

# ANTI-RACISM

## A Student Plan of Action

*American Indian/Alaska Native (Native American) and Indigenous Students*



*Adopted by the Delegates April 6, 2024*

# Introduction

The Student Senate for California Community Colleges (SSCCC) represents students from the most diverse higher education student population in the nation, the California community colleges (CCC).<sup>1</sup> American Indian and Alaska Native Students, commonly referred to as Native American students, bring a wealth of cultural diversity, resilience, and unique perspectives to the classroom. With a history deeply rooted in the land and traditions that span generations, Native American students contribute to the vibrant mosaic of our educational institutions.

Native American and Indigenous students hail from various tribal nations, each with distinct languages, traditions, and customs. The United Nations notes,

According to the United Nations, "Among the indigenous peoples are those of the Americas (for example, the Lakota in the USA, the Mayas in Guatemala or the Aymaras in Bolivia), the Inuit and Aleutians of the circumpolar region, the Saami of northern Europe, the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders of Australia and the Maori of New Zealand."<sup>2</sup>

Their presence in the classroom provides an opportunity for cross-cultural exchange and fosters a deeper appreciation for the historical and contemporary contributions of Native peoples. While each student brings a unique story and background, there are shared values within Native cultures, such as a profound connection to the land, a respect for elders, and a commitment to preserving cultural heritage.

Over the past 8 months, the SSCCC connected with American Indian/Alaska Native students across the state to create our Chapter 3 - American Indian and Alaska Native Student Task Force group. After a series of talks, town halls, and research, the task force group has created this chapter with the highlights of their experiences as a Native American student in our system of education. The highlights include background information on their culture and traditions, current problems faced, and solutions this community would like to see implemented.

<sup>1</sup>California Community College Chancellor's Office, <https://www.cccco.edu/About-Us/diversity-equity-inclusion#:~:text=As%20the%20largest%20and%20most,of%20students%20in%20our%20colleges.>

<sup>2</sup>United Nations, Who are Indigenous People. ([https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/5session\\_factsheet1.pdf](https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/5session_factsheet1.pdf))

## American Indian and Alaska Native Student Community

- It is important to understand that our American Indian/Alaska Native Community brings a set of valuable strengths to our higher education system.
- Despite their unique strengths, Native American students may also face distinct challenges, including disparities in educational resources, cultural representation, and a historical legacy of systemic marginalization. Educators and administrators must create inclusive spaces that honor and validate the identities of Native American students, acknowledging the importance of their cultural heritage in shaping their educational journey.
- Some of the critical concerns shared with us during our town hall sessions and throughout our research include:

### **CULTURAL MISMATCH**

The curriculum in mainstream educational systems may not always reflect the history, culture, and contributions of Native American peoples. This cultural mismatch can lead to a lack of engagement and connection with academic content.

### **LACK OF REPRESENTATION**

The underrepresentation of Native American educators, administrators, and curricula that accurately represent Native history and culture can contribute to feelings of isolation and a lack of cultural relevance in the educational experience.

### **EDUCATIONAL DISPARITIES**

Native American students often experience disparities in educational resources, including access to quality teachers, advanced coursework, and modern facilities. Some Native American communities may lack adequate funding for schools and face challenges in providing a well-rounded education.

- A common issue among our Native American/Indigenous students is their reservation location. In most cases, their home location is very far from their campus, making it difficult to access a basic education.
- Due to their reservation location, most students experience internet issues or struggle to buy school supplies, which creates a barrier to accessing support and school resources

## **EMERGENCY FUNDING SET ASIDE FOR NATIVE/INDIGENOUS STUDENTS**

Emergency funding for Native/Indigenous students is crucial in promoting equity and access to higher education by addressing financial barriers and supporting students during times of need.

## **LANGUAGE PRESERVATION**

The preservation of Native languages is a critical aspect of cultural identity. However, many Native languages are endangered, and efforts to teach and preserve them may face challenges due to limited resources and support.

## **BETTER OUTREACH EFFORTS FOR NATIVE/INDIGENOUS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS**

Effective outreach efforts for Native/Indigenous students should be culturally sensitive and respectful of their traditions, languages, and worldviews. It's essential to involve Indigenous community leaders, elders, and educators in the planning and implementation process to ensure cultural relevance. Additionally, building partnerships with tribal governments, tribal education departments, and Native-serving organizations is essential for effective outreach. These partnerships can help ensure that outreach efforts are aligned with the priorities and needs of Indigenous communities.

## **RECOGNITION/ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY**

Recognition and acknowledgment of tribal sovereignty are essential for promoting justice, equity, and self-determination for Indigenous peoples in the United States. This requires a commitment to upholding treaty rights, honoring tribal governance structures, and fostering meaningful partnerships between tribes and other governmental entities.

## **MISUSE OF PROPER TRIBAL NAMING CONVENTION**

Native American and Indigenous students have different backgrounds and cultures. It is vital to use their proper tribal name preference. Websites such as CCCApply only include federally recognized native tribes, which leaves non-federally recognized tribes out of their picture, affecting native and indigenous students.

## **HAVING AMERICAN INDIAN/ALASKA NATIVE AND INDIGENOUS STUDENT SCHOOL CENTERS AT ALL COLLEGES**

Native and Indigenous student school centers provide a supportive environment where students can connect with their cultural heritage, traditions, and languages. These centers serve as hubs for cultural activities, events, and programming that promote cultural identity and pride.

- Centers offer opportunities for leadership development and empowerment. They provide platforms for students to develop leadership skills, engage in advocacy work, and become active leaders in their communities.

## **HIGH DROPOUT RATES:**

Some Native American communities experience higher dropout rates than the national average. Factors contributing to this include socioeconomic challenges, lack of engagement, and a disconnect between the curriculum and the students' cultural background.

## **NATIVE/INDIGENOUS STUDENTS RESOURCE GUIDE:**

It is crucial to provide our native students with all the resources they need to succeed. These resources may include:

- Information on financial aid opportunities, scholarships, and grants available specifically for Native and Indigenous students.
- Listings of culturally relevant academic programs, Indigenous studies departments, and tribal colleges and universities.
- Resources for mental health and wellness support, including counseling services and culturally competent healthcare providers.
- Links to Indigenous student organizations, clubs, and cultural centers on college campuses.
- Guidance on navigating the college admissions process, including application tips and resources for standardized testing preparation.
- Information on internships, research opportunities, and career development resources.
- Resources for connecting with Indigenous communities, tribal governments, and cultural events.
- Legal resources related to Indigenous rights, tribal sovereignty, and discrimination.

# CULTURAL AWARENESS AND RESPECT

Create a climate of cultural awareness and respect to allow students of color to feel welcome, free to express their opinions, and safe in every collegiate environment.

Suggestions:

- Appreciate the contributions of Native American Students and other people of underrepresented students to society.
- Create an environment where students can thrive while being their authentic selves
- Establish appropriate etiquette sensitive to cultural backgrounds



# EQUITY TRAINING

- Provide adequate training for all employees and students to understand cultural diversity and address issues of racism, unconscious bias, and microaggressions to pursue racial equity that is conducive to student success.
- Require student orientation to include anti-racism and microaggression training, student rights in the grievance process, and where to go to report instances of racism and microaggressions.
- Advocate at your local college for job opportunities for Native American Students.
- Provide opportunities for students to be involved in equity training development.





## PEER MENTORS AND ALLIANCES

- Establish appropriate channels of communication for students to seek help and resources in addressing racism, microaggression, and other racial barriers to their education.
- Create a peer mentor program or equity center with students from different backgrounds who are trained to resolve conflict, receive complaints, mentor others, and provide information to students struggling with racial barriers.
- Form a participatory governance committee to address diversity, equity, and inclusion with representatives from the student body associations and faculty so students have a platform for policy recommendations and administrative remedies.



# CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE

Create a climate of cultural awareness and respect to allow students of color to feel welcome, free to express their opinions, and safe in every collegiate environment. The classroom experience for an American Indian/Alaska Native student can vary based on different factors such as location, tribal affiliation, school policies, and individual circumstances. Improving the classroom experience for Native American students involves collaborative efforts among educators, administrators, Native communities, and policymakers. Culturally responsive education, increased representation, and community involvement are essential to creating an educational environment that values and supports Native American students. Explore the challenges within the narrative below of Samantha Redbird, a Native American student whose experiences provide profound insights into the intersection of culture and education.

My name is Samantha Redbird, and I come from the Kashaya Pomo tribe in Northern California. Growing up on the reservation, I was immersed in the rich traditions and cultural heritage of my people. Education was always valued in my family, and I was eager to pursue higher learning after graduating high school.

I enrolled at the local community college, hoping to expand my knowledge and opportunities. However, my journey has been fraught with challenges unique to Native American students like myself.

One of the biggest hurdles I've faced is the lack of cultural representation in the college curriculum. The courses offered rarely acknowledge or reflect the history and experiences of Native peoples in California. As a result, I often feel disconnected from the material and struggle to find my place in the classroom.

Financial hardships have also plagued my college experience. Coming from a low-income household on the reservation, I've had to rely on limited financial aid and scholarships to cover tuition and living expenses. Balancing school with part-time work has been a constant juggling act, leaving me drained both mentally and physically.

# CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE

Academically, I've encountered barriers stemming from disparities in K-12 education and access to resources. The educational opportunities on the reservation are limited, and I've had to work twice as hard to keep up with college-level coursework. It's frustrating to feel like I'm always playing catch-up despite my dedication and effort.

Another challenge has been the lack of support services tailored to the needs of Indigenous students. Few resources are available for students like myself to navigate the college system and address academic or personal challenges. I often feel isolated and overlooked, struggling to find the support and guidance I desperately need.

Geographic isolation adds another layer of difficulty to my college experience. The reservation is remote, with limited access to transportation and amenities. Getting to and from campus is a constant struggle, and I often miss out on opportunities to participate in campus activities or access support services.

Despite these obstacles, I remain committed to my educational goals. With the support of my family, community members, and Indigenous advocacy groups, I'm determined to overcome these challenges and pave the way for future generations of Native American students. Together, we can work towards creating a more inclusive and supportive college environment that honors and uplifts Indigenous voices and experiences.

Samantha's story illustrates the resilience and determination of Native American students in California who face systemic barriers to education while also highlighting the importance of advocating for greater cultural representation and support within the community college system.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The SSCCC is grateful to all members who participated in the Chapter 3 chapter development. This document results from an entire year of work, from recruiting Native American students to participate to hosting town halls and hearing other students' input. This chapter includes invaluable information shared by our students from throughout the state. The SSCCC will actively collaborate with our system partners, such as the Chancellor's Office, faculty, staff, administration, and other student organizations, to break down the barriers of racism and racial inequities that are impacting the lives of students. We encourage all students, faculty, administrators, and community members to join us as we create change in the California community college system in the pursuit of student success and racial equity.



## NEXT STEPS

Implement cultural competency training for faculty and staff to enhance understanding of Native American and Indigenous cultures.

Establish support services that address the unique needs of Native American and Indigenous students, including counseling, mentorship, and academic advising.

Work towards incorporating Native American and Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum to ensure diverse representation.

Organize cultural events, celebrations, and awareness campaigns to highlight the rich heritage of Native American and Indigenous communities.

Establish feedback mechanisms to gather input from Native American and Indigenous students, ensuring their voices are heard in decision-making processes.

Ensure that counseling services are culturally sensitive and address the mental health needs of Native American and Indigenous students.

Identify and promote financial aid opportunities and scholarships specifically designed for Native American and Indigenous students.

Create designated spaces on campus where Native American and Indigenous students can gather, share experiences, and celebrate their cultural heritage.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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