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# Tribal College Libraries and the Federal Depository Library Program

Charles D. Bernholz and Rachel Lindvall

At the 2003 Fall Federal Depository Library Conference, we had the opportunity to present two information sessions on tribal college libraries. We were particularly fortunate to be able to offer the view of a regional depository librarian in a state that contains two tribal colleges—the Nebraska Indian Community College and the Little Priest Tribal College—and the perspective of the director of library services at Sinte Gleska University in South Dakota, the first tribal college to offer a master's program on an Indian reservation. Our comments were supplemented by those of Diane Cullo, the director of development, communications, and program initiatives for the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC).

There has been a rich history of proposals for Indian higher education, with the eventual creation in 1968 of the first tribally controlled community college, Navajo Community College (now Diné College).<sup>1</sup> Federal support for their program was assured with the passage in 1971 of the *Navajo Community College Act* (Public Law 92-189). The consortium's efforts began shortly thereafter when, in 1972, six such colleges, including Sinte Gleska, formed an association.<sup>2</sup> The *Indian Education Act* in 1972 (Public Law 92-318), and particularly the *Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act* in 1975 (Public Law 93-638), expedited developments.

Today, the group's focus is boldly pronounced on their web site ([www.aihec.org](http://www.aihec.org)):

AIHEC's mission is to support the work of these colleges and the national movement for tribal self-determination. Its mission statement, adopted in 1973, identifies four objectives: maintain commonly held standards of quality in American Indian education; support the development of new tribally controlled colleges; promote and assist in the development of legislation to support American Indian higher education; and encourage greater participation by American Indians in the development of higher education policy.

In these endeavors, the number of institutions has grown from six to thirty-four within the United States, with one additional one in Canada.<sup>3</sup> Communication among these colleges and universities is enhanced by the consortium's own quarterly publication, the *Tribal College Journal* ([www.tribalcollegejournal.org](http://www.tribalcollegejournal.org)), a "culture-based publication [that] addresses subjects important to the future of American Indian and Alaska Native communities."

However, tribal colleges have had many difficulties during their brief tenure. The libraries at these institutions suffer from the same problems that all libraries face: lack of

space, limited staffing, and inadequate acquisitions budgets. More than a decade ago, Duran commented upon the critical function that libraries must play within these colleges.<sup>4</sup> Technology to support education and cultural responsibilities within these communities is a necessary foundation for such performance, but these resources require funding that is very difficult to obtain.<sup>5</sup> Monette, though, has noted that even if tribal colleges and universities are "often located in economically depressed areas, are the poorest institutions of higher education in the nation, [and] . . . are also the most isolated," securing these technologies and thereby diminishing the "digital divide" will create a "powerful tool for closing all the other 'gaps' that they must face."<sup>6</sup>

For a number of years, the Government Printing Office (GPO) has discussed with the tribal college community the possibility of adding their libraries to the list of selective depositories (R. Haun-Mohamed, pers. comm.). As part of this program, these institutions too would have the chance to select from the vast array of government documents printed and distributed by the GPO and to supplement their collections in the process. Moreover, "select" is very much the operative word here, because each library would have the ability to choose only those materials that reinforced its collections. Focus may be placed, for example, on educational materials, on health-related issues, or on senior citizen information. This advantage would be of particular importance to such college libraries as the ones at the Nebraska Indian Community College and at Little Priest Tribal College—just as it is at Sinte Gleska University—because all three of these academic libraries serve as the public libraries in their communities as well.<sup>7</sup> Thus, just as a tribal college library's efforts may be enhanced by a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to serve in its public role, documents from the FDLP may additionally offer the community greater insight into, and access to, resources in areas of human services, of ranching and agriculture, and of Veterans Affairs that geographic distances may sometimes impede.

This potential may be understood more clearly when we reconsider the findings of Cheryl Metoyer-Duran's analysis of the perceptions of tribal college presidents on the role of the library in their institutions.<sup>8</sup> One shared perceived characteristic was that the library had to serve as a major link between the community and the resources, not just between the college and the resources. Suddenly, grant funding and grant writing for project support, tribal business contact information, and college accreditation were mixed in the same facility. Information literacy was driven to the forefront of tribal needs, and one tribal college president made this quite clear by stating "Information literacy makes

legitimate the idea that seeking information about issues, ideas, or concepts that concern Indians need not come from books alone; the information may come from many different sources."<sup>9</sup> The vision of information literacy, desired by all tribal college presidents for their programs and communities, will become clearer in the next few years, and government documents can aid in this quest.

Today, the Internet is a vital link for all educational undertakings, and the tribal colleges are working hard to open this avenue to their students as well as to their public patrons. The electronic transition will make available in digitized formats more government documents, and this will reduce the processing costs and save precious shelf space associated with traditional paper and microfiche materials. At the Nebraska Indian Community College and at the Little Priest Tribal College, there was an additional, critical issue. It became clear, when discussing selective depository status with them, that both institutions believed that becoming a member of the FDLP would require managing whatever materials the GPO might send to them. There was concern that they would receive a substantial proportion of the more than 7,500 items offered by the GPO. They concluded that, given this potential volume of materials and their very limited facilities, depository status would be impossible to administer. The flexibility of actual selective status would certainly alleviate their concerns, and this electronic transition would offer these and other tribal college libraries a far greater opportunity to acquire government documents for their communities than their space for tangible items would ever have allowed.

Further, the GPO has recently announced *A Strategic Vision for the 21st Century* (2004) that entails a reorganization to address their three fundamental missions of providing publishing and printing services to the federal government, copies of relevant materials to the general public, and—through the FDLP—"nationwide community facilities for the perpetual, free and ready public access to the printed and electronic documents, and other information products, of the Federal government."<sup>10</sup> With regard to the latter, the GPO plans to develop a fresh operational model for the FDLP that would afford "access to all past, present and future Federal documents in a digital format that can be searched, downloaded and printed over the Internet at no charge."<sup>11</sup> Print copies of essential federal publications will also be available through the authoring agency. The GPO's objective is "to digitize and authenticate all known Federal documents, beginning with the Federalist Papers, to allow the entire collection to be searched on the web and viewed over the Internet from a home, office, school or library," and to complete by December 2007 the retrospective conversion of 70 percent of all targeted documents.<sup>12</sup>

This endeavor will be a benefit to all citizens, but it will be particularly useful for academic institutions. Electronic access to the entire array of all known federal documents means that even the most remote library can provide this service, and this would be a boon to tribal colleges.

There is substantial support for such improved linkage between federal government endeavors and the goals of tribal educators. President Bush's July 2002 Executive Order 13270, *Tribal Colleges and Universities*, seeks to "encourage tribal colleges to participate in Federal programs," to emphasize the development of educational opportunities for their communities, and to insure the "preservation and revitalization of tribal languages and cultural traditions."<sup>13</sup> Ann Marie Downes, the past president of Little Priest Tribal College in Nebraska, was one tribal college administrator named to the President's Board of Advisors that was created as part of this Executive Order. In addition, all tribal colleges are land-grant institutions through the *Equity in Educational Land-Grant Status Act*, so their access to the FDLP is facilitated by the same 1907 legislation (34 Stat. 1012, 1014) that initiated depositories at many land-grant academic institutions.<sup>14</sup>

One of the impediments to this achievement, though, is the belief of some librarians in the documents community that tribal colleges are just too small to be participants in the FDLP. Yet there are tribal college libraries in existence today that match or exceed the book volume holdings of designated federal depositories at academic institutions. The 2004–2005 *American Library Directory* indicates that Diné College holds 55,000 volumes in Tsale, Arizona, and another 23,000 at Shiprock, New Mexico; that Salish Kootenai College has 46,000 items; that Haskell Indian Nations University maintains 45,100; and that Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute declared 30,000. Sinte Gleska University has 48,000 volumes itself. Each of these holdings is larger than or close to those amounts held by other special educational locales: the American Samoa Community College, with 30,000 volumes, is a selective library.<sup>15</sup> These numbers indicate that tribal colleges are committed to their task of providing effective educational facilities, and the enhanced access to the proposed GPO electronic collections will bring *all* libraries to the same level. Selecting and receiving specific, community-relevant print materials, as part of the FDLP, would allow tribal colleges to expand their delivery scope to their very important public library responsibilities within the community, as well. Directly servicing both the academic needs as well as those of the community is a method to maximize the total return from placing a selective depository at a tribal college.

We believe that the FDLP would be a useful community educational asset that should be considered by all tribal college boards, and that the ever-expanding access to the electronic assembly of government documents will mean that even small college libraries in this consortium will be able to enrich the lives of their students and their community members through these opportunities. ■

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- these presidents are women. It is important to note that the students at these institutions are members of more than 250 tribes (Ambler, "Thirty Years Strong," 7).
4. Duran, "The Role of Libraries," 402–05.
  5. "Tribal Colleges Struggle for Funding," 12.
  6. Monette, "Leadership, Money," 26.
  7. These joint community responsibilities are quite evident. Fort Peck Community College declares that the "Library has been designated a Tribal Library by the Tribal government and, as such, serves the whole reservation population as the major resource/research center for students, faculty, community and professionals" (see their Library link at [www.fpcc.edu](http://www.fpcc.edu)). Little Big Horn College notes that the "Library also serves an important role as the Public Library for the Crow Indian Reservation" (<http://lib.lbhc.cc.mt.us/policy/mission.htm>). Oglala Lakota College states: "Our mission is to ensure that students, staff and our community are effective users of ideas and information" (<http://library.olg.edu>).
  8. Metoyer-Duran, "Tribal Community College Libraries."
  9. *Ibid.*, 367.
  10. U.S. Government Printing Office, *A Strategic Vision for the 21st Century*, 1.
  11. *Ibid.*, 2.
  12. *Ibid.*, 2, 5.
  13. The text of this Executive Order is available at [www.ed.gov/about/inits/list/whtc/edlite-exec.html](http://www.ed.gov/about/inits/list/whtc/edlite-exec.html). See the "White House Initiative on Tribal Colleges and Universities Home Page" at [www.ed.gov/about/inits/list/whtc/edlite-index.html](http://www.ed.gov/about/inits/list/whtc/edlite-index.html) for more on this federal program.
  14. This Act (1994; 108 Stat. 4048) follows a rich tradition in the United States. States and territories have been provided with federal support to create "colleges for the benefit of agriculture and the mechanic arts" (1862; 12 Stat. 503) and for such educational programs at institutions "where a distinction of race or color is made in the admission of students" (1890; 16 Stat. 417, 418). In addition, legislation was passed for the development of "agricultural experiment stations" (1887; 24 Stat. 440) and for "cooperative agricultural extension work" (1914; 38 Stat. 372). The nation's oldest higher education organization, the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, noted that these newly decreed land-grant institutions "are the most important provider of higher education opportunities for Native Americans" (*The Land-Grant Tradition*, 7).
  15. Section 1905 of Title 44—"Distribution to depositories; designation of additional libraries; justification; authorization for certain designations"—defines the parameters for the designation of selective depositories for Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia, Guam, American Samoa, and the Virgin Islands (1968; 82 Stat. 1238, 1284). The Northern Marianas College was added later to these depository sites (1989; 103 Stat. 1870, 1874).

## References and Notes

1. See Crum, "The Idea of an Indian College or University" and Stein, "Tribal Colleges," 261–62. In addition, see Stahl, "The U.S. and Native American Education," for a federal perspective.
2. The other five initial members were D-Q University ([www.dqu.cc.ca.us](http://www.dqu.cc.ca.us)), Navajo Community College ([www.dinecollege.edu](http://www.dinecollege.edu)), Oglala Sioux Community College ([www.olg.edu](http://www.olg.edu)), Standing Rock Community College ([www.sittingbull.edu](http://www.sittingbull.edu)), and Turtle Mountain Community College ([www.turtle-mountain.cc.nd.us](http://www.turtle-mountain.cc.nd.us)). See Ambler, "Thirty Years Strong," 6–9, for the first three decades of AIHEC's progress.
3. There are AIHEC member institutions in Arizona, California, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota, Washington, and Wisconsin, and in the province of Alberta. The board of directors is composed of the presidents of the thirty-five colleges; more than one-third of