

Circle of Hope



The American Indian College Fund’s mission is transforming higher education by providing American Indians with funding for access to higher education while also creating public awareness of this nation’s tribal higher education institutions and American Indians.

As the president of the College Fund, I am concerned. For nearly 27 years, we have been at the heart of support for Native students, building a strong foundation for a better America among one of the most underserved populations in the country. Our support for education transforms the lives of both Native students and rural students, and their communities.

I am concerned that under our country’s new administration, the United States will take steps backwards in its service to college students and to Native people. In this time of uncertainty, it is more important than ever that the College Fund and our supporters show our students that we are not going away. Instead, we are going to generate more resources, create more paths to college, and help more people find careers that contribute to personal and community well-being.

- Education is the answer to so many of the challenges faced in our country.
- Through education, diversity is honored and inclusion is truly realized.
- Through education, economic stability and jobs are created for all.
- Through education, pressing environmental issues are addressed in innovative, collaborative ways.
- Education is the answer when we are seeking greater and better discourse and the free exchange of ideas.
- Education is a resource for us to be better people, living well on this planet, together.

In the coming months, it is even more critical that we demonstrate and reinforce our support for those that are disenfranchised or forgotten, in Native communities as well as others. We must work together to support organizations and individuals who share our values of inclusion, access, security, prosperity, and equality for all.

Under the new administration, we can expect major changes in how education is funded and supported. It is possible that financial aid programs will be cut and that critical funding to tribal colleges will be at risk. The very colleges that serve the most rural Americans could close their doors because of lack of support and lack of funding.

At the American Indian College Fund, we remain even more committed to our vision of healthy, prosperous individuals and families.

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STUDENT SPOTLIGHTS



At first glance, Tada seems like a student whose success is a longshot. Like many American Indian students, she's overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles to reach new heights. Sometimes, students just need the support of people like you to achieve success.

According to Tada, if you knew her four years ago, you would never have guessed that she would rise to where she is today.

"In fact, if you knew me, you would probably bet money that it was only a matter of time before I was on another downward spiral," she says. "My life was this revolving door of poor decisions. Statistically, I should not be here right now."

Tada began her college career at Oglala Lakota College as an early entry student, in high school. In a few short years, she received two Associates Degrees in Science, Engineering, and Math and Life Sciences. She had her goals outlined and knew the path she needed to take to reach them.

Then, halfway through her Bachelor's in Chemistry at South Dakota School of Mines, she suddenly became ineligible to receive federal assistance to pay for her college education.

The loss of her dreams and hope for the future triggered a very difficult period in Tada's life. She struggled with alcoholism, homelessness, and imprisonment. But when she was released from jail,

Oglala Lakota College was there, welcoming her, offering her an opportunity to turn her life around.

"The first year back was tough: no job, no financial aid, being a single parent, and battling depression," Tada says. "Luckily, Oglala Lakota College said 'Don't worry about the cost right now, let's just get you enrolled.' I did well that year and the next year I was eligible for an American Indian College Fund Scholarship."

Fast-forward three years, and it is a very exciting time for Tada. As a first-generation student, through the College Fund, she is turning what was a long-term dream into an achievable goal. Because of the American Indian College Fund, her kids have a safe home, she will be a college graduate, she has a promising career path, and she has been able to express the importance of education on Capitol Hill. *"I share my story with other Native people to encourage them that this is not an unachievable dream."*

Every day, Tada is grateful to the College Fund and its generous donors: *"You invested in what was a very troubled individual," she says, "and provided me the opportunity to become a productive, contributing member in a competitive, professional world."*

OUR ACTIONS TODAY BRING HOPE FOR A BETTER TOMORROW



We go to college to learn new things, have new experiences, realize our untapped potential, and open our minds to thoughts and ideas we've not heard or considered before. We're encouraged to view things through a larger lens and learn not only from our professors, but also from each other. It's where we find the common thread of humanity and the things that bring us together, and also where we learn to value and appreciate our differences.

In recent months we've heard many stories of our students experiencing increased racially driven comments and interactions. In the short term we continue to support, guide, and try to protect them through these experiences. What we do in the long term is continue to empower American Indian people through higher education.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHTS



Part of Brook's success comes from celebrating and knowing his Native heritage, and from the support of people like you. Brook's identity as an American Indian is what motivates him every day.

Brook is from the Blackfeet Indian reservation in Browning, Montana, and attends the Blackfeet Community College. He is majoring in criminal justice and behavioral health.

Brook describes his upbringing as "both traditional and non-traditional," as his father worked in the rodeo and on his family's ranch, while his mother lived a more traditional, reservation-based life. When it came time to pursue higher education, Brook really struggled, trying to live in both the non-traditional and traditional worlds.

"I went to Montana State University at Billings pursuing music," Brook says. "Then my favorite uncle became ill, so I moved closer to home and applied to the local community college. During the spring semester, my uncle died. I felt his death deeply and it was really tough to stay focused on school."

Brook thought he might try to go to the University of Montana, but even with financial assistance, could not afford it. As luck would have it, Brook stayed at home and registered to attend Blackfeet Community College. And lucky it was - Brook has thrived at Blackfeet, successfully campaign for vice president

of the student senate and being selected for the American Indian College Fund's Ambassador program. *"Participating as a College Fund Ambassador is a great honor and privilege, and gives me the platform to pursue my greatest passion - giving all American Indian students a voice - and to remind people we are still here.*

"My American Indian heritage brings joy to me as a person. It makes me proud of who I am. I've dealt, like most of us, with racism, the hardships of being an American Indian, but to me it brings joy because that's who I am, and I'll never change who I am."

We infuse our focus to increase the number of American Indians with college degrees with even stronger commitment, and approach our work with an even greater sense of urgency.

We feel the pressure to provide more scholarships to more students and to be sure to do everything possible to ensure our scholars graduate. We expand our programs to work with high school students to be sure they apply for and attend college; we grow the number of internships available to our students; we create new leadership development opportunities; we seek funding to provide additional culturally appropriate programs and teaching methodologies to strengthen cultural identity; we provide tutors and mentors; we create new degree programs in response to job market trends; we provide fellowships to our faculty so they continue to grow and develop into even stronger teachers; and we provide high quality, affordable childcare on campus.

We do this together - you, the College Fund, our schools and our students. Because the near-term future is uncertain and our students need us to maintain and even increase the ground we've gained in recent years, we will work harder and smarter and we will give more of ourselves than we thought possible. And it will be worth it.

Whether we walk through the door for the first time feeling insecure and scared, or confident and inspired, the college experience ultimately humbles us. We walk out the door with our degree and also a better understanding of just how much alike we are. Education is the great equalizer - and as we think about the future, education is the answer.

THE NEW ADMINISTRATION – WHAT'S AT RISK FOR AMERICAN INDIAN STUDENTS?

In recent years we've made great strides in securing parity in government funding for minority serving institutions, including tribal colleges and universities. With the new presidential administration and political platform, that funding is at risk. While all institutions of higher education would feel the loss that comes with budget cuts to education-related programs, that loss will be felt most acutely by tribally-run colleges and universities and American Indian students.

Currently more than 17,000 American Indian students attend tribal colleges and universities - institutions that fill a higher education gap in rural areas where resources are hard won, students are some of the poorest in the nation, and endowment money is scarce. Now, more than ever, it is important that we educate ourselves on the proposed actions of the new administration in relation to higher education - and share our concerns with elected officials to ensure our voices are heard and our values, priorities, and needs are considered.

The College Fund recently launched a new advocacy page on our website (www.collegefund.org/Action). Here you will find the latest information about proposed legislative changes, budget cuts, potential new legislation, and impact specific to American Indian students and institutions of higher learning. You will find information on how your voice can be heard by contacting your political representatives. You can also join our advocacy network to receive email updates regarding the College Fund's position on active legislation.

And just as importantly, your increased support means the College Fund, our network of tribal colleges and universities, and our student scholars will remain focused on one thing - increasing the number of American Indians with college degrees (currently only 13%) - whatever the political climate.



President's Letter continued from page 1

We are committed to the safety and well-being of our tribal students and to all marginalized people.

We are committed to building an even stronger foundation for access to equal education by increasing our support for student financial aid and for the institutions that serve Native and rural communities.

To do this, we need your support.

However you choose to commit your support to Native students, please make a donation today. If you have never attended an event, please join us. If you have never called or written your elected officials, become an advocate for higher education through our advocacy page.

Invest in our students and in higher education. Their future is our future.

As I always say, actions are an act of courage. Now, more than ever, courage matters.

Your actions demonstrate your commitment to our students' dreams of a better future. Your actions show that you believe that education is the answer.

In solidarity and with love for all students and their families,

Cheryl Crazy Bull

Cheryl Crazy Bull
President & CEO, American Indian College Fund



ADRIANA

STUDENT SPOTLIGHTS

Adriana's experience with institutionalized racism was more than enough to make her leave high school behind. But after learning her native language, and with your support behind her, she's helping show others that they belong in this world.

Adriana is a sophomore at Leech Lake Tribal College in Minnesota. In high school, she was one of only a few American Indian students at her school, and frequently encountered racism. She dropped out halfway through her junior year.

But she wasn't about to give up on her dream of a college education. She worked hard for six months at an Alternative Learning Center and was able to catch up with her graduating class. The week she graduated high school, she enrolled into Leech Lake Tribal College and took a class to learn her native Ojibwe language. That's where she finally found peace in identifying as an American Indian young woman, and where she met her mentor.

"Taking his classes led me to become a tutor on campus, helping other students learn the Ojibwe language," Adriana says. "I took one of his classes every semester which led him to ask me to team teach with him this past summer. I had no interest in teaching, but as the class went on I noticed how easy it was for me to teach something I was very passionate about."

"The American Indian College Fund is not only helping me with my journey of revitalizing my culture. The support I receive that doesn't go toward books and fees goes toward gas and groceries. I am very grateful for the American Indian College Fund and everything they do for me and others like me."

(more Student Spotlights on page 2)

CAPPING CHARITABLE CONTRIBUTION DEDUCTIONS

As a non-profit organization, we have a responsibility to steward your gifts effectively. We also have a responsibility to stay informed about the charitable giving environment and how policies may impact our donors and the sustainability of our organization. One of the potential tax reform initiatives being discussed by the new administration is capping the annual charitable donation deductions. Details released as of December 2016 include capping individual filers at \$100,000, joint filers at \$200,000, lowering tax savings for every \$1,000 contributed based on an individual's tax bracket, and potentially disallowing tax savings in future years based on your level of giving. This cap doesn't impact all our generous donors— in fact, it doesn't impact the majority of our donors— but it does signal a shift in the way charitable giving is being viewed, which could ultimately impact you.

We are able to address our mission because people like you are committed to and care about our mission. We understand that a large part of our support comes from friends like you who prioritize giving to the College Fund over other charitable giving and even sometimes making personal sacrifices so you can stand up for what you believe in. In fact, much of our outreach asks you to maintain or increase your annual gift so that we can support more students every year. We do this because **our students need the College Fund and they need you.**

Here are some ways you can safeguard your giving in future years and ensure the organizations you trust, like the College Fund, can continue to support their mission.

- Establish or increase your investment in a donor giving account under a charitable giving program or donor-advised fund
- Make significant gifts while you can and before new policies are put in place
- Contact your elected officials to make sure your opinions are known

We always say every gift is important - but equally important is that our donors feel empowered when they support the causes that matter to them the most. Our scholars remain hopeful about the future, as does the College Fund, because of friends like you.

Attention Charitable Giving Account Holders!

Have you already set aside money for charitable giving through a donor-advised fund or other charitable giving account or trust?

If so, you can easily and conveniently make an impact on American Indian education by making a designation to the American Indian College Fund today.

Transform a student's life by making a grant to the American Indian College Fund today!

You can visit our website at www.collegefund.org/DAF to get started.

Become an American Indian College Fund Ambassador!

If you know someone who might be interested in the work we do, please introduce us by:

- forwarding the email you receive from us
- posting on your social media accounts with the tags @CollegeFund and #standwithnativestudents
- sharing our videos with your network

Help us get the conversation rolling by telling the world about our mission!

Visit us on these social media outlets:



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