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# A Proposal Request for a Native American Task Force on Student Success at Portland State University

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**A proposal request for a  
Native American Task Force on Student Success  
At Portland State University  
By Dr. Cornel Pewewardy  
Director and Professor of Native American Studies  
June 15, 2012**

Introduction. The concept of education is sacred to most American Indian/Alaska Native people. In our traditional ways of knowing education is the method for which we learn how to help our children grow up healthy and become evolving human beings contributing to a societal good. Education is the way we learn about our creation stories, spirituality, social and family relationships as well as how to provide for our tribal Nations. In our contemporary life Native people are experiencing education in a more formal setting such as K-12 schools and higher education but still the traditional concept of education has those same purposes.

For over 500 years American Indians/Alaska Natives have been talked about, written about, and spoken for. In retrospect if there was one ethnic group of people who have donated more capital to U.S. higher education it is American Indians/Alaska Natives. The very existence of their tribal land base from which most colleges and universities presently reside is evidence of negotiated treaties, federal Indian policy of forced removal from tribal lands, and federal and state policies of manifest destiny. Portland State University is no difference than most higher education institutions in this country. In a recent email from Cheryle A. Kenney, current chairwoman of the Grand Ronde Tribe:

As you are aware, the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde ceded the lands that Portland is built upon and we have several hundred members who reside in Portland. From time to time, the Tribe needs to have a meeting with its members in Portland. As other important matters surface that require a gathering of Native Americans, such as the recent Cobell settlement, meeting space could be used if available to meet at NASCC. We especially hope that the PSU administration continue to fund the Native American student committee and activities and

demonstrate the unique relationship that PSU have with Native American Tribes. (Cheryle A. Kennedy, Chairwoman Grand Ronde)

Tribal leaders of the past had the foresight to realize that colonization by foreigners was inevitable eventually, so they negotiated education provisions in treaties and agreements they concluded with the U.S. Initially, they considered that the formal education provisions to be made to them would be supplementary to their existing non-formal systems, which had always served them sufficiently well. Their original intention was to ensure that tribal communities were able to survive the impending onslaught of the new dominating foreign culture. They felt that they could best accommodate this need if they learned to understand the European American lifeways and learned how to navigate their cultural institutions. Formal education was viewed in a very real sense as a survival mechanism for American Indians/Alaska Natives.

American Indian/Alaska Natives represent a mere 3.6% of the higher education population while they are more than 5% of Oregon's state population. American Indians/Alaska Natives have the lowest enrollment rates in higher education of all ethnic minority groups. Obstacles and threats that impede American Indian/Alaska Native students' participation in higher education are illustrated by larger social ills that manifest themselves as poverty, illicit drug abuse, poor high school preparation and lack of role models/mentors in addition to the unique historical social, political, and economic disenfranchisement that have characterized American Indians/Alaska Natives. Data gathered from the recently released report *Coalition of Communities of Color in Multnomah County* illuminate the disparity of American Indian/Alaska Native students in Portland and Oregon higher education institutions in enrollment, persistence and graduation when compared to the overall student population. See:

<http://coalitioncommunitiescolor.org/docs/AN%20UNSETTLING%20PROFILE.pdf>

The continued underachievement and isolation of such an ethnic group and growing national statistic is nothing short of a national tragedy in higher education. Unless more resources are placed into the resolution of this educational crisis, AI/AN students will continue to remain a legacy of despair in the history of this country. Thus, the Native American Task Force on Student Success at Portland State University (PSU) will be a one-year undertaking comprised mostly with volunteers from Portland State

University and the local Native community. The mission of the task force is examine the recruitment and retention strategies of Native American students at Portland State University as well as explore strategies for Native American students to re-enter back into their tribal communities after graduation.

Need. American Indians/Alaska Natives continue to rank as the ethnic group that has historically benefited the least from the public education system. In terms of attainment of positive outcomes, recent student data indicate that they continue to have the lowest matriculation rates and the highest attrition rates of all students in the country (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000). Although AI/AN represent more than one percent of the general population, they represent significantly less of the total undergraduate postsecondary student population. This same disparity exists in Oregon, where at 5% it is one of the nation's largest Indigenous population. Furthermore of the relatively low number of postsecondary AI/AN students, most are enrolled in two-year public institutions like Portland Community College and Mount Hood Community College.

The Portland urban Indian community includes almost 25,000 people from over 380 Tribes from Oregon and other states. Community is found in a network of organizations and events that affirm tribal identities and have cultural significance. Membership within this unique community gives a sense of belonging and a feeling of responsibility for the members. Its population is "young and growing" with over 40% under the age of 25. The community sees the preparation of their youth to become "the future leaders of this city, their tribes, and our community" as some of their most important work. Many barriers hinder the accomplishment of this work however. Members of the Portland urban Indian community "count disproportionately among the urban poor...experience the highest rates of homelessness, poverty and unemployment of all ethnic groups" and are impacted by depression, addiction and diabetes "in numbers far exceeding the norm" (PIRC, 2008 p. 2). Only 37% of the community's high school students graduate on time, and K through 12 students fall far behind the general population of students in statewide assessments for proficiency. The Portland School District assessment results for 2007-2008 reveal that on average the % of AI/AN students who meet or exceed the standards in Reading and Literacy at grades 4, 7, and 10 is 11% lower than that of the general population. The gap for Math scores is 6.8% and Writing is 17.8% (ODE, 2008).

Education is key to closing the achievement gap and removing the barriers, but to be effective, it must be responsive to the diverse cultures, indigenous values, worldviews and needs of the communities it will serve. It must be community-based and culturally responsive. Community-based education “begins with people and their immediate reality and is dependent on “participation, in which people renegotiate and reconstruct the ways in which a school relates to its community’s interests” (Corson, 1999, p.10). The expectation is that the community members become the experts, the advisors and controllers of the educational system; their values begin to shape educational process. The purpose of the Native American Task Force on Student Success is to build sustainable pathways for AI/AN students at Portland State University.

Goal, objectives and outcomes. The proposed Native American Task Force on Student Success is designed to meet the following goals and objectives:

**Goal 1: Increase number of Native American students at Portland State University with at least a 5% population of Native American students**

Objective 1.1: Recruit Native American undergraduate students through internal recruiting of undergraduates at PSU and external recruiting in partnership with Tribal communities and the Native American Task Force on Student Success.

**Goal 2: Retain the number of Native American students enrolled full-time at Portland State University. Establish sustainable pathways for AI/AN students that integrates research based effective practices with community based, culturally responsive student support systems unique to the needs of Native students.**

Objective 2.1: Align practices within the existing student support vehicles to foster collaboration among Portland State University, regional tribal Nations in Oregon, and local urban Portland Indian community.

Objective 2.2 Provide culturally focused professional development to administrative, instructional and mentoring staff through workshops on cross-cultural communication, development of anti-bias competency, and skills necessary for working with Native students.

Objective 2.3: Coordinate strategic planning in coordination with the newly hired Chief Diversity Officer to increase both access and success of Native students.

Objective 2.4: Develop a strategic plan for sustainability with the Advisory Board of the

Native American Student and Community Center.

Objective 2.5: Develop a pipeline between the sectors (K-12 and two-year and four-year colleges) to improve Native student success.

**Goal 3: Support and retain American Indian/Alaska Native students at every step of their academic program through advising, mentoring, and community building**

Objective 3.1: Utilize individualized advising to monitor and support students' progress.

Objective 3.2: Provide support for exam preparation - test-taking skills and study strategies.

Objective 3.3: Develop an ongoing community of support for AI/AN students through the Native American Student and Community Center, a gathering place for PSU's Native students.

**Goal 4: Coordinate the placement of American Indian/Alaska Native students into the work force or graduate schools**

Objective 4.1: Collaborate with partners to identify placement opportunities for AI/AN graduates.

Objective 4.2: Prepare AI/AN candidates for the interview process and other skills necessary to obtaining employment.

Objective 4.3: Collaborate with partners to create a welcoming return back into the tribal community workforce.

**Goal 5: Create a multi-dimensional induction program to support Native American students during their first year at Portland State University.**

Objective 5.1: Conduct training for mentors who will be working with Native American students in their first year at Portland State University.

Objective 5.2: Develop mentoring partnerships between experienced faculty and staff at Portland State University and Native American students.

Objective 5.3: Conduct annual workshops, seminars and banquet to bring together Native American students, their mentors and PSU alumni to strengthen the Native community.

Personnel Staffing. Dr. Cornel Pewewardy will be chair of the Native American Task Force on Student Success and responsible for leading the task force, initiating and sustaining communication among PSU faculty and administrative personnel, and

preparing monthly reports. He will also be responsible for ensuring that the task force complies with PSU's Office of Research and Sponsored Projects and Human Subjects Research Review Committee. Dr. Pewewardy is the Director and Professor of Native American Studies at Portland State University.

Diversity Laurel (graduate student) Office of Graduate Studies. A graduate assistant will be responsible for the overall implementation of the schedule and help guide the task force activities. The graduate assistant will submit monthly reports, oversee weekly operations, and work closely with the chair and task force committee members to establish a strategic plan to implement the task force.

The support staff at the Native American Student and Community Center will assist with the internal support like scheduling monthly meetings of the Advisory Board and Task Force Members; assistance in procurement supplies and materials; assistance in processing stipends and meals; and other fiscal tasks.

Budget Request. This task force is projected for one academic year 2010-2011, starting September 2010 and concluding June 2011. The chair's contribution is in-kind because he is a full time faculty member in CLAS.

Diversity laurel (graduate assistant): 1 GRA at 20-40% FTE - \$13-\$15K

Travel stipends for Task Force Committee Members: Ten (10) meetings will be held for the duration of this task force starting in September 2010, October 2010, November 2010, December 2010, January 2011, February 2011, March 2011, April 2011, May 2011 and June 2011. There will be four (4) out-of-town site visits to the tribal reservations of Grand Rhone, Selitz, Warm Springs and Umatilla. Site visits to these tribal reservations are critical to building bridges and collaboration of resources. Six (6) meetings will be held on campus at the Native American Student and Community Center. On campus parking will require parking passes. All meetings will be half-a-day in which lunch will be provided.

Office supplies, materials and resource books (\$1000)

Equipment: One laptop computer and software (\$2000)

Ceremonial regalia and cultural items (\$2000)

Summary of budget proposal

10 monthly meetings (includes travel stipends & lunch X 20 members on Advisory Board

and Task Force): \$40,000

Parking accommodations for 10 members for campus meetings: \$500

1 GRA at 20-40% FTE - \$13-\$15K: projected high end of \$15,000

4 meeting with advisory board - this may overlap with task force meetings.

Office supplies: \$1000

Equipment includes one computer laptop and software: \$2000

Website construction and maintenance: \$2000

Ceremonial items: \$2000

**Sum Total Cost Requested: \$62,500**

Tentative Advisory Board Members

United Indian Students in Higher Education (1 elected student officer)

American Indian Science & Engineering Society (1 elected student officer)

Steve Woodcock, Education Specialist (Indian Education), Oregon Dept. of Education

Karen Kitchen, Director of Indian Education Programs, Portland Public Schools

Se-ah-dom Edmo, Oregon Indian Education Association, Lewis & Clark College

Matt Morten, Executive Director of NAYA

Tana Achley, SALP Programs, PSU

Katy Katty, Education Specialist, Siletz Education Office

April Campbell, Grand Rhone Education Office

Wendell Jim, Warm Springs Education Office

Zenaida Lyles, Umatilla Education Office

Dr. Jackie Balzer, Associate Dean of Student Affairs, PSU

Tentative Task Force Committee Members

Dr. Cornel Pewewardy, Director and Professor of Indigenous Nations Studies, PSU

Dr. Grace Dillon, Associate Professor of Indigenous Nations Studies, PSU

Dr. Maria Tenorio, Director of the American Indian Urban Teacher Program, PSU

Tana Achley, SALP Advisor, PSU

Dean Azule, Native American Student Services Coordinator, PSU