



# Creating Visibility and Healthy Learning Environments for Native Americans in Higher Education

Declaration of Native Purpose  
in Higher Education:  
An Indigenous Higher Education  
Equity Initiative



# AMERICAN INDIAN COLLEGE FUND

EDUCATION IS THE ANSWER

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## About the American Indian College Fund

The American Indian College Fund is uniquely qualified to launch an Indigenous Higher Education Equity Initiative.

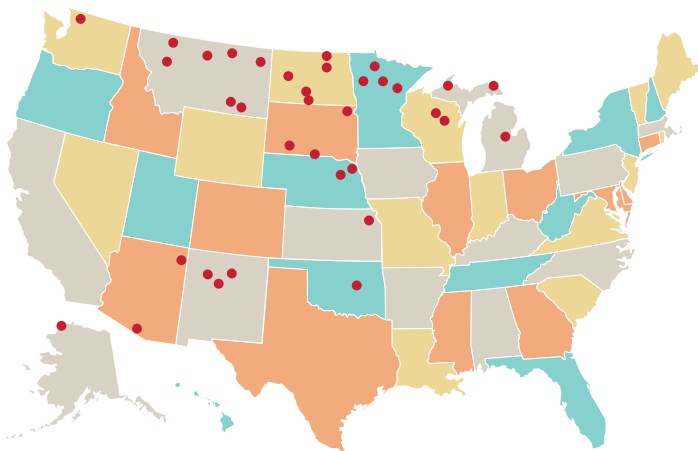
Founded in 1989, the College Fund has served as the nation’s largest charity supporting Native higher education for 30 years. The College Fund believes “Education is the answer” to the social and economic issues facing Native American communities and our country as a whole. To that end, the College Fund provided nearly 6,000 scholarships last year totaling \$7.65 million to American Indian students, with more than 131,000 scholarships and tribal college program support totaling \$201 million since its inception.

The College Fund also supports a variety of academic and support programs at the nation’s 35 accredited tribal colleges and universities, which are located on or near Indian reservations, ensuring students have the tools to graduate and succeed in their careers.

The College Fund consistently receives top ratings from independent charity evaluators and is one of the nation’s top 100 charities named to the Better Business Bureau’s Wise Giving Alliance. For more information about the American Indian College Fund, please visit [www.collegefund.org](http://www.collegefund.org).

## About the American Indian Higher Education Consortium

The American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), founded in 1973, serves as the voice of the tribal colleges and universities (TCUs), providing membership services, advocacy, research, outreach, and program support for the TCUs and their students. AIHEC is headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia.



## About Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs)

Tribal colleges and universities, situated on or near American Indian reservations, serve Native and rural students and their communities. Established by and controlled by tribal nations, TCUs provide culturally based higher education curriculum steeped in place and tribal traditions, spirituality, language, and culture, affirming Native students' identities as Indigenous peoples.

The first tribal college was established in 1968 by the Navajo Nation nearly 51 years ago to provide access to a quality higher education for the Diné people. This action of establishing a tribally controlled higher education institution was the catalyst for a national movement. As of 2017, 37 TCUs nationwide served over 15,000 students, with 13,000 students identifying as American Indian or Alaska Natives. Of the 35 accredited TCUs the College Fund supports, all offer certificate and associate degree programs; 16 offer bachelor's degree programs; and five offer master's degree programs.

The work TCUs do in producing culturally based curricula; working with Indigenous students and communities and tribal governments; and in creating education environments that are welcoming and identity-affirming uniquely positions them to serve as partners in creating equitable, welcoming higher education institutions nationwide.

### IHEEI Organizing Committee

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## Terminology

This report uses the terms **American Indian, Indigenous, Native American, and Native** interchangeably. These terms are also inclusive of Alaska Natives.

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## Executive Brief: Why Create an Indigenous Higher Education Equity Initiative?

In 2018, a research project investigating national public opinion about how non-Natives perceive Native peoples (*Reclaiming Native Truth*, First Nations Development Institute & Echo Hawk Consulting, 2018) revealed that most people believe that the Native population is declining, and most do not think about Native people much, if at all. *Reclaiming Native Truth* proved what most Native people have experienced: Native people are misrepresented if they are even mentioned, and are invisible in American society.

In theory the erasure of Native Americans would seem to be difficult, if not impossible. Today in 2019, more than 550 federally recognized and nearly 100 state-recognized American Indian tribes exist in the United States, with at least another 400 tribes that do not benefit from state or federal recognition but still exist as intact cultural groups. More than five million people in the United States identify as being American Indian and/or Alaska Native as of the last U.S. Census.

Native people live in urban and rural settings and on and off Indian reservations. They are represented in every field as artists, poets, musicians, astronauts, scientists, stylists, doctors, laborers, politicians, preachers, teachers, doctors, lawyers, and soldiers. Yet despite the remarkable achievements that Native people have made while enduring discrimination at the hands of the government and fellow Americans since European contact, *Reclaiming Native Truth* illustrates that most Americans have little to no knowledge about Indigenous peoples.

However, invisibility is in essence the modern form of racism used against Native Americans. It is this invisibility that leads to a college access and completion crisis among Native American students. When a student is invisible, his or her academic and social needs are not met. This leads to students feeling alienated and alone, derailing their matriculation and the realization of their dreams and potential.

Invisibility also prevents many young Native people from even thinking college is a possibility; others entertain the idea but are stopped from enrolling in college because of negative experiences with admissions processes or on college campuses.

Removal is one method in which Native Americans are rendered invisible on campuses. On an early spring day in May 2018 this became national headline news when two teen brothers, members of the Mohawk Nation, made a trip from their home to attend a college tour at their "dream school," Colorado State University (CSU). While navigating the area surrounding the campus, they got lost. When the young men arrived at the designated meeting place for the tour, it had departed without them.

After the young men caught up to the tour group, instead of being welcomed, a mother accompanying her daughter on the tour was suspicious of the brothers because of their dark skin, clothing, and quiet demeanor, and called the campus police. The brothers were removed from the tour for questioning. After campus police verified the brothers were indeed registered for the tour, it had already concluded. The traumatic experience soured the young men's impression of the campus, and they returned home. Countless people across the nation saw the removal from the tour as a reminder of the challenges Native peoples experience in trying to enter higher education.



The American Indian College Fund (the College Fund), headquartered in Denver, Colorado, believes Native people have the right to go to college and to go to any higher education institution of their choosing. The CSU incident, in the College Fund's home state, was just one example of the many obstacles that Native students face when attempting to get a higher education, contributing to the overall college-access crisis for Native Americans.

The College Fund decided to use its established expertise working in higher education with Native students; its connections with tribal colleges and universities (TCUs); its experience conducting and publishing research; and its national education, media, and policy network to create a scalable plan for higher education institutions to make college campuses safe and welcoming while raising the visibility of Native Americans.

The College Fund envisions this work will help college campuses increase Native American student access to and graduation from higher education institutions; Native people will become more visible on college campuses and thus in society; and campuses will become intellectually and demographically more diverse, fulfilling their purpose to serve as centers for free exchange of ideas and learning to benefit all of society.

With the cooperation of the leadership at CSU, the College Fund hosted the Indigenous Higher Education Equity Initiative (IHEEI), on August 29-30, 2018. Leadership from the College Fund, TCUs, mainstream colleges and universities, non-profit organizations, foundations, institutes, and associations, along with Native college students, met in Denver, Colorado to create a plan to increase visibility and promote college access and success for Native Americans.

The College Fund asked participants to commit to increasing the number of Native American and Alaska Native students entering college and earning a degree by:

- **Acknowledging** the Indigenous people on whose lands work is being done and where institutions exist;
- **Training and helping** students, faculty, and staff to call out racism when it happens;
- **Educating** college personnel about Indigenous culture, history, and inclusion;
- **Examining** curriculum to ensure fair representation; and
- **Including** Native student data in institutional data points.

In response to this call to action, IHEEI attendees generated a Declaration of Native Purpose in Higher Education to assist higher education institutions in ensuring the access, visibility, and success of Native American students on their campuses; and to assist colleges and universities as they carry out their duty to inspire and build a United States that values and makes visible Native American experiences and stories.

By leveraging the expertise of the TCUs and listening to Native students' voices to achieve these goals, colleges and universities can implement the following strategies while dramatically increasing successful higher education opportunities for Native students on their campuses.





## Declaration of Native Purpose in Higher Education

The purpose of this declaration is to assist institutions in their efforts to ensure the access, visibility, and success of Native American students in higher education. The intended outcome is for colleges and universities to inspire and build campuses and a United States that value and make visible Native American experiences and stories.

- **We believe** that Native American students have a right to a higher education and to attend any college or university of their choice.
- **We believe** that colleges and universities have the duty to recognize and acknowledge that college campuses reside on the original homelands of Indigenous peoples.
- **We believe** that colleges and universities have the duty to incorporate Indigenous knowledge for Native students to survive and thrive.
- **We believe** in the inherent right of all Native students to have a place on college campuses that fosters their sense of belonging and importance in their campus community.
- **We believe** that colleges and universities have a duty to make visible, to advocate for, and to empower Native students' degree attainment.
- **We believe** that colleges and universities have a duty to cultivate an ethic of care in supporting Native peoples by listening, learning, and engaging with Native students, staff, and faculty.
- **We believe** that senior leadership at higher educational institutions must make a commitment to do system-level work that benefits Native students' college degree attainment.
- **We believe** that colleges and universities have the responsibility to uphold tribal sovereignty by generating meaningful government-to-government relationships with tribal nations and tribal colleges and universities.

## Indigenous Higher Education Equity Initiative Report

### Using A Declaration of Native Purpose to Create Equity in Higher Education for Native Americans

Fifty years ago, a congressional report titled *Indian Education: A National Tragedy – A National Challenge* documented many of the circumstances impacting Native peoples. These included the lack of culturally relevant curriculum, lack of control over education systems by Native people, and grossly underfunded education programs, to name a few. The report summed up glaring data by stating, "These cold statistics illuminate a national tragedy and a national disgrace. They demonstrated that the 'first American' has become the 'last American' in terms of an opportunity for employment, education, a decent income, and the chance for a full and rewarding life." This report illustrated the ongoing crisis with regard to access to education for Native American people.

Although much progress has been made in the past 50 years, the grim statistics concerning inequity in higher education attainment by Native people belie the claim that equity has been achieved today. Only 14% of American Indian and Alaska Natives age 25 and older have a bachelor's degree today, compared to 30.3% of the overall U.S. population, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. And if we do not create equity for access to and in our higher education institutions, the outlook will not improve for the next generation. Currently 27.7% of the American Indian and Alaska Native population is under the age of 18, compared to 23% of the overall population. As these young people near college age, Native American peoples will face an even greater college access crisis.

*"To solve the problem of equity in higher education, one must look at the underlying causes."*

To solve the problem of equity in higher education, one must look at the underlying causes. Make no mistake, it is invisibility—and its twin opposite—the romanticizing and dehumanization of Native peoples derived from centuries-old practices used to eradicate and fracture the existence of Native lifeways—that together work to feed the Native American college access and completion crises. When Native students' needs are not met, the result is the unrealized potential of thousands of people, cascading into potentially tragic personal, familial, social, and economic effects.

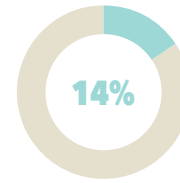
Invisibility is, as stated, the modern form of racism used against Native Americans. In academia, Native peoples continue to be relegated to a mere footnote under an asterisk in reports and scholarship, justifying their exclusion from research studies because of low numbers. In most studies they are simply ignored. This treatment has prompted some Native American scholars to move from using the term underrepresented, when speaking of Native Americans in research, to invisible.

Native people don't fare much better outside of academia. In 2018, the research and narrative change initiative, *Reclaiming Native Truth* (First Nations Development Institute & Echo Hawk Consulting) set out to determine national public opinion about how non-Natives perceive Native peoples. The majority of survey respondents indicated they believe that the Native population is declining (false—Native populations have been increasing steadily) and that they do not think about Native people (affirming the pervasiveness of invisibility). The study proves with data what many Native people already know: the misrepresentation and invisibility of Native peoples continues to this day.

The American Indian College Fund (the College Fund) knows that ignoring these phenomena is not an option. Neglecting Native populations fuels the college access and completion crises by creating obstacles to equity in higher education in the following ways:

**First**, disregarding Native peoples perpetuates the status quo. Native perspectives will continue to be marginalized or erased and discouraging trends and the unrealized potential of an entire group of people will persist.

**Second**, neglect maintains the pervasive deficit narratives about Native peoples, stigmatizing Native peoples' places in society and in education.



American Indian and Alaska Natives age 25 and older with bachelor's degree



Overall U.S. population with bachelor's degree





**Third**, Native peoples are combined with other minority populations, thereby ignoring or erasing their sovereign, government-to-government legal relationship with the United States (U.S.) and diluting the nuances of their distinctive cultural life ways.

**Fourth**, higher education professionals and policy-makers who seek ways to resolve inequities by enhancing the access and success of Native students are left with little to no guidance.

**Finally**, this absence of representation limits Native Americans from seeing their full potential and the opportunities that are available to them.

The incident at Colorado State University (CSU) in May 2018 underscored the necessity that education leaders take action to increase the visibility of Native students' experiences, stories, and lives in curriculum, campus, and in higher education research.

The American Indian College Fund invited presidents from the nation's tribal colleges and universities (TCUs) to meet with mainstream higher education leaders and Native students to together create a scalable plan to address the Native college access and completion crises. The goal was to harness the expertise of all participants: the TCUs' expertise working with Native students, reforming curricula, training faculty and staff to work with Native students, and creating welcoming campus physical and social environments, alongside the College Fund's expertise working with TCUs and their students; conducting and publishing research; and leveraging national education, media, and policy networks. The College Fund knew that both their and the TCUs' expertise would be invaluable to mainstream higher education institutions—something that should not be ignored, as approximately 90% of Native American college students attend mainstream colleges and universities.

On August 29-30, 2018, the Indigenous Higher Education Equity Initiative (IHEEI) convening brought together thought leaders from tribal and non-tribal higher educational institutions, non-profit organizations, foundations, institutes, and associations along with Native students to create a plan to encourage both understanding of Native peoples and issues and to increase opportunity for post-secondary education.

The result of that convening was the Declaration of Native Purpose in Higher Education, as highlighted in the brief.

Following is that Declaration, a deeper look into each tenet, and scalable action items that can be implemented on college and university campuses nationwide as a starting point for creating equity in higher education for Native Americans.



## Declaration of Native Purpose in Higher Education

### Overview

In 1961, 700 Native peoples representing 64 Tribal Nations met in Chicago to discuss ways to defend against the then-federal government policy of termination of tribes. Representatives created an Indian political agenda guided by a shared declaration of principles referred to as the Declaration of Indian Purpose. This work spurred the birth of self-determination and the expansion of economic development for and by Native peoples.

Close to 75 years have passed since that movement sparked transformational change for tribal nations. Inspired by that influential movement and centered upon a responsibility to carry on that legacy, the attendees of the IHEE generated the following Declaration of Native Purpose in Higher Education as a collective declaration of principles to ignite change for Native peoples in higher education.

The goal of the collective declaration is to assist colleges and universities as they carry out their duty to inspire and build a United States that values and makes visible Native American experiences and stories. By implementing the strategies discussed with this declaration, colleges and universities can dramatically increase successful higher education opportunities for Native students and increase Native peoples' visibility.

Mainstream institutions must educate both Native and non-Native students about the oppression that Native peoples have endured and overcome at great odds to maintain their tribal identities, languages, cultures, and unique perspectives, along with coursework for Native languages, cultures, governmental structures, literary canons, arts, history, sciences, and more. Developing an understanding of history is critical to address contemporary socio-economic issues and to support tribal sovereignty and self-determination.

Higher education must allow Native students to imagine and frame their futures and possibilities in a healthy, positive, culturally appropriate way while also ensuring they are visible to non-Natives who can learn about and benefit from the rich cultures of Native peoples.

**We believe that Native American students have a right to a higher education and to attend any college or university of their choice.**

To achieve this goal, higher education institutions must:

1. Examine and expand curriculum to include Native languages, Native histories, Native cultures, and contemporary issues, to name a few.
2. Connect recruitment, admissions, and matriculation as a path to college and career for Native American students from urban, reservation, and rural environments. Today, many institutions limit their recruitment to readily accessible populations or ignore Native populations entirely.
3. Remove obstacles to enrollment, such as financial aid, discriminatory admissions criteria, or elimination based on test scores which are proven to not be the predictor of success for Native American students.





**We believe that colleges and universities have the duty to recognize and publicly acknowledge that college campuses reside on the original homelands of Indigenous peoples.**

We understand there is an interconnected relationship between the formation of universities (such as the land grant systems established by The Morrill Act of 1862), the expropriation of Indigenous lands, and the genocide of Indigenous peoples. Even for non-land grant institutions, the lands they sit upon were once Indian lands.

Higher education institutions benefitted and continue to benefit from these histories and policies. Intricately connected to tribal sovereignty is acknowledgment that college campuses were built on the original homelands of Indigenous peoples. Deliberate and appropriate Indigenous land acknowledgments that are treated as an institutional responsibility can be incorporated in many ways across college campuses to engender visibility of Native students while demonstrating the college or university values and seeks to build relationships with Native peoples.

1. The process of creating a land acknowledgment includes stewarding relationships with Native peoples and listening to their concerns regarding renaming places with Indigenous or inoffensive place names.
2. Land acknowledgments must be communicated and affirmed from the president and top administration officials of the institution and implemented throughout the norms and values of the institution.
3. Land acknowledgments should be given to all visitors and guests. A college or university can educate any individual or group coming to campus, whether to work, learn, or visit.
4. Institutions must evaluate whether Indigenous place names are included throughout campus on buildings and walkways, and Indigenous architecture and design are included on the campus to honor both the place the institution occupies and the people who once lived on those lands and that are still here today.
5. Institutions must evaluate campus names and mascots. Some campuses have continued the names of or continue to name structures, parks, and walkways after colonizers and settlers who have dark histories. Many higher education institutions have mascots, buildings, and statues that reinforce racism and white supremacy. To make a campus a modern and welcoming space, these hurtful vestiges of the past should be examined and removed.

**We believe that colleges and universities have the duty to incorporate Indigenous knowledge for Native students to survive and thrive.**

To create campus cultures where Native peoples can survive and thrive, higher education institutions must evaluate their practices and norms and eradicate those that harm and disenfranchise Native peoples.

Higher education institutions can thoroughly and meaningfully incorporate diverse knowledge in both curriculum and administrative practice by:

1. increasing Native professors across all disciplines/fields;
2. enriching academic programs by including Native knowledge, history, culture, contemporary issues, philosophy, and governance, and ensuring the use of indigenous teachings and learning practices;
3. increasing Native administrators throughout student and academic affairs divisions;
4. and cultivating relationships with Tribal Nations and TCUs to use their advice and expertise to achieve the above goals and objectives.

**We believe in the inherent right of all Native students to have a place on college campuses that fosters students' sense of belonging and importance in their campus community.**



*"We talked about the transition from a tribal college or university to mainstream [campus] being difficult and the invisibility that you feel. I think the strong message that came out was that place is important, and if there isn't a place, then we should create a place within a place."*

– Dr. Karen Gayton Comeau, Hunkpapa (Standing Rock Sioux) Tribal educator and elder

Native students report they felt visible when in a dedicated space or engaged in community and academic activities with other Native students. To ensure their success and well-being, college campuses must create a physical space where Native students can gather, study, see advisors, speak in their Indigenous languages, see others that look like them, seek refuge from culture shock, and reinforce their Indigenous identities that are rooted in an Indigenous worldview of respect, relationships, reciprocity, and relevance. The following action items can ensure the success of a place for Native students:

1. The space should be dedicated to Native students;
2. The space should be staffed by Native people who understand the historical and contemporary challenges facing Native students;
3. The space should offer both academic and social programs and activities that strengthen and advance Native students' sense of belonging and importance, making them feel welcome and a vital part of the campus community.





In addition, to reinforce Native student success, higher education institutions can do the following:

1. Have Native faculty and administrators on hand to welcome Native students to campus to provide them with both role models and the sense of support.
2. Design and implement Native student support programs, some of which are cohort models that provide students with financial assistance, group learning, and social opportunities, especially for first-year students or by major, to create a sense of community and support.
3. Consider designating a floor or section of campus housing to Native students for additional support.

**We believe that colleges and universities have a duty to make visible, to advocate for, and to empower Native students' degree attainment.**

Higher education institutions have a duty to support all students' academic success, but too often Native students are neglected.

Most Native college students today are enrolled at mainstream institutions, which speaks to the vital need to address degree attainment for Native peoples at non-TCUs. Mainstream higher education institutions should consider creating formal or informal partnerships with TCUs who are successfully supporting Native students' college enrollment and degree attainment.

In a 2008 study to determine Native student persistence, researchers Guillory and Wolverton investigated state boards, university presidents, and faculty to identify factors that support Native student persistence. They discovered that from an institutional perspective, adequate financial support and academic programs were the main determining factors that led to Native student success.

With that in mind, recommendations for increasing visibility, advocating for, and empowering degree attainment include:

1. Improve Native student visibility by improving institutional data and answering the following questions:
  - a. From where is the institution recruiting?
  - b. How many Native students are enrolled at the institution?
  - c. How are these students doing – are they making progress toward their degrees? Are they graduating?
  - d. What tribal nations do they represent?
  - e. What is the institution doing to support Native student degree attainment?
2. Provide financial assistance for Native students. Everyone wants to graduate without debt. Financial assistance achieves that end but also has a historical significance that provides restitution for Native students by righting the wrongs of past discrimination.



3. Financial support can come in many forms: institutional scholarships, grants, and in-state tuition for all members of federally and state-recognized tribes.
4. Consider tuition waivers for Native students in states which took Indian land to give to land grant institutions. Waivers are a form of restitution for past wrongs that reduce historical barriers to equity.

On a national level, student data must be transparent across sectors (federal, state, tribal, and institution) to advance policies, to grow funding investments, and to advocate for and enact systemic and structural strategies that ultimately empower and increase Native student degree attainment.

**We believe that colleges and universities have a duty to cultivate an ethic of care in supporting Native peoples by listening, learning, and engaging with Native students, staff, and faculty.**

Higher education institutions have a duty to place Native peoples and their experiences at the center of discussions to inform decision-making when creating policies and programs to deepen their understanding of Native experiences and needs. Native college students make up a diverse student demographic including first-generation, low-income, single parents, caretakers, veterans, LGBTQ, etc., demonstrating the importance of learning the intersectional needs for diverse identity groups.

1. Create individual personal relationships with Native students, staff, and faculty to gain insights to create and nourish an ethic of care to support Native students' well-being in an environment that has often produced harm, isolation, and fear.
  - a. Hosting lunches with students or having planned or impromptu face-to-face visits in the Native community or at the Native student center builds rapport with students.
  - b. Conversations with Native students do more than build rapport, they provide institutions with a deeper awareness of effective ways to address concerns.
2. Officials must form committees and listening groups on campus to better understand Native student needs and social context when creating policies and programs that impact them.
3. Whether working with Native peoples on a personal or professional level, officials, faculty, and staff must respectfully and thoughtfully listen to the input of Native students, staff, and faculty when making decisions that impact them.
4. Understand the differences in culture when working with Native students. For example, family has a powerful central role in Native students' college enrollment and persistence. Higher education institutions can support students better by understanding Native family structures and their significance and role in student success. Native families move beyond the white social norms of two-parent (mother and father) paradigm by including clan relatives, extended family, and community members such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, children, cousins, and/or people in the community.



5. Building relationships that are expansive and multi-generational supports Native students who shared they often choose a college because there is a history of family attending the college, which generates a tradition for family members to follow and to help other relatives access college in the future. They also shared family is also often the reason why they stayed the course in college, with the goal of earning a degree.
6. After listening, act. But first, inform the community of the planned action.

**We believe that senior leadership at higher educational institutions must make a commitment to do system-level work that benefits Native students' college degree attainment.**

Regents and senior leadership have the responsibility to work towards Native student success with a systems-level approach. Systems-level work includes the complex functions of higher education institutions such as financial aid, admissions, academic affairs, business affairs, etc. that ensure the institution's smooth operation.

1. Senior leadership can provide specific direction when creating or modifying institutional missions, strategic plans, vision/goals and policies to increase visibility and support of Native students. Methods should also be designed to determine whether system-level work addresses the concerns and inspires practices that bolster Native student degree attainment.
2. Leadership must hold the entire campus accountable when working with Native students by providing hiring guidance and training so that staff has an understanding of cultural differences and the impact when they do not consider how rules, regulations, and policies can hurt particular students.
3. Training for working with Native students should be provided for all departments, including student affairs, financial aid, and admissions staffs, who are often the first departments that Native students encounter.
4. Academic departments should also receive training, such as how to interact with Native students in a classroom setting.
5. Natives come from hundreds of cultures and traditional backgrounds, so caution is needed when selecting individuals to lead professional training sessions.
6. Campus leadership performance standards should be communicated and measured to better support Native students, communities, and tribes. Staff performance should also be evaluated in a way that ensures accountability and the ability to work with diverse students and ensure the campus environment is welcoming for all. If performance expectations are not written, quantified, and measured, change will not happen.



7. Increasing Native student representation and a sense of belonging by making students feel like they are an important part of the campus community are powerful motivators for staying in school, particularly for people who have a long history of being excluded or erased because of their Indigenous identity.
  - a. Increasing Native student representation can be achieved through admissions or residence programs tailored for Native students (such as cohort programs mentioned earlier or recruiting programs in targeted geographic areas or reservations).
  - b. Being the only Native student in a class, in a residence hall, or even on campus in a mainstream institution is a common and overwhelming experience. Students experience racism, isolation, invisibility, and ignorance, including having to educate non-Native students about their cultures. This fractures their sense of belonging at college and can cause students to take time off from or quit school. Having the support of other Native students, people from their tribe or community in a cohort or residence hall ensures students have a built-in support system, makes them happier, and gives a greater chance of success.



**We believe that colleges and universities have the responsibility to uphold tribal sovereignty by generating meaningful government-to-government relationships with tribal nations and tribal colleges and universities.**

*"We are not just border walkers. We are border crossers. And if we are border crossers, then institutions of higher education must, too, be border crossers. No longer can we allow our roads only to lead to those institutions of higher education; those institutions of higher education must also make roads, inroads, into our respective communities, into our homelands. Learn of these phenomenal bodies of traditional knowledge that you all carry, that our ancestors handed down to us."*

– Dr. Henrietta Mann, Cheyenne Tribal educator and elder

Higher education institutions foster and honor relationships with federal, state, and international governments, but rarely do they make a commitment to guarantee and honor relationships with tribal nations.

Higher education institutions have the responsibility to view tribal nations as sovereign nations with the authority to make decisions for the betterment of their people and the land in which institutions reside, creating more engaged and informed citizens which benefit Native students as individuals, as community members, and as citizens of their nations.

*"I think first and foremost that at a public university it's been in our mission since 1881. It's not a choice to serve all the citizens of the state; it's a moral imperative to serve all the citizens of our state."*

– Dr. Barry Dunn (Sicangu Lakota), President, South Dakota State University



Public colleges and universities have a moral imperative to serve all of the people of their states, and that includes the Indigenous peoples of that land and states where college campuses exist. Honoring these moral imperatives and upholding sovereignty are fundamental to making Native students visible at institutions of higher education.

**To serve all citizens, institutions must:**

1. Uphold and value tribal sovereignty by educating both Native and non-Native people about sovereignty and why it's important. Native sovereignty benefits not only Native people, but also the country in general.
2. Build connections and foster collaborations with tribal nations to uphold tribal sovereignty and Native nation-building by providing a voice for tribal nations on institutional governance and policies that impact Native students and communities.
3. Work with TCU leadership, faculty, and staff to learn systemic and curricular ways to disrupt the damaging deficit narrative that helped create the disparities in higher education achievement.
4. Develop partnership with TCUs to learn about the academic and social issues Native students face and to help ensure that Native students are prepared for college and that their needs are met when they arrive at a mainstream institution.
5. Form councils, presidential commissions, and task forces, inviting the participation of tribal and TCU representatives and Native students.
6. Ensure representation of tribal delegates or officials on state boards of education and be inclusive of TCU representation for the purpose of gathering input, providing a broader understanding of decisions being made across university sectors, and the opportunity to vote on matters that impact Native students.
7. University leaders must continuously forge new relationships to ensure continuity of tribal government representation as must tribal leaders and educators.



## Resources for more information about Native American Students and Tribal Colleges and Universities:

- The American Indian College Fund [www.collegefund.org](http://www.collegefund.org)
- The American Indian Higher Education Consortium [www.aihec.org](http://www.aihec.org)
- ASHE-NITE Paper Series (2018). *Bringing Visibility to the Needs and Interests of Indigenous Students: Implications for Research, Policy, and Practice*. Nicole Alia Salis Reyes, Assistant Professor, Educational Administration, The University of Hawai'i, Manoa; and Heather J. Shotton, Associate Professor, Native American Studies, University of Oklahoma.
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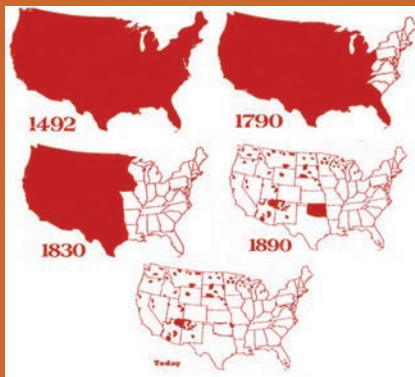


# Appendix – The Promise of Indigenous Educational Sovereignty: Addressing Racial Equity

## Structural Racism

- After contact, genocide, disease and warfare decimated Native populations
- Removal from homelands along with slavery and incarceration destroyed Native ways of living
- Education serves as a tool for colonization and assimilation
- Laws, policies, and institutions create environments that disenfranchise and marginalize indigenous people
- Misrepresentation of historical events and figures, continued use of mascots, as well as pop culture/mainstream stereotypes dehumanizes American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) people

## Loss of Homelands



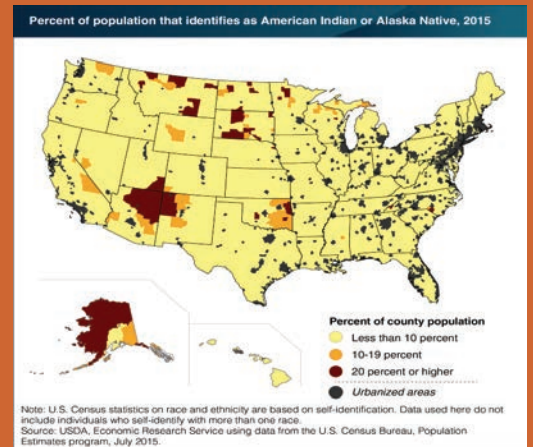
Being in Place  
Being in Sight

6.8 million people of Indigenous Ancestry (AIAN)

## We are Americans

- Our history is informative and our knowledge is necessary to understanding democracy. We are resilient and bring significant contributions to society's well-being.
- Indigenous peoples values are rooted in relationships and connections to land and resources. Our values are important.
- There are an estimated 5.2 million people with indigenous ancestry in the U.S. We are still here. Our visibility adds richness and diversity to American society.
- We invite active engagement of allies to share our history, values, and visibility.

## We are still here



## Student Success: Design & impact from a culturally rooted framework

- Scholarships
- Persistence and completion support
- Pathways to post-secondary access
- Career education and employment
- Leadership development

## Tribal College & University - Capacity: Culturally responsive and place-based

- Program expansion and creation
- Professional/faculty development
- Student retention and graduation support
- Community health, wellness, and literacy
- Business and economic infrastructure

## Indigenous Higher Education Equity Initiative

- Increase access
- Recognize tribal lands and people
- Train staff, faculty and students to recognize and address racism
- Incorporate tribal history, culture, and inclusive representation in curriculum, pedagogy, and imagery
- Report Native student data
- Increase and disclose tribal collaborations
- Create leadership opportunities (appoint to board and committees)

# Promising Practices

## College & Career Success

- Create pathways to post-secondary opportunities and career choice
- Build college-going culture
- Link high schools, post-secondary institutions, and employers
- Increase Native student engagement, capabilities, skills, and knowledge
- Support programs that increase Native student retention and completion

**69.6% of AI/AN graduate from high school compared to 82.3 of overall population**

**14% of AI/AN have a college degree compared to 30.3% of overall population**

**National college-going rate is 69% while at some reservation high schools the rate is as low as 18%**

## Inclusivity & Target Populations

- LGBTQ
- Re-entry & Incarcerated Natives
- Disconnected Youth
- First Generation Workers

**32% are 18 and younger compared to 24% of overall population**

**27.6 % of AI/AN live below poverty line compared to 7.4%**

## Community Asset Building

- Native language restoration
- Leadership and citizenship engagement
- Health and wellness programs
- Native Arts
- Child Welfare and Youth Programs
- Research

## Tribal and Individual Prosperity

- Food sovereignty
- Sustainability
- Non-profit development
- Entrepreneurship
- Business infrastructure



## Schooling & Youth Programs

- Integrate culture, history, and contemporary issues throughout curriculum
- Native language instruction
- Co-curricular and extracurricular activities and programs
- Native teachers, administrators, and para-professionals
- Recruit for post-secondary education
- Therapeutic, cultural supports

## Early Childhood Education

- Build on family and community strengths and partnerships
- Introduce cultural frameworks and expectations of systems
- Navigate gaps in child's access to education readiness
- Influence policies through family engagement with local, tribal, and state programs
- Provide skills with transitions for children and their families

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