

# Enrollment Management Report

## SNAPSHOTS

3

### REALITIES & INNOVATIONS

Marguerite J. Dennis explores the geopolitical tensions in higher education.

6–7

### STRATEGIC PLANNING

Lisa Silverstein, Ph.D., describes how several tribal colleges created enrollment management plans.

8–9

### MANAGING YOUR OFFICE

Donna Talarico explains tools to connect and collaborate with your marketing team.

10–11

### LAWSUITS & RULINGS

Review summaries of recent court cases and agency rulings.

12

### LEADERS & INNOVATORS

Billie Jo Hamilton, M.B.A., Associate Vice President for Enrollment Planning and Management at the University of South Florida, led her institution to enrollment success with effective use of financial aid and good communication.



## POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

# Design a graduation application process that promotes completion

By Joan Hope, Ph.D., Editor

When Margo Landy, Ph.D., became University Registrar at San Francisco State University in fall 2019, the graduation evaluation process was paper based, and it took at least two to three months to award degrees after end of term processing. The university had a degree audit system, but it wasn't being used to review student completion. Also, the deadline for students to apply to graduate was in the middle of the term the student intended to graduate, so if a student hadn't completed all the requirements, it was too late to do anything about it. That made for difficult conversations when students learned in March that they weren't going to graduate, Landy said.

Landy explained how she and her team created a more efficient process that served students better at a session at the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers annual meeting. Read on to learn how an online graduation application tied to the degree audit system, along with earlier deadlines, support student completion.

Landy and her team's vision was to start with accurate degree audits for each student that were kept up to date with course substitutions, waivers, or other degree adjustments. Students would be able to see what requirements remained and what had been completed.

They decided to create paperless processes, with an online graduation application and electronic processes for advisors to submit substitutions or adjustments.

With those steps in place, they could use an automated process to award degrees efficiently, based on degree audits.

To achieve that vision, they followed these steps.

1. Finished encoding all majors and minors in the degree audit. A lot of progress had been made with the majors, but that wasn't true of the minors.

2. Rolled out the online application to graduate. That step included moving the priority application window for spring graduation to early to mid-fall and explaining to students that applying then would result in the most support.

3. Socialized the degree audit. Getting advisors to stop ignoring the degree audit was more difficult than it sounds, Landy said.

Leadership support was crucial to success, and the project had that from the beginning. Officials had to build partnerships across the university and tried to become best friends with advising. "They really hold the keys to the kingdom in terms of what students are told," Landy said. Academic deans and chairs were important friends, also, Landy added.

*continued on page 4*

# Culture at the heart: Cultivating Native student success

By Lisa Silverstein, Ph.D.

“**B**ut the TCUs are already doing it. Sense of belonging is in the fabric of TCUs,” said Monte Schaff, Institutional Research Analyst from United Tribes Technical College, a small tribal college in Bismarck, North Dakota. He spoke at the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers Strategic Enrollment Management conference in Aventura, Florida in November 2021.

Tribal colleges and universities are small, higher education institutions that serve a majority American Indian/Alaskan Native students. Most TCUs are located on or near reservations and are sanctioned, or chartered, by the governing body of an Indian tribe or tribes. And, as Schaff emphasized, they are experts in creating a sense of belonging for students. TCUs provide a variety of postsecondary degrees grounded in place-based education experiences of their traditional and regional Native cultures, cultures that are foundational in their strategic enrollment management plans.

TCUs are where many Native students feel at home in earning their postsecondary degrees. Like many rural community colleges, they are often a gathering space for the community and are essential to college access and success for Native peoples and communities by offering tuition at more affordable costs. For some, they are the only option for access to postsecondary education. Strategic enrollment management planning at these institutions is vital for creating sustainable place-based education efforts for Native communities.

In 2019, the American Indian College Fund launched the Cultivating Native Student Success project to address two main issues: the low percentage of Native students in college across the nation as compared with other race and ethnicities, and the decline in tribal college and university enrollment, specifically. The project’s focus is to create sustainable strategic enrollment management plans reflective of Native student and community culture, assets, and needs, with the goal to increase enrollment, retention, and completion of their student body, no matter the entry point. Five TCUs — Stone Child College in Box Elder, Montana; Oglala Lakota College in Kyle, South Dakota; Salish Kootenai College in Pablo, Montana; Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe College in Hayward, Wisconsin; and United Tribes Technical College in Bismarck, North Dakota — make up the Cultivating Native Student Success Collaborative. These TCUs represent a spectrum

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Lisa Silverstein is the College Access and Success Senior Program Officer at the American Indian College Fund where she supports programming for Native students in their education pathways from high school through to college completion and capacity building with the institutions supporting these students. In education for over 20 years, Silverstein worked with youth and teens in outdoor education programming, and as a teacher in a Title I school early in her career. She directed accelerated developmental education programs and taught a variety of undergraduate and graduate education courses. She led an innovative learning community program, contributed to rural teacher education programming efforts, and continues to advocate for equity and access in higher education. ■

of geographic location, size, course delivery methods, and where they are in the strategic enrollment management planning process.

### What is Cultivating Native student success?

- Supports transformative and systemic change at TCUs in strategic enrollment management, academic planning, and expanded student supports.

- Builds capacity of TCUs by utilizing culturally reflective strategies to increase enrollment, persistence, and graduation rates of TCU students through holistic, place-based, and collaborative student supports.

The project started with a heavy lift with the TCUs analyzing their enrollment, retention, and completion data to find their baseline and create benchmarks. They continued their work by utilizing traditional SEM planning templates and examples to support their institutional team efforts. What quickly came to the surface when working within these templates, however, was culture, which did not always fit into parts of the templates. Indigenous ways of being and knowing are the heartbeat of the TCUs, rooted and grounded in their communities. TCUs create sense of belonging and academic validation, inherent in every corner of their institutions. The project shifted from what the TCUs

were “missing” according to mainstream practices to where they truly excelled, focusing on their assets and strengths in providing a quality Native college experience for Native students and communities.

## What are we learning about SEM from these Native-centered institutions?

There is a lot to be learned from the work of these TCUs, particularly for small, rural colleges, in creating culturally grounded SEM plans:

► **Infuse the cultural values of the students and community into in strategic planning early.** Diversity and inclusion are not an add-on, they are woven in the fabric. When analyzing the student experience, culture is not separate. This is the core of holistic practice. TCUs are authentic experts in creating sense of belonging.

“In creating our plan, we are increasing our enrollment, persistence, and retention by *keeping our identity*. We have a strong sense of family. We are adding more Chippewa Cree culturally specific programs,” said Marquieta Jilot, Dean of Student Services, at Stone Child College.

► **If a traditional SEM outline does not fit, create one that does.** The SEM goals of enrollment, retention, and completion are shared. However, the creation of the plan is reflective of the culture and speaks to everyone at the college, with accessible language to create mutual buy in. The planning process is authentic, meaningful, and sovereign. It cannot be rushed. Take time to reflect and create policies, programming, and processes.

“We are listening to student needs. We reorganized departments and staff to be more student focused,” said Amie Tryon, Director of Academic Success at Salish Kootenai College.

► **A dedicated enrollment manager/director is essential.** At small institutions, staff wear many hats. Reorganizing to prioritize enrollment management is crucial to success in recruitment and in communicating translatable retention and persistence information. When teams meet regularly, functioning and flow follows the process rather than the individuals. This helps mitigate staff turnover, which can cause disruption in team dynamics and planning. Involvement of the president is also key.

“We are utilizing community members for our outreach sites to support recruitment. One site has the highest enrollment they’ve seen,” said Odawa White, Ed.D., Dean of Continuous Improvement at Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe College.

► **Time and space for collaboration and connection with staff from other TCUs is essential.** As small institutions, TCUs sometimes have only one faculty member in a subject area and some do not have a dedicated institutional researcher, let alone a department. Bringing staff together in communities of practice to learn from one another in similar roles promotes an intrinsic motivation and deep sense of learning with a common understanding of how their institutions work.

► **Include culturally relevant mental health and wellness supports.** Creating a dedicated position at the college and including that individual in SEM planning is essential for student persistence and retention. And when there are supports for staff and faculty well-being too, there is even greater success in the TCU community.

“Since I’ve started in this position, I not only have student referrals and student meetings, but have held talking circles with staff as well. They requested supports too,” said Bobbi White, Wellness Coordinator at Oglala Lakota College. ■

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