Transitioning to Excellence in Agricultural Natural Resource Baccalaureate Education

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Abstract
This project was a two-year collaborative project (now, extended to three years) between Montana State University (MSU) College of Agriculture, Chief Dull Knife College, and Little Big Horn College. The primary objective of the project was to develop and deliver model curricula that will create improved opportunities for American Indian students from 1994 land grant colleges to transition and achieve success in the baccalaureate agriculture curricula offered by 1862 Land Grant Universities. A second important objective is to develop a model for increasing 1862 Land Grant University faculty skills in recruiting and advising students from important under-represented American Indian populations.

In this project, a team of eight MSU faculty and administrators worked with faculty and administrators from Chief Dull Knife College and Little Big Horn College. Together they developed five culturally appropriate short introductory baccalaureate courses on agricultural and natural resource science and management. Each of these one and two credit hour courses was delivered on-site at Dull Knife Memorial College and Little Big Horn College by five faculty teams over a consecutive three-day period. Each course included experimental learning activities and students carried out assignments that developed their research skills.

To ensure cultural relevance, at the outset of the project the MSU faculty/administrator team will participated in a two-day cultural awareness workshop at Chief Dull Knife College coordinated by Chief Dull Knife College administrators and faculty and the director of the MSU AIRO program. In addition, a project advisory committee was established and included faculty from the two tribal evaluation components utilizing an external expert consultant to assess impacts and outcomes.

The first objective was to develop and deliver a model curriculum that creates improved opportunities for American Indian Students. Five curricula were developed and delivered to Chief Dull Knife College and Little Big Horn Students. Learning was enhanced through field trips (on-site instruction) and hands on experiences. Curricula received positive responses to the
participating students. Students enjoyed the positive learning environment and hands-on experiences. Students also positively commented on the instructors' effectiveness and knowledge. The poster displays the quantitative data collected from student course evaluations. This objective was achieved and supports the idea that the project should be continued and implemented in other land grant universities.

The second objective was to develop faculty skills in recruiting and advising American Indian Students. The Cultural Awareness Workshop provided faculty with an understanding of Native America Culture, which was helpful when developing and delivering the curricula.

The AIAEE “Transitioning to Excellence” poster will highlight the program and its results. This initial USDA project was the beginning of a continuing effort to work together with all audiences in the west.

**Keywords:** Transitioning, cultural awareness, higher education (Tribal Colleges & Land-Grant University), agriculture and natural resources