Islands of Hope: A History of American Indians and Higher Education

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To understand the recent growth of American Indian controlled higher education, which began in earnest with the founding of Navajo Community College in 1968, it is necessary to comprehend the context in which American Indian higher education developed. Accordingly, the history of traditional Indian education in the pre and post colonial era and the U.S. government's influence upon Indian education will be examined. Ultimately, the twenty-four tribally controlled colleges, the two federally controlled colleges and the four independent colleges primarily serving American Indians will be analyzed. The continued development of these colleges is critical to the future of Indian education.

European Contact

The exact number of Native Americans living in America at the time of European contact is unknown. There were probably five to seven million American Indians, though some estimates range as high as eighteen million. By 1890 that number had dropped below a quarter million and it was believed that Indians were a "vanishing race."[1]

European contact permanently altered the development of American Indian education. In 1500 the European and American Indian cultures were largely dissimilar, and not surprisingly, so were their systems of education. By this time period, Europe had some of the most renowned institutions of higher learning in the world. American Indians, on the other hand, had vastly different means of educating their people. Though it is difficult to generalize about the Native American system of education, because American Indians were comprised of hundreds of tribes, each with unique characteristics, most Indian education was not formally structured. Parents and elders of the tribe taught children lessons, imparted wisdom and developed pragmatic skills, but the European style compartmentalization of education did not exist in most Indian cultures. For Indians, education was part of the life process. Indians did not have official institutions called schools, nor were buildings erected solely for the purpose of education. Yet, Indians certainly were able to educate their children. Their methods simply differed. Today, the European influence on Indian education is quite evident, though there is a strong trend towards increased Indian control over their institutions of higher learning. This was not the case in the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when white governments imposed their will and education agenda on the Indians. Clearly, profound changes have occurred in American Indian education in the five hundred years following Columbus' voyage.

Disease, warfare, and famine contributed to the rapid decline of the Native population. Not surprisingly, many Indians did not trust the white government and rejected offers to educate their children. However, Indians refused these offers of education for several additional important reasons. Primarily, Indian educational philosophy was markedly disparate from traditional European educational philosophy. Indians believed European education caused whites to be enslaved by materialism. They feared that Native students would become bound to the possessions their education helped them obtain. Freedom was, therefore, sacrificed. As Mescalero Apache Chief Cadete explained in the mid-1900s:

> You desire our children to learn from books, and say, that because you have done so, you are able to build all those big houses, sail over the sea, and talk with each other at any distance, and do many wonderful things; now let me tell you what we think ... You say that you work hard in order to learn how to work well ... you build big houses, big ships, big towns, and everything else in proportion. Then, after you have got them all, you die and leave them behind. Now we call that slavery. You are slaves from the time you begin to talk until you die; but we are free as air ... Our wants are few and easily supplied. The river, the wood and plain yield all that we require, and we will not be slaves; nor will we send our children to your schools, where they will only learn to become like yourselves.[2]

Not only did Indian educational philosophy differ, but so did methods and curricula. Generally, Indian forms of education included oral histories, ceremonies, apprenticeships, story-telling, tutoring and learning games. In some tribes, such as the Choctaws, the elders gathered the children together for the purpose of teaching, and thus a more formal system of education was practiced.[3] Methods reflected cultures that were characterized by

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[1] Matthew Snipp, *American Indians Today*, Paper presented at the proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the National Rural Studies Committee, Las Vegas, N.M., 14-16, May 1992, Dialog, ERIC, ED 354 129, p. 16.

[2] David H. Dejong, *Promises of the Past: A History of Indian Education* (Golden: North American Press, 1993), 5.

[3] Eber Hampton, "Toward a Redefinition of American Indian/Alaskan Native Education," *Canadian Journal of*

cooperation, subsistence economies, strong kinship bonds, spirituality, and self-reliance.[4] Because of such remarkable disparities between Anglo and Indian culture, the Iroquois refused the Virginia legislature's offer to educate six members of their tribe at the College of William and Mary in 1744. Benjamin Franklin recorded Iroquois Chief Canassatego's explanation:

> We know you highly esteem the kind of learning taught in these Colleges, and the maintenance of our young Men, while with you, would be very expensive to you. We are convinced therefore, that you mean to do us Good by your Proposal; and we thank you heartily. But you who are so wise must know that different Nations have different Conceptions of things; and you will not therefore take it amiss if our Ideas of this kind of Education happens not to be the same with yours. We have had some experience of it. Several of our young People were formerly brought up in the Colleges of the Northern Provinces; they were instructed in all your Sciences; but, when they came back to us, they were bad Runners, ignorant of every means of living in the woods, unable to bear Cold or Hunger, knew neither to build a Cain, take a deer, or kill an enemy, spoke our language imperfectly, were therefore neither fit for Hunters, Warriors, nor Counselors; they were totally good for nothing. We are however not the less obliged for your kind Offer, tho' we decline accepting it; and to show our grateful Sense of it, if the Gentlemen of Virginia shall send us a Dozen of their Sons, we will take great care of their Education, instruct them in all we know, and make Men of them.[5]

Colonial Colleges

Many colonial college founders had noble intentions, but almost all were entirely ineffective in educating Indians. Harvard established in its charter of 1650 that one of its objectives was to educate the "English and Indian youth of this country in knowledge."[6] For this express purpose, the Indian College was the second building erected on the campus. Though Harvard was prepared to accommodate thirty Indian students, never more than three to five attended during the short existence of the Indian College. Unfortunately, two died of diseases while in attendance and another was killed by fellow Indians. In 1665 Caleb Cheeshehteaumuck, the only recorded graduate of Harvard's Indian College, earned a Bachelor of Arts degree, but he died of tuberculosis the winter after graduation.[7]

The college of William and Mary had only minimally more success than Harvard. Founded in 1693, William and Mary also had an Indian College and a stated purpose to educate and convert the Indians.[8] Because one of the primary functions of the colonial colleges was to train ministers, it was not surprising that founders of these colleges also sought to Christianize the natives. By 1720 William and Mary had twenty Indian students, and in 1723 a building was erected for them. Brafferton Hall, which has been recently restored, was the oldest building in the country constructed for Indian education. Despite these efforts, enrollment did not significantly increase.

Moor's Charity School was founded in 1754 in Lebanon, Connecticut.[9] During its first fourteen years of operation, Reverend Eleazer Wheelock helped educate sixty to seventy-five Indian students. The most famous was Sampson Occum, a Mohegan and a celebrated Presbyterian minister in America and England, who dedicated his ministry to converting and preaching to his fellow Indians.[10] In 1769, Moor's Charity School moved to Hanover, New Hampshire, where Reverend Wheelock also founded Dartmouth College.

Of the early colleges, Dartmouth is the most well known for educating American Indians. However, Dartmouth's example hardly constitutes an unqualified success. Reverend Eleazer Wheelock's plan was to persuade Indian parents to send their children to him, whereby he would expose them to religion, learning and civilized life.[11] Reverend Wheelock's educational plan had an enduring effect on Indian education in America, for removing Indians from their homes and immersing them in Anglo culture was a method employed until the middle of the twentieth century. Wheelock believed that Native Americans were idle, wandering and vicious, and unfortunately, this also became a pervasive and long standing popular belief. Wheelock's motives, albeit misguided, were founded in benevolence, for he believed

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Native Education 20 (1993): 268.

[4]Cheryl Crazy Bull, "Who Should Pass Judgment?" *Academe* 80 (July-August 1994): 23-24.

[5]Ernest L. Boyer, *Tribal Colleges: Shaping the Future of Native America* (Princeton: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1989), 9-10; and Dejong, 4-5.

[6]Norman T. Oppelt, *The Tribally controlled Indian College: The Beginnings of Self Determination in American Indian Education* (Tsaile: Navajo Community College Press, 1990), 2.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Grayson Noley, *Educational Reform and American Indian Culture*, Paper commissioned for the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, American Institute for Research in Behavioral Sciences, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ., 22 October 1992, Dialog, ERIC ED 362 341, p. 7.

[9]Noley, 7-8.

[10]David McClure and Elijah Parish, *Memoirs of the Rev. Eleazer Wheelock, D.D.* (Newburyport: Edward Little & Co., 1811; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1972), 16.

[11]McClure and Parish, 19.

that Indians were indeed educable and capable of civilized behavior. Alternatively, in the 1700s and 1800s as American settlers pushed west, the most prevalent means of dealing with the Indians was to kill them. As their justification, many whites believed Indians were intellectually inferior and that there was little in Indian culture worth preserving.[12]

Due to Reverend Wheelock's influence, Dartmouth was the first college established primarily for educating natives, though it never succeeded in accomplishing this mission. Dartmouth's charter, like other colonial colleges, stated that it was founded for instructing Indians in "reading, writing and all parts of Learning which will appear necessary and expedient for civilizing the Christianized Children of Pagans."[13] Clearly, Reverend Wheelock did not foresee the obstacles which would thwart such a lofty endeavor. Funding was continually a problem, and debt eventually forced Moor's Charity School to permanently close in 1850. At Dartmouth, from its founding until 1965, no more than two hundred Indians attended the college and fewer than thirty actually graduated. Like other colonial colleges that were founded to educate the native peoples, Dartmouth ultimately became an elite institution for white students. Even Hamilton College, which was originally an academy for the Tuscanna, Oneida and Stockbridge Indians, soon became a selective liberal arts college with little Indian presence, and few now know of its origins as an institution for Indian higher education.[14]

Mission Schools

In the aftermath of these early unsuccessful attempts at educating Indians, higher educational opportunities for American Indian students during the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries declined even further. In the early 1800s, the federal government in cooperation with religious organizations embraced Indian education, but ultimately the United States government seized increased responsibility and began to dictate the method of education entirely. As Horace Mann's popular schooling movement expanded across the country in the mid-1800s, the focus on Indian education shifted away from higher education to the elementary and secondary levels. Moreover, as lower level education became a requisite for higher education, college opportunities for Indians almost completely disappeared because the government failed in its effort to provide adequate preparation at the lower levels. The reason for the government's direct involvement in the elementary and secondary education of Indians was the widespread belief that Indians should be assimilated into American culture. In 1820, Secretary of War John C. Calhoun explained that the Indians, "should be taken under our guardianship; and our opinion, and not theirs, ought to prevail in measures intended for their civilization and happiness."[15]

[12]Boyer, 10.
[13]Oppelt, 5.
[14]Ibid., 6.
[15]Dejong, 57.

The mission schools, popular in the early to mid-1800s, received funding from the federal government and from private organizations. These schools were established to help Indians become settled farmers and Christians, with the goal of having students abandon native customs. In addition to teaching reading, writing and arithmetic, manual labor was offered to boys and domestic skills were taught to girls.[16] Most schools had boarding facilities in order to further isolate Indian children from tribal culture. Higher level courses, however, were not offered at mission schools. If these schools had succeeded in completely assimilating Native Americans into white society, land might not have become a source of contention between the two groups. Nonetheless, assimilation was rejected by many Indian tribes, and so whites resorted to forcible removal when Indian property was coveted. Because of religious controversy between Protestants and Catholics over the allocation of federal funding to sectarian education for Indians, by 1901 federal appropriations for sectarian schools was completely eliminated.[17] Clearly, diminishing monetary support doomed the mission schools.

Early Indian Controlled Education

During the early 1800s, two tribes, the Choctaws and the Cherokees, established extraordinarily sophisticated educational systems with over two hundred schools and academies.[18] Even more remarkable was that these tribes were able to reestablish Indian controlled education even after President Jackson signed into law the Indian Removal Act of 1830.[19] This law caused the removal of the "Five Civilized Tribes" (Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw and Seminole) from the Southeastern region of the United States and forced them to relocate to the Indian territory, in present day Oklahoma.[20] The Choctaws and Cherokees used the funds from the treaties signed with the federal government for educational purposes. The Choctaw leader, Pushmataha, believed that Indian children needed to learn the ways of their adversaries in order to survive.[21] In 1825, Choctaw Academy was founded in Kentucky. Though the school was jointly run by the Indian tribe, the Baptists and the government, much of its success was attributed to Choctaw involvement. The school's demanding curriculum included: geography, writing, arithmetic, surveying, natural philosophy, history, English grammar, moral philosophy and music.[22] Unfortunately, the school declined when the Choctaws were again removed from their land in Kentucky.

The Cherokees' elaborate school system even included opportunities for higher education. In 1822 a Cherokee Indian named Sequoyah created a syllabary for the Cherokee language. As a result, newspapers and books, called talking leaves, were

[16]Ibid., 58.
[17]Ibid., 82.
[18]Ibid., 87.
[19]Oppelt, 7.
[20]Dejong, 86.
[21]Noley, 11.
[22]Oppelt, 9.

soon published in Cherokee.[23] Within several decades a ninety percent literacy rate was achieved by the Cherokees, which was higher than the white literacy rate in surrounding states.[24] Even the Cherokee Constitution of 1839 emphasized the importance of education. After their forced relocation, known to the Cherokees as "the trail of tears," the Cherokees continued to provide for education in their new lands, which included building a Male and a Female Seminary in 1851. When Oklahoma became a state in 1907, the Female Seminary became Northeastern State Normal School which today is Northeastern Oklahoma State University.[25] A former teacher at the Male Seminary, Almon C. Bacone, established the Indian University in 1881, which was renamed Bacone College following his death.[26] Still in existence today, it is the oldest Indian College in the United States. Bacone College not only received support from the government but from private benefactors as well. In fact, Mrs. John D. Rockefeller donated ten thousand dollars to the college in 1883 for the construction of a building on the campus. Though its enrollment has never been exclusively limited to Indians, it has always had a substantial proportion of Indians enrolled. Furthermore, Bacone College has an impressive list of more than half a dozen famous Indian and non-Indian alumni including: Patrick Hurley, Secretary of War 1929-1933 and Ambassador to China 1944-1945 and Lloyd House, a Navajo and former Arizona State Senator.[27]

Government Run Indian Schools

Indian controlled education, however, did not become the dominant model of Native education in the United States. By the 1870s the federal government had almost entirely taken on this responsibility. Moreover, assimilation continued to be emphasized at government run reservation day schools and off-reservation boarding schools. At the time, it was widely believed that if American Indians did not assimilate they were doomed to extinction, because their population had dropped below 250,000.[28]

Army Officer Richard Pratt's Carlisle Indian School, founded in 1879 in Pennsylvania, became the archetype for the government run Indian schools.[29] One of America's most accomplished athletes, Jim Thorpe, a two time football All American and 1912 double Olympic gold medalist in the decathlon and pentathlon, was Carlisle's most famous graduate.[30] In 1911, Thorpe led Carlisle to victory over the highly regarded Harvard football team.[31] This gained national prominence for Carlisle in athletics. On the athletic field, Carlisle was able to compete with the best universities, though academically, Carlisle was not equal. Indeed, Carlisle was a college in name only. In reality, it was nothing more than a secondary school. Pratt's school was run in typical military fashion and discipline dominated. Native American students from numerous western tribes attended this boarding school where complete submission to white culture was demanded. Students could not speak their native languages, nor was tribal dress or long hair for boys permitted. Truly, assimilation, rather than providing higher education, was the goal of these schools.

Carlisle and other boarding schools have received much criticism because arduous physical labor was required of Indian students and because of the "outing system" Pratt developed whereby students were placed in the homes of whites in order to acculturate them. Probably the greatest travesty was that by the early 1900s some government officials had resorted to kidnapping Indian children in order to fill the boarding schools. Many Indians had resisted attending these schools because the physical conditions were deplorable, diseases were rampant and academic preparation was minimal. Dana Coolidge, author of "Kid Catching on the Navajo Reservation," submitted testimony before the 1929 Senate subcommittee investigating these conditions. She revealed the extreme inadequacies of some of the government run boarding schools.

This stockman had previously been describing the overcrowded conditions at Fort Defiance where, according to him, the children slept three in a bed like sardines ... [He explained] "My orders are to bring in every child of school age, and that's what I'm going to do. It is up to the people at the fort to take care of them." At that time, in 1928, on account of the spread of trachoma, certain schools on the reservation had been denominated "Trachoma schools" and all infected were transferred to them, while, conversely, all uninfected children were sent away to nontrachoma schools ... The heartbreak and misery of this compulsory taking of children was never more fully exemplified than on my recent visit to Lee's Ferry, Arizona, where old Jodie, or Joe Paiute, lives. He is the last of his people in that part of the country and he and his wife had ten children. But as they came of school age they were taken away from him, and of the first eight all but one died in school ... the school had lost track of her. While working for me, Jodie informed me that the truck was soon coming to take his little boy and girl, the last two children of ten ... Very likely his last two will die.[32]

Norman Oppelt, in *Tribally Controlled Indian Colleges,* acknowledges the dysfunctions of many of the boarding schools, but argues that the schools must be considered in the context of the time period. He believes that boarding schools had positive aspects because they revealed a belief that Indians were educable, that education was the key to Indian survival and that Indians

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[23]Ibid., 7.
[24]Dejong, 87.
[25]Oppelt, 10.
[26]Dejong, 91-92.
[27]Oppelt, 21-22.
[28]Dejong, 107.
[29]Boyer, 11.
[30]Jack Newcombe, *The Best of the Athlectic Boys: The White Man's Impact on Jim Thorpe,* (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1975), p. 179-189 and John Maher, "Echoes of a Distant Glory," *Austin American Statesmen,* 5 November 1995, sec. C, p. 18.

[31]Maher, sec. C, p. 17.
[32]Dejong, 119.

could benefit from exposure to a second culture. Furthermore, they helped to develop a Pan-Indian perspective, as students came from numerous tribes.[33] A former boarding school, once designated the Carlisle of the West, Haskell Indian Nations University gradually evolved into a post secondary institution during the mid-twentieth century. Like Carlisle, in the early 1900s Haskell fielded powerful football teams that were able to defeat the University of Texas and Texas A&M.[34] For a number of years Haskell was the only federal Indian school that offered education beyond the eighth grade. Certainly, Indian schools were valuable in that they offered opportunities for many young American Indians in academics as well as interscholastic sports.

In the late 1800s, two other schools for Indians that ostensibly were colleges were founded. Distinguished for being the only state supported Indian institution, Croatan Normal School, was established in North Carolina. Although it was known as a normal school, teacher preparatory classes were not added until nearly forty years after its founding. Today it exists as Pembroke State University, and although it still has a large Indian population, the university does not restrict enrollment to Indians because it is a public institution. An independent college for Indians, Sheldon Jackson College, was founded at about the same time in Sitka, Alaska. It was not until 1944, however, that post-secondary classes were added, and not until 1981 did it become a four year institution.[35]

Indian Education Reform

The Meriam Report of 1928 had a profound effect upon Indian education.[36] Sponsored by the Institute for Government Research, the report severely critiqued government run Indian schools.[37] Detailed problems included: harsh discipline, decrepit physical facilities, poor teacher preparation, and a uniform curriculum that emphasized white culture and neglected Indian culture. Within a couple of years after the report was released, several government boarding schools closed. When President Franklin Delano Roosevelt appointed John Collier as Commissioner of Indian affairs, fundamental changes in Indian and government relations began. An outstanding leader, Collier was dedicated to focusing on Indian needs. With his leadership, the Indian Reorganization Act was passed in 1934 which initiated Indian self-determination.[38] Finally, the government recognized that Indians deserved a voice in running their schools.

George Sanchez was another educational leader who pressed for Indian self-determination. In 1944, the government hired Sanchez of the University of Texas to evaluate Navajo education.[39] Sanchez advised that the government should increase funding and the number of schools on the reservations, but his recommendations were not implemented.[40] Unfortunately, many of the Meriam Report reforms and others were put on hold, as World War Two commenced. In one respect, World War Two helped to further the cause of Indian higher education. Twenty-five thousand Indians served in World War Two, and many took advantage of the educational opportunities offered in the G.I. Bill.[41] Nonetheless, Indian involvement in higher education remained minute. As Brubacher and Rudy reported in 1958:

> If we can say, then, that the education of American Negroes has made a slow but very real progress in the years since emancipation, we must acknowledge that the college training of another group, the American Indian, has been practically nonexistent in a special or distinct sense. The Bureau of Indian Affairs, the United States government with the supreme authority for planning an educational program for the tribes, decided early to terminate the schooling of Indian youth at the secondary level.[42]

In the 1960s signs of permanent change in Indian higher education emerged. Following the lead of Haskell, many off reservation boarding schools initiated post secondary level courses. For example, the Santa Fe Indian School became the Institute of American Indian Art and began offering advanced courses. However, retaining students remained a problem. Though the number of Indians in college had doubled in the five year period from 1957-1962, the number that successfully graduated from college did not appear to change much at all. In 1966 only sixty-six Indian students graduated from four year institutions.[43] Forty years after publication of the Meriam Report, the Kennedy Report repeated many of the same criticisms of Indian education.[44]

Indeed, the widely publicized Kennedy Report, officially called *Indian Education: A National Tragedy - A National Challenge*, illustrated the failure of government run Indian education. Facilities were overcrowded and poorly maintained, many teachers were ill prepared and preferred not to teach Indian students, academic preparation was negligible, curricula denigrated Native culture and assimilation had failed.[45] Furthermore, life on reservations was marked by extreme destitution, high unemployment (as much as eighty percent) and high infant mortality rates. The report concluded that Indian participation and control over Indian education was essential. Critics of the report

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[33] Hazel Hertzberg, *The Search for An American Indian Identity* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1971), 15-18 and Oppelt, 20.

[34] Maher, sec. C, p. 18.

[35] Oppelt, 23.

[36] Lewis Meriam, *The Problem of Indian Administration*, Meriam Report (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1928).

[37] Boyer, 16.

[38] Ibid., 18.

[39] George Sanchez, *The People: A Study of the Navajos* (U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Indian Service, 1948).

[40] Dejong, 161.

[41] Oppelt, 25.

[42] Ibid., 26.

[43] Ibid., 27.

[44] Dejong, 196.

[45] Noley, 28.

claimed that it overemphasized the government's failure and neglected the progress in Indian education that had been made. Nonetheless, several important changes were brought about by the Kennedy Report with respect to Indian higher education.[46] First, scholarship support was increased. Second, Indian studies programs were developed in many non-Indian institutions. Most importantly, funding for Tribally Controlled Community Colleges was established.

Tribal Colleges

Tribal colleges represent a real hope for the future of Indian higher education. Most importantly, tribal colleges are crucial to preserving Indian heritage. At these institutions students study and learn about native culture and customs. Furthermore, tribal colleges are places of opportunities for Native Americans. Although the idea for creating such colleges dates back to 1911, it was not until 1968 that the Navajos established the first tribal college.[47]

Navajo Community College, in Tsaile, Arizona, has piloted the way in tribal education. Today, a total of twenty-four federally funded tribally controlled community colleges exist.[48] Additionally, there are two institutions run by the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs and four independent colleges for Native Americans, including one in Canada.[49] These thirty institutions are members of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC). They are located in Alberta, Canada, and the following states: Arizona, California, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota, Washington and Wisconsin. In Alaska, Sheldon Jackson College is a fifth independent college for Native Americans, but it is not a member of AIHEC. In 1989, the twenty-four federally funded colleges educated over 10,000 students with 4,400 full time students.[50] In 1995, the thirty AIHEC colleges taught over 20,000 Indian students, according to a recent pamphlet published by the Consortium. Clearly, these colleges are growing rapidly. The majority of colleges for Native Americans offer two year programs, though three are accredited at the baccalaureate level and one is accredited at the master's level.[51]

The institutions of higher education that serve Native Americans represent islands of hope.[52] Much of the literature about the history of Indian education speaks of historic failure. Long standing problems include: high illiteracy, extreme destitution, coercive government intervention, destruction of Indian culture, predictions of Indian extinction, and white perceptions of Indian inferiority, savagery and lack of intelligence. In 1991 the Indian Nations at Risk Task Force found that Native students have "the highest drop-out rate (36%) in the country..." partly due to schools with unfriendly climates "that fail to promote appropriate academic, social, cultural and spiritual development."[53] Part of the solution can be found in Indian colleges which provide many benefits to Indian students to reverse this trend. In particular, tribally controlled colleges have helped to promote Indian culture, foster Indian educational philosophy and curriculum, and provided a comfortable environment, the necessary facilities and requisite funding for Indian students.[54]

Tribal colleges have had a distinct role in American higher education. First, like most community colleges, these two year schools provide a conventional curriculum that is geared towards transferring to four year institutions. Second, tribal colleges also offer vocational education programs to develop specific job skills. Third, the local colleges accommodate the needs of the particular tribal community. This includes providing adult education, literacy tutoring and graduate equivalency programs, as well as alcohol rehabilitation and daycare facilities. Fourth, the colleges are centers of research and scholarship on Native America. In fact, the research journal, *Tribal College*, is the only publication dedicated to focusing on higher education and American Indians.

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[46] Dejong, 196.

[47] Agnes Grant and LaVina Gillespie, *Joining the Circle: A Practioner's Guide to Responsive Education for Native Students*, Paper sponsored by the Office of Educational Research. Eric Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools. 1993 Dialog, ERIC ED 360 117, p. 26.

[48] Administrator Nedra Rodriguez of the Bureau of Indian Affairs Post Secondary Division, telephone interview by author, 4 December 1995, Austin. Different articles reported different numbers of tribally controlled colleges. Confusion over the exact number is caused by definitions. Some Indian colleges are not tribally controlled, such as Haskell, but do accept government funding, while others, such as the Institute of American Indian Art do not receive federal money. Some colleges are tribally controlled but do not receive government money, though the majority, twenty-four tribally controlled colleges, do receive government funding.

[49] U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs ([Washington, D.C.]: U.S. Department of the Interior chart and American Indian Higher Education Consortium pamphlet, 1995).

[50] William G. Tierney, *Official Encouragement, Institutional Discouragement: Minorities in Academe - The Native American Experience* (Norwood: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1992), 116.

[51] Grant and Gillespie, 26.

[52] Dejong, 244.

[53] Jon Reyhner, "New Directions in United States Native Education," *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 20 (1993): 67.

[54] Boyer, 3-5.

In addition, Navajo Community College has its own press which publishes books and literature dealing with Native Americans. Most importantly, tribal colleges help sustain native culture and traditions.[55] These Indian run schools are curricula centers for tribal languages, arts and crafts, spiritual beliefs, tribal history, native culture and tribal traditions.

Funds provided by Public Law 95-471, the Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act of 1978, were critical to the growth of tribal colleges. According to Ernest Boyer, "these colleges stand out as the most significant and successful development in Indian education history."[56] Though many colleges offer Indian studies programs, the drop out rate for Indian students in non-Indian colleges is almost ninety percent. Tribal colleges have a much higher success rate because they provide a learning environment that builds self-confidence, understands Indian culture and provides special programs in areas where Indian students need assistance such as counseling or basic skills tutoring.[57]

Though each tribal college is unique, there are some common elements. None of the schools have very large enrollments. However, while the present Native American population is only two million, it is increasingly youthful, as the average age is sixteen.[58] Navajo Community College in Arizona is the largest school with just over one thousand students, though most tribal college enrollments are in the hundreds. Most of the students in tribal colleges live on reservations, while it is estimated that only one-third of the total American Indian population live on these lands. The majority of Indian students are older, female and first generation college students.[59] Many who enter do not complete degree programs, nonetheless, an educational opportunity is provided for those who would otherwise be unable to obtain any higher education at all.

Governance of tribal colleges is independent from tribal governments, though the Presidents of the colleges are predominantly Native American. In contrast most of the faculty remains non-Indian, partly because there are a limited number of native teachers available. Physical facilities vary, though most classes are conducted in simple buildings indicative of limited financial resources. Clearly, funding remains the greatest challenge that tribal colleges face. As the community they serve is largely impoverished, tuition must be kept low. Tribal colleges do not get monetary support from local taxes, as is common for most community colleges, so federal funding is critical.[60] Yet per pupil federal funding has continued to shrink since tribal college enrollment has grown faster than federal funding. Robert Sullivan who testified before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs on the 1990 Reauthorization of the Tribally Controlled College Assistance Act summarized this sad state of affairs when he explained that the tribal colleges were being penalized for success.[61] On the other hand, the Bureau of Indian Affairs countered that government funds were never intended to be the sole source of support to these colleges.[62]

Funding is also connected to the issue of accreditation and self-determination. In many instances accreditation is a matter of survival for tribal colleges. Due to a failure to obtain and or retain accreditation, several tribal colleges have been forced to close over the past three decades. According to Cheryl Crazy Bull, President of Sinte Gleska University, "To be accredited meant 'official' recognition by other educational institutions and government agencies and even by students. It also meant participation in federally funded programs, such as student financial aid and the opening of doors for private and foundation resources."[63]

To many Native Americans, accreditation is another form of white government control imposed upon Indian education. When Stanley Redbird, the founder of Sinte Gleska University was asked if accreditation was important, he replied, "Yes, it is. We can't get away from white culture. It's like water flowing in. You have to learn something about it and master it."[64] Of the twenty-four tribal colleges, seventeen are fully accredited by state and national organizations.[65] Because of funding problems and accreditation issues, complete self-determination in Indian higher education has not been truly achieved. Some tribal college administrators believe that tribal colleges should be responsible for their own accreditation, rather than be judged by a foreign entity unfamiliar with tribal needs. To investigate such a possibility, a task force has been created by several tribal college leaders.[66] Nonetheless, native control of Indian higher education has been significantly improved in recent years, due in large part to changes motivated by the Kennedy Report and the Tribally Controlled Community College Act.

While there are many advocates of tribal colleges, there are also some critics. Researchers at Michigan State University found that segregation of American Indian undergraduate students in institutions of higher education was higher in states with tribal

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[55]Tierney, 116.
[56]Boyer, 24.
[57]Ibid., 3.
[58]Tierney, 8.
[59]Boyer, 31.
[60]Ibid., 32-36.

[61]Congress, Senate, Select Committee on Indian Affairs, *Reauthorization of the Tribally Controlled College Assistance Act of 1978: Hearing Before the Select Committee on Indian Affairs*, 101st Cong., 2nd sess., 9 April 1990, 17.
[62]Ibid., 15.
[63]Crazy Bull, 20.
[64]Ibid.
[65]Joe T. Darden, Joshua G. Bagaka, Tracy Armstrong, and Terrence Payne, "Segregation of American Indian Undergraduate Student in Institutions of Higher Education," *Equity and Excellence in Education* 27 (December 1994): 62.
[66]Crazy Bull, 21.

colleges.[67] Tribal colleges, it was claimed, offered inferior education because, "two-year colleges are less likely to be wealthy in resources and choices. A two-tiered system of educational opportunity is developing."[68]

What was not recognized was that there has been a long history of educational disparity between whites and American Indians in the United States, and that tribal colleges are attempting to correct this imbalance. Indeed, tribal colleges provide higher educational opportunities to American Indians that never existed before. Critics also argued that segregation represents a critical barrier to full Indian participation in American society. Such arguments are similar to those of the assimilation proponents of the nineteenth century.

Due to the inability of most post secondary institutions to retain American Indian students, tribal colleges are necessary to encourage native students to pursue higher education. Statistics alone bespeak the need for tribal colleges. Though data on Native American graduation rates is imprecise, surveys suggest that fewer than sixty percent of ninth grade Native Americans graduate from high school, fewer than forty percent of Native American high school graduates continue on to college and of those who pursue higher education eighty-five percent do not receive a four year degree.[69] In fact, because of inadequate sample sizes the Census Bureau did not report 1993 American Indian high school completion or college going percentages to *The Chronicle of Higher Education* though figures were reported for other racial groups.[70] In 1993 American Indians comprised only .9 percent of total college enrollment. Of these approximately 122,000 Native American students,[71] a large proportion attend tribal colleges. Indeed, in 1995 tribal colleges educated over 20,000 students.[72]

Clearly, tribal colleges are instrumental in helping to increase college enrollment for Native Americans. To sustain tribal colleges in risk of losing accreditation, temporary accreditation should be offered while a process to achieve permanent accreditation is established. Federal funding is also critical to the survival of tribal colleges, yet Indians must also develop resources in their own communities which can be of assistance. Perhaps a portion of the revenue from the casinos functioning on many reservations could be directed, by law, to educational institutions. In addition, partnerships between community colleges and state colleges need to be fostered to a much greater extent. Such relationships would ease the transition of Indian students from tribal colleges to four year institutions. Furthermore, the number of Indian colleges that offer four year programs should be increased. Tribal colleges could follow the example of Haskell Indians Nations University which just three years ago adopted a four year program in which graduates could earn a B.S. in elementary teacher education. As recently as last summer, the Kansas State Board of Education granted Haskell's teacher education program accreditation.[73]

Tribal colleges have been instrumental in preserving Indian heritage and are crucial for the higher education of American Indians. It is important that real opportunities exist for Native Americans that choose to attend predominantly white institutions. Whites and Indians will benefit from exposure to one another because each can learn about the other culture. The assimilation programs of the past were largely failures but fortunately were unable to destroy Indian culture. Most importantly, tribal colleges are critical to increasing the number of Native Americans in higher education. It has been demonstrated that in states where there are tribal colleges, there is greater Indian enrollment in all institutions of higher education than in states that do not have tribal colleges.[74] Only through comprehensive effort on all fronts can Indian higher education progress from islands of hope to meaningful opportunities for advancement for Native Americans.

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[67] Darden, Bagaka, Armstrong, and Payne, 61.

[68] Darden, Bagaka, Armstrong, and Payne, 67.

[69] Tierney, 8-9.

[70] Census Bureau and U.S. Department of Education, "Trends Affecting Affirmative Action; 1993 Enrollment by Race at 3,400 Institutions of Higher Education," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 28 April 1995, sec. A, p. 22-26.

[71] Ibid.

[72] U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs ([Washington, D.C.]: U.S. Department of the Interior chart and American Indian Higher Education Consortium pamphlet, 1995).

[73] Administrator Ricky A. Robinson of Haskell Indian Nations University, Telephone interview by author, 4 April 1996, Austin.

[74] Darden, Bagaka, Armstrong, and Payne, 67.

Tribally Controlled Community Colleges and Universities

Name and Location	Charter Date	Tribe
1. Bay Mills Community College, Brimely, MI.		
2. Blackfeet Community College, Blackfeet Browning, MT.	1976	
3. Cheyenne River Community College,Eagle Butte, SD.	1973	Cheyenne River Sioux
4. College of the Menominee Nation, Keshena, WI.		
5. D-Q University, Davis, CA.*	1977	Soboba
6. Dull Knife Memorial College, Lame Deer, MT.	1975	Northern Cheyenne
7. Fond Du Lac Community College, Cloquet, MN.		
8. Fort Belknap Community College, Harlem, MT.		
9. Fort Berthold College, New Town, ND.	1973	Mandan, Arikara, Hidatsa
10. Fort Peck Community College, Poplar, MT	1978	Assiniboine and Sioux
11. Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa Community College,Hayward, WI.		
12. Leech Lake Tribal College, Cass Lake, MN.		
13. Little Big Horn College, Crow Agency, MT	1977	Crow
14. Little Hoop Community College,Fort Totten, ND.	1974	Devil's Lake Sioux
15. Navajo Community College, Tsaile, AZ.	1968	Navajo
16. Nebraska Indian Community College, Winnebago, NB.	1973	Santee Sioux, Omaha, and Winnebago
17. Northwest Indian College, Bellingham, WA.		
18. Oglala Lakota College, Kyle, SD.	1970	Oglala Sioux
19. Salish Kootenai College, Pablo, MT.	1977	Salish-Kootenai
20. Sinte Gleska College, Rosebud, SD.	1971	Rosebud Sioux
21. Sisseton-Wahpeton Community College,Sisseton, SD	1979	Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux
22. Standing Rock College, Fort Yates, ND.	1972	Standing Rock Sioux
23. Stone Child College, Box Elder, MT.		
24. Turtle Mountain Community College, Belcourt, ND.	1972	Turtle Mountain Chippewa

*not located on a reservation.

Bureau of Indian Affairs Colleges

1. Haskell Indian Nations University, Lawrence, KS.	1884	
2. Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute, Albuquerque, NM.	1971	

Independent Institutions for Native Americans

1. Institute of American Indian Art, Santa Fe, NM. (Federally funded until 1988)	1890	
2. Crownpoint Institute of Technology, Crownpoint, NM.		
3. United Tribes Technical College, Bismark, ND.		
4. Red Crow Community College, Cardston, Alberta, CANADA		
5. Sheldon Jackson College, Sitka, AL. (not a member of AIHEC)	1878	

Experimental Colleges

1. Flaming Rainbow University, Tahlequah, OK.	1971	
2. Tanana Chiefs Conference Land Claims College, Fairbanks, AL.	1973	

Closed Tribal Colleges

Ojibwa Community College	1975	(Chippewa) Keweenaw
Lummi Community College	1973	Lummi
College of Ganado (became a branch of Navajo Community College)	1979	Hopi

Information from *Tribal Colleges: Shaping the Future of Native America,* p. 27, *The Tribally Controlled Community College*, p. 77, *The American Indian Higher Education Consortium* 1995 Pamphlet and Bureau of Indian Affairs Chart 1995.

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