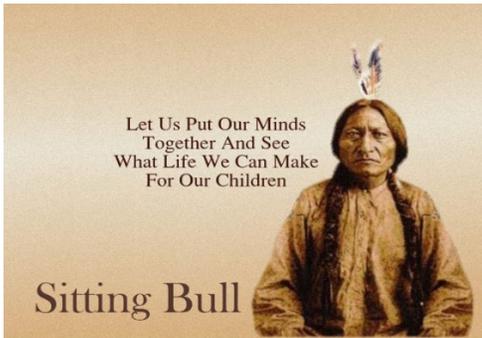


November is

NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH; LET'S TALK HIGHER EDUCATION!



“American Indians are unique in that we are the only group within this nation for which the federal government has an obligation to provide education services, yet we are among those with the lowest rates of educational achievement and attainment in this nation. Something must change.”

Dr. Susan Faircloth

Native American Speaker Amidooli “Rainbow” Pacheco has a TED Talk on Equality in Education and references that when Native youth are bombarded constantly with negative statistics and the probability they will fail, those youth will live up to that expectation. These are just a few examples of the educational challenges facing Indigenous youth:

- 67% of Native American Students graduated from high school, in 2015, compared to the national average of 80% [usnews.com/news/articles/2015/11/06/native-american-students-left-behind](https://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2015/11/06/native-american-students-left-behind)
- Only 19% of Native Americans ages 18-24 are enrolled in college compared with 41% of the overall U.S. population, according to the [Postsecondary National Policy Institute](https://www.postsecondarynationalpolicyinstitute.org/).
- 14.5% of the American Indian and Alaska Native population earned a bachelor’s degree or higher compared with 31.3% of the overall population in 2017, according to the [Census Bureau](https://www.census.gov/).

Though statistics are the primer of this image, visiting with a couple of WNCC’s Native American students about their personal struggles/opinions really provide the color that make this picture clearer.

- A lighter-skinned Native student expressed that he didn’t really feel like he totally fit in at the reservation because he “looks white”, but off the reservation he doesn’t really fit in because his mannerisms and culture are very much traditional Native.
- Tribal members, on or near the reservation, typically do not have health insurance, as Indian Health Services (IHS) are available, which includes health, dental and optical. For our students, the nearest IHS is 133 miles one way, so they agree it should have been a “bigger” consideration when selecting a college.
- Having a roommate can be difficult, as most Native children do not have “sleep-overs” with anyone besides their family, so these interactions can be challenging.
- Because reservations are considered sovereign nations, they do not have to follow state guidelines regarding attendance. One student informed me that if a family member passed away, a typical funeral/wake can last 3 days, but their absence was never questioned by the school, nor was it counted against their scores.

These are just a few examples of what was shared, but aren’t they powerful?

As representatives in higher education, let’s begin to change the conversation!

- Founded in 1969, Native Forward is the oldest and largest provider of scholarships to Native American students in the country with well over \$350 million in scholarships awarded. Visit the [Native Forward Scholars Fund](https://www.nativeforward.org/).

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- College fairs specifically for Native youth **and their families** have shown to be very beneficial. Colleges should provide a setting that allows meaningful conversation about what to expect from college life, courses, financial aid (and their many forms 😊), and the admissions process. There are times it may prove too difficult for a student and their family to attend a college fair in person, or the event may be overwhelming, whereas providing a website-based virtual college fair could increase the outreach not only to local Native youth, but those far from your campus as well.
- The [National Congress of American Indians Law & Policy Scholarship Program](#) aims to provide a holistic development opportunity for exceptional American Indian/Alaska Native students with significant financial need to reach their greatest potential through academic excellence, leadership development, and service. The goal of the program is to provide American Indian and Alaska Native youth opportunities to assist in their continued development as the next generation of American Indian and Alaska Native leaders and civically engaged citizens of the United States.
- [College Horizons, a pre-college program for Native American high school students](#), is open to current sophomores and juniors. This individualized program helps students select colleges suitable for them to apply to, get admitted to, and receive adequate financial aid. Of these students served by College Horizons, 99% have been admitted to college, 95% matriculate on to a four-year institution, and 85% graduate from college in four to five years. During this program, students: research their top 10 schools; complete college essays, resumes, the Common Application, the preliminary FAFSA; and receive interviewing skills and test-taking strategies (i.e., for the ACT and SAT) as well as financial aid/scholarship information. In addition to this, the counselors and advisors for the program are indigenous in order to better relate to the students and their experiences and include various cultural activities to instill a sense of pride as a college-going Native student.
- See also **The Hunt Institute**. [New Hunt Higher Ed Issue Brief: Supporting Native Students](#)

“Tanka wopila” ~ Lakota Sioux
(*Thank you very much*)

