

Culture & Connection

The Power of TCU Relationships

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Thank you for your invitation to be here in your beautiful country and to be asked to present for the Institute for American Studies, Rikkyo University. I am honored to share some insights from the perspective as a Tribal College University or TCU faculty member. As a precursor, I qualify the following comments as my own and as such, my opinions may or may not be attributed to all other TCU faculty and of course, for that matter, all other Native people. Also, I will use the terms Native or Tribal in portraying people living within the United States whose history, language and cultures are indigenous to those lands.

For almost two decades, I have worked mostly within the TCU environment. My work life includes teaching, administrative work and many of the usual faculty responsibilities; however, one of the reasons I appreciate my profession is that it allows me the freedom to keep learning. The types of courses I teach at my own TCU include mostly upper division management courses and one of these courses is called conflict management; a course that evolved for two reasons. First, our students were asking for information in dealing with difficult situations at work surrounding the issue of conflict. Second, at about the same time as these student requests I became involved with several national organizations concerned with prevalence of conflict in Indian Country. One such organization is a national, non-profit legal firm that defends Native tribes called the Native American Rights Fund from Boulder, Colorado. As part of their Indigenous

Peacemaking Initiative, I along with other tribal members from Chickasaw, Dine (or Navajo), Mohican, Apache and Native Hawaiians and Alaskan Natives serve as volunteer advisory members. Our main goal is promote peacemaking practices and increase the awareness for traditional forms of justice. Unfortunately this is necessary because of the many social interruptions to tribal societies over the last two hundred years (discussed later) and many forms of traditional knowledge and practices such as indigenous peacemaking practices that were once important and commonly used by tribal people are not as prominently practiced in our current tribal communities. My TCU faculty work allows me the latitude to network on various levels which enables me to then integrate what I learn back into my courses.

Consequently, I appreciate my profession because it allows me to connect with other organizations and cultivate professional relationships that add additional meaning to embed into my courses that ultimately benefit my ability to facilitate learning. In many ways, the faculty work at TCUs entails not only providing higher educational opportunities but it also entails rebuilding native communities which encompass a mission to restore tribal knowledge and practices. As such, the overall theme of this presentation is to emphasize the importance of TCUs and the relationships they help to create.

To begin, what some people may know about Native tribes within the U.S. are some rudimentary things such as various historical Indian wars, battles or massacres. There may also be familiarity with more contemporary social issues that are very challenging for some Native people which unfortunately continue to impose great hardship for Native people and our Native communities. Conversely from a more positive stance, there may also be awareness about our Native spiritual practices. For those of us involved with these or other forms faith-based practices, we actively participate to enhance and maintain not only our own well-being, but also the well-

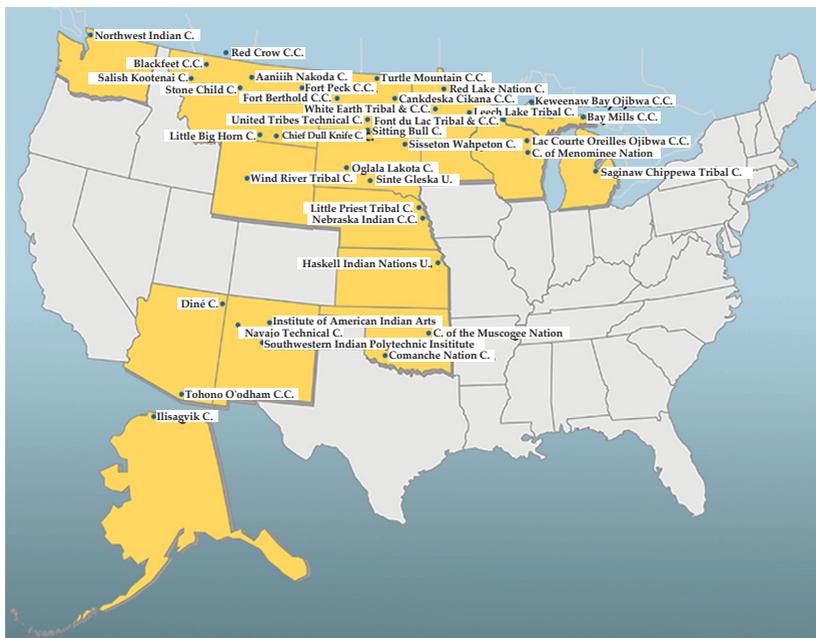
being for our families and entire community of relations. The connections to spiritual beliefs are deeply embedded into Native philosophies which serve to inform cultural practice and require a lifetime to fully grasp. Combining this Native philosophical narrative back to the work of TCU faculty, the term *Wolakota*, provides a framework that encourages strong connections and an egalitarian stance that insists on responsibility for self and others:

The term *Wolakota* means the power of peace or lifestyle. Thus [it] means that the power is in the hands of the people One way to attain this is to respect your fellow human beings and other life forms. Everyone who joins in this lifestyle of *Wolakota* feels the growth of harmony and unity from deep within By implanting this concept we can achieve a sense of fairness, credibility and support Moreover, accepting “*Wolakota*” into the system this can boost or strengthen our group unity because the concept of “*Wolakota*” entails group cooperation and participation. Ultimately, “*Wolakota*” protects the individual within the group and offers group support for individuals who need it It is important to understand that “*Wolakota*” promotes mutuality that is why everyone, the faculty specifically, must contribute one way or the other. Without this, the group and the individual will be unable to contribute effectively. (Victor Douville, September 15, 2004)

On a more broad landscape regarding and with reference to TCUs, a native vantage point serves as a compass regarding cultural, historical, and political influences and to a large degree, these influences helped create TCUs. Prior to delving into the cultural, historical and political realms that helped to influence the creation of TCUs; the next section will provide a TCU over-view.

Tribal Colleges & Universities (TCUs) Over-view

Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) are important to many Native American communities and share common features. Most have



Tribal Colleges and Universities Map
Source: AIHEC Website

relatively small student bodies that are predominantly American Indian, most are located on remote reservations, with limited access to other colleges; most were chartered by one or more tribes, but maintain their distance from tribal governments; all have open admissions policies; and all began as two-year institutions. (AIHEC and the Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999, p. A-3). Currently, there are 37 Tribal Colleges and Universities within the United States, the majority of which are affiliated with each other through the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC). AIHEC was conceived in the early 1970s as an entity to serve and promote TCUs in policy, fiscal, and legislative development. According to their website, AIHEC provides:

[L]eadership and influences public policy on American Indian higher education issues through advocacy, research, and program initiatives; promotes and strengthens Indigenous languages, cultures and communities, and tribal nations; and through its unique position, serves member institutions and emerging TCUs ... and is supported by member dues, grants and contracts. (AIHEC, 2014a)

In addition, AIHEC also provides detailed information about all TCUs on their website (www.aihec.org) including the previous map indicating the geographical location of all affiliated TCUs. (AIHEC, 2014b). From the next section, a contextual framework provides a cultural, historical and political backdrop that impacts Native/Tribal communities and by extension, TCUs.

Cultural Background

Most if not all Indigenous peoples have their own creation stories that portray their genesis as a people. For the Lakota (or Sioux) people, our historical beginnings were strongly linked to the buffalo that provided food, clothing, housing as well as an economy and equally importantly, our belief system. Lakota culture is based upon strong connections to spiritual beliefs. For the Lakota, that 'spiritual bringing' was provided by the White Buffalo Calf Pipe Woman who brought instructions in how to live through the sacred pipe teachings that created our value system. Some of these important values embody a host of principles and include: Generosity, Respect, Fortitude, Wisdom, Humility, Courage and Compassion. As a people, we strive daily to live these values. Of course, we acknowledge that we never achieve an idealized state; but we understand that a life is a series of gradual steps towards concerted efforts to live as best we can, according to these stated (as well as many other) values. Additionally, various Native nations each have their own unique creation stories, culture, spirituality, language and philosophies.

Historical Background

Historically, with regards to Lakota people, well-known leadership included Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull and Sinte Gleska, whose English name was Spotted Tail. From the time these men were very young, they spent most of their adulthood or lives, trying to deter European encroachment. Sitting Bull and Spotted Tail in their later years would come to learn from their travels to Washington DC, the overwhelming number of Europeans and continued efforts to thwart their movement was impossible. They would see cities for the first time and all of the inventions that would have seemed very alien to these chiefs. During this time frame too, Native leaders all across Indian Country would too, come to realize that the wave of invasion would not end. For the Lakota, this realization became evident when too, when the U.S. government initiated policies authorizing mass killings of the buffalo knowing they were the primary source of livelihood for many tribes. Without proper nourishment, Native leaders knew it would be futile to continue combative approaches. As a consequence of these many difficult circumstances, Native leaders across Indian Country turned their attention to contemplate how their people and future generations could survive.

A possibility of hope came to Spotted Tail who asked some catholic Jesuits to bring education to his people (the Sicangu or Burnt Thigh people on the Rosebud) as initial first impressions about the few Jesuits were favorable. Jesuits in Spotted Tail's company were respectful, helpful and willing to offer teachings that seemed compatible with Lakota egalitarian beliefs and as such Spotted Tail became optimistic about the value of education for his people. In efforts to model his newfound appreciation for educational opportunity, he sent several of his own grandchildren to Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania during this time frame. He would later come to regret this decision when during a 'surprise' visit to Carlisle he

witnessed children engaged in manual labor and forced to cut their hair and disavow their culture and language with little evidence of the educational opportunity Spotted Tail had been promised. Spotted Tail returned home with his grandchildren despite robust objections by school officials and became much more interested in providing ways to achieve meaningful education but closer to home. The lesson learned was that education must add value to the lives of the people, and take into consideration the issue of culture without displacement.

By extension too, we might easily imagine that along with Spotted Tail who lived between 1823 and 1881, that other Native leaders during this time would be equally concerned about the future prospects of their people. Seeing so little hope and so few options, we can understand how Native leadership turned to education as a way for their people to survive. As such, education became the new shield that seemed to offer the best chance for protection and hope for the future for Native people all over Indian country.

Larger and more organized and powerful efforts by the government and auxiliary systems within the U.S. evolved as well during the latter part of the 1800s and into the 1900s. U.S. government officials collaborated with various Christian denominations and missionaries and it was hoped that the strict doctrine of religion would civilize the Natives, which meant persuading Native people to abandon their spiritual practices, native language usage, and other most cultural practices. As such, Christian indoctrination played heavy into the evolution of Native culture during this timeframe. Churches, missionaries along with boarding schools were swiftly constructed all across Indian Country. The church's history employed a sundry of tactics incorporating at times, both deep empathy as well as brute discipline. Forced displacement of Native children too, during this time frame coupled with numerous U.S. policies to expropriate land - and thus culture - resulted in catastrophic conditions with reference to Native families and their respective homelands with Cleary and Peacock stating:

Assimilationist education policies were implemented to remove any vestiges of tribal cultures in an effort to “Americanize” tribal members. American Indian children were forced to attend mission and government schools, where they were forbidden to speak in their native languages or live their cultures. In many of these boarding schools, the children were consciously deprived of seeing their parents for extended periods. (p. 63)

Enumerable circumstances like unending white settlement and encroachment, forced placement onto reservations, annihilation of the buffalo, Native leaders incarcerated or killed, complete alteration of roles for Native people and men in particular, and spiritual practices outlawed ... altogether this tsunami of devastation created havoc to Native societies. The ill effects of which, are still felt to this day and Marshall (1995) likens this process of “dehumanization” as a three-phase cycle:

First, this process involves defining a group of people (or an individual) as lacking any semblance of worthiness to, any similarity and any connection whatsoever with what was or is for the moment defined as “civilized,” based on emotion and self-serving rationalization. Second, it entails following up with action and/or policy Third, it seeks to justify the first two phases with more self-serving rationalization. (p. 72)

Political Background

In reference to the U.S. political environment, during and leading up to the 1960s, Native people along with other peoples of color began to organize and flex their political muscles to improve life especially on Indian reservations. Young college students who were the children of relocated native people from South Dakota, Oklahoma, Montana, Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico and other places began to congregate resulting in a take-over of Alcatraz Island off the bay of San Francisco. Over the course of six

months, this young group of native students initially led by Richard Oaks brought national and international attention to the disparaging conditions of American Indians especially those living on Indian reservations (Plutte & Fortier, 2002).

These very poor living conditions too, became highly visible to the general public when Robert Kennedy visited the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota during his presidential campaign in the late 1960s. As a result of this attention and growing sympathy for the status of the “first Americans” numerous employment and housing project developments began in Indian country. Along with construction of homes, funding for schools and infrastructure was also brought to Indian country primarily during the Nixon administration whose efforts officially ended federal Indian termination policies.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) controlled many things on the reservations and employed few, if any, Native people especially in leadership positions. Native leadership noticed this growing lack of opportunity, especially for their young people. Consequently, they began talking about creating higher educational opportunities so that Native people could become the leaders for these and other powerful organizations.

Specifically on the Rosebud reservation in the early 1960s, a brother and his sister played a significant role in the development of what would become Sinte Gleska University. Annie Red Bird-Douville, a much lesser-known educational advocate, was known to have influenced her brother, Stanley Red Bird, Sr., to do more to create a college for Sicangu young people. (Victor Douville, personal communication, October, 2013)

Stanley, at the time was a tribal council member, was lobbied by his sister Annie to consider developing a college at home so young people, including her then, young son Victor, would not have to venture so far away from home and experience economic hardship and culture shock just to get a college education. Again, looking at the conception of other TCUs during

this time and given the concern for children by mothers and grandmothers from Arizona to Pine Ridge, it is easy to postulate that other women like Annie, were equally instrumental in developing their tribal colleges.

Unfortunately, there are very few Native women known, given credit or recognized in the historical records for their contributions. In fact, I only learned about Annie's role recently when visiting with her son, Dr. Victor Douville who is a Lakota Studies scholar at my TCU. As such, this tendency to minimize or overlook the contributions of women in reference to Native history is unfortunately an oversight that must be corrected and addressed by future scholars.

In addition, other important contributors along with the Red Bird siblings were a burgeoning, young scholar Joseph Marshall, Jr., now a well-known author. Also, several non-Natives individuals were also involved in early planning efforts to create the vision for a college on the Rosebud reservation. Gerald Mohatt who would be the first college president of Rosebud Community College as it was called then, and a Jesuit priest, Fr. Joseph Gill who would develop a feasibility study and establish empirical evidence needed to fund a prospective college. Needless to say, there were many obstacles to consider including a lack of resources, legislative support, as well as the overall unfriendly racial climate of Native people and "their causes."

Though vastly condensed, the preceding glimpse into the historical, political and cultural influences that ultimately resulted in the TCU movement serves to provide not only acknowledgement for prior leadership, but also a deep appreciation for the risks and commitment by prior generations of Native people and their allies. In many ways, firmly acknowledging these influences provides the context for where TCUs are today. Though many, many years have passed since these wise ancestors walked among us, their teachings and strength of conviction remain. Today, our task as educators is to continue to build on their courage.

Current Tribal College and University (TCU) Landscape

TCUs are important to many Native American communities. Most TCUs have relatively small student bodies that are predominantly American Indian. Currently, there are 37 Tribal Colleges and Universities within the United States, the majority of which are affiliated with each other through the American Indian Higher Education Consortium well known by its acronym, AIHEC. AIHEC was conceived in the early 1970s as an entity to serve and promote TCUs in policy, fiscal, and legislative development. I estimate there about 30,000 full-time TCU students; as well as about the same number of part-time, vocational and foundational students attending TCUs.

In terms of faculty, there are about 770 full-time faculty who teach at TCUs. Also, TCUs are categorized as teaching institutions, not research institutions. In terms of administration, TCUs each are led by their respective college presidents and various administrative and academic leaders under the auspices of their respective governing board of directors or regents. TCUs are accredited by the same standards as other U.S. based college & universities.

Altogether TCUs offer 5 masters degrees, 71 Bachelors, 555 Associates and 235 vocational and/or certificate programs. (AIHEC). Most students are considered 'non-traditional' which means that most students have dependents, are older than the typical college student and often have not followed a straight academic path from high school into college. In addition, most TCU students work at least part-time and over 90% are eligible for some type of federal aid. Pictures and additional information and maps can be found through the AIHEC.org website or by contacting individual TCUs.

TCUs and the Connection to Spirituality

Before talking about some specific demographics of my TCU, I want to first preface this section by stating the primary difference between TCUs and mainstream U.S. colleges and/or universities is our mission to integrate and sustain our collective Native identities and cultures. This integration is a fundamental edict directly from founding contributors to TCUs directly linked to Native custom and philosophy; consequently, the strength of this resolve is strongly represented in TCU mission and vision statements. Often today, it is the native or cultural studies departments at each of the TCUs that lend their expertise to maintain strong institutional cultural connections. These native studies departments too are often asked to provide cultural leadership to their TCU departments and administrations, as well as the community at large. For example, at Sinte Gleska we rely on our colleagues from the Lakota Studies department to inform and lead social and ceremonial efforts institutionally as well as in various community or organizational efforts. This web of cultural connection is especially evident during public events held at our campus.

As such, expressions of spirituality through prayer and song are important aspects of TCU organizational culture though Deloria noted, “Other people feel that Indian ceremonials are simply remnants of primitive life and should be abandoned” and as such, this reliance on establishing a public spiritual connection may seem misplaced by non-Natives. (1973, p. 274). However, prayers emphasize togetherness in mind and spirit and often are initiated by those who generally have fluency in the Native language. Specifically, prayers acknowledge relationships with the creator, with former relatives including people, as well acknowledgement of natural elements that are considered relatives, and include the earth, the animal and winged nations and the star nation, as examples. Prayers are made to the higher power and acknowledge important spiritual relationships and

most often too; cultural connections through prayer begin with smudging. Smudging is a process where often sage (or peji hota), which is medicinal plant that is harvested then dried. A small amount of sage is lit inside of a shell and as the sage burns, the smoke rises. A designated person is asked to take this shell around to every person. Often, people also are asked to stand and/or form a circle. When the burning sage comes to each person, they will each gently wave the smoke toward themselves. Smudging is an intentional and deliberate act in preparation for prayer. It is the belief that smudging helps to clear minds, focus energy and some believe that smudging re-establishes an ancient sensory connection recognized only by our own spirits that lie within. Lakota traditional prayers conclude with the term, *Mitakuye Oyasin*, meaning, 'We are all related'. This simple but important phrase to close a prayer acknowledges our relationship with creation in connection to everything and everyone else and provides a strong reminder "our responsibility to respect life and to fulfill our covenantal duties" (Deloria, 1999, p. 52).

The section above clearly established explicit connections that TCUs maintain and practice. Deloria (1969) described these connections as an integral "internal strength" (p. 232). Everyone who attends and/or works at TCUs is familiar with these types of ceremonial activities and as such, they are commonplace. Having addressed the integral aspect of Lakota culture, the following section offers some rudimentary information about one TCU as well as insights from several graduates.

Sinte Gleska University & TCUs: The Impact of TCU Graduates

Student enrollment at Sinte Gleska University (SGU) varies but ranges from 700 to 1,000 full-time students per academic semester and we offer academic programs in six areas: Arts & Sciences, Business, Education, Human Services, Lakota Studies and Vocational programming. There have

been about 1,800 graduates of Sinte Gleska University since the early 1970s. These graduates work in a variety of capacities adding to the economic and intellectual capacity of our tribal community as often, many TCU graduates choose to live and work within their Native community after graduation. The first person to graduate with a Bachelor's degree in the early 1970s went onto law school and attained his Jurist Doctorate and following is a short interview with the Honorable Judge Marshall:

My Lakota name is "Many Shot At Him." My name comes from my father who was a veteran from 2nd World War. I am a Chief Judge for the Rosebud Sioux Tribe for 27 years and also a Judge for several other Tribal courts. My Lakota values influence my years as a TCU student. At Sinte Gleska University we had small classes and that enabled us to develop good relationships with our instructors. For example, my goal at that time was to complete my Human Services degree but I didn't really have an idea to get an advanced degree. However, because of my relationships with several of my instructors, they urged me to apply to Law School. Perhaps because of our relationships they seen something in me that I could be successful in law school that I really didn't see in myself. For whatever reason, they encouraged me to apply and I didn't think I would have done that except their urging and confidence in me and I think it developed a confidence in myself.

My life goal at that time was to come back and serve my tribe after getting a higher degree. Some of those relationships I developed way back when are still important to me today.

As a TCU alumnus, Judge Marshall is an exemplary TCU alumnus; however, he is not an exception. Another more recent TCU graduate at both the B.A & M.A levels in Human Services is Jess Bordeaux, who is now in her 2nd year of her PhD Clinical Psychology program at a mainstream university:

As a TCU graduate, I can look back at my experience and attribute a lot of the positive qualities of that experience to the relationships that I had made with

a lot of my faculty on campus. The interpersonal relationships allowed me to feel supported and connected not only to my community but to the reservation as a whole. My TCU in terms of location was great because it allowed me to be close to my family and have that support network which was really important to me. In addition, the staff at the TCU really was supportive in recognizing the nontraditional student life and they really took into consideration and made my school experience it workable for me and other students. It was just overall a good experience in that a lot of those relationships I still maintain to this day. I know there are people I can call and vent my frustrations at being a mainstream university now. I know that I can always call home and get help.

In comparing the difference in relationships during my TCU experience compared to relationships here at the university I am now, the main difference is that I knew TCU staff growing up on a personal level. Over here at my mainstream institution, they don't know my background and they seem unfamiliar with my culture and it's really hard to get to know faculty here; whereas people at home (where my TCU is located) know my family and my background. I do experience some culture shock and being here and being a minority, actually for the first time (in my college experience) was really hard. Back at home, TCU students are mainly native and the minority students are non-native (or White) and so having to live now, the opposite of what I was used to, is sometimes difficult. In my experience and from what I observed at my TCU, white students were definitely catered to more and from what I saw, a lot of things were changed to make them feel comfortable and that has not happened for me here at the mainstream university. They haven't really gone the extra step, I feel to help me acclimate or make me feel more comfortable.

As indicated in both interviews above, TCU alumni Marshall and Bordeaux both espouse the importance of their TCU relationships as valuable both in the past tense, as well as expectations of future relationships.

The next and final section will reference my own reflections about the importance of TCU relationships.

Concluding Remarks about TCU Relationships

One of the most interesting things about working at a Tribal College is the width and depth of our collective relationships. First, because of our small sizes, faculty relationships offer students ample support. Not surprisingly, for some Native American students, this type of support and validation for their Native identity is a new experience when they first become a TCU student. As faculty, we benefit too from our work with students and in a 2002 survey by the American Indian College Fund (AICF), TCU faculty generally have very high levels of job satisfaction due to the meaningfulness and the relationships that are a direct result of their work.

Consequently, creating classrooms based on mutual respect serves as encouragement for both faculty and student and in this manner, a type of wealth is created. According to one of our revered elders, Leksi (Uncle) Albert White Hat, the term 'wealth' is defined as the ability to walk or live with respect and this concept is known as Wicozoni. This understanding of wealth is certainly a departure from standard business notions, but for Lakota people this definition is more appropriate as it reinforces cultural values that prioritize healthy relationships.

TCUs are very young institutions and we have much to learn; however, in terms of what we offer, TCUs are deliberate in creating structures that are mindful of Native culture. TCUs as systems born of community, understand that living our culture is not easy nor is the work we do at TCUs. Likewise, TCU environments are certainly not free of internal challenges. However, the TCU movement has proven over the last 40 years that much is possible despite the obstacles that seem to be ever present. We recognize that because of the important life-long connections we to work develop: to our Creator, to our lands and to each other, we understand that true power to make positive change resides in the everyday relationships we create. Pilamaya ye (thank you.)

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