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## Tribal Colleges Face Multiple Challenges in Economic Wake of COVID



Supporters of Tribal Colleges and Universities are calling on Congress to set aside at least \$40 million per year for much-needed repairs, digital infrastructure upgrades and financial support for struggling students. (American Indian College Fund)

September 17, 2020

*This story is based on an opinion piece by Cheryl Crazy Bull and Sara Goldrick-Rab that first appeared on The Hechinger Report. Broadcast version by Eric Galatas for Public News Service Reporting for The Hechinger Report-Colorado News Service*

**DENVER** – As students return to college this fall, advocates for the nation's 37 Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) are calling for increased investment and support.

According to Cheryl Crazy Bull, president and CEO of the [American Indian College Fund](#), tribal schools have been underfunded since they were created, and the pandemic has exposed a crippling digital divide that has left many students behind.

"People were unable to continue their education virtually, because they didn't have internet access, they didn't have access to technology, to the equipment that was needed," she explained.

Tribal Colleges and Universities serve some 100,000 students in remote rural communities, mostly in the Midwest and Southwest, where some students hitchhike more than 40 miles just to get to class.

TCUs typically do not receive funding from state and local governments, nor from property taxes.

Based on the most recent [#RealCollege Survey](#) by The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice, Crazy Bull said more needs to be done to get assistance directly to students. She pointed to research showing high rates of students struggling to meet their basic needs, even before the pandemic.

"What we discovered through the survey was that 62% of our students indicated that they had been food insecure, which ranged from not having food to just worrying about food," she said. "And not surprisingly, that 59% of our students were housing insecure."

Crazy Bull said having a college degree or professional credential has become essential for landing jobs that pay a living wage.

She added that skills developed at TCUs also give graduates the tools they need to be entrepreneurial, and boost social and economic development in their communities.

"Not only are you going to benefit economically, but your health is going to be better. You're more likely to be able to maintain a home, have adequate transportation, having the ability to take care of yourself and your family," she said.

To address financial shortfalls, the American Indian College Fund and others are calling on Congress to set aside at least \$40 million per year to help TCUs, as part of a broader package of emergency support of at least \$1 billion for all minority-serving institutions.

*This information originally appeared on [The Hechinger Report](#).*

*Support for this reporting was provided by Lumina Foundation.*

Eric Galatas, Public News Service - CO

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