



**Written Testimony of Dr. Brad Hall, President, Blackfeet Community College
Submitted to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies
For the hearing titled: Preparing for the Future: America's Community Colleges**

Filed: February 24, 2026

Introduction. Blackfeet Community College (BFCC), a Tribally controlled, Land-Grant institution in Browning, Montana, provides accessible, high-quality education rooted in Blackfeet culture and values. Accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, BFCC offers in-person and online programs that support academics, workforce development, cultural preservation, and lifelong learning for all students across the Blackfeet Nation and beyond.

When it comes to size and impact, BFCC is small but mighty! For our Fall 2025 semester, we enrolled 362 students, a 14% increase above our Fall 2024 enrollment. We succeed in large part because we offer students a welcoming, supportive environment with a 13:1 student-to-faculty ratio paired with very affordable tuition: just \$3,610 for the entire academic year.

BFCC is deeply committed to advancing Tribal and rural prosperity by eliminating the financial, academic, and health and wellness barriers students face. Because 67% of our students receive federal Pell Grants, a core strategy is to provide paid internships and emergency aid to directly alleviate financial hardship and prevent enrollment loss.

Successes: Workforce Development and Career and Technical Education Paired With Industry and Community Partnerships Creates Significant Positive Economic Impacts.

BFCC's key programs that directly lead to employment include the Industry Trades certificate (and planned pathways), which equips students with essential skills for the building trades and directly addresses regional labor gaps; Nursing, which responds to persistent shortages in the health sector; Class 7 Teacher Certification, which prepares local educators to serve in Tribal and

rural schools; and programs in Legal Studies and Anthropology, which strengthen Tribal governance and natural resource stewardship. By concentrating on these critical areas, BFCC is effectively laying a robust foundation for strong, self-reliant economic growth in the region.

All of BFCC's programs of study are aligned with the demonstrated needs of our local community, workforce opportunities and cultural revitalization efforts. These combined efforts guide the future development of the college to enhance access to trades, job placement and emerging economic trends of the Blackfeet Nation and our expanding service area, through a strong emphasis on hybrid, land-based and experiential learning.

BFCC has entered into a paid internship agreement with community employers and non-profit organizations. A recent example is with Pursuit, which is providing summer project-based paid internships for BFCC students at the East Glacier Park Lodge, focusing on gardening, engineering, culinary, and hotel management. This partnership will also be instrumental in the college's future development of hospitality and tourism programs that connect students to meaningful career-aligned employment opportunities.

All of these successes for individual students add up to significant financial benefits for the local community, the state economy, and the nation as a whole. In September of 2025, the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) published an economic study highlighting the impact of Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs). The study, titled: *Building Local Economies of Scale: The Impact of Tribal Colleges & Universities in Rural America*, found that in Fiscal Year (FY) 2022-2023, TCU alumni accounted for \$3.8 billion in economic impact across the country – the equivalent of supporting 40,732 jobs nationwide. Looking only at BFCC's impact during that same period, the study found that our alumni contributed \$15 million to the Blackfeet Indian Reservation economy – the equivalent of supporting 391 jobs. For every \$1.00 spent on

BFCC, students gain \$5.20 in lifetime earnings, U.S. taxpayers gain \$1.02 in additional tax revenue and public sector savings, society gains \$2.90 in additional income and social savings, and Montana taxpayers gain \$3.5 million in additional tax revenue and public sector savings. Not a bad return on investment!

The important role of the Pell Grant Program, Title III, and NACTEP. BFCC's student body is 61% full-time students and 39% part-time students, and 67% of our students receive federal Pell grants. Without the federal Pell grant program, the opportunities we provide would be out of reach for most of our students. We applaud Congress for using the One Big Beautiful Bill Act to appropriate additional funding to the Pell grant program to prevent a near-term shortfall and for creating a new category of Pell grant we are excited to participate in: Workforce Pell. We would also especially like to thank this Subcommittee and your Senate counterparts for keeping the maximum Pell grant award level in place for FY 2026. **Going forward, we ask that you appropriate additional funding to shore up the Pell grant program for the long term, while refraining from making any eligibility changes that would limit access.** For example, some of the changes proposed this past summer to increase the credit hour eligibility threshold for part-time and full-time students would have been devastating to our students, many of whom are already balancing significant work and family obligations while going to school, and are simply not in a position to take on more credit hours just to qualify for Pell.

The Title III - Strengthening Tribal Colleges and Universities, parts A and F, funds are some of the most flexible and important funds TCUs receive each fiscal year. Title III funds can be used for everything from scientific equipment, to facility construction, to student tutoring, to library books. Because TCUs operate on such limited budgets, largely without any endowments, wealthy alumni networks, or state support to speak of, any interruption, reduction, or delay in

these funds would be devastating. If, for some reason, our Title III funds were to disappear, every single TCU would have to close its doors. **We would like to thank this Subcommittee and your Senate counterparts for appropriating strong, consistent Title III funding in FY 2026, and we ask that this continue in FY 2027.**

While the Native American Career and Technical Education Program (NACTEP) is not specifically for TCUs, we are among the eligible entities, and especially here at BFCC, NACTEP plays an outsized role in our students' success. Our current NACTEP Program supports students enrolled in the following programs of study: AS Hydrology, One Year Certificate in Records Management and AS in Blackfeet Legal Studies. This program provides funding for faculty, comprehensive student support services, and operates a Career Center to support employment readiness upon graduation. We are evolving this program in our new application to provide similar services for our Nursing BSN program, One-year Certificate in Industry Trades and Class 7 Teacher Certification, which develops local educators to become state-certified to teach the Blackfeet Culture and Language as local schools advance language immersion and cultural programs. **We would like to thank this Subcommittee and your Senate counterparts for appropriating strong, consistent NACTEP funding in FY 2026, and we ask that this continue in FY 2027.**

Challenges. BFCC has operated on the funding that we receive primarily from the Department of the Interior, Department of Education, and the Department of Agriculture as a 1994 Land Grant Institution. Over the last year, our campus has faced significant uncertainty due to shifts in federal funding and administrative policies. Any uncertainty or delay in funding, as witnessed over the last year, directly undermines our college's ability to maintain the consistency of

programs and services, ensure employees jobs are protected, and continue to grow our campuses to meet the evolving needs of the “Universal Community” we serve.

All TCU’s are open enrollment institutions, any student who wants to, can attend a Tribal College; this is what makes us important drivers of economic, inclusive prosperity to residents in our states and the regions we serve. TCU’s remain chronically underfunded, compared to other institutions of higher education in our states and among other Land-Grant Institutions. Our colleges stand as anchors for opportunity in rural and underserved regions where, in many cases, we are the only institution of higher education within hundreds of miles. Continued and increased funding opportunities will enhance what we already do and also fulfill our obligations to our tribal nations, one student success at a time.

Opportunities. BFCC urgently needs a modern facility for our Industry Trades Program to ensure student success and meet regional workforce demand. The new space would include specialized workstations for carpentry, welding, plumbing, and electrical work, along with essential hands-on materials such as lumber, piping, and wiring. This investment will expand the current one-year certificate into stackable two-year pathways, offer additional licenses, and provide practical training that drives local economic growth. By producing qualified, skilled labor to fill critical roles, this facility will reduce reliance on outside contractors, close workforce gaps, and empower graduates to secure well-paying careers, thereby strengthening the region’s long-term economic stability and self-sufficiency.

Conclusion. Thank you for including TCUs among the community college witnesses for this important hearing. BFCC remains committed to working collaboratively with the Subcommittee as a trusted resource to ensure that Tribal Nations and Tribal citizens have a say in shaping their education and their future.