OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Because of the pandemic, it became apparent that a majority of our students faced challenges in continuing their education. Family obligations, loss of employment, food insecurity, illness, lack of childcare and lack of access to technology and internet services were the issues that kept arising.

To assist our students, FDLTCC was able to:

- Made available $97,066 in Emergency Student Aid for FDLTCC students (March 2020-April 2022 anticipated)
- Purchased laptops and created a laptop loan program for students in need.
- Expanded the college food pantry for easier access for all students.
- Implemented campus modifications for health and safety reasons
- Professional Development: a number of FDLTCC faculty participated in on-line course delivery training.

The COVID relief funding Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College received was greatly appreciated. The pandemic exacerbated the differences our rural students faced regarding access to education as well as the campus’ need to address health and safety issues within the facility.

Funds were spent on:

- assistance to pay student debt owed to college during semesters under the pandemic
- assisting students with essential academic needs such as laptops, internet access, and provision of hotspots
- combating food insecurity as well as expansion of the on-campus food pantry
- emergency housing needs, e.g., securing short-term housing, security deposits, assistance with utilities, etc.
- emergency expenses related to dependent care
- campus VPN and remote network access capacity upgrades
- health and safety measures
  - provided PPE for faculty and staff
  - made all classrooms zoom capable so a switch to remote delivery could be made as necessary
  - purchased touch-free restroom fixtures that are currently being installed
  - upgraded campus security camera system to help monitor campus with fewer staff in facilities
  - will be installing keyless door entry capabilities to maintain less contact at greatly used points.
REQUEST: $40 million TCU IT Service Fund
USDA – Rural Utility Service

• The ongoing pandemic has exacerbated the digital divide and underscored the lack of broadband access across Indian Country. To address these deficiencies that could leave Indian Country – and AI/AN students – behind the rest of the U.S. for generations, Congress must act to establish a *permanent TCU IT Service Fund within the USDA-Rural Utilities Service Program*. An annual $40 million set-aside for TCUs, which are 1994 land-grant institutions served by USDA, would help cover rapidly increasing network, connectivity, and equipment costs, maintenance, infrastructure expansion, and IT staffing.

• Congress recognized this need in the pandemic and attempted to provide support to TCUs by including them in the new **NTIA Tribal Connectivity Broadband program**. Unfortunately, due to NTIA’s program design, to date, not even one TCU has been awarded direct grants.

Broadband and IT Challenges
Communities surrounding campus do not have broadband capabilities. Many of our students live in rural areas that do not have good access to internet consistently. Not all students have the same access to technology for ability to do remote learning.

REQUEST: $3.2 billion TCU Construction Fund
DOI – Bureau of Indian Education

A July 2021 AIHEC survey of TCUs revealed many chronic unmet facilities and infrastructure needs, including lack of student and faculty housing, inadequate classroom space, insufficient libraries, and outdated laboratories.

• TCU deferred maintenance/rehabilitation: $400 million (total)
• TCU completion of master plans: $2.7 billion (total)
• TCU operation and maintenance: $20 million (annual, recurring need).

AIHEC strongly urges Congress to fund dedicated TCU facilities programs through DOI-BIE to modernize current facilities and build safer 21st century campuses.

Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College: Construction, Maintenance, Rehabilitation

Although the campus is comparatively new, some of our systems are failing. The heat pumps in our housing facility are old and replacement parts are difficult to come by. Energy control system in the main building is controlled by two different systems. Our campus is in the middle of a pine forest that causes concerns in drought and windy conditions, but we have no funds available to thin trees and replace with other vegetation.