Championing Success

A REPORT ON THE PROGRESS OF TRIBAL COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY ALUMNI

Prepared by the Institute for Higher Education Policy for the American Indian College Fund

APRIL 2006

Supported by Funds from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

The American Indian College Fund provides scholarships and other support for the nation's 32 tribal colleges. These tribal colleges play a vital role in preparing students for a brighter tomorrow, offering accredited degrees while keeping them in touch with their Indian culture. The colleges currently serve more than 30,000 part- and full-time students, representing over 250 tribes. The Fund provides approximately 5,000 scholarships annually for American Indian students seeking to better their lives through continued education.

The American Indian College Fund has been commended in recent years by those who recognize the positive impact our work has had in changing peoples' lives for the better. Recently awarded the "National Scholarship Provider of the Year Award" and named the "Best Educational Charity" by *Reader's Digest*, the Fund was also featured by Continental Airlines in their in-flight video presentation, seen by nearly three million passengers.

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With its credo "Educating the Mind and Spirit," the Denver-based American Indian College Fund distributes scholarships and support to America's Tribal Colleges and Universities. These unique institutions of higher education are dedicated to fighting the high rates of poverty, educational failure, and cultural loss confronting American Indians.

Preface

"The battle for Indian children will be won in the classroom, not on the streets or on horses. The students of today are our warriors of tomorrow." —Eddie Box, Southern Ute

Education is one of the most important tools for individual and community empowerment. For native communities in this country, access to education is a critical element in their overall well-being and development. Currently, education attainment levels for American Indians are among the lowest in the country. According to the 2000 population census, only 71 percent of American Indians and Alaska Natives had attained a high school diploma or higher compared to 80 percent of the entire population. Enrollment and completion levels in higher education are lower than the national average as well. These statistics are alarming and point to the need for increased investment in institutions specifically focused on the education needs of American Indians.

In the wake of the Civil Rights and Self-Determination movements of the latter part of the 20th Century, American Indian leaders recognized the failure of mainstream colleges and universities to educate American Indian students, particularly those from reservation communities. Leaders took the education of their people into their own hands and began the Tribal College movement. In 1968 the first tribally controlled college was founded in Tsaile, AZ, as Navajo Community College, later renamed Diné College. Like many tribal leaders, the founders of Navajo Community College realized that too often American Indian students attending college away from home were not returning with degrees. Rather, students returned home with stories of the discrimination that they faced, the lack of social and financial support, and an overall educational experience that did not affirm their cultural realities. These experiences posed significant challenges for American Indian students in obtaining degrees. Tribal leaders recognized the need for institutions of higher education in their own communities. These institutions would help students overcome obstacles faced elsewhere.

Today, there are 32 Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) in the United States, operating accredited degree programs in a variety of fields and offering degrees at the associate's, bachelor's, and master's level. One of the most important qualities of Tribal Colleges and Universities is their focus on serving American Indian communities by providing the opportunity to attain a degree in a supportive and culturally relevant environment. TCUs are mostly located on or near American Indian reservations, serving students who previously would have had little or no access to higher education. TCUs serve many non-traditional students: those who are older, work while attending school, and are responsible for the care of dependent family members. These students must overcome the many challenges associated with being a non-traditional student, as well as face historical barriers that have developed over centuries of cultural conflict between Native American and Western societies.

TCUs answer the call to successfully educate American Indian students by focusing on a mission that is twofold. TCUs primarily work to prepare American Indian students

Highlights

This report presents the findings from an original survey and personal interviews conducted with American Indian College Fund scholarship recipients. The report is a snapshot of how scholarship recipients are faring after graduation, their employment and educational activities, their perceived level of satisfaction with services received at the TCU they attended, and their perception of how well they were prepared for employment and further education. The report points to the many benefits students received from TCUs as well as the importance of financial aid received from a variety of sources, including the American Indian College Fund.

Scholarship recipients were largely non-traditional students.

- Ninety-one percent of scholarship recipients were non-traditional—having dependents, being older than 24, not enrolling continuously, working full time while enrolled, or a combination more than two of these characteristics.
- Thirty-six percent of scholarship recipients were first-generation college students.
- Only 20 percent of recipients were financially dependent on a parent or guardian.
- Despite the barriers non-traditional students face, scholarship recipients appear to have completed degrees in relatively short time spans. Fifty-seven percent graduated between two and three years from enrollment, and another 18 percent graduated in four to five years.

Most recipients were now employed or have pursued further education since graduation.

- Sixty percent of scholarship recipients were employed, and 47 percent were enrolled in a college or university. A substantial proportion, 22 percent, were working and going to school simultaneously.
- Seventy-one percent of graduates who were working reported that their education was good or excellent preparation for employment; 69 percent of those continuing their education believed their TCU provided good or excellent preparation for further education.

Scholarship recipients earned degrees and work in important areas for tribal communities.

- Twenty-five percent earned degrees in business, 13 percent in social work/human services, 11 percent in nursing/health care, and 9 percent in teaching/education.
- Graduates also work in important areas of need. Seventeen percent of recipients were working in education, 14 percent in social work or human services, and another 10 percent in health care or nursing.

Students chose to attend a TCU for a variety of reasons. TCUs offered a viable option for degree attainment and the pursuit of life goals.

- Most commonly, recipients' reasons for attending a TCU: were earning a degree (77 percent), making life better for themselves and their family (73 percent), improving life for their tribe (64 percent), preparing for their career (59 percent), preparing for transfer to a four-year institution (55 percent), and attending a nearby college (47 percent).

- Graduates reported their education was helpful with employment goals, including helping to update skills (37 percent), obtaining a new job (25 percent), and obtaining a raise (22 percent).

Graduates were overwhelmingly satisfied with their TCU experience.

- Eighty-six percent of respondents were satisfied with the courses in their major or field of study. Further, 83 percent were satisfied with their contact with faculty and administrators, 82 percent were satisfied with the overall quality of instruction, and 78 percent were satisfied with curricula on tribal culture.

Financial aid is a major concern for American Indian students and funding from the American Indian College Fund offers a critical source of support.

- Recipients used funding from the American Indian College Fund in a variety of ways. Most commonly, recipients used their scholarships for living expenses (77 percent), books and supplies (66 percent), transportation (58 percent), and tuition and fees (56 percent). The variety of uses was possible because of the flexibility offered with scholarships from the American Indian College Fund.

Recipients also relied on other sources for financial support.

- Recipients relied on federal grants (86 percent), scholarships from their Tribe (53 percent), scholarships from the TCU they attended (43 percent), and personal income (42 percent).

Recipients noted the importance of having a variety of financial aid sources to fit their various needs.

- Forty-six percent of recipients believed federal grants were their most important aid source.
- Eighteen percent felt scholarships from the American Indian College Fund were their most important aid source; this was the second most important aid source reported by respondents.

Together, these findings illuminate the important role TCUs play for American Indian students and tribal communities. Several steps can be taken to build upon the successes of TCUs and their graduates.

- Increase philanthropic giving to the American Indian College Fund to allow for higher scholarship amounts, increased numbers of students receiving awards, and additional funds available for enhancement of individual campuses.
- Increase investment from federal and state governments to help satisfy financial need, of students who depend upon a variety of sources to fund their education.
- Enhance the capacity of TCUs through increased funding to allow the schools to continue offering services already proven successful and offer more institutional scholarships.
- Maintain active alumni networks through increased outreach to aid future follow-up efforts, and help to show the success of TCU alumni after graduation.
- Conduct future research that garners a higher survey response and use comparison studies to strengthen the ability of advocates to secure support for TCUs and the American Indian College Fund.

for immediate employment after graduation or continuation in higher education either at mainstream institutions or four-year TCUs. Additionally, TCUs ensure that students receive an education that is well grounded in their native history and culture so that they can serve as leaders in the tribal community. Indeed, as Boyer (2003) notes, "In a very real way the function of Tribal Colleges is to help ensure the survival of indigenous people in America."

TCUs routinely must work to fulfill their mission using strained resources. One of the primary sources of financial support comes from the American Indian College Fund. Established in 1989, the Fund is the major provider of private scholarships for American Indian students attending Tribal Colleges and Universities. In 2004, the Fund awarded $4 million to more than 5,000 students (American Indian College Fund Annual Report 2004). In addition to scholarships, the Fund supports TCUs with grants for campus construction, cultural preservation, and other board-directed initiatives.

The American Indian College Fund also supports TCUs by helping to disseminate knowledge about the success of the institutions and their alumni. The Fund has commissioned periodic studies that follow up with scholarship recipients who have graduated. These studies look at the progress scholarship recipients have made in employment and further education since graduation in order to illustrate the benefits offered by TCUs and the funding received from the American Indian College Fund. This report is the third commissioned by the American Indian College Fund.[1]

[1] Prior studies were conducted in 2001 and 2003 by Harder+Company.

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Introduction and Background

American Indian students face numerous barriers to higher education. Yet enrollment of native students continues to increase, in large part due to the success of Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) in creating a culturally relevant and supportive atmosphere in which students learn and grow. Organizations such as the American Indian College Fund contribute to this success by helping American Indian students overcome financial barriers to enrollment and degree attainment.

Historical Context

Tribal Colleges and Universities have been on a 37-year journey of building successful institutions of higher education for American Indian students. Prior to the founding of the first Tribal College in 1968, Navajo Community College (now Diné College), much of American Indian education was characterized by attempts to assimilate the population into Western ways of thinking and learning. For example, federally funded off-reservation boarding schools that operated during the 19th and early 20th centuries removed American Indian youth from their families and their culture in order to fully indoctrinate them into the White world. Schools on and off reservations did not offer strong academic curricula but rather stressed basic work skills and made little or no mention of Native American culture (Boyer 1997a; Monette 1995; Wright and Tierney 1991). Western models of education have failed both on the secondary and post-secondary levels, with the result that American Indians have historically had low levels of educational attainment compared to the rest of the population.

In 2000, 71 percent of American Indians and Alaska Natives 25 years old and older had attained a high school diploma or higher, compared to 80 percent of the entire population. Additionally, 16 percent of the American Indian population ages 16 to 19 were not enrolled in high school or had not graduated from high school, compared to 10 percent of the same cohort nationally (U.S. Census Bureau 2003). And while enrollment of American Indian and Alaska Native students more than doubled during the period from 1976 to 2002, from 76,100 to 166,000, American Indian enrollment as a percentage of all postsecondary enrollments only grew from 0.7 to 1 percent during the same period (Freeman and Fox 2005). American Indian students who do continue on to postsecondary education often face social and cultural isolation on mainstream campuses and return to their homes without attaining a degree (Witkowsky 1998).

In recognition that many American Indian students were not being adequately served by mainstream institutions, tribal leaders came together and established institutions of higher education that were grounded in traditional "ways of knowing" and culturally sensitive pedagogy. Today, 32 TCUs exist in the United States, operating accredited programs in a variety of fields ranging from business management to environmental sciences.[2] While the majority of TCUs are two-year institutions, seven

[2] The American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), the membership body of Tribal Colleges and Universities, lists 36 institutions as members. There are three AIHEC member schools not listed on the American Indian College Fund roster of schools including Red Crow Community College in Canada, Comanche Nation College in Lawton, OK, and Wind River Tribal College in Ethete, WY. D-Q University and Si Tanka University are also no longer listed on the American Indian College Fund roster; however, there were survey respondents who graduated from both universities prior to their closures. Data from these respondents are included along with graduates of the 32 colleges recognized by the American Indian College Fund.

now offer a bachelor's degree and two offer a master's degree.[3] Additionally, many TCUs have articulation agreements with four-year institutions that allow students to easily transfer to obtain an advanced degree or take distance education classes from their TCU (American Indian College Fund 2006; Boyer 1997a).

Mission of Tribal Colleges and Universities

TCUs are mainly tribally chartered and locally controlled, although there are three federally chartered Tribal Colleges (AIHEC and Institute for Higher Education Policy 1999).[4] Since these institutions were founded in order to address the higher education needs of American Indians, needs not being addressed by mainstream higher education, the mission of Tribal Colleges and Universities has been described as one that is twofold: that of preparing American Indian students for immediate employment after graduation or continuation in higher education at mainstream institutions as well as ensuring that students are well grounded in their native history and culture so that they can serve as leaders in the tribal community (Boyer 2003). As Boyer (2003) notes, "In a very real way the function of Tribal Colleges is to help ensure the survival of indigenous people in America."

The commitment of TCUs to sustaining traditional cultural values is important to the success of their students. Tribal language, history, art, music, dance, and other elements of tribal life are embraced and formally taught at TCUs. Tribal culture also influences the curricula and is reflected in the colleges' educational philosophies (AIHEC and Institute for Higher Education Policy 2001). At the same time, the colleges are fully engaged in local communities and often serve as the place for cultural preservation. For example, TCUs have cultural learning centers that offer open access to community members and serve as a central place where tribal archives held, and cultural exhibitions are displayed (AIHEC and Institute for Higher Education Policy 2001).

TCUs are often compared to community colleges in that their mission and curriculum are tailored to the specific needs of the surrounding communities (AIHEC and Institute for Higher Education Policy 1999). TCUs are also similar to community colleges in the ways that they contribute directly to the economic development of local communities through workforce training, fostering local entrepreneurship, as well as direct spending in the community by employees, students, visitors, and the institutions themselves (AIHEC and Institute for Higher Education Policy 2000). The ability of TCUs to help foster economic development is an important aspect of their mission, especially since they are located mostly on reservations that are geographically isolated and economically impoverished. Social problems such as high rates of suicide and alcohol related deaths, along with high unemployment and poverty rates, make the job of building institutions to promote success in higher education that much more critical (AIHEC and Institute for Higher Education Policy 1999).

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[3] In 1983, Oglala Lakota College and Sinte Gleska College became the first two Tribal Colleges to be accredited at both the associate's and bachelor's degree levels. Sinte Gleska also became the first Tribal College to offer a master's degree in 1989. See the history of Sinte Gleska College at http://www.sinte.edu/catalog/SGUctlg007.html and the history of Oglala Lakota College at http://www.olc.edu/history.

[4] These are Haskell Indian Nations University, the Institute of American Indian Arts, and Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute.

Community Ties Develop through Traditions

TCUs often offer activities derived from Native American traditions. Pow-wows, elders' storytelling, and talking circles are occasions that Nonabah Sam, an alumnus of the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) in Sante Fe, NM, remembers clearly.

One of Nonabah's favorite traditions is the talking circle, in which tribal members help each other resolve problems by listening. No one in the circle is allowed to speak, except for the troubled individual as he expresses his feelings. This silent acceptance, with the guide of a talking circle organizer, leads each individual to recognize the solution to their problem. Nonabah observed that these types of social gatherings strengthened community ties within the campus and enhanced a sense of belonging among students. As she puts it, "They would keep community together." She appreciates IAIA's environment, which incorporates traditional Native American cultures into its contemporary educational system.

Nonabah completed her bachelor's degree in Museum Studies and immersed herself in the world of professional Native American artists during her studies. Her experience at IAIA made her realize the importance of Indian education. With her passion, she is currently considering going on to a graduate program in Native American museum studies.

Despite the obstacles, TCUs continue to grow. Enrollment of American Indian students at TCUs is growing at almost twice the rate of American Indian enrollment in higher education in general. Between 1997 and 2002 enrollment of American Indian students at TCUs grew by 32 percent, compared to 16 percent enrollment growth in higher education institutions overall (Freeman and Fox 2005). Despite the fact that TCU enrollment has grown, American Indians still show low levels of educational attainment compared to the national population. In 2000, only 42 percent of American Indians had participated in some college education and only 12 percent had earned a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 52 percent and 24 percent of the national population respectively (Bauman and Graf 2003). Many barriers to attendance and attaining a degree still exist, preventing many more students who would benefit from postsecondary education from enrolling.

Barriers to American Indian Success in Higher Education

As mentioned, many American Indians feel alienated at mainstream institutions and feel they lack cultural support. American Indian students often have many of the risk factors for dropping out before attaining a degree—including working full time, being a single parent, not enrolling immediately after graduation from high school, and attending college on a part-time basis (Choy 2002). Many mainstream institutions do not reach out to them or provide the support students need when they work full time or support dependents.

In addition, they face a number of other barriers to entering higher education. For example, American Indians living on reservations tend not to have role models who have graduated with a postsecondary degree, and educational attainment is low. Further, for many, academic preparation is inadequate. Many do not want to move far away to attend a mainstream institution, since most reservations are fairly isolated. Financial constraints such as the high cost of tuition as well as room and board costs are also major hardships (Harder+Company 2003).

In order to address the financial aspect of these barriers, in 1989 the Tribal Colleges founded the American Indian College Fund, which raises money for scholarships, endowments, programs in teacher training, cultural preservation, facilities improvements, and other board-directed initiatives. A substantial portion of the funds raised are used to support student scholarships at TCUs across the United States, with $4 million awarded to more than 5,000 students in 2004 (American Indian College Fund 2004). In general, TCUs determine student eligibility for these scholarships and award only those students who are currently enrolled at a Tribal College.

Assessing the Progress of TCU Graduates

As enrollment at Tribal Colleges and Universities has continued to grow, the interest in assessing the progress of these students beyond graduation has also increased. While previous research is limited, some surveys and studies have been conducted to address these issues. Boyer (1995) surveyed enrolled TCU students to examine their experiences and satisfaction levels, while Monette (1995), Wright and Head (1990), and a survey by the Institute for Higher Education Policy (2000) focused on the progress of TCU alumni in general.

The American Indian College Fund also commissioned two prior studies in an attempt to assess the experiences of TCU alumni who received scholarships from the Fund (see section on methodology). This report presents the results of the third survey of scholarship recipients who have graduated from a TCU. The report also presents profiles of select respondents.

The following sections are organized thematically. The report opens with the demographics of scholarship recipients who responded to the survey, followed by a summary of scholarship recipients' use of various financial aid resources. The next section discusses recipients' experiences while enrolled including their reasons for choosing to attend their TCU, experiences with temporary leave, and their satisfaction level with various aspects of their education. The next section addresses degrees earned by scholarship recipients and fields of study. Next, the report details the activities of respondents at the time of the survey, including their employment activities, educational activities, and earnings. The final section presents conclusions of the report along with recommendations to further the success of TCUs and their graduates.

Methodology for the Report

The American Indian College Fund commissioned the Institute for Higher Education Policy to assess the educational experiences of scholarship recipients who have graduated from a TCU as well as their employment and further education. Several

sources were used for this report, including an original survey of scholarship recipients, interviews with scholarship recipients, and published national data sources.

Survey Design and Administration

The survey population was derived from a list of scholarship recipients provided by the American Indian College Fund in June of 2005. Those who had expected graduation dates of June 2005 or earlier were included in the final survey population.[5] This resulted in a total survey population of 2,600 individuals. In July of 2005, surveys were mailed to those with complete mailing addresses (2,450), and were emailed to those with email addresses (1,739). Individuals for whom both mailing and email addresses were obtained received surveys in both formats. During the months of July, August, and September several attempts were made to follow-up with individuals who had not responded. In July a follow-up postcard was sent in the mail, along with a follow-up email, and phone calls were conducted during the months of August and September. The survey closed in September 2005.

A total of 376 completed surveys were returned.[6] Because only expected graduation and not actual graduation dates were available from the American Indian College Fund database, many respondents had not yet completed their studies at the Tribal College or University where they were enrolled. A total of 127 survey respondents were not yet graduates. An additional two were graduates of non-TCU institutions.[7] Removing these cases left 247 valid cases for an overall response rate of 11 percent.[8] In some cases, respondents did not complete all portions of the survey; therefore, only valid percentages are reported.

Limitations of the Survey Data

The survey results are an informative snapshot of scholarship recipients who had graduated with a degree or certificate or had completed their desired studies, if one assumes that respondents are similar to the whole population of scholarship recipients. The results presented here are consistent with previous surveys and point to concurrent patterns seen in prior studies. Demographically, most scholarship recipients who responded to this survey were similar to all TCU students; most were older than 25, female, and primarily American Indian (See Figure 1, Figure 2, and further discussion in the next section). When possible, data from previous surveys are presented along with results from the current survey to show comparability.

[5] Expected graduation dates were not available for all recipients. Reported expected graduation dates ranged from May 2002 to May 2009. Readers will find that some survey respondents report graduation dates in years before 2002. This is because participants were entered into the database when they received the scholarship, perhaps for the pursuit of a second degree.

[6] In addition, 272 mailed surveys were returned as undeliverable.

[7] Scholarships from the American Indian College Fund are awarded to students who attend Tribal Colleges and Universities; however there are a select group of awards that are offered to American Indian students attending a selected number of non-TCUs (American Indian College Fund 2005a).

[8] The total of undeliverable letters was not included in the calculation of the response rate.

Some limitations are often a factor when conducting surveys, including the potential of self-selection bias as well as respondents' different interpretation of survey questions or failure to respond to certain questions.[9]

Finally, it is important to note that participants graduated within a range of years. This consideration is relevant when looking at demographic characteristics such as age distribution, marital status, and number of dependents, which may be influenced by time.[10] Respondents had enrolled over the range between 1980 and 2005, although the majority (57 percent) had enrolled between 2001 and 2003. Meanwhile, respondents had graduated between 1992 and 2006, with 87 percent graduating between 2003 and 2005. (See Appendix Figures A1 and A2 for details.)

Analysis of the Data

Very little research has been conducted on the experiences of American Indian students during and after postsecondary enrollment, and specifically on students at TCUs. Nevertheless, data from previous surveys or national data are presented in this report, when possible, in order to offer contextual meaning. The survey results may be compared with previous studies of scholarship recipients, data on Tribal College students in general, and information on American Indians nationwide. Data sources include:

- The previous surveys of alumni commissioned by the American Indian College Fund of 2001 and 2003 (conducted by Harder+Company), which present qualitative and quantitative data on TCU alumni who have received an American Indian College Fund Scholarship. The data collection methodology for these surveys is similar to the methodology used for the current survey and are presented in order to show comparability with current survey results.
- The survey of TCU alumni conducted by the Institute for Higher Education Policy in 1999, which also provides quantitative and qualitative data on a sample of all TCU graduating students.
- The National Center for Education Statistics' Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), which collects institution-level information on enrollment, program completions, faculty, staff, and finances for the nation's postsecondary institutions. Data on Tribal Colleges and Universities are used from the IPEDS Enrollment Survey from 2003-2004 and Completions Surveys from the years between 1995-1996 and 2003-2004. Institutional charges and financial aid data are used from the IPEDS 2003 and 2004 online Data Analysis System. There are TCUs that have not reported data in some years.
- The U.S. Bureau of the Census, which collects data on American Indians and reservations, including demographic characteristics, education attainment, and income information.

The analysis in this report focuses on the experiences of American Indian College Fund scholarship recipients and the impact of TCUs on those students.

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[9] Self-selection bias may occur if individuals with certain characteristics (such as those with higher levels of attainment) were more likely to respond. Also, scholarship recipients without accurate contact information were not able to participate in the survey.

[10] See Appendix for year of enrollment, year of graduation, and time to degree.

Student Voices

Finally, the report presents qualitative data gathered from answers to an open-ended survey question asking respondents to share stories and/or comments about their TCU experience, particularly how their education was of benefit. Additional data were gathered from telephone interviews conducted with several survey respondents. These stories are provided in order to put a human face on the challenges and successes of American Indian College Fund scholarship recipients.

Findings of the Study

In contrast to mainstream institutions, Tribal Colleges and Universities provide American Indian students with the support they need to achieve a degree. Although community colleges also have support systems in place for non-traditional students, American Indian students fare better at TCUs. Research has suggested that the distinction may be the cultural identity fostered by TCUs, as well as their strong connections to local communities (Harder+Company 2003). As one scholarship recipient said, "I feel that the college I attended helped 'our people' to see what we are and allowed others to realize the history from a different aspect. I didn't like the big university, because I was one of six Native Americans. And I was the only one who came from the Ojibwe heritage. It was very lonely and isolated. Ultimately I came back to where I was more comfortable, where I knew I wasn't alone."

American Indian College Fund support of TCUs contributes to the strength of these colleges. The following sections reveal the experiences of TCU graduates who received scholarships from the Fund, from the instruction they received while in college to their employment and further education after graduation.

Demographics of Scholarship Recipients

Like community colleges, Tribal Colleges and Universities enroll a disproportionate number of non-traditional students, who tend to have more risk factors for dropping out before achieving a degree. TCUs serve large proportions of older students, women, those with dependent family members, first-generation college students, and many others who previously had little access to postsecondary education in their communities. Scholarship recipients who responded to the survey were very similar, consistent with characteristics of the student bodies at TCUs.

Most scholarship recipients were older than 25, with 70 percent being between the ages of 25 and 49 (See Figure 1). Only one quarter were under the age of 25.[11] This is similar to the pattern of enrollment at TCUs overall, where only 42 percent of students enrolled in the fall of 2003 were under 25 (NCES 2004a). The proportion of younger students at Tribal Colleges and Universities is substantially lower than at all degree-granting institutions (mainstream and both two- and four-year institutions), where 60 percent of enrollees in the fall of 2002 were under 25 (NCES 2004a). (See Figure 2 for comparisons of data from different sources.)

As in Tribal Colleges overall, most alumni who responded to the survey were American Indian women. An overwhelming proportion, 82 percent, of survey respondents were women, and 95 percent reported being American Indian. It is important to note, however, that other racial/ethnic populations are served by TCUs as well. For example, 14 percent of alumni respondents to the survey were White.[12] This

[11] It is important to note that this age distribution reflects their age at the time of the survey and not at the time of entry into college.

[12] The numbers reflect the fact that respondents were able to choose more than one race/ethnicity. When separated out, about 85 percent of respondents were American Indian only, while ten percent reported being American Indian and White.

Figure 1: Demographic characteristics of survey respondents

DEMOGRAPHICS	PERCENT DISTRIBUTION
Race/Ethnicity**	
American Indian or Alaska Native	95
African American	0
White or Caucasian	14
Asian American or Pacific Islander	0 *
Hispanic American	1
Other	1
Age	
Younger than 25	23
25-34	36
35-49	34
50 and older	7
Gender	
Male	18
Female	82
Miles Traveled to TCU	
Five Miles or Less	35
6-10 Miles	15
11- 50 Miles	32
51-90 Miles	5
91 Miles or More	12
Highest Level of Education Attained by Either Parent	
High School Diploma/Equivalency or less	36
Some College	19
Business/Trade School	8
Two-year College Degree	18
Four-year College Degree	11
Graduate/Professional Degree or Some Graduate/Professional Study	5
Don't Know	5
Marital Status	
Unmarried with dependents	39
Unmarried without dependents	26
Married with dependents	27
Married without dependents	4
Other	4
Number of Dependents	
1-2 Dependents	65
3-4 Dependents	29
5-6 Dependents	7
Age of first dependent	
Four years and younger	26
5-9	27
10-14	17
15-19	18
20-24	5
25 and older	7

Note: Percentage totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

* Rounds to zero.

** Respondents were able to report multiple responses.

Source: 2005 TCU Alumni Survey

distribution is similar to the racial/ethnic distribution reported by all TCUs in the fall of 2003 (NCES 2004a), and many of the colleges have reported increasing numbers of students at their institutions who are not American Indian.

Access to college in local communities is extremely important to most American Indians, especially those living on reservations. This is reflected in the large proportions of students who attend a TCU close to their home. Half of scholarship recipients responding to the survey traveled less than 10 miles to the TCU they attended, and almost half of respondents chose their TCU because of its close proximity to their home. It is also important to note, the substantial proportion of students who travel longer distances to attend school. Thirty-two percent of scholarship recipients surveyed traveled from 11 to 50 miles to attend their TCU, and another 17 percent traveled more than 50 miles. The determination of these students is especially significant given the transportation barriers that many students face when living on reservations.

Tribal College students are also commonly the first in their family to attend college, and more than one-third of scholarship recipients were first-generation college students. While it has been shown that first-generation students face unique barriers in enrolling and persisting through higher education (Choy 2002), TCUs may help mitigate some of these barriers for first-generation American Indian students through family-centered models of education, culturally relevant curricula, and supportive academic environments (Harder+Company 2003; Ortiz and HeavyRunner 2003). At the same time, the accessibility of TCUs may have helped to increase the number of second-

Figure 2: Comparison of 2005 survey respondent characteristics to other data sources

Demographics	2005 Survey Respondents	1999 Survey of TCU Alumni	TCU Enrolled Students Fall 2003 (IPEDS)	TCU Completions 2003-2004 (IPEDS)
Age (% distribution)				
Younger than 25	23	17	42	†
25-34	36	37	26	†
35-49	34	37	23	†
50 and older	7	9	8	†
Gender (% distribution)				
Male	18	26	33	30
Female	82	74	67	70
Race/Ethnicity (%)**				
American Indian or Alaska Native	95	†	80	78
African American	0	†	0 *	0 *
White or Caucasian	14	†	18	18
Asian American or Pacific Islander	0 *	†	0 *	0 *
Hispanic American	1	†	1	3
Other	1	†	1	1

Note: Percentage totals may not add to 100 due to rounding.

† Not available

* Rounds to zero

** Respondents were able to choose multiple responses for race/ethnicity.

Source: 2005 TCU Alumni Survey; NCES 2004a; NCES 1996-2004 (data from 2003-2004 only); Institute for Higher Education Policy 2001.

generation college students in native communities and to promote postsecondary education within families. Evidence from past surveys shows that students who attend TCUs often serve as motivation for other family members to attend (Harder+Company 2001). Moreover, 38 percent of respondents to this survey had a parent who completed a business/trade school, two-year, or four-year degree.

Obtaining a postsecondary degree is an important achievement not only for the individual, but also for families, especially given that the majority of scholarship recipients care for dependent family members. About two-thirds of survey respondents reported caring for dependents, 39 percent unmarried and 27 percent married. Only a quarter of survey respondents were not married or not taking care of any dependents at all. Most respondents were caring for one or two dependent family members under the age of 18. Several were caring for family members who would not be considered dependents in the traditional sense—7 percent of respondents reported having dependents aged 25 or older. This supports previous findings that 42 percent of scholarship recipients supported a spouse or partner, while another 43 percent supported a sibling, parent, grandparent, or other extended family member (Harder+Company 2003).

Clearly, American Indian College Fund scholarship recipients are non-traditional—91 percent either have dependents, are older than 24, did not enroll continuously, worked full time while enrolled, or some combination of these characteristics. In addition, only 20 percent of scholarship recipients had parents or legal guardians who provided the majority of the student's support all or part of the time they were in college. These students face numerous barriers to success yet, as shown below, they are succeeding in finding jobs or pursuing higher education after graduation.

Despite barriers, scholarship recipients appear to have relatively short times to degree completion, measured as the number of years between their reported enrollment year to their graduation year. The majority of respondents (56 percent) graduated between two and three years from enrollment, while an additional 18 percent graduated in four to five years.[13] Male respondents, those without children or other dependents, and traditionally aged students tended to graduate in fewer years.

Reasons for Attending

Students choose to attend a TCU, for a variety of reasons (See Figure 3). Scholarship recipients most frequently reported choosing to attend a TCU to earn a degree or certificate—clearly students see local TCUs as a viable option toward their goal. Other frequent responses included: to make life better for their family, to improve life for their tribe, to prepare for their career, and to prepare for transfer to a four-year institution. About half of the respondents also chose their TCU because of its proximity to their home and because of the cost of tuition.

Survey respondents also commented on the sense of community and comfortable educational environment that they experienced while attending their TCU. Tribal Colleges and Universities offer American Indian students the opportunity to learn in a safe environment. Indeed, fostering a sense of community is an important element of

[13] Eight percent graduated in one year (likely in certificate programs), while 16 percent graduated in six or more years.

helping their students overcome barriers to college success. As one scholarship recipient said, "I sincerely believe that if it weren't for the Tribal College I *wouldn't* have pursued my education. I felt safe and at home at this college, simply because it was in my own community amongst the people I knew and grew up with."

Figure 3: Reasons reported by survey respondents for choosing to attend a TCU

Reasons	Percent
To earn a degree	77
To make life better for me and my family	73
To improve life for my tribe	64
To prepare for my career	59
To prepare for transfer	55
To attend a nearby college	47
For cost of tuition	43
To update my skills	38
To learn about my tribe's history and language	30
To receive personal attention	25
Other reasons	9

Note: Respondents were able to report multiple responses.
Source: 2005 TCU Alumni Survey

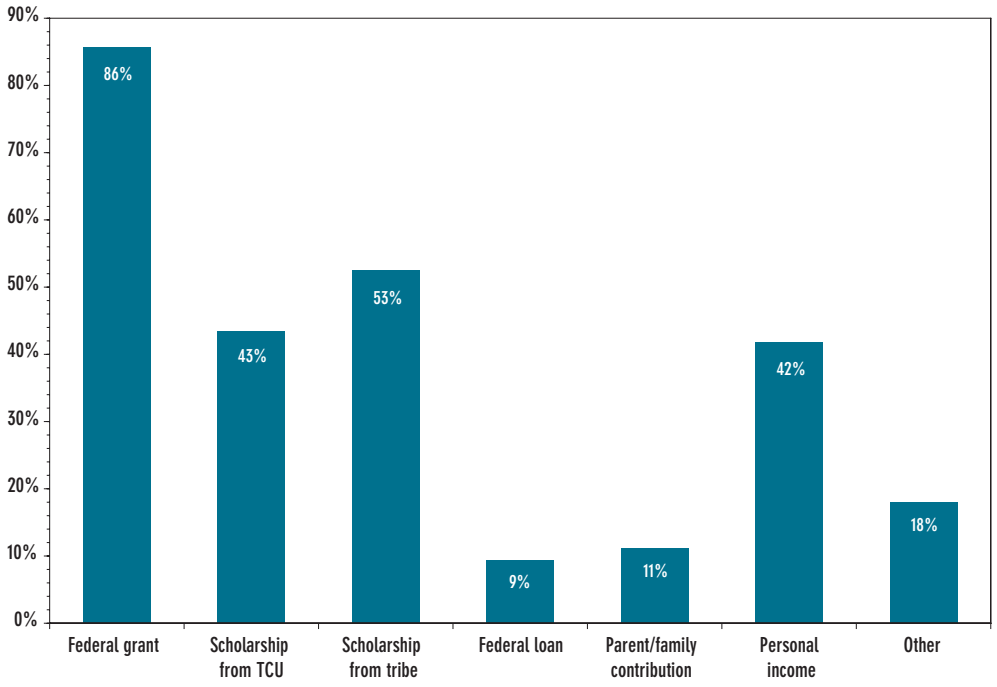
Importance of Financial Aid

As mentioned, American Indian students face many barriers to enrolling in college. When students who were interviewed commented on negative aspects of their experience as a student, they most commonly reported the financial hardships they endured in order to complete their studies. Evidence from this and prior surveys suggests that scholarship recipients, like all Tribal College students, face significant financial burdens and rely heavily on the availability of financial aid resources to attain a postsecondary degree. Although tuition and fees are relatively low—average tuition at TCUs was about $2,200 for full-time undergraduates in 2004-05 (NCES 2004b)—these costs are still high enough that many students simply cannot afford to attend without substantial help.

Given their extreme financial need, students attending TCUs tend to be eligible for financial aid from various sources. Students attending TCUs, as well as American Indian students in general, rely mostly on federal need-based aid, particularly grants, to fund their education. In 2002-2003, 74 percent of first-time, full-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students received aid from any source at TCUs—71 percent received a federal grant, 24 percent received a state or local grant, 38 percent received an institutional grant, and only 2 percent received a loan (NCES 2003). According to one student, "Returning to or entering college is a way of facing the world and improving one's standard of living. Given the options for returning to school, one can be thankful for scholarships, grants, etc. that help with the economic burden of college life."

The scholarship recipients who responded to the survey appeared to be more likely to receive most forms of aid to fund their education. Figure 4 shows that, excluding the American Indian College Fund scholarships of which all survey participants were recipients, federal grants (including the Pell Grant) were the most heavily relied upon form of aid, cited by 86 percent of scholarship recipients. Respondents also relied heavily upon scholarships from their Tribe, scholarships from their TCU, and personal income. Most TCU students must work while they are enrolled to help pay for their education. In fact, while attending a TCU, 70 percent of responding scholarship recipients were employed, with 46 percent of those students working full time. A previous study of scholarship recipients suggests, however, that receiving a scholarship from the American Indian College Fund allows students to work fewer hours, which may have a positive impact on persistence (Harder+Company 2003).

Figure 4: Financial aid reported by survey respondents other than Fund scholarship, by source



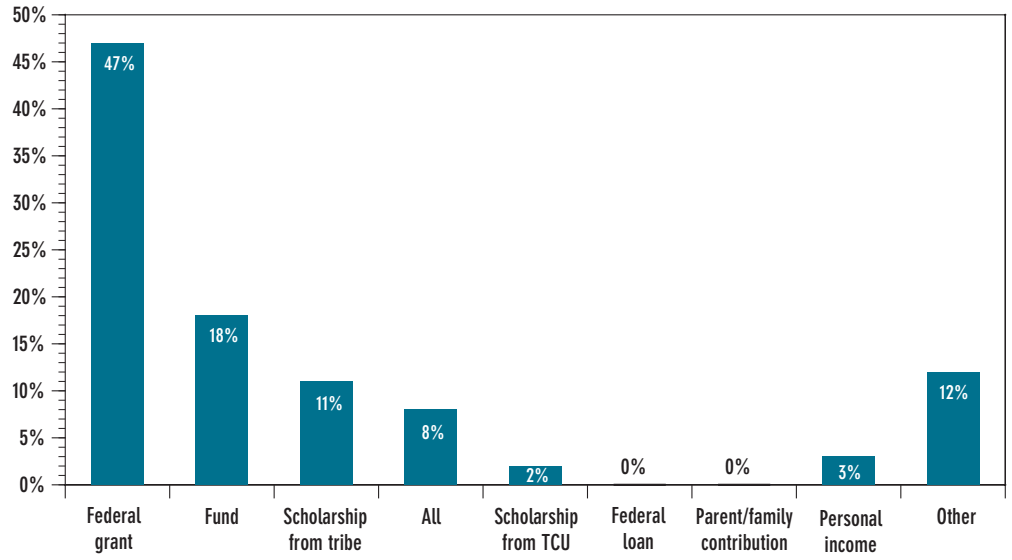
Note: Respondents were able to choose multiple responses.
Source: 2005 TCU Alumni Survey

It is important to note that respondents did not rely heavily on loans or family contributions. Very few TCU students borrow federal Stafford loans, and by choice, Tribal Colleges and Universities generally do not participate in the campus-based Perkins Loan Program (AIHEC and Institute for Higher Education Policy 1999). Further, given the low earning levels endemic to many reservations and the dearth of opportunities for jobs, low income levels constrain family contributions toward higher education (AIHEC and Institute for Higher Education Policy 1999).

The aid received by TCU students often is not enough to meet the students' full financial need. This is where scholarships received from the American Indian College Fund are essential to help TCU students finance most or all of their educational expenses. When asked about their most important aid source (Figure 5), 18 percent of survey respondents felt their most important aid source was the scholarship provided by the American Indian College Fund. These scholarships lessen the pressure of family responsibilities and allow students to reduce their work hours, which in turn may help them persist to a degree (Harder+Company 2003). Taken together with "other" private scholarships, scholarships from Tribes, and scholarships from the colleges themselves, private funding rivals that of federal funding in its importance to students.

While the average award given by the American Indian College Fund is $750

Figure 5: Most important aid source reported by survey respondents



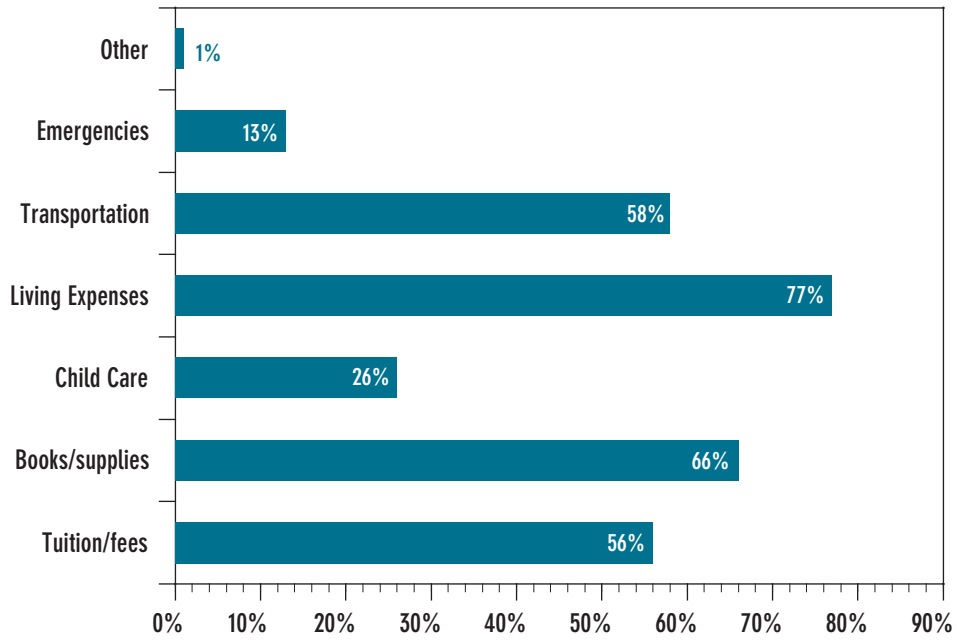
Source: 2005 TCU Alumni Survey

(American Indian College Fund 2006), the flexibility offered in its use is of particular importance, as reflected in the various ways that respondents used their scholarship money. Most forms of financial aid, such as Pell Grants, require that recipients use the funds toward traditional measures of the price of attendance, as determined by the school's financial aid office. Respondents to this survey used money from the American Indian College Fund most often for living expenses, books and supplies, transportation, as well as tuition and fees (See Figure 6). However, many recipients also used the funds for circumstances that arose while they attended a TCU, such as daycare or family issues.

A previous study found that 98 percent of recipients felt their scholarship money was somewhat important to very important in financing their Tribal College education (Harder+Company 2003). The fact that scholarships from the American Indian College Fund are identified as critical to students, despite their relatively low dollar amounts, confirms how important these funds are to students. As one student said, "Thank you for your financial support and for helping fund my goals in obtaining my degree. Being a recipient of this scholarship is very rewarding in the sense that you believed in me. Thank you."

Because students attending TCUs rely on a variety of financial aid sources outside of federal and state aid, it is important to know where they obtain financial aid information. Respondents to the survey most often learned about financial aid resources from a faculty or staff member (67 percent) or their TCU in general (61 percent), suggesting that outreach efforts to students would be most effectively implemented through the institutions themselves.

Figure 6: Use of Fund scholarship by survey respondents



Note: Respondents were able to choose multiple responses.
Source: 2005 TCU Alumni Survey

Experiences While Enrolled

One of the assets of TCUs in increasing access for American Indian students is the high level of satisfaction students express. Many American Indian students feel ambivalent toward mainstream higher education due to the difficult experiences many faced in primary and secondary levels, which often make native culture invisible. Further, many confront teachers who make negative judgments about their student's achievement abilities (Ortiz and HeavyRunner 2003). American Indian students often lack the self-confidence to make the decision to apply to college. The satisfaction level of students who graduate from TCUs is an important indicator of the institutions' success in helping students overcome these feelings.

Student Satisfaction

Tribal Colleges and Universities offer students an educational environment that aims to support and motivate students to succeed, recognizing the many complex challenges they face. Generally, students who attend TCUs are consistently satisfied with this experience, particularly with the quality of instruction, relationships with faculty and staff, and curricula that focus on native culture. Scholarship recipients who responded to the survey were consistently satisfied with the educational framework created by TCUs, as shown in Figure 7. Respondents most frequently reported being satisfied or very satisfied with courses in their major field of study, contact with faculty and administrators,

"I am Totally Indebted."

Julian R. Lucero-Emmons completed his associate's degree in General Studies at Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI) in Albuquerque, NM. He sees SIPI as a good avenue for transition from rural to urban lifestyles as well as two-year to four-year educational institutions. SIPI's services, such as writing courses and distance learning satellites, help students who have never lived outside of Indian reservations to develop study skills. SIPI also offers collaborative programs with the University of New Mexico, a nearby four-year institution, to help students transition to a four-year university atmosphere. These programs include honor societies, the Alliance for Minority Participation Program, and agricultural activities. At the same time, Julian points out the benefit of the small campus at SIPI—all students know one another, and ideas flow easily among classmates.

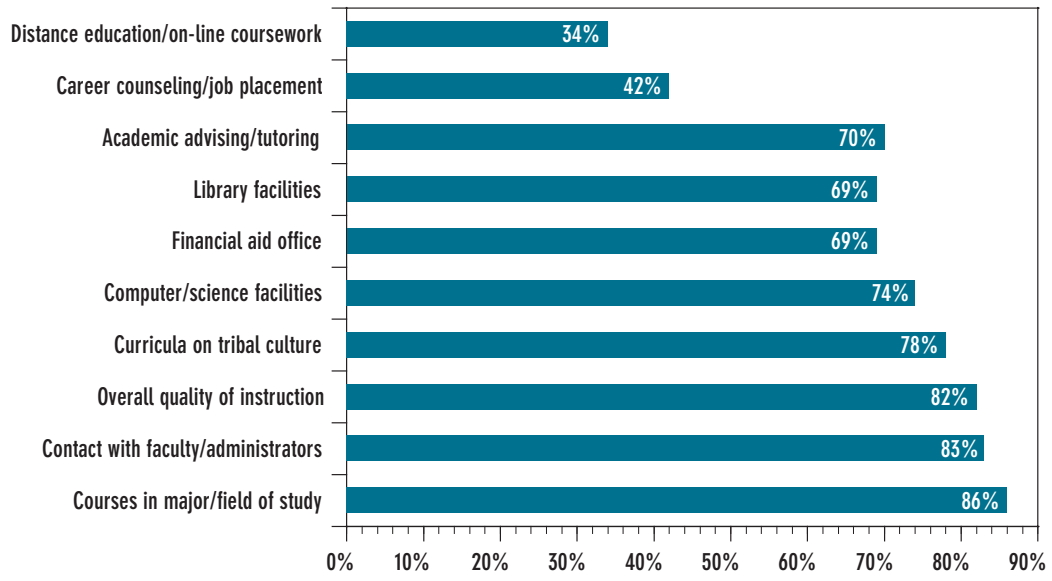
Julian transferred to the University of New Mexico to obtain a bachelor's degree in University Studies and will be graduating magna cum laude in summer 2006. He is currently the Assistant Food and Beverage Director at the Albuquerque Marriott Hotel, and is considering applying to a graduate program in hotel management. "Students need to work hard," Julian replied when asked what advice he would give to other students. He emphasized the importance of keeping a balance between schoolwork and social life in order to succeed academically. "The knowledge that I gained by attending the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute and the support that I gained from the American Indian College Fund helped to make me the person that I am today. I am totally indebted."

and overall quality of instruction. Appreciation for faculty is reflected in the graduates' satisfaction level with the instruction and contact with faculty at their TCU. Eighty-two percent of respondents to this survey reported being satisfied with the overall quality of instruction that they received. One student explained that "Fort Belknap College had very good teachers who went [above and] beyond, helping students with finding financial help and transportation so they could get to school. Their teaching methods were of the best I have ever seen. The University in Great Falls should take a good hard look at Fort Belknap's ways and learn; then maybe there would be more Indian college graduates from their schools."

Faculty play an incredibly important and distinct role for students attending TCUs. Indeed, faculty members at TCUs are often considered one of the most important components of the overall educational experience, serving as motivators, mentors, and support systems for students.[14] Because of their willingness to help students, faculty

[14] The role of faculty at Tribal Colleges and Universities is similar to that of community college faculty, a majority of whom consider student contact as the most important aspect of their professional role (Tippeconnic, III and McKinney 2003; Rifkin 2000).

Figure 7: Survey respondents reporting that they were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with various aspects of their TCU experience



Note: Respondents were able to choose multiple responses.
Source: 2005 TCU Alumni Survey

"emerge as heroic figures" in the eyes of students (Boyer 1997b). Respondents quite frequently offered stories of how the professors and staff of their TCU were positive elements of their overall educational experience. The caring nature of faculty helps students persist through college, despite the challenges they face. According to one student, "The best part of attending a Tribal College is the encouragement and support I received from the faculty and staff. The experiences that they shared with me have given me the courage to continue my education at a mainstream university. They have reminded me that my hard work will pay off in the long run."

Satisfaction with curricula on tribal culture was also one of the top responses, with more than three-quarters of scholarship recipients reporting they were satisfied or very satisfied. Part of the mission of TCUs is to integrate tribal tradition into all aspects of instruction, even the sciences. TCUs also host ceremonies, talking circles, and other events on campus. These activities allow students to rediscover their heritage and gain the confidence they will need as they continue after graduation.

Scholarship recipients were generally less satisfied with career counseling and job placement, and distance education. Only 42 and 34 percent of respondents were satisfied with career counseling and distance education, respectively. It is important to note, however, that many respondents in these categories reported a neutral satisfaction level.[15] This suggests that these students were not "dissatisfied" with these services but

[15] Career counseling received 24 percent neutral response and distance education received 20 percent neutral response.

Finding the Support Needed to Succeed

After an unsuccessful search for work in the medical assistance field, Lou Anne McCutcheon decided to attend Lac Courte Oreilles Community College (LCCC) in Hayward, WI to obtain two associate's degrees in business management and social work. Prior to enrolling in LCCC, McCutcheon had attended a non-tribal technical school and graduated with a medical assistance associate's degree; and although McCutcheon successfully graduated from the technical college, she found the atmosphere "cold" and one in which it was difficult to stay motivated. In contrast, her experience with LCCC was characterized by more one-on-one attention from faculty and a more connected student body. In fact, it was this connection, which McCutcheon says "didn't happen at the technical college," that helped her get through her most difficult time while pursuing her education at LCCC.

During her time at LCCC, McCutcheon underwent major surgery and was forced to stay at home for several weeks while she recovered. During this time her professors taped lectures and allowed McCutcheon to turn in assignments from home in order to maintain credit in the class. The understanding from faculty coupled with support from her fellow students helped McCutcheon succeed, despite her medical difficulties.

Since graduating from LCCC, McCutcheon has been working as a data entry and billing clerk at a local medical clinic. McCutcheon credits her accounting classes taken at LCCC with preparing her for success in this position, and while she is happy with her job, she still has plans to continue her education further. From her experience at LCCC, McCutcheon has increased confidence that she can succeed in school. As she recalls, "…before enrolling in LCCC, I was hesitant about school and work because of my disability, and I didn't know if I could handle going back to school." But with the support of professors who continued to cheer her on, she was able to succeed.

perhaps did not use them often. Still, these areas typically receive the lowest levels of satisfaction according to past assessments. This is perhaps due to the scarcity of jobs on reservations as well as the continuing need for increased resources dedicated toward career centers on campuses (AIHEC 1999).

Choice of College

The high level of satisfaction felt by graduates and enrolled students is also reflected in the large proportions of students who are choosing to attend a TCU as their first option. During the beginning of the Tribal College movement, one of the major concerns of tribal leaders was the frequent return of American Indian students who had not successfully completed a degree at a mainstream institution. Students who faced cultural isolation and discrimination at mainstream institutions were able to find a more supportive environment at TCUs. Current survey data suggest that the success of TCUs

in helping students access college and persist is leading to more students choosing TCUs as a first option, rather than a mainstream institution.

The majority of respondents to this survey, 63 percent, did not attend a postsecondary institution before enrolling at the TCU from which they graduated. As seen in Figure 8, for those who had enrolled in a previous institution, the most common reasons for leaving the previous school include lack of financial support, followed by family responsibilities and the completion of a degree or desired studies. Information reported in this and previous surveys points to the importance of financial support to American Indian students' success in college, of which the American Indian College Fund plays a vital role. Additionally, students may find Tribal Colleges are more flexible in allowing them to balance school and other responsibilities. Research on Tribal Colleges suggests that individual attention given to students along with assistance and support programs help students succeed in college while balancing many other life roles such as being a parent (Ortiz and HeavyRunner 2003).

Figure 8: Reasons reported by survey respondents for leaving previously enrolled institution

Reason left	Percent
Lack of financial support	32
Family responsibilities	31
Completed degree or desired studies	30
Felt socially or culturally isolated	22
Other reasons	21
Lack of support services	20
I felt unprepared academically	19
I did not want to be away from home or family	13
Lack of transportation	9
Medical reasons	5

Note: Respondents were able to report multiple responses.
Source: 2005 TCU Alumni Survey

While enrolled, students may face obstacles that force them to temporarily leave school. Often, family obligations are among the main reasons why American Indian students leave college before completing their degree (Boyer 1997a; Ortiz and HeavyRunner 2003). While the majority of respondents did not "stop-out" from their TCU, 38 percent did leave temporarily. Of those, 61 percent did so because of family obligations, followed by financial reasons (36 percent) and work obligations (34 percent). As mentioned, nearly three-fourths of respondents worked full time, part-time, or seasonally while enrolled.[16] While mainstream institutions see stopping out as "at risk" behavior, TCUs are more supportive of students who must temporarily take care of family or other obligations and provide daycare and other services to students while they are dealing with circumstances (Harder+Company 2003; Ortiz and HeavyRunner 2003).

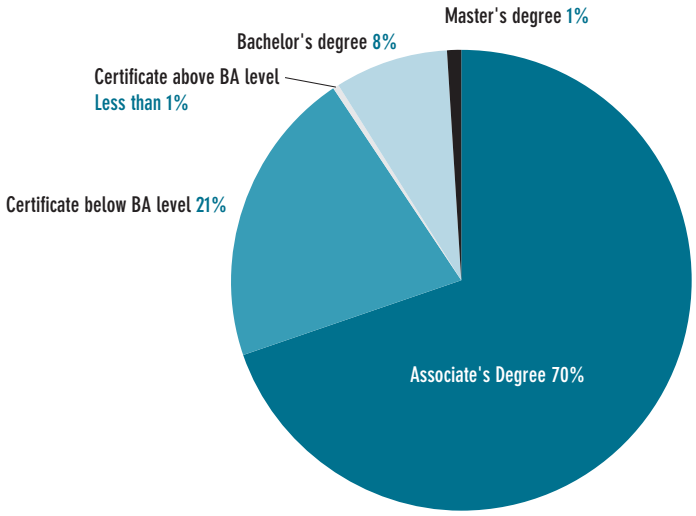
Clearly, financial support is important to help ease these burdens and allow students to stay in school if at all possible. For example, flexibility is important, and the Fund's scholarships allow students to pay for emergency expenses that may arise. As satisfaction levels suggest, this support is appreciated by scholarship recipients and constitutes an important area where students feel they are being well served by TCUs and the American Indian College Fund.

Degrees and Fields of Study

Most TCUs are two-year colleges that primarily award associate's degrees and certificates, although several now offer bachelor's degrees, and students are graduating

[16] Obligations to work and family were also found to be the most common reasons for students' temporary leave by Harder+Company in 2003.

Figure 9: Distribution of degrees at all TCUs by award level , 2003-2004



Source: NCES 1996-2004 (data from 2003-2004 only)

with bachelor's degrees in increasing proportions. In 2003-2004, 70 percent of all degrees and certificates conferred by TCUs were associate's degrees, 22 percent were certificates, and 8 percent were bachelor's degrees.[17] (See Figure 9). Further, the percentage of bachelor's degrees conferred across all TCUs has been increasing, from about 4 percent during the late 1990s to about 8 percent since 2000 (NCES 1996-2004).[18] Scholarship recipients reported similar trends, with 80 percent receiving an associate's degree from the TCU that they attended and another 6 percent receiving a bachelor's degree (See Figure 10).

The degrees and fields of studies offered at TCUs are directly related to the needs of the reservation or surrounding community served by the institution. Boyer (1995) found that enrolled students at TCUs most frequently major in business, health professions, education, and vocational/technical trades. These fields of study often correspond with areas of need within tribal communities, such as health services, education, and rural farm and business development.[19] Tribal Colleges and Universities play an important role in training an American Indian labor force equipped to serve their communities in these professions.

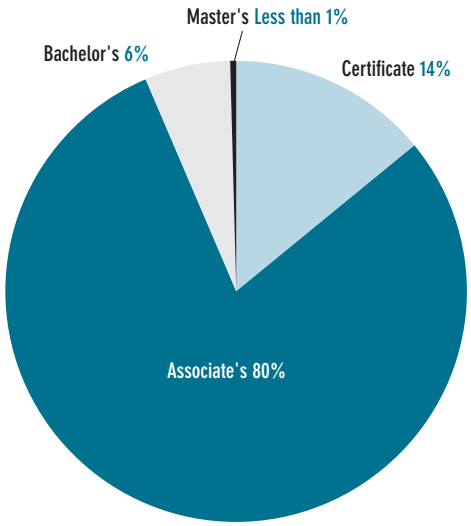
The importance of business and development training among American Indians has also been emphasized by tribal leaders. Recent testimony by Peter Homer of the National Indian Business Association (1998) before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs recognized the role of TCUs in providing the skills and training needed for entrepreneurship and economic development on reservations. Homer (1998) further

[17] Less than 1 percent were certificates above the BA level. NCES (1996-2004). Information taken from 2003-2004 only.

[18] Data on degrees conferred are taken from the IPEDS Completions Survey for the following years: 2003-2004; 2002-2003; 2001-2002; 2000-2001; 1997-1998; 1996-1997; 1995-1996.

[19] The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (2003) chronicled some of these areas in *A Quiet Crisis: Federal Funding and Unmet Needs in Indian Country.*

Figure 10: Distribution of degrees received by survey respondents, by award level



Source: 2005 TCU Alumni Survey

emphasized the need for increased funding for business development resource centers at TCUs in order to enhance economic prosperity on reservations.

Other critical areas of need in tribal communities include a labor force trained in health and human services as well as in education. A recent study showed that rural ethnic populations, including American Indians, are among those most underserved by the health professions (Probst et al. 2004). According to the study, 92 percent of counties where American Indians or Alaska Natives constitute a majority are "health professional shortage areas." Equally important is training teachers to serve American Indian students in culturally relevant ways (Jacobs and Reyhner 2002). It is particularly important to build a trained force of educators to serve American Indian students in rural communities (Naomi et al. 2003).

Figure 11: Fields of study reported by survey respondents

Field of Study	Percent
Other	27
Business	25
General Studies	18
Social Work/Human Services	13
Computer/Office Technology	11
Nursing/Health Care	9
Teaching/Education	9
Native American Studies	8
Social/Behavioral Sciences	4

Note: Respondents were able to report multiple responses.
Source: 2005 TCU Alumni Survey

The significance of Tribal Colleges and Universities in preparing students to serve their communities is reflected in the percentage of students graduating with degrees that correspond to these areas of need, and the Fund's scholarships contribute to this goal by supporting students in their endeavors. As seen in Figure 11, scholarship recipients most frequently majored in business management. Other common fields of study include general studies, nursing and healthcare, social work and human services, computer office technology, and teaching/education. Respondents also reported other

fields of study not listed on the survey, but that show connections to the needs of tribal communities, such as automotive technology, natural resources and environmental sciences, and tribal law, among others.

The majors of scholarship recipients parallel the distribution of degrees awarded at all TCUs, where the top five programs conferring degrees include liberal arts and sciences, business management, marketing and related support services, education, health professions and related clinical sciences, and security and protective services (AIHEC 2005b). While the large proportion of students receiving liberal arts degrees acknowledges their focus on preparation for further study at a four-year institution, the concentration of degrees specifically related to the needs of native communities, such as business, education, and health sciences, further emphasizes the important function of TCUs in preparing students to work within tribal communities.

Current Activities

Learning about the activities of TCU alumni after graduation is an important measure of their progress and of TCUs' preparation of its students for employment and further education. In fact, the overwhelming majority of scholarship recipients who responded to the survey were employed or pursuing further education at the time of

Success from Community-Based Education

Albert Jewett, a graduate of Si Tanka University in Eagle Butte, SD, established his current career path in his early forties by going back to school for a business degree. He had been a cattle rancher for most of his life, but a back injury forced him to re-train for a different occupation. Albert chose to attend Si Tanka University, a Tribal University only a mile away from his residence. This provided him with all the necessary support, both academically and emotionally, to successfully complete his degree.

"There was a lot of encouragement," Albert said. Instructors were eager to help students, and small class sizes guaranteed one-on-one contact between students and instructors. As a non-traditional student, Albert also found academic support services such as writing centers and tutoring to be helpful in updating his study skills. Another key to his success was the cultural identity that was shared by the university and the surrounding community. Albert, his wife, and daughter attended the same university, sharing experiences both on campus and at home. "The whole college was like a family," Albert explained.

His business degree has brought him to an entirely new work place, which he really enjoys. "Education is challenging, but there are benefits," he said. He emphasizes that Tribal Colleges increase access to education within Indian reservations and concluded that, "Tribal Colleges are very important, especially to rural areas. A lot of students that have not been able to succeed in mainstream universities…come home and are finally able to pursue their education."

their response—60 percent and 47 percent, respectively. In addition, a substantial percentage of all respondents (22 percent) did both. Moreover, graduates were working in areas of importance to tribal communities. These findings are important, particularly given the barriers that American Indians face in employment and educational attainment.

Employment

There are many barriers to employment on reservations, including a lack of business investment, remote locations, and other factors. In 2003, American Indians held the highest unemployment rate across all ethnic groups, at 15 percent (Freeman and Fox 2005). In 2000, the median unemployment rate on TCU reservations was almost 10 percent.[20] When looking at employment of American Indians on reservations, a recent study (Gitter and Reagan 2001) found that proximity to a reservation reduces the likelihood of employment of American Indian men by 11 percentage points, controlling for other factors such as labor market conditions.[21] Given these constraints, the employment levels reported by graduates of TCUs is an important sign of progress for individuals as well as communities served by TCUs.

In the face of barriers to employment, it is encouraging that most TCU graduates reported being employed (See Figure 12). Among scholarship recipients, 60 percent were employed outside the home, in the military, or self-employed.[22] About 82 percent of those working were doing so on a full-time basis. Many working scholarship recipients were still enrolled in higher education. Only 10 percent of those who were not employed or enrolled were still seeking employment.

In addition, graduates are working in areas of critical need. Figure 13 shows that the most frequent job categories were clerk/secretary/office manager, followed by education, health care/nursing, and social work/human services. Examples of "other" occupational areas reported by respondents include tribal law and government, gaming and tourism, and others.

One area that continues to pose a challenge for American Indians, including graduating scholarship recipients, is the low earning levels prevalent on reservations. Figure 14 shows

Figure 12: Current activities of survey respondents

Activities	Percent
Working full-time outside home	49
Working part-time outside home	7
Seeking full-time job outside home	18
Seeking part-time job outside home	9
Self-employed	7
Serving in military	0*
Homemaker	12
Retired or not employed	2
Attending college full-time	39
Attending college part-time	9
Other	12
	Percent distribution
Working only	38
Attending college only	25
Working and attending college	22
Seeking work **	10
Other	6

Note: For the first set of activities, respondents were able to report multiple responses.

* Rounds to zero

** And not employed or attending college

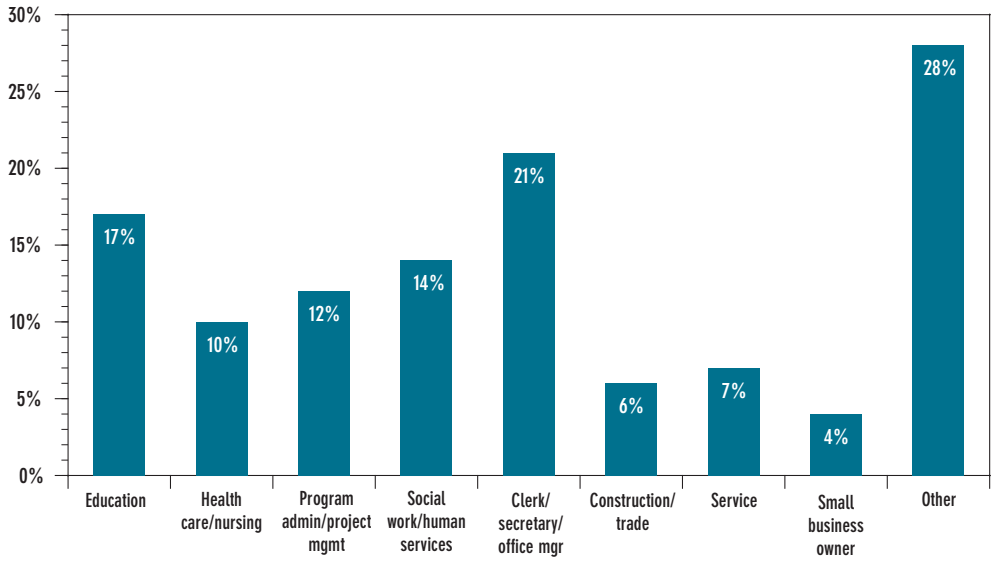
Source: 2005 TCU Alumni Survey

[20] Census Bureau Factfinder 2000.

[21] Proximity to reservations did not have the same effect on other racial/ethnic groups.

[22] Note that respondents could choose multiple responses, such as working part time and full time. Harder+Company (2003) found 68 percent of its survey respondents were employed full time, part time, or seasonally.

Figure 13: Job categories reported by survey respondents



Note: Responses are for those who were employed. Respondents were able to choose multiple responses.
Source: 2005 TCU Alumni Survey

the distribution of income of respondents who were working. As calculated from these ranges, scholarship recipients reported a median income of $19,556 and $22,059 for those who worked full time. These median earnings were lower than the median income for all American Indians living on reservations, $23,070 in 1999 (Northwest Area Foundation 2005). However, this figure includes all sources of income while survey respondents were asked to report only individual earnings from employment.[23]

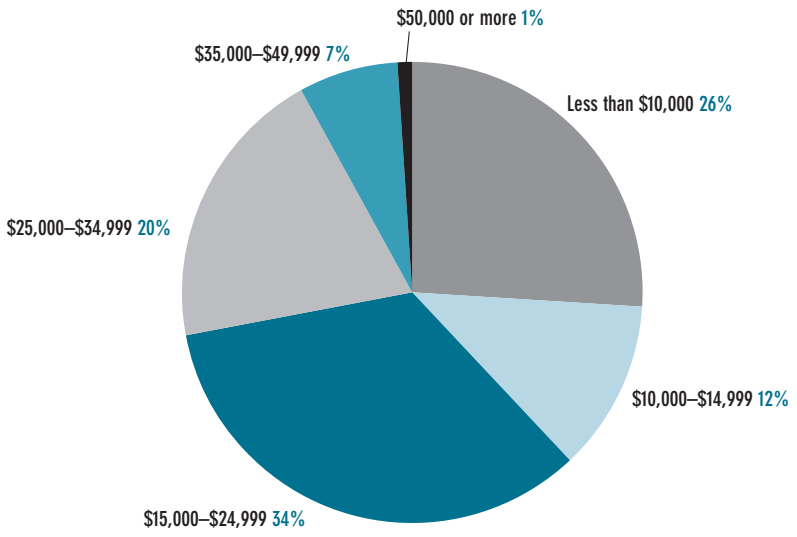
Further Education

In addition to employment preparation, one of the central goals of Tribal Colleges and Universities is to prepare students for continued education at four-year colleges and universities. It is particularly important for American Indians on reservations to obtain advanced degrees, as growth is most likely to occur in jobs that require bachelor's degrees or higher. In addition, highly educated graduates can serve as role models in their communities.

About half of scholarship recipients continued their education after completing their first degree at a TCU. Of those, 86 percent pursued a bachelor's degree, 16 percent pursued an associate's degree, and 17 percent pursued a master's degree (See Figure 15). By the time of the survey, about 14 percent of these students had completed a degree, while 80 percent were still enrolled. The completion percentages also varied

[23] Additionally, it is important to note that due to data limitations, the information offered by respondents is not representative of the entire population. Earning levels of this sample may be particularly low, compared to the population as a whole.

Figure 14: Income from employment reported by survey respondents



Note: Figures are for those who were employed.
Source: 2005 TCU Alumni Survey

by the type of degree pursued—for example, of those pursuing an associate's degree, 36 percent had attained the additional degree and more than half (64 percent) were still enrolled in college. Only 10 percent of students pursuing a bachelor's degree had attained a degree by the time of the survey, but about 83 percent were still enrolled. This difference is not surprising given that pursuit of bachelor's degrees may involve transfer to another institution, or a delay between graduation from a Tribal College and entry into a bachelor's degree program.[24]

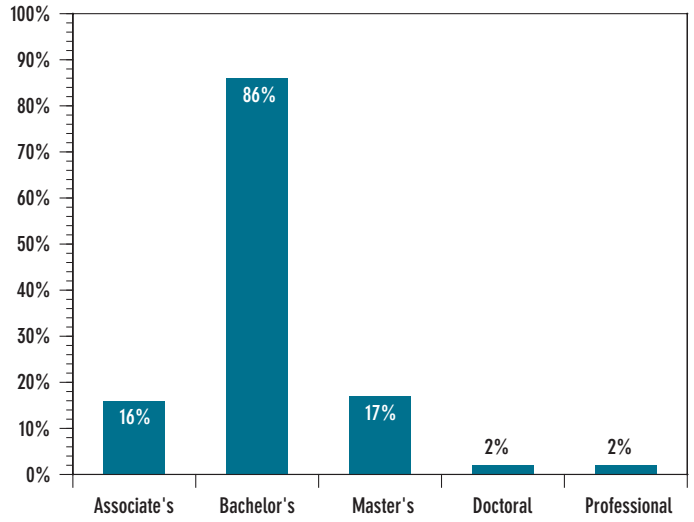
Further degree fields of study closely mirror those of first degree attainment. The most frequent field of study for respondents was business, with about 30 percent studying in this area. The participation of American Indian students in business is particularly important for the future growth of small businesses on the reservation and creation of new jobs. Other scholarship recipients pursued degrees in social work/human services, teaching/education, and nursing or health care (Figure 16).

Preparation for Employment and Further Education

In general, scholarship recipients found their TCU education to be good preparation for employment and further education. About 71 percent of graduates who were working reported that their education was good or excellent preparation for employment and 69 percent of those continuing on to further education believed their TCU education was good or excellent preparation for the pursuit of a second degree.

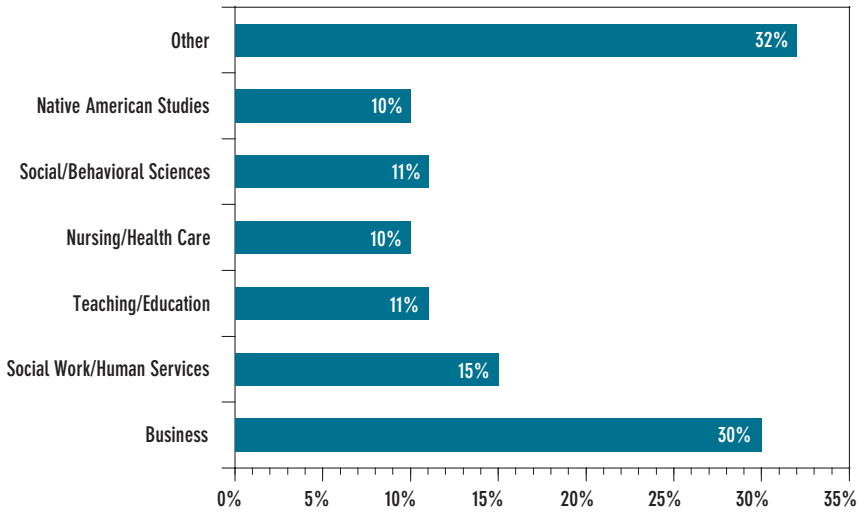
[24] Note that there were relatively few respondents who had attained an additional degree by the time of this survey.

Figure 15: Degrees pursued by survey respondents after graduation, by award level



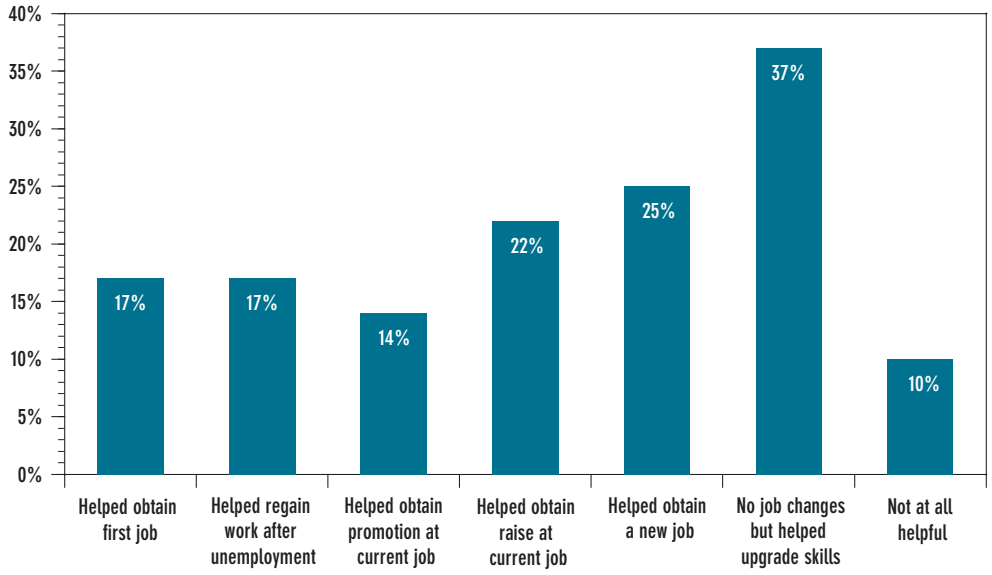
Note: Responses are for those who pursued further education. Respondents were able to choose multiple responses.
Source: 2005 TCU Alumni Survey

Figure 16: Degrees pursued by survey respondents after graduation, by field of study



Note: Responses are for those who pursued further education. Respondents were able to choose multiple responses.
Source: 2005 TCU Alumni Survey

Figure 17: Helpfulness of TCU education in employment, as reported by survey respondents



Note: Responses are for those working. Respondents were able to choose multiple responses.
Source: 2005 TCU Alumni Survey

Respondents were also able to choose multiple ways that their TCU education helped in their employment prospects. Scholarship recipients who were working generally felt that their education was helpful in updating their skills along with obtaining a new or first job or a salary increase (Figure 17). Past surveys have found similarly high levels of satisfaction with employment preparation and highlighted the benefit of the TCU education on students' ability to directly impact their local community. An overwhelming majority of survey respondents in 2002 agreed that their involvement in their tribal community increased as a result of attending a TCU, and respondents felt they were able to gain employment that directly benefited their Tribe (Harder+Company 2003).

Other Outcomes

In addition to economic and social barriers, many American Indian students face psychological barriers such as feelings of inadequacy and lack of confidence when it comes to postsecondary education. Many respondents to the survey noted the importance of their TCU experience on their enhanced confidence level and ability to continue their education at a mainstream university. Moreover, respondents noted the great sense of accomplishment that comes with attaining a degree, and the impact that their educational accomplishments have had on their overall outlook on life.

For example, one scholarship recipient said, "I was taking a year off from an Ivy League school where I had run into major depression. As my year was winding down I

realized that I didn't want to go back. A family member suggested that I try SKC (Salish Kootenai College) to help me get my feet back on the ground. I have to say that the three years I spent at SKC were the best years I've had at college…. I'm not sure if the environment at SKC was the reason that I wasn't depressed while going to school there. I do know that it felt good to be surrounded by native people who understood where I was coming from. I didn't feel insecure about who I was, and I just had a great experience overall."

Building a Foundation for the Future

When Belinda Burk Jaeger's children became teenagers, she decided to pursue a college degree. The stay-at-home mom began to research options, and after looking around at bigger universities, she decided to attend Northwest Indian College in Bellingham, WA, which she had come across during an Internet search. For Burk Jaeger, who is a first-generation college student, the cost seemed manageable and the size of the school was less intimidating than larger universities. Other schools Burk Jaeger explored had rather young populations, while as Burk Jaeger notes, "the average student at Northwest Indian College is in their 30s." By beginning her education at Northwest Indian College, Burk Jaeger was able to learn in an environment that was comfortable and familiar.

Upon receiving two associate's degrees from Northwest Indian College, Jaeger went on to enroll in Western Washington University to pursue a bachelor's degree in law/diversity as well as environmental policy and planning. Burk Jaeger hopes to use her education to help advocate for environmental justice on Indian land, noting that "Indian land gets taken advantage of so much…these are economically depressed areas that want to take advantage of financial opportunities, but they might not be the best situation for the land." When Burk Jaeger embarked on the journey of higher education she was the first in her family to go to college. Now, her children benefit from the example she has set. She and both of her sons attend Western Washington University together. For Burk Jaeger, the most fulfilling aspect of earning a degree from Northwest Indian College was "having a foundation… and knowing within myself that it was possible."

Conclusions and Next Steps

Collectively, Tribal Colleges and Universities are committed to improving educational attainment and employment prospects of American Indians living on reservations by offering a higher education that is culturally relevant and connected to the needs of tribal communities. The American Indian College Fund serves as a vital support to TCUs in their mission, by providing financial assistance to students attending TCUs, as well as the institutions themselves. Assessing the experiences of scholarship recipients while they are enrolled as well as their activities after graduation helps to understand the significance of funds provided by the American Indian College Fund, as well as the benefits of attending a TCU in general. The results presented in this report suggest the many areas in which students have benefited from their experience attending a TCU and the importance of the Fund's scholarships to the achievement of their educational goals.

If the results of this study are representative of the experiences of all scholarship recipients, it seems clear that scholarship recipients who graduate from TCUs are showing positive trends in their employment and further educational pursuits. More than half of those graduates are employed, despite the barriers to employment faced by American Indians living on reservations. Graduates are happy with their educational experience and attribute good or excellent preparation for their employment to the colleges. In addition, about half of respondents went on to further education after graduating from their TCU, overwhelmingly to pursue a bachelor's degree.

Further, the fields that graduates have chosen for their careers and further study are closely related to areas of need among communities served by TCUs. This factor suggests that TCUs are fulfilling a significant role in preparing American Indians to work for the development of their local communities, and the Fund's scholarship program is helping to support that role.

Most scholarship recipients are pleased with their overall TCU education, and specifically the preparation received for their post-graduate activities. Indeed, the role of instruction and faculty is consistently shown to be the hallmark of the graduates' educational experience at TCUs. Respondents specifically noted the importance of faculty in providing mentorship, flexibility, and good instruction. Because students attending TCUs deal with an array of challenges, the attention to students offered by faculty is of extreme importance in students' ability to succeed. Further, the community-based model of education helps students overcome major obstacles such as depression or low-self esteem. By helping to instill confidence, TCUs also help students transition to larger universities and lessen the culture shock that many will face.

Many TCU students have conflicting responsibilities or financial burdens that cause them to temporarily stop out of college, but scholarship recipients were happy with the support they received to persist beyond these challenges. The Fund's scholarship program exemplifies this support, as it allows flexibility for recipients to use the funds to meet multiple needs.

At the same time, even if students do not stop out, the financial hardship incurred while pursuing a postsecondary degree continues to confront TCU students. For students that qualify, financial hardships are only somewhat mitigated

by public financial aid such as Pell Grants, and students often turn to private sources of funding in order to successfully complete their degree. The significance of scholarships was voiced substantially in the survey as well as hand written comments by participants. Respondents expressed, in particular, deep gratitude for the American Indian College Fund.

The current survey highlights the many successes TCUs and their graduates have achieved as well as the ways that financial aid provided by the Fund supports American Indian students in their pursuit of postsecondary education. In order to build upon these successes the following steps are recommended.

- ***Increase philanthropic giving to the American Indian College Fund.*** Scholarship recipients collectively noted the importance of funding offered by private organizations, especially the American Indian College Fund. The Fund continues to raise money for scholarships as well as essential funding for Tribal Colleges to improve and expand their offerings and facilities. However, there are many students on TCU campuses who have financial need but do not currently receive scholarships. At the same time, the scholarship amounts are relatively low. More philanthropic giving to the Fund would allow for higher scholarship amounts, increased numbers of students receiving awards, and additional funds for institutional enhancement.
- ***Increase investment from federal and state governments.*** Scholarships offered by the Fund and other private organizations constitute a vital portion of TCU students' financial aid packages. But these funds alone cannot satisfy students' financial need. Rather, TCU students must turn to grants offered by federal and state governments to attend college. Increasing the investment toward TCUs at the federal and state levels would help more American Indian students attend college and attain a degree.
- ***Enhance the capacity of Tribal Colleges and Universities.*** The great degree to which alumni report positive satisfaction levels with their educational experience points to the many ways that TCUs are successfully helping their students. Increased investment from the private and public sectors will help the colleges and universities continue practices that have proven successful. In addition, increased funding will allow TCUs to offer more institutional scholarships that are an important element of student aid packages. Similarly, increased funding will make it possible for institutions to offer more distance learning opportunities, enhance student services such as career placement centers, and continue community-learning opportunities. Finally, additional human and financial resources are needed so that TCUs can establish networks with their graduating students to aid future follow-up studies.

- ***Continue outreach to alumni and scholarship recipients.*** Continued outreach to scholarship recipients, as well as TCU alumni in general, is an important step in illustrating their successes after graduation. It is important that alumni understand the need to participate in follow-up activities, including surveys, so their progress can be shown to

private funders and public policymakers. Establishing alumni networks on individual campuses and recruiting graduates to serve as mentors to entering students can help maintain connections. These efforts will help strengthen the ability of TCUs to periodically follow up with their graduates.

- ***Conducting future research with the goal of achieving higher survey response and using comparison techniques.*** The current survey presents a descriptive look at alumni scholarship recipients' experiences while attending a TCU and their progress after graduation. Future studies that garner higher survey response rates and utilize a comparison group will only strengthen the ability of advocates to secure support for TCUs and the American Indian College Fund. Gaining assistance from the colleges and universities, maintaining frequently updated contact lists, and obtaining funding to conduct a longer study will help increase survey participation substantially. Additionally, many questions can be addressed by comparing recipients of the American Indian College Fund scholarship to non-recipients. Studies using a comparison group of students can go a long way in highlighting the benefits of receiving a scholarship.

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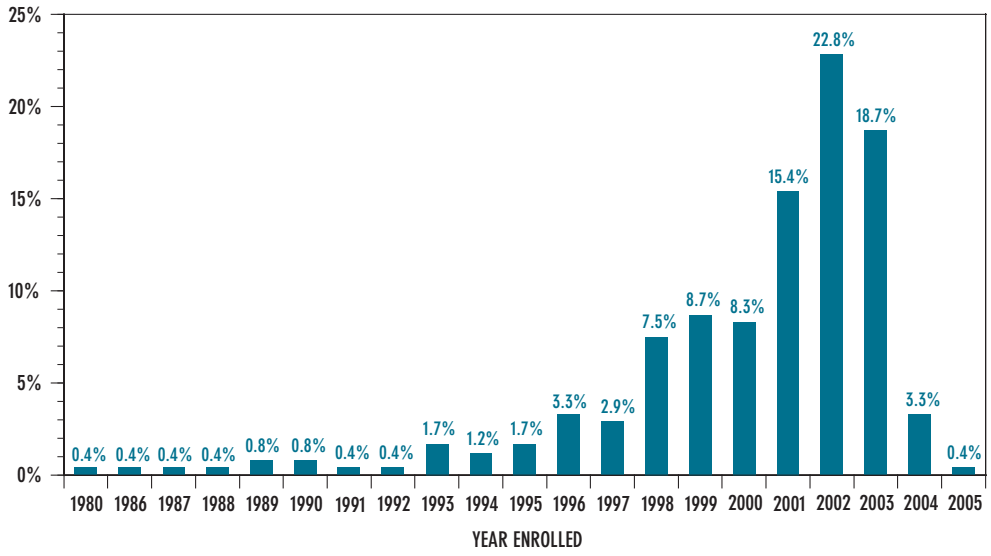
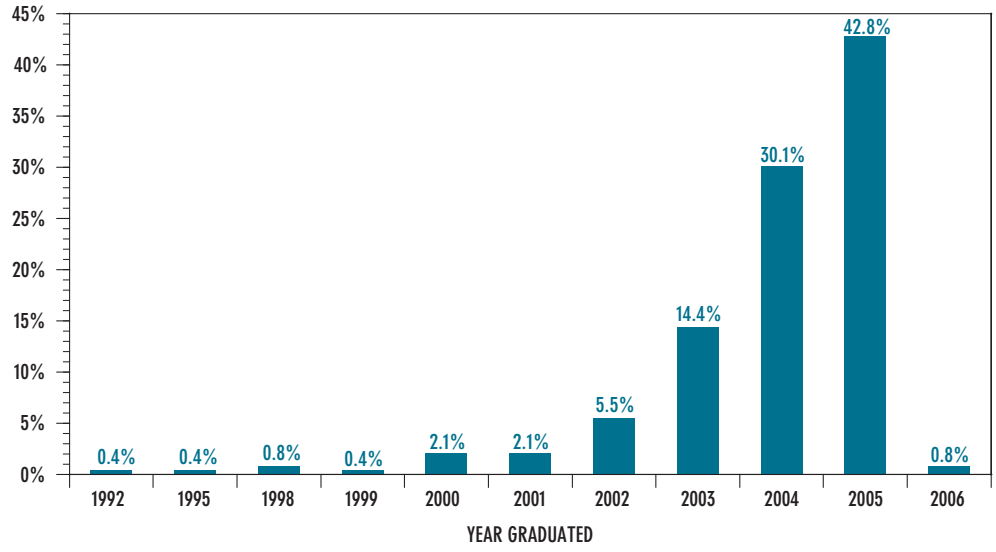
Appendix

Figure A1: Distribution of survey respondents' first year of enrollment



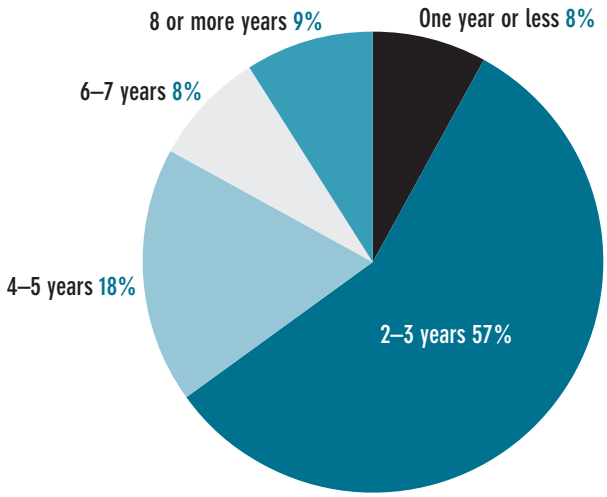
Source: 2005 TCU Alumni Survey

Figure A2: Distribution of survey respondents' year of graduation from a TCU



Source: 2005 TCU Alumni Survey

Figure A3: Survey respondents' time from first enrollment at a TCU to graduation



Source: 2005 TCU Alumni Survey

Figure A4: Tribal Colleges and Universities from which survey respondents earned degrees

Name of TCU	Percent
Bay Mills Community College	2
Blackfeet Community College	9
Cankdeska Cikana Community College	3
Chief Dull Knife College	3
College of Menominee Nation	4
Crownpoint Institute of Technology	2
D-Q University	0 *
Diné College	5
Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College	2
Fort Belknap College	2
Fort Berthold Community College	0 *
Fort Peck Community College	4
Haskell Indian Nations University	7
Institute of American Indian Arts	3
Keweenaw Bay Ojibwa Community College	0
Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa Community College	2
Leech Lake Tribal College	5
Little Big Horn College	1
Little Priest Tribal College	2
Nebraska Indian Community College	1
Northwest Indian College	3
Oglala Lakota College	3
Salish Kootenai College	4
Si Tanka University	4
Sinte Gleska University	2
Sisseton Wahpeton College	2
Sitting Bull College	3
Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute	6
Stone Child College	2
Tohono O'odham Community College	0 *
Turtle Mountain Community College	6
United Tribes Technical College	3
White Earth Tribal and Community College	0
Missing	0 *

* Rounds to zero

Source: 2005 TCU Alumni Survey

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