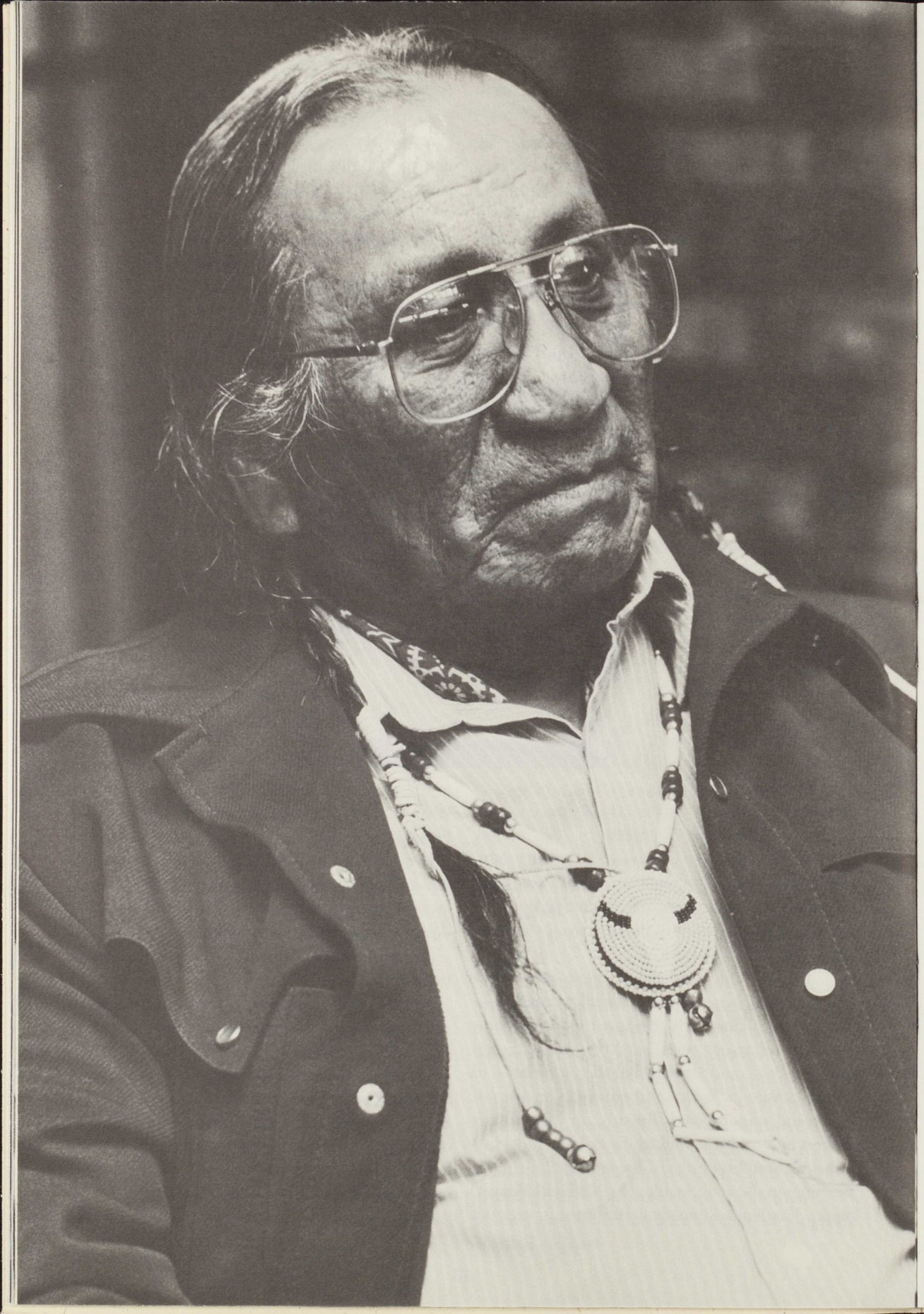

Cultural Preservation:

A vital mission of Indian colleges

A commitment to preserving tribal cultures is what most distinguishes Indian colleges from other American colleges.

Cultural preservation is one of the ways in which the Indian colleges have taken a leadership role in their communities and the nation. In the past, a tribe's culture was carefully passed from person to person and generation to generation. Because of the events of the past 500 years, the passing on of cultural knowledge has often been disrupted. Indian colleges provide a structured setting for the crucial tasks of teaching and studying tribal cultures. These activities enrich not only the lives of the students and their tribal communities, but all Americans. For the heritage of the great Indian nations is integral to the history, culture and democratic tradition of the American people.

We can't afford to lose the wisdom and knowledge embodied in our Indian cultures. Yet they are in danger of being lost. Since European contact, Indian tribes have been assailed by disease, dislocation, acts of outright genocide and efforts to force assimilation. Tragically, in addition to an overwhelming loss of life, over the past several hundred years tribes have been witness to the loss of a wealth of cultural knowledge and traditions.

Many American Indian tribes have completely disappeared. Some tribes have physically survived; however, their languages and customs have not. Others still have significant portions of their cultures intact. But even they find themselves in a race against time. The survival of the languages, spiritual teachings and customs that sustained their people for thousands of years has been challenged with each generation.

In spite of the losses of the past several hundred years, Indian communities still consider themselves wealthy in culture and spirituality. The 29 Indian colleges have taken upon themselves the challenge and responsibility of nurturing this cultural wealth.

The colleges operate with a dual mission of making post-secondary education more accessible to their people while also working to preserve

Left, Ambrose Little Ghost, a Lakota elder who is spiritual leader, counselor and instructor at Little Hoop Community College