MONITORING REPORT: SINTE GLESKA UNIVERSITY

Sinte Gleska University is herein submitting a monitoring report to the Higher Learning Commission as prescribed by a letter from the HLC Board of Trustees dated November 12, 2013. In said letter, the HLC Board of Trustees determined that Sinte Gleska University would be placed on a status of probation due to non-compliance relative to Criterion 2 and Criterion 5 within the Criteria for Accreditation. The HLC Board of Trustees further cited non-compliance issues in terms of six Assumed Practices: specifically, A.9; D.1; D.2; D.3; D.4; and D.6.

A.9—Relating to Governing Board Authority

(The governing board has the authority to approve the annual budget and to engage and dismiss the chief executive officer.)

The first step in addressing this area is to conduct SGU Board of Regents matters in accordance with the Sinte Gleska University By-laws. In particular, the SGU By-laws set forth the parameters for establishing regular SGU Board of Regents meetings, for defining the composition of the SGU Board of Regents membership, for appointing new members, in the event of position vacancies, to the SGU Board of Regents and for delineating the roles and responsibilities involved in the scope of work and authority for the SGU Board of Regents.

SGU By-laws: Article Four—Board of Regents

--Section One: Number, Composition and Representation
This section provides the number of members to serve on the SGU Board of Regents to include the following constituencies: student Regent, staff and faculty Regent, regional Regents and elder Regent.

--Section Two: General Eligibility Requirements
This section provides the requirements for eligibility to serve on the SGU Board of Regents.

--Section Nine: Elder's Advisory Council
This section provides a process with appointment authority to fill vacancies on the SGU Board of Regents.

--Section Eighteen: Vacancies
This section provides for appointing new Regents to fill vacant positions on the SGU Board of Regents.
SGU By-laws: Article Five—Board of Regents Duties and Responsibilities

--Section One: General
The SGU Board of Regents is responsible for general governance of the corporation to include upholding and supporting the institutional mission statement, goals and purposes and enhancing the public image of Sinte Gleska University. This responsibility and authority may be exercised only by the Board as a unit. Major activities within the purview of the SGU Board of Regents include: participation in planning for the University; ensuring adequate resources by participating in fundraising efforts; approval and adoption of institutional policies; approval of the organizational management structure; approval of the annual University budget; approval of financial depositories of the University and persons authorized to sign checks on behalf of the University; and other duties as may be set forth in the SGU Board of Regents Policies and Procedures Handbook. The fiduciary role of the SGU Board of Regents requires that each Regent perform his or her responsibilities and duties in a manner that places the interests of the corporation and the members of the corporation above any other considerations.

--Section Seven: Delegation of Authority
The SGU Board of Regents, as the governing body for the corporation, delegates responsibility for the day-to-day management and leadership of the corporation to officers of the University who shall be responsible for implementation of policies and directives adopted by the Board.

SGU By-laws: Article Six—Meetings of Regents

--Section One: Regular Meetings
This section provides for the conduct of regular SGU Board of Regents business on a monthly basis.

SGU By-laws: Article Twelve—Amendments to By-laws

The SGU Board of Regents may amend its By-laws at a regular or special meeting or at a corporate meeting called for that purpose and approved by a vote of eligible voters. Any amendments must be consistent with the Corporate Charter.

Sinte Gleska University will utilize a consultant throughout 2014 to review the SGU By-laws and propose any amendments that may be necessary to ensure the efficient management, leadership and operation of Sinte Gleska University and the SGU Board of Regents. Any such proposed amendments to the SGU By-laws will be approved and implemented prior to December 31, 2014.

(Institutional Recommendations for Improvement)
   a. Examine composition of Elders Advisory Council;
   b. Publish a SGU Board of Regents Directory with photos, vitae and other relevant information on the SGU website;
   c. Schedule annual training opportunities for the Board;
d. Publish an annual schedule of Board meetings to include dates for special activities such as participation in institutional planning/fundraising efforts and regular monthly activities such as annual recurring responsibilities on the SGU website;
e. Provide an agenda of SGU Board meetings on the SGU website.

D.1--Relating to Institutional Capacity to Meet Financial Obligations

(The institution is able to meet its current financial obligations.)

Sinte Gleska University reflects a deficit balance in the SGU General Fund which has probably been the case at various intervals throughout our history dating back to the 1970’s. In this most recent era, the SGU General Fund deficit has existed since 2006 at which point Sinte Gleska University no longer had any available investment monies (Bedford donation funds) to compensate for the negative fund balance.

The majority of revenue at Sinte Gleska University is derived from federal funding. At present the operating budget for Sinte Gleska University consists of 30+ fund accounts including grants through the Bureau of Indian Education, the Department of Education, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Labor. These grants represent restricted funds with the exception of Public Law 95-471, as amended; monies which are intended to serve as core operating funds for Sinte Gleska University and which have minimum restrictions in terms of expenditure.

The challenge for Sinte Gleska University, on the revenue side of our budget, is to increase our amount of discretionary funding in order to reduce our SGU General Fund deficit. Given that tuition is the main source of SGU General Fund revenue, Sinte Gleska University has historically viewed and treated our tribal college core funding as the most realistic avenue for gaining more funds through student enrollment increases of tribal members. Last year, the pro-rata ($ per Indian Student Count) was calculated at approximately $5,850 which allowed Sinte Gleska University to realize a $150,000 increase in annual funding even though our ISC enrollment remained unchanged from the previous year. This result is attributed to a general decrease in ISC enrollment in all tribal colleges/universities which given level annual appropriations yields a higher yearly pro-rata.

Central to our efforts to increase tribal college funding revenue has been the establishment of the SGU Recruitment and Retention Committee. This committee has met on a regular basis since June of 2013 and was formed to examine new and improved strategies for increasing student enrollment at Sinte Gleska University. To date, enrollment has decreased slightly in both the 2013 Summer and Fall Semesters however Sinte Gleska University can still maintain its same 2012-13 ISC average through the addition of professional development courses for SGU staff plus workshops and CEU course offerings during the 2014 Spring Semester.
On the expenditure side of our budget Sinte Gleska University began the year by implementing a change in health plan coverage for SGU employees which provided a cost savings of nearly $250,000 ($20,000/month X 12 months). We also implemented several changes relating to personnel contracts such as offering an 11 month employment contract option to staff employees, reducing new part-time employee contracts to 11 month work periods and not filling certain position vacancies upon employee resignation. Sinte Gleska University will conduct a comprehensive analysis of an 11 month contract issuance for all SGU staff during the 2014-15 contract year.

As stated on numerous occasions, Sinte Gleska University has no long-term debt and will continue to address our SGU General Fund deficit issue. Sinte Gleska University has met all of its financial obligations throughout our 40+ years of institutional existence and will continue to implement budgetary adjustments as required in a manner that is consistent with the best academic interests of our SGU student population.

D.2—Relating To the Institution Having a Prepared Budget

(The institution has a prepared budget for the current year and the capacity to compare it with budgets and actual results of previous years.)

Sinte Gleska University prepares an annual with a detailed listing of projected revenues and expenses for 35 program areas which include academic departments, institutional and student support services, grants and special project initiatives. Our budgeting goal is to attain a balanced budget. Our budget goal in the upcoming years must necessarily entail a reduction of our SGU General Fund deficit.

A primary concern in terms of budget preparation stems from the number of federal and other grants that comprise the nucleus of our annual budget. While we typically know whether grants will continue or terminate from year to year, we oftentimes do not know the exact funding level until we actually receive the notice of grant award. This situation is especially true with tribal college funding—our largest funding source—wherein the funding level is not known until mid-July even though the grant funding period is listed as July 1-June 30 for any given year. The preponderance of grant funding also adds to complexity of multi-year budgeting efforts since once again final revenue availability is uncertain over a 2 year timeframe.

Despite these circumstances, Sinte Gleska University is committed to improving our budgeting practices and processes in the future. For next year an annual operating budget will be completed by July 1, 2014 for presentation to the SGU Board of Regents during the July meeting and approval prior to the onset of the fiscal year on October 1, 2014. At the same time projected revenues for the following year will be identified with the understanding that changes may become necessary due to the uncertain nature of grants at Sinte Gleska University.
D.3—Relating to Long-Term Financial Sustainability

(The institution has future financial projections addressing its long-term financial sustainability.)

One of the key efforts for determining long-range financial sustainability at Sinte Gleska University is to ensure that program quality and program delivery is not compromised or sacrificed for SGU students. Such program assessment is not limited only to academic departments and academic degree offerings; rather, this process will be applied to other program areas including student and institutional support services to further examine and measure program efficiency and viability.

Sinte Gleska University has cited that budget reductions will be implemented according to the following overall program areas: 1) personnel (including changes in employee contracts, benefits and hiring decisions); 2) program delivery (including both academic and community outreach programs); and 3) student services. We have already implemented certain actions relating to the personnel area and will continue to do so during the 2014-15 contract year. The next step is to conduct a program assessment process during the 2014 summer months that will allow for changes to be implemented before August 1, 2014, the start of the contract year, and before October 1, 2014, the start of the 2015 fiscal year. In the case of academic programs, this assessment will consider variables such as number of students served, average class size, number of graduates, number of faculty, teaching loads etc. along with factors such as the graduate employability and other program evaluative measures. (See sample plan—Attachment).

In terms of the budget, Sinte Gleska University does not need, as stated on many occasions, to address any long-term debt issues or considerations. There is no type or level of institutional financial indebtedness at Sinte Gleska University. Instead, the budget must be viewed relative to the current operating revenue sources and expenditures. As with any organization, whether nonprofit or for-profit, the two ways to improve the bottom line is to bring in more or pay out less.

Grant funds that have been in existence for at least five years and are expected to be available for at least the next five years are as follows:

- Tribal College Core funding (US Department of the Interior: P.L. 95-471)
- BIE Adult Education funding (US Department of the Interior: P.L. 93-638)
- BIE Job Training funding (US Department of the Interior: P.L. 93-638)
- BIE Scholarship/Higher Education Grant funding (US Department of the Interior: P.L. 93-638)
- BIE Snyder Act funding (US Department of the Interior: P.L. 93-638)
- TITLE III formula funding (US Department of Education: Title III, Part A, Sec. 311-315 of the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965, as amended; Title III, Part F, Sec. 371 of the Higher Education Act, as amended)
- Tribal College Endowment Program (US Department of Agriculture: Equity in Educational Land Grant Status Act of 1994)
The Tribal College Core funds and the Title III formula funds are based on enrollment levels of Indian students attending Sinte Gleska University. Beyond our plans to increase enrollment and thereby increase certain revenue sources, Sinte Gleska University also intends to engage in more aggressive fundraising pursuits in the next two years, although these efforts will likely be adversely affected by our HLC probationary status. (NOTE: Sinte Gleska University has witnessed a significant decrease in student enrollment during the 2014 Spring Semester which we attribute to the recent HLC determination and pronouncement of probation status—we believe this negative effect can be reversed to some degree starting in the 2014 Summer Semester.)

And so, our budgeting plans are to focus on The Future of Sinte Gleska University, and include a reduction of continuing annual costs but coupled with an increase in fundraising efforts. The budget process will include a cost-benefit analysis of current spending trends in major budget categories of personnel, facilities management, program and student services, along with assessment of emerging opportunities and partnerships in the areas of research and tribal nation building at Sinte Gleska University. Overall, our plan is to eliminate the SGU General Fund deficit over an 8 year period at a rate of $250,000 per year. This approach is the most realistic plan for Sinte Gleska University and can be realized through careful decision-making and a strict adherence to established budget parameters and constraints along with any other pertinent cost reduction policies and measures. Sinte Gleska University expects to reduce our SGU General Fund deficit by 10-15% prior to our next scheduled comprehensive evaluation visit.

D.4—Relating to Systems for Collecting and Analyzing Institutional Information

(The institution maintains effective systems for collecting, analyzing and using institutional information.)

The University uses Jenzabar™ as its institutional software. A database sharing solution for small to mid-size colleges and universities, the system stores and shares data between various university offices including student registration, academic advising, student services, financial management, and fundraising; it also includes add-on packages for financial aid (Power Faids) and data queries (InfoMaker). The University produces the required IPEDS reports as well as a yearly report required by the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC). This 50-page EXCEL workbook helps AIHEC use several indicators on American Indian success in higher education to report to Congress on the status and needs of the TCUs. Some of the data sets align with the IPEDS surveys; however, data specific to TCUs must also be reported. This effort began in 2004, and requires qualitative responses and photographs as the AIMS Report (American Indian Measures for Success) is used for reports to Congress and other public relations efforts to keep TCUs in the forefront of congressional decision-makers and private philanthropists. AIHEC recently developed a database for this reporting; thus, underscoring the demand for digital data collection that also impacts budgetary decisions in terms of employees required to process all of the data requests from various agencies and organizations.
Other required reports include the National Science Foundation’s Higher Education R&D Survey, the Application for Designation as an Eligible Institution under the US Dept. of Education’s Title III program, the HLC report, and various grant-related reports necessitating student and financial data.

The University produces these reports with a small staff, consisting primarily of three persons from Administration, Student Services, and IT who have proven proficient and responsible in terms of generating the data and reports. The database manager routinely responds to requests for reports or help to generate a report. This does not preclude each academic department as well as support offices from maintaining a user-friendly ACCESS-based report system. Various faculty and staff have created and administered student and staff surveys. There is also a course evaluation system in place that generates data.

As with other processes in higher education, data entry is now a major and necessary skill set for employees. For SGU, the progression from paper to digital records has been slow. The learning-curve for most computer-related fields is flat, particularly on a rural and isolated reservation located in a rural state. It is likely that only 10-15% of faculty and administrators are proficient data collectors/users or prioritize data collection and analyses beyond basic student information numbers such as enrollment, retention, graduation, and student placement post-degree. Likewise, financial information is available, but again a small percentage of employees use the data for financial decision-making beyond what is needed for departmental outcomes.

The University collects institutional data and is able to generate required reports. The area of improvement is in institutionalizing data collection, management, and usage. This includes determining positions of responsibility and accountability and establishing dissemination venues and timelines. The University will have the following documents in place by the 2015 site-visit: 1) Record Retention & Management Policy; 2) person in authority/responsibility (chain of command—Administrative Council); 3) additions to Faculty and Employee Handbooks on the roles and responsibilities of faculty and staff in collecting, managing, analyzing, and disseminating data collected through the institutional database (Jenzabar modules). Training opportunities for faculty and staff are included as part of on-going professional development as determined by the person in authority/responsibility.

### D.6—Relating to Qualified Personnel in the Chief Financial Officer Position

*The institution’s administrative structure includes a chief executive officer, chief financial officer and chief academic officer (titles may vary) with appropriate credentials and experience and sufficient focus on the institution to ensure appropriate leadership and oversight.*

Sinte Gleska University has had difficulty hiring for the Chief Financial Officer position. The University had an open advertisement during 2006, seeking an experienced business manager who could also help the Finance Office staff progress in use of the institutional software. In the meantime, the University
took the following actions: appointed its Senior Fiscal Officer to act in the position; hired a man who had prior experience leading tribal organizations as a CFO as well as educational background, only to have him leave after seven months; appointed, at two separate times, three other staff members to this position in order to keep the workflow manageable and help the University meet its financial obligations. Since October 2012, the administrator assigned to assist with Finance Office oversight has conducted a search of those whose names were brought to her attention as possible/likely candidates (including the CFO from a regional tribal college), contacted a search organization to request a proposal on using its services, assisted with reorganizing Finance Office staff for efficiency and accountability, assisted in hiring a Senior Accountant, and assisted with developing a job description for general advertisement of the position. The Senior Accountant is a CPA, has worked previously for SGU as a consultant, is familiar with and an expert user of the accounting software, and has helped with the COA as outlined in the Audits. This is the first year in several years that the US Department of Education has not contacted us because of concerns with audit findings. Having a Senior Accountant on staff has helped us eliminate one of the major findings regarding the lack of staff experience.

The University has continued to pursue individuals familiar with tribal organizations as potential CFO candidates, or, as consultants who can provide on-site expertise. We have received a response from a tribal member who has expressed interest in providing on-site supervision on a consulting basis. She has sent us a proposal, and we will meet with her before the middle of February.

During the past two years, the Vice President for Administration and the Vice President for Institutional Relations/Resource Development have worked closely with the Finance Office staff in order to strengthen internal controls. We feel that the more positive audits, in terms of reducing the number and type of audit findings, indicate improvement in this area.

The University has published an advertisement with the CFO job description, actively seeking qualified candidates.

**Criterion Five, Core Component 5.C—met with concerns**

*(The institution engages in systematic and integrated planning.)*

The University conducts all of its business mindful of its core values and its mission. Key to our identity as a tribal university is our commitment to tribal nation building. The university is distinctly Lakota, and the responsibility we have to preserve the *Lakol wichohan* (the traditional way of life) is paramount. To this end, we have institutionalized several events that are important to the preservation and growth of the Lakota culture. These include the Founders Week forums, which are major planning events involving faculty, staff, students, and community leaders and members; the Northern Plains Indian Art Market which is our commitment to preserving and promoting the unique traditional and contemporary artistic expressions of who we are as indigenous nations of the northern high plains; the Elders Honoring Day held every December to show the appropriate esteem and respect to the keepers of our language,
history, and customs, to ask their advice and to thank them for their contributions to us as a nation. We also are engaged in planning for the Oceti Sakowin (the Seven Council Fires—of whom we are but one tribe yet asked by others to serve in leadership), and sponsor a planning event every December at the Lakota Nation gathering in Rapid City to bring all of our relatives together to speak to the serious issues confronting our survival as tribal nations. These events entail time dedicated to planning, event hosting, and recording and disseminating the results/decisions/next steps as presented. This we do well, and is a testament to our carrying forward of a critical issue, Tribal Nation Building, identified in previous strategic planning sessions held throughout our history, and specifically mentioned in our last and most recent planning documents.

Our efforts at institution-wide planning in other critical areas mentioned in a previous Strategic Plan (academic program stability, financial stability, telecommunications, nurturing Lakota language and culture, facilities development/management) need attention. The University did gather staff for three planning sessions in 2013. The general nature of the meetings, the minutes generated, and further discussions with administrators, faculty groups, and staff resulted in determining the critical issues for the next five years. These are: Lakol Wicohan, Academic Enhancement, Institutional Environment, Resources, and Tribal Nation Building. Each critical issue had two to three goal areas associated with it. These issue and goal areas should guide the university for the next five years. Five years is viewed as an optimum time due to the nation’s and world’s volatile economic situation as well as the changing nature of higher education and workforce development—all affecting Sinte Gleska University as a tribal chartered institution located in a rural and economically depressed area.

The new directions are actually extensions of our planning and development efforts over the past 15 years. They are redefined according to planning and events and the mission and values of Sinte Gleska University as described above. The Critical Issues need to be institutionalized. That process will take place as the University undertakes preparation for the 2015 site-visit. The University will conduct a monthly meeting for all staff and faculty, inviting students and community members to participate. The time between meetings will require that individual departments and units meet to determine the path they will follow in order to achieve the goals or suggest new goals that will be brought to the attention of all at the monthly all-staff meeting. Meetings will begin mid-February and end mid-August 2014. The outcome is the delineation and acceptance of institutional goals, with each department assigning personnel, timelines, and budgets for their role in attaining the goals. This document will guide the development of the yearly institutional budget as departments assess their progress in achieving the stated goals and the resources needed to help them do so.

The 5-year planning document will be available for implementation and approved by the Board of Regents by the end of December 2014. Using the framework already in place and addressing the Future Direction of Sinte Gleska University, it is expected that the following will enter into the planning discussion:

• Students/Student Life/Student Activities/Student Employment/Recruitment & Retention
• Degree Programs
• Faculty/Faculty Development/Faculty Handbook
• Facilities/Maintenance/Construction/Emergency Planning/Campus Safety
• Support Staff/Support Systems/Technology
• Community partnerships/School partnerships
• Grants/Fundraising/Budget Planning
• Media/Public Relations

Other areas of concern and interest are also expected to emerge.