

Sinte Gleska University

SGU's Nation-building Work

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January 2017

As a Tribally-chartered entity, Sinte Gleska University is a unique institution of higher learning with mandates unlike most other such institutions. The highest order of these mandates is the responsibility to the Sicangu Lakota Oyate to provide educational opportunities in all areas that benefit the quality of life on the Rosebud Sioux reservation and beyond. These mandates were handed down by the people that created this university as a vehicle to not only educate our people, but to do so in a way that maintains our cultural integrity and place in our environment that is uniquely Lakota.

The initial leaders were a group of medicine men who saw our youth leave the reservation to attain an education, only to return without a clue as to who they were and what was needed for them to help advance our people within a structure that was foreign to them and devoid of any of the values inherent within our parent culture. Through Euro-western thought and practice, our Lakota way of life, *wolakota*, was being replaced by a system that valued individualism, ethnic dominance, competition, and profits. Continued participation in this system would bring about the ultimate demise to our cohesive structure and value system as Lakota People.

The educational system SGU operates under sets the university apart in that we have to make sure that our tribe advances along with our individual tribal membership. In order to do so, we have to tailor our system of education and instruction so as to be in touch with the needs of our community. Typically in a university setting, the instruction is modeled after the patterns of industry growth and the needs of the corporate community. Jobs are created to foster such development and the community is often shaped by those corporate needs. Research parks are created, followed by investments and efforts to thrive in government contracts and corporate opportunities that relate to research and development.

Education is big business. But not on the reservation, where the community is often barely surviving the elements, let alone the changes, that come with politics and programs that often are threatened to be cut at the whim of the party in power. Our institution is vital to those folks who feel the winds of change constantly blowing from season to season. They are often forgotten as state, tribal and presidential elections come to pass. The people matter here, and our institution is a glimmer of hope to them and their children, many of whom will be first-time students and graduates of higher learning.

When our SGU president was hired, he was told our institution would face many challenges as we go forth. One of them is the effort to provide education to our people in such a way that instills the "parent culture" within them to help meet the needs of the community while providing the tools and skills set necessary to get a job.

Our president was hired by people with foresight to see that changes would be coming along with challenges to our ways of life and the importance that it holds within it through the value system. He was told that our preservation of culture and ways of being were the first mandates to him. He was also instructed to use our system of government to regain control of our education and to seek reciprocity with other agencies. He was also told to help develop the reservation economy as well through this university. Lastly, our tribal government was imposed upon our people through the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. We have been unable to effectively grow under that governmental structure. We were told to change this system to a model that is more compatible to our own ways and values. We are trying to figure out what might best fit our value system and structure based on traditional Lakota culture and the original intentions of federal Indian treaties.

The Rosebud Sioux Tribal Council passed a motion for us to pursue this effort of seeking other models for governance. The tribe has also worked with the Bush Foundation and the Harvard University, Kennedy School of Governance in pursuing this change. No other institution of higher learning is charged with such huge mandates to change so many things outside of its classrooms. We realize this is difficult to do and still maintain our efforts to develop our students to the best of their ability in their chosen fields. Thus our nation building efforts are vital to sustain that effort while providing our tribe with programs and services they need today and in the near future.

Toward that end we have made many efforts to improve upon our community education efforts from canning classes to outreach in the twenty communities to derive from them the input we need to stay in touch locally. We also have activities throughout the year to bring in our people to assess how we are doing and to stay connected like our Founder's Day week long forums and our *wacipi* (pow-wow). We recently had an Elder Dinner for community members we bussed in from across our five-county reservation area. They were treated to live music, bingo, the high school student choir, an SGU employee-sponsored holiday dinner and gifts for the elders. Our president provides an annual update on institutional activities during these events and visits with the hundreds of community members who attend.

SGU's efforts to serve the people often go undocumented as we are asked to participate in so many facets of our community. This active community involvement is encouraged by our president and Board of Regents, and is evidenced by the many employees who also participate in local government. We have many current and past employees and students who are active as community officers. Our tribe has many committees to serve the needs of the people and our employees and students participate in them as well. We have employees who serve the tribe as members of boards and committees as well as on our local school boards. We feel this helps to push the mission of the university to the local community and helps solidify our efforts to educate and serve the needs of our people.

The University administers many programs to serve and meet the needs of those people. For example, our gardening project plants gardens in four communities and did 60 smaller plots to work with as many people as possible. We sell the plants to the public and use the vegetables in our lunch program for the students.

This is just one example of the work we do and how we try to interface with the public. We applied for a grant for youth activity money from our tribe's housing corporation for \$10,000, we got about \$6,000 worth of steel from the tribe and a Tony Hawk Grant for \$15,000. We built a steel skate park ramp in Antelope community and a wooden ramp in Mission at the Boys & Girls Club. SGU still has almost \$10,000 to add more ramps or benches to the community to compliment the ramps already built. We have had to maintain them and do work to repair or maintain these to safe standards.

The SGU *Tiwahe Glu Kinipi* (Bringing the Family Back Together) program is another example of working with our community to serve their needs. We have many families signed up to work with our Human Services department through this program. We provide equine therapy for young people as well for those who need mental health services.

SGU has a strong representation of participation by employees, former and current students and graduates alike who have been elected to positions within the state, county, city, tribe, and community positions within the tribe that help promote nation-building. Our tribe is spread out over a five county area where members are elected to run 20 different communities that may comprise tribal, city and county governments. Antelope Community, where SGU is located has about 3,000 people and serves many families in a region that runs south of Mission to the state line and runs about 9 miles east of town to about 5 miles east of Mission. The tribe gives each community some money, relative to their size, to operate how they see fit to distribute monies from the casino for medical and funeral related travel and utility assistance. We rent land from the community for our bison operation and this helps the community with resources as well. Our rent is over \$21,000 annually and we also give the community two bison to help feed the people during the Antelope Fair in the summer. So as one can see, the communities operate largely the same as a city, although unincorporated and without state resources on trust lands with federal money developing housing and infrastructure with the tribe.

Our students and staff have served as Tribal Council members. Currently the RST Vice Chairman is a SGU graduate, and others are also serving in Tribal Council officer positions. We have many positions available in tribal organizations such as the Treaty Council, which currently includes a staff and a faculty member. SGU has hosted meetings and public forums for the treaty council on campus.

SGU continues to show our impact in all areas of our quality of life in our tribal entities like the housing corporation and the casino, who have SGU graduates managing their operations. Other positions that we are affiliated with include the Tax Commission, which has a staff member. The Tribal Utility Commission includes a Business student, the Credit Committee has a staff member and the tribe's land corporation board chairman is a staff member as well. Lastly, the tribe's economic development corporation, REDCO, has a former staff member, a graduate, and a former department chairperson among others who are employees in the company.

There are far too many committees, boards and commissions within the tribe to name that have participation from SGU staff, students and graduates and we haven't even mentioned state government, where we employ a member of the S.D. House of Representatives and the S.D.

Senator from our district is a graduate, and even our registrar, who serves as the Mayor for the city of Mission.

In the last tribal election, three of our staff ran for tribal council positions. Our tribe has 20 tribal council members and five other elected officials to operate a budget that exceeds \$100 million annually. Nation-building starts with SGU education, employment and participation in our community activities where we constantly promote our Mission to the people. In the past our budget was \$180 million and we had \$60 million come in from the Obama stimulus package. Not many places in the world are able to bring in this type of money and operate all the regular programs a government provides from courts, policing to social services and natural resource management. Our students need to be ready to handle decisions regarding the future of our tribe and its million acres that we own over an area the size of Connecticut. We have a couple of rivers that run through our lands and dams have been planned in the past and along the river is enough timber to build 300 houses annually just to keep it safe from becoming a fire hazard.

Our tribe is rich in land and history, unfortunately our resources are undeveloped and often untapped in an area that could potentially be lucrative if the resources were applied effectively. We could use our lands for farming, ranching and hunting to mention a few things that could be done here with proven success.

Our campus is host to a variety of community activities from wakes and funerals to tribal programs, using the campus facilities to host meetings and public events. Community members often rent our facilities to host family events and even the tribe's annual youth appreciation day activities and Headstart graduation is held here. We have hosted the local Farmers and Ranchers Workshop for the past 10 years or more. We host a job fair from our Institute of Technologies every spring that is widely attended by students, employers and the public alike.

SGU hosts the annual Founders' Week forums and meetings where community leaders and industry experts are invited to discuss how to improve upon our efforts in nation building. The last tribal constitution referendum included a provision to plan and consider the next Seven Generations when creating legislation. SGU is the only organization within the tribe's hierarchy that continues to do planning and meetings about nationhood annually. This year (2017) during the Founders' Week program, we plan on bringing together various plans from other organizations with hopes to integrate goals, objectives and activities into one comprehensive plan. We want to bring together the various entities that work on development for the tribe who want to plan and develop their own communities, but need assistance in doing so with the limited resources they have on their own.

We helped develop the CEDS document the tribe used on an EDA grant. This document maps out the intent and efforts of the tribe within the area of economic development. The federal government uses this information to understand and serve the needs of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe. Harvard University has worked on economic development studies regarding our tribe in the late 1980s and again here recently within the past five years. SGU has been vital in the efforts of the tribe to bring a better understanding of the barriers and obstacles faced here on the Rosebud as well as the solutions needed to combat the ills of poverty in the community. REDCO has hosted

some of their community planning meetings for the Turtle Creek Development and for their food sovereignty grant.

SGU maintains the archives for the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, housing artifacts and documents for the tribe. On the research side, the University has established an Internal Review Board (IRB) for the tribe. But this is inactive at this time since we lost our employee who led this effort. We are the GIS program for the tribe as well and have hosted several trainings for various programs in the tribe, IHS and the BIA. Our multi-purpose building is the local community emergency backup location for Homeland Security in case of a catastrophic event in our community. The TCSD Middle School is the primary location.

As a 1994 Tribal land grant institution, SGU provides extension services for the community in partnership with South Dakota State University. We do a lot of community outreach through workshops, gardening projects, and selling plants. This unique designation provides many resources available to develop our lands and natural resources primarily through U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Todd County school district was recently awarded \$590k through two grants supported by the state to start a new program of delivery for our elementary and middle school. This was from legislation sponsored by our SGU staff member to help look at new ways to teach native students. The school district has requested that SGU help assess the situation and provide solutions to bring a new paradigm of learning to our local youth. It is exciting to consider that for years we have wanted to help change their programs to be more inclusive of cultural programming. Now we have the opportunity to do this important work that illustrates our intent to provide nation building efforts to each and every area in our community.

When the tribe has a development that affects the people like the 25 year lease to develop and operate a hog farm, SGU is often involved in more ways than one. Our students led the protests against the project and educated the leadership and masses on the environmental issues with the project for our public. Additionally, ten acres were set aside for SGU to test the land to see the extent of the environmental damages on the property. The tribe has refused to renew the lease on the property and we still have studies to perform on the area that housed one of the largest hog farms in the country.

Tribal Land Enterprise (TLE) is the tribe's land management corporation that has existed for over 60 years as the oldest corporation of its kind. This Tribally-chartered organization manages one million acres of land for the tribe. TLE asked SGU to develop a land curriculum with financial resources to start the process. SGU will continue to play a major role in the development of the tribe's lands and resources.

The SGU story always includes the articulation of the mandates handed down by the Medicine Men when they inducted our president at his inauguration ceremony: 1) Lakota language and culture retention, 2) ownership of education, 3) economic development through education, and 4) changing our system of government. These are tough mandates to achieve let alone provide students with an education that prepares them for the workforce, identifies employment opportunities, and conducts nation-building for the tribe and its twenty different communities.

How does a university do so much with so little for so many? SGU has done so much with so little for so long that we believe we can do anything with nothing or very little. We understand our mandates are beyond the typical post-secondary school mandates. These are complex with cultural, political, socio-economic and spiritual undercurrents that are not well understood by mainstream society.

Yet, as Sicangu Lakota descendants and as educators, we embrace the original mandates whole heartedly. We understand what is at stake – a nation building for the future of our children, grandchildren and those yet to come.

Mitakuye oyasin (all my relatives).