

Annual Report on Programs to Increase Enrollment, Retention, and Support for Students who are Tribal Members in Compliance with SDCL 13-53-54

Submitted by the South Dakota Board of Regents to the South Dakota State Legislature July 1, 2026

REPORT BACKGROUND

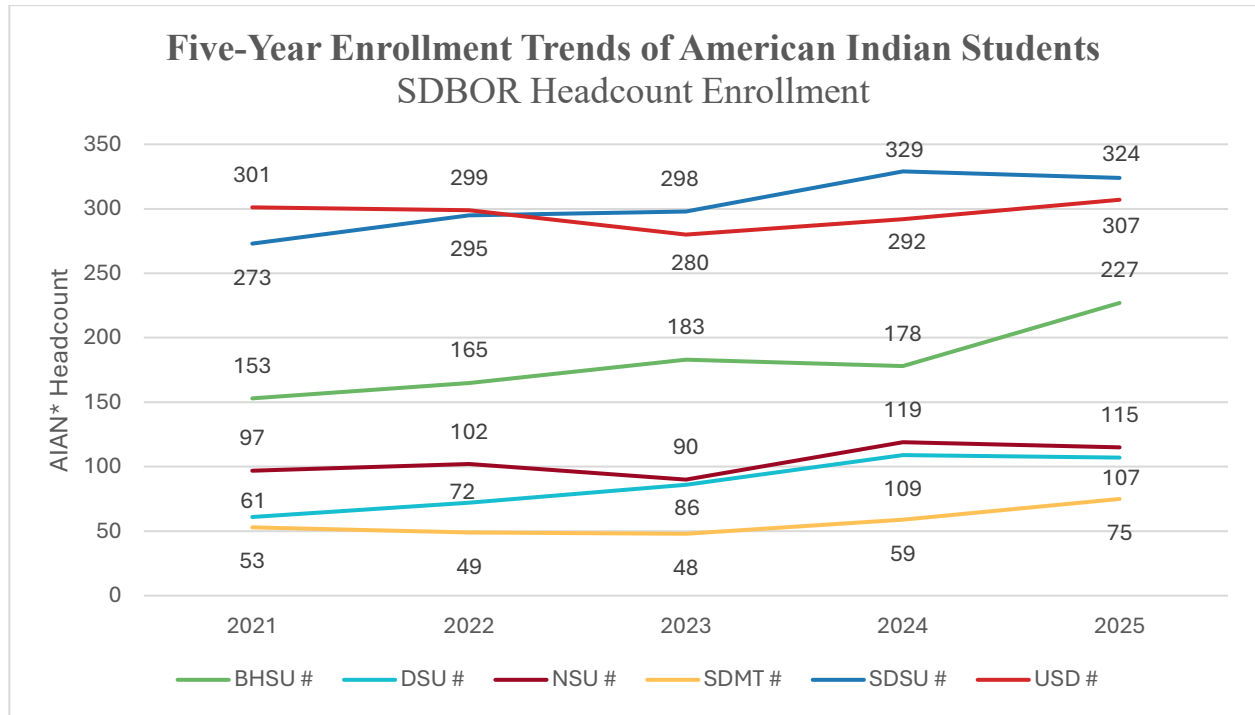
SDCL [13-53-54](#) requires the Board of Regents (BOR) to provide an annual report on the progress and actions “to develop programs to increase enrollment and improve retention, and student supports for any student who is a member of one of the nine federally recognized tribes in South Dakota at state institutions, including exploration of tuition assistance or waiver programs.”

DATA NOTES

For the purposes of this report, students who have self-identified an ethnicity/race of American Indian/Alaskan Native (AIAN), multi-racial where at least one race was American Indian/Alaskan Native, or self-identified as a member of a federally recognized tribe are considered AIAN to measure the effectiveness of programs implemented to improve outcomes for American Indian students.

ENROLLMENT DATA

BOR institutions continue their efforts to recruit and retain AIAN* students and have increased the percentage of system-level enrollment¹. The number of students who identify as AIAN* increased from 2.80% (938) in the fall of 2021 to 3.20% (1,155) in the fall of 2025.



AIAN * Headcount and Percent of Total Headcount														
Fall	BHSU		DSU		NSU		SDMT		SDSU		USD		System Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
2021	153	4.44%	61	1.91%	97	2.93%	53	2.21%	273	2.40%	301	3.23%	938	2.80%
2022	165	4.88%	72	2.23%	102	3.10%	49	1.98%	295	2.61%	299	3.13%	982	2.91%
2023	183	5.36%	86	2.47%	90	2.60%	48	1.94%	298	2.60%	280	2.87%	985	2.87%
2024	178	5.40%	109	2.92%	119	3.26%	59	2.30%	329	2.74%	292	2.78%	1,086	3.01%
2025	227	6.71%	107	2.81%	115	3.11%	75	2.97%	324	2.68%	307	2.98%	1,155	3.20%

¹ Enrollment data was obtained from the Regents Information Systems Student Success Analytics Fall Census Snapshots for 2020-2024.

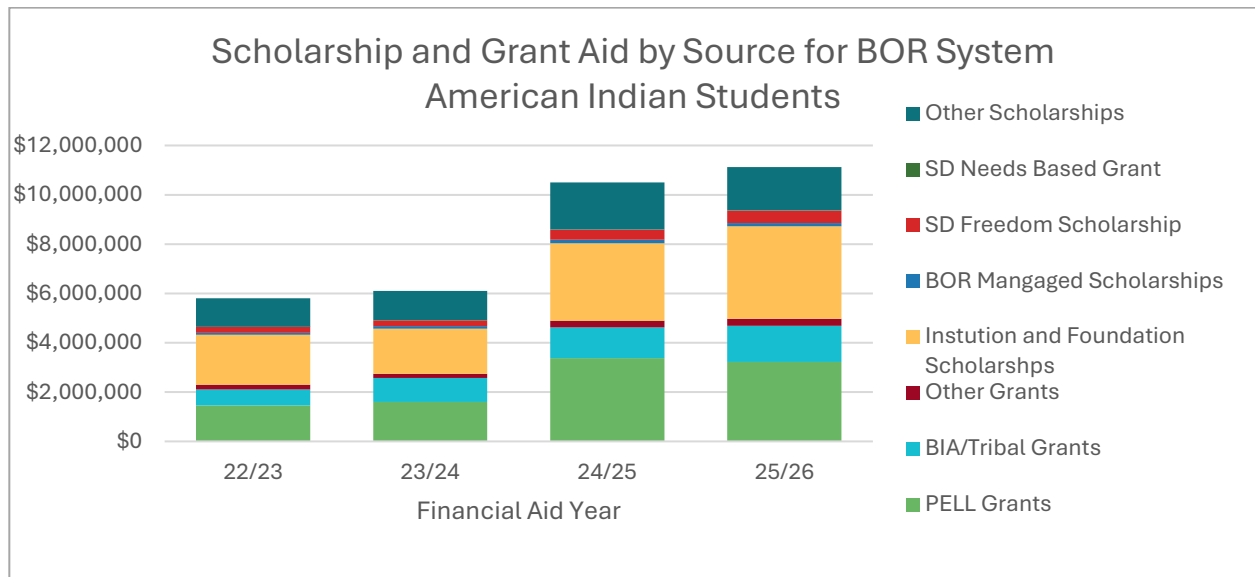
* Students self-identified as American Indian/Alaskan Native, multi-racial where at least one race was American Indian/Alaskan Native or identified as a tribal member.

GRANT AND SCHOLARSHIP DATA

SDCL 13-53-54 authorizes BOR to explore tuition assistance or waiver programs for students who are members of one of the nine federally recognized tribes in South Dakota.

For financial aid year 25-26, BOR universities awarded over \$4 million in institutional, foundation, system, and state grants and scholarships to AIAN* students². The amount of institutional grant and scholarship aid dollars has grown steadily over the last three years. Additionally, since 22-23, total tuition assistance has increased by nearly 90% for BOR AIAN* students.

Grants and scholarship award amounts continue to benefit in the 25-26 aid year with the use of the South Dakota Freedom Scholarship. 82 AIAN* students were awarded \$503,000 in South Dakota Freedom Scholarship funds in aid year 24-25.



Financial Aid Year	# AIAN* Students Receiving Grants & Scholarships	PELL Grants	BIA/Tribal Grants	Other Grants	Institution and Foundation Scholarships	BOR Managed Scholarships	SD Freedom Scholarship	SD Needs Based Grant	Other Scholarships	Total Grants & Scholarships
22/23	623	\$1,460,000	\$641,000	\$196,000	\$2,022,000	\$79,000	\$250,000	\$6,000	\$1,146,000	\$5,800,000
23/24	619	\$1,604,000	\$975,000	\$160,000	\$1,839,000	\$92,000	\$244,000	\$4,000	\$1,182,000	\$6,100,000
24/25	703	\$3,375,000	\$1,249,000	\$267,000	\$3,148,000	\$138,000	\$401,000	\$16,000	\$1,901,000	\$10,497,000
25/26	733	\$3,224,000	\$1,458,000	\$267,000	\$3,742,000	\$135,000	\$503,000	\$14,000	\$1,750,000	\$11,122,000

² Financial Aid data was obtained from the SD BOR Student Information System. The data includes award information for the financial aid year for students identified as AIAN* in the Student Information System Fall Census Snapshot. Scholarship awards for all subgroups were totaled and rounded to the nearest \$1,000.



BLACK HILLS STATE UNIVERSITY

BLACK HILLS
STATE UNIVERSITY

Center for American Indian Studies Overview

The Center for American Indian Studies (CAIS) at Black Hills State University serves as the institutional hub for supporting Native American student access, success, and engagement. Established by an act of the South Dakota Legislature, the Center carries a broad mandate to administer academic programming in American Indian Studies, coordinate services for Native students, promote cultural awareness, and strengthen recruitment and retention efforts across the university.

The Center is staffed by a Director, Assistant Director, and Professional Advisor, who work collaboratively to advance these priorities. The Director provides overall leadership and oversight of CAIS operations and associated student services. The Assistant Director manages the Center's daily functions and serves as a primary point of contact for students, while also developing initiatives that support access, transition, and persistence. The Professional Advisor plays a central role in advising and mentoring, helping students navigate academic requirements and connect with campus resources that contribute to their success.

Located in Jonas Hall, CAIS provides a dedicated physical space designed to foster both academic success and cultural connection. The Center includes study areas, a student lounge, and access to essential resources such as computers and printers. More importantly, it serves as a community space where Native students can build relationships, find support, and strengthen their sense of belonging within the university environment.

Recruitment Efforts

Recruitment of Native American students at BHSU is a collaborative and relationship-centered effort led by CAIS in partnership with the Admissions Office. Admissions staff engage directly with high schools that serve significant Native student populations across South Dakota and neighboring states, building connections with students, families, counselors, and educators. These efforts emphasize not only the availability of academic programs but also the broader value of higher education for individuals and their communities.

The Center complements these efforts through consistent outreach and engagement. CAIS staff participate in regional events such as the Lakota Nations Invitational and the Black Hills Powwow, creating opportunities for direct interaction with prospective students. Communication through social media and email supports these efforts; however, the Center continues to prioritize in-person engagement as the most effective approach to building trust and meaningful relationships.

Campus visits are a particularly important component of recruitment. CAIS works closely with Admissions to ensure that both group and individual visits include opportunities for prospective students to connect with Center staff and current Native students. During BHSU Preview Days, CAIS provides personalized guidance regarding academic programs, financial aid, and available

cultural and support resources. These interactions help establish an early sense of connection to the university and lay the foundation for a successful transition and retention.

Retention and Student Success Initiatives

Retention efforts coordinated through CAIS are comprehensive and designed to support students from their initial transition through graduation. A central component of this work is the GS 100 University Experience course, a one-credit first-year seminar specifically tailored for Native American students. Taught by the CAIS Professional Advisor, the course introduces students to campus resources and fosters early engagement, helping students build confidence and navigate the academic environment during their first semester.

In addition to this course, a Native American-focused orientation program helps incoming students acclimate to the university. The program introduces campus resources, facilitates relationship-building with peers and mentors, and reinforces academic expectations while emphasizing cultural identity and belonging. These early interventions are critical in establishing a strong foundation for student success.

Ongoing support is provided through structured programming that maintains consistent engagement throughout the academic year. A mentorship program connects students with dedicated points of contact who provide guidance, accountability, and encouragement. The Native Scholars Program builds on this model by offering biweekly meetings focused on academic progress, personal development, and cultural identity. Regular weekly engagement activities further strengthen students' connections to the Center and to one another, reinforcing a sense of community and support.

Integration of Academic and Cultural Support

A distinguishing feature of CAIS programming is the intentional integration of academic development and cultural support. Within the student's introductory GS 100 course, monthly thematic content addresses key areas such as academic skills, goal setting, Indigenous heritage and identity, and holistic well-being. This structure ensures that culturally responsive support is not limited to orientation but is embedded in the academic experience, providing continuity and relevance throughout the first year.

This integrated approach reinforces mentorship efforts and aligns student development with both academic expectations and personal growth. By connecting students' cultural identities to their educational journeys, CAIS strengthens engagement and supports long-term persistence.

Institutional Collaboration

The work of CAIS is strengthened through active collaboration across campus. The Center partners closely with New Student Orientation and other institutional units to ensure that Native students are fully supported within broader university processes. In these collaborations, CAIS serves as both a resource and a liaison, helping to coordinate services, align institutional efforts, and advocate for the needs of Native students.

This collaborative approach enhances the university's overall capacity to serve Native students and reinforces CAIS's role as a central contributor to student success initiatives.

Student Engagement and Leadership Development

CAIS fosters student engagement and leadership development by supporting student organizations and co-curricular programming. Lakota Omnicore and the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) offer opportunities for students to develop leadership skills, build community, and engage in cultural and professional activities. These organizations also contribute to campus-wide awareness and play a key role in enriching the student experience.

Beyond student organizations, CAIS supports a range of activities that promote academic and professional growth. These include tutoring services, scholarship-writing workshops, leadership development programs, and participation in campus events and recognition ceremonies. Collectively, these opportunities help students build skills, confidence, and a strong connection to the university.

Research, Partnerships, and Experiential Learning

The Center also facilitates opportunities for research and experiential learning, particularly in STEM fields. Through partnerships such as the DOE EPSCoR National Lab initiative, Native students gain exposure to national research laboratories and career pathways in science and technology. These experiences broaden students' perspectives, strengthen academic engagement, and support recruitment into high-demand fields.

Such initiatives demonstrate CAIS's commitment not only to access and retention but also to preparing students for meaningful careers and advanced study.

Academic Programs and Faculty Support

CAIS serves as the administrative home for the American Indian Studies (AIS) major and minor programs at BHSU. These programs provide students with opportunities to engage deeply with Indigenous history, culture, and contemporary issues.

The presence of Native faculty is a critical component of these programs. Faculty members contribute not only through instruction but also through mentorship, cultural knowledge, and advocacy, strengthening connections between the university and tribal communities while supporting student success.

Specialized Program Development

In addition to its degree programs, CAIS has developed the Wichozani Health and Wellness certificate in partnership with the Indian University of North America at Crazy Horse Memorial. This program focuses on Indigenous health and wellness, integrates traditional healing practices, and prepares participants to address health challenges within tribal communities.

The development of this certificate reflects CAIS's commitment to expanding culturally relevant educational opportunities and strengthening pathways into critical workforce areas.

Conclusion

Recruitment and retention efforts coordinated through the Center for American Indian Studies

represent a comprehensive and intentional approach to supporting Native American students at Black Hills State University. Through culturally responsive programming, strong community partnerships, and sustained academic and personal support, CAIS creates an environment in which students are not only able to access higher education but are positioned to thrive and succeed.

These efforts ultimately contribute to student persistence, degree completion, and the preparation of future leaders who will serve their communities and professions with knowledge, confidence, and cultural grounding.

Compliance with SDCL 13-53-54

This report is submitted in fulfillment of the requirements outlined in **South Dakota Codified Law (SDCL) 13-53-54**, which directs the Board of Regents institutions to report on efforts related to the recruitment, retention, and support of American Indian students. The information presented herein documents Black Hills State University's coordinated, institution-wide approach through the Center for American Indian Studies (CAIS), including organizational structure, targeted recruitment strategies, comprehensive retention programming, academic offerings, and collaborative partnerships. Collectively, these efforts demonstrate BHSU's ongoing commitment to improving access, supporting student success, and strengthening educational outcomes for American Indian students in alignment with the expectations of the statute.

Numerous programs and efforts support Dakota State University's dedication to serving Native American students, both in the community and on campus. Included are DSU's ongoing efforts to aid in the recruitment and retention of Native American students, as well as the important events and outreach that occurred during the year.

Academic Initiatives, Outreach & Recruitment

- **Dakota State University (DSU) + Oglala Lakota College (OLC) Summer IT Institute**
Dr. Pete Hoelsing (DSU) and Chair Dana Gehring (OLC) coordinated the third year of the DSU-OLC Summer IT Institute, "Digital Natives," during July 2026, having previously done a second year of this institute in July 2024. The first five days of the institute were held on the Oglala Lakota College campus in Kyle, SD, with mathematics sessions presented by DSU math faculty member Dr. Rich Avery and technology sessions presented by DSU computer science student Miles Livermont. The second week of the institute was held on the Dakota State University campus. Mathematics sessions were presented by DSU math faculty member Rich Avery. Multiple faculty and staff delivered instruction at DSU during week two across all three years, with sessions in MadLabs® and Habeger Science Center. Technology sessions were designed by DSU computer science faculty member Kanthi Narukonda, and delivered by student staff of the CybHER Institute and research staff of the Applied Research Lab. The DSU/OLC Summer IT Institute was funded by an award from the SD EPSCOR Research Infrastructure Improvement (RII) Track-1 grant, and included two days of industry and community engagement in Sioux Falls. The students have an opportunity to learn about STEM and related fields, helping break down barriers so Native American students can see themselves in STEM careers. During the 2025 Digital Natives Institute, DSU used funding from the CyberAg Special Appropriation to support ag-centric technology learning activities.
- **Teacher Apprenticeship Pathway**
Dr. David De Jong, Dean of the College of Education & Human Performance, continued into the second year of the Little Wound Teacher Apprenticeship Pathway for 8 Native paraprofessionals in Little Wound School. The paraprofessionals enrolled in DSU to earn their degree in Elementary Education or Special Education. The program allows Native American paraprofessionals to become certified teachers and is funded by a grant awarded to The Little Wound School from the United States Department of Education Indian Affairs. The expenses for participating paraprofessionals or student assistants are covered by the awarded grant. Dr. DeJong met with the Native paraprofessionals and their school leadership team several times over the past two years. Currently, two teacher apprentices in the Little Wound Teacher Apprenticeship Pathway are employed full-time at Little Wound School. Beginning in Summer 2026, the Mahpiya Lúta Teacher

Apprenticeship will launch with approximately 10 Native paraprofessionals enrolled in either K-8 Elementary Education or K-12 Special Education at DSU.

- **Collaboration with Oglala Lakota College**

DSU continues to work with Oglala Lakota College (OLC) on a range of sponsored programming initiatives, including proposals to USDA's NIFA program and various National Science Foundation programs.

- **2025 Rosebud Sioux Tribe Professional Conference presentations**

DSU was invited to provide a line-up of presentations as one of the Nation's leaders in Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology and research. Faculty members, Dr. Chad Fenner and Dr. Abeer Alkhwalid provided plenary presentations and workshops on Artificial Intelligence, including the ethical considerations and practical applications for Tribal Nations workforce. The presentations promoted DSU programs and also provided meaningful support, training, and partnership opportunities with Tribal Nation leaders.

- **Makato'h Reconciliation and Healing Horse Ride (formally Dakota 38+2)**

In December 2025, DSU and the City of Madison partnered to support and welcome the Makato'h Riders. The ride honors the 38 Dakota tribe members executed extrajudicially in Makato'h on December 26, 1862, and the two hanged two years later, the largest mass execution in U.S. history. Riders traveled 330 miles through harsh winter conditions, inspired by a commitment to reconciliation and cultural preservation. The ride symbolizes resilience and unity, ensuring that the stories of the Dakota people and their sacrifices are never forgotten. DSU hosted the riders for dinner on December 16th, inviting Native American Student Association members, students, faculty, staff, and community members to share a meal with the riders during their stop in Madison.

- **Recruitment**

DSU traveled and provided outreach to schools through college fairs and high school visits. Our calendar included college fairs at Red Cloud Indian School, Lakota Tech High School, Cheyenne Eagle Butte High School, and Crow Creek Tribal School.

Additionally, we followed up our college fair season with visits to the following schools: Lower Brule, Crow Creek, Bennett County, Sisseton, White River, Wakpala, Cheyenne Eagle Butte, McLaughlin, Timber Lake, and Flandreau Indian School.

- **School and Classroom Visits**

DSU's Governors Cyber Academy and faculty host classroom takeovers and visits at area schools throughout the academic year. The opportunities are available to all schools and students, sharing career opportunities in technology and cyber lessons.

Student Programming

- **The Native American Student Association (NASA)**

The Native American Student Association (NASA) at Dakota State University continued its mission to build community and support for Native American students. NASA receives student General Activity Fee (GAF) funding to support its activities. Activities are designed to foster a sense of community, provide cultural affirmation, and support the academic and personal success of Native students at Dakota State University. These efforts contribute directly to statewide goals of increasing Native student enrollment, improving retention, and enhancing student support.

2025-26 Activity Summary:

NASA held regular meetings throughout the academic year, both in person and online, providing Native and Indigenous students with opportunities to connect with one another, build peer support networks, and engage in meaningful discussion about their experiences as students at Dakota State University.

The organization focused on strengthening relationships among current members and fostering a sense of belonging and community for Native students on campus. Meetings provided a consistent space for students to share experiences, support one another academically and personally, and maintain connections to Native and Indigenous student life at DSU.

NASA also emphasized leadership development and organizational sustainability by encouraging participation from newer members and discussing future leadership opportunities within the organization. These efforts were intended to support the organization's continuity and ensure ongoing opportunities for Native student engagement at Dakota State University.

The American Indian Cangleska wašté (Good Circle) Program (CP) uses a holistic model that imitates the family-centered orientation of tribal life for American Indian students at Northern State University (NSU). This model provides student-focused planning and experiences to help students cultivate a deeper cultural footprint during their college experience, while also providing enhanced academic support services. The program is designed to work collaboratively with faculty and staff to support NSU's overall mission. The program's outcome is to build a sense of community that contributes to students' personal growth and academic success, leading to the graduation of American Indian students at Northern State University.

The Circle Program offers a variety of services to engage and support American Indian students and the broader NSU Community, including:

- Coordinated recruitment efforts with NSU Enrollment Services, including partnering on campus tours and visit days, high school and prospective student outreach, and new student registration activities.
- Enhanced high school dual credit student outreach.
- Cangleska wašté (Good Circle) pre-orientation program to help successfully transition students to college.
- Personalized academic advising and support from the time of acceptance to graduation.
- Peer-mentoring that builds connectedness and supports students as they acclimate to college life.
- Gerianne Pfeiffer Donor Fund and Give N Day campaign to offer expanded scholarships and funding for student needs through awards and support of the NSU Foundation.
- Academic and cultural workshops and programming, including Native American Day and Native American Heritage Month events.
- Individualized and group tutoring in collaboration with the Student Success Center.
- Tribal higher education financial aid and scholarship workshops and guidance in partnership with NSU Financial Aid.
- Academic and commencement recognition through the annual *Crazy Horse Memorial Scholarship and Reception* and *Graduation/Feathering Ceremony*.
- Collaborations with BOR institutions, Tribal Colleges, and regional communities.

The Circle Program also began working with the NSU College of Arts and Sciences and Residence Life in 2026 to plan a new Teepee Living Learning Community (LLC); the proposed LLC is scheduled to be implemented in fall 2027.

The Circle Program serves as a liaison to Enrollment Services and Admissions staff to help them understand Native communities', families', and students' social norms to best support Native American student enrollment and transition to university life.

- Lara Nelson, American Indian Circle Program Director, attends an Admissions staff meeting annually to share best practices for recruiting Native American students.
- Admissions Counselor, Kelsy Kuo, serves as the Admissions representative on the American Indian Advisory Committee.

Over the past academic year, Native American student recruitment efforts in high schools and at college fairs included the following listing from NSU Admissions:

- Standing Rock High School's College/Career Fair
- Minnewaukan Public School's College/Career Fair
- Dakota College at Bottineau College/Career Fair
- Sisseton/Wahpeton Oyate College/Career Fair
- LATC College Fair
- Stanley County HS College Fair
- Mobridge College Fair
- Spearfish HS College Fair
- Rapid City College Fair
- Red Cloud HS College Fair
- Lakota Tech HS College Fair
- TF Riggs College Fair
- Sturgis HS College Fair
- Crow Creek HS College Fair
- Sisseton HS Visit
- Eagle Butte HS Visit
- Dupree HS Visit
- Mobridge HS Visit

Native American student campus visit data from NSU Admissions included:

- Thursday, August 14, 2025
 - Individual prospective student
- Thursday, October 9, 2025
 - Tiospa Zina Group Visit
 - 30 Juniors and Seniors
- Wednesday, October 22, 2025
 - Individual prospective student
- Thursday, October 23, 2025
 - Individual prospective student
- Tuesday, January 20, 2026
 - Individual prospective student
- Tuesday, March 10th, 2026
 - McLaughlin Elementary School
 - (60 guests) 4th and 5th Grade Elementary School Students
- Wednesday, March 25, 2026
 - McLaughlin High School
 - 30 Sophomores
- Friday, April 10, 2026
 - Douglas High School Art Students
 - 6 High School Students, Grade(s) not shared
- Thursday, March 26, 2026
 - Individual prospective student

- Wednesday, May 6, 2026
 - Individual prospective student
- Total: ~ 132
 - Elementary students: ~ 60
 - High School students: ~ 72 (individual prospective student visits schedule: ~ 6 + groups: 30 + 30 + 6 = ~ 66)
 -

Northern State University Admissions also regularly collaborates with Aberdeen Central High School's Native American Student Association (NASA) student program to offer on-campus group tours and visits.

The CP regularly uses the Admissions CRM Slate to reach out to and connect with prospective and accepted students. This process supports students through the enrollment funnel. Furthermore, increased personalized engagement efforts for all Native American students taking high school dual credit courses at NSU result in HSDE students receiving academic support and tutoring upon request.

The Circle Program's pre-orientation and peer mentoring components continue to be recognized as best practices for supporting students' transition from high school to college. Northern experienced an increase in student participation, with the Circle Program serving 98 students during the FY25/26 academic year.

In response to this growth, the Circle Program continues to expand its traditional three-day pre-orientation into a full, year-long first-year experience. This enhanced model leverages the expertise of peer mentors and professional staff to provide targeted academic support, ensure students are equipped with essential technology and skills from the outset, and foster overall college readiness. The program is designed to cultivate a strong sense of community and belonging at NSU, deepen peer-to-peer connections, and enhance student engagement across campus.

In 2025-2026, the CP partnership with Northern State University Foundation (NSUF) annual Give N Day campaign was again a success, helping students with emergency expenses and supporting the Circle Program throughout the academic year. The NSUF also secured a generous donation from the family of Gerianne Pfeiffer for additional direct student support to students.

The Native American Student Association (NASA) is a recognized student organization. NASA offers cultural education and event programming for NSU and the Aberdeen community throughout the academic year at the discretion of the student organization membership.

The Circle program collaborated with the Northern Innovation Start-Up Center to host Chef Braveheart at the annual 2025 Technology & Entrepreneurship Summit and partnered with Enrollment Management to invite the Native American Student Association (NASA) of Aberdeen Central High School to attend.

The Circle Program Director also chaired and co-presented at the South Dakota Higher

Education Native Higher Education Consortium in Vermillion, SD, during the annual 2025 SDHEA Annual Conference.

Each year, the Circle Program proudly honors graduating Native American students through the Feathering Ceremony, held in conjunction with spring commencement. This meaningful event invites graduates' families and friends, as well as NSU faculty and staff, to celebrate the achievements of Native American students in a culturally significant and community-centered way. Hosted by the American Indian Circle Program, the ceremony features speakers, traditional drumming, and singers who come together to pay tribute to the graduates. Since its inception in 2005, the Feathering Ceremony has remained a cherished tradition, symbolizing resilience, accomplishment, and cultural pride. The 2025-2026 academic year had the largest graduating cohort since the Circle Program's inception.

Northern State University is dedicated to recognizing tribal traditions and ceremonies that support the holistic well-being of American Indian and Alaska Native students. As such, the Circle Program invites the campus community to participate in a monthly Smudge. All are welcome to learn about smudging and the importance it symbolizes in Indigenous culture; smudging is also a time of reflection. The CP planted traditional prairie sage in the Mewaldt-Jensen courtyard, adjacent to the Circle Program student lounge on campus, to contribute to the monthly smudge and to the time spent building community.

The Circle Program provides robust academic advising services to help all Native American students at Northern State University. In addition to academic planning and course registration activities, Circle Program advising assists students with study skill development; offers temporary textbook loans in partnership with the Williams Library; and provides guidance on student employment, scholarships, tribal aid, financial literacy, and other topics key to academic success. Students are also connected to campus and community resources, including tutoring and academic support services, counseling and wellness resources, accessibility services, career development opportunities, cultural programming, mentoring support, food and basic-needs assistance, housing resources, and referrals to local community organizations that support student well-being and persistence through graduation.

The Circle Program has devised a stop-out/re-entry program in which the Circle Program Director continually engages with students who withdraw from NSU. The goal is to help students develop pathways and clarity around how to complete a degree by providing personal, academic, and financial advice during the re-admission process. The program maintains personal relationships with students so that they are well connected to support and resources at the point of re-entry.

On campus, the Cangleska wašté student lounge serves as a space for educational, social, and cultural programming, as well as for student studying and tutoring. Peer mentors and NASA use the space for leadership development and to build community amongst all students. The CP student lounge is part of the Student Success Center/Opportunity Center. During the 2025/2026 academic year, there were 538 kiosk check-ins to the CP student lounge.

The Circle Program 5-year plan (2020-2025) includes increasing the number of students entering

master's programs after completion of undergraduate studies. This goal is further supported through collaboration with the TRIO McNair grant project at Northern State University. To date, several American Indian students have been accepted into the TRIO McNair Scholars program.

Northern State University offers a Native and Indigenous Studies academic minor. The Native and Indigenous Studies Minor is an interdisciplinary program that offers students insight into Native American and broader indigenous cultures and a space to consider the importance of indigenous perspectives and knowledge in the twenty-first century. The minor enables students and faculty to make connections among Native American populations and across a broad range of topics. Students may choose to participate in experiential learning opportunities and complete Lakota language courses. Students with a minor in Native and Indigenous Studies will approach their work through a more robust cultural lens that is inclusive of the fastest-growing demographic segment of South Dakota and the region.

The American Indian Advisory Committee (AIAC) is tasked with reviewing and making recommendations regarding policy, practices, academic offerings, and programming to support NSU's American Indian students, recruit and retain American Indian students, and connect the University to the American Indian community at large. The work that the committee does complements NSU's strategic priorities. The committee is chaired by the Director of the American Indian Circle Program.

Native American students have strong advocacy and support at Northern State University through the American Indian Advisory Committee, the Student Success Center and Student Success Committee, the CARES team, and the Opportunity for All Council. Campus units, including TRIO Student Support Services, TRIO McNair, Accessibility Services, academic support, tutoring, and others, also work collaboratively to provide support and assistance to Native American students. Students' university success team, comprised of faculty, professional advisors, and other personnel, is also highlighted and accessible through Navigate, the campus student success platform and app.

The Circle Program Director (1 FTE) provides direct support to students, faculty, and staff; advises American Indian students; serves as a campus to community liaison; attends the Indian Education Summit and South Dakota Higher Education annual conference; assists with recruitment activities in partnership with NSU Enrollment Services; and collaborates on the BOR Native Task Force, now known as the South Dakota Higher Education Native Consortium (SDHEDNC) with other BOR Indian Education Directors, private and public schools and tribal colleges.

SOUTH DAKOTA MINES

South Dakota Mines provides an extensive network of support for American Indian students that begins before enrollment and continues through graduation. The university actively recruits students through outreach to tribal schools, participation in college fairs, partnerships with community tribal organizations, and hands-on STEM experiences offered through the American Indian Science & Engineering Society (AISES). These efforts are designed to increase awareness of careers in science, engineering, and technology while building connections with prospective students and their communities.

Once students arrive on campus, the Opportunity Center's Office of Multicultural Affairs helps ease the transition to college through a pre-orientation program that allows students to move in early, connect with peers and mentors, meet advisors, tour on- and off-campus spots, and learn about campus resources. Peer mentoring continues throughout students' first year, providing guidance, support, and a sense of community. The Center also offers scholarship alerts, internship and co-op opportunities, leadership development, emergency assistance funding, and cultural programming that support student success.

Mines is home to a high-achieving, award-winning AISES chapter that promotes academic achievement, professional development, networking, community service, and cultural engagement. The organization hosts cultural events, participates in regional and national conferences, connects students with internships and career opportunities, and helps support a strong Native student community on campus. Students also have opportunities to participate in campuswide cultural events and traditions, including the annual Native Graduation Honoring Ceremony, which celebrates graduates and their families through traditional songs, prayers, honorary guests, and community recognition.

Additional academic and financial support is available through the Tiospaye Scholar Program, which focuses on increasing the number of American Indian students earning STEM degrees. The program provides financial assistance, academic support, professional development opportunities, cultural engagement, social networking, and a dedicated on-campus space. Since its establishment in 2009, the program has graduated more than 60 scholars and has helped connect students with research opportunities, internships, graduate school pathways, and industry partners.

Beyond direct student services, South Dakota Mines continues to strengthen its commitment to Native student success through partnerships with tribal communities and tribal colleges, as well as a multidisciplinary Tribal STEM Faculty Group. These collaborations support scholarship development, research initiatives, curriculum enhancement, community outreach, and STEM education opportunities that benefit both students and tribal communities across the Black Hills and beyond. Together, these efforts create an environment where American Indian students can thrive academically, professionally, and culturally.

SDM Recruitment, Retention, and Support:

- **Opportunity Center's Office of Multicultural Affairs General Services**

The Center provides direct student support services for all students, including self-identified American Indian students, first-generation, non-traditional, and underrepresented groups. Support services include, but are not limited to, scholarship alerts, internship/co-op information, and opportunities for leadership and professional development. Additionally, per donor wishes, the office maintains a student assistance fund to help students pay for education, school supplies, food, and emergencies.

This office also provides leadership and helps facilitate the coordination of programs for underrepresented groups, including those related to American Indian students. The office reaches out to all students by hosting cultural programming through the four professional student national organizations, inviting students, faculty, and staff to expand their cultural knowledge. In addition, several departments partner with the Center to support campus culture initiatives for the entire Mines community.

- **Opportunity Center's Pre-Orientation and Mentor Program**

This program invites self-identified American Indian students, including non-traditional and transfer students, to participate in a pre-orientation mentorship program that spans their entire first year at Mines. At the start of the fall semester, students arrive on campus the week before classes begin to acclimate to college life. The Residence Life Office allows students to move in prior to the official "Move-in Day". During this time, students attend sessions to become oriented to their class schedule, meet their advisors, be paired with mentors, build relationships, and learn how to succeed in college. Mentors check in with mentees throughout their entire first academic year.

- **Admissions Tours for American Indian High Schoolers**

The South Dakota Mines Admissions Office makes concerted efforts to connect with high school students, school counselors, and math and science teachers at both tribal high schools and high schools with high concentrations of American Indian students. These tours include visiting campus spaces, meeting Tiospaye Program graduates and AISES leaders, and participating in fun activities led primarily by an admissions counselor.

- **Tiospaye Scholar Program**

American Indian students at South Dakota Mines may qualify for the Tiospaye Scholar Program. This program is dedicated to increasing the number of American Indian students receiving STEM degrees by providing support in five areas: financial, academic, professional, cultural, and social. In the current version of the program, students in approved STEM majors are eligible to apply for the NSF All Nations AMP stipend after one semester of attendance. Students with cumulative GPAs exceeding 2.5, 3.0, and 3.5 are eligible to receive \$1200, \$2400, and \$3600 annually. Once AMP scholars confirm AISES membership, they become Tiospaye Scholars and are eligible for the support components.

Since its inception in 2009, the program has graduated 65 Tiospaye Scholars. Many have gone on to pursue master's degrees, as well as one PhD and one MD. The Tiospaye Scholar Program works closely with Admissions, Financial Aid, AISES, the Opportunity Center, Tribal Colleges, NSF REU Programs, and many faculty across campus. The

Tiospaye Scholar Program is housed on the garden level of the Devereaux Library and is co-located with the Industrial Engineering Department. In this location, Tiospaye Scholars have access to the Tiospaye Malone Study Rooms and study resources. Monthly Tiospaye Lunch Meetings provide interaction with summer research opportunities, company internships, additional scholarship opportunities, graduate school opportunities, and more. The Tiospaye Scholars are active in supporting recruiting visits by high schools on the reservations.

- **Campus Tribal Liaison**

The Associate Vice President for External Affairs in the President's Office serves as Liaison between the university and tribal schools and organizations, as well as serves as chair of the Crazy Horse Memorial Foundation Board. The Liaison has assisted in planning outreach events for tribal school students and frequently represents the university in discussions involving collaboration with tribal organizations. The Liaison now oversees the Tiospaye Program following the recent retirement of the previous Director.

- **American Indian Science & Engineering Society (AISES) Chapter**

South Dakota Mines has an award-winning AISES chapter that promotes excellence, leadership, and educational and professional development opportunities for students. Among their 40+ active members, AISES participates in national and regional conferences, scholarships, job placement assistance, internships and co-op opportunities, networking and social support, community service, and social events such as volleyball meetups and game nights. They are also heavily involved on campus, participating regularly in large annual Mines events, including the Student Org Fair, Wellness Fair, and Cultural Expo. The chapter also supports the Native Graduation Honoring Ceremony.

- **Native Graduation Honoring Ceremony**

The Office of Multicultural Affairs coordinates and sponsors the Native Honoring Ceremony, established in December 2008. This is a special ceremony held each spring. It celebrates and honors South Dakota Mines Native graduates by providing a traditional meal for graduates, family, and the invited community. Speakers are drawn from faculty, staff, alumni, and honorary guests from tribal communities. The Honoring Ceremony includes an invocation, prayers, songs, a traditional meal, and gifts from their families to the graduates.

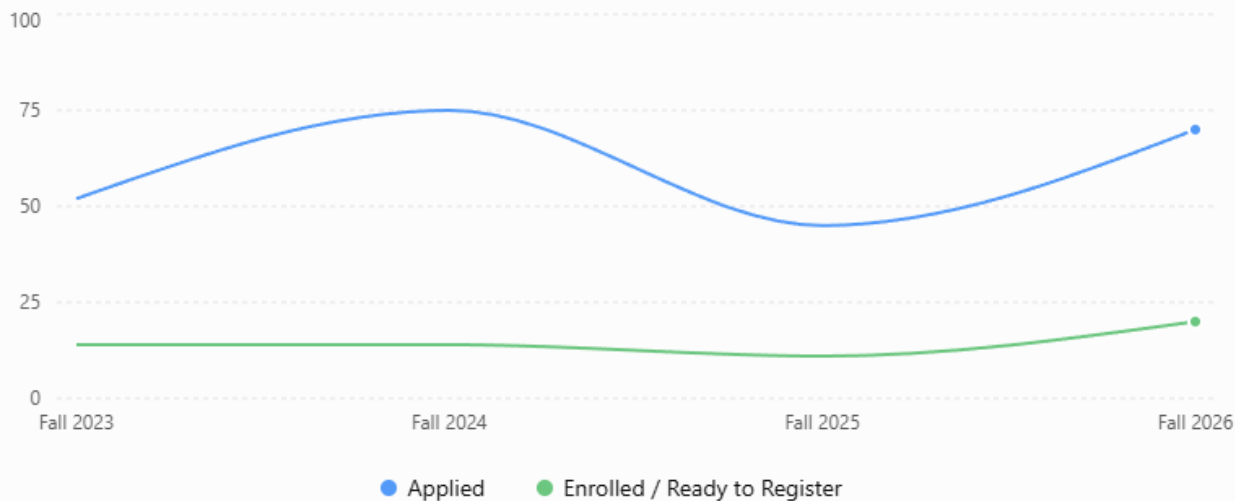
4-Year Enrollment Trends:

Native Freshman

- Fall 2026: 70 Freshman Applied/20 currently Ready to Register-planning to attend
- Fall 2025: 45 Freshman Applied/11 Enrolled
- Fall 2024: 75 Freshman Applied/14 Enrolled
- Fall 2023: 52 Freshman Applied/14 Enrolled

Freshman Applications and Enrollment Trends

Comparison of freshman applications and enrolled/ready-to-register students by fall term.



Quick observations:

- Fall 2026 currently has 70 Native applicants and 20 students ready to register, already exceeding enrollment figures from the previous three years.
- Applications peaked at 75 in Fall 2024 before dropping to 45 in Fall 2025 and rebounding to 70 in Fall 2026.
- The applicant-to-enrollment conversion appears strongest in Fall 2026 so far (20 of 70, approximately 29%) compared to:
 - Fall 2025: 11 of 45 (24%)
 - Fall 2024: 14 of 75 (19%)
 - Fall 2023: 14 of 52 (27%)
- Fall 2026 is on pace for a stronger incoming Native freshman class if current registration trends continue.

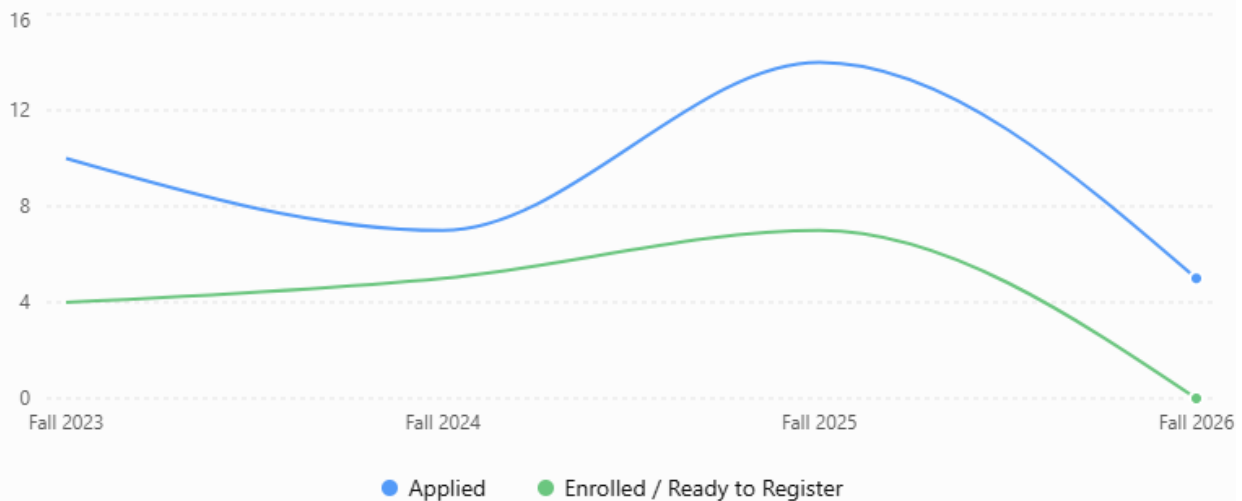
Fall 2026 is on pace for a stronger incoming Native freshman class if current registration trends continue.

Native Transfer Students

- Fall 2026: 5 Transfer/0 currently Ready to Register-planning to attend
- Fall 2025: 14 Transfer Applied/7 Enrolled
- Fall 2024: 7 Transfer Applied/5 Enrolled
- Fall 2023: 10 Transfer Applied/4 Enrolled

Transfer Applications and Enrollment Trends

Comparison of transfer student applications and enrolled/ready-to-register students by fall term.



Quick observations:

- Fall 2025 had the strongest transfer class in this dataset with 14 applicants and 7 enrolled.
- Fall 2024 had fewer applicants (7) but a relatively strong conversion rate with 5 enrolled.
- Fall 2026 currently shows 5 transfer applicants and 0 students ready to register, though that number may increase as the cycle progresses.
- Transfer enrollment has ranged between 4 and 7 Native students over the past four years, indicating a relatively stable but small transfer population.

2025-2026 Highlights and New Initiatives

- Began collaboration with the **Intertribal Agriculture Council** in April to connect students with agricultural, environmental, and natural resource career pathways serving Tribal Nations. We also shared their STEM summer internship opportunities with AISES members and Tiospaye Scholars who may remain in the area over the summer.
- Partnered with Tribal Colleges and Universities, including **Oglala Lakota College**, **Sinte Gleska University**, and **Crazy Horse Memorial University**, to develop educational pathways between institutions. We are also developing spring programming that will include collaboration with Crazy Horse Memorial University students prior to their April graduations.
- Sent four students to the **AISES National Conference** on October 2-4 in Minneapolis. We also tapped the AISES network by connecting students to national employers, professional mentors, research opportunities, and leadership development programs over the past year.
- Maintained close ties with industry partners through the **Tiospaye Scholar Program**,

exposing students to graduate education opportunities, research experiences, and STEM careers serving Tribal communities. This collaboration produced our Native Honoring Ceremony keynote speaker in May, as well as other honorary guests.

- Invited **K–12 programs, colleges, and tribal schools** for campus tours and events (since July 2025):
 - 353 high school students
 - 83 college students
 - 32 alumni and non-profit affiliates
- Hosted a **Rapid City Area Schools Engineering Camp** on January 27, which saw 84 visitors (up from 66 last year).
- Organized and shuttled four students to the annual fall **Volksmarch** on September 28, hiking up Crazy Horse Memorial. This was our third year participating, and a tradition we will continue to expand.
- Redesigned and grew the **Native Graduation Honoring Ceremony** held May 7. This included five graduates, their families, friends, and honorary guests (roughly 60 guests in total). The week leading up to commencement also included a Tipi Raising Ceremony on May 5, which involved an educational component.
- Continued partnering with the **Black Hills Clean Water Alliance, Great Plains Tribal Water Alliance, and Black Hills Center for American Indian Health**, among other regional entities and stakeholders, to engage students in conversations surrounding environmental stewardship, water resources, community sustainability, and personal health. We also maintained close ties with our regional engineering, mining, construction, and manufacturing employers, such as **Nucor** and **Scull Construction**, that provide internships, co-ops, scholarships, and employment opportunities for Native STEM students.

In alignment with SDCL 13-53-54, South Dakota State University (SDSU) offers programs via its American Indian Student Center (AISC) to provide culturally appropriate retention advising and programming to positively impact the recruitment and retention of all students, with an emphasis on those enrolled in one or more of our nine tribal nations in South Dakota. The AISC is led by the Larson Family Endowed Director of American Indian Student Success and Engagement, with the assistance of two Student Success Advisors. Additionally, the university's Coordinator of Recruitment works directly with prospective students, with a focus on students enrolled in South Dakota's nine federally recognized tribal nations, supporting students through exploration of SDSU and onboarding to the university.

The Student Success Advisors are key members of the Student Success Network of the Wintroe Student Success and Opportunity Center. The AISC provides social, cultural, and academic programming and support for SDSU students. Key programs and support include the following:

- The AISC First Year Experience utilizes Indigenous methodology to inform program components to allow student participants opportunities to establish campus connections, create lifelong friendships, and build a support system to facilitate the transition to SDSU and enhance their overall academic experience. It consists of the following components:
 - Welcome Week is an early orientation program that allows students to arrive on campus prior to the start of the fall semester. Students meet with their academic advisor, AISC staff, and current SDSU upperclassmen before the start of classes. They participate in activities designed to help them become acclimated to campus. They also learn valuable skills and connect with resources that will help them be successful at SDSU.
 - Oyate Yuwitaya Tipi (the tribes/people live together) Living Learning Community (OYT LLC) is designed for first- and second-year students who are enrolled or are eligible to be enrolled in federally recognized tribes. Wokini Scholars are expected to live in the OYT LLC, or another LLC currently established at SDSU connected to their academic program, their first year to work toward building connections and a sense of belonging with other students who share similar life experiences.
 - SDSU's Artist-In-Residence Program is a three-day program that allows students, staff, and the community to connect with Indigenous artists through luncheons, workshops, and presentations.

The AISC team advises two registered student organizations: the American Indian Student Association (AISA) and the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES). AISA focuses on cultural and social connections to foster a strong sense of community. They also host the SDSU Annual Wetu Wacipi. The SDSU AISES Chapter focuses on professional development opportunities for its members. The chapter engages in fundraising efforts and community outreach to support these professional development activities. Both groups host and participate in programs that increase awareness of issues impacting Indigenous peoples, and membership is open to all SDSU students. 25 students were inspired to seek leadership roles through these organizations during the 2025-2026 academic year.

The Wokini Initiative: A New Beginning is SDSU's collaborative, holistic framework for supporting American Indian student success. Wokini is a collaborative effort that supports SDSU's historic land grant mission through improving American Indian and Indigenous student enrollment and success; offering professional development opportunities to increase knowledge and understanding of Oceti Sakowin history, culture, language, and contemporary issues; and strengthening university partnerships with tribal communities and peoples, cultural organizations, and local communities.

The number of Wokini Scholars increased from 15 in fall 2018 to 158 in fall 2025. Efforts instrumental to this success have included the USDA-NIFA/Igluwiyea Grant, which has supported the Wokini Initiative-Sinte Gleska University partnership, and a recently finalized \$1M Margarette A. Cargill Philanthropic Grant to support a welcoming environment on the SDSU campus.

Wokini Challenge Grants were awarded to six projects in 2023 and eight in 2024 to various collaborating units within SDSU to support American Indian student leadership development, student success, networking and relationship-building, and the enhancement of research and extension programming with tribal communities. Wokini continues to bring various partners together to create connections on and off campus. Wokini Initiative networking opportunities include partnerships with the Levitt at the Falls, the He Sapa Wacipi/Black Hills Powwow, and the Lakota Nation Invitational (LNI), as well as collaborations with Tribal Colleges and Universities.

As part of the Wokini Initiative, the university has appointed a Coordinator of Recruitment within the Office of Admissions, with a collaborative relationship with the AISC, focusing on recruitment and enrollment. This staff member supports students as they explore pathways in higher education; promotes the university's opportunities to students, families, and partners across the state through recruitment outreach; plans and orchestrates opportunities for prospective students to engage with the university; and supports students as they navigate the college search and enrollment processes.

The American Indian and Indigenous Studies (AIIS) program, which is housed in the School of American & Global Studies, works toward mutual goals with the AISC and the Wokini Initiative. The AIIS program is committed to broadening students' knowledge of the histories, languages, cultures, arts, and contemporary situations of American Indian nations and peoples, with an emphasis on the historical and contemporary significance of American Indian experiences. AIIS students engage with American Indian communities within domestic contexts, and graduates pursue advanced degrees or careers in tribal, state, or federal government, nonprofit organizations, and community development. The AIIS major offers flexibility and can easily be paired with another major, making it a meaningful complement to a wide range of academic pathways for SDSU's Native and non-Native students alike.

SDSU's Oceti Sakowin language program offers the only academic credentials in the South Dakota Board of Regents system, including a Basic Oceti Sakowin Language Proficiency Certificate and a Minor in Oceti Sakowin Language. In support of K-12 and community

language revitalization efforts, SDSU is now an SDDOE site authorized to recommend candidates for the South Dakota Native American Lakota, Dakota, Nakota Language and Culture teaching permit, directly addressing state certification needs and expanding pathways for language educators in Indigenous communities. In May, we graduated our first cohort of students to attain the Oceti Sakowin Language minor and recommended our first candidate for the L/D/N teaching certification, a significant milestone in the university's commitment to Indigenous language revitalization. While we join a growing number of Indigenous language revitalization programs nationwide, our programs are distinctive in the SDBOR context and represent SDSU's unique capacity to serve students with ties to South Dakota's nine tribal nations.

In addition to the recruiting and retention activities offered by the AISC and Wokini Initiative, SDSU supports students pursuing nursing degrees through the Native American Nursing Education Center (NANEC). The NANEC provides programming designed to help students enrolled in nursing programs thrive and flourish. Some of the NANEC programming opportunities include:

RN to BSN Mentoring

- Undergraduate Nurse Mentoring
- Graduate Nurse Mentoring
- Wohanpi na Wounspe (Soup and Learn) - Open to all SDSU nursing students, staff, faculty, and the public. This professional development opportunity promotes cultural education, awareness, and competency grounded in Lakota culture and values.
- You' Nihanp Ceremony - The ceremony signifies recognition of achievement for students for having completed their nursing program and acknowledgment of the responsibility of professional nurses.
- Wicozani Otipi - A place inspired by Lakota artwork for nursing students, faculty, and staff to rejuvenate and relax.
- Nursing Oíčhimani (The Journey into Nursing)- SDSU-NANEC Pre-Nursing Summit was created in the summer of 2025 to welcome and prepare prospective pre-nursing students from several tribal schools to prepare them for college.

SDSU has several active and recently completed grants to develop and support programming that aids in the retention and recruitment of students:

- NIFA/USDA New Beginnings for Tribal Students: Igluwiyea (Prepare Oneself) – Continuing Pathways from Preparation to Graduation at Land-Grant Institutions
Purpose: This project focuses on engagement and community building to improve Indigenous student success and create educational pathways and resources that promote access to higher education.
- NIFA/USDA New Beginnings for Tribal Students: Oyate Awáŋwáka (Taking Care of the People) Project
Purpose: The purpose of the Oyate Awáŋwáka project is to provide specialized support to Native American students as they transition from Oglala Lakota College (OLC) into SDSU's RN to B.S.N. program and complete baccalaureate studies.
- Indian Health Service (IHS) American Indians into Nursing: Wicozani: A Place of Health and Balance
Purpose: This project's purpose is to recruit, retain, and graduate both RNs and nurse

practitioners to increase the number of nurses available to deliver healthcare services to tribal communities in South Dakota and the region.

- John T. Vucurevich Funding: Stronger Together: The Power of Intentional Mentors & Academic Tiospaye (Extended Family)

Purpose: This grant supports NANEK operations.

The University of South Dakota (USD) maintains a longstanding and deeply rooted commitment to supporting Native American and Indigenous students through a comprehensive network of academic, cultural, and community-based initiatives. This commitment is embodied most visibly through Native Student Services (NSS), housed within the Native American Cultural Center (NACC), which serves as a central hub for culturally grounded student support. Together with campus partners, tribal communities, and national organizations, USD works to ensure that Native students experience a welcoming, affirming, and academically supportive environment from their first point of contact through graduation.

Native American Retention Team

At the heart of this work is the Native Student Retention Team, a coordinated group of professionals who guide Native students through their academic journey. The Director of Native Student Services oversees the division and the daily operations of the NACC, maintains relationships with tribal nations across the region, provides campuswide training, and offers individualized support to students. The Director also sits on the University's Retention and Persistence Committee, which oversees retention data and efforts to improve retention and graduation rates. The Coordinator of Native Student Services assists the Director of Native Student Services in managing the NACC's daily operations. In addition, the coordinator collaborates across campus to design and implement programming that strengthens belonging, community, and academic success for Native students. The Director of Native Recruitment and Alumni Engagement supports admissions and transition processes for incoming Native students, assists with housing and financial aid navigation, and maintains engagement with more than 1,500 Native alumni. This position also oversees the Wiyuskinyan Unpi Tipi Living Learning Community. Complementing these roles, the Native Student Advisor in the Academic Advising & Success Center provides holistic academic advising from orientation through graduation and teaches a First Year Experience course designed specifically for Native students. The advisor spends 10-15 hours physically at the NACC to develop closer relationships with students and staff.

Native American Cultural Center

The Native American Cultural Center itself serves as a home away from home for many students, including those who do not identify as Native. It is a space where kinship, cultural practices, and community needs are prioritized. Conveniently located in a house across the street from campus, the space provides a haven from the pressures of academic life. Students use the NACC to study, meet, gather, and participate in cultural and social programming. The center hosts community dinners, workshops, speakers, and cultural events that foster a sense of belonging and strengthen connections among students, faculty, and tribal communities.

First-year Living Learning Community

USD's commitment to culturally grounded residential experiences is further demonstrated through the Wiyuskinyan Unpi Tipi Living Learning Community, established in 2021. Students live in close proximity in the North Complex halls and often enroll in the Connecting Cultures first-year experience course together. Meaning "Where They Live Contently," the community

provides a supportive environment for Native American and Indigenous students as well as students studying Native American Studies. Programming within the LLC centers on cultural preservation, tribal sovereignty, language revitalization, and community leadership. During the 2025–2026 academic year, the community supported over 50 students, making it one of USD’s most active and impactful living learning environments on campus.

First-year Experience

Native Student Services also leads a range of academic and cultural programs designed to strengthen student success. The Early Scholars Program, offered in partnership with TRIO Student Support Services and the Opportunity Center, provides early move-in and orientation support for first-year and transfer students. The First Year Experience course, entitled Connecting Cultures and taught by the Native Student Advisor, introduces students to academic strategies, campus resources, and peer networks within a cohort-based environment.

The Iwacinyehci Peer Mentoring Program pairs new students with upper-class Native mentors who have successfully navigated the transition to university life, fostering a strong sense of belonging and community. Mentors in the program assist mentees by connecting them with campus resources, faculty, and cultural support groups, such as the Tiospaye Student Council.

Student Organizations

Student organizations also play a vital role in strengthening Native student leadership and visibility on campus. The Tiospaye Student Council encourages leadership development, promotes Native American life on campus, and hosts the annual Wacipi—now in its 52nd year and the longest-running higher education Wacipi in South Dakota. The American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) and the Society for the Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS) provide professional networking, research opportunities, and community outreach in STEM fields. These organizations often collaborate to support shared goals and expand opportunities for students.

Finally, each spring, NSS organizes the annual Native Graduate Honoring to celebrate the accomplishments of graduating Indigenous students while highlighting their cultural heritage. The ceremony celebrates Native graduates, Native Studies majors, and student leaders. The Honoring typically features traditional regalia, honor songs, guest speakers, and the presentation of specialized, culturally significant stoles to the graduates. The event is a campus tradition that welcomes families, faculty, and supporters to celebrate the hard work and resilience of Native students. Twenty-six students across all academic levels were honored in May 2026.

Academics

The Institute of American Indian Studies (IAIS) further strengthens USD’s commitment to Indigenous education and research. The Institute also collaborates with the USD Native Studies Department, Native scholars, and other campus partners to enrich academic and cultural programming across USD and the Vermillion community. IAIS administers the Glenn E. and Barbara R. Ulliyot Lakota Scholarship, awarding \$20,000 over four years to incoming freshmen, and supports additional scholarships for Native students. In partnership with the Director of Tribal Relations and the USD Archives in ID Weeks Library, IAIS recently hosted its first annual statewide gathering of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers at USD, strengthening

relationships with tribal nations. IAIS also provides cultural programming, including beading, quillwork, ribbon skirt making, and other traditional arts, and invites cultural experts to campus to share their knowledge. Finally, the Director of Tribal Relations and the Director of IAIS also attend the Lakota Nation Invitational every December to connect with tribal representatives.

USD's commitment to Native arts and cultural preservation is also reflected in the Oscar Howe Summer Art Institute (OHSOI), which provides high school students with immersive arts education rooted in American Indian culture. Students attend free of charge and receive instruction from prominent Native artists while building community and artistic skills.

The Annual Oscar Howe Memorial Lecture was established in 1989 by USD to help perpetuate Howe's message that Native American art is a vital cultural force in today's world and to promote cutting-edge Indian art on the Northern Plains. Oscar Howe, Yanktonai Dakota, served as USD artist-in-residence and art faculty member for 25 years, bringing international recognition to both the university and the state of South Dakota. The 36th annual lecture was given by Dr. Delphine Red Shirt.

Additional opportunities for Native students to engage in research and creative scholarship are available through the South Dakota Oral History Center, which houses the American Indian Research Project and offers scholarships and internships; the Graduate Research Training Initiative for Student Enhancement (GRISE), which supports students from underrepresented groups in STEM; and SD Rise Up, a national partnership that introduces students to public health leadership experiences.

Beyond undergraduate education, the USD Sanford School of Medicine (SSOM) advances Native student success in healthcare fields through several initiatives. USD serves as a satellite site for the Indians Into Medicine (INMED) program, offering academic preparation, mentorship, and support for Native students pursuing medical careers. SSOM reserves two seats for incoming INMED medical students and provides ongoing support through monthly meetings, conference participation, and access to the Avera Health American Indian Scholarship, awarded annually to an incoming Native medical student. SSOM also partners with the South Dakota Department of Education and Department of Health to host Scrubs Camps, including long-standing programming in Pine Ridge, to introduce high school students to healthcare careers.

The University of South Dakota Knudson School of Law offers an Indian Law Certificate. The certificate program will give graduates a tangible credential that will assist them in holding careers working for tribes in-house, firms that serve tribes, and other related areas. Students who complete the Indian Law Certificate program will be fluent in federal Indian law and develop expertise in the federal legal framework governing tribal gaming enterprises, as well as in individual Native will drafting. Over the last year, the Native American Law Student Association hosted monthly speakers through the "Indian Law: Advocates and Allies Speaker Series" to give current law students more opportunities to learn about what's happening in Indian law. The student organization also hosted a Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives (MMIR) Walk for Awareness and multiple fundraisers centered around Native American traditions.

2025-26 Highlights

- Recent initiatives further demonstrate USD's expanding commitment to Native student success. USD and the Vermillion School District were awarded a \$75,000 annual grant from the Clayton and Odessa Lang Ofstad Foundation to strengthen Native student pathways, family engagement, and culturally responsive programming.
- Native Student Services continues to provide leadership at the Lakota Nations Education Conference, offering sessions on culturally responsive teaching, Native student success, and Lakota language and culture.
- The Institute of American Indian Studies continues to expand its cultural programming and Indigenous-centered research support, reinforcing USD's role as a statewide leader in Indigenous education.
- USD's AISES (American Indian Science & Engineering Society) student chapter was awarded the BOR Community Services Award.

Together, these programs, partnerships, and initiatives reflect USD's comprehensive and evolving commitment to Native American and Indigenous students. Through culturally grounded support, academic guidance, community engagement, and strong relationships with tribal nations, USD continues to strengthen pathways to student success and foster an environment where Native students can thrive academically, socially, and culturally.