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Wokini Initiative: The New Beginnings Newsletter

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The New Beginnings Newsletter, May 2020

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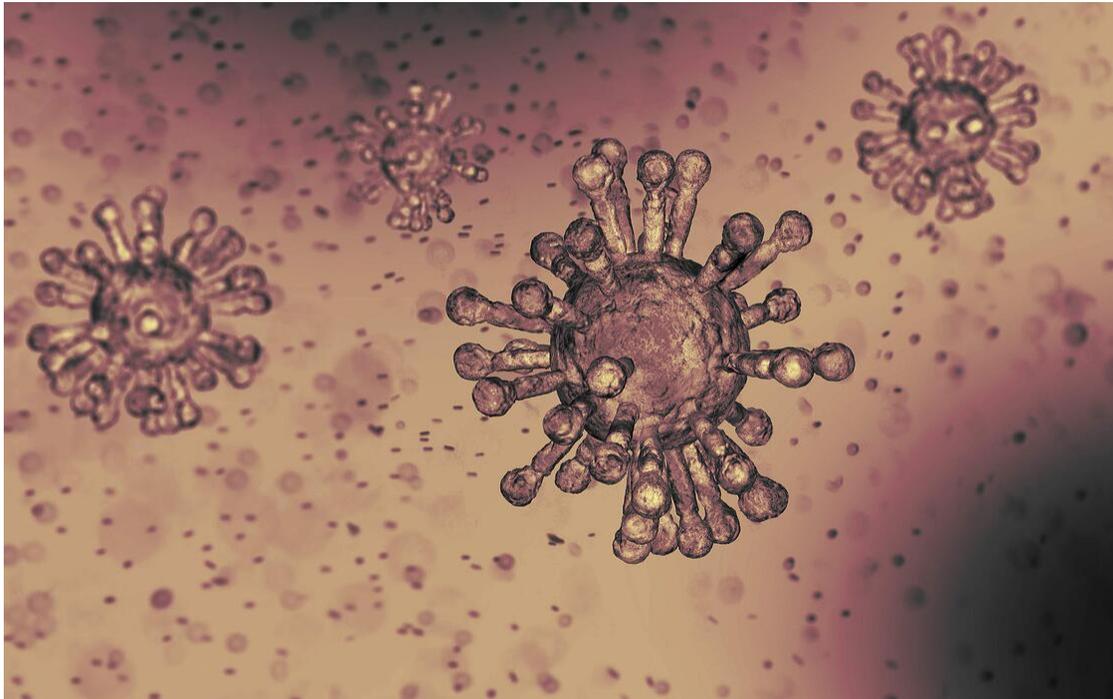
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THE NEW BEGINNINGS NEWSLETTER



SOUTH DAKOTA
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**WOKINI
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A NEW BEGINNING
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Coronavirus in Indian Country

The coronavirus pandemic has led to significant changes in the social lives of everyone on the globe and challenges healthcare systems, governments, small businesses, and economies. The same is true of American Indian communities across the nation, for whom the coronavirus poses unique challenges and extra dangers. The coronavirus pandemic makes apparent the continuing social and economic disparities that plague Indian country, yet it also highlights the unique strengths and forms of resilience that American Indian communities possess.

Many of the challenges and dangers of the pandemic are exacerbated by health disparities and economic inequalities that Indian country continues to struggle against.

The Indian Health Service (IHS), the federal health agency that serves 2.5 million Native Americans, is particularly well known in Indian country for being chronically underfunded and suffers from high rates of leadership turnover, outdated electronic health record systems, and staff shortages. Congress approved an additional \$2 billion in funding for the IHS to combat the virus, but it is not clear if money alone will be able to overcome the persistent organizational problems that affect the IHS's ability to provide tests, accurate data on infections, and care to victims of coronavirus. Early on in the pandemic, many IHS staff were removed from service in IHS facilities to serve elsewhere, which aggravated an already existing staff shortage. The pandemic also poses a risk to American Indians because American Indians are more likely to have preexisting health conditions, live in housing that is overcrowded and that lacks indoor plumbing.

During the month of April, many of the biggest stories coming from Indian Country centered on controversies related to accessing coronavirus emergency relief funds. Several tribes sued the federal government after learning that a portion of the funds would be directed towards for-profit Alaskan Native corporations rather than entirely towards tribal governments. In another surprising case, tribal data given to the U.S. government to apply for coronavirus aid was leaked to non-federal government employees, attorneys and lobbyists. This data breach is yet another episode in a long history of tribal struggle for data sovereignty.

While the global pandemic exposes the continuing health disparities and economic inequalities that exist for American Indians, it has also brought out many positive examples of indigenous solidarity and resilience. The Facebook group 'Social Distance Powwow' was created so that native people from around the nation and the world could come together to support each other and view and compete in online powwows during the COVID-19 pandemic, but in less than two months it has evolved into so much more! The social media platform allows American Indians to support each other spiritually, emotionally and financially. The group has become a platform for indigenous people to connect with one another to support indigenous healthcare workers and other frontline staff as well as veterans, "boys with braids", and people

celebrating birthdays during the pandemic. The page has become a great way to promote indigenous arts, handmade jewelry and clothing and indigenous owned businesses. The page was created on March 16th by Dan Simonds (Mashantucket Pequot), Whitney Rencountre (Crow Creek), and Stephanie Herbert (Mi'kmaq) and has since gained over 170,000 followers. Social distance powwow has become a viral sensation across Indian country and created a new form of indigenous solidarity whose influence will likely outlast the COVID pandemic.

Many native-run non-profits and social enterprises are doing important frontline work to help Indian Country through the pandemic. One of the founders of the social distance powwow page, Whitney Rencountre, is also the director of the Ateyapi YES Youth Mentoring Program which provides after school programming to at risk native students. This program has continued to provide food and supplies to 400 native families during the pandemic. The Cheyenne River Youth Project in the Cheyenne River Reservation is continuing to provide programming for children who lack social support and safe homes and is continuing to provide take out meals to community members.

People often consider crisis, pandemic, or natural disaster to be times of social disorder. However, these disruptions show more clearly than ever the ways we depend on one another for our health, economic well being and essential services. The pandemic shows that there is wisdom of the Lakota phrase 'mitakuye oyasin,' meaning, we are all connected.

Cancryn, Adam. "Where Coronavirus Could Find a Refuge: Native American Reservations." *POLITICO*, Politico, 28 Mar. 2020.

Fonseca, Felicia. "Tribes Sue over Distribution of Coronavirus Relief Funding." *Tulsa World*, Tulsa World News, 17 Apr. 2020.

Rickert, Levi. "CARES Act Tribal Data Breached: One Observer Calls It Indian Country's 'Watergate'." *Native News Online*, 20 Apr. 2020.

Trahant, Mark. "Cheyenne River Youth Project Continues to Offer Services During COVID-19 Pandemic." *Native News Online*, 18 Apr. 2020.



Tribal Spotlight: Sisseton Wahpeton

The Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate live on the Lake Traverse Reservation, located in the north eastern corner of the state of South Dakota. The reservation is home to the Sisseton and Wahpeton bands of the Isanti Dakota and currently has about 12,000 enrolled members.

The band names 'Sisseton' and 'Wahpeton' refer to the characteristics of the land that these bands used to inhabit. Wahpeton is the short version of wahpetonwan, a Dakota word meaning 'people dwelling among the leaves.' This description refers to the fact that the Wahpeton once lived in densely forested regions of Minnesota. Sissetonwan means 'people of the fish villages.' Before European and settler contact, the original territory of the Isanti Dakota stretched as far north as Manitoba in Canada and as far south as the present day border of Minnesota and Iowa.

The Sisseton-Wahpeton reservation was established shortly after the 1862 U.S. Dakota War. After the Dakota were expelled from Minnesota following the end of the war, many Dakota families were coerced by death threats from the US army to hunt

down other fugitive Dakota. The Lake Traverse Reservation was the base from which this operation was carried out. In the aftermath of these traumatic events, the Dakota remaining at Lake Traverse officially became part of a government recognized reservation in 1867.

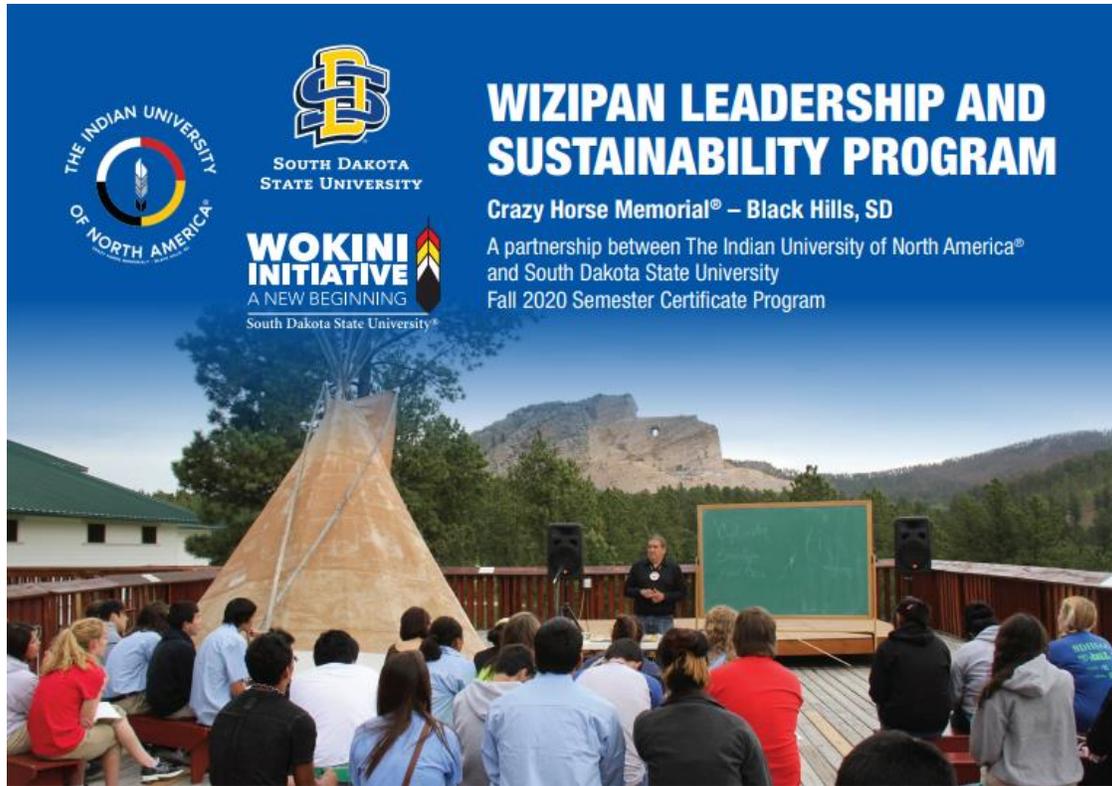
Lakota Language Instructor Position Available

The American Indian Studies Program, American Indian Student Center, and the Wokini Initiative have come together to offer an exciting career opportunity for a Lakota Language Instructor/Lecturer at our Brookings campus. We are looking for a creative individual grounded in Lakota culture, language, and communities to join our collaborative programs beginning in August of 2020. This is a nine-month, full-time, benefits-eligible position, supervised by School of American and Global Studies Director in the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.

SDSU is especially interested in candidates who can effectively contribute to and/or coordinate course offerings that address the experiences of underrepresented minorities in organizations and our university's understanding of Indigeneity, tribal relations, treaties, and sovereignty. Indigenous people, women, minorities, veterans, and people with disabilities are especially encouraged to apply.

For more information on this position and to apply, click [here](#).

The Wizipan Leadership and Sustainability Program



The Wikipan Leadership and Sustainability Program of The Indian University of North America® at Crazy Horse Memorial is a semester long experience through a partnership between the Crazy Horse Memorial Foundation and South Dakota State University. Wachante Hecha Wikipan in Lakota implies the Heart of Everything that Is, but Wikipan on its own, according to the late Lakota leader Albert White Hat, references the Black Hills as a container of all resources; any person that goes into the Black Hills starving can be nourished, both physically and spiritually. The program will begin on August 31st and end on December 16th. The experience is focused on Care of Self, Care of Community, Care of Environment, and Care of Culture.

The courses offered are designed to provide students with the skill sets needed to understand the role of leadership in their communities. Sustainability affords students the opportunity to ensure the well-being of their communities and future generations. The Wikipan Program is equivalent to a study abroad program, but offered at The Indian University of North America at the Crazy Horse Memorial®. Students will have

the opportunity to earn 15 credits and think critically about what sustainability and leadership in action can look like in their communities.

If you have advisees or know students who might qualify for this program, you can find more information and application instructions [here](#).

Wokini Spotlight: Amber Morseau



Amber Morseau is the Program Coordinator at the American Indian Student Center. In this role, she works with other departments, student groups, and organizations to plan and organize extracurricular activities for American Indian students. These extracurricular activities help American Indian students to develop a social network and explore different interests outside of the classroom.

Amber formerly worked as a graduate assistant in the Center for Multicultural Affairs at Eastern Michigan University. In this role, she was responsible for programming a broad range of multicultural events including Cultural Heritage Months, the Martin Luther King Day Celebration and Luncheon, Multicultural Graduation Celebration, and various fundraisers. Her favorite events to plan were in November, when she got to work with the Native American Student Organization to plan events related to Native American Heritage Month. By working with a broad range of student groups at Eastern Michigan University, Amber gained the experience needed to bring together multiple groups and create relationships that unified the campus community.

Amber is passionate about creating a supportive community of American Indian students because this is something she did not have during her own educational experience. Working with students who have a similar background to her, she sees the value of being a mentor and being available to help students navigate their own college experience.

Book of the Month: Real Indians, Identity and the Survival of Native America

Real Indians, Identity and the Survival of Native America by Eva Garroutte covers the racial ideologies which surround American Indians. The book shows how the racial category of American Indians is socially constructed through history and in relationship to various forms of colonial power. The book also puts emphasis on blood quantum and analyzes how this form of racial identification aligns with genocidal colonial programs. Garroutte goes on to show how the construction of American Indians as a race compares to other racial groups in the U.S. and shows how racial constructions are tied to political power. This book is ideal for anyone interested in the sociology of race and critical race studies.

Lakota Word of the Month

Čhaŋwápe Tǎó Wí (May) - The moon of green leaves
(Chan wah pay toe wee)



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