



Into the Future: Better Development

Regarding the future of TCUs and EMSIs, most of the interviewees presented a positive and optimistic perception. Meanwhile, interviewees provided specific suggestions on how to better the development of their own institutions or TCUs and EMSIs as a group. A better future of TCUs and EMSIs also means a better future for AIANs and CEMs.

9.1 SUGGESTIONS FOR TRIBAL COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

In order to improve TCUs for the future, interviewees gave many good suggestions, which covered a variety of themes: the visibility of TCUs, sustainable funding, leadership and management, faculty, partnership, relationship with the tribe, program optimization and development, and developing optimal facilities and technology.

9.1.1 *Increase Visibility*

Before talking about the specific suggestions for the future development of TCUs, interviewees suggested that TCUs should increase their visibility to have society better recognize their value and significance.

I think tribal colleges like all ethnic minority-serving institutions are hidden gems, especially the tribal colleges because people do not know how lucky

we already are to have a college in the area. Who would establish a community college on our reservation? Nobody really thought tribal colleges were going to succeed. But look, we are here, and we are here all these years later because we have such dedication. All the tribal institutions serve the purpose to support our people, to keep our people healthy, and to provide our people with an avenue to a better life. That is the whole idea of our tribe. You work for the people. (TCU05)

In specific, the general population should have a better understanding of what TCUs are doing and achieving. Notably, the successes of TCUs in surviving through the early years and maintaining growth as an essential part of AIAN HE should be recognized by the general population in the United States.

Tribal colleges and universities are there, and they need to be more visible. Many people just do not know about them in the way they should. I think something needs to be done. Plus, [students from tribal colleges] are turning out to be good students, because we are seeing them come to our institution as transfer students. Many of them are well-prepared academically and are successfully receiving their four-year degrees. Those things should be out there to show the work that tribal colleges are doing and give them the credit that they have been able to exist this long with minimum resources. They are doing much good. I think that is something that really needs to be out there. (CAE09)

Summarizing what the interviewees argued, through increasing the visibility of TCUs and their successes and importance in the general US society, AIANs can attract more attention to their histories and current status, which will, in turn, provide additional support to the development of their education.

9.1.2 *Improve Funding Ability*

The lack of stable funding sources has been a primary barrier hindering the future development of TCUs. Given this barrier, content area experts (CAEs) and TCU administrators expressed their suggestions to the federal government and TCUs.

First, the federal government needs to give more credit to TCUs for their contributions to AIAN HE. More importantly, the federal government needs to realize its promise to guarantee funding according to the

Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Act and to provide additional funding in support for TCUs. “Tribal colleges provide an opportunity to a special kind of education for many people on different tribal nations.... The government needs to continue and expand their support, including such things as achieving the prosperity of the 1994 land-grant institutions” (TCU06).

Compared to placing all of the burdens upon the federal government, many interviewees pointed out how TCUs should unite to better coordinate with the federal government for their own promised rights. Therefore, TCUs need to strengthen the institutional lobbying ability of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) in Washington, DC. “[TCUs should] become more effective at lobbying Congressional representatives and promoting American Indian education as a ‘national priority’ based on treaty obligations with the President and Congress by passing legislation that mandates each Federal Agency to create special initiatives including funding on an annual basis with the tribal colleges” (CAE13). Moreover, to reduce the dependency on federal funding, TCUs should recruit or cultivate grant-writing expertise to improve their grant application ability to obtain more soft-money funding opportunities.

We are always scanning our environment inside to identify our needs that are unique to each coming group of students and to the community that has ever-changing development in our economy among our people, family, health, and employment. Our ability to respond to these changing challenges is one that concerns all of us. Our resources are slim. If we had the grant writing department with some broad-based expertise, it would really help the growth and expansion of our resources to develop new programs. (TCU02)

Solving the major funding challenge for the future development of TCUs requires a multi-pronged approach. Many interviewees argued that while it is necessary to reemphasize the promised responsibilities of the federal government, TCUs should also depend more on themselves through improving their lobbying ability as a solid group. Moreover, TCUs should improve their grant writing and application ability to obtain additional funding opportunities.

9.1.3 *Strengthen Leadership and Management*

The stable and competent leadership has been recognized by many CAEs as a critical factor of the future development of TCUs. Because TCUs are owned and governed by tribes, tribal leaders play a vital role in ensuring excellent leadership for TCUs.

Leadership is key, and leadership is stability. Once they are doing better, they are having stable leadership.... The tribal colleges will succeed if they can have long-term stable leadership. That means the regions which run these [tribal colleges] have to give credits to them and not to fire people from left to right. They need to hire qualified leaders for the college and give them the necessary leader support. (CAE10)

In specific, a good leader or an excellent team of leaders of TCUs can give the right vision for the future development of their institutions. In addition, stable leadership and good leaders can attract better faculty to create programs for their students, which will eventually build up a positive reputation for their institutions. Meanwhile, qualified leaders can positively apply their connections to gain various support for their institutions. "Another thing about great leaders is that they reach out to the state legislature, and they reach out to people in Congress. That will improve [their institutions] a lot, and as a result of that, [there will be] more funding [opportunities] and support will be more positive" (CAE11).

In the view of TCU administrators, to realize sound management of their institutions, constant and open communications within the institution are key ingredients. "We need to make sure everyone talks to each other. And for the communication with our Board of Trustees, we need to strengthen that.... [We are] trying to utilize strategies where the Board of Trustees and faculty and staff can communicate more through participation in fundraising efforts, or certain programs that are going on" (TCU07).

As a CAE mentioned, good professional development programs are necessary for TCUs to improve the management abilities of administrators, faculty, and staff members. "For leadership, what they are doing is they are growing their own. They conduct the development program for their faculty now through grants and the American Indian College Fund" (CAE09).

Stable leadership is a key factor for the future development and sustainability of TCUs. Therefore, TCUs should work closely with their tribal

governments to ensure the right persons are in positions of leadership. And for sound management, TCU leaders should promote open communications. Professional development programs for administrators and faculty and staff members are essential to improve the management level of TCUs.

9.1.4 *Maintain and Grow Faculty*

The lack of qualified faculty has been a significant barrier for TCUs to realize their missions because faculty members play a significant role in serving AIAN students through excellent programs.

[Tribal colleges] should ensure to have highly-qualified and highly-engaged faculty. As in any institution of higher education, if you do not have faculty that engage with students and their professions, people will not be in their classes. And they do not learn anything even if they are [in the classroom]. That is a huge problem for tribal colleges because where they are located there are not that many highly-qualified faculty members, so the people they have are really working double, triple, or quadruple time sometimes to make sure that this place is not dead. (CAE06)

Interviewees provided two suggestions to address the issue of qualified faculty. Generally speaking, TCUs should take some actions to maintain their faculty members and even create their own faculty team. First, to maintain their faculty members, the primary thing that TCUs should do is to provide better compensation for faculty members. “They need to raise faculty salaries overall because they need to be in the run for the top-notch people. That helps with the accreditation and helps in the classroom. I think that will help them become better” (CAE09).

Second, as a TCU administrator introduced, his institution is working on growing their faculty team, which can be considered a method other TCUs can help solve their faculty issues as well. “The final area is that we are interested in growing our own faculty. We are so rural. When we recruit someone far away who often are urban people and are used to large cities, we cannot keep people here. So, the best strategy for us is to develop our expertise and our own faculty” (TCU02).

9.1.5 *Maintain and Expand Partnerships*

As presented in the chapter on facilitating factors, partnerships with mainstream HEIs and other tribal colleges are crucial for the development of TCUs. Therefore, interviewees suggested that TCUs should maintain their good cooperative work among tribal colleges as a group and expand connections with other mainstream colleges and universities. The establishment of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) has in many ways helped TCUs gain excellent achievements thus far in this regard. Therefore, TCUs should place greater value on and help strengthen this Consortium. “All TCUs should work together. TCUs should try to work as an organization to gain more power in their development. They should conduct more collaboration and should not just work as an individual institution” (CAE02). One CAE gave his opinion on the significance of cooperation among TCUs:

I would say that it is not simple to say that tribal colleges need more money, and it is that tribal colleges need to maintain the strategy that gives them the political clout and the political leverage they can get. That means the future is a shared future, and they must work together. I think they always need to work together. I think there is always a danger that, as the decades pass, the sense of cohesion and the sense of shared destiny can get lost, especially when there is a conflict within and between the institutions. Maintaining and strengthening the cooperation of institutions is vital for the better development of tribal colleges. Through that, they can get support to succeed. (CAE12)

Also, TCUs need to maintain and expand their connections with mainstream HEIs and the state HE systems. “I also believe that they should strengthen their memorandums of agreement and the transferability of the credits [with other higher education institutions].... Therefore, they need more communications and dialogues. More than that, the right policy should be put into practice. That is where the key is. It is our policies that would make it put into practice” (CAE14). TCUs cannot have a bright future if they fight individually or develop in a closed system. Therefore, TCUs should treasure the existing AIHEC partnership, and they should improve and expand upon their connections.

9.1.6 *Strengthen Relationships with Tribe*

Even though TCUs are chartered by their tribes, it does not necessarily mean that they have taken for granted support from the tribal governments. Therefore, for better development in the future, TCUs “need to continue the relationship building with the band and the community” (TCU07), and “should grow with their communities” (CAE02). This connection is significant because it is directly related to the tribal support for TCUs. “Developing a stronger relationship with local tribal leaders to ensure that the tribe makes greater commitments to the college and takes a political stand with the funding agencies, namely the Congress” (CAE13).

To maintain these relationships, TCUs should keep their needs-based strategy to serve their communities. “[The tribal college] meets the needs of the community and tribal people, and I think it will make them better, but it depends on what the needs are. They have to respond to those needs of the community and tribal group for what students are needing” (CAE09). As a specific example, some interviewees highlighted the vital role of TCUs in developing the natural resources and technology industry on their reservations.

I think in some time in the future we are going to be able to have the credentials of the tribal members to help tribal nations to capture some of the benefits and take advantage of the area’s natural resources. I think that is a logical step but really helps tribal nations gain greater wealth. Another area is technology and energy. I think it is a great opportunity for tribal nations to build upon the success and capture the benefits that can come from technology and energy. I think there is tremendous potential there.... I think we will hit those areas as more tribal members earn advanced degrees and knowhow. (CAE15)

TCUs should do everything they can to strengthen their relationships with their tribes. Therefore, TCUs should work closely with the tribal governments to identify the development needs and finally work together to understand how to best address these needs.

9.1.7 *Provide Quality Programs*

Many interviewees argued that the quality of programs offered at TCUs is the key to success and the future. Given the various challenges that exist,

funding or money cannot fix everything for TCUs. So they need to keep improving the quality of their programs to ensure every student can learn what they want and achieve what they dream.

If you ask the presidents of tribal colleges, they would say the biggest challenge is money. They said they do not have enough money to support students and to operate the college. I personally do not think the money is the end-all of fixing everything. I think if you have good and strong programs, and you can engage students then you are successful in what you are doing, even though there are only ten or twelve people that are graduating. (CAE06)

In specific, to guarantee the quality of programs, TCUs should establish a sound monitoring system for quality assurance purposes, especially of those newly established TCUs and programs. “I think for the better development, we need to strengthen our current programs. As I said, a lot of our strategies are new, our programs are new, or the way of being run [is new], so we just need to monitor those and apply continuous improvement processes to make sure we always are in a strengthening mode” (TCU07). Also, some interviewees suggested that good institutional research can contribute to program quality improvement. “We are currently reviewing our data collection process as we feel we can streamline that to better collect data that is meaningful [for the quality of our programs]” (TCU04).

9.2 SUGGESTIONS FOR ETHNIC MINORITY-SERVING INSTITUTIONS

For the better development of EMSIs in the future, interviewees suggested that, first, EMSIs should take full advantage of the national policies not only on HE, but also on other areas like the economy, development, and foreign affairs. Furthermore, EMSIs should improve institutional management, balance their institutional role in serving as both ethnic and regular HEIs, and at last, improve the quality of their programs.

9.2.1 *Take Advantage of National Policies*

As discussed previously, national policies have been recognized by many interviewees as the major facilitating factor in the development of EMSIs. Therefore, interviewees argued that EMSIs should take full advantage of

not only the HE policies, but also the general national policies on the economy, development, and foreign affairs. First, for EM HE, EMSIs should seize the chance of current plans focusing on recruiting student talents nationwide and globally. “Our university has become a candidate of the national *111 Plan*,¹ and beginning next year, we will be eligible to [receive the financial support] to introduce talents listed in the *Thousand-Talent Plan and Hundred-Talent Plan*” (EMI02). In addition to the talent plans, EMSIs should take the opportunity of the latest *Double First-Class University Plan* that includes not only HEIs but also disciplines. In this sense, this plan provides a broader platform than previous ones for EMSIs to enter the prestigious HE plans. Therefore, EMSIs should make use of their advantages of ethnic programs to enter the *Double First-Class University Plan* and receive support for the further development of these programs.

In addition to the HE policies, EMSIs should also carefully consider and seize the chance brought by the general national economic, development, and foreign policies, like the Belt and Road Initiative. For example,

[Our] university should take full advantage of the current economic-oriented Belt and Road Initiative and the Develop-the-West Strategy.... If we can fully apply these two policies to the development of our university, we will have an excellent development [strategy].... [They can bring resources,] and resources are important. Moreover, these national policies can guarantee stable resources on a long-term basis. Therefore, we need more research on these policies and how to apply them with our characteristics to serve the local needs. (EMI02)

In the Chinese centralized political and HE systems, EMSIs should take a careful review of the policy environment, and perhaps more importantly, they need to identify and seize the opportunities offered by these policies for their future development.

9.2.2 *Enhance Institutional Management*

From vocational post-secondary schools to research universities, EMSIs cover all levels of HEIs in China. So the institutional management abilities of EMSIs are different due to their institutional levels. Treating EMSIs as a group, many interviewees argued that enhancing institutional

management is a crucial point for their improvement, especially of those institutions trying to enter the list of world-class universities.

To reach high-level institutional management, in general, EMSI leaders should have a strategic vision for their future development.

Let me emphasize strategic planning and development as being really important. Let us try to brainstorm that Ethnic Minority groups on the level of the playground at the very beginning. The mindset is very important if we want to be successful. If you think you are inferior to someone, usually you are really inferior to someone at the end of the day. However, if we can be strategic and have a competitive mindset, let me say, “Okay, what are my competitive advantages?” “Can I be better than those groups who are competing with me?” Definitely, Ethnic Minority people have a lot of competitive advantages, but the only thing is that we need to utilize that visibility and dig deeper into that visibility until there are favorable policies, available funds, and a good governance structure. Moreover, a leader should have the vision to guide those projects. I see this as a project. If I have a school—and I am the dean or president coming to that school—I really need a strategic vision for my school to be prosperous and an attractive place for Ethnic Minority people to come. So, all that hinges upon leadership. (CAE03)

Regarding the vision of the future of EMSIs, they also need to deal with the misunderstanding of them as “policy institutions” that their most important and only task is to realize the policy objectives in providing HE access to EM students and guaranteeing ethnic unity. “I think there is some misunderstanding about the overall purpose and the need for these universities. Ethnic Minority-Serving Institutions, as well as the Chinese government, could do a better job to promote the value of ethnic institutions to the broader Chinese society” (CAE01).

Interviewees also suggested that EMSIs should take advantage of the Chinese cultural tradition that promotes the harmonious relationships of different cultures in their institutional management and development. “Ethnic Minority-Serving Institutions should focus on the future and create a community of a shared future for mankind in a harmonious way. [To realize this mission,] Ethnic Minority Colleges and Universities should creatively promote the Chinese tradition of treasuring multicultural and harmonious co-existence. This is a soft power which can help lead the future of ethnic institutions” (EMI03).

9.2.3 *Balance the Dual Institutional Role as Ethnic and Regular HEIs*

As emphasized by many interviewees, EMSIs are essentially regular HEIs with particular tasks of serving EM students and areas. In this sense, for their future development, interviewees further suggested that EMSIs should balance their position between the roles of ethnic institutions and regular HEIs.

On the one hand, as a special group of HEIs, EMSIs have their specific target population—EM students—and therefore, they are offering ethnic programs. EMSIs should leverage this unique institutional characteristic as a competitive advantage with China’s regular HEIs. “In the competition with other regular comprehensive research universities to qualify as Double First-Class Universities, Ethnic Minority Colleges and Universities focus too much on the criteria to be top-class comprehensive universities while ignoring their advantages in Ethnic Minority serving, training, and research” (CAE04). EMSIs should recognize their significance and indispensability in the Chinese HE system. “We need to keep our unique characteristics; then there will be people needing you.... The talents we have cultivated are also important. Just as Peking University and Tsinghua University are indispensable, we are also indispensable” (EMI01).

On the other hand, EMSIs should not ignore their role as regular HEIs that serve in talent training, academic research, and social service. “Universities are special organizations in society with their own characteristics of academic freedom and autonomy, which is also the vitality of Ethnic Minority-Serving Institutions as social organizations. Ethnic institutions have their special mission and target populations, but the realization of the special mission relies on their characteristic as institutions of higher learning” (CAE05).

To realize the balance between ethnic and regular roles, interviewees suggested that EMSIs should internalize the ethnic characteristics throughout the institutional operation and the delivery of their programs.

Actually, there is not a conflict between the dual roles of EMSIs in serving both Ethnic Minorities and the development pursuit of EMSIs as regular higher education institutions. Ethnic institutions should internalize the ethnic characteristics in their development as an academic organization, rather than merely make ethnic characteristics as a slogan. For example, they should apply ethnic languages in the organizational operation and create

more textbooks of ethnic languages to serve more Ethnic Minority students. Of course, in the aspect of regular higher education institutions, ethnic institutions should devote their efforts to serve the general population and society as well. Only with the development as regular higher education institutions, can they more fully promote their unique ethnic characteristics. (CAE16)

From this point of view, some interviewees thought that to be a comprehensive institution will bring about the positive development of EMSIs. “It is important for [ethnic institutions] to offer programs covering all disciplines. Because they are coming from the low-level institutions, to be comprehensive will increase their institutional standing” (EMI05).

9.2.4 *Improve Program Quality*

As argued by many interviewees, the future development of EMSIs in many ways relies on the quality of the programs they provide. “Ethnic Minority-Serving Institutions should improve discipline and program quality because it directly influences the institutional ability in talent training, research, and social service. They should put more emphasis on this area” (EMI05).

Regarding the specific suggestions to improve the quality of programs, many interviewees expressed that there should continue to be a particular emphasis on talent training. First, EMSIs should emphasize the significance of multicultural program delivery while reaching the goal of helping EM students live a better life in modern society.

[Ethnic Minority-Serving Institutions] should, on the one hand, continue respect and positively support the development of multicultural programs. Ethnic institutions should eliminate negative stereotypical perceptions about Ethnic Minority youth and apply a culturally-appropriate way of instruction to help Ethnic Minority students bring out the best in them. On the other hand, by respect multiculturalism, ethnic institutions should recognize Ethnic Minority students’ great potentials in adapting to cultural changes and engaging in modern life. Moreover, these programs should strengthen students’ abilities to effectively use modern technology. (EMI03)

In alignment with the growing internationalization trend that exists within Chinese HE, EMSI programs should serve as a platform for EM students to grow their global competencies. “The primary concern of my

university is still in talent training. However ... the university [also] needs to be creative to ensure the management of the training process is in line with internationalization” (EMI02).

NOTES

1. The *111 Plan* is a term shorted for the Program of Introducing Talents of Discipline to Universities, which was implemented in 2006 by the China Ministry of Education and the State Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs. The *111 Plan* aims to introduce talents from the global top 100 universities to improve national key disciplines and promote the building up of world-class universities.