



Sisseton Wahpeton College: Priorities for the 118th 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. At SWC, 74% of students are first generation, 55% non-traditional, and nearly 20% enter with a GED, testing into one or more remedial courses. 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.

Sisseton Wahpeton College (SWC) has been fortunate to bring students front and center. With the opening of the Dr. Elden Lawrence Dormitory in fall 2019, we can provide student housing for up to 36 students each semester. The dormitory is an excellent addition to SWC campus and the low cost per semester (\$1500) makes housing affordable to local students as well.

Co- and Extra-Curricular activities have begun to sprout at SWC with USDA Extension activities as well as cultural events. This year the Dakota Studies Department hosted the 1st Annual Moccasin Tournament. The Athletic Director at SWC continuously provides youth athletic camps at SWC, engaging SWC athletes in providing mentorship to local youth who want to grow up and attend college as well as join one of the three sports (basketball, volleyball, and golf) SWC has to offer.



Student athletes have come from Nebraska, Texas, and Oklahoma to play men's and women's basketball. In 2022, the Board of Trustees approved SWC to begin offering women's volleyball and men's golf. The season was successful for both teams on their maiden journey. The final invitational for SWC Mustang Golf left the course with the men bringing home the championship. This was a nice addition to the trophy case to accompany the Women's Mustang trophy for winning the NIAC 2022 Women's Basketball Championship.

The college is well on its way to constructing a Student Center with a full cafeteria, book store, business entrepreneurial center, and a commons area. SWC currently offers a food pantry, transportation vouchers, clothing exchange, a quiet room, and mental health counseling.



SISSETON WAHPETON COLLEGE FACTS:

- Enrollment Trends (Fall 2022/Fall 2023): Increased by 15%
- Affordable Tuition: \$60 per credit (Native American / Other)
- Student to Faculty Ratio: 6.1 to 1
- Part-time/Full-time: 119 / 28
- Persistence: 64.4%
- Highest level of degree/program available: Bachelor of Science
- TRIO Programs: No
- September of 2021, SWC received accreditation for our first four-year programs: B.S. in Behavioral Science and B.S. in Business Administration. These account for over 20% of total enrollment.

Sisseton Wahpeton 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.

Sisseton Wahpeton College has USDA NIFA awards in both the Equity and Extension programs. Although each project supports different activities, they share the common goal of supporting economic development and improving the health of the people on the Lake Traverse Reservation through better nutrition and physical activity.

The flagship of the Equity projects was the creation and implementation of a certificate in Culinary Food Science. To date this new one-year program has graduated five (5) students. SWC Equity also supports science instruction and STEM outreach to the local k12 schools, including hosting the Lake Traverse Reservation Science Fair.

SWC Extension supports numerous food sovereignty initiatives including community gardens, along with workshops targeting food preservation, fishing and hunting, animal husbandry, beekeeping, traditional crafts, and gathering native plants.



Sisseton Wahpeton College: Broadband and IT Progress & Challenges:

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.

- Student and community access to broadband is an ongoing issue, primarily due to the initial and monthly cost (\$68.95 + taxes & fees). The cost of software needed for certain courses is also prohibitive for many students, as a result SWC maintains over 150 workstations within classrooms, computer labs, Library, and other areas for student and community member use.
- SWC purchased computer workstations to update systems in offices, classrooms, and for student use (\$175,000). Additionally, the college upgraded servers and other parts of the cyberinfrastructure to support distance learning and enhance network reliability (\$187,000).

- Cybersecurity is a threat to all institutions, regardless of size. Unfortunately, the cost of implementing appropriate security measures and purchasing cyber-insurance is not proportional for small colleges such as SWC. This last year, the college secured grant funding to invest over \$100,000 to purchase new hardware and software packages to enhance cybersecurity. More will be required by our insurance company next year to renew the college's coverage, with annual costs (antivirus/antimalware, network protection, multifactor authentication, etc.) will exceed \$50,000 in future years.
- Implementation of a 10Gb infrastructure is approximately 80% complete.



**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 21st century campuses.



Sisseton Wahpeton College: Construction, Maintenance, Rehabilitation

- Sisseton Wahpeton College was established in 1978 utilizing a repurposed k12 school. Utilizing competitive grant funds, SWC was able to add on to the small building. The last addition was the college's library.
- The \$1.8M new dormitory (opened fall 2019) was built on grant private and federal funds and a USDA Loan.
- A recent proposal from SWC to the Sisseton Wahpeton Tribe created a \$4.7M set aside added to the college's \$3.2M construction fund. These funds will be utilized for the new Student Center
- Currently, the college buildings and infrastructure are becoming dated and require maintenance.

- Roofing, HVAC, Sewer & Water, and internal components (flooring, drywall & paint, furnishings, and electrical).
- Utilizing HEERF monies to offset student debt has contributed to increased enrollment, persistence, and retention rates at SWC
- Increased student enrollment for the college brings on the need for additional classroom space and faculty offices. The onset of COVID19 pandemic in spring 2020 disrupted the college climate, but the students continued to persevere. Enrollment, in spite of a brief decline in fall 2020, has continuously increased along with the need for additional classroom space.