 19: Percentage of American Indian undergraduates receiving aid and average amount received by type and source of aid, 2003–04**



compared to mainstream four-year institutions), but most TCUs are located in poverty-stricken areas where even these fees might constitute an entrance barrier.

It is important to set tuition rates in the context of students' ability to pay given relatively low incomes. One must also consider the opportunity costs of going to college. Many American Indians must work to support families or give back to their tribes. Attending college often means that students must either decrease the time they spend at work or attempt to do both and face a greater likelihood of dropping out.

### Financial Aid Sources for American Indians

Almost 80 percent of American Indian students applied for any source of financial aid in 2003–04; over 60 percent applied for federal aid (USDE 2004c). Almost 70 percent of American Indian students received some form of aid, with an average award amount of \$6,400 (figure 19). Of all types of aid (federal, state, and institutional), American Indian students were most likely to receive federal aid (around 50 percent) and least likely to receive institutional aid (17 percent). American Indians were more likely to receive grants of any type (59 percent) rather than loans (32 percent). However, the average total grant award was \$3,700, compared with a total loan amount of \$6,000 (USDE 2004c).

In comparison with other racial/ethnic groups, American Indians were second most likely to receive financial aid (67 percent) after African Americans (76 percent).

However, the average amount received was the second lowest (\$6,413), followed only by the amount Hispanic students received (\$6,253) (USDE 2004c). American Indian students were the third most likely group to receive federal Pell grants (33 percent), after African American (47 percent) and Hispanic students (37 percent); their award was one of the lowest (\$2,444) in comparison with other racial/ethnic groups. These trends may be related to the relative likelihood that American Indian students will attend public two-year institutions.

American Indians also participated in another major form of financial aid: federal student loans. In 2003–04, American Indian students were as likely as all undergraduate students to receive subsidized and unsubsidized Stafford loans: In both groups, 28 percent received subsidized loans and 21 percent received unsubsidized loans. The average loan awards granted to American Indian students were about the same as average awards for all undergraduates (USDE 2004c).

American Indian students are somewhat more likely than average undergraduate students (especially White students) in the United States to receive federal grants. This is important, as low-income students and students of color are more likely sensitive to grants than to loans in terms of their enrollment and persistence in college (Heller 1997). However, American Indian students participate in the federal loans program with about the same frequency as an average undergraduate in the United States.

These federal aid sources are crucial to enable American Indian students to enroll and remain in college; however, many students must find additional sources of aid or drop to part-time status. About half of American Indian students have remaining need<sup>13</sup> after financial aid; of those with remaining need, the average amount is \$4,207 (USDE 2004c). Trends in federal and state financial aid suggest that this problem will persist in the future.

## **Trends: State and Federal Funding for Higher Education**

American Indian students who attend mainstream postsecondary educational institutions are affected by the same trends in state and federal financing as most American students. In this part of the report, we look at some major trends in funding higher education for American Indians in mainstream institutions.

### **Trends in State Student Aid**

An important component in rising tuition is the decrease in state government funding for higher education, including both direct appropriations to public institutions and funding for state student aid programs. In this part of the report, we concentrate on the Southwestern region of the United States, where over 39 percent of all American Indian students live.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>“Unmet need” is defined here as total price of attendance minus expected family contribution minus total aid.

<sup>14</sup>The Southwest is defined as including Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas.

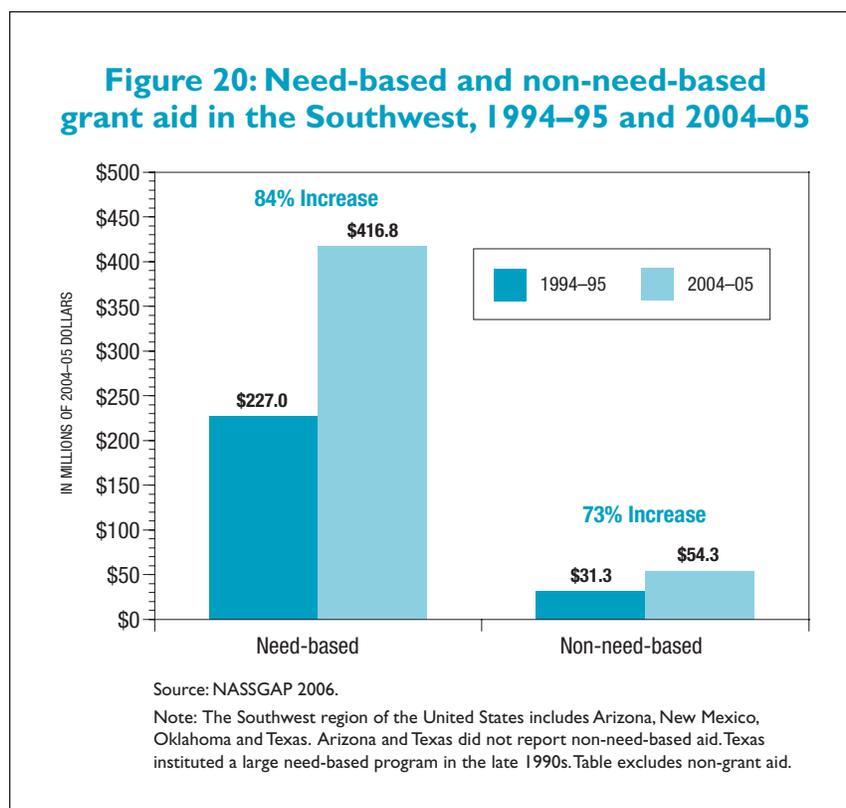


Figure 20 examines changes in need-based and non-need-based state grant awards in the Southwest. Overall, these states saw increases in both kinds of aid from 1999–2000 to 2004–05 after accounting for inflation. However, in two states—Arizona and New Mexico—need-based

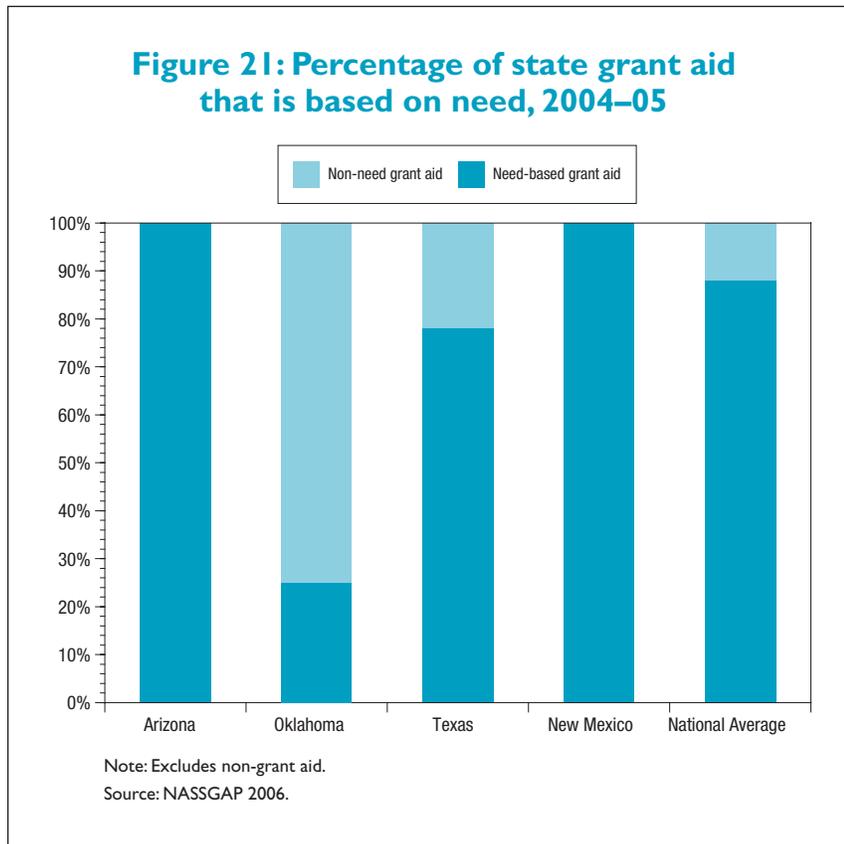
aid decreased in real terms, by 4 percent and 20 percent, respectively. Arizona did not report non-need-based grant aid; however, New Mexico reported an increase of over 100 percent in non-need-based aid (NASSGAP 2006). The growth of non-need-based student grant aid and decrease in need-based aid are especially important for students of color, including American Indian students. If an increasing share of state appropriations is aimed at merit awards, minority students might be marginalized in their ability to attend college.

To illustrate trends in individual states and regions, we can look at the state grant dollars available on a per-student basis in the Southwestern states. Some of these states ranked in the bottom half of all states in the provision of need-based aid per undergraduate student; for example, Arizona ranked 45th in the country and New Mexico ranked 29th. On the other hand, Texas ranked 12th. Need-based dollars per undergraduate student ranged from \$10 in Arizona to \$417 in Texas (NASSGAP 2006). At the same time, the proportion of state grant aid that is need-based varies across the Southwestern states (figure 21).

In recent years, the share of most state governments’ direct appropriations to public institutions has greatly diminished in the financing equation of higher education. At the same time, in the Southwest, state grant expenditures as a percentage of higher education operating expenditures were lower than the 11 percent national average (figure 22); in fact, Arizona was at 0.3 percent.

## Trends in Federal Student Aid

Currently, the major part of federal financing of higher education comes from financial aid. According to the College Board (2006b), the total amount of all federal grants increased by 78 percent (in constant dollars) between 1995–96 and 2005–06.



Pell grants increased by 80 percent over this period; however, due to a simultaneous increase in the number of recipients, the increase in amount per recipient was only 21 percent from 1995–96 to 2005–06. Meanwhile, the volume of federal student loans grew by 86 percent in constant dollars along with the number of borrowers. In the period

2000–01 to 2005–06, loans from all sources increased from 46 percent to 52 percent of total student aid for undergraduates (College Board 2006b).

## Funding Sources for TCUs

TCUs are in a unique funding situation. States have no obligation to provide funding for TCUs because of their location on federal trust territory. At the same time, the federal trust territory status prevents the levying of local property taxes, which are often used to support community colleges elsewhere in the United States. Thus, the main source of funding for TCUs is the U.S. government. According to treaty obligations and the trust responsibility between the sovereign Indian tribes and nations and the United States, the federal government is bound to provide funding for American Indian tribes for a variety of programs, including higher education. In particular, TCUs depend on the funds distributed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) through the Tribally Controlled College or University Assistance Act of 1978 (TCCUAA), which authorizes funding through several sections (AIHEC 2006c):

**Figure 22: Appropriation of tax funds for higher education operating expenses and state grant funding in Southwestern states, 2004–05**

	Funding for higher education operating expenses (in \$ billions)	State grant expenditures as a % of higher education expenses	State rank
National Average		11.0%	
Arizona	922	0.3%	46
Oklahoma	763	6.2%	30
Texas	4,801	7.5%	25
New Mexico	678	8.7%	20

Source: NASSGAP 2006.

- **Title I** currently allocates funding to 26 of the TCUs through a formula based on the number of Indian students enrolled (called the Indian Student Count or ISC). No funds are distributed for non-Indian students, who make up 20 percent of total enrollment at Title I schools. In 2005, the total funding per American Indian student provided under TCCUAA was \$4,447. Appropriations have never reached the authorized level of \$6,000 per student. Despite increases in total appropriations, Title I funding per Indian student has increased only slightly since 1981 (by \$1,616) and, in fact, has decreased by almost 30 percent when inflation is considered (figure 23). This decrease is explained by fast enrollment growth, accompanied by the relatively small increases in appropriations from Congress.
- **Title II** provides funding for core operations for Diné College.
- **Title III** provides funds to eligible institutions to increase their self-sufficiency by improving and strengthening academic quality, institutional management, and fiscal stability.
- **Title IV** authorizes funds to finance local economic development projects.

In addition, funds are authorized for facilities renovation and technical assistance. Recently, total appropriations have increased slightly, after remaining static for many years in real terms (Cunningham 1998; AIHEC 2006c).

### Other Funding Sources

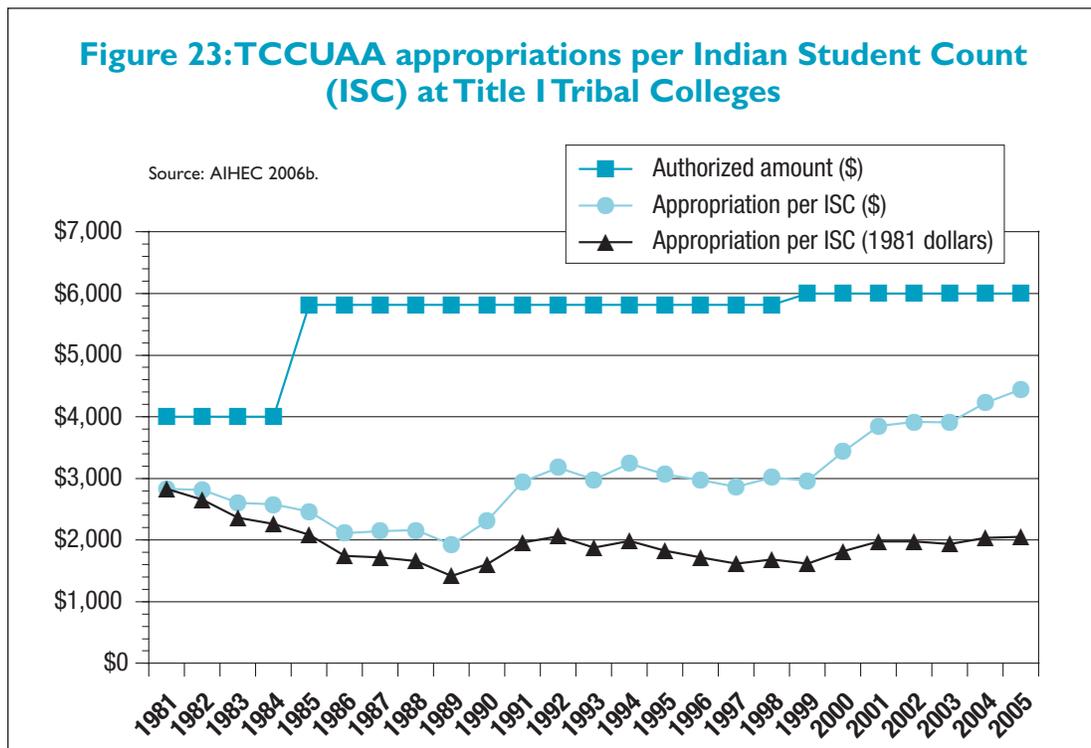
In 1994, 29 TCUs were awarded land-grant status in federal legislation.<sup>15</sup> As land-grant institutions, these TCUs have access to resources that can be invested in additional faculty or equipment to conduct agricultural research, either independently or in collaboration with four-year institutions (Fann 2002).

<sup>15</sup>Land grant status was awarded to the 29 following institutions: Bay Mills Community College, Blackfeet Community College, Cheyenne River Community College, D-Q University, Dullknife Memorial College, Fond Du Lac Community College, Fort Belknap Community College, Fort Berthold Community College, Fort Peck Community College, LacCourte Orielles Ojibwa Community College, Little Big Horn Community College, Little Hoop Community College, Nebraska Indian Community College, Northwest Indian College, Oglala Lakota College, Salish Kootenai College, Sinte Gleska University, Sisseton Wahpeton Community College, Standing Rock College, Stonechild Community College, Turtle Mountain Community College, Navajo Community College, United Tribes Technical College, Southwest Indian Polytechnic Institute, Institute of American Indian and Alaska Native Culture and Arts Development, Crownpoint Institute of Technology, Haskell Indian Junior College, Leech Lake Tribal College, and College of Menominee Nation.

In addition, the majority of tribal colleges receive funding from Title III under the Higher Education Act's Aid for Institutional Development program. Finally, specific tribal colleges may receive minimal funding from other sources, including state block grant programs for adult education; the Department of Education's Minority Science and Engineering Improvement Program; Environmental Education Grants through the Environmental Protection Agency; and rural development grants through the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In addition, United Tribes Technical College and Crownpoint Institute of Technology receive funds through the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Improvement Act (formerly Vocational and Applied Technology Act), while Haskell Indian Nations University, Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute, and the Institute for American Indian Arts receive funding through separate authorization. These institutions are not funded through the TCCUAA (Cunningham 1998).

### Summary

In this section we described the increasing costs to students of pursuing postsecondary education; specifically, the rising cost of tuition and fees. Although large proportions of American Indian students apply for and receive financial aid (especially federal aid), often it is not enough to offset a student's full costs. Given current trends in state and federal aid, this situation is unlikely to change in the near future. A similar situation exists with state appropriations to public institutions and federal appropriations to TCUs. Without increased investment in American Indians—both current and prospective students—it will be difficult to continue to increase the educational attainment of this population. Increasing the enrollment and degree attainment of American Indians is crucial to the economic and social well-being of individual American Indians and of both reservation-based and non-reservation-based communities.





# Conclusions and Recommendations

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American Indian students face great challenges in accessing higher education, especially mainstream colleges. These challenges have included the historical legacy of failed government policies regarding education for American Indians—policies that largely failed to address cultural and other differences. This legacy has contributed to a cycle of poverty, poor health, and lack of support that contributes to the failure of many American Indian students, especially those who live on reservations, to enroll in college or achieve a degree. A number of tribally controlled colleges have made inroads where mainstream colleges have not, and more and more American Indian students are completing high school and continuing on to postsecondary education. However, many barriers to their success remain.

The numerous and extensive benefits of investing in higher education for American Indians suggest that higher education is one of the main drivers for economic and social development of American Indian communities. The enrollment of more American Indian students in postsecondary education, and their achievement of certificates and degrees, will not only assist in their personal development but also contribute to the economic and social welfare of the nation as a whole. However, it will be difficult to reach the goal of reducing gaps in enrollment unless more funds are directed to support systems and other resources that have proved effective in the past.

Each part of the higher education system can play a role in helping these efforts:

## Federal government agencies

- Increase funding for the TCCUAA of 1978, the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Improvement of 2006, and other federal programs that are relevant to health, environmental issues, economic development, and other issues that impact American Indians on their path to higher education.
- Increase funding for need-based financial aid programs such as Pell grants.
- Support formula-funded institutional development programs such as Title III, which help higher education institutions (such as TCUs) that serve primarily disadvantaged populations build their technological, facilities, and other capacities.
- Support and expand the American Indian Higher Education Consortium–American Indian Measures for Success (AIHEC-AIMS) comprehensive data collection initiative at TCUs to include student learning outcomes.
- Increase funding for student support services programs that help disadvantaged students while they are enrolled in school.

- Increase funding for early intervention programs such as the TCU–Head Start partnership, Gear Up, Talent Search, and Upward Bound to help increase the academic preparation of American Indian children.

### **State and tribal governments**

- Establish and increase state funding for each non-Indian state resident enrolled at a tribal college. Because TCUs are located on federal trust lands, states have no obligation to fund them, even for the non-Indian resident students who account for 20 percent of enrollments across all TCUs.
- Improve outreach to high schools regarding the availability of need-based state grant aid, particularly in states with high concentrations of American Indian students.
- Facilitate transfer between community colleges and four-year institutions.

### **Mainstream colleges and universities**

- Improve outreach efforts to tribal college students and their parents.
- Conduct local seminars on issues such as the admissions process, transferring credits, and financial aid resources.
- Coordinate with TCUs and other colleges to facilitate transfers and coordinate programs for American Indian students, and foster faculty development and exchange.
- Increase participation in diversity training for faculty and staff.
- Facilitate the establishment and integration of American Indian support organizations on campus.
- Encourage American Indian students to pursue formal advanced education and lifelong learning.

### **Elementary and secondary systems**

- Ensure that K–12 guidance counselors and other staff are aware of admissions practices at TCUs and other colleges, as well as the availability of state, tribal, and federal financial aid.
- Encourage American Indian students to participate in college preparatory curricula, and provide tutoring when necessary.
- Train teachers and staff regarding the cultural differences in pedagogy, especially in geographic areas that serve many American Indian students.
- Work with local TCUs to jointly address the challenges of remediation and student retention.

## Community and philanthropic organizations

- Provide scholarships and support services to American Indian students who plan to attend college.
- Support community programs that are successful in reaching low-income, first-generation American Indian college students.
- Fund and promote evaluations of program models and best practices that have been successful in supporting American Indian students on their path toward college and graduate degrees.
- Strengthen TCUs with grants that improve capacity in areas such as administrative infrastructure and faculty recruitment.

Finally, all these actors should be aware of programs and services that are already helping American Indian students follow the path from high school into college and toward the attainment of a degree. Many of these programs—which may occur at the K–12, postsecondary, or community level—are models that can be replicated in other communities. If all partners work together toward the goal of investing time, money, and other support for increased opportunity for American Indians, the benefits will be reaped by local communities as well as by the nation as a whole.



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