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New Report Examines American Indian College Going

RAPID CITY, S.D. – A new report takes a look at the college-going challenges faced by American Indian students in South Dakota, and recommends specific strategies to support those students and ensure their success in postsecondary education.

“This is a growing demographic for South Dakota,” Jack Warner, executive director and CEO of the South Dakota Board of Regents, said. “We have made it a priority for the public universities to recruit more American Indian students and to ensure that they are successful in our system.” To that end, a working group composed of campus officials recently focused particular attention on American Indian students’ perspectives about college-going activity in South Dakota.

An interpretive study, conducted by the regents’ institutional researcher, Daniel Palmer, used a focus group design to interview 49 current American Indian undergraduate students enrolled at four South Dakota public universities.

Palmer found that financial challenges, lack of mentorship, the fear of leaving home and family, and fears of culture shock and alienation all impact American Indian students and their college-going plans. On the other hand, these students cited support of their families, setting an example, service to their tribe, and beating the odds as primary reasons to pursue postsecondary education.

Based on those findings, the working group offered several recommendations for improved access and success by American Indian students. Among its recommendations:

- **Improved outreach to high schools.** Campuses must be more vigorous in reaching out to native high school students, and doing it in a meaningful way. A family-centered approach was recommended, which may include information sharing and mentorship, as well as providing more help to students and their families to complete admission and scholarship paperwork.
- **Additional strategies.** Other suggestions include providing more scholarship and grant aid, expanding American Indian student centers and programs, publicizing distance education opportunities, and enhancing the American Indian cultural footprint on all campuses.
- **Focus on retention.** Colleges must develop academic programs and student services that better reflect the family-centered orientation of tribal life. This includes building a stronger sense of community for American Indian students by cultivating deeper relationships between students, campuses, and their communities.

The report is available online at

<http://www.sdbor.edu/mediapubs/documents/AmericanIndianCollegeGoingStudyBOR1213.pdf>