

First of all, tribal colleges are profoundly important to preserve the Native Indian culture and history -- all of which is in great danger of disappearing into memory.

And the second reason is the sad reality that about 90% of Native students who leave the reservation to attend college elsewhere -- drop out. I wish that were not so, but it's a reality.

On the other hand, at the tribal colleges, right there on the reservation, it's the reverse situation.

The Indian colleges have a 90% success rate!

And at the tribal colleges, the Native student takes basic "Navajo 101" as well as modern physics and computer science.

In other words, these tribal colleges have a dual mission which includes both conventional and cultural education.

Take the case of Tonya Anderson. She was her high school's valedictorian, bright, hard working and ready for college, "a real go-getter" one teacher called her.

But then, she left home for junior college in Hobbes, New Mexico. She felt strange there. It was not like home. There were only three or four other Indians.

Emotionally defeated, she returned home. But fortunately, she was able to enroll in Crownpoint Institute of Technology, a school established by the Navajo Tribal Council.

Now she's majoring in the administrative assistant program so she will have the skills necessary to support herself and her young son while going to pre-med school.

But I must explain a sad irony to you:

Since tribal colleges are located on federal trust territory, states have no legal obligation to fund them -- and as you may know, states are the primary source of funding for mainstream public education institutions.

And in the few states where tribal colleges do receive state support, it's usually for non-Indian students to attend!

So exactly what does this mean?