

United States Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
Indian Education Series: Examining Higher Education for American Indian Students
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Dirksen Senate Office Building, Room 628

Testimony from Cheryl Crazy Bull, President and CEO, American Indian College Fund

Introduction

Greetings. I am Cheryl Crazy Bull, a citizen of the Sicangu Lakota Oyate from the Rosebud Reservation of South Dakota and the President and CEO of the American Indian College Fund. Thank you for inviting me here today to talk to you about the financial needs of American Indian and Alaska Native students when seeking a higher education at tribal colleges and universities (TCUs).

About the American Indian College Fund

The American Indian College Fund (the College Fund) is a non-stock corporation with tax-exempt status pursuant to Internal Revenue Service Code Section 501(c)(3). The College Fund was established 25 years ago by the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) with the mission to provide scholarships to American Indian and Alaskan Native students seeking a higher education and to support tribal colleges and universities that are located on or near Indian reservations. Tribal colleges and universities, also known as TCUs, are located on or near Indian reservations to provide Native people with access to an affordable, culturally sensitive, quality higher education.

Native and Tribal College Student Profile

Nationwide, Native youth face some of the lowest high school graduation rates. American Indian/Alaska Native educational attainment rates are the lowest of all ethnic and racial groups. Less than 13% of American Indian and Alaska Natives earned a college degree as compared to 28% of other racial groups (*U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics*).

The reason for low higher education attainment amongst Native people may be due in part to poverty, making financial assistance critical for Native student success. The average income of first-time entering TCU students is \$15,262, contrasted with the average cost of a TCU education at \$13,800 (of which the average annual tuition cost of \$2,964 is included) (*Source: AIHEC*). Studies of American Indian College Fund scholarship applicants show that only 1 in 20 can afford to attend college without financial assistance. (*Source: American Indian College Fund*). This should be no surprise based on the economic profile of our students' communities. Seven of the 10 poorest counties in the United States have a TCU, and on TCU reservations unemployment rates are generally greater than 50%. (*Source: AIHEC*).

Tribal college students' participation in the federal Pell Grant program is also an excellent indicator of financial need. As you know, only the neediest students are eligible for Pell

Grants. Students attending tribal colleges demonstrate very high need by the high percentage of students who receive Pell Grants at tribal colleges. The national average for all students receiving Pell Grants at all schools in academic year 2012-13 was 36% (*Source: College Board*). Tribal colleges have a much higher percentage of students who receive Pell Grants, with approximately 80% of TCU students receiving Pell Grants. The number is even higher at some tribal colleges with more than 90% of their student body receiving Pell Grants (*Source: AIHEC*).

Pell Grants help fill some of the gap for tribal college students, but it is not enough. The maximum Pell Grant amount per academic year is \$5,645. With an average cost of TCU education at \$13,800, that leaves an average of \$8,155 in unmet need. Unfortunately, only two TCUs participate in the federal student loan program, leaving that need unfilled for most Native students (*Source: AIHEC*).

Despite inadequate and inequitable federal funding for TCUs (tribal colleges are the most poorly funded institutions of higher learning in the United States compared to historically black colleges and universities and state land-grant institutions) TCUs themselves help to bridge the need gap by writing off an average of \$100,000 in uncollectable tuition costs annually. (*Source: AIHEC*).

With so much unmet student need for funding and the trend TCUs are seeing in enrollment growth by 23% over the past five years as more students see a higher education as a path to self-subsistence and a better life, the need will only increase. (*Source: AIHEC*). Scholarships and programmatic support for the TCUs are the way to match that need. Unmet need will only result in fewer students and lost opportunities for Native people to become self-sufficient, providing better lives for themselves, their families, and opportunities for their entire communities.

Non-Financial Profile of Native Students Attending Tribal Colleges

In addition to growing up and living in areas burdened with disproportionate rates of poverty, tribal college students also face other unique challenges which can interfere with their ability to obtain a higher education.

Many tribal college students travel staggering distances to attend college. The average commute for a tribal college student is 30-100 miles one way (*Source: AIHEC*). And in rural reservation communities, there is often no transportation system in place. When living in poverty, a car (or money for gas) is another cost that makes attending college impossible without financial assistance. Distance learning might help fill the gap for students with transportation challenges, but low bandwidth in many reservation communities and the fact that so many Native people do not have computers in the home make this unrealistic at present for many students and potential students. (According to the *Federal Communications Commission in 2011*, American Indian tribes could be the most underserved group of Americans in the country, with only 68 percent having access to telephones and less than 10 percent to broadband. According to the FCC, the actual percentage, based on anecdotal evidence, may be even lower, at just 5 to 8 percent. By comparison, approximately 65 percent of all Americans use broadband.)

Tribal college students also have family commitments that create financial need, such as children they care for, or elders. Although this has become less of a concern as more students entering TCUs are younger, it is always an issue in Native communities, where extended families often

live together. For the academic year 2011-12, twenty-nine percent of first-time TCU students were between the ages of 25 and 34, with 27 percent between the ages of 18 and 21, 18 percent between the ages of 35 and 49, 17% between the ages of 22-24, 7 percent between the ages of 50-64, 1 percent between the ages of 15-17, and 1 percent age 65 and greater. (*Source: AIHEC*). In addition, 59% of all students (and 52% of first-time entering students) at tribal colleges are the first in their families to attend college. (*Source: AIHEC*).

Tribal colleges are open admission institutions, no student is turned away. This means that anywhere from a few to dozens of students from the rural communities located on or near reservations attend TCUs. As a result, tribal colleges serve a unique role as rural education providers throughout many states in the Upper Midwest, Great Plains and in the Southwest.

Tribal college students' financial need is compounded by the social issues they are confronted with, including the lack of role models, identity and self-esteem issues rooted in historical trauma, generational poverty and unemployment, and continued oppression.

These issues are in turn compounded by issues of academic readiness and lack of modern services in schools and Native communities, including low college preparedness levels of Native youth (74 percent require remedial math instruction and 50 percent requiring remedial reading or writing), and inadequate funding for Title III student support services, and the lack or scarcity of college counselors and 21st century counseling programs available to high school students in Native communities. (*Source: AIHEC*).

How the American Indian College Fund Helps Fill the Gap

The American Indian College Fund is the largest private provider of scholarships to American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) students in the United States. We attempt to fill the need gap by providing desperately needed scholarships to tribal college students. We provide scholarships by fundraising with private donors, including individuals, corporations, and foundations who generously support our mission.

In order to qualify for a scholarship with the American Indian College Fund, students must meet the following minimum criteria: have U.S. citizenship; be enrolled in an accredited tribal college or university; be enrolled full-time enrollment is required for the Full Circle Scholarship Program, but not for the TCU Scholarship Program; be registered as a member of a federal or state recognized tribe, or a descendant of at least one grandparent or parent who is an enrolled tribal member (Alaska Natives may also use Native Corporation membership); submit a completed on-line application; and have a minimum cumulative grade point average of a 2.0 for the Full Circle Scholarship Program (there is no grade point average requirement for the TCU Scholarship Program).

In the academic year 2012-13 the American Indian College Fund funded 3831 American Indian and Alaska Native students with an average scholarship of \$1,403 per recipient. The College Fund administered 226 scholarship programs that year. In sum total, in our 25 years the American Indian College Fund has provided nearly 100,000 scholarships totaling \$78,000,000. (*Source: American Indian College Fund*).

The total number of applications the American Indian College Fund received for both Full Circle and TCU Scholarships since 2010 is as follows (*Source: American Indian College Fund*):

Year	Full Circle program tribal college apps	Full Circle program non-tribal college apps	Full Circle program total apps	TCU program apps	Total apps submitted	Unduplicated count of recipients
09-10	313	69	382	5056	5438	3484
10-11	525	500	1025	4957	5982	3529
11-12	467	658	1125	5314	6439	4218
12-13	1228	1452	2680	5900	8580	3831
13-14	1874	2296	4170	5462	9632	n/a
14-15	2040	2806	4846	n/a	n/a	n/a

(2014-15 data current as of June 1, 2014)

While the main focus of the College Fund is to support tribal college students, we also provide scholarships to AIAN students at public and private colleges all across the nation. In the last 5 years 660 non-tribal college students have received scholarship awards totaling over \$8,400,000.

The Cobell Education Scholarship Fund

In addition to providing scholarships through our partnerships with private donors, the American Indian College Fund was named by the U.S. Department of the Interior and the plaintiffs of Cobell v. Salazar to administer the Cobell Education Scholarship Fund. Graduate student scholarships will comprise 20% of the annual awards, and the American Indian Graduate Center (AIGC) of Albuquerque, New Mexico, was named by the U.S. Department of the Interior and the plaintiffs to distribute the graduate student scholarships.

The scholarship was created as part of the \$3.4 billion Cobell settlement (IndianTrust.com) through the vision and leadership of the late Elouise Cobell, a member of the Blackfeet Nation in Montana, who initiated a class action lawsuit in 1996 on behalf of American Indians whose trust land funds had been mismanaged by the federal government on behalf of individual Indian land owners for decades. Before her passing, Cobell, the lead plaintiff in the case, said the set-aside of funds from the settlement for a higher education would “mean a great deal... to the Indian youth whose dreams for a better life including the possibility of one day attending college can now be realized.”

The implementation agreement between the American Indian College Fund, the Department of the Interior, and the plaintiffs was signed in March 2014.

To qualify for the scholarships, under the terms of the settlement agreement, students must meet the following criteria: Be an enrolled member of a federally recognized tribe or a direct descendant of a federally recognized tribe and be attending an accredited post-secondary vocational education at a vocational institution and is seeking a certificate in a career program; or an accredited four-year degree-granting public or private university and seeking an undergraduate degree; or an accredited public or private institution and seeking a graduate degree.

A Board of Trustees has been named to manage the Cobell Education Scholarship Fund. The first board meeting is scheduled June 17, 2014, to be held in Denver, Colorado. Members of the Board of Trustees include: Carla Fredericks, Three Affiliated Tribes, American Indian College Fund representative; Turk Cobell, Blackfeet, plaintiffs' representative; Alex Pearl, Chickasaw; plaintiffs' representative; Pam Agoyo, Cochiti, Kewa, Ohkay Owingeh Pueblos; Department of Interior representative; and Jean O'Brien, White Earth Ojibwe, Department of Interior representative.

The American Indian College Fund received an initial payment of nearly \$580,000 on April 22, 2014. Most of this payment will seed administration of the Cobell Education Scholarship Fund and the operations costs of the Cobell board of trustees. We hope to receive a second payment to fund fall scholarships, and we will begin the full scholarship cycle after fall 2014. Establishing an endowment will be part of those efforts pending board of trustees' approval.

A web site has been created for the Cobell Education Scholarship Fund at www.cobellscholarships.org where individuals can read news about the settlement and the scholarship fund, link to application portals for the scholarship, review the audited financials of the American Indian College Fund, and read information about student scholars after scholarships begin distribution.

Road Map for the Future

As we see the numbers of Native students enrolling at tribal colleges increasing, there is a growing need for scholarships and funding for programs at the tribal colleges that impact student success—while the unmet need continues for current tribal college students.

The American Indian College Fund's plan for the future is simple: we want to educate 60% of American Indian and Alaska Native people served by our tribal colleges and universities by 2025. With an educated American Indian and Alaska Native citizenry dedicated to working for change in their communities, we can transform Indian Country from a landscape of desperation to places of aspiration, inspiration, and imagination. This transformation contributes to a better America, one where equity and social justice thrive, and where diversity and identity are valued.

The American Indian College Fund will implement a four-step plan to provide students with financial access to a post-secondary education and to support tribal college programs and initiatives focused on student support so tribal college students succeed to positively impact their families and their communities. In the past 25 years the American Indian College Fund has distributed approximately \$76,000,000 to support TCU capacity-building and student success efforts at the tribal colleges. Funding is also needed in this arena to ensure student success.

Step one of the plan includes funding the following programs to prepare students for future success. Students in grades kindergarten-fifth grade: early childhood education; Science, Technology, Education, and Mathematics (STEM) programs and initiatives; literacy; and Native language and cultural immersion. Students in sixth-twelfth grade: STEM programs and initiatives; leadership and mentoring; cultural education programs; learning labs; tutoring, study skills, and career planning; and bridge programs including early college programs.

Step two of the plan includes providing access to post-secondary education, including career and skills advising; GED preparation; college readiness and academic preparedness; financial support to make postsecondary education affordable; and building partnerships with high schools and community resources.

Step three is to provide meaningful higher learning opportunities, including academic, career, and technical education programs for a variety of career paths and skill levels; integrating technology as a resource for student learning and institutional advancement of student success; cultural integration and place-based educational strategies, including Native language; apprenticeships and internships; initiatives to support student adaptation to higher education for success; mentoring programs; leadership programs; fellowships and faculty development; development of candidates for future professional education; accreditation support; and partnerships and collaboration with private entities for supportive, cutting-edge learning opportunities.

Step four is to provide support for meaningful employment for tribal college graduates. Programs include counseling and support for new or first-time employment; career advancement planning; career centers; job search workshops and support; leadership programs; mentoring; and follow-up with tribal college alumni to assess program impact.

As we move forward into our next 25 years, the College Fund will strategically bring private sector dollars to the tribal colleges and their students to support all areas of institutional development and community outreach. The trust responsibility of the federal government to provide equitable and high quality educational access and success for AIAN is essential. We support the goals of AIHEC and the tribal colleges to develop greater federal funding to support tribal college student success in the following areas, particularly if sequestration is re-instituted: 1) federal funding for TCU operations so they can remain open and keep tuition low to provide student access to a higher education; 2) funding for GED/ABE programs so students can complete high school and continue their educations (on average, less than 50% of Native students graduate from high school each year in the seven states with the highest percentage of American Indian and Alaska Native students, according to *The Civil Rights Project*); 3) funding for day care centers at the TCUs (which are currently subsidized by about \$250,000/year); and 4) funding for TCU student support services that directly impact student success, retention, and graduation rates.

Thank you for the opportunity to share testimony about the scholarships and program support for tribal colleges and their students.