

July 15, 2010 AIHEC Presidents Retreat – Discussion on Accreditation

(Notes from Cheryl Crazy Bull)

Remarks by President Lionel Bordeaux, Sinte Gleska University:

After greeting us in Lakota, Lionel shared the story of how the script for Dances With Wolves was developed – three scripts and by the third one Doris (Leader Charge) agreed to teach. Felt the film showed the humanity of Lakota people. Hoped for Costner to move forward with the next act with the film to show how our lives changed.

Dave and I go back a long time – he was hired on a 3-2 vote of AIHEC at the time, hard to believe that when you look at how many of us there are now. At that time we always envisioned an education institution on every tribal nation. The problem was we had a very small appropriation. We always welcomed additional and new members because we knew the future of what this meant for Indian America. We sometimes had to make cuts at home to accommodate the new members. We knew we could not expect everyone to be able to bring congressional support. We have come a long way with our funding.

As far as accreditation goes we have to have it – accreditation is really the laws, the customs, the spirituality, the belief of who we are. In our case Stanley (Red Bird) wanted to go with tribal accreditation immediately. Our position is that unless you have your own accreditation you don't really have ownership. We have already given the education of 95% of our youth over to public education – sometimes that is the enemy – they don't always like us and know us. It would be as if when they hit our shore, our people took our children to the shore and gave them our children. We would say we give them to you to teach, to entrust with our future. That is what we are doing. Forty years later we are still talking about it. An Indian school board still doesn't have power because the power still lies at the state level with certification officials, or at Chicago (referring to the Higher Learning Commission) where they have power. They shape our future for us. In a lot of ways that is embarrassing and shameful –that is our responsibility. We need to prepare that little guy for who we are – not what someone else says who we are supposed to be. When Stanley wanted this Chicago said fine, not one of your graduates will teach in the schools – you have to pay our membership, let us come and evaluate you. We had to back up.

We wanted to teach that wolakota still exists, that the blood of our ancestors in their veins still means something. We did what we had to do and became the first TCU at the bachelor's level. That shouldn't have to happen – that validation should come from you, from us. That validation should come from us. It took us 6 years to get congress' approval to allow us to be the carriers, masters of who we want to be. We were told get your own tribes to support you, how can congress support you if you don't. So we got an NIEA resolution, and then went to NCAI. In 1976 at the Dallas NCAI, we took resolutions from Rosebud, Great Sioux Nation, went there and the first vote was not supportive. Sam Deloria worked on the language and the

second vote we got it. I presented as a council member and stood before the delegation and it was defeated. There was clapping from the audience and a cold shiver went through me. That was painful to feel, painful to carry. I was standing there with something correct, something right and our own people rejected us. It came to pass that they supported us.

Finally we had a congressional hearing, Jim Abourezk held the hearing and myself, Dave, Louie LaRose, and Tom Atcitty presented AIHEC's picture. And the National Tribal Chairman's Association actually came forward to oppose us led by our own president from Rosebud. They opposed our legislation, the BIA opposed our legislation. Who supported us – the department of education, the last one that we would have expected – Ernest Boyer.

So AIHEC has had a rocky road even with our own people, because we were different. Colonialism took its toll on our people – even today our people would rather send their kid to Harvard than to one of us. It is our charge to beat that down – to take that colonialism and its measures and take charge of our own system – create that with our own beliefs, looking to the seventh generation and what we want for them. That is our charge of what accreditation is – proving to ourselves who we are. We have proved to congress, to our accreditation people that we can do it, we have already done that. We have shown we can take our position beside mainstream higher education. Now it is time for us to have our own equal position – take our spot there and have reciprocal agreements, that our courses are equals. That is our future. And it is coming. I thank our officials, Dave, Cynthia, Cheryl – we need to create a tribal accreditation council – then we need to spell it out – how we going to operate it and what are its guidelines.

We need certification from all levels – prenatal and on.

That is one of the reasons that AIHEC was born – create our own – and move forward.

Recently I had a meeting with SD secretary of education – looking at our teacher certification. TCSD had a 70% drop out rate for last year's graduating class, this year 73%. Of this year's 254 freshmen, 78 already dropped out this year. We have this all over Indian America – what is that saying to our future? Instead of the doctorates that we honored yesterday, what about those 78? What statistics will they be? Hopefully not what Newt Gingrich said – the Rosebud Sioux lead the world in suicides. As if to confirm that we had 4 suicides a few weeks ago. I had a brother who committed suicide when I was 17 – it stays with you your whole life. It is especially hard on mothers. One of the things we can do to address that is create our own accreditation model. Put our thoughts and deeds into it. The SD secretary of education said SD is failing in Indian education – not just at Rosebud and Pine Ridge but in Rapid City and Sioux Falls – I will take your cutting edge measures if you bring it. For tribes to operate K-12, you couldn't do any worse than what we are doing. It brought tears to my eyes, this man was honest.

I know we are honest in our hearts, you are going to support a tribal education model. A lot of our leaders are in the spirit world, giving us guidance today. Thank you, love you, appreciate you.

Remarks by Tom Shortbull, President, Oglala Lakota College

I was president from 1975-79. This was an issue then and it is an issue now. There is only one person that has ever spoken for tribal accreditation, and that is Lionel Bordeaux. The rest of us have always used the mainstream system and the only reason is credibility. We knew the people would not think of us as credible if we had our own system. Lionel has never been able to garner support. Even my donors ask for our accreditation status.

We do have issues with accreditation. We sometimes get people who are prejudiced. Many times it is a crapshoot. But we are better off with that system because people will think we are a fly-by-night college if we go with tribal accreditation.

What NCA brings us is immediate credibility. I have always been opposed to our own accrediting agency. If some of you go that route, you will not see OLC doing it.

Also you have talked about National Indian University: I can't see why we would use precious federal resources toward this. We have many problems on our reservations. Lionel has said this as well. We need more money to support those issues such as the suicides. Rather than divert federal funds we should use federal funds for those issues. I would say that an assessment is important – has anybody asked the graduates of Indian country if they had an option to go to Harvard, Yale – I would say they would want to do this because it means more money. I just don't see any advantages to go down that route. I am going home because of the death of an elder. To me it is a wasted effort because most of us will stay the route of the accrediting body.

We need better teams, a better experience. We do have problems with teams in terms of their mentality for how they deal with us. (Tom cited his personal experiences with prejudices and the impact on accreditation.)

Dave Gipp, President, United Tribes Technical College:

I was AIHEC Executive Director from 1973-1977. I came in at a very formative time. By the spring of 1973 AIHEC was incorporated in the State of Colorado as a non-profit. Gerald One Feather, first president of AIHEC representing Oglala Lakota Learning Center (affiliated with USD, BHSC), Sinte Gleska Community College, Navajo Community College which was the sponsor for AIHEC Title III funds – they were in a beginning accrediting status as was DQ, The other founding members of AIHEC were DQ, Standing Rock and TMCC. Then Lionel in fall of 73 became AIHEC president. Stanley also an AIHEC founder. Dave Riesling, Tom Atcitty, Maynard

White (SRCC), Carol Davis, Twila Martin, Larry Belgarde, were key people as well. To see a good picture of the early history of TCUs, read Wayne Stein's book – Making Good Medicine.

In 1973, there were 5 major goals of AIHEC Board, which included Gerald One Feather of OLCC:

1. financial development – stable funding
2. curriculum development – by and for the TCUs – specific programs of your tribal culture, important to student attainment/development
3. human resources – improve staff and faculty – qualifications of people was an important part of the experience of creating TCUs - get qualified people in our ranks
4. research – what is research, what is its meaning to us, academically and for TCUs – how and what we want – how do we create researchers
5. accreditation (agency) – NCC and DQ had candidacy and others came shortly thereafter – our institutions needed affiliations in order to have accreditation – needed that recognition for receiving funds.

In the early days AIHEC hired Larry Dennison then hired Richard Nichols, whose efforts were to coordinate accrediting efforts by AIHEC and the colleges at time. AIHEC had a committee – from 74-77 met and walked with issues of accreditation (in AIHEC archives). Accreditation means money in black and white terms – Title III, Financial aid – that was our early dilemma. **Out of financial necessity the tribal colleges would pursue regional accreditation.**

The talk about accrediting agency went away and would periodically arise. The issue is what is our necessity and what do we need to do to meet that necessity. This includes recognizing the reality of the six regional agencies. There are ways to get our own agency.

We had this discussion in 1994 in Nashville - one opportunity was a proposed amendment to the regional agencies legislation. We had a rep of NCA come to us (Steve Crow) and say we will get some Indian evaluators and become more culturally sensitive. Until then we hadn't been heard. The amendment would have established this accrediting agency. That ended the conversation again among the tribal colleges and we didn't pursue this amendment any further.

Recently I introduced an NCAI resolution with others endorsing and promoting accreditation by tribal governments for higher education and K-12. Our current reality is that tribes at their level can pass accreditation, status, credentials – whatever they pass is fine for the tribe but it has no effect because it is not recognized by the federal or state systems. Need methodology to ensure accrediting is recognized.

I am not saying that standards are not an issue – I am invoking the idea that we need to have tribal standards – exercise our own sovereignty, our own nation status. You are either tribally chartered or somehow tied to tribes. (UTTC with its corporate charter is tied to tribes through board membership). I am not saying that assessment and standards aren't important.

This may even be a harder path because we will have to work with others, we have to protect the ability of our students to transfer. Doesn't preclude us from belonging to both.

Also look at accreditation in terms of federal Indian law – our act – it was our own politics that held it up – December 13, 1978 when the bill became law. That legislation requirement for funding requires accreditation. That comes from AIHEC membership criteria – reasonable or specific progress toward accreditation.

Cynthia Lindquist Mala, President, Cankdeska Cikana Community College:

Thanked both Dave and Lionel for their perspectives. Having the foundation, the vision, of our Founders is important and we are appreciative of this background/history.

We also invited Dr. Sylvia Manning, President of the North Central Association-Higher Learning Commission. She is doing some phenomenal work with the TCUs. She is trying to understand us more and the work we do and we are pleased to have her come to visit us.

Dr. Manning: Thank you. I want to share that I regard my role here as a resource. I have been here 2 years and did not grow up in “accreditation”. After 40 years in higher ed, I decided to go back to work. I had experience with accreditation from the other side as a participant. I have Karen Solomon with me, she is much more knowledgeable. She works with about 150 institutions and is a resource for your efforts as well.

To add to the picture of accreditation, I would like to do a 2 minute history. As a personal aside, as I listened to President Bordeaux, the whole idea of resisting death by assimilation and the recognition of the centrality of education, is very powerful. The danger of losing cultures is huge (for everyone). Simply the saving of languages which are the heart of culture. So any little contribution I can make as you move forward with decisions about how to manage your fate, I am glad to offer.

Dr. Manning gave a brief history of the development of (regional) accreditation and national accreditation. These national recognized accrediting bodies are another option for participation in funding especially related to Title IV (financial aid). There are institutions that have both or more than one. The issue of transfer is an institutional issue not an accrediting agency.

The federal government has a 760 page guide for how to get recognized by the federal government. This guide gives the ground rules. All other accrediting that exists, exists this way – the US department of education recognizes this. Then you can become the Title IV gatekeeper. You could have an accrediting agency created by an Act of Congress.

Ferlin Clark, President, Dine College:

I would like to comment on what Lionel, Dave, Wayne have talked about with NCC. It is ironic that AIHEC came to be with Tom Atcitty while at home with the Board of Regents there was discussion about tribal control and what that looked like. Tom shifted from a cultural paradigm to a mainstream paradigm – that is not what our board wanted – it is us, our language, culture, history that we want. Our colleges were created with ceremony – there is no guide. What they were talking about is that we will go to our own traditional ceremony. That is what our philosophy is all about – according to how we (tribal people) are organized. We are not going to partner with NAU, ASU – even though ASU did the study. Raymond Nakai told others “we are not asking for your permission, we are telling you what we are going to do”.

Ned Hatathli was writing about that – he wanted the Navajos to sit at the table. That is what he was talking about – the shift in control came simultaneous with accreditation. That is a continuous conflict still. That is a history lesson – our elders are saying “don’t forget that”. The medicine men are the ones that put this down. You cannot disrupt stories, songs, prayers. For NCC, it shifted everything including started the shift in our curriculum. Dean Jackson went to bring our Dine way back. Some of us are over-colonized. We don’t really believe in our way.

Tom talked about going to Harvard – I went to Harvard, I didn’t learn a leadership song there, I didn’t learn how to do any of that there – I learn that at home.

HLC can’t accredit our Dine language and culture. Need to publish our dissertations. Maybe there is a different way to organize it – maybe it is the four seasons. Dine is organized with the corn stalk philosophy.

Until HLC has Navajo people coming to assess us, we are not in the best place to participate. WINHEC has some of the guidance. Who is going to accredit us? You get a degree from Dine College it is our own tribe who accredits that.

I stand with our own accreditation process. Before our elders pass on, that is the urgency of it.

Cindy: part of our struggle is our own people believing in us. Wodakota comes from the people. This belief is so tied to our history and colonization. (Testimony at state legislature) shared that my people are just now embracing education, just now embracing college – in my lifetime. Just now we are coming to understand that education is the pathway. To learn Dakota, to become a doctor, engineer – that we can have both pathways. Our tribal colleges are good places, powerful places, important places, we are a sanctuary, it is a good place, to question, to look at what our tribes are doing. Through education we unlearn dependency. Part of it is the struggle to validate ourselves and who we are . our people are comfortable with others evaluating us. That is all we know, we have to unlearn that. We have to revitalize, strengthen the beauty of who we are, that is tied to our accountability which is what accreditation is all about. Good for us to bring that back to center.

Janine Pease, Vice President, Academics, Fort Peck Community College: WINHEC process is a viable accreditation model and I would like Lionel to share some of the history of the founding of WINHEC.

Lionel gave a brief history of the development of WINHEC. WINHEC emerged out of the development of relationships with Maori people. He also shared the experience SGU had with Anita Roddick – that we could use sweet clover. Unfortunately we had a group of people who came and said you cannot commercialize mother earth – she called it a silent barrier. One of the things she said was I don't know I am at a tribal nation. Everywhere you went with the Maori, you knew you were in Maori country. The communal nature of their culture was evident. So we created an alliance to look the University of the World for indigenous people. The actual formation of WINHEC evolved out of the forum in Canada in 2002. We developed and signed our agreement – we created WINHEC. Alaska people came forward with their K-12 accreditation model and that is what we adapted.

The WINHEC experience was a shared one from the accreditation perspectives of all institutions. We have only had our first accreditation visits. The Maoris' have completed for their three institutions. We have two native Hawaiian serving institutions, Fort Peck and MSU have gone through it. Others are on schedule – Saami.

Wayne Stein provided comments regarding WINHEC & MSU.

Janine provided an overview of the WINHEC accreditation model and the experience of Fort Peck. Please see the WINHEC site for more information.

Phil Baird, Vice President, United Tribes Technical College:

Phil shared his paper on the accreditation concerns and opportunities that he has begun gathering from interviews with tribal college Presidents and staff. His paper summarizes the opportunities to focus on cultural practice and knowledge and on potential challenges. His recommendation is to focus on students and how accreditation serves their learning.

NOTES FROM DAVID GIPP

Discussion on the Creation of a Tribal Higher Education Accreditation Agency
(July 15, 2010)

Lionel Bordeaux gave an extensive overview of the WINHEC origins for accreditation, and its birth. Janine Pease provided a detailed overview, as well. She provided a PowerPoint.

Ferlin Clark gave a presentation about the importance of tribal values and heritage in our process for qualitative accreditation. Phil Baird gave brief remarks on the discussions and the paper he has prepared. He provided remarks from his experience and service as a past NIEA president.

Dr. Sylvia Manning gave a presentation on NCA, its history and the support of NCA with the colleges and with the idea of an agency.

This was a discussion among the tribal college and university presidents about this topic that dates back to 1973, when the American Indian Higher Education Consortium was first created.

AIHEC: Is there an accrediting body and is it separate from AIHEC?

Is there institutional commitment? There are resolutions passed by NCAI and there could be legislation enabled which could support this concept.

There are key questions: What is the purpose of this agency and what are our goals? What will be the result?

Dr. Yarlott suggested we may want to do this in incremental steps. It may be that the TCUs will want to be members of both the existing accrediting bodies and also be one of its own agency.

We can have a multi-membership in accrediting bodies – institutional multiple participation.

We need to focus on how we educate our students and from a tribal standard of identity, culture and citizenship.

We could use WIHEC as the model for this development. It could also be a way in which we interact with mainstream institutions (Native serving).

WINHEC envisions what “we are supposed to be like and what we offer. The WIHEC process stands on “our own standards.”

Dr. Davis and Dr. Crazy Bull said we need to look at (1) Marketing; (2) an Accreditation (governance) Council and (3) Reclaiming who we are...

TASKS:

Articulate the purpose of an AIHEC Accrediting (Agency) effort.

Purposes: What do we want from our graduates?

We need to set our own standards and maybe they should be higher than what is expected from the existing agencies.? What do want graduates to look like or be? What values? How do we prioritize?

Look at how we are organized.

How the tribal values affect our behaviors in an academic and career development setting?

The TCU's already have the flexibility to account for these values and how they are used.

Faculty, however, need to buy in...

Marlin Spoon Hunter: He noted the issues of language and culture and this should be a focus. Higher retention rates are associated with these topics for success. The local college is able to account for prayer and spirituality along with history, culture, and language. He noted the book "Rebuilding Tribal Nations." This is about reclaiming who we are when we speak of our schools and our accrediting.

We are preparing our children and grandchildren for the future.

Can we survive the next five hundred years? Yes, we can. Relearning our language, and through prayer and ceremony we can do all this...

There was a great deal of discussion about the disparities among our tribal populations – high dropout rates, poor attainment academically, poverty conditions, low completions at the four year college level, etc.

There was also discussion about the loss of language, culture, heritage and history, etc. Ferlin Clark noted the issue of intellectual property and not going too far. There are some things that belong in the home. Some can be done in the classroom.

We need to customize some things for AIHEC. We will need our academic staff and our cultural leaders at the table.

This can be part of the AIHEC strategic plan. WINHEC is already part of this.

It was suggested that we take time via AIHEC to design a framework for this kind of development. We need a working group. Cheryl suggested we meet during the UTTC summit. Volunteers asked for them: David Yarlott, Ferlin Clark, Lionel Bordeaux, Janine Pease, Jim Davis, Cynthia Lindquist, Cheryl Crazy Bull, Blue (IAIA), Phil Baird, Diana Canku, Laurel Vermillion, Marlin Spoon Hunter, Dick Little Bear and others who want to join.

They will do work from now through October and report to the full AIHEC members in October. They will develop a report. The plan will be to convene a group on September 8, 9, or 10th. Look at the Indigenous framework as a precursor on our website. Carrie Billy said they will send the book on this to the presidents.

David Yarlott said this is an investment in ourselves. The measure will be what we do, aside from the speeches. We are framing a process for the future for our people. We will be judged by our actions for the results.

Lionel Bordeaux suggested we should invite First Nations representatives to these meetings also.

Dr. Sylvia Manning was honored with a shawl and a prayer offered by Marlin Spoon Hunter.

A straw POLL: (not taken)

Who is interested?

Who is not (or is opposed)?

The session ended at 12:55 p.m.