



## California Indian Nations College Achieves a Historic Milestone

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California Indian Nations College (CINC) graduating class of 2025. (photo courtesy of CINC)

By Jeanne Ferris

In early February this year, *California Indian Nations College* (CINC) in Palm Desert was awarded an inaugural eight-year full accreditation by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC).

This places CINC among regionally accredited institutions recognized by the *Council for Higher Education Accreditation* and the *U.S. Department of Education*.

*California Indian Nations College* was chartered by the *Twentynine Palms Band of Mission Indians* in 2017 and founded by respected tribal elder, Theresa Mike of the Lummi Nation.

To be fair, there are two other tribal colleges: the *California Tribal College*, located in Woodland, which offers certificate programs focused on leadership, governance, federal Indian law, and culture.

And the other is *Kumeyaay Community College* in San Diego, which specializes in Kumeyaay language, arts, and history.

However, CINC is the first accredited Tribal college in California (there are 37 accredited Tribal colleges in the U.S.) to offer higher education access and opportunities with a culturally responsive approach to one of the largest Native American populations in the U.S.

Receiving this accreditation required a rigorous self-evaluation, a sustained community engagement, and an intentional institutional development that addressed the compliance requirements, corrected deficiencies, and met Standards 4.5 and 4.6.

This collective effort was supported by CINC's administrative staff, faculty, students, board members, and many Native and non-Native elected leaders, including Assemblymember James C. Ramos (D-San Bernardino) and Assemblymember Jeff Gonzalez (R-Indio).

My congratulations to California Indian Nations College students, faculty, and administration for achieving a historic milestone! The forward momentum continues, as it is the first tribal college in almost 30 years to earn initial federal accreditation for an eight-year term. The path to accreditation is arduous, but CINC has demonstrated it can meet the challenge. It is unconscionable that California, the state with the greatest number of Native Americans, has no Indian College, and now we do. This is a tremendous achievement, a long time coming!

—Assemblymember James C. Ramos, Serrano/Cahuilla and life-long resident of the San Manuel Indian reservation

*News from Native California* interviewed CINC President, Celeste Townsend about this important milestone:

### **What does this accreditation mean for a prospective student?**

Accreditation means Native and non-Native students can safely advance with pride, knowing their education is both culturally responsive and fully recognized at the university of their choice. Their credits transfer, their degrees carry weight, and new opportunities

open—whether they continue with higher learning or step into the workforce. This milestone strengthens academic pathways while honoring CINC’s commitment to educating, strengthening, and empowering all students, upholding community values, and supporting the success of future generations.

### **How will it help their academic career?**

Accreditation helps strengthen a student’s academic career by ensuring their hard work is recognized beyond CINC, while our personalized support helps them define and reach their goals. Students receive individual guidance, academic advising, and hands-on assistance that meets them where they are—whether they plan to transfer, earn a degree, or build skills for the workforce. Together, accreditation and personalized support give students confidence, direction, and real pathways forward.

### **What changes can an existing CINC student working toward graduation expect?**

Current students can feel confident knowing they made the right choice by attending California’s only accredited Tribal College. They can expect a rigorous academic experience that strengthens their skills, along with continued personalized support to help them stay on track to graduation. Accreditation reinforces the quality of their education and empowers students to move forward with confidence in whatever path they choose next.

CINC is a non-profit, two-year institution that centers Indigenous knowledge, leadership, and community engagement in its curriculum.

It provides associate degree programs that foster academic success through an encouraging, inclusive learning environment.

CINC offers an Associate of Arts degree in Liberal Arts.

Within the degree, students can choose to emphasize Art & Humanities, Business & Technology, or Social & Behavioral Sciences.

For interested Native and non-Native students, please visit: [www.CINCollege.org](http://www.CINCollege.org) or email: [admin@CINCollege.org](mailto:admin@CINCollege.org) Phone: (760) 363-4383