

The Wokini Initiative: A Strategic Investment to Better Serve the Dakota and Lakota Residents of South Dakota

**Barry H. Dunn, President
South Dakota State University**

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Introduction

As a part of the historic U.S. land-grant system of public higher education, South Dakota State University (“SDSU” or “University”) stands as a beacon of opportunity. Grounded in our nation’s democratic principles of equality, SDSU is committed to provide access to higher education, to champion and create knowledge and understanding, and to continuously expand the University’s reach and opportunities. It is the University’s responsibility to foster an educated society, which will result in a strong democracy with a prosperous economy.

SDSU is the largest, most comprehensive university in the state — serving more than 12,600 undergraduate and post-graduate students. It attracts students, faculty and staff from around the region, nation and the world. The land-grant heritage commits SDSU to serve the entire state of South Dakota, providing academic programming in four additional communities outside of Brookings and on-line. Research field stations are located in five sites across the state, while eight regional extension centers offer programming in every county and beyond through its web-based extension learning platform, iGrow.

South Dakota currently has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the nation and, in general, has a very healthy economy. However, the people living in the nine Indian reservations within the state have the highest unemployment rate in the nation, reaching more than 80 percent in certain areas. Many of those same people are among the poorest in the nation. SDSU has a responsibility to provide educational opportunities for this underserved population, as it does for all people. A recent Lumina Foundation report on the percentage of people in South Dakota who have completed post-secondary education also provides evidence of an internal dichotomy in South Dakota. Based on 2014 data, the most recent available, 43.1% of South Dakotans ages 25-64 had achieved an associate degree or higher, compared to 20% of the American Indian population.

The University continues to identify opportunities, particularly in the areas of outreach and support, for those in South Dakota who face the greatest economic challenges and who can benefit the most from the educational, research and outreach opportunities SDSU offers.

History

Dakota Agricultural College—today known as South Dakota State University—was founded in 1881 with a small gift of land from the city of Brookings in the Dakota Territory. When South Dakota was granted statehood in 1889, the college was granted land-grant status under the Morrill Act of 1862. As outlined in the Enabling Act of 1889, the financial support provided to the state by the federal government in association with that status came in the form of grants of land: the first, to support the college’s academic mission, was 120,000 acres; the second, to support formation of the South Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station (“SDAES”) mission under the Hatch Act of 1887, consisted of 40,000 acres. These lands were located across South Dakota, but primarily in the western part of the state.

Those same lands had been previously guaranteed by the U.S. government to the Lakota and Dakota tribes, primarily through The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, which designated them as part of the Great Sioux Reservation. Under the Dawes Act of 1887, the federal government claimed much of the land in western South Dakota to use it for a variety of purposes, including committing the afore-mentioned 160,000 acres to the state of South Dakota to support its new land-grant college and SDAES.

Today, South Dakota stills holds title to much of the land-grant property. The annual income from renting the land is used by SDSU and the SDAES for base funding purposes. When any of the land-grant designated property was sold over the years, the proceeds were placed in trust by the state. The annualized return on those investments continues to flow to both SDSU and SDAES. While variable, the total annual income is estimated to be \$600,000.

Education has been and continues to be a critical element in federal and state policies, as well as supported tribal and American Indian programs. Federal trust obligations included educational services to enrolled members of tribal nations. These federal educational responsibilities shifted in part to the states by organization of states from territories along with state constitutions providing equal opportunity and the 1924 Citizenship Act granting citizenship to all Native Americans residing in the United States. Additionally, the 14th Amendment to the

United States Constitution places responsibility for education primarily with the states. By way of example, but in no way exclusion, the State of South Dakota has also recognized its responsibility for American Indian education through legislative establishment of the Office of Indian Education, the Office of Tribal Relations, and postsecondary resident tuition for high school graduates of institutions operated by the Bureaus of Indian Affairs.

Proposal

In Lakota, the word “wokini” means “new life” or “a new beginning.” With this spirit, and with the utmost respect for the Lakota and Dakota people, the administration, faculty, staff and students of SDSU propose the creation of the “Wokini Initiative.”

The new initiative will offer programming and support to those citizens of the nine tribal nations in South Dakota interested in gaining access to educational and advancement opportunities at South Dakota State University and enhanced research and outreach collaborations and programs with tribes, tribal colleges and other tribal organizations.

The Wokini Initiative programs will be developed by SDSU staff and faculty in collaboration and consultation with the tribes and their leaders, the four tribal colleges serving South Dakota, and tribal members from across the state.

SDSU proposes using the annual revenue SDSU and SDAES receive from their designated land-grant properties to provide sustainable, ongoing funding for the initiative. Use of the funds from these lands for the purposes set forth herein bears a reasonable relationship to achieving convergent state interests. With the intent of being even more impactful, every effort will be made by SDSU to leverage these monies in order to secure federal and state grants, grants from private foundations, and private gifts.

For example, the Northwest Area Foundation, Lumina Foundation and W.K. Kellogg Foundation are private foundations that currently commit grant dollars to initiatives and programs that advance economic, social, and cultural prosperity in native communities. USDA-NIFA has multiple grant opportunities that SDSU faculty have been successful in obtaining and certainly can be competitive for in the future. Private individuals have long supported efforts on campus related to American Indian programming and will surely be interested in this new initiative.

Partnerships with tribes, tribal colleges and tribal organizations will enhance the success of obtaining extramural funding.

The Wokini Initiative will have both on-campus and off-campus programs. The following are example components to illustrate the potential of the Wokini Initiative on SDSU's campus:

- Similar to the South Dakota statutorily recognized Indian studies centers at the University of South Dakota and Black Hills State University, a new, stand-alone American Indian Student Center ("AISC") central to campus can be built and could be recognized by the South Dakota Legislature. Across the country, the most successful AISCs include a stand-alone facility with computer labs, study areas, classrooms, and recreational spaces to create a "living room" feeling. While targeted for American Indian students, this facility will serve and benefit all students on campus.
- Working through programs such as the federally and state funded GEAR UP and Jump Start grant programs that are managed through the South Dakota Board of Regents and its institutions, financial aid can be combined with donor funded scholarships and endowments and an expanded support network structured to prepare, attract, recruit, retain, and graduate enrolled tribal members at SDSU. The objective of these efforts is to offer American Indian students the access to academic, personal, health and financial wellness knowledge needed to succeed at SDSU and in life after graduation. The following two examples provide compelling evidence that this effort will be successful. First, NCAA Division I student athletes are provided this same type of multifaceted support, and they consistently outperform the general university student population here at SDSU. Additionally, a successful program providing multifaceted support to students from backgrounds traditionally underserved can be found in the federally funded TRiO programs, including Student Support Services and Upward Bound. Participants must meet one of three criteria in addition to having academic need: first-generation, low income, or physical/learning disability. At SDSU, students in these programs consistently outperform the general university population and significantly outperform eligible non-participant students.
- The SDSU Provost's Dissertation Fellows Program targets individuals from underserved populations. The Wokini Initiative could financially assist those who are enrolled

members of American Indian tribes, and SDSU could emphasize recruitment of individuals meeting this criterion to advance the Initiative.

- Programs could be started as part of SDSU's American Indian Studies major for the preservation of language and an expansion of the arts, two critically important aspects of the Lakota and Dakota cultures.

Off-campus Wokini programing could include:

- SDAES revenue from land-grant property to fund collaborative research projects related to native communities, including key areas of study such as human health and nutrition or natural resource management. These projects would be a partnership between the University and community members, tribal colleges, and the tribes.
- An adult leadership development program that is culturally and historically sensitive, designed around the structure and function of tribal governments, whose goal is to help individuals achieve their personal goals but also improve economic development and stability in tribal communities across South Dakota. Dialogue and conversations with tribal leaders will inform the program to ensure the focus is on areas that will advance the American Indian communities. In addition, inclusion of tribal leaders and American Indian community members in many aspects of the program is desired to enrich the experience and provide mentorship for the students who will lead in the future.

Context

For decades SDSU faculty, staff and students have strived to serve the Lakota and Dakota people while acting in the areas of educational outreach and support. Numerous successful programs have been created and implemented in alignment with SDSU's land-grant mission including: an American Indian Cultural Center on campus; ethnobotany research to help catalog the medicinal use of native plants on the Standing Rock Reservation; SDSU's counseling program in conjunction with Sinte Gleska University; the Prairie Ph.D. which supported tribal member seeking advanced academic degrees; the West River nursing program to increase the number of registered nurses at Pine Ridge Reservation; the SDSU Success Academy in conjunction with the Flandreau Indian School, with multiple extension programs, and many, many more. Unfortunately, these programs generally were underfunded from the start and became unsustainable, as they relied heavily on good intentions and small grants.

The Wokini Initiative is designed to revive the best of these, to allow the creation of new ones, and to remove the common limitation of all of them—their fundamental financial instability.

Request

To be successful, the Wokini Initiative requires consensus among the leadership of South Dakota State University. This includes support from the University Budget Oversight Committee, President's Council, Faculty Senate, Student Association, Professional Staff Advisory Council, Civil Service Advisory Council, Tiospaye Council, and the SDSU Foundation.

Implementation timeline would include having the program concept agreed upon internally by February, with the goal of gaining support from the South Dakota Board of Regents at their March meeting.

Once support is garnered from those constituent groups, SDSU will engage with tribal leadership to gain feedback, input and support for a fall 2017 initiative launch.

Concluding Thoughts

SDSU was founded in 1881 to make it possible for individuals to imagine their potential beyond pre-conceived limitations.

SDSU is a public university whose work clearly benefits its graduates. It also is a comprehensive university, where research and outreach spur economic development and prosperity for all sectors of the state's and region's economy and strengthens community and social structures. As stewards of the land-grant mission, it is the University's collective duty to marshal its resources and efforts toward its continuing goal of providing access for all to the benefits of education.

The Wokini Initiative is a strong step SDSU can take to help ensure all people—including those among the most economically disadvantaged in this state—have access to educational opportunity and are empowered to help strengthen the foundations of its mutual communities and shared interests.

To help them is to help us all.