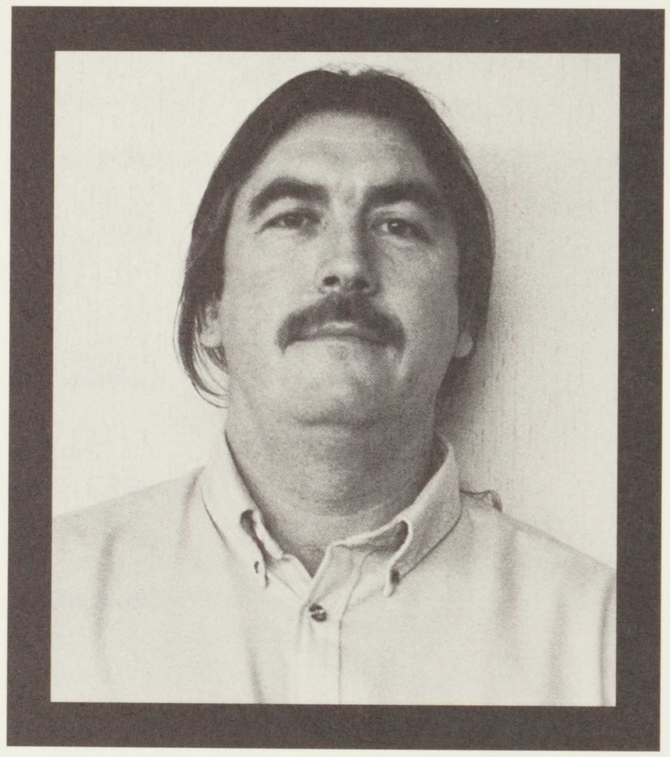
# Chairman's Message

It is my pleasure to introduce this report on the American Indian College Fund's activities and achievements in 1993. We at the Indian colleges are proud of what has already been accomplished by this organization in its first five years.

I accepted the office of chairman in 1993 at a very exciting moment in the Fund's development. We had recently received a prestigious challenge grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), the largest ever made to an Indian organization, to be used to support Native American studies at our 29 member colleges. The Fund was just getting a campaign underway to raise the $2.25 million needed to meet the three-to-one match for our $750,000 NEH challenge grant.



I am particularly heartened by this grant, because it is proof of how much times are changing. In the past, our cultural traditions have had little or no currency outside our tribal groups. It has been difficult to raise money to support curriculum in tribal language, history, philosophy and art.

When I was doing my doctoral studies, I chose the Ed.D. track instead of the Ph.D. track because the university would not recognize my use of Assiniboine, my tribal language, as a legitimate second language. While foreign students could get credit for their native languages, I could not.

This perception, that Native American languages and cultures are not legitimate or viable, is one our member colleges often come up against in trying to support their cultural studies programs. It is very acceptable for non-Indians to build academic careers on studying American Indians. But, if Indians decide to study themselves, we're considered to have some kind of bias.

The contributors to the American Indian College Fund understand the importance of tribal studies at our colleges. You have listened when we have explained the need for cultural and language preservation. In the past, there have been many dramatic political attempts to eradicate our languages and traditions, to make us immigrants in our own country. Yet, through these difficult times, our tribal cultures have sustained us. They continue to sustain our students.

The expectation of Indian colleges has often been that we teach the basic skills of the dominant culture, not tribal cultures. We are told to produce engineers, not Assiniboine language experts. We see no dichotomy. Students do not have to choose between their traditional cultures and the dominant culture. Indian colleges help produce electrical engineers who are conversant in the philosophy, history and traditions of their tribes.

Some tell us it is too late to save our languages and cultures. "Just let them assimilate," they say. Indians will not accept that. We are very stubborn people, much like the Israelis who renewed Hebrew. Almost a dead language in 1949, today it is spoken by millions.

We believe that with your support, we, too, can resurrect our languages and cultures. Our hope rests almost exclusively upon our colleges. The $3 million Native Studies Endowment that the American Indian College Fund will establish with the NEH challenge grant will provide our colleges with the resources they need to support cultural studies for years to come.

James L. Shanley

Dr. James Shanley
President, Fort Peck Community College

*Right, pow wow dancers, Rosebud Reservation, South Dakota*