

A National Collaboration to Strengthen the Advanced Environmental Technology Education Programs at Tribal Colleges

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Project Website: <http://ateec.org/tribal-colleges/about>

Background

In Native American communities, the importance of humankind's relationship to the environment and respect for the land has been recognized for centuries and is deeply connected to Native American culture and history. Members of Native American communities view life as a whole, emphasizing the interconnections that exist among all things (Crazy Bull, 1997). This cultural concept has been translated into an interdisciplinary curricular emphasis (Pease-Windy Boy, 1995; Schmitz, 1992) that is now viewed as an asset for students grappling with the highly complex problems of today's rapidly changing world. Community lies in the heart of traditional Native education. There is a widespread acknowledgement and understanding of the need to strengthen environmental technology education at Tribal Colleges. Many Tribal governments are striving to identify economic development and employment opportunities for their sovereign lands that are consistent with and supportive of their culture and heritage.

Indian reservations are home to some of the most polluted and environmentally degraded sites in the country. Reservations contain a disproportionate share of superfund sites, Brownfield's designated areas, and toxic military sites. These sites are the legacy of misguided activities by non-Native American firms and government agencies. People living on reservations have some of the highest incidences of environmentally-related health problems. These reservations also remain the most geographically, economically, and educationally isolated areas in the nation, and due to a lack of resources, are least able to cope with the complex environmental challenges that they face. There are 565 federally recognized Tribes controlling 55 million acres of land. The current Native American population of 2.3 million is expected to exceed 4.6 million by 2050. There are 37 Tribal Colleges located on reservations throughout the United States.

The development of high quality, specialized environmental education and technical training has been recognized as necessary for economic development. Many Tribal Colleges have developed environmental science and technology programs. However, prior to this project, there was no comprehensive sustainable program to accomplish successful programs or link Tribal Colleges to each other or the broader environmental technology education community.

This project endeavored to promote, acknowledge and motivate Native American students to develop an interest in environmental science and to choose environmental careers.