

## Blackfeet Community College: Priorities for the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress

(February 2023)

### Blackfeet Community College Facts:

- Enrollment Trends (Spring 2020/Fall 2022): **Percentage change 330/337 = <1%**
- Affordable Tuition: Full Time is \$1,805.00/Semester
- Student to Faculty Ratio: 7:1
- Part-time/Full-time: 2020 = 86/244; 2022 = 142/195
- **Persistence = 58%**
- Highest level of degree/program available: BSN
- TRIO Programs: No



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.

*BFCC offers events/activities during the academic year for the students with topics such as job/career fairs, USDA hosted Watershed Coalition Tour, Producer Farm Bill and community conference, renewable energy training, medicinal herbs/roots, ribbon skirts, moccasin making, backrests, belts, rattles, shawls, traditional singing and handgame. Students receive help with job search, resumes, career assessments and mapping, job search, and soft skills development.*



### Blackfeet 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.

Blackfeet Community College: The New Beginnings for Tribal College Students has strengthened relationships with Montana State University. The project has built pathways for transfer to the School of Agriculture. BFCC is working with local producers on the ARMP to implement a Processing Plant. BFCC will be launching a mobile meat processing project through Land Grant programs. The USDA Extension program is working on trail systems that will interpret Piikani Culture land stewardship. The program partnered with a local non-profit to implement a regenerative grazing demonstration. Extension has implemented renewable energy in the existing greenhouse and managed to grow through -40 temps. USDA Extension presented with partners as part of Climate Smart Team that will be awarded five million dollars to Piikani Lodge Health Institute to implement Climate Smart agriculture practices.

**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.



**Blackfeet Community College: Broadband and IT Progress & Challenges:**

- BFCC completed a fiber optic upgrade across campus; upgrades to all the network switches, and an upgrade of the firewall to MX250
- 1.3 M in software and hardware costs
- The cybersecurity setup and a lot of configuration with their Security Operations Center(SOC) for 24X7 monitoring and scan of our current network and all devices. Contract is \$24,999/year for 5 years of service (\$125,000 total)
- Upgrades to campus facilities
- security camera system and lighting improvements
- IT illiteracy needs puts strain on IT
- department staff for technical support
- BFCC is continuously challenged with post covid availability of IT equipment procurement and installation
- Inflation increases are in addition to already expensive IT equipment
- National and local workforce delays have stalled work in progress and delayed the upgrades
- Expansion of fiber to east campus and wireless internet access are still a need for utilities expansion



**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.

**Blackfeet Community College: Construction, Maintenance, Rehabilitation**

- Narrative: Blackfeet Community College major maintenance projects were already experiencing delay due to limited contractors and limited staff time. Certified trades professionals are limited in the community so scheduling becomes a challenge when it has to align to fundraising and grant writing timelines.
- BCC has a signature project in the planning phase; the construction phase will be on hold until O&M is solidified to maintain increased square footage of campus.
- Fundraising and construction/maintenance and project planning support training would be beneficial to TCU Staff and administration.
- Investment in capital projects is conducive to long-term planning and expansion for academic programs and can balance cost savings when alleviating continual upgrades to old facilities.