



# The Role of a 1994 Land Grant College

By Gary A. Halvorson

## On the Ground

- Tribal colleges provide educational opportunities to many Native American people, who otherwise would not be able to attend college.
- A strong collaboration with a tribal college takes into account the needs and input of the Native Community and does so in a culture-centered way. Discussions with a collaborating tribal college should begin early in the grant writing process.
- Tribal colleges can make significant contributions to the research effort. These contributions include their own research capabilities, a great cultural experience for everyone involved, and students who will continue their education as a result of their experience with the grant.

**Keywords:** Tribal college, collaboration, environmental science, prairie dogs, culture, Native American.

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In 1994, the US Congress authorized the formation of the 1994 Land Grant Colleges.<sup>1</sup> These colleges are also known as tribal colleges. They became part of the Land Grant system of higher-education institutions, which were first authorized in the *Morrill Act* of 1862.<sup>2</sup> Currently, thirty-six 1994 tribal colleges exist and are found mainly in the plains and in the north central and southwestern states. They are associated with one or more American Indian Tribes. Although tribal colleges share many things in common, a great diversity of cultures, programs, and resources exist among tribal colleges. They provide educational opportunities for many Native American tribes with which they are associated.

## Sitting Bull College

Sitting Bull College<sup>i</sup> (SBC) is a 1994 tribal college located in Ft. Yates, North Dakota, on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation

<sup>i</sup> For more information on Sitting Bull College, see <http://sittingbull.edu/>.

(SRSR). SBC started as Standing Rock Community College and received a charter from the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in 1973. SBC received full accreditation in 1984, and in 1996, the name was changed to Sitting Bull College after the famous chief. It received accreditation for 10 years in 2004 and was approved to offer a bachelor of science (BS) degree in Environmental Science in 2007. SBC currently has about 300 students; 94% of whom are Native American (70% female and 30% male).

In January 2014, SBC was accredited to start a master of science (MS) degree program, which is based on a cohort model. The first cohort of MS students began taking classes in Fall 2014. Six science faculty members are at the PhD level and mentor undergraduate and graduate students in their research programs. The Associate of Science, BS, and MS degree students are required to complete a research project to graduate.

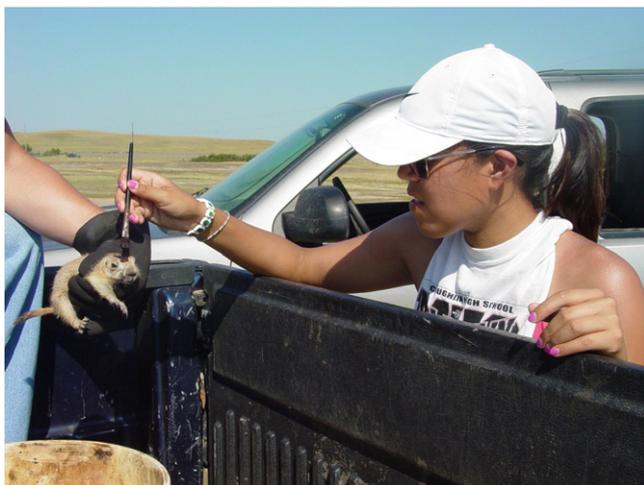
## Collaborative Research

SBC has engaged in numerous collaborative projects in the past with 1862 Land Grant Universities<sup>2</sup> and other research institutions. Collaborative research has not always been a good experience for tribal colleges, including SBC. Larger universities have often sought to collaborate with tribal colleges to help them get large research grants. Once the grant is received, the role of the college is often marginalized and the promised benefits never materialize. All too often, the funding received is minimal and has to be used for things that the tribes do not want or cannot use. Sometimes a tribal college finds out after the fact that a grant was written using its name as a collaborator without its knowledge or permission.

Luckily, this does not happen nearly as much as it used to. The most important thing that a research university can do is develop a strong, positive relationship with tribal colleges. This should be done early in the grant writing process. Once tribal colleges feel comfortable that their needs and capabilities are taken seriously, it is possible to move forward with collaborative research. The current collaboration entitled “Renewal on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation: Land, Cattle, Beef, and People” is an example of how constructive collaboration should work. The collaboration started with discussions between Ms Linda Black Elk, an SBC Instructor, and Mr Tim Faller, who represented the researchers at North Dakota State University (NDSU) and USDA-ARS.<sup>3</sup> This initial dialog resulted in further discussions. Using a culture-centered approach in mutual

discussions was important to SBC to make sure that cultural sensitivities and ways of dealing with people in a culturally appropriate ways were understood and accepted. It was also important that the research was something that helped meet the needs of the community members. Together, a conceptual framework was developed for research that would provide benefits for the people of the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation. It also provided for serious research inquiry for the researchers.

SBC received a small research grant to begin the research. Some initial field research began at the proposed study site. The team conducted surveys of Standing Rock Community elders and ranchers about the possibility of a larger research project. The results of the surveys were used to develop a research proposal that included the interests of the Standing Rock Community. The goals of the proposed research now included developing a source of natural beef from cattle raised on the site and do so in harmony with the wildlife in the area, including prairie dogs. The role of SBC in this research includes ensuring that the research is carried out in a culturally sensitive way, seeking continued input from community members, providing students with jobs related to the research, giving training to the students in the research areas, and making sure that the people of Standing Rock benefit from the research. Funding was received for the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) proposal. The fact that SBC had done its homework and developed a true collaboration that was important in getting this research funded. The research is an example of how collaborations with tribal colleges should work.



Celina Brownotter is painting a prairie dog. This identifies the dogs for study of their activities during research.

It was important to the community that the research should take into account the needs of and input from the Standing Rock Community. The elders, especially, wanted a holistic approach to food production in harmony with nature. A major goal of the research is to provide a source of nutritious food to the people of Standing Rock. It has also been important to the teachers at SBC that the students have been able to participate in this research and learn from the researchers in the program.

### What Tribal Colleges Can Add to a Collaboration

As members of the tribal college community, it is important for all of the collaborators to understand that they can get something valuable from this collaboration and also have something valuable to contribute by providing new perspectives on many issues. They can provide a great cultural experience for everyone involved. SBC has significant research capabilities that it can contribute to the research program. Last, but not least, students of SBC may choose careers in science or agriculture and may decide to continue their education at the collaborating universities based on their experiences in the program.

### References

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