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"2+2+2" COLLABORATION ADDS UP TO SUCCESS FOR AMERICAN INDIAN STUDENTS"

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“2+2+2” COLLABORATION ADDS UP TO SUCCESS FOR AMERICAN INDIAN STUDENTS”

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Background

In South Dakota, contemporary realities for American Indians in higher education are wrought with irony. Though the American Indian population is young and growing at a rapid rate, only a small number attend college and complete baccalaureate degrees. While nine reservations occupy almost 20 percent of the state's land mass, most tribes struggle to attract, retain and develop the resident expertise needed to effectively manage their resources.

Challenges facing American Indian communities will require baccalaureate educated professionals, and most SD tribal colleges currently offer predominantly associate degrees. Various governmental, political and community leaders have called for a model which fosters collaboration between high schools, tribal colleges and state universities which will help Native students overcome barriers and complete their higher education. South Dakota's 2+2+2 program provides such a model.

Overview

The 2+2+2 project is a collaborative effort to help more Native Americans complete baccalaureate degrees. Each "two" of the 2+2+2 represents two years. The first two years is spent at a reservation high school, the second two years at a tribal college, and the last two years at SDSU. The project combines a number of methods to help students complete their degrees in a holistic, seamless manner. These include:

Articulation

Students moving between high schools, tribal colleges and SDSU need assurance their credits will receive fair evaluation at each level. Catalogs have been exchanged and

course equivalencies have been negotiated between participating tribal colleges and SDSU. Faculty are working to develop transfer guides for students which will prescribe a schedule of study at each level and allow students to plan for their future in an informed, purposeful manner.

Experiential Learning

Most American Indian high school students do not have a clear picture of career opportunities available to them. An integral component of the 2+2+2 is to provide students with hands-on learning opportunities that will motivate them to pursue careers. This is accomplished through summer institute, research apprenticeship and "day in the life" programs, each of which includes career exposure and awareness, along with information on campus resources and planning for success.

Student Support System

The 2+2+2 program is designed to assist students with transitions between high school, tribal college and SDSU. Financially, the program provides large scholarships, jobs on campus and assists students with other expenses. Incoming American Indian students are connected with others through SDSU's Native American club. Free tutoring, an emergency fund and general networking/support are facilitated through the campus office of Native American student advisement. Multicultural student services has initiated a peer mentoring program as well.

Curriculum, Shortcourses and Distance Education

Three courses have been taught from SDSU via interactive television to the state's tribal Colleges. More courses are being developed for Internet delivery. In addition to these technology-based approaches, faculty have traveled to tribal college sites to deliver short courses of interest to Native American students.

2+2+2 curriculum work has included revising SDSU courses for inclusion of American Indian perspectives, and designing collaborative learning opportunities which engage students at all three levels in the educational process.

Reciprocal Faculty Development

To encourage faculty involvement, the 2+2+2 project sponsors an immersion program that releases faculty for up to 25 percent of their workload to work with tribal counterparts to further project goals. In addition, 2+2+2 sponsors two-way travel of tribal and SDSU faculty to enhance collaborative efforts. Recently, the project led 26 faculty to three of the state's reservations and tribal colleges, where objectives included exposure to reservation communities and tribal Colleges, in-service on American Indian history and culture, and networking with tribal professionals with common interests.

Implications/Lessons Learned

Much of the effort in the early stages of the 2+2+2 involved developing relationships with reservation contacts. This trust, though hard-earned, is integral to project success. Persistence has been another key factor. It has been important for SDSU staff to commit to long term project goals, and not expect to see large enrollment gains instantaneously.

The importance of multi-level educational collaboration is one key project implication. Attention to the difficult transitions between high school, tribal colleges and baccalaureate institutions is paramount. The greater the community involvement, and the earlier Indian students begin thinking about college and careers, the more likely they will be to persist in their education.

A final implication is the project's holistic approach. Those involved in the 2+2+2 have rejected the view of the project as merely a targeted effort to increase SDSU's minority student numbers. Rather, the program is constructed as a systemic approach to supply an American Indian workforce for the reservation communities of the state. Realizing this objective has multiple barriers has required a multi-faceted, integrated approach. This makes the project difficult to manage, staff and evaluate; none-the-less, now in its fourth year, interest and participation in the program is on the rise. Currently, SDSU is hoping to adopt the model, successful in the colleges of Agriculture and Biological Sciences and Family and Consumer Sciences, university wide Project leaders are also exploring expanding the program into neighboring states, particularly those with strong networks of tribal colleges.

Presenters:

Timothy J. Nichols serves as Assistant to the Director of Academic Programs in the College of Agriculture and Biological Sciences at South Dakota State University, where his work includes student recruitment, retention and placement. He also serves as coordinator for a number of special programs to enhance the college's working relationship with the state's American Indian communities.

Laurie Stenberg Nichols is Dean of the College of Family and Consumer Sciences at South Dakota State University, where she directs several outreach programs to the state's American Indian communities. Her teaching/research interests include balancing work and family, adult development, and intimate relationships.

Diane Kayogo-Male is Professor of Sociology at South Dakota State University, and serves as evaluator on the 2+2+2 project. An award-winning educator, Dr. Male teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in Social Problems, Social Theory and World Population Issues and Evaluation Research.