

Oglala Lakota College
“Beating the Odds” to Improve Student Success
Innovative Approaches Show Promise in
Increasing College Completion for Underrepresented Students

Kyle, SD: Oglala Lakota College is recognized nationally for “beating the odds” in helping students most prone to dropping out of college stay on track toward graduation. In a new national report published by HCM Strategists, a Washington, D.C. public policy advocacy firm, Oglala Lakota College is profiled along with more than 30 postsecondary institutions for its efforts to improve college completion rates and prepare students for successful careers.

The unfortunate reality is that approximately 2.2 million students will enroll as full-time freshmen in America’s colleges and universities this fall, but less than 60 percent will earn a four-year degree within six years and less than 30 percent will earn a two-year degree within three years. It is even worse for low-income and minority students, putting America further behind in meeting future workforce needs.

According to the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, nearly two-thirds of available jobs by 2018 will require some sort of postsecondary education. Employers are expected to need nearly 22 million new workers with postsecondary degrees, but colleges will fall short of meeting that need by 3 million graduates.

[*Beating the Odds: What It Means and Why It’s Important*](#), developed with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is the result of a series of conversations with leaders from 32 postsecondary institutions about what colleges must do to help students – particularly low-income, minority and adult students – successfully earn a degree. Each of the colleges and universities featured in the report is considered a national model for their approaches to boost completion rates.

“The odds of a low-income American completing college haven’t changed in at least 20 years,” said Kristin Conklin, founding partner at HCM Strategists. “Oglala Lakota College is demonstrating how to beat those odds, ensure student success and help our economy recover. Today these campuses are the exception. The *Beating the Odds* provides a blueprint for others to follow and help change the exception to the rule in postsecondary education.”

Unemployment on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation makes it difficult for students to complete school. Families are characterized as single-parent, reducing the ability of women to attend school. Native American youth require more remedial education than the overall average. This increases the time or number of credit hours to completion. OLC established a Foundational Studies Department in 2006 to address remedial education for reentering students in a coordinated and consistent method. More than 65% of entering freshmen at

OLC require some remedial education to prepare them for college level coursework. Student success in these remedial courses leads directly to program completion in higher education.

OLC maintains a conservative approach toward financing the educational needs of students. Financial aid through the college is limited to endowed scholarships, the American Indian College Fund as well as federal Pell Grants. Student loan programs are not supported because of the repayment burden that a cash poor reservation economy cannot service. OLC goes one step further and offers waiver of Native American students tuition-due balances through the generous support of donors across the country to the Student Success Fund and to an endowed scholarship fund. Distance education is an important initiative to increase on-time completion because of the large geographic area served by OLC on the Pine Ridge and Cheyenne River Indian Reservation as well as the Extension Center in the Black Hills.

“It does not come as a surprise that the OLC has been recognized as one of 32 colleges/universities across the country as “beating the odds” in helping our students reach one of the most important days on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation – graduation day,” stated OLC’s President Thomas Shortbull. He goes on to say, “The faculty, staff, students and the Board of Trustees at OLC stand ready to meet all challenges when it comes to making sure that our students receive a quality education. You see, we are rebuilding the Lakota Nation one student, one graduate at a time.”

With 40 years of providing higher education to the Lakota people OLC has graduated over 3000 students and continues to build upon this success. In 2011 OLC issued 204 diplomas and certificates as compared to 133 in 2009 and 155 in 2010. OLC enrolled over 1800 students in the Fall semesters of 2009 and 2010, the largest enrollment ever over a 5 year period. This comes at a time when colleges and universities are seeing a drop in enrollment and graduates.

The institutions featured in the *Beating the Odds* report represent different sizes, sectors and programs, but share a similar focus on serving a low-income, minority and mobile student population and improving persistently low degree attainment rates. The report identified four key approaches that are necessary for postsecondary institutions to dramatically improve student success:

- **Help students prepare for the rigors of college**, including summer-bridge and dual-enrollment programs, career and college-ready coordination and better credit-transfer policies.
- **Focus on retention through student support**, including redesigning courses – like remedial education – and providing targeted and comprehensive support services like academic advising and counseling.

- **Find new and innovative ways for students to access postsecondary education** by more effectively serving the unique needs of today's students and keeping them on track to graduation.
- **Demonstrate leadership in creating a culture of completion** by uniting the campus in a shared responsibility for student success and completion.

Future conversations are expected to continue the Beating the Odds effort and share strategies and policies aimed at improving the odds of success in higher education. A video of the September 2010 convening is available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=nby7bs99XuQ. An additional platform for sharing resources and best practices is available at www.completionmatters.org.