

Tohono O'odham Community College  
Education Division  
Dr. Jesús de la Garza, Vice President

## **Service Learning Course Descriptions**

### **November 1, 2005**

#### **Background Information**

Since the 1980's when the Tohono O'odham Skill Center was established, all of the apprenticeship programs have responded to requests from community residents to repair, renovate, and/or undertake new construction projects. In all cases, the resident provided the construction materials, but the project requests were the foundation of the apprentices' on-the-job training when contractor work was not available. No labor costs were part of the project requests from residents. When the dream of establishing a college on the Tohono O'odham Nation became a reality, the Skill Center and the college merged in 1998 as one entity. The above practices continued to flourish as part of the Occupational Programs.

To travel long distances on and off the Nation is a common experience shared by all residents. The Tohono O'odham Nation is located in southern Arizona approximately sixty miles west of Tucson. The Nation shares a part of the international border with Mexico and is comparable in size to the state of Connecticut. In the case of the Occupational Programs' instructors and apprentices, project requests have meant that services were provided at work sites as much as 120 miles away in remote areas of the Nation. Oftentimes one or more of the apprentices was from the village where the project had been requested. When this was the situation, the apprentice assumed a leadership role that may not have been apparent in previous interaction with the instructors and peers.

There was a clear protocol that was followed by the apprentice when communicating with the resident(s) that had initiated the request. Frequently, the communication was exclusively conducted in O'odham, particularly, if the project was requested by an Elder of the village. When the apprentice introduced him or herself to the resident(s), there was a clear declaration of relationship with the people of the village as to parents, maternal and paternal grandparents, at the very least, and where they reside or resided in the recent past.

Not all of the apprentices know the O’odham language or the appropriate protocol to guide them in their proceedings and interaction with the residents. Fortunately, the instructors that have been with the Occupational Programs the longest provide cultural guidance and O’odham language support. Service, then, to the community is enhanced by the quality of the relationships that the apprentices are able to establish. In short, all apprentices must express some version of the above protocol before initiating work on the project in the O’odham language.

One of the courses (**BCT 100, Professionalism in Service for Building and Construction Technologies**) is described as follows: “Procedures in business and customer service. Includes an introduction to professionalism, self-evaluation, service routine, dealing with a dissatisfied customer, and problem situations.” During the time prior to accreditation, TOCC established an Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA) with Pima Community College. One outcome of the agreement was related to the adoption of their curriculum for courses and programs. Since accreditation was granted by the Higher Learning Commission of NCA, it is now incumbent upon us to develop a unique curriculum that is appropriate for this cultural milieu.

As such, it is anticipated that changes incorporating service learning will be introduced as professional development opportunities are provided for all faculty, whether in the Occupational or Academic sides of the house. For example, there are no reflection opportunities provided within the context of the occupational program courses, but clearly there is much to reflect about, consider, and learn in order to serve with distinction! Housing problems on the Nation include inadequate or non-existent plumbing, over-crowded conditions, and no electricity for an estimated 40% of the dwellings. O’odham language courses will be developed specifically for the apprentice-related work setting, including appropriate protocol when interacting with others in the field.

An assessment of a student’s understanding of the Tohono O’odham Himdag (Way of Life) and the extent to which an individual is grounded in the culture, as reflected by Gewkdag (strength), is being developed as part of the General Knowledge Student Learning Outcomes Assessment. There are, at least, four values that are interwoven throughout the Himdag: Belief, Sharing, Balance, and Respect. The above protocol for apprentices is viewed as being embedded in the Himdag; the protocol reflects a belief in

the Himdag, a respect for all things, a sense of balance in one's life, and sharing is valued as a way of life. It is said that sharing is so much of the way of life, for example, that there is no word in the O'odham language that conveys the meaning "Thank You," because sharing is inherent to the Himdag and to the Tohono O'odham.

It is in this context that service learning will be developed. A colleague has described the two words, tribal and college, as "living in the hyphen" (tribal-college), where the two worlds of tribal knowledge and wisdom meet with the western tradition of education. The college is embedded in the Himdag, rather than integrating the Himdag into the curriculum, yet the vision and mission statements include the following: "Our vision is to become the Tohono O'odham Nation's center for higher education, and to enhance the Nation's participation in the local, state, national and global communities." The mission of the college "...is to enhance the unique Tohono O'odham Himdag by strengthening individuals, families, and communities through holistic, quality higher education services. These services will include research opportunities and programs that address academic, life, and development skills."

In closing, we have a complicated task before us, but because sharing is central to the way of life here, I believe that service learning will be readily adopted. **Contact:** Jesús de la Garza; **Phone:** 520-383-0012; **E-mail:** [jdelagarza@tocc.cc.az.us](mailto:jdelagarza@tocc.cc.az.us)