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Eighty Percent of The Indian University of North America 7th Gen Program Participants are Currently Enrolled in Higher Education or Have Graduated from College

CRAZY HORSE, SD (Apr. 5, 2020) — Crazy Horse Memorial announced today that 80 percent of past participants in its 7th Gen Summer Program have completed college or are currently enrolled in higher education, an increase of 3 percent over last year.

The 7th Gen Summer Program takes place each year at The Indian University of North America, a partnership between Crazy Horse Memorial and the University of South Dakota. The program provides select high school graduates with the opportunity to earn 12 college credits and gain experience through a paid internship position at Crazy Horse Memorial.

In addition to accepting up to 32 students into the first-year program, 7th Gen also welcomes select applicants who completed the first-year program to also complete the upper-level program. These students gain additional work-study experience through full-time, paid internships at Crazy Horse Memorial, and they earn additional college credits.

Crazy Horse Memorial funds the student tuition and books and the majority of student food and lodging costs for both programs. Students who attend do not need to rely on financial aid beyond that provided by Crazy Horse Memorial. They can fund their share of food and lodging costs through the paid internship.

The Indian University of North America is dedicated to improving Native American students' college graduation rates. Just 17 percent of Native high school students attend college; of those who do, graduation rates are 20 percent lower than that of non-Native students.

“Like many first-generation college graduates, our students benefit from the strong student support and success coaching provided by the faculty and staff while they are in our academic programs and beyond,” said Laurie Becvar, Crazy Horse Memorial’s president and chief operating officer. “Student success coaching and the annual research on college persistence and completion have been a part of The Indian University of North America since its inception in 2010. The follow-up is challenging and intense, but our team always does a great job with the research.”

Joshua Rudnik, director of The Indian University of North America, and Charlie Luecke, who serves as a student success coach were in charge of research for this year’s 7th Gen Summer Program College Persistence and Completion Report. Rudnik said it’s vital to gather this data and follow trends on Native higher education.

“Native students are often excluded from post-secondary data due to the small sample size, or because they’re grouped with others,” he explained. “We’re encouraged by the numbers in this year’s report, because we’re definitely seeing an uptick in Native students who completed or are currently enrolled in post-secondary education — they’re earning degrees and certificates, they’re completing trainings, they’re pursuing doctoral programs, and they’re studying abroad. And it’s clear that our success coaching is having a meaningful impact.”

Success coaching lies at the heart of 7th Gen, which is not just a summer program designed to fill the gap between high school graduation and the first semester of college or tech school. Students actually complete their first semester of college during the summer semester. It's a priceless opportunity for Native students to build long-term relationships with educators who also serve as mentors, role models, and friends.

"We are part of their educational village," said Rudnik, who has worked with Crazy Horse Memorial for six years. "We're here to help in a variety of ways, from assisting with resumes and applications to simply offering a word of encouragement when it's needed. We want to show our young people what's possible, and that success can be measured in a variety of ways. They might want to get a four-year degree, but they also can do great things and have successful careers on different paths."

Luecke, who joined 7th Gen in 2012, noted that nearly 300 students have completed the summer program to date. Due to the success coaching initiative, their involvement with 7th Gen extends far beyond the program itself.

"What I love most is the relationships with the students, and those don't end with the summer completion ceremony," he explained. "We help with scholarships, job recommendations, resumes, and portfolios. We consult with students who are interested in going on to graduate school. But we do much more than that."

"We build and maintain each student's educational village, their team," he continued. "Everyone needs a team in their corner. We understand that mental health is just as important as academic achievement, so we work with our students on success strategies like time management, weekend rejuvenation, exercise, and restorative sleep."

Summer is intense, Luecke said. Students are juggling classes, 24 hours of work each week, and campus and residential activities. It is, however, just the beginning.

"Whether you want success coaching or not, we'll be calling or emailing you anyway," Rudnik said with a laugh. "We never give up on trying to connect with our students, and we're committed on a year-round basis. This isn't just about one survey for research purposes. The students will build their own support systems as they move forward, but they'll always know we're here for them."

The Indian University of North America currently has contact with 262 of 295 former students, an impressive 89 percent.

"Covid has certainly had an impact on our students, and that has come out in conversations," Luecke said. "Some are working in health care and education, which is stressful. Others are managing hybrid and remote learning, which is difficult when they have to share bedrooms and live in multigenerational households with little work space. But I'm so pleased with their resilience, and we encourage them to rely on their educational village for support. Education is a collaborative adventure — our message to them is, 'You don't have to do this alone.'"

To learn more about Crazy Horse Memorial, to plan a visit, and for information about making a contribution, call (605) 673-4681 or visit crazyhorsememorial.org. To stay up to date on the latest news and events, follow the Crazy Horse Memorial on Facebook ([/crazyhorsememorial](https://www.facebook.com/crazyhorsememorial/)), Twitter ([@crazyhorsemem](https://twitter.com/crazyhorsemem)) and Instagram ([@crazyhorsememorial](https://www.instagram.com/crazyhorsememorial/)); and follow The Indian University of North America on Facebook ([/TheIndianUniversityofNorthAmerica](https://www.facebook.com/TheIndianUniversityofNorthAmerica/)) and Instagram ([@IndianUniversityCrazyHorse](https://www.instagram.com/IndianUniversityCrazyHorse)).