LITTLE PRIEST TRIBAL COLLEGE: RESPONDING AND ADAPTING TO COVID-19
117th Congress – 2nd Session (March 2022)

Through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA) and American Rescue Plan (ARP), Little Priest Tribal College received urgently needed funding to immediately transition to online learning platforms, modify campuses for health and safety concerns, and address the digital divide challenges in Indian Country. Our students received emergency grants, laptops, tuition assistance, and internet stipends to help them stay enrolled in courses. As we continue to support students during this difficult time and develop a plan to “return to normal,” TCUs need your continued support to address ongoing and increasing needs.

This past year all the classrooms continued to use the Hyflex technology (cameras, microphones, monitors, and computer hardware and software) located in all the classrooms to enable remote learning. Students also utilized the free laptops during this time to attend classes and complete assignments. Due to COVID, there was a security shed purchased and located at the entrance to campus with a full-time employee to provide temperature checks and provide masks to incoming employees, students, and guests. There was also a help desk located at the main entrance in the Administration Building to check temperatures and provide masks to all visitors. The HVAC systems/filters were upgraded to provide better air filtration. This past year LPTC was able to add additional positions in the Student Services and IT Departments.

Little Priest Tribal College Student Highlight

Little Priest Tribal College: My name is My Soul Earth Kearnes and my major is Indigenous Science – Environmental. I plan on working for a zoo in the landscape or in botanical gardens tending the plants. I would like to eventually sell plants to consumers to be self-sufficient in their own food source. Some of the challenges during the pandemic was maintaining my studies, helping my children with their schoolwork, and readjusting to keeping our health so it is in a good place both mentally and physically. It was helpful to have online tutors available and classes via Hyflex during COVID. The monetary assistance for food and emergencies was also helpful as a student at LPTC.
LITTLE PRIEST TRIBAL COLLEGE: Broadband and IT Challenges

- Little Priest Tribal College is experiencing supply chain challenges due to COVID-19.
- Importance to evaluate Cybersecurity has increased due to increasing internet activity.
- Need to upgrade Firewall and VPN protections to secure data.
- Working with tribal government to provide wireless internet service to off campus sites.
- Need to upgrade fiber infrastructure on campus with redundancy.
- Providing fiber optic to offsite campus building to provide faster and more reliable internet.
- Provided laptops to all student, staff and faculty for remote connectivity e.g. distant learning, telecommuting and after-hours support.

LITTLE PRIEST TRIBAL COLLEGE: Construction, Maintenance, Rehabilitation

The main campus buildings are all aging and require constant and expensive maintenance. Existing facilities lack adequate space to support the needs for classroom and lab space, student support services, and faculty office. The classroom and laboratory space were inadequate prior to the pandemic, with space problems increasing due to social distancing needs. Plans to build a new modular building to house new laboratories and classrooms with federal pandemic funds were torpedoed when the DOE issued new guidance in May 2021 after passage of the ARP Act. Building plans have been radically scaled back to provide less laboratory space and to exclude all additional classroom space, and other sources of funding have been identified. Currently, LPTC consulted with HDR, Inc. to develop a master plan for the 10 acres acquired from the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska to expand the campus.

In order to make these advancements with new construction there also needs to be fiber optical internet to offsite locations at the cost of $500,000. The total cost of new construction will range from 25-35 million dollars.

Student Support Services: Space needs for student services, including student lounge and activities areas, have been critically unmet, even prior to the pandemic. Expanded tutoring and counseling services, including mental health counseling, require additional space and are increasing congestion. Plans to build a new modular facility for student services with federal pandemic funds were dropped after the May 2021 guidance by the DOE. Other funds are not available for this construction, so we are using federal pandemic funds to remodel existing student services facilities to achieve very modest gains.

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 design of the program, to date, not even one TCU has been awarded direct grants.
**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.

**IT Building:** A modular building to house our cramped IT department was completed in December 2020 (for $400,000) before the new regulations prohibited modular construction. This enabled improvements in delivery of internet services, increasingly needed to support our online and Hyflex courses, all newly developed in response to the pandemic.

**Parking Lot:** Our parking lot shows significant wear and tear. Efforts to find funds to repave it have not been successful. Cost estimates range as high as $500,000.