

## Nebraska Indian Community College (NICC): Priorities for the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress (February 2024)

Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) provide rigorous postsecondary education and research opportunities for American Indians and Alaska Natives (AIANs) and other rural community residents. TCUs offer higher education that is uniquely Tribal, founded on Native languages, culture and philosophy with strong student support systems and community engagement. Unfortunately, federal education completion metrics fail to consider the unique nature of TCUs and our students. Federal completion rates focus on first-time, full-time students. But success at TCUs is defined holistically and most students attend part-time or are transfer students. Our shared vision: Strong Sovereign Nations Through Excellence in TRIBAL Higher Education.



### NEBRASKA INDIAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE FACTS:

- Spring 2020/Fall 2022: 96% increase
  - Spring 2020 degree-seeking: 116 students
  - Fall 2022 degree-seeking: 227 students
- 114% increase (221 Spring 2020 / 474 Fall 2022)
- Affordable Tuition: \$1 per Credit Hour for all students
- Student to Faculty Ratio: 5 to 1
- Part-time/Full-time: 398 PT / 76 FT
- Persistence Rate: 60%
- Highest level of degree/program available: Associate Degree (2-year program)
- TRIO Programs: No
- NICC uniquely serves two tribes, the Omaha Tribe of Nebraska, at the Macy Campus, and the Santee Dakota Nation, at the Santee Campus, and maintains a campus site in downtown South Sioux City, Nebraska. In 2020, NICC also began collaborating with Pawnee Nation College in Pawnee, Oklahoma while they work towards their own accreditation.

NICC provides students at all 4 campuses and online within the state of Nebraska, access to Morning star counseling and mental health services. We also provide a loaner laptop to degree-seeking students under our 1:1 laptop program and provide Internet service to many students using either in-home MI-FI's or by paying for internet services on their behalf. Degree-seeking students who excel academically are eligible for monetary grade incentives based on their final grades each semester. Using a combination of physical and online textbooks, we provide all students with books and supplies free of charge. NICC also strives to identify non-cognitive barriers facing students and works diligently to create interventions. For example, one method NICC employs is the administration of the NURO non-cognitive assessment instrument to help identify and aid students facing non-cognitive barriers such as food insecurity, housing insecurity, and those at risk of severe PTSD, suicidal ideation, and other high-alert issues.



### Nebraska Indian Community College: 1994 Land-Grant Programs

1994 Land-grant Institutions: The Equity in Educational Land-Grant Status Act created the "1994 Land-grants" more than 25 years ago. Since then, funding for the 1994 Land-grant programs and resources have remained inadequate to address the growing agricultural needs and opportunities in Indian Country.

NICC's greenhouses and gardening programs are teaching students how to grow their own gardens using state of the art equipment. The green houses are both heated and cooled, the water for plant growth is filtered inside of the greenhouse to take out chlorine and other unwanted elements giving plants the best possible chance to survive and produce. The greenhouses provide fresh vegetables year-round for the campus.

## Nebraska Indian Community College: Food Sovereignty

NICC, a land-grant institution since 1994, serves the Omaha Tribe of Nebraska at its Macy Campus, and the Santee Sioux Tribe of Nebraska at the Santee Campus. It also has a campus site in South Sioux City, Nebraska, and collaborates with Pawnee Nation College in Pawnee, Oklahoma.

NICC was one of the recipients of grants awarded to 39 Native American tribes and organizations to help them conduct food sovereignty or community food assessments in their various locales, from 2016 to 2017. First Nations Development Institute (First Nations) provided the grants, totaling nearly \$650,000, under its Native Agriculture and Food Systems Initiative, with generous support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the Indigenous Peoples Fund of Tides Foundation. The grant allowed NICC to partner with the Santee and Omaha tribal governments and programs, and the Center for Rural Affairs (CFRA) located in Lyons, Nebraska, to carry out activities to encourage community participation in the food sovereignty assessments. Mike Berger is the grant writer for NICC and the grant manager with the project. In serving its clientele, NICC has had a substantial impact by making a variety of cultural, educational, and social resources available in isolated and economically underdeveloped areas.

### **REQUEST: \$40 million TCU IT Service Fund USDA – Rural Utility Service**

The ongoing pandemic has exacerbated the digital divide and underscored the lack of broadband access across Indian Country. To address these deficiencies that could leave Indian Country – and AIAN students – behind the rest of the U.S. for generations, Congress must act to establish a *permanent TCU IT Service Fund* within the **USDA-Rural Utilities Service Program**. An annual \$40 million set-aside for TCUs, which are 1994 land-grant institutions served by USDA, would help cover rapidly increasing network, connectivity, and equipment costs, maintenance, infrastructure expansion, and IT staffing.



### **Nebraska Indian Community College: Broadband and IT Progress & Challenges:**

- Upgrades and new laptop for faculty and staff – complete setup laptop, LCD, Dock, Keyboard & Mouse, laptop bag \$2,000-\$2,500 per employee. 3-5 year upgrade cycle for laptops.
- 1 to 1 laptops for students \$800-\$1000 per device.
- New Servers \$5,000 to \$10,000 per unit.
- Software Support & Maintenance costs 40k-50k per year
- 3 campus locations 100mbps internet costs
  - Macy Campus- \$926.18 per month
  - Santee Campus – \$1,069.95 per month
  - South Sioux City Campus - \$425 per month
- LTE Wireless Internet for all students within 7 miles of a tower location on the Santee and Omaha Reservations.
  - Current Tower locations: Macy, Santee, Walthill, and Pender Nebraska.
  - New Towers being constructed in 2023 – Bancroft and 3 towers on the Santee reservation

### **Challenges:**

- Virtual CISO (Cyber Information Security Officer) \$35,000-45,000 per year – we don't currently have this in place. It is not feasible to hire a full-time person.
- Cyber Security policy assistance: 10k
- On-going costs to maintain one to one laptops for students 100k per year.
- On-going costs to maintain wireless towers and student CPE device 30-40k per year.
- Additional IT staff for training and support.
- Would like to construct another tower on the Omaha Reservation to cover area not currently cover by the towers already in place. \$250,000 for tower and base station equipment.
- Broadband internet does not reach all NICC's students, nor does it reach all NICC's dual credit high schools. Local communities with Native American populations local to the Santee Campus are not served with broadband internet.



**REQUEST: \$3.2 billion TCU Construction Fund  
DOI – Bureau of Indian Education**

A July 2021 AIHEC survey of TCUs revealed many chronic unmet facilities and infrastructure needs, including lack of student and faculty housing, inadequate classroom space, insufficient libraries, and outdated laboratories.

- TCU deferred maintenance/rehabilitation: \$400 million (total)
- TCU completion of master plans: \$2.7 billion (total)
- TCU operation and maintenance: \$20 million (annual, recurring need)

AIHEC strongly urges Congress to fund dedicated TCU facilities programs through DOI-BIE to modernize current facilities and build safer 21<sup>st</sup> century campuses.

**Nebraska Indian Community College: Construction, Maintenance, Rehabilitation**

Facilities management at NICC is challenged in a few different ways, lack of trained and experienced personnel is one of the largest issues. NICC's facilities contracting section only consists of one person, it is impossible for that one person to be present at all 4 campuses to monitor contractors as they do their work. This lack of contractor surveillance has led to shortcuts taken by builders during construction causing improper or poor water drainage, concrete preparation, roofing, insulation, and door installs amongst other deficiencies that have been found on NICC's campuses.

NICC's Grounds section (non-existent) is also lacking trained and experienced personnel normally depending on faculty or staff members to repair equipment, and maintain shrubs, bushes, lawns, flags plus flag poles, and the overall general appearance of their campuses.