

**THE CHALLENGES OF REMEDIAL/ DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION:
TCU LISTENING SESSION / BISMARCK, ND, 9/7/2007**

The United Tribes Technical College hosted a listening session on its Bismarck, North Dakota campus on September 7, 2007. The White House Initiative on Tribal Colleges and Universities (WHITCU) sponsored the listening session with the National Science Foundation's Tribal Colleges and Universities Program playing a supportive roll. Eighteen individuals representing 12 tribal colleges and universities (TCUs) participated in the listening session, which focused on the challenges faced by TCUs when first-year students enter a TCU unprepared academically for college-level work.

The four-hour listening session provided the participants with the opportunity to talk freely about their perspective of under-prepared students and how TCUs address the need for remedial/developmental instruction. The salient points listed below were guided by the following two broad questions: 1) How is your TCU affected by the need to provide developmental (remedial) courses? 2) What are some of the steps your TCU has taken to address the need for remedial and/or developmental instruction? What is working? What is not working?

- There was general consensus that TCUs enroll a high percentage of under-prepared students. These students, however, are motivated and are willing to do whatever is necessary to succeed at their TCU.
- Participants agreed that TCUs must make a commitment to serve under-prepared students by providing remedial/developmental courses that will bring these students quickly up to academic standards.
- The terms "remedial" and "developmental" were used interchangeably with "developmental courses" being the preferred term to describe what TCUs do to meet the needs of under-prepared students. "Under-prepared," most felt, is a more accurate phrase than the often-used phrase—"at risk".
- TCUs provide developmental courses and services to under-prepared students in a number of ways. One college established a Foundational Studies Department to increase student academic preparedness for postsecondary study. At other TCUs, under-prepared students participate in a variety of locally initiated remediation activities such as peer or staff tutoring, study skills, and developmental courses that are offered through general studies or departmental curriculum.
- Placement exams or other such evaluation instruments are used to appropriately place under-prepared students in developmental courses in reading, writing, and/or mathematics. But placement exams have not been evaluated for their appropriateness for American Indian students.
- Participants acknowledged that the preparedness of faculty to deal with low-skill-level students and the provision of skills-development instruction could be a factor in student success.
- A serious barrier that TCUs face is the lack of funding to develop remedial programs and appropriate development coursework.

- A serious barrier that students face is finding sufficient financial support for developmental studies. Extended periods of time spent in developmental/ remedial work can limit the amount of time for which a student can receive financial support for his or her pursuit of college-level studies.
- Some TCUs have been able to form good networks with their K—12 colleagues through activities such as summer workshops for math and science teachers. Others encounter disdain from local K—12 school personnel. They recount the racism toward American Indian students that results in lower expectations, low levels of support, and high dropout rates.
- Without an effective developmental/remedial program, a TCU would not be able to provide its students with a college education, better jobs, and more stable lives.

The participants felt that the opportunity to voice their concerns relative to the issues of under-prepared TCU students was of value and that other “listening events” should be held.