



Testimony of Melvin Monette, Director of Graduate Fellowships
on behalf of the
American Indian Graduate Center, Inc.

Before the United States Senate Committee on Indian Affairs

Prepared for the Oversight Hearing:
“Examining Higher Education for American Indian Students”

June 11, 2014

Chairman Tester, Vice Chairman Barrasso, and members of the Committee, thank you for inviting the American Indian Graduate Center (AIGC) to testify. I am Melvin Monette, Director of Graduate Fellowships and Special Programs and a citizen of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians. On behalf of Director Sam Deloria and AIGC, I am grateful for this opportunity to provide testimony for the record on “Examining Higher Education for American Indian Students,” as part of the Committee’s Indian Education series. I would also like to thank the Committee for hearing the collective call of tribes and Native communities regarding the need to address the current state of Native education. The renewed commitment of this Committee to focus on improving all education systems serving Native students is critical as we work together to ensure equitable educational opportunities.

The American Indian Graduate Center, Inc. (AIGC) is the oldest and largest provider of graduate and professional student scholarship services in the United States. AIGC is a 45 year old, private, national 501(c)3 located in Albuquerque, New Mexico. We have managed the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) Special Higher Education Programs contract to provide scholarships and fellowships to over 16,000 American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) full-time and degree-seeking graduate- and professional-level students who are members of federally-recognized tribes studying any major of choice at any US accredited institution in the United States.

AIGC is also the provider of 40 annual BIE Loans for Service to AIAN graduate- and professional-level students who intend to seek employment primarily with the BIE, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) or other federal agencies serving the AIAN communities. The intent is to provide agencies with well trained, highly qualified individuals to fill vacancies created by retirements and other attrition. To date, we have funded 330 individuals who are either continuing their education, working in intended areas, seeking employment or have completed the required employment and remain employed in AIAN serving organizations. Additionally, AIGC manages private and corporate scholarship funds for both undergraduate and graduate students. The award winning program boasts high-level federal appointees, tribal leaders, published researchers, large and small private business owners, some of your own congressional staff and many community leaders, among our alumni. Our sister program, AIGC Scholars is the American Indian administrative partner for the Gates Millennium Scholars Program. AIGC and AIGC Scholars collaborate in student recruitment, outreach, student services and professional development for those institutions serving Native students.

For the most recent academic year, 2013-2014, AIGC funded 545 undergraduate, graduate and professional level AIAN students: 106 Doctoral, 284 Masters, and 145 Professional. These students represented 149 federally-recognized tribes, attend school in 47 states, studied in 161 major areas, and have a combined unmet need of \$10,049,626 at time of reporting financial need. Besides membership in a federally-recognized tribe, AIGC funds students regardless of where they sit on the American Indian identity spectrum. We are careful, as you should be, not to stereotype Indian students with a narrow model of geographic isolation or culture as an impediment to successful participation. All Native students are deserving of AIGC assistance and capable of the academic success we expect of them.

American Indian Higher Education Inequitable Outcomes

Since 1977, American Indian and Alaska Natives have more than tripled in the number of baccalaureate degrees conferred each year; however, comparing the percentage distribution of degrees conferred to all other races, AIAN's have not even doubled. While we are enjoying more numbers, comparatively we continue to represent less than 1% of all baccalaureate degrees conferred. Unfortunately, the collective and average federal student loan data for AIAN's is statistically insignificant except for the 1999-2000 reporting year which indicates a \$22,000 average loan debt for 18-24 year-old college seniors. This report does not tell us the average debt of AIAN students who have a tendency to be older than the average traditional college student. (Digest of Education Statistics, 2013 Tables and Figures)

Since 1977, AIAN's have more than tripled in the number of Master's degrees conferred each year (1018 to 3674); however, comparing the percentage distribution of degrees conferred to all other races, AIAN's have only doubled. While we are enjoying more numbers, comparatively we continue to represent less than 1% of all master's degrees conferred. The Fields of Study most pursued and completed by AIAN Master's level students are Education, Business, Health Professions, Public Administration and Social Services, Psychology, and Social Sciences and History. (Digest of Education Statistics, 2013 Tables and Figures)

Since 1977, AIAN's have more than tripled in the number of Doctoral degrees conferred each (240 to 913); however, comparing the percentage distribution of degrees conferred to all other races, AIAN's have only doubled, in fact we experienced a .1% drop from 2011 to 2012. While we enjoy more numbers, comparatively we continue to represent less than 1% of all Doctorate degrees conferred. The Fields of Study most pursued and completed by AIAN Doctorate level students are Health Professions and Related Programs, Legal Professions and Studies, Education, Psychology and Biological and Biomedical Sciences. In 2011, AIAN's made up .4% of all full-time instructional faculty. Since 2007, the percentage has remained the same, while the number has increased less than 200 from 3340 to 3529. Less than 600 AIAN's are full professors (.3% of the total). Comparatively these faculty earn less, are younger, and have a total household income less than their non-Native peers. (Digest of Education Statistics, 2012 and 2013 Tables and Figures)

For the Academic Years 2011 and 2012 AIAN's received 662 and 618 selected Professional degrees, respectively. Slightly more than half (53%) of those degrees (688) are Law (LLB or JD) and another 16% (214) are MD's. As a collective, health sciences make up 540 (42%) of these degrees. The selected professional degrees include dentistry (60), medicine (214), optometry (7), osteopathic medicine (53), pharmacy (120), podiatry or podiatric medicine (15), veterinary medicine (40), chiropractic (31), law (688) and theology (72). (Digest of Education Statistics, 2013 Tables and Figures)

At all postsecondary levels, including institutional employment, American Indian and Alaska Native people continue to lag behind their non-Native peers. While American Indians and Alaska Natives represent 1.7% of all people in the US (2010 US Census), we continue to represent less than 1% of all levels of postsecondary students. We call for funding of programs to create equity for citizens of federally-recognized tribes in the United States. Our recommendations include replication of the American Indian Law Center's Pre-Law Summer Institute (PLSI) for other fields of study. This program has been in existence since 1967 and has over 90% rate of completion for those participants who enter law school. The

aforementioned professional degree data is our proof that such programs work; it is no accident that Law degrees are more than double those of other professional fields. This program doesn't assume the definition of "Indian" student includes substandard; rather, it assumes all are capable of succeeding in law school and prepares students for the rigor of such by providing them with the requisite reading, study and writing skills necessary to succeed in Law School. The program focus is industry specific, but the frameworks are replicable to most any professional program.

The Broken Pipeline to Higher Education

We are all aware of the dismal state of Native education partly due to lack of preparation of the professionals who serve Native students. There is an overrepresentation of Indian children in Special Education because schools don't know where to place students coming from low performing schools. We need to increase the capacity and development of Title VII teachers to work on a tutorial basis, among other areas of need, to bring these children up to par with their peers. Native students in tribal, BIE and large urban centers continue to lack access to Advanced Placement (AP) and Post-Secondary Education Opportunity (PSEO) courses which have been proven to impact college readiness. If AP and PSEO are proven to prepare students for the rigors of college, why can't the regular classroom teachers be challenged to create rigorous coursework for all students? High School counselors serving AIAN students spend more time creating schedules and performing disciplinary actions than they do providing college access information. As a former college recruiter, I experienced many tribal, BIE and other rural Native serving schools deny all students access to information about colleges. The message that any amount of higher education is valuable is not getting through to our students. Our students are faced with seemingly unmovable obstacles as the numbers show.

- 23% of American Indian and Alaska Native students received special education service in 9th grade in 2009. The next highest group is White students at 10.7%. Clearly, we need to make an impact in k-8 education by adequately preparing teachers to work in Native communities.
- 31% of American Indian and Alaska Native students were enrolled in high-poverty public schools in the academic year 2010-2011, compared to 6% of their white peers.
- 23% of American Indian and Alaska Native students attend schools that are comprised of 50% or more American Indian and Alaska Native peers (16% of American Indian and Alaska Native students attend schools that are comprised of 75% or more American Indian and Alaska Native peers).
- Fewer American Indian and Alaska Native students attend high schools that offer AP or IB courses than all other groups.
- 29% of AIAN 9th graders' high school counselors report the primary goal of the school counseling program is to help students plan and prepare for postsecondary education. This is compared to 41% of Hispanic students' counselors – the next highest group. By 9th grade, 34% of AIAN males and 21% of AIAN females have been suspended or expelled; second only to black students with 42% male and 24% female. On all indicators, AIAN students reported the highest percentage of 9th grade students who had ever been retained a grade. The highest. Second only to black students, 44% of AIAN students' parents were contacted by the school about a child's problem behavior at school and 28% had been suspended or expelled. 43%, the highest of all races, of AIAN students' parents were contacted about poor attendance and 50% were contacted about poor academic performance. On both measures, AIAN students experienced the highest percentages.
- 87% of AIAN students did not participate in math and science related school-sponsored activities.
- Second only to Hispanic students (15.1%), AIAN students dropped out at a rate of 12.4% in 2010.
- Less than 1% differentiates the graduate rates of Black and AIAN students; both group experience less than 65% graduation rates.
- With the highest percentage of any group at 28.5% AIAN students expect to complete high school or less. Another 10.9% expect to complete some college.
- When it comes to an expectation to complete a bachelor's degree, AIAN 9th grade students fall to the bottom of the list at 11.8% while 26% expect to complete a graduate or professional degree.
- Fairly equal with their peers, 22% of AIAN students don't know what they want to do post-high school. Native teenagers are "normal" when it comes to being asked questions about their future.

- American Indian and Alaska Native students take either the SAT or ACT at the lowest rate of all groups – 68%.
- The only group below the 90th percentile, 87.4% of AIAN seniors in 2004 planned to continue their education after high school. Of that group 13% applied to only one college while only 34.4% applied to 2 or more colleges. When it comes to 5 or more colleges, the numbers for AIAN students was statistically insignificant.

This profusion of disparities for AIAN k-12 students is well documented. The relationship to higher education is a definite lack of adequate preparation for postsecondary education. How can we expect any student to persist who begins behind from the onset? One proposal might include summer enrichment and higher education preparation programs that provide life-skills training necessary to navigate life after high school. Another might include supporting mentoring and internship opportunities at the local level through federally funded projects which provide meaningful experiences necessary for individuals to make educational and career choices. Access to individuals who have experienced and completed college provides positive mentorship for students.

Only 27% of AIAN students reported participation in college preparatory and awareness programs. We must fund federally supported college readiness programs that are proven to work for Indian students. Mandatory summer bridge programs are only effective if students and families have the financial means to attend and engage in them. Monies such as the grants to TCU's and Native American Serving Non-Tribal Institutions must include specific set-asides for access to these programs. Additional funds must be appropriated to those institutions serving a smaller percentage, yet a critical mass, numerically, to support AIAN and low-income students attendance at the programs that we know work for all students with the economic means to attend.

Native students have the least access to counselors, family members and online resources to plan for higher education. We know that President Obama's Broadband Access initiatives are providing access to more rural and tribal communities; however, as more and more American Indian and Alaska Native students attend online education forums, this community level broadband is already overtaxed. More efforts must be put behind increasing household access for Native families to research post-secondary opportunities and to complete coursework in timely manners. It is reported that in 2006, a reflective study of the 2004 graduating class found that AIAN students applied to college at the lowest rate, 75.2% - and this is out of the percent that graduated. 65.4% of this group applied for financial aid.

Financial Aid

Again, for the most recent academic year, 2013-2014, AIGC funded 545 undergraduate, graduate and professional level AIAN students: 106 Doctoral, 284 Masters, and 145 Professional. These students represented 149 federally-recognized tribes, attend school in 47 states, studied in 161 major areas, and have a combined unmet need of \$10,049,626 at time of reporting financial need.

With respect to financial aid, for all levels of higher education, for students who are already behind their peers in academics and socialization into college or graduate school, their financial aid package has to be supported. The BIA must release tribal scholarship funds for distribution much earlier to meet the needs of incoming students. Students contact AIGC, regularly, to request assistance for books, supplies, housing and other items needed for immediate engagement in school. Releasing tribal education dollars at the critical starting point for students will go a long way toward persistence. When students don't have to play catch up, weeks into the semester, with their readings and other assignments, they are able to seek, early in the term, any other support needed to remain caught up with all work. AIGC and AICF cannot provide this funding. These students are not only attending classes. Many AIAN students that we serve are moving children and families to new schools, locating accessible housing, maneuvering new health care systems, trying to find other resources and navigating a new environment; all while daily, trying to work with tribes, AIGC, financial aid offices and business offices to remain in school while waiting for the tuition payment to arrive without

taking out unnecessarily high amounts of student loans.

Tribes cannot provide this alone. Institutions cannot be responsible to make up the difference. We need a collective. There is a wealth of expertise, within the Department of Education's Federal Student Aid program, that can provide outreach to Indian communities. Allocation of funds for such positions is greatly needed.

We recommend the following:

1. Increase funding for research opportunities for Natives in graduate programs to provide true fellowships to post-secondary institutions for Native students without requiring them to agree to "return home" or "give back" as part of their funding. It is not expected of other groups and it's unfair, if not inequitable, to expect Native people to "return home" or "give back". The reality is that an extremely high percentage of all graduates work at all levels of public service in some capacity. An educated and employed Native professional is just as likely to provide for their "community" as any other educated professional. By providing institutions the financial assistance to recruit and retain top graduate students, this provision would create equitable access to highly-selective and competitive research institutions where Natives are statistically under-represented.
2. Include Native students receiving BIE loan for service program money, DOE discretionary grant assistance and other similar programs in the "non-compete" clauses for federal positions.
 - a. VISTA has a one (1) year non-compete status for federal positions.
3. Include Tribal Citizenship in demographic collections for higher education – this would ensure that money intended for tribal citizens is used to fund tribal citizens. Additionally, this provides tribes, the BIE and DOE with true numbers of tribal citizens being served at all levels of education. Collecting "citizenship" status versus "ethnicity" strengthens data, shifts the focus from institutions boasting self-identified numbers to those institutions with fewer numbers but greater need. As an added bonus, tribes will have access to true data and information about their citizens to report return on investment numbers.
4. Either expand the definition of Native American Serving Non-Tribal Institutions to include those institutions with a specific number of Native citizens versus a percentage of the total or provide similar funds to institutions with a critical number of Native citizens. Reauthorize and reallocate funds for this program, especially in the mandatory funding category – Native students shouldn't be subject to the whims of grant funding. Research tells us that some students benefit from the services the NASNTI program intends to provide. There have been no new grantees since 2011.
5. Expand FERPA to include Tribal Education Departments as they are Local Education Agency responsible for reporting data on their citizens. This provision will allow tribal education departments to more effectively align tribal resources with community needs.
6. Continue to press the FCC on issues of Broadband access for tribal communities. The reality is that while broadband access is increasing for tribal communities' economic centers, it is not reaching citizens who reside in more rural areas. With the increased interest of Native students in online education, be it for-profit or non-profit institutions, broadband access is critical to the learning experience for these students.
7. Online Education Institutions. While many non-profit institutions are creating online programs that are more academically rigorous and will better prepare Native students for employment in their communities, for-profit institutions continue to prey on Native communities with their assumptions that Native students have access to unlimited funding. Anecdotally, we hear story after story from Native graduates that they have student loans far exceeding that of their peers who attended traditional institutions. We would like to call on Federal Student Aid to provide data on Native students in these institutions in comparison to Native students in all institutions. Additionally, we call on Federal Student Aid to provide this information for all levels of higher education.
8. National programs like AILC and AIGC can be partners in the creation of college and graduate school preparation programs that work. We would like to offer our expertise, national outreach and networks, and collective alumni experiences to work with the Departments of Education, Interior, and Health and Human Services in creating frameworks for model programs at all levels. The proven program strategies of Know Before You Go, PreLaw Summer Institute and longer summer bridge programming will impact the persistence rates for Native students nationally.

This testimony is intended for higher education; however, we would be remiss in our duties if we didn't remind the SCIA that native learners in Indian country are failing, in part, due to a federal system that is failing them. Construction needs in BIE and tribal grant schools are embarrassingly high and are systemically necessary. More must be done to reduce the administrative costs of managing construction grants to increase the direct funding to these schools. We can cite research about the impact of asbestos, black mold, failing heating and cooling systems, exposed wiring, broken pipes and dismal aesthetics on classroom learning, but it's time to move beyond Native communities proving the need to the BIE being given the tools (funding) necessary to address those needs. Then, we must address the need for highly qualified teachers' housing and pay in these remote communities. Native students deserve educational professionals who are dedicated to their community rather than Teach for America-like programs providing "saviors" to Indian country.

Congress and federal agencies should fund Native education programs that strengthen tribal self-determination, such as tribal education agencies, and ensure resources are appropriated to the BIE to address student concerns and needed systemic changes. To start, the Department of the Interior should transfer budget authority from the BIA to the BIE to increase its efficiency and effectiveness by decreasing the bureaucracy inhibiting funds from positively impacting Native students and tribal self-determination.

As a result of BIA authority over the BIE budget, the BIE is often low in priority when compared to other programs. Recently, internal BIA FY 2014 Operating Plan reduced BIE higher education scholarships. While the reduced lines were under tribal priority allocations, such reductions were not authorized by tribal leaders but were a result of internal redistributions in the agency. Although the reductions are small as compared to the overall increase in the BIA budgets after Congress postponed sequestration, rescissions without appropriate consultation are unacceptable. Providing the BIE the ability to develop its own budget would ensure the BIA cannot reallocate funds from the BIE as it would be a separate Bureau with its own budget authority.

Tribal Colleges serve 9% of Native learners in higher education. While that number may be low by comparison to their mainstream counterparts, the TCU students become the work-force for their communities in larger percentages than the latter group. The BIA, Department of Interior and all other agencies must work together to examine barriers to economic development on reservations. While the rest of America is working on economic recovery, Indian country is still working on development. Billions of dollars are spent to aid developing countries while tribal funds continue to be cut. We must remove barriers, create opportunities, and provide technical assistance to tribes and individuals wanting to do business in their own communities.

Conclusion

AIGC appreciates the continued support of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs and we look forward to working with its members under your leadership. We share your commitment to Native Higher Education to ensure all AIAN serving post-secondary institutions are effective at helping our students to persist to the fullest desired education level. To attain parity, there must be a collaboration among all entities at all levels – tribal, federal, state, local with community based organizations' input and inclusion of post-secondary institution leadership. Once again, thank you for this opportunity and should you have any questions, please contact Sam Deloria, AIGC Director at sam@aigcs.org.