



WHITE EARTH TRIBAL &
COMMUNITY COLLEGE
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Achieving
the Dream

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.

Putting Tribal Culture Front and Center

When revising its Satisfactory Academic Probation (SAP) program, White Earth Tribal and Community College embraced its vision of “carrying into the future the way that we were given” by first engaging its tribal elders for advice. The elders’ wisdom — including the Seven Grandfather Teachings that guide interpersonal action and the Medicine Wheel used for health and healing — were woven into the content of a mainstream SAP program structure. By incorporating tribal culture and beliefs into this program, White Earth found students are increasingly likely to relate to the sessions and respond positively.

White Earth created the First Year Experience Coach position to implement the changes. After each SAP workshop, White Earth takes the additional step of having students complete a short survey on the effectiveness of the material covered. This survey feedback is incorporated as a means of continuously improving the program.

College Information

- Tribally chartered by the White Earth Band of Ojibwe
- Location: Mahnom, MN
- As of 2019–20, WETCC offers one distinct undergraduate degree with five emphases

Since renamed the Academic Improvement Plan (AIP), this revised SAP program has been so well received that access to much of the content and associated sessions are now extended to all White Earth students.

Fostering Communication by First Defining Roles and Responsibilities

Turnover can be very disruptive to student success work on campuses. With turnover that impacted just about every leadership position at roughly the same time, White Earth Tribal and Community College quickly realized the value of thoroughly documenting the roles and responsibilities of key positions. In turn, the new leadership team invested the time and energy to determine, document, and publish a handbook detailing the duties of most of the White Earth administration, faculty, and staff roles. This approach ensures each person understands the expectations associated with their position as well as that of their counterparts.

With the right people in place to do the right things, the White Earth leadership team shifted its focus to fostering strong cross-institution collaboration and communication. A top priority was to form the College Senate that brings together members of the faculty senate, student senate, and cabinet, along with

representation from departments like human resources and information technology to address top institutional issues. They also created an alumni panel to incorporate their voice and strengthen their alumni community.

The Campus Happenings weekly email is used to share updates, hot topics, and progress these groups are making broadly with all White Earth faculty and staff. This email has become the primary distribution channel administrators, faculty, and staff rely on to stay updated on top college actions and events.

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.