



Tohono O'odham Community College Priorities for the 118th Congress February 2024

Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs)- Overview

Tribal Colleges and Universities provide rigorous college education and research opportunities for Native Americans, Alaskan Natives (AIANs), and other rural community residents, many of whom might not be able to access college if TCUs did not provide the opportunity. Besides making higher education accessible in often remote rural settings - like that of TOCC in the heart of the Sonoran Desert - TCUs embrace a dual mission that provides students an excellent education and an opportunity for them to reclaim and celebrate their rich tribal heritages of language, sense of place, and culture. It's a potent combination and the results, both in terms of standard metrics emphasizing retention and persistence, and qualitative accounts from students themselves testifying to the power of regaining connections to indigenous knowledge are heartening and growing.



Tohono O'odham Community College – A Young TCU at a Glance



- In the heart of the Sonoran Desert 60 miles west of Tucson and 20 miles north of the Mexican border
- Soaring student enrollment – from 211 in 2015 to 440 in 2020 to 1250 in spring 2024: >500% increase
- Boasting the lowest tuition in Arizona: Free for Native members of 574 recognized tribes; 34.25/credit for all others
- Delivering Associate degrees and certificates through online and face-to-face classes
- Providing mental and physical wellness programs, healthy meals, co-curricular events
- Supporting student success through advising, counseling, tutoring, and cultural activities

- Hosting the O’odham Language Center toward language reclamation and revitalization
- Providing apprenticeship training and Journey person certification in carpentry, electrical, and plumbing
- Farming vegetable and grain crops including heritage varieties of tepary beans and other plant foods thereby addressing food deserts and preserving genetic diversity while teaching students modern and traditional farming techniques, a charge that meshes with TOCC’s role as a 1994 Land Grant institution



Construction and Maintenance at TOCC

TOCC’s physical plant at its main Black Mountain Campus is taking shape in large part due to the availability of Title III funds that the College has used for its new combination Arts Sciences Administration building completed in Fall 2021 and an O’odham Language Center scheduled for completion in May 2024. Additional dorms, faculty housing, a student union, and a replacement building that could provide space for student services support staff currently housed in a steel building meant for use for storage of agricultural and construction implements and tools are top priorities.

TOCC continues to rehabilitate older buildings to support its operations. A \$1.2 M rehabilitation completed in 2022 provides excellent space for the Apprentice program but the space is insufficient to support the demand for training from the community. TOCC has done a good deal of improvement to its physical plant with the resources available to it; the potential to do much more if supplemental funds were available is tantalizingly close.

TOCC and the “1994 Land-Grant Status Act

Like other TCUs, TOCC is proud of its status as a “1994 Land Grant” institution. The rich traditions of Tohono O’odham harvesting wild foods and growing crops in their Sonoran Desert homeland stretch back for millennia. TOCC engages students in internships where they learn traditional and modern agricultural practices including growing invaluable heritage crops: squash and bean varieties including the famous tepary bean. They are experimenting in a variety of ways in order to cope with the increasingly hot temperatures that are in some cases stymying the growth of heritage and other crops. The work could be expanded geometrically if the federal government would fund the 1994 institutions at the level of the 1883 institutions.