Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

**Media Contact:** Nedra Darling, OPA-IA Phone: 202-219-4152
**For Immediate Release:** March 12, 2014
Print PDF

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Kevin K. Washburn today announced that the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI), a Bureau of Indian Education operated post-secondary institution of higher learning in Albuquerque, N.M., has been awarded "initial accreditation" status by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

"The Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute holds a special place in Indian education because of its emphasis on training American Indians and Alaska Natives in science, math and technology, and I congratulate SIPI on its achievement of receiving initial accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission," Washburn said. "Under Dr. Sherry Allison's leadership SIPI has achieved accreditation, which holds the promise of more American Indians and Alaska Natives entering these fields that are so important to Indian Country's future."

"I join with Assistant Secretary Washburn in congratulating SIPI on achieving initial accreditation status," said Bureau of Indian Education Director Dr. Charles M. Roessel. "Thanks to the hard work of SIPI President Sherry Allison, staff and faculty members, the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute is now accredited, demonstrating a commitment to quality. This award directly benefits SIPI students, who can continue and complete their post-secondary education at SIPI with confidence."

SIPI's accreditation status was upgraded from "candidate for accreditation" following a rigorous candidacy and accreditation review process recently conducted by the HLC. The HLC visiting team found that SIPI had responded to the Commission's concerns cited in a 2009 review and that it is now in compliance with HLC standards. Initial accreditation means that an institution is accredited by the Commission after going through a period of candidacy. Subsequent reviews, assuming that SIPI continues to meet the criteria for accreditation, will result in the college receiving "continued accreditation" status.

"We are honored to receive initial accreditation from the Higher Learning Commission and we are grateful for the time and effort it took in reviewing our institution," said SIPI President Allison. "Achieving initial accreditation status is the result of the hard work of all of the faculty and staff, and we are fortunate that they are committed to expanding the minds and spirits of our students. This accreditation means that SIPI will be able to continue to educate a new generation of students to meet the needs of their communities and the nation."

As the HLC visiting team noted in its final report: "SIPI has become a learning organization that uses performance measures and data driven decision making in every aspect of the institution." The team further praised SIPI's academic programs for being "active in community development projects [and] helping students put their learning into practice."

HLC accreditation certifies that the teaching and learning processes at SIPI meet the rigorous educational standards established by the Commission and that the college is engaged in continuous improvement.

The Higher Learning Commission is an independent corporation and one of two commission members of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA), one of six regional institutional accreditors in the United States. The HLC accredits degree-granting post-secondary educational institutions in the North Central region. HLC accreditation grants membership in the Commission and in the North Central Association.

Established in 1971 at the request of the 19 Pueblo tribes in New Mexico and other federally recognized tribes to help train American Indians and Alaska Natives for employment, the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute is a National Indian Community College and Land Grant Institution with a national, tribally appointed board of regents. SIPI provides career technical training and transfer degree programs to students from the nation's 566 federally recognized tribes. It offers competitive job training programs; grants Associate of Applied Science, Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees; and provides opportunities for students to transfer into four-year degree programs. For more information, visit www.sipi.edu.

The Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs oversees the Bureau of Indian Education, which administers the federal school system for American Indian and Alaska Native children from the federally recognized tribes. The BIE director is directly responsible for implementing federal education laws and programs within and overseeing the funding or direct operation of 183 elementary and secondary day and boarding schools on 64 reservations in 23 states serving over 40,000 students, including off-reservation boarding schools and peripheral dormitories near reservations for students attending public schools, two-third of which are tribally operated. The BIE also provides post-secondary education opportunities to American Indians and Alaska Natives by offering higher education scholarships, providing operational support funding to 27 tribal colleges and universities and two tribal technical colleges, and by directly operating two institutions of higher learning: Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kan., and SIPI.