

Education for a Credentialed Leadership

NAES College

Within a milieu of civil rights activism in the late 1960s and early 1970s, community-based and tribal colleges emerged as innovative models within higher education in the United States. The founding of community-based colleges in urban centers and tribal colleges on rural reservations illustrated a movement toward self-determination in higher education. This movement spoke to the growing and collective awareness among diverse groups that American higher education offered few opportunities for historically marginalized populations. Indeed, higher education held a select position in American society. The exclusion of minority populations from mainstream higher education denied access to an essential basis of social mobility and consequently maintained long-existent structures of advantage mostly for Americans of European descent, with the noteworthy exception of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).¹

Community-based and tribal colleges both established an alternative to traditional institutions of higher learning and put forward new ways of envisioning the structure, role, and curricula of higher education. This movement presented a shift in higher education as those underrepresented in universities and colleges called for unique institutions designed specifically for their particular needs. The emergence of community-based colleges, such as Sojourner-Douglass College (founded in 1972) for African Americans in Baltimore and Boricua College (founded in 1973) for Puerto Ricans in New York City, and tribal colleges such as Navajo Community College (founded in 1968) in Arizona and Oglala Lakota College (founded in 1970) in South Dakota added to earlier changes in higher education. Community-based colleges and tribal colleges testified to a transition for minorities on the periphery of higher education's borders. Within this periphery, community-based and tribal colleges sought to establish a

relationship between higher education and the development of community members committed to serving their respective populations.²

Native American Educational Services (NAES) College developed within the community-based college and American Indian self-determination movements. NAES College's identity as an urban institution utilized the core features of the community-based college movement designed to meet the needs of particular ethnic minorities in metropolitan areas, and its identity as an American Indian institution reflected the influence of the American Indian self-determination movement that fueled the creation and growth of tribal colleges on rural reservations. In this way, NAES developed within two concurrent and—in many ways—overlapping movements that sought to reposition education for those historically excluded from colleges and universities in the United States.³ Through a combination of influences and a unique institutional design and mission, NAES College sought to fill a critical gap as the first Indian-controlled private college to offer a four-year degree.⁴

NAES College established itself as an institution based on a principle of community self-determination. NAES College's mission remained one rooted in the core belief that an Indian-controlled, community-based institution could enable its students to connect their learning experiences with their positions in American Indian organizations, empower them to influence the growth and efficacy of those organizations, and thus increase the social, cultural, and economic livelihood of the American Indian community in Chicago.⁵ To position the history of NAES College as solely a community-based college serving an urban minority or to position the history of NAES College as solely an Indian-controlled college within the American Indian self-determination movement would minimize the importance of NAES College in the history of American Indian education, for the history of NAES College speaks to the dynamic relationship between American Indians in a particular urban context and a vision for higher education particular to community development.

The Founding of NAES College

The concept for NAES College originated through the Native American Committee's synthesis of two educational initiatives offered through Northwestern Illinois University: the University Without Walls program and the Uptown Field Center.⁶ As two experimental educational initiatives, the University Without Walls program and the Uptown Field Center enabled students to earn a baccalaureate through direct involvement with community development initiatives.⁷ By means of an experiential learning

process, the University Without Walls program at Northeastern allowed students to focus on individualized study plans and earn credit for past learning experiences and career-based activities.⁸ Along with this program, Northeastern's Uptown Field Center sought to provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to assume leadership roles primarily in community-based health, social services, and educational organizations.⁹ The University Without Walls program and the Uptown Field Center—both components of Northeastern's Center for Program Development—offered a combination of traditional and nontraditional learning models that later influenced the academic development of NAES College.¹⁰

In the early 1970s, a core group of American Indians who worked and volunteered for the Native American Committee (NAC) enrolled in Northeastern's University Without Walls program and utilized the Uptown Field Center as a resource for learning community organizing strategies and developing social services for American Indians in Chicago.¹¹ NAC's leadership at this time recognized the value of establishing a college-educated staff to manage the increasingly complex nature of its organization and advance its mission of providing programs for the American Indian community with greater efficacy. NAC estimated that only six American Indians living and working in Chicago held a college degree in the early 1970s and viewed the overall lack of education among American Indians in Chicago as a significant obstacle to community development. Northeastern first attracted fifteen American Indians—mostly in their late twenties and thirties—who found it difficult to give up gainful employment to attend a traditional program at a college or university.¹² Northeastern's University Without Walls program and Uptown Field Center enabled NAC's staff to continue community development work and complete a four-year degree. This, from NAC's perspective, enabled the organization to strengthen itself while developing a professional, credentialed leadership within the American Indian community.¹³

Both the University Without Walls program and Uptown Field Center offered flexible and innovative learning processes. NAC's synthesis of these two nontraditional approaches in higher education for its own purpose formed, in essence, an innovative model that later influenced the development of NAES College's structure and focus.¹⁴ Together, Northeastern's University Without Walls program and the Uptown Field Center allowed for a high level of flexibility with the integration of field-based research, coursework in a student's immediate community, credit for past learning experiences, and self-directed study with faculty and community-based support.¹⁵ NAC fully invested itself in this method of organizational development vis-à-vis community-based learning. "Indian students participating in Northeastern Illinois University's University Without Walls

Program through the Uptown Field Center,” according to Joseph White (Ho-Chunk), a member of NAC’s board of directors, “have made up the basic work force of the Native American Committee.”¹⁶

The powerful effect of Northeastern’s alternative educational programs on this new generation of leadership at NAC led to a sense of agency whereby the community began viewing itself as a catalyst for positive change.¹⁷ This activist-oriented group of American Indians—while relatively few in number—guided NAC to become an important foundation for American Indian community development in Uptown.¹⁸ From this core group at NAC, the objective of establishing an American Indian–controlled institution of higher learning in Uptown based on Northeastern’s University Without Walls program and the Uptown Field Center came to fruition.¹⁹ NAC proposed the formation of the Rural-Urban Learning Exchange that soon transformed into Native American Educational Services (NAES). The State of Illinois recognized NAES as a corporation on May 17, 1974, and NAES began offering courses in the spring of 1975 through a cooperative agreement with Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio.²⁰

From Founding to Accreditation, 1973 to 1984

In 1973, the Native American Committee began to submit grant proposals for the Rural-Urban Learning Exchange (RULE). As originally designed, RULE would provide study sites for three American Indian communities: Chicago, the Leech Lake Reservation in Minnesota, and the Fort Peck Reservation in Montana. William Whitehead, Dennis Harper, and Robert V. Dumont Jr. wrote the original proposals detailing “a systematic and sustained method by which leadership could be trained for a variety of professions and at the same time maintain a basic responsibility to the Indian community.”²¹ Finding an accredited institution that would provide a degree and allow for a high level of autonomy became one of NAC’s top priorities. Stanley Newman, who co-directed the Uptown Field Center, served on the board of trustees of Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. Through its connection with Newman, NAC met with representatives of Antioch College and soon thereafter sent a proposal, on March 20, 1974.²² NAC sought to develop a baccalaureate program that offered a high level of flexibility and remained community controlled. Ultimately, its goal was to establish a credentialed leadership for each American Indian community.²³

By April 1974, NAC approved an initial Academic Review Committee and continued negotiations with Antioch College to become an affiliate.²⁴

As one of the ten founding institutions of the Union for Research and Experimentation in Higher Education, Antioch College—like Northeastern Illinois University—belonged to a select group of institutions dedicated to nontraditional and innovative programs.²⁵ Antioch College attracted many minority and community-based organizations through its liberal approach to granting credit and a baccalaureate to students at affiliated institutions across the United States. Community-based institutions serving minority populations such as Sojourner-Douglass College, Colegio Cesar Chavez, La Universidad de Aztlán, and Colegio Jacinto Treviño found that an affiliation with Antioch College allowed them to offer educational programs as they moved toward becoming totally independent and accredited institutions.²⁶ This would also prove to be the case with NAC as the organization weighed how best to establish an American Indian college in Chicago.

The name for the new institution changed from the original Rural-Urban Learning Exchange (RULE) to Native American Educational Services (NAES) to better represent the mission of the program. Among those influential in designing the new institution were Faith Smith (Ojibwe), secretary of NAC's board of directors and former acting executive director of the American Indian Center, Nancy Dumont (Assiniboine), project director of NAC's Educational Center, Dennis Harper (Ojibwe), former director of NAC, and William Crazy Thunder (Sioux), program director of NAC. They all served on the founding board of directors for what would become the first, private American Indian-controlled college. With this board of directors, NAES incorporated as a legal not-for-profit corporation in Illinois on May 17, 1974.²⁷ Soon afterward, on August 23, 1974, NAES and Antioch College reached an agreement that went into effect on September 1, 1974.²⁸

Through the agreement, Antioch provided NAES with a high level of autonomy as an affiliate. "Self-determination and autonomy," recollected Antioch president William M. Birenbaum, "guided the development of the new centers."²⁹ Under this guiding philosophy, NAES held almost full institutional control as it set admissions policies and appointed its own faculty. Moreover, NAES College's Academic Review Committee oversaw the institution's academic program that operated within Antioch College's University Without Walls structure. These factors, in turn, enabled NAES to maintain, in essence, an Indian-controlled institution even though Antioch ultimately awarded the baccalaureate.³⁰ In exchange for sponsoring NAES as an affiliate institution, Antioch College received 11 percent of each student's annual tuition of \$2,500.³¹ Affiliates such as NAES College also furthered Antioch's commitment to educational equity, especially in urban areas where Antioch's centers fostered "the educational goals of

the nation's minorities."³² By the mid-1970s, one-third of Antioch students were minorities and its thirty off-campus centers across the United States accounted for most of this growth.³³

Once an agreement was reached with Antioch College in 1974, the founders of NAES College sought funding to hire a coordinator, faculty, and staff to begin laying the groundwork for the institution. Startup funds, in the form of grants, came through the Illinois Regional Medical Program, the Ann Maytag Shaker Foundation, the Inland Steel-Ryerson Foundation, and the Playboy Foundation.³⁴ By 1975, this funding allowed for the employment of Faith Smith as director, Edith Johns (Ho-Chunk) as an instructor, and Patricia Wesaw (Mohawk) as a financial aid counselor.³⁵ Some of the founders of NAES continued to work for NAC when NAES incorporated as its own educational organization, and some soon left Chicago to work with reservation communities. Nancy Dumont, for example, directed NAC while William Crazy Thunder assisted with NAC's Youth Services.³⁶ During this period, the Ford Foundation awarded Dennis Harper a \$15,266 fellowship in rural educational development, and Harper left Chicago to start an educational program in Cass Lake, Minnesota. William Whitehead and Robert V. Dumont Jr. both left Chicago to start the NAES site on the Fort Peck Reservation in Montana. Whitehead soon ended his association with NAES, and Robert V. Dumont Jr. was hired by the Fort Peck Tribal Board and later became director of academic programs and a faculty member for NAES College.³⁷

In Chicago, on the second floor of NAC's main office at 4546 North Hermitage Avenue, NAES College offered its first classes in 1975. In April, eleven students enrolled in the first course titled "Dynamics of Community Health," funded through the Illinois Regional Medical Program. Edith Johns, a registered nurse, taught the course, which focused on such topics as diabetes, child development, Indian health care, and patients' rights.³⁸ NAES also began planning student tutorials and scheduled additional courses such as "Community Development and Institutional Change" for the fall and "Historical Process and Legal Issues" for Winter 1976.³⁹

Perhaps because many students were unfamiliar with a University Without Walls degree model that combined coursework, independent study, work and field experiences, and credit for prior learning, pressure for NAES to formalize its degree model with Antioch College became more intense as students grew frustrated with the lack of clarity regarding the program.⁴⁰ In September 1975, NAES began addressing this issue with the publication of *Native American Educational Services Adult Degree Completion Program*, a thirty-four-page document giving an overview of NAES and degree requirements.⁴¹ Nonetheless, confusion over NAES College's nontraditional approach to higher education and, more particularly, the

University Without Walls program through Antioch College persisted for many students.⁴² Much enthusiasm and commitment existed during these early years, but difficulties mounted as NAES struggled to stabilize its institutional structure, design a cohesive curriculum, and attain adequate funding simultaneously.⁴³

In order to address many of the issues it faced as an institution, NAES College first sought to strengthen the role of the Academic Review Committee to better guide its direction and mission.⁴⁴ The Academic Review Committee formed in 1975 as a “standing advisory committee,” and its obligations included meeting three times a year, reviewing admission requirements, approving individual degree plans, and monitoring the overall quality of NAES’s program.⁴⁵ By 1978, however, the Academic Review Committee had only met twice and, in the eyes of Antioch College, “functioned loosely as a quality control group.”⁴⁶ On February 24, 1978, a new set of bylaws specified the replacement of the Academic Review Committee with the creation of a new board of directors. This, in turn, gave full control of NAES College to the board of directors as a legal body.⁴⁷ Many of the members of the Academic Review Committee accepted positions on the newly formed governing body of NAES College.



Figure 6.1. Members of NAES College’s board of directors: (left to right) Willard LaMere, Sol Tax, David Beaulieu, Robert Thomas, and Larry Wetsit. (Courtesy of NAES College and Dorene Wiese)

The first board of directors included Gerald Gray (Blackfeet-Cree), Julie Herrera (Laguna Pueblo), Caleb Shields (Sioux), David Beaulieu (Ojibwe), James Roland (Cheyenne), Sol Tax, Robert K. Thomas (Cherokee), Lawrence Towner, Patricia Wesaw (Mohawk), and Ralph Wolff.⁴⁸

In addition to strengthening the organizational structure of the institution, the board of directors also became a necessity as NAES pursued developing into a fully accredited Indian-controlled college. The first step in this process was to receive recognition from the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association.⁴⁹ Faith Smith sent an application to the North Central Association in November 1977 to begin the process of institutional accreditation.⁵⁰

The period between the fall of 1977 and the summer of 1978 represented a turning point for NAES College as it prepared for the North Central Association's evaluation visit.⁵¹ In order to improve the quality of the institution, NAES College—in a relatively short amount of time—placed a greater emphasis on examining divisions of power, professional roles,



Figure 6.2. Faith Smith, president of NAES College. (Courtesy of NAES College and Dorene Wiese)



Figure 6.3. NAES College at 4550 North Hermitage Avenue. (Courtesy of NAES College and Dorene Wiese)

student feedback, program and course planning, academic resources, and financial stability.⁵² The difficult and challenging pursuit of candidacy status led to a rapid process of improvement for NAES. The founding vision for establishing an Indian-controlled college dedicated to community development was becoming a reality and was eventually recognized by the North Central Association.

On May 23 and 24, 1978, a three-member team organized by the North Central Association visited NAES College in its new location at 4550 North Hermitage Avenue, a former parish house of All Saints' Episcopal Church.

The North Central Association awarded NAES College "candidacy for accreditation status" in July 1978.⁵³ The strengths documented by the North Central Association included NAES College's organizational structure, clarity of its overall mission, dedication to American Indian students,

potential for growth, and curricular design “related to the primary goal of the institution to provide educational and credentialing opportunities for the actual and potential community leaders.”⁵⁴ Furthermore, the North Central Association pointed to the dedication, enthusiasm, experience, and overall quality of full- and part-time faculty.⁵⁵

Indeed, the full- and part-time faculty of NAES College, at this time, consisted of a small but solid core of individuals devoted to the success of NAES College and its student body. NAES president Faith Smith and Robert V. Dumont Jr., director of academic programs, were both founding members of the college and remained instrumental in continuing the mission of the institution.

Armin Beck, who joined the NAES faculty in the fall of 1977, added a great deal of experience in organizational management, community development, and urban education. In helping to strengthen NAES College’s academic program, Beck’s influence in the accreditation process proved substantial.⁵⁶ In addition to the full-time faculty, part-time faculty included Flo Wiger (Sioux), director of the Native American Support Program at University of Illinois at Chicago, Norma Stealer (Ho-Chunk-Sioux), director of the Native American Committee, Edith Johns (Ho-Chunk), a registered nurse, John Hobgood, professor of anthropology at Chicago State University, and Eliezer Krumbein, a clinical psychiatrist.⁵⁷ In its 1978 report, the North Central Association viewed the adjunct faculty members as an “asset” and “excellent resource” not only because of their abilities but also because they provided a strong link between NAES and the community.⁵⁸

Among the concerns expressed by the North Central Association’s evaluation team were the college’s tuition-driven budget and unclear degree requirements.⁵⁹ While NAES was quite satisfied with the overall decision made by the North Central Association to award the institution candidacy status, it also realized that efforts toward full accreditation would require a great deal of effort. Faith Smith knew that NAES College’s overall mission was “overshadowed by the struggle to stay alive financially.”⁶⁰ On August 15, 1978, Janet A. Hartle, director of academic affairs at Antioch University wrote to William Birenbaum, president of Antioch University, and stated, “To bring you up to date, it remains very much a question whether or not NAES will survive financially for another month.”⁶¹ Since NAES depended almost solely on tuition for its funding base, it sought to attract more students to its program and find alternative sources of funding.⁶² The latter proved to be a more viable option because, first, NAES students could rarely afford tuition and depended heavily on rather erratic sources of financial aid and, second, NAES continually struggled throughout its history to increase its enrollment and consequently remained a small community-based college in Chicago averaging fewer than twenty



Figure 6.4. Robert Dumont, director of academic programs and faculty at NAES College. (Courtesy of NAES College and Dorene Wiese)



Figure 6.5. Armin Beck, faculty at NAES College. (Courtesy of NAES College and Dorene Wiese)

students per year, a situation where actual costs always exceeded tuition revenue.⁶³

To address its consistent funding problems, NAES pursued alternative funding strategies. In 1978, the institution received a grant from the Inland Steel-Ryerson Foundation to hire Florence Dunham (Mohawk), a NAES student, as an administrative assistant for institutional development.⁶⁴ Smith and Dunham put together proposals for federal and private grants and contacted potential donors to increase NAES College's revenue. This strategy brought in needed funding as NAES College, for example, obtained \$7,000 from local foundations between 1978 and 1979. Furthermore, between 1980 and 1981, NAES received its first federal grants from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) and Title III of the Higher Education Act ("Strengthening Developing Institutions").⁶⁵ With a \$50,582 FIPSE grant and a \$100,000 Title III grant, NAES had to face the added fiscal oversight associated with such grants. Nevertheless, NAES believed that it could responsibly manage the federal grants and, moreover, that the future of the institution depended on such a funding structure.⁶⁶

In order to address the other concerns of the North Central Association, NAES engaged in a thorough self-study process and instituted many necessary changes. In its first biennial visit, North Central Association, was "impressed with NAES's efforts to systematically address program needs and concerns."⁶⁷ Moreover, it concluded, "NAES is proceeding in a timely and appropriate fashion to achieve accreditation."⁶⁸ Refining its degree program, for instance, remained an ongoing area of focus for NAES as it progressed through the accreditation process. Prior to 1981, NAES offered three major areas of study: Community Development, Community Education, and Community Human Services.⁶⁹ On June 12, 1981, NAES consolidated these areas into a single academic program in community studies to strengthen the focus of the degree after a year of development.⁷⁰ To further strengthen its academic program, NAES instituted an Academic Affairs Committee on November 14, 1983. The main purpose of the Academic Affairs Committee was to continue to develop and improve NAES College's baccalaureate "in accord with institutional and community relevance."⁷¹

The community studies baccalaureate program satisfied the requirements of the Board of Higher Education for the State of Illinois in November 1983 and the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education for the North Central Association in August 1984.⁷² With the approval of the State of Illinois and the North Central Association, NAES College became a fully independent and accredited institution of higher education.⁷³ One of NAES College's most important strengths, according to the team, was NAES College's strong sense of purpose. NAES College, like other com-

munity-based institutions of higher education, maintained that academic programs designed for particular groups became more meaningful for students and enhanced community development.⁷⁴

NAES College's attainment of accreditation represented a significant milestone in the history of the institution. The institution put considerable effort into maintaining what it considered an appropriate degree model for its students while proving to the Board of Higher Education for the State of Illinois and the North Central Association that its academic program met external standards of quality.

Reflecting on the period between candidacy status and accreditation, Faith Smith recalled, "Long hours, severe shortages of funds, and functioning within the world of higher education which was suspicious of our existence—all of these conditions were normal parts of our daily working lives."⁷⁵

Accreditation for American Indian colleges—as well as other minority colleges—on the periphery of higher education presented many challenges as institutions became accountable to state agencies and regional associations that, in some cases, threatened institutional autonomy and imposed a system of education opposed to an institution's cultural values. Since federal and private grants and student financial aid often required such recognition, however, few options existed beyond the accreditation



Figure 6.6. Class at NAES College. (Courtesy of NAES College and Dorene Wiese)

process.⁷⁶ With that said, NAES College viewed the accreditation process as a valuable experience that helped the institution grow stronger and thus serve its students more effectively.⁷⁷ Reflecting on accreditation, Dr. David Beck, who served as NAES College's dean and a faculty member, shared, "I thought of it as something that was extremely important because we wanted our students to have a degree that was viewed as legitimate by the outside world, and if they went on to graduate school we wanted them to have a bachelor's degree that a graduate school would accept."⁷⁸

In seeking accreditation from the North Central Association, NAES engaged in a rigorous review process between 1978 and 1984. This process required NAES to conduct a thorough institutional self-study.⁷⁹ With areas ranging from institutional governance and financial planning to academic standards and institutional mission, NAES examined its strengths and weaknesses and sought to improve as an institution.⁸⁰ The North Central Association's accreditation process became, according to NAES, a helpful and consultative method of institutional development.⁸¹ By 1984, almost seven years after submitting its first proposal for accreditation, NAES College proved the quality of its baccalaureate to the North Central Association and, more importantly, its worth to Chicago's American Indian community.

Academic Program

NAES College built its academic program on a model of higher education that highlighted the importance of American Indian control. For those involved with the institution, higher education could foster the growth and development of a professional Indian leadership in Chicago and strengthen American Indian organizations working to improve the livelihood of American Indians living in the city. The academic program centered on community development consistent with the cultural values of American Indians living in Chicago.⁸² For NAES, education needed to be "harmonic with the Indian community's cultural system," and success for the institution was determined by not only the academic achievement of the individual but also how the individual effected change in the community as a result of his or her education.⁸³

By focusing on and remaining accountable to community, NAES College created in the words of David Beaulieu (Ojibwe), chairman of NAES College's board of directors, "a vision of higher education which is in the finest tradition of Indian people."⁸⁴

An examination of NAES College's academic program establishes how the institution attempted to fulfill its vision of higher education through its baccalaureate degree. In its curricular design, NAES built its

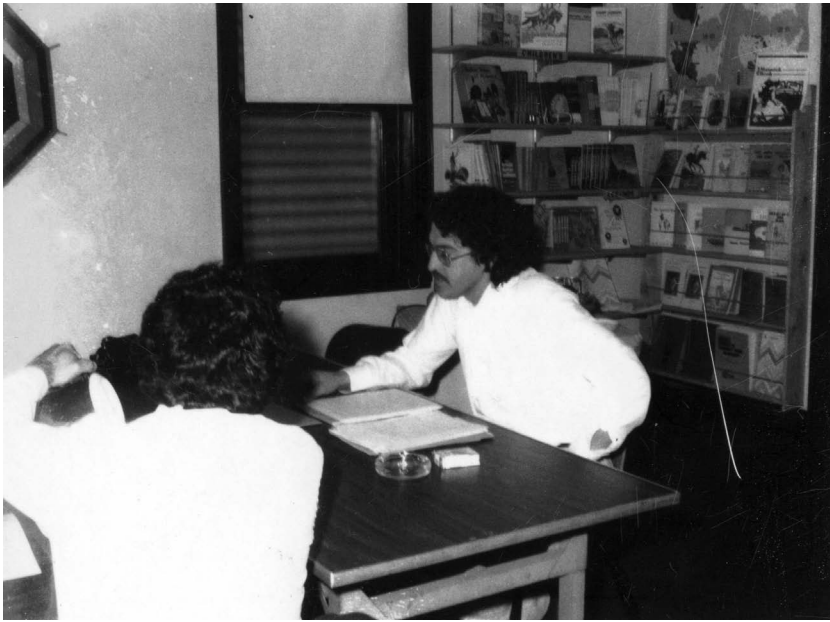


Figure 6.7. David Beaulieu, member of NAES College's board of directors. (Courtesy of NAES College and Dorene Wiese)

academic program on acknowledging the value of a student's life experiences correlative to college-level knowledge and skills. At the center of this design was forming a connection between education and community development while maintaining an Indian-centered framework for learning. NAES College's academic program when examined in relationship to the institution's core mission of improving the community through education illustrates how the institution sought to fill a critical gap in higher education for Chicago's American Indian community.

In a 1973 grant proposal for the Rural-Urban Learning Exchange, NAC put forward three admission requirements for potential students: (1) students needed to be in their late twenties or older, (2) students needed to work in some area of community development or social services, and (3) students needed to possess a commitment to the American Indian community.⁸⁵ When NAES admitted its first students in 1975, these proposed admission requirements stayed in effect, and, with the exception of some minor changes, continued throughout the history of the institution.⁸⁶ In establishing these requirements, NAES sought a specific type of student, namely, one who possessed an experiential knowledge from working with

Chicago's American Indian community and planned to remain committed to the needs of the community. These requirements—in addition to their relationship to the institution's mission—allowed NAES to award credit for prior learning and work experiences since students ranged in age from twenty-four to sixty-two, with the average age of students consistently falling in the mid- to late thirties throughout its history.

With such a design, NAES students were able to concentrate almost solely on core seminars, independent studies, and field projects. This, in turn, enabled NAES to function essentially as a two-year baccalaureate program since students could meet their general studies requirements through a number of options including transfer credit, credit for prior learning, tutorials, and work experiences.⁸⁷ This model in higher education came as a practical approach to the admission of so-called nontraditional students who brought with them a number of learning experiences beyond those of the traditional undergraduate. Community-based colleges such as NAES especially focused on adult learners who emerged as a larger demographic for higher education in the early 1970s.⁸⁸

From 1975 to 1981, NAES College offered three specializations for its baccalaureate: Community Human Services, Community Education, and Community Development. These areas of specialization came as a result of NAES College's efforts to become and remain a community-based institution since most—if not all—of the Indian organizations benefited from employees with an education in one or more of the areas of focus.⁸⁹ Throughout the 1970s, as Indian organizations grew—in size, number, and complexity—in Chicago, the increased demand for American Indian employees and community leaders with a professional knowledge base made NAES a viable option for those who wanted to earn a baccalaureate while continuing to work in American Indian organizations and further contribute to community development.

Students continuing to work full time in Indian organizations contributed to NAES College's model of education and the needs of the community. In addition, it also met a basic necessity as 90 percent of NAES students were supporting families while pursuing their degree and could not financially afford to attend school without full-time employment.⁹⁰ The areas of specialization ultimately geared academic study to the professional interests and goals of individual students while at the same time maintaining a connection with the specific professional needs of American Indian organizations and, more broadly, the community. In this way, NAES designed the academic program to foster a higher level of agency for American Indian organizations vis-à-vis a professional and credentialed leadership based on a fundamental tenet of self-determination: developing a community from within the community.

Structure and Design of NAES College's Baccalaureate Program

To understand how NAES College's academic program fit its community-based mission, an examination of the structure and core requirements of NAES College's baccalaureate becomes necessary. Prior to its candidacy status with the North Central Association, NAES College required its students to complete a minimum of thirty-six credit hours through its own courses and alternative learning methods and granted a maximum of eighty-four credits from transfer credits and credits for prior learning.⁹¹ NAES College grouped its academic requirements into six areas: (1) Educational Planning, (2) Professional Development, (3) Core Seminars, (4) Basic Competency Skills, (5) Major Area of Study, and (6) Electives.⁹² Students fulfilled the requirements for educational planning and the core seminars solely through NAES coursework. Additionally, students fulfilled the requirements for professional development only through an individualized course of study directly related to their positions in American Indian organizations. With such a design, NAES College sought to establish a foundation through its own course offerings and required a student to design and engage in his or her own set of learning experiences through the guidance of a faculty advisor.

Since most students came to NAES College as professionals and paraprofessionals in American Indian organizations and were considerably older than average undergraduates, this design was meant to further their abilities in relationship to the specific work-related needs of each individual. Furthermore, NAES College designed its academic program as a validation of the knowledge and skills its students possessed from, in many cases, years of employment in Indian organizations.⁹³ Thus, the overall academic program relied on a series of short-term study plans, a long-term degree plan, and a required field project. The program represented an individualized approach to learning. The academic program was set up to provide "students with maximum flexibility to develop a course of study best suited to their professional and academic needs."⁹⁴ Ultimately, at the end of a student's program, NAES College's faculty review committee assessed whether or not a student's final transcript summary and portfolio substantiated that a student met all credit requirements and the long-term degree plan.⁹⁵

For the first trimester of the program, NAES College required students to enroll in educational planning. This three-credit course set in motion each student's academic program as he or she learned the requirements of NAES College's baccalaureate program and primary learning methods as specified in the *NAES Student Handbook*, developed a long-term

study plan with the assistance of a faculty member, and began a proposal for his or her field project. In this course, NAES faculty also led students through the process of earning credit for prior learning.⁹⁶ Perhaps above all else, this course presented in detail NAES College's philosophy of education and its nontraditional methods of learning.

NAES College's academic model did not fit within the traditional college framework. The influence of the University Without Walls and Field Center movements continued to distinguish the structure and design of the program.⁹⁷ NAES's alternative model of education was, in the words of Robert V. Dumont Jr., one where "individuals design their own course of study,"⁹⁸ and, in the words of Faith Smith, one where "the responsibilities for learning are with the student."⁹⁹ Educational planning, then, not only functioned as an introductory course but also one that made it known that a high level of self-direction would be expected of NAES students.

The three core seminars titled Dynamics of Community Development, Dynamics of Human Services, and Dynamics of Community Education connected to NAES's three areas of specialization. Students needed to complete the core seminars in their first three trimesters, thereby giving



Figure 6.8. Students in the NAES College library. (Courtesy of NAES College and Dorene Wiese)

them an overview of the particular aspects of study deemed most important in strengthening the American Indian community.¹⁰⁰ For each sixteen-week core seminar, faculty provided a general overview of the area and used both theoretical and practical perspectives.¹⁰¹

Dynamics of Community Development focused on topics such as “organizational models of development,” “fiscal practices,” “resource utilization,” and “governmental policy.”¹⁰² Moreover, the integration of case studies and field research projects attempted to reinforce the relationship between knowledge and action as students analyzed the problems American Indian organizations faced in serving the community more effectively.

NAES faculty tried to make Dynamics of Community Development relevant to the actual problems and difficulties the American Indian community faced in improving organizations. Guest speakers brought a range of knowledge. From those who headed Indian organizations to those who received services, the method of connecting real issues with the coursework was paramount to the guiding educational philosophy of NAES College.¹⁰³ In such an educational environment where students were actively involved with community organizations, according to David Beck, “[Students] could contribute to each other’s learning, to their own learning, and to the growth of institutional knowledge.”¹⁰⁴ Ultimately, NAES designed the Dynamics of Community Development so that its students would understand the core problems the community faced and be better prepared to effect change in their organizations.¹⁰⁵

Dynamics of Human Services provided an overview of health and social services for students. Since many students worked in Indian organizations that provided human services, the purpose of the Dynamics of Human Services seminar went back to the earliest conceptions of NAES College as the planners believed that the institution’s educational program needed to directly connect to the organizations established to benefit the community.¹⁰⁶ Human services, as a field of study, related to many of the Indian organizations that existed in Chicago during the 1970s. For example, organizations and programs such as St. Augustine’s Center for American Indians and its Bo-Sho-Ne-Gee Drop-In Center, the American Indian Center and its Social Services Department, the Native American Committee and its Native American Outpost, and American Indian Health Services offered health and human services.¹⁰⁷

In designing an academic program relevant to those students invested in the community, Dynamics of Human Services focused on the processes of administering health and social service organizations and addressed the major mental and physical health-related issues that most affected American Indians living in Chicago. Moreover, it also concentrated on preventative care and patients’ rights.¹⁰⁸ Since such topics extended beyond,

in many cases, the professional expertise of NAES faculty, the institution utilized adjunct instructors, consultants, and guest speakers in areas such as medicine and addiction counseling.¹⁰⁹ A requirement of the seminar was a field research project or practicum designed to engage the students more deeply. As with the other core seminars, this aspect of Dynamics of Human Services reinforced NAES College's philosophy that a relationship between conceptual and practical approaches to learning needed to be maintained.¹¹⁰

In Dynamics of Community Education, NAES College emphasized the importance of education from an American Indian perspective. This core seminar examined the historical role of education upon American Indian communities from the boarding school experience through the self-determination movement. A focus on education as a community responsibility, educational law and policy, and the educational and cultural needs of American Indian students stressed the importance of understanding education as a social and political process and its effect in Indian communities.¹¹¹ With alternative, Indian-centered schools and programs such as Little Big Horn High School, O-Wai-Ya-Wa Elementary School, the American Indian Center's Head Start program, and the Native American Committee's GED program and Alternative Education Center, Chicago's American Indian community in the 1970s placed an emphasis on meeting the diverse needs of American Indian children and adults through educational programs.¹¹² To meet the growing need within the community for educational leaders, NAES emphasized that a community's control or lack of control of education was directly connected to autonomy or dependence, respectively, through Dynamics of Community Education.¹¹³

As with other seminars, connecting the theoretical and practical understandings was an important aspect of Dynamics of Community Education. Armin Beck taught the seminar and invited some of the nation's most influential leaders in Indian education to speak to students. People such as Seferino Tenerio (Pueblo) with Indian Education Training, Inc. and Gerald Gray (Blackfeet-Cree), superintendent of Rocky Boy Elementary School in Montana, added a depth of knowledge to the seminar through conveying the importance of understanding legislation and policy and, moreover, establishing an Indian voice in the community to direct educational programs.¹¹⁴ A research-based field project was a requirement for the seminar. This presented a focal point for the term as students discussed, in most instances, their case studies of educational programs in Chicago.¹¹⁵

Along with the requirements of Educational Planning and the core seminars, NAES College integrated work-study into its overall degree program. Being employed or assisting as a volunteer in an Indian organization served as a prerequisite for admission. This prerequisite allowed NAES to include a series of short-term plans between students and their faculty advi-

sors to identify the knowledge and skills that would be helpful for their respective areas of employment or volunteer work¹¹⁶ NAES categorized this requirement as professional development, and it included a combination of practical work experience, academic study, and a stipulated learning outcome. NAES considered this to be an important aspect of its overall program, for in its design it instilled in students that professional development through systematic learning not only benefited the individual but also each student's respective organization and the community.

With such a focus, credits in professional development illustrated the influence of the University Without Walls movement. The institution's belief that a student's employment or volunteer work with an Indian organization should function as a learning experience to the same extent as a classroom course placed an emphasis on students "working independently and setting and maintaining a clear set of goals for themselves."¹¹⁷ This also connected to NAES's belief that a "capable community leadership" would derive from those who saw themselves as agents in the learning process, a process that extended beyond the walls of the classroom.¹¹⁸

Just as the University Without Walls movement in higher education influenced NAES's program with its emphasis on individualized, independent, and self-directed learning, the field center model also served as a strong influence on the institution. Perhaps the most apparent way that the field center model shaped NAES College's academic program came in the way of its required field project. The field project and accompanying research paper needed to connect to a student's employment or volunteer work.¹¹⁹ Begun in the first trimester of a student's enrollment at NAES, the field project functioned as a capstone in that it, ideally, synthesized a student's knowledge through the course of his or program and contributed to developing stronger American Indian organizations that ultimately benefited the community.¹²⁰

Through the field project, an emphasis was placed on applied research. This, in many ways, was based on action anthropology.¹²¹ Simply put, action anthropology stressed the researcher's engagement with a community in order to assist it in meeting community needs and solving community problems.¹²² As one of the leading scholars of action anthropology, Professor Sol Tax of the University of Chicago strongly supported NAES College's efforts. Tax helped found the college and served on the original Academic Review Committee in 1975. When the Academic Review Committee transitioned to a board of directors in 1978, NAES College invited Tax to serve as a member—a position he held through 1993 just years before his death in 1995.¹²³

Sol Tax, according to NAES, "shared, indeed played a key role in helping to define, a vision of Indian higher education as the basis for community development in culturally relevant terms."¹²⁴ The field project,



Figure 6.9. Sol Tax, member of NAES College's board of directors. (Courtesy of NAES College and Dorene Wiese)

heavily influenced by action anthropology, fit within the philosophy of community building held by Tax and NAES College. In its design, the field project included the social application of new knowledge generated through research in order to benefit community development while respecting the community's values.¹²⁵

The field project remained a fundamental aspect of NAES College's academic program throughout the history of the institution. Some thirty years after NAES adopted the requirement, the institution still considered the field project integral to its program, for it focused on bringing new and beneficial knowledge into the American Indian community and encompassed a wide range of subjects.¹²⁶ For students such as Margarete Delgado (Oneida), who graduated from NAES College in 1983 and went on to earn master's degrees from University of Illinois at Chicago and University of Chicago, the field project allowed students to work closely with NAES faculty and advisors similar, in some respects, to a master's thesis committee. In having students collaborate with faculty and advisors and pursue a subject of research relevant to their professional interests, NAES College utilized the field project as a way to broaden the experiences of students and illustrate that they could contribute to the development of the American Indian community while furthering their own abilities as

students.¹²⁷ David Beck, a former dean and faculty member at NAES and now professor and department chairperson of the Native American Studies Program at the University of Montana, stated, "With the field project, students would have to understand a problem and articulate the problem and solution and do research to prepare their reports. The idea was the same as master's and doctoral programs which was to create new knowledge for the community."¹²⁸ By 2002, the number of field projects completed by NAES students in Chicago totaled more than fifty.¹²⁹

NAES College's Baccalaureate in Community Studies, 1981 to 1989

Beginning in 1981, NAES College replaced Community Human Services, Community Development, and Community Education with a single area of specialization in Community Studies. This shift occurred as NAES recognized that it would serve its students more effectively through a more focused degree program. While continuing to maintain a relatively individualized learning model, NAES viewed a single area of concentration "as a natural evolution in academic planning and refinement and not a completely new degree program."¹³⁰ One of the concerns expressed by NAES at this time was that it was awarding too much credit for "applied" learning and did not require enough "conceptual and theoretical components" for its baccalaureate.¹³¹ Thus, NAES College pursued not only a more focused degree in the early 1980s but also one that increased the institution's standard requirements. In the mid- to late 1970s NAES required students to complete a minimum of thirty-six credits. This, however, changed in the early 1980s as NAES required student to complete at least forty-four credits in 1980 and fifty-four credits in 1984 through its own courses and tutorials.¹³²

Part of what fueled this shift was NAES's pursuit of full accreditation. The institution called for a higher level of student accountability and integrated "restrictive and specific categories of learning."¹³³ NAES College's baccalaureate degree by the mid-1980s took on a significantly more structured system of learning. The academic program, according to a 1984 institutional self-study for the North Central Association, permitted the college to find an appropriate balance between faculty-directed coursework and tutorials and independent study. The core seminars and the tutorials totaled fifty-four credits and could only be completed through NAES College. NAES limited students to a total of sixty-six credits through other learning methods such as independent study, transfer credit, and credit for prior learning by the mid-1980s, and credit through these alter-

native means went through a more extensive evaluation process than in previous years.¹³⁴

The most substantial changes in the baccalaureate degree model during the early to mid-1980s came in the way of (1) the introduction of six areas of core knowledge that framed all of NAES College's requirements in Community Studies and (2) a modified group of core seminars. NAES College utilized six areas of core knowledge in designing courses, tutorials, and independent study plans and evaluated the worth of transfer credit and credit for prior learning based on whether or not the learning experience connected to one or more of the six areas of core knowledge. Thus, the core areas of knowledge fulfilled prescriptive as well as evaluative roles for the institution.¹³⁵ Three of these six areas included Tribal/Community Knowledge, External Tribal/Community Studies, and American Indian Studies. These areas placed an emphasis on what NAES considered to be the intellectual and philosophical traditions of American Indian communities. Learning within these three areas held the utmost value and became the "primary emphasis" and "foundation of the degree."¹³⁶

These areas of knowledge positioned an understanding of American Indian community values and knowledge at the center of learning from three distinct perspectives. Tribal/Community Knowledge highlighted the importance of American Indian oral tradition, written works, and tribal-federal documents in understanding how the knowledge and values of American Indians from pre-contact to the present defined and incorporated the concept of community.¹³⁷ Shifting from an American Indian viewpoint to a non-Indian viewpoint, External Tribal/Community Studies and American Indian Studies integrated scholarship from the disciplines of anthropology, history, and law in order to examine how such sources of knowledge defined, understood, and affected American Indian communities.¹³⁸ With such a design, NAES College pursued core areas of knowledge whereby students could gain an awareness of "the diversity and the commonality of the Indian experience of tribes, Indian communities, and American Society" from Indian and non-Indian worldviews.¹³⁹

NAES College's other three core areas of knowledge included Regional Studies, Universal Knowledge, and Professional and Technical Skills. As the institution remained committed to its mission of effecting positive change in Chicago's American Indian community, it integrated a wide range of knowledge and skills particular to each student's academic program and, in some instances, a class or group facing a common set of issues or problems. Regional Studies, Universal Knowledge, and Professional and Technical Skills thus covered areas of learning considered important to people beyond just American Indians living in Chicago.¹⁴⁰ For example, courses titled Chicago Political Systems, Not For Profit Corporate Manage-

ment, and Basic Accounting Techniques aligned with Regional Studies, Universal Knowledge, and Profession/Technical Skills, respectively.¹⁴¹ Also, to assess whether or not credit for prior learning and transfer credit connected directly with the baccalaureate degree in Community Studies, NAES examined their connection with one or more of these three areas. NAES, for example, used the aforementioned three areas in awarding credit to students who worked with local government agencies, provided counseling, and managed employees in their various organizations.¹⁴²

NAES also made significant changes to its core seminars in the early 1980s. Dynamics of History and Culture, Dynamics of Religion and Philosophy, Dynamics of Language and Learning, Dynamics of Government and Law, Dynamics of Finance and Management, and Dynamics of Economics and Development replaced the three earlier core seminars in 1983.¹⁴³ Each core seminar totaled six credit hours with two of those hours dedicated to research or fieldwork in the Indian community. NAES considered this shift paramount to its mission of preparing students to understand theoretical and conceptual elements believed to be critical to the continual development of an urban Indian community.¹⁴⁴ Thus, the six core seminars addressed NAES's ongoing concern for students to possess the knowledge, culture, and values and the professional skills and competencies necessary for the advancement of American Indian organizations in Chicago.¹⁴⁵

In the late 1980s, NAES College's core seminars, coursework, flexible and individualized tutorials, and community-based field project combined to form what students, faculty, and the North Central Association considered a solid academic program beneficial to the American Indian student and the American Indian community in Chicago.¹⁴⁶ Almost fifteen years since it offered its first course in 1975, NAES College had significantly refined its academic program while maintaining what it considered to be the fundamental elements of an American Indian institution of higher education. The early influences of the University Without Walls movement, the field center model, and the American Indian self-determination movement remained firmly fixed in the institution's mission and academic framework, and in 1989 NAES College received a five-year continuation of its accreditation from the North Central Association for its baccalaureate degree in Community Studies.¹⁴⁷

NAES College's Struggle for Stability, 1990 to 2008

Financial stability remained a constant struggle for NAES College throughout its history. In addition to its struggle for financial stability, NAES gradually moved away from its primary mission in the 1990s when it accepted

a Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) grant through the Department of Labor. This move consequently led to a gradual decline of its overall academic program. Furthermore, NAES's fiscal mismanagement of the JTPA grant significantly weakened the stability of the institution. NAES never found it easy to establish a solid funding base, and the 1990s represented the arrival of a long and difficult process of maintaining its existence as an institution of higher education. In 1990, Robert V. Dumont Jr., who helped establish the institution, wrote, "We are probably at the most critical point in the College's history."¹⁴⁸ His words proved to be prophetic.

The number of problems during this period shook the very foundation of the institution, and, in many ways, NAES never fully recovered from this turbulent time. The institution was beset with difficulties, and its efforts to redirect its course proved insufficient in light of the fiscal problems it faced. In 1996, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association placed NAES College on probationary status. While NAES successfully worked to be removed from this designation, it would eventually lose its accreditation in 2005, thirty years after it offered its first class. NAES's board of trustees asked President Faith Smith to resign as the institution fell into disarray.¹⁴⁹ Under the direction of NAES's new president, Dr. Dorene Wiese (Ojibwe), who was brought in to salvage a difficult situation, NAES College—with few options—affiliated with Eastern Illinois University. NAES continued to serve American Indian students in Chicago through Eastern Illinois University's baccalaureate program in General Studies, and, in 2008, NAES College celebrated the graduation of its first three graduates from the state university.¹⁵⁰

The foremost issue affecting NAES College throughout its history was its inability to maintain fiscal viability. The North Central Association team that visited the institution in 1978 wrote, "Although the budget has been adequate for the past four years, the tuition-driven budget leaves NAES in a precarious position. It is urgent that NAES seek additional sources of funding."¹⁵¹ Again in 1982, the North Central Association team expressed concern about the institution's long-term fiscal strategies. "Financial resources are uncertain," the team reported, "and plans for financial development are incomplete."¹⁵² Even upon NAES receiving accreditation in 1984, the North Central Association team expressed that the college lacked a "solid financial base."¹⁵³ NAES, however, was not unlike other community-based colleges and tribal colleges in this regard. Overwhelmingly, most community-based colleges and tribal colleges found fiscal viability a major obstacle in serving largely low-income students. In attempting to keep tuition affordable, both community-based colleges and tribal colleges relied heavily on federal and state sources of funding that were often unreliable for long-term financial stability.¹⁵⁴

NAES attempted to increase its student body, but the college remained one that could not augment its numbers significantly. Consequently, NAES could not establish a solid funding base through tuition. Moreover, when student enrollment decreased significantly in the 1990s, the institution became ineligible for sources of funding dependent on evidence of growth.¹⁵⁵ During the 1970s and 1980s, full-time student enrollment at NAES College in Chicago typically ranged from twelve to eighteen students. In the 1990s, however, student enrollment dropped to as low as seven full-time students per year.¹⁵⁶ The 1990s were indeed bleak years for the institution as only one student graduated between the years 1993 and 1996 and more than half of the students during the same time period did not meet basic requirements to remain in good standing.¹⁵⁷ Such problems seriously compromised the financial stability of NAES.¹⁵⁸ Efforts to increase full-time enrollment did not gain much ground, as NAES only increased its enrollment to nine students by the year 2000.¹⁵⁹ Combined with low student enrollment, the inability of students to pay their full tuition further added to NAES's lack of financial stability.¹⁶⁰

NAES's financial instability did not solely rest with a decline in student enrollment, although the decline—it can be argued—served as an indicator of the weakening of NAES's academic program during this time.¹⁶¹ In reality, the main causes of NAES College's instability resulted from a lack of diversified fundraising initiatives, fiscal mismanagement that severely impaired the institution in the 1990s, and a loss of its central educational mission. NAES College faced a growing deficit without any substantial funding plans for its baccalaureate program, and a sense of despair seemed to permeate throughout the college. Both the administration and faculty expressed that NAES was in a state of decline in 1990.¹⁶²

Matters became worse in the coming years. In her monthly report of September 1993, under the heading of accomplishments, Faith Smith simply wrote, "I can't think of any."¹⁶³ Of the major problems identified in her November 1993 monthly report, Smith listed a lack of financial resources, few fundraising plans in development, and a backlog of reports submitted to funding agencies.¹⁶⁴ These, as well as other problems, persisted and increased in intensity. In the early 1990s, NAES was quickly unraveling as an institution.

NAES College's acceptance of a JTPA grant from the Department of Labor in 1993—while adding a much-needed source of revenue—diverted NAES College from its primary purpose and eventually led to serious fiscal mismanagement issues for the institution.¹⁶⁵ "When I became Dean of the Chicago Campus in 1997," David Beck shared, "I think that it had been since 1993 that NAES had a college graduate. I think that was a direct consequence of getting that grant. The institution, as I recall, was in a

situation of financial crisis.”¹⁶⁶ According to Beck, “The impact that it [the JTPA grant] had was to draw all the resources toward that program and away from the core mission of the institution.”¹⁶⁷

The JTPA program focused on GED classes, computer training courses, employment training, and job referral. By December 1993, NAES worked with more than 101 JTPA participants, and 164 participants by March 1994.¹⁶⁸ The grant infused money into NAES during a very desperate time, but problems with the grant mounted rapidly. In 1996, the Department of Labor determined that NAES mismanaged JTPA grant funding and, therefore, violated federal regulations. According to the Department of Labor, NAES drew down all of its annual grant funds totaling \$547,042 by January 3, 1996 for a grant scheduled to last until June 30, 1996. Furthermore, the Department of Labor found that NAES “failed to pay JTPA participants and JPTA funded staff” and “expended JTPA funds for non-JPTA purposes.”¹⁶⁹ Misappropriation and early drawdown of funds, unapproved changes to the JTPA program, inadequate record keeping, collection of tuition for JTPA services, payment of NAES staff salaries from JPTA funds for non-JTPA services, and nonpayment to JPTA employees all represented grave violations of federal guidelines.¹⁷⁰

With the future of NAES in jeopardy, tensions at the institution heightened. One critic came from within NAES. Vonda Gluck (Ojibwe-Sioux) was a 1982 alumna of the college and served as the chair of NAES College’s Chicago site council.¹⁷¹ On February 9, 1996, on behalf of the Chicago site council, she wrote to the board of trustees,

The College is currently in violation of the Job Training Partnership Act due to illegal drawdowns of the JTPA funds for fiscal year 1995–1996. These drawdowns were not authorized by the Chicago Campus administration or by its Site Council but were performed at the direction of the President of the College, Faith Smith, without prior knowledge of any Chicago Campus personnel. As a result of the drawdowns, the JTPA funds were depleted long before the program year was scheduled to run out. This has caused a large proportion of the JTPA programs to be curtailed; service delivery has virtually ceased; layoffs have occurred; and the staff has not been paid for their current pay period. The checks for the prior pay period were distributed nine working days late, and we do not know the source of income for these checks. Morale of staff is low, and the reputation of the College in the community is threatened.¹⁷²

Gluck criticized the leadership of Faith Smith, but her overall blame for the state of the institution rested with NAES's board of trustees. She stated,

The Board has effectively abdicated its fiduciary responsibilities. The Site Council is concerned with the effectiveness of the Board in general. We feel the Board suffers from "Founders Syndrome," that the relationship of certain Board members to the history of the college, albeit well-meaning, has made them blind to objectively viewing the governance of the institution. . . . Altogether, we feel the Board structure and composition is not responsive to the educational needs of the community and to the financial conditions which are supposed to support these needs.¹⁷³

Neglect of board responsibilities explains much of the dysfunction at NAES during this time. For those who remember how the board oversaw the administration of NAES, a common conclusion is that the board was largely uninvolved and the administration, especially the president, was not held accountable.

NAES lacked the oversight necessary to function effectively as an institution. Terry Straus, a former professor at NAES College, stated, "Everybody talked about NAES in the community as Faith's college. That's what everyone called it. . . . It never had a good board. It had some good people on the board, but it never had a board that functioned very well."¹⁷⁴ From David Beck's perspective, board members "were really letting the administration guide it." "That early on," he continued, "was a strength and later was a weakness."¹⁷⁵ Faith Smith blamed NAES's financial problems on the lateness of payments resulting from the government shutdown of 1995 and 1996 as well as late private grant payments. In a letter to the Department of Labor, she stated,

A number of circumstances occurred beyond our control which created the problems leading to the premature draw-down of funds. One of those circumstances was the unprecedented federal government shutdown in December and January which interrupted the receipt of other federal funds due to the College which, under normal circumstances, would have been available to NAES in December. This situation was aggravated by the postponement of other funds promised to the College from private sources.¹⁷⁶

The Department of Labor determined that NAES had access to its JPTA funds during the government shutdown and the shutdown was not a factor in NAES's misuse of JPTA funds.¹⁷⁷ On June 26, 1996, NAES learned that the JPTA grant would not be renewed.¹⁷⁸

The loss of the JPTA grant presented yet another challenge to the already struggling institution. The Department of Labor transferred the JPTA grant from NAES to California Indian Manpower in July 1996.¹⁷⁹ Ultimately, NAES was responsible for \$123,201 in misused JPTA funds.¹⁸⁰ The difficulties that surrounded the JPTA grant years continued as NAES attempted to deal with the consequences. In a 1998 institutional self-study for the North Central Association, NAES College addressed its history of problems relating to the JPTA grant:

Financial record-keeping was in disarray, the range of services being provided by the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) grant were under dispute, and the Campus' focus on non-degree granting educational programs was at its peak.¹⁸¹

Indeed, not only did NAES College find itself dealing with financial mismanagement, but it also diverged from its primary purpose established with the founding of the institution, namely, developing a professionally credentialed leadership for Chicago's American Indian community.

Beginning in 1996, an intensive effort by NAES to restore its core mission, purpose, and standards and increase sources of funding revitalized hopes that the institution could overcome the problems it faced. Through its study *Principles, Standards, and Practices of the NAES College Mission and Purpose* and similar institutional initiatives, NAES College committed itself to significant reform measures that proved fruitful.¹⁸² David Beck, who became dean in 1997, emphasized that his primary focus was "bringing the mission of higher education back to the forefront of the campus."¹⁸³ Between 1996 and 1998, seven students graduated from NAES in Chicago with their baccalaureate, the same number of students as between the years 1990 and 1996.¹⁸⁴ Furthermore, in 1997, NAES obtained grant funding for a financial consultant to increase its financial viability.¹⁸⁵ With funds from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, individual donors, and a challenge grant from the U.S. Department of Education, the NAES College campaign made fiscal viability look possible even though the institution's accrued debt would take years to reduce.¹⁸⁶ In 2001, the North Central Association took NAES off probationary status after a large bequest from an individual donor and increased fundraising helped the institution prove its financial stability to the accrediting agency.¹⁸⁷

At the same time it was building its financial stability, NAES sought to strengthen its academic program by making it more relevant and marketable. Thus, in 2000, the institution changed its baccalaureate's focus from Community Studies to Public Policy.¹⁸⁸ This shift in focus came as a result of NAES's recognition that community development depended increasingly on a student's ability to engage in and influence public policy.¹⁸⁹ "As a field of academic study," according to the *NAES College Catalog, 2000–2001*, "public policy focuses on how government meets needs, solves problems, and spends public funds at the federal, state, local and tribal levels."¹⁹⁰ While much of the coursework—as expected—reflected this shift, the structure of the academic program preserved what had, by this time, become mainstays of the college, namely, a reliance on credit for prior learning, transfer credit, and the field project.¹⁹¹ The addition of six credits in a tribal language could be fulfilled through coursework, transfer credit, or credit for prior learning. Between 2000 and 2003, NAES College in Chicago awarded its baccalaureate degree in Public Policy to six students who fulfilled the set requirements.¹⁹²

By 2003, NAES College—once again—found itself in financial difficulty, and in 2005 the board of trustees of the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association withdrew its accreditation.¹⁹³ Poor decisions such as not paying a negotiated settlement of \$18,000 to the Department of Labor led to the entire JPTA debt and interest being subject to collection.¹⁹⁴ In its criticism, the Higher Learning Commission pointed to the NAES administration's not planning for long-term viability and the board's overreliance on the president for information it was receiving.¹⁹⁵ In 2005, NAES College cancelled its fall semester as a result of losing its accreditation. Revealing the depth of problems NAES faced, the *Chicago Tribune* reported,

As the college's finances deteriorated, its former president borrowed more than \$95,000 for personal use and the school spent more than 1.2 million in grants and funds designated for specific purposes on salaries and other operating expenses, according to interviews and financial audits. The college also is fighting a government lawsuit alleging the school owes more than \$200,000 for misusing a job-training grant.¹⁹⁶

When Dorene Wiese replaced Faith Smith as president of the college, she met with a number of representatives from universities in order to find a suitable program for NAES's students. An initial agreement fell through as the Illinois Board of Education informed East-West University of Chicago

that it risked putting its own accreditation at risk if a merger with NAES occurred.¹⁹⁷ Without many options left for NAES and the American Indian students who invested their academic careers in the institution, Dorene Wiese approached the possibility of NAES students enrolling at Eastern Illinois University through its School of Continuing Education.

In the spring of 2006, NAES students began a program located in Chicago through a partnership with Eastern Illinois University.

Eastern Illinois University proved to be a good match with one of the lowest tuition rates in the state and a willingness to provide courses in the Chicago area and through the Internet.¹⁹⁸ As one of the first three graduates of Eastern Illinois University's program in association with NAES, Joe Pete (Ojibwe) expressed his appreciation of both NAES College and Eastern Illinois University:

In 2001, I was walking by NAES College near my home. I knew of the school, as my young nephew had earned his degree there. . . . I enrolled the following fall semester and am now



Figure 6.10. NAES class, Spring 2006 (first row, left to right) Jolene Aleck, Roger Standing Cloud, and NAES president Dorene Wiese; (second row, left to right) Robert Miller, Toni Whitaker, Georgina Roy, and Butch Deloney; (third row, left to right) Melanie Cloud, Johnnie Jimenez, NAES-EIU Faculty Doug Miller, Charles Roy, and Jan Horak. (Courtesy of NAES College and Dorene Wiese)

at the end of my long journey to earn a college degree. NAES College has provided me not only with the opportunity to see a brighter future, but more importantly, the great honor of learning with Native people. I have learned what it means to be Indian from my fellow students, what it means to feel an attachment to a beautiful culture that engenders a love for the earth and for others. When Eastern Illinois University joined with NAES to help students to continue our education, and to help the college survive, I felt truly honored once again. . . . EIU understands that to honor is to embrace. To honor is to share. To honor is to accept.¹⁹⁹

The affiliation with Eastern Illinois University allowed NAES to continue. Dorene Wiese's attempt to pull the college back from the brink of collapse ended with a unique and innovative collaboration that enabled students like Joe Pete to complete their baccalaureate and continue to work toward positive change in their community. In the words of Joe Pete, "EIU and NAES have allowed me now to live that dream."²⁰⁰

Conclusion

In 1983, Marilyn Gittel, a professor from the City University of New York (CUNY), wrote an evaluation of community-based colleges, commissioned by the Ford Foundation.²⁰¹ Gittel concluded,

[C]ommunity-based colleges have made an important contribution to higher education in America. They service an otherwise neglected population, offering them the option of private higher education, with lower income, minority, adult women being the major beneficiaries of these neighborhood-based institutions. They spend less money educating people who require more support and have become especially proficient at skills development and at transmitting a sense of confidence and purpose to their students.²⁰²

As one of the nine schools researched by Gittel, NAES College fared well in its ability to prepare students for leadership roles and their involvement in community development.²⁰³ Indeed, the American Indian community recognized NAES students as those dedicated to their respective organizations and the larger community, and NAES graduates by and large viewed their dedication as an inherent responsibility as former NAES students.²⁰⁴

NAES College was founded on the belief that American Indians living in Chicago could establish an institution of higher education that met the needs of the community. During the era of the University Without Walls movement, field center models of education, and the American Indian self-determination movement, the formation of NAES College paralleled the expansion of other community-based and tribal colleges that were shaping new institutional models of higher education—specifically, models designed to meet the particular needs of nontraditional, minority students. It, however, remained distinct in being the only American Indian-controlled institution of higher education in an urban area.

Through a number of crises throughout the years—many external, many internal—NAES College struggled to maintain its baccalaureate program and financially sustain itself as an institution. Ultimately, NAES College designed its curriculum to fulfill a critical gap in higher education and sought to promote a sense of agency in the community through an academic program designed by and for those committed to improving the livelihood of American Indians living in Chicago through community self-determination. As it drifted from its original mission of education for a credentialed leadership, however, the institution declined and eventually lost its accreditation. A lack of board oversight and fiscal mismanagement led to problems that were too vast and deep to repair.