

Testimony of

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Submitted to the U.S. House Education and Labor
Subcommittee on Higher Education, Lifelong Learning, and Competitiveness

Field hearing on "*Higher Education Act: Institutional Support for Colleges and Universities Under Title III and Title V,*" scheduled at 10:00 a.m. at the Austin Community College Eastview Campus, 3401 Webberville Road in Austin, Texas.

June 4, 2007

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of the Tohono O'odham Community College (TOCC), one of the newest developing tribal college, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to the to the U.S. House Education and Labor Subcommittee on Higher Education, Lifelong Learning, and Competitiveness regarding the *Higher Education Act: Institutional Support for Colleges and Universities Under Title III*.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the legislation that established Title III-A, Sec. 316 is to “provide grants and related assistance to Indian Tribal Colleges and Universities to enable such institutions to improve and expand their capacity to serve Indian students.”

To fulfill the dreams of generations of the Tohono O’odham Nation members, the Tohono O’odham Nation Legislative Council established Tohono O’odham Community College (TOCC)—one of the 35 tribally controlled colleges and universities in the United States—in January 1998, as the official institution of higher education of the Tohono O’odham Nation. The college is located in Sells, Arizona, the administrative center of the Tohono O’odham Nation, approximately sixty-miles southwest of the nearest off-reservation population center, the city of Tucson.

Since the inception, the College achieved outstanding successes in the development of its infrastructure, recruitment of highly qualified and committed faculty and staff, involvement and collaboration with the community, and responsiveness to meeting the educational needs and desires of its students and of the Tohono O’odham Nation. By 2005, TOCC was designated a land grant institution and achieved full accreditation from the Higher Learning Commission.

The vision for TOCC is to become the Tohono O'odham Nation's center for higher education. Assuming this role, the mission is two-fold. The vision is to enhance the Tohono O'odham Nation's participation in the local, state, national, and global communities.

The Tohono O'odham Nation, lying along 75 miles of the Mexico-US border, is geographically the second largest reservation in Arizona—the size of Connecticut—and today home to some 11,000 of the Tohono O'odham Nation's 27,000 citizens. A large number of Tohono O'odham members reside in Tucson, Phoenix, other nearby towns and cities, and still farther distant. The Tohono O'odham Nation politically and geographically consists of eleven units, known as districts.

Tohono O'odham Nation's 24,000 membership living in Arizona has a median household income of \$6,000 less per year than other Arizona tribes and less than half the U.S. average. Official unemployment rate is 23% of the total workforce. Because of the reservation's lack of jobs, the Tohono O'odham Nation's statistics show a discouraged unemployed rate of 67% of the workforce.

According to economist Marshall Vest, the income gap in Arizona is growing faster than in any other state. About 900,000 Arizonans now live below the poverty level, almost twice the number recorded in 1990. The average income of the bottom fifth of the population, where many Tohono O'odham Nation household income exist, is one of the nation's lowest, \$7,273 per year or lower in 1998. Adjusted for inflation, this Arizona population has had income fall 15% in the decade from 1990–2000. During the same period, the top fifth of Arizona households saw income increase by 31 percent.

The 2000 Census estimated 13 percent of American families are living in poverty. Yet in Arizona, 17% of the population—the 7th highest percentage nationally—live in poverty. Despite the overall poor standing of Arizona, over three and a half times as many Tohono O’odham families (24%) live below the poverty line. While the increasing income gap between rich and poor means fewer Arizona families are occupying middle-class status, it also means that the economic status of the vast majority of Tohono O’odham is further sinking vis-à-vis the rest of the population.

Major determinants of economic status are literacy and education levels. Associate degree graduates earn 30.6 percent more (\$7000) per year than high school graduates. Bachelor degree graduates earn 60.3 percent (\$13,300) more than high school graduates. Tohono O’odham’s educational performance is among the poorest in the nation. Although overall 65% of American Indians have a high school diploma or have completed a GED, only 48% of the Tohono O’odham Nation’s population has done so. Furthermore, only 4.6% of Tohono O’odham’s population has an earned baccalaureate degree. In an average year, approximately 100 students graduate from K-12 public, Catholic, and BIA schools on and off the reservation.

Tohono O’odham health problems in general are serious. The Tohono O’odham have the country’s highest Type II Diabetes rate. Especially acute is the rate of Diabetic mothers. The U.S. has 25 diabetic mothers per 1,000 live births. On the Tohono O’odham Nation, the rate is 79 per 1,000 births. Teenage pregnancy rates are 118 per 1000 persons, or 12% of all women ages 15-19. At 9.1% of the total population, the Tohono O’odham Nation’s mortality rate for post-neo-natal fatalities is the highest in the U.S. Neo-natal care is also a major problem. Three times as many Tohono O’odham mothers are likely to

drink during pregnancy than in the U.S. population as a whole. Alcohol and drug abuse combined with crime associated with such abuse, and factors such as early mortality from vehicle accidents, are other serious problems that negatively impact family life.

The acute economic and health problems confronting the Tohono O’odham translate into inordinate educational and institutional challenges faced by TOCC in carrying out its mission to enhance the quality of life of the Tohono O’odham Nation.

The student body at TOCC continues to grow in number. For academic year 2005-2006, the unduplicated head count and FTS (full-time student equivalency) per semester were as follows: Fall 2005—286 students (151 FTSE), Spring 2006—215 students (149 FTSE); and Sumer 2006—150 students (60 FTSE). For Spring of 2006, gender distribution was 133 females and 82 males. Ninety-five percent of the student body are American Indian or Alaskan Native, and the vast majority are members of the Tohono O’odham Nation.

TITLE III

Title III helps the college address many of the challenges mentioned above. The Tohono O'odham Community College used Title III over the first year to support the retention of the students at TOCC. The goals of the project are to

- (1) Increase student enrollment sufficient to ensure the long-term financial viability of the institution.
- (2) Realize the Vision and Mission of the College by connecting the unique academic needs of the science and math curricula to the Tohono O'odham *Himdag (Way of Life)*.

- (3) Provide basic skills programs targeting the academic remediation needs of students.
- (4) Develop a sponsored projects program that enhances TOCC planning and development ability to implement, evaluate, and ultimately institutionalize academic and support programs, services, and resources.

The Title III grant has contributed to the enhancement and integration of the science and math coursework into *the Himdag*. The funding has provided a state of the art science laboratory for research opportunities and programs, hired math, science and GED instructors, established a study center to provide tutoring and mentoring for students enrolled in developmental coursework, increased student enrollment in science and GED classes, established a sponsored projects office to maintain good standing with granting agencies and increase funding opportunities to support TOCC academic programs, student services, and operations.

The grant has facilitated in bringing additional resources to TOCC. TOCC submitted a proposal and was awarded, "Everything in the Desert Connects" to the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), under the Instrumentation Program for Tribal Colleges and Universities. TOCC will use these funds to purchase GIS/GPS, and remote sensing equipment, accompanying necessary software for the purposes of enhancing, educational experiences not only for TOCC students but also for numerous tribal programs, while also impacting local farming and ranching endeavors.

Now that the Title III laboratory is operational, the college had 12 students enrolled in an environmental biology course--a first--in the summer semester. This increased enrollment for the environmental biology course supports the conclusion that if

the college built laboratory facilities enrollment would increase. Student opinion indicated that there is a need for the college to upgrade its mathematical and science program with GIS/GPS equipment, calculators, and software. The new lab facility is equipped with a wireless network with which the new GIS/GPS lab would connect. As a result of Title III grant, TOCC is able to offer a new state of the art science laboratory that will invite similar grant programs, such as the Department of Defense - Instrumentation Program for Tribal Colleges and Universities, for continued contribution of additional resources to TOCC. Prior to the new laboratory, TOCC had no formal hands-on laboratory facilities such as the Biology/Chemistry laboratory.

The educational attainment for Tohono O’odham Nation students is reported in the two school districts located on the reservation with high school graduation rates of 39.7% and 55.0% for 2002-03. Nevertheless, TOCC has served 3,490 students and graduated 195 students with two-year associate degrees, certificates, and GEDs since the year of 2000.

Tohono O'odham Community College
Awards by Term

DEGREE CODE	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	TOTAL
AA	3		5	6	3	2	4	23
AAS	2		6	2	1	3	17	31
ABUS				1			2	3
AGS	3	1	3		1	1	0	9
CERT	8	14	4	2	7	7	12	54
GED	12	10	6	13	11	12	11	75
ALL AWARDS	28	25	24	24	23	25	46	195

TOCC's success is measured by the improvements the college has made to students' lives. We know that culturally appropriate higher education for our people works when we began to see the economic benefits that will strengthen individuals, families, and community with greater workforce skills, opportunities for leadership,

financial stability, employment opportunities close to home, and knowledge to take care of the land. We know that culturally appropriate higher education for our people works when we began to see the social benefits that will impact families and communities with the ability to reduce the social problems, preserve the culture, language, and traditions, further educational opportunities, use better technology, and improve Community programs

RECOMMENDATIONS

More than two dozen federally chartered tribal colleges and universities are associated with educating Native Americans at the postsecondary level. They get the vast majority of their support from the federal government, receiving a total of nearly \$100 million in operating funds each year through the Labor Department's Bureau of Indian Affairs, and a significantly smaller amount for programs and facilities through the Education Department's Strengthening Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities program. As one of the newest member of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), we recommend the following:

- o Expand and increase authority for the Tribal Colleges and Universities' Title III Part A program. Attached is AIHEC's Summary of Proposed Amendments to the Higher Education Act (110th Congress).
- o Oppose establishing a new HEA Title III Program for Native American Serving, Non-tribal institutions.

- o Continue funding to build a strong working relationship with the funding agency and to provide the necessary training/knowledge on Title III programs for tribal colleges and universities.
- o Consider allowable costs for transportation needs for students living in isolated and rural locations and for instructors who travel to those distant locations to conduct classes.

On behalf of the Tohono O'odham Community College, one of the newest members of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), I urge you to consider the recommendations put forward to you today and I thank you for the opportunity to address you.