

TCUP CENTRAL

Expanding the Future of Tribal Education

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Office of University
Partnerships
Tribal Colleges
and Universities
Program

Expanding Minds and Preserving Cultures

Like most institutions of higher education, Tribal colleges wear many hats. In addition to their primary goal to deliver academic instruction that provides students the skills they need to succeed, Tribal colleges serve as a valuable resource for their communities, offering career development programs and much-needed community services, enhancing economic development, and creating strong leadership. At Tribal colleges, supporting the community is not an option—it's a given. But what sets them apart from other colleges and universities is a commitment to their culture. Tribal colleges play a vital role in preserving native languages and maintaining cultural traditions.

This issue of *TCUP Central* showcases the efforts of three Tribal colleges that are expanding the minds of students while strengthening the community and preserving their cultures.

Chief Dull Knife College Balances Educational Opportunities with Community Needs

Harmony is a reoccurring theme in Native American cultures. The philosophy of striking a balance with other humans, creatures, and Mother Earth so that all

may live in harmony is the moral of many Native American stories. These subtle messages that promote harmony have been clearly heard and are being applied at Chief Dull Knife College, a tribally controlled institution of higher education located on the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation in Lama Deer, Montana.

With the assistance of TCUP funds, Tribal colleges and universities continue to renovate and expand their physical facilities to meet the growing educational needs of their students, faculty, and staff, as well as their communities.

Support for Parents Leads to a Learning Experience for Students

When the need for additional safe and reliable childcare arose in the small rural town of Lama Deer, many community members saw it as an insurmountable challenge, as resources and options are often limited. But the faculty and staff

at Chief Dull Knife College devised a solution that turned the problem into an educational opportunity for students—and provided parents with much-needed childcare.

With a recent grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD's) Office of University Partnerships (OUP), Chief Dull Knife College built a new Early Childhood Learning Center that is mutually beneficial to students and community members.

Designing a Center that Balances Culture with the Natural Environment

Planning for the new Early Childhood Learning Center began in 2003 when Chief Dull Knife College sought assistance from the University of Washington and the Pennsylvania State University, with whom it had a working relationship. The three institutions formed the American Indian Housing Initiative (AIHI), a collaborative effort to adapt and deploy sustainable building technologies on American Indian reservations. The Early Childhood Learning Center project enlisted the help of faculty and students from the University of Washington, Penn State, and the

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Expanding Minds, *continued from page 1*

University of Wisconsin–Madison to design and build a center that complemented the unique cultural heritage of the Northern Cheyenne. To ensure that the structure met the needs of the community, faculty and students held community design workshops and used landscape projects as an opportunity to unite Cheyenne youth and elders with college students.

Innovative Building With Straw Bales

The result of this collaborative effort was a 4,000-square-foot facility that uses straw

bales as its primary building material. The advantages of a facility built with eco-friendly straw bales are numerous. Straw bales provide excellent thermal insulation, making them an ideal building material that can endure Montana's average temperatures that range from 5° F in the winter months to 89° F in the summer months. In addition, Montana can experience unseasonably cold or hot temperatures that range from 50 degrees above or below average. Straw bales are also weatherproof, fire resistant, pest-free, and soundproof—all very desirable features for a childcare facility. Moreover, building with straw bales is extremely cost-effective (\$2 to \$4 per bale) as the material is easily available and installation requires minimal expertise.



Construction of the outer shell of the Early Childhood Learning Center

The facility also maximizes daylight and uses radiant floor heating and evaporative cooling to further enhance its energy efficiency.

The Early Childhood Learning Center at Chief Dull Knife College is the seventh building constructed through the collaborative effort of the AIHI and its partner universities. Each year, students and faculty collaborate on the design, planning, and construction of a sustainable home or community building. Facilities are constructed in two 3-week blitz-build workshops during the summer. To date, partner universities and the AIHI have built four homes and three community buildings using straw bale construction.

“This is truly a mutual learning experience for everyone involved, no matter what their background,” said Sam Dennis, professor of landscape architecture at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. “It’s about bringing together the resources and the expertise of the Cheyenne and other people to create a sustainable building and partnership.”

A Mutually Beneficial Solution

With the addition of the new Early Childhood Learning Center, the availability of safe and reliable childcare



Early Childhood Learning Center under construction

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is no longer a weighing issue for the community. In addition, the center enables students who are pursuing degrees in early and elementary education to interact with young children more closely and translate education theory into practice. The center provides college students with an opportunity to hone their skills, making them better prepared for life after college—all while providing a valuable service to the community.



Early Childhood Learning Center

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Cultural Learning Center Builds Skills and Preserves Heritage

The spiritual heart of the campus. That's how Tom Davis, president of Little Priest Tribal College (LPTC) in Winnebago, Nebraska, describes the school's Cultural Learning Center. One of five main buildings on the LPTC campus, the center stands as a repository of the knowledge and culture of the Winnebago people. It is also one of the few places in this rural community where students can access the Internet and information on topics of interest to them. To ensure that the facility offers students the equipment and resources they need, the college recently used grant funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD's) Office of University Partnerships (OUP) to enhance the center.

Center Helps to Preserve Language and Culture

LPTC holds stakeholder listening sessions with the college's internal constituencies—students, faculty, staff, administrators, and board of directors—

to identify specific institutional needs. The Cultural Learning Center, with its classroom, museum, offices, computer lab, and kitchen, was constructed in response to those needs. For example, students wanted more classroom and meeting space to support the tribal language program. The center now houses the Renaissance program where students are instructed in Winnebago language and culture. "The Winnebago language is dying," says Davis. "But through the Renaissance program, teachers fluent in the Winnebago language, along with their teaching assistants, instruct over 900 students per year in this language." In this program, students also receive instruction in the Winnebago culture from ethnobotany to tribal games and music. They also participate in programs where they compete to demonstrate their mastery of the language or display their skills by cooking traditional feasts that feature dishes such as milkweed soup. Through this program, college students have access to more than four semesters of language classes. "This is important,

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Front view of the Cultural Learning Center

because 75 percent of our graduating students go on to pursue baccalaureate degrees that have a foreign language requirement,” says Davis. “Although Winnebago is not considered a foreign language at LPTC, many universities consider it as such and students are able to use it to fulfill their foreign language requirement.”

The center also houses the college’s Land Grant programs, which includes a research program. LPTC is strong on experiential learning and undergraduate research, and students in this program aid in research in areas such as ethnobotany and other culturally related disciplines.

Exhibiting and Documenting History

In the Winnebago community, the need for tribal archives and a museum is a major priority, and LPTC has as part of its responsibility the development of programs that preserve the language, culture, and traditions of the Winnebago people. The Cultural Learning Center houses the Tribe’s museum, archives, and a computer lab that is often used for language and cultural education. The museum is a substantial area with many Winnebago artifacts, including arrowheads, baskets, clothing, and headdresses. It has many unique features, such as the Mayan Center.

A number of years ago, the college completed a project with the Mayan people in Mexico. The museum documents the project with artifacts as well as photographs that illustrate the commonalities between the Winnebago and Mayan cultures.

The college Web site has a virtual museum that includes a powerful presentation of Winnebago cultural artifacts that can be examined from different angles and magnified to provide detail. Faculty, students, and tribal elders worked together to build this museum. Individuals from the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C., also worked with middle school students at the center’s computer lab to develop the photography using a lazy Susan device to capture all



Back view of the Cultural Learning Center

three dimensions of the photographed objects. The students worked with elders from the Renaissance program to create text to explain the objects’ cultural significance.

At the center’s computer lab, professionals with the Renaissance program use regular computers with special software to digitize hundreds of hours of tapes on language and culture for transcription to become part of online classes. Students also use the lab to complete research and homework.

Multifunctional Center

“The Cultural Learning Center is a multifunctional center that provides instruction and information and is a place where students sometimes gather to hold meetings,” says Davis. They fully utilize the center’s kitchen facilities to prepare traditional meals for campus events. “Food is central to the Winnebago

culture,” says Davis. “It fully expresses the culture at meetings, ceremonies, and classes—especially those on language and culture.”

In addition to TCUP funds, LPTC also received assistance from the Winnebago Tribe, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the American Indian College Fund, the U.S. Department of Education Title III, the National Science Foundation, and The American Indian Higher Education Consortium’s Log Cabin Project to help enhance the Cultural Learning Center.

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Salish Kootenai College: Health Fitness Center Helps Promote Active Lifestyle

The benefits of being physically fit are more than skin deep. Being physically active can save your life. In fact, being physically active could save more than 250,000 lives each year. That's the number of deaths attributed to lack of regular physical activity.

Physical inactivity ignites an unhealthy chain of events that can have deadly results. Being physically inactive—a category that more than 50 percent of Native American males and 64 percent of Native American females fall into—often leads to obesity, a leading risk factor for diabetes, which is the fourth deadliest disease among Native Americans and the most important risk factor for cardiovascular disease. Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death of Native Americans, occurring at rates almost twice that of the general U.S. population.

But, perhaps more than any other health condition, physical inactivity can be prevented. It's often a challenge that requires a lifestyle change, and Salish Kootenai College in Pablo, Montana, is helping students make that change.

Unwilling to Become a Statistic

As area residents changed their living patterns, the likelihood of engaging physical activity was reduced. "Our people have transitioned from an active farming community to a people that now live in cluster housing," said Joe McDonald, president of Salish Kootenai College. "This has reduced the amount of daily physical activity. They no longer need to walk. Anywhere we travel is by car."

Salish Kootenai College has reintroduced students and community members to the idea and importance of maintaining

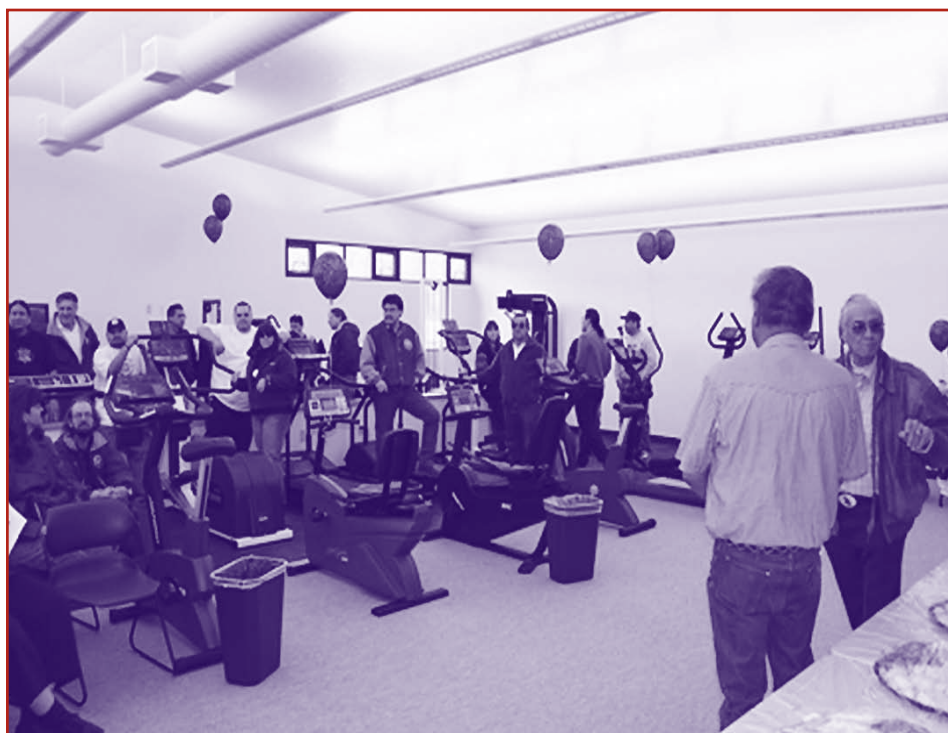
an active lifestyle. Thanks to a grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD's) Office of University Partnerships (OUP), the college has recently constructed a health fitness center that includes the latest equipment found in fitness centers nationwide. The new fitness center is a vast improvement over previous exercise facilities that mostly included high school gymnasiums with limited access and equipment. "We have a fair amount of students that use the new fitness center, and its convenient location is helping attracting more of the local residents," said McDonald.

The health fitness center, which is the fourth facility the college has built to serve students, faculty, and staff, also provides dietary information and health referrals to reduce the incidence and effects of diabetes and obesity. Providing nutritional information is critical to improving the lives of students and the larger community, as the traditional diet is rich in fat and starch-based foods that add to an overall unhealthy lifestyle. Information on housing, health, employment, and higher education opportunities is also available at the fitness center.

A Future of Growth

The college plans to expand the fitness center with funding from various sources, including HUD and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The expanded facility will build upon the health referral system and dietary information already available. When completed in 2007, the center will include a demonstration kitchen where students can learn about healthy ways of cooking and also serve as a community facility for large gatherings.

The college works to preserve traditional languages, build leadership for economic development projects, and engage



Inside the newly dedicated health and fitness center

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Salish Kootenai College, continued from page 5

people where they live to ensure that the tribal cultures are preserved for future generations. With a grant from the Kellogg Foundation, the school is building a cadre of community leaders

that will help with economic development projects designed to enhance the overall condition of the community. The cultural and language preservation projects help to ensure that as growth occurs, the traditions of their ancestors are not forgotten and still provide an important touchstone for tribal members.

For additional information about Salish Kootenai College and its community outreach work, contact:

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*Dedication ceremony for the Salish Kootenai
College health and fitness center*

HUD's Office of University Partnerships (OUP) provides grants to institutions of higher education to assist them and their partners with the implementation of a broad range of community development activities, including neighborhood revitalization, housing, and economic development. This newsletter, *TCUP Central*, highlights the efforts of grantees in OUP's Tribal Colleges and Universities Program. With interesting articles on campus rehabilitation and renovation projects and vital social service programs, it is a valuable resource for Tribal colleges and universities.