



Between the fall of 2019 and spring of 2022, through the Serving Native American Students with Holistic Student Supports project, six Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) began redesigning the student experience through the development of a customized holistic student supports framework. This approach emphasizes the need for institutions to deeply understand their students and then collaboratively redesign services that are critical for the success of every student. The colleges participated in a community of practice with other TCUs in the project and received intensive, customized coaching from Achieving the Dream to strengthen their capacity to serve students in their communities. The overarching goal of the project was to help colleges dismantle barriers in structure, policy, and practice to make it easier for students to identify and access academic and nonacademic supports in a timely manner to support completion of their college goals.

Ensuring All Efforts Support Getting Tribal College Students to Succeed

Nueta Hidatsa Sahnish College (NHSC) is undergoing a fundamental paradigm shift whereby each person working at the college — from the president to the faculty to the maintenance team — understands and appreciates that they play an essential role in helping students succeed. NHSC leveraged individual expertise in a collaborative environment to design for the students they serve.

“Our holistic supports allowed us to pair our New Student Orientation experiences with our Psychology of Student Success (PYS 100) course, or first-year experience, that focuses on all the essentials for student success. This change has made it more convenient and accessible for our students to transition into college.”

This shift was initiated by the college president when she opened strategic planning to everyone within the college.

College Information

- Tribally chartered by the Three Affiliated Tribes of the Fort Berthold Reservation
- Location: New Town, ND
- As of 2020–21, NHSC offers 14 associate degrees, three bachelor's degrees, and four certificates. NHSC also offers dual credit courses and courses for non-degree seeking students.

The first step in the process was to redefine NHSC's mission statement. The planning team decided to move away from its previous mission of “offering educational and vocational services” toward the idea of being “a unique educational community founded in culture and spirituality that nurtures holistic student success” with a tagline of “together we thrive.” To achieve this mission, NHSC's president and leadership team encourage faculty and staff to be innovative and try new things. The college's president appreciates that they are

pioneers in their work to foster tribal student success. As such, they must try different approaches, even if sometimes they might not work.

This innovative culture has led to incredible student support achievements, including:

- A fully electronic admissions and registration system, eliminating the need for students to travel to campus
- A seamless first-year student experience, including a robust online new-student orientation which can be adapted to hybrid or in-person delivery
- A new gateway to math program that has increased completion rates by 35 percent
- Course sequencing and academic pathways, ensuring each student clearly understands which courses need to be taken and in which order to complete the program on time
- Externships where students can stay on the reservation while they work
- Fully documented and published standard operating procedures (SOPs), aiding in personal accountability and filling in when someone is out

Offering a Semester-Long New-Student Orientation that Sets Students up to Flourish

Nueta Hidatsa Sahnish College (NHSC) sought to welcome first-time college students in a more accommodating and personalized way. They decided to combine the flexibility of on-demand resources with the personal touch of real-time conversations by packaging the college's revised virtual new-student orientation into their existing semester-long, one-credit student success course. The course is now adaptable to be delivered in a hybrid or in-person format.

Previously, NHSC's student orientation was a multi-day, in-person program offered before the start of classes. But students struggled to fit it into their schedule, resulting in it being more of a burden than an asset. Plus, given the amount of content covered in a short period, students found it overwhelming to absorb and contextualize the information shared.

In response, NHSC first built a new, virtual new-student orientation leveraging Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College's orientation structure. It offers engaging videos from college administrators, practical information on topics like navigating financial aid and logging into email, and information such as library hours. Students continue to take this orientation at the beginning of the semester, but now it is woven into the mandatory student success course, which covers test-taking techniques, learning styles, money management, and more. In this new model, instructors can reference the orientation information — and students can ask questions about it — over the course of an entire semester.

This program is showing promising results. NHSC's leaders report that their student pass rate rose from 64 percent to 78 percent — an increase of 14 percentage points — during the orientation's inaugural semester.

Achieving the Dream (ATD) is a partner and champion of more than 300 community colleges across the country. Drawing on our expert coaches, groundbreaking programs, and national peer network, we provide institutions with integrated, tailored support for every aspect of their work—from foundational capacities such as leadership, data, and equity to intentional strategies for supporting students holistically, building K-12 partnerships, and more. We call this Whole College Transformation. Our vision is for every college to be a catalyst for equitable, antiracist, and economically vibrant communities. We know that with the right partner and the right approach, colleges can drive access, completion rates, and employment outcomes—so that all students can access life-changing learning that propels them into community-changing careers.