

An organisational analysis of the World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium²

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Abstract

In this paper, we offer an organisational analysis of the World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium (WINHEC), aiming especially at achieving nation-building and self-determination for indigenised higher education efforts. We use a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges approach to examine WINHEC's organisational contributions, effectiveness, unique aspects, and challenges. Our findings carry some important implications to further the indigenous engagement and governance within indigenous higher education worldwide.

Background

Although indigenous academia has existed in certain forms and at various levels for millennia, it has only recently entered mainstream awareness, motivating diverse researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders to acknowledge its importance in societies and to the histories of people worldwide. This significance needs both mainstream and indigenous-oriented higher education to preserve indigenous values, knowledge systems, philosophies, and wisdom production (Chilisa, 2012; Dei, 2011; Denzin, Lincoln, & Tuhiwai, 2008; Kovach, 2009; McGovern, 1999; Memmi, 2006; Mutua & Swadener, 2004; Reagan, 2010; Semali & Kincheloe, 1999; Smith, 2012; Teasdale & Rhea, 2000). During the development of indigenous higher education worldwide from 1900 to the present, old issues and new directions emerge as a result of dynamic relationship efforts between indigenous organisations and among diverse groups. Regarding indigenous education efforts, several scholars argue that the central topic debated by all kinds of international organisations is the general lack of educational success among the peoples (Abu-Saad & Champagne, 2006; Brayboy, et al. 2012; Huffman, 2008, 2010). In addition, over the past few decades, indigenous peoples around the world have confronted various developments that often complicate the issue of their educational achievement. Two of the developments are of particular importance: (1) the dynamic relationships between indigenous populations and the state; and (2) the definition and recognition of indigenous peoples' ownership, use, and management of language, identity, culture, land, and other resources. Struggles regarding nation-building, sovereignty, universal education, land recognition, and language, culture, and identity preservation are common among indigenous peoples globally.

The first development has led to a tide of political organising efforts (or at times, reorganising) within indigenous communities. Inter-communal and local organisations, national and regional confederations, and international linkages have risen rapidly across five continents. Sometimes these organising efforts encounter great resistance from nation states and are carried out in locations where indigenous populations comprise only a fraction of the current population. The second development extends in the aftermath of World War II, where we have witnessed a dramatic proliferation and involvement of pivotal international organisations and actors. Regardless of their various specific organisational objectives, multilateral organisations (e.g., UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, and OECD), bilateral donor agencies (e.g., SIDA and USAID), nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), and regional agencies (e.g., the regional development banks and the European Union) have come forward with pioneering declarations, political leverage, financial support, and developmental agendas in support of indigenous peoples.

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Although the current outcomes fail to meet certain standards and the expectations of all stakeholders, many advances have occurred. Furthermore, the United Nations has built the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) as an advisory body to the Department of Economic and Social Affairs' (DESA) Economic and Social Council. This forum was established with a mandate to discuss indigenous issues with respect to "economic and social development, culture, environment, education, health and human rights" (UNPFII, n.d.). This multi-mission focus limits DESA to have enough international influence to significantly affect indigenous higher education at the global level. Undoubtedly, the aforementioned organisations have made great progress regarding the development of indigenous education on national, regional, and global education policies and practices, albeit mostly at primary- and secondary-education levels. However, they did not provide globally articulated, indigenous-oriented or indigenous-based organisations for postsecondary education with an active, professional, ethical, culturally responsive, and accountable mandate. Thus, the World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium (hereafter WINHEC) emerged as a product of, and in response to, this history of inequity within higher education.

WINHEC rose after decades of institutional-, local-, state-, national-, and global-level initiatives to facilitate tribal nation building, self-determination, sovereignty, indigenous knowledge systems, and culturally responsive education through indigenous control of higher education. Both resulted from the drive for indigenised academic identity. The Consortium emerged as an indigenous-generated academic player to embody a set of ideas, knowledge, and innovations unique to indigenous peoples, either from times past, present, or in the process of development. According to the *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (2003), the term *indigenise* means "to cause to have indigenous characteristics or personnel" (p. 634). Extending this definition, the Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice (2004) contends that indigenising the academy is to make it "both responsive and responsible to First Nations goals of self-determination and well-being" (p. 113). Likewise, we further see indigenising the academy as a critically indigenous-generated praxis that involves various indigenous populations across the world. WINHEC represents a population that has suffered a history of exclusion in mainstream academia and whose members are generally economically poorer than people from mainstream societies, and strives to gain academic recognition for indigenous epistemology.

Since the beginning of the international indigenous-rights movement in the latter half of the 20th century, indigenous scholars have been obliged to balance individual rights with collective rights through international initiatives. Indigenous nations had found themselves divided by newly-imposed international borders or lumped together with other groups entirely. It became particularly challenging to find a forum that would deal with their demands instead of eschewing responsibility. Consequently, indigenous leaders began to unite with other Aboriginal groups to increase their effectiveness in fighting for their rights. Since the 1970s, increasing numbers of indigenous peoples have formed organisations across geographic and political borders, which bring international attention to their common struggles, despite their vastly different cultures and locations. These organisations vary—from global ones, such as the World Council of Indigenous Peoples, to the smaller ones, such as the Coast Salish Gathering—and reunite cultural groups divided by political borders. Various international indigenous organisations began to rise in the 1960s, initiated by indigenous scholars and non-indigenous professionals that became more aware of the need to unify the strengths of all indigenous peoples around the world and establish a sustainable development institution for their advancement.

We are careful not to over-generalise indigenous education issues in the arguments and findings sections of this study noting how each indigenous group, language, culture, and identity is in many ways unique. These unique attributes need to be recognized, and even celebrated as a best practice to help indigenous institutions realize sustained growth. Indigenous-generated priorities and subjectivities with regard to education are the key components to achieve the ideals of WINHEC. In response to globalising challenges and opportunities, we should promote universal approaches to knowledge and understanding. Rather than forcing indigenous languages, cultures, and identities to conform to one education path or another, we support a path toward indigenous sovereignty—where indigenous peoples have the ability to choose for themselves the best education solutions for their unique and often complex circumstances.

An Overview of WINHEC

Established in August 2002 in Canada, the founding nation members present at the launch of the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education were Australia, the states of Hawai'i and Alaska, and the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) of the United States, Canada, the Wānanga of Aotearoa (New Zealand), and Saamiland (North Norway). WINHEC is the first global organisation to provide a forum for exchange and cooperation in improving indigenous higher education. Its principal mission is to create “a multi-nation effort to accredit, empower[,] and thus affirm native control of indigenous higher learning” (Meyer, 2005, p. 1). The Consortium works with indigenous peoples to share their vision and protect their rights, particularly with regard to preserving languages, cultures, and traditions through higher education. An indigenous-based organisation should be founded to resist the negative impact of academic neo- and post-colonialism. To construct an *indigenous subjectivity* in education, indigenising the academy, establishing a recognised accreditation mechanism, and forming indigenous knowledge systems are increasingly necessary transformations. All three indicators provide multiple platforms for indigenous sustainable development. Hence, indigenous subjectivity can wield critical ethnic consciousness and power substantially, and to express indigeneity effectively through, for instance, indigenous peoples' ethnic languages and traditional knowledge (Jacob, Liu, & Lee, 2014).

It is necessary to perceive WINHEC both as an international organisation and as a movement since it seeks to facilitate cultural exchange and academic dialogue through international cooperation. To achieve global targets, the Consortium uses a particular global strategy framework (see Figure 1), which provides a common strategic approach that includes founding principles, objectives, and a rationale to establish working groups. WINHEC believes that indigenous peoples have the right to determine their way of life and their relationship with governments. In its accreditation handbook (3rd edition) approved on 25 August 2010, the Consortium adopted its founding principles on Articles 12, 13, 14, and 15, after the United Nations General Assembly adopted the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* in 2007 (WINHEC 2010, p. 2).

Many indigenous populations share a similar historical fate: their languages, cultures, social systems, and values have been neglected and oppressed by waves of colonisation for centuries (UNESCO, 2006). Alongside the gradual rise of human-rights awareness, indigenous peoples' desire for educational equity has increased. As part of this trend, some indigenous education leaders and scholars launched WINHEC to create an organisation strong enough to influence the future course of history: “when a dozen education leaders met in Alberta, Canada, in August 2002, [to establish WINHEC] they felt the familiar thrill of history being made” (Ambler, 2005, p. 18). “Creating an accreditation body for indigenous education initiatives and systems that identify common criteria, practices and principles by which indigenous peoples live” became one of the Consortium's essential goals (WINHEC, 2010, p. 3). Due to the uniqueness and rapidly evolving nature of the WINHEC accreditation process, it becomes a complex phenomenon to study. This inherent difficulty is also compounded by the lack of scholarly literature available about quality assurance for indigenous higher education institutions (hereafter HEIs). We particularly use the WINHEC accreditation issues in this study to suggest how its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges influence non-indigenous and indigenous peoples.

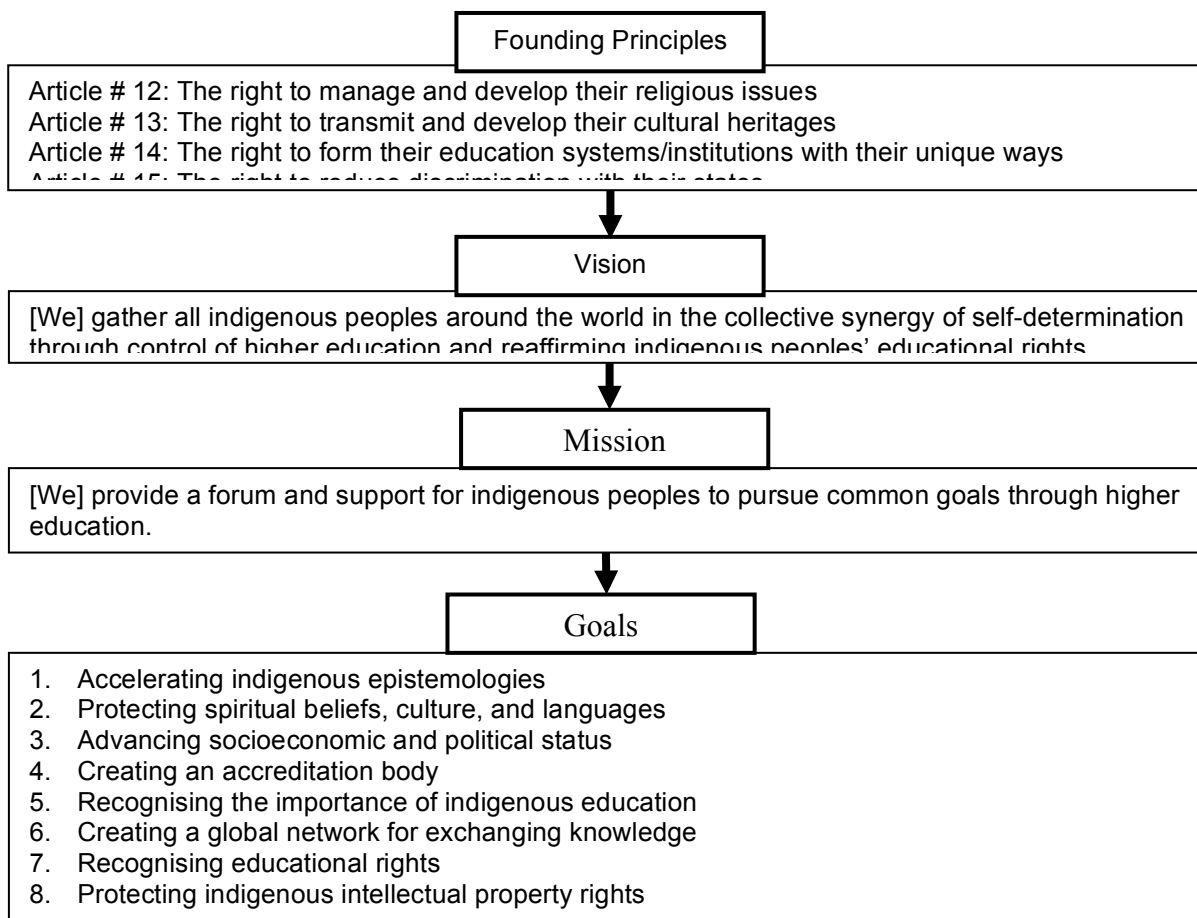


Figure 1. WINHEC's Global Strategic Framework
 Source: Created by the authors based on WINHEC (2010).

Using an organisational analysis approach, this article examines the role that WINHEC plays in the development of indigenous higher education worldwide. We are particularly interested in exploring WINHEC's contribution to indigenous engagement initiatives and comparing the nature of the Consortium's operations to those of other international organisations in the development of indigenous higher education. Research on the evaluation of indigenous organisations, especially international ones, is relatively scarce since focused scholarship related to WINHEC is a relatively new development in higher education studies. This study points out potential and generative lines of enquiry already underway, as well as some questions that are critical for researchers interested in WINHEC.

The description of the methods we used for this review is followed by brief overviews of each of the four aspects of a *strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges* (SWOC) analysis. In that section, we present the features that define the nature of WINHEC. The concluding section considers the implications of this study for indigenous higher educational development practice, further research, and the continuing definition on the field of indigenous higher education development.

Methods

Resources for this study included archival documents from the existing literature and discourses (e.g., public statements documented on websites, online newspapers, blogs, social media, etc.) that are not yet published in the academic literature but are available primarily through the internet. The organizational analysis of the documents was carried out through a four-step process. First, we formed a team to examine the status of indigenous organisation studies and determined our topic as an organisational analysis employed by WINHEC, while compiling sources that were helpful to formulate the research questions. Second, we conducted a thorough literature review with a particular focus on the primary and secondary sources to support our examination of WINHEC. Third, we identified the historical data available via the official WINHEC website (www.win-hec.org), mainly targeting journal articles, meeting minutes, annual

conferences and agendas, and the organisational constitution. Fourth, we established inclusion criteria to evaluate the quality of our assembled data. For instance, we used keywords relevant to the development of WINHEC (e.g., mission and accreditation) to select documents for analysis.

This study was conducted over a one-year period from January to December 2012. It included four phases: 1) defining the research questions; 2) conducting the literature review; 3) performing the SWOC analysis; and 4) write ups for publication (Jacob, et al., 2013). All team members had a good working knowledge of the literature and experience in the field of educational organisational development. Our analytical framework identified internal and external factors that favoured and hindered the achievement of organisational goals and objectives, both explicitly stated and implicit.

Findings and Discussion

International accreditation is currently developing as one of WINHEC’s core directions, and it is worth asking whether WINHEC’s objectives and methods can meet the indigenous and non-indigenous needs recognised by its indigenised accreditation framework. To dissect the contributions, effectiveness, potentials, and challenges of WINHEC’s role in the multisectoral approach outlined by the indigenous accreditation mechanism, we employed a SWOC analysis to evaluate the effectiveness of WINHEC’s services and programmes. Figure 2 summarises the four key aspects of WINHEC’s accreditation operation.

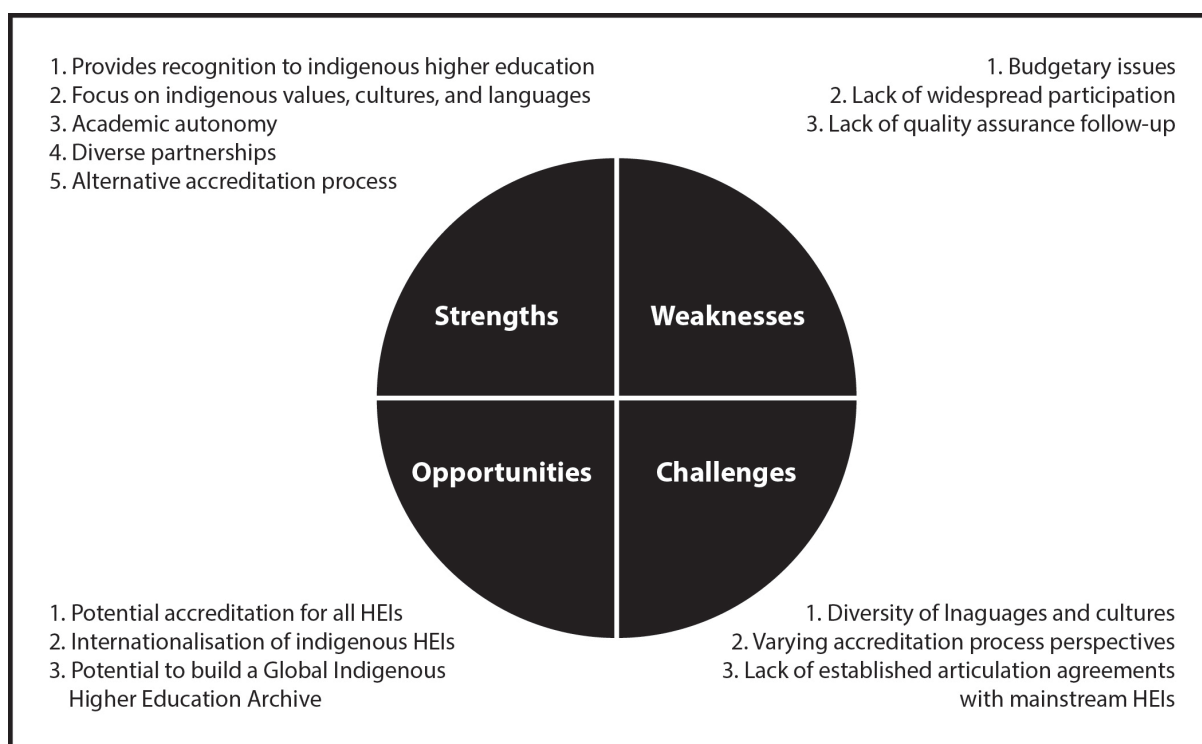


Figure 2. SWOC analysis summary of WINHEC
 Source: Adapted from Jacob and colleagues (2013, p. 37).

Strengths

Recognition. Over the past few decades, a primary reason that indigenous education reforms efforts fail in many countries has been the absence of indigenous engagement and the loss of indigenous identity within mainstream education systems. When indigenous higher education is officially recognised and accredited, it is helpful to overcome the inequalities and injustices that inevitably occur from these fail education reform efforts. Recognising and accrediting indigenous higher education institutions and programmes becomes a positive symbol around which to reconstruct indigenous subjectivity and value human rights in the formal higher education system. Moreover, recognised accreditation is a practical step to transforming indigenous

peoples' endangered status and marginalised condition. The advantage of official recognition is obtaining identity from diverse indigenous and non-indigenous peoples publicly, legitimately, and internationally.

Indigenous values, cultures, and languages. A unique element of WINHEC accreditation as compared to non-indigenous-based accreditation bodies is its focus on indigenous values, cultures, and languages. Therefore, indigenous and non-indigenous peoples are encouraged to pay more attention to their worldviews, cultures, and dialects. Through the accreditation process, indigenous people can develop a positive identity and have more willingness to use their previously disregarded cultural capital. WINHEC recognises three elements that are essential to the protection and enhancement of indigenous subjectivity: language, culture, and spiritual beliefs. Meyer (2005, p. 4) claims that the priority placed upon language by WINHEC "is itself a reminder that what has birthed our worldview is held in ancient symbols, codes and energies that we are returning to for meaning and joy." WINHEC encourages the use of indigenous languages in all facets of programming.

Additionally, a focus on cultural preservation is considered to be the best and one practice that WINHEC aims to support at the higher-education level. Indigenous cultures have survived the on-going societal bombardment of the belief that the dominant or global way of thinking is better than traditional indigenous ways. Pursuing its wider goal to consolidate the integrity of indigenous cultures with healthy ethnic/cultural identity through education, WINHEC perceives that quality assurance is achieved when culture is preserved and celebrated within higher education systems.

WINHEC also supports spiritual beliefs and practices found in indigenous centres of higher learning. According to Meyer, "WINHEC encourages both process and product of accreditation efforts that are accomplished and supported within a framework that honors all spiritual beliefs, practices and expressions" (2005, p. 6).

An additional organisational strength of WINHEC is that it emphasises creative cultural expression as an intrinsic part of self-identity. WINHEC as an organisation is able to provide a higher education venue that encourages the expression and shift of a one-sided paradigm for indigenous learners. This could be realised through, for instance, an expression of a physics problem using *kapa haka*—*kapa* meaning rank or row, and *haka* referring to a Māori dance. It aims at creating an arena that, when indigenous people enrol in higher education, they would often secure a creative affinity and credibility that their cultures express.

Since its establishment, WINHEC has recognised the important role elders play in indigenous education. Elders are considered culture bearers who shoulder great responsibility in the preservation of indigenous knowledge, languages, and traditions. In the process of building connections between HEIs and indigenous communities, elders play a significant part in terms of transition and interpretation of indigenous knowledge (Ilokepa-Guerrero, Carlson, Railton, Pettigrew, Locust, & Mia, 2011).

Academic autonomy. Through the WINHEC accreditation process, indigenous peoples have more power to decide on curriculum content, design, and language(s) of instruction. Thus, they have some quiet control over academic programmes and the ability to employ the faculty members they need. The WINHEC accreditation process represents academic autonomy and is its recognised strength that should be further developed and expanded.

Diverse partnerships. The accreditation review team comprises both community members and indigenous higher-education members (WINHEC, 2010). In other words, the community is considered a key stakeholder group in the accreditation process. Consequently, indigenous HEIs can be significantly supported by community members and in turn, members of local communities gain a sense of ownership and contribution because they are able to participate in the process.

HEIs are also starting to pay attention to indigenous programmes, departments, and colleges and are becoming aware that they should apply for WINHEC accreditation to obtain the identification certification as bicultural institutions. As Walter Fleming (Staff Reports, 2009) points out that "By being accredited by

WINHEC, potential students and indigenous communities can be assured that [Montana State University's] Native American Studies department has met both academic and cultural standards of excellence." Further, since "institutions rarely assess, or even identify, their institutional values," the WINHEC accreditation process gave the Montana State University's Native American Studies Department the opportunity to identify a "value system upon which it has always operated but never articulated" (Ibid.).

Alternative accreditation framework and process. Figure 3 shows the framework and process of WINHEC institutional/programme accreditation. On behalf of WINHEC, the Accreditation Authority was established in 2003 to implement the idea of academic accreditation for indigenous HEIs and programmes. To the best of our understanding and based on our document analysis, the WINHEC review team members and other consultants involved in the accreditation process do not have any set of criteria derived from the principles of general higher education accreditation. Meyer argues that "we did not offer templates of comparison or review aggregated data, rather questions probed into understanding how language, culture and belief systems were strengthened with coursework, community and collaborations with global cousins" (2005, p. 4). The accreditation process assigns a central role to the natural formation of indigenous performance. Meyer further notes that "indigenous accreditation then is no longer about overseeing well-intentioned ideals, but rather it became a way to bear witness" (p. 4).

WINHEC provides different kinds of indigenous knowledge the opportunity to exist, which are also valued and used in many academic pursuits. When undergoing the WINHEC accreditation process, HEIs and/or indigenous higher-education programmes have the opportunity to enhance the preservation of indigenous cultures, traditions, and values.

The *WINHEC Accreditation Handbook* (2010) states that the accreditation process focuses on educational institutions' "performance, integrity, and quality that entitles them to the confidence of the cultural and educational community being served" (p. 4). The *Accreditation Handbook* also recognises the importance of including "participation by indigenous peoples to be served through the respective institution/programme, including responsibility for establishing review criteria and participating in the self-study and review process" (p. 4).

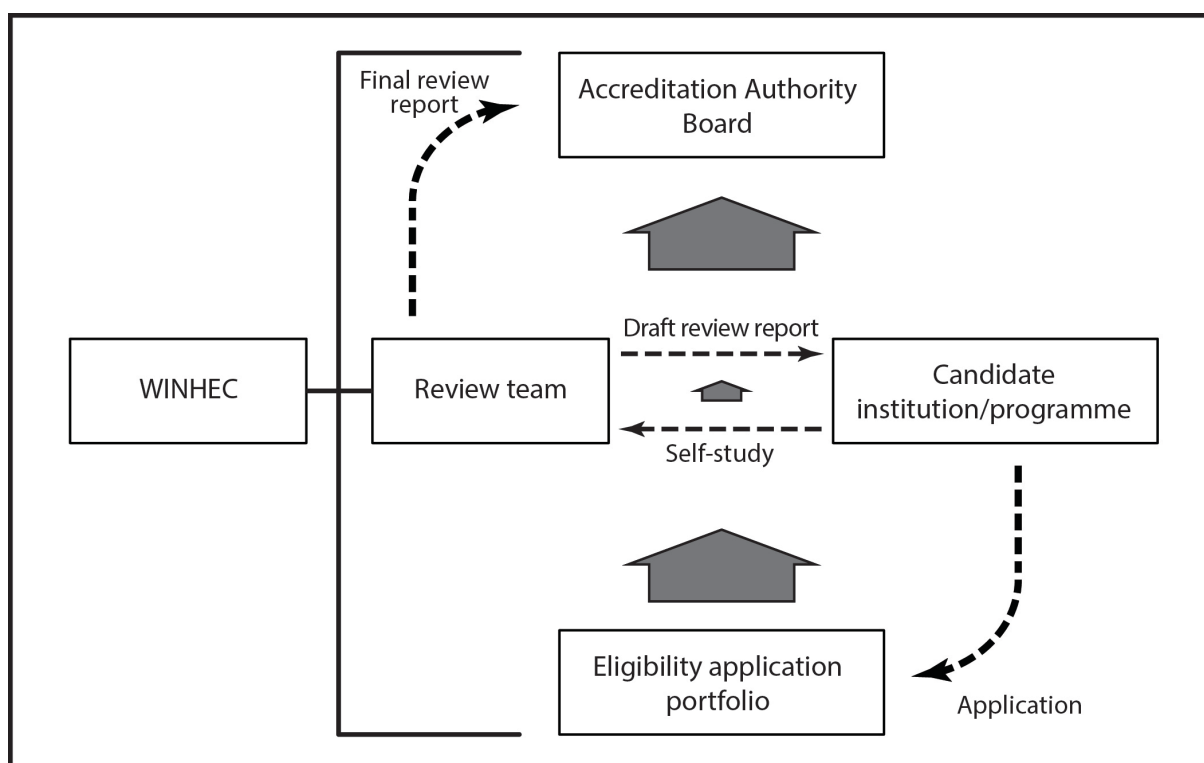


Figure 3. WINHEC institutional/programme accreditation framework and process

Source: Adapted from Jacob and colleagues (2013, p. 42).

Two points in the accreditation process are worth to note. First, candidate HEIs or programmes can undergo a self-study process through which they critically examine themselves in terms of educational structure and funding, academic achievement, and their service to indigenous communities. Considering the effort and time constraints involved, members of the review team prefer to receive a completed self-study in advance of their visit. In addition, at least one “Elder who has been associated with a member program or institution” (WINHEC, 2010, p. 11) tends to enhance the quality and effectiveness of each review team visit, and also reflects the importance of elders in taking an active role to improve indigenous higher education.

Weaknesses

Budgetary issues. At the AIHEC meeting in 2002, all of WINHEC’s founders gathered and mentioned their institutions’ financial sustainability crises. Turoa Royal and Trevor Moeke (both Maori) from New Zealand noted that efforts to help achieve WINHEC’s goals had cost the Maori approximately NZ\$250,000 (US\$182,000) a year (Ambler, 2005, p. 20). Moreover, they stated that this amount was clearly insufficient for WINHEC to fulfil its mission, leading to a continual need to raise funds. One way that the Maori might consider to overcome this weakness is to seek more stable funding sources, including potential endowment donors. Our other potential critique regards financial transparency: prospective members may need to understand the flow, management, and status of the funding, and be reassured that the Consortium utilises substantial, effective, and accountable business practices. Although WINHEC publishes journals, little is known about how many or whether they are profitable. Additionally, similar to non-indigenous organizations, WINHEC faces uncertainty in issuing memberships to groups or to individuals, or whether such memberships are increasing, declining, or remaining flat. These budgetary issues make it difficult for WINHEC to determine the status of its sustainable management and operation.

Lack of widespread participation. Although WINHEC (2010, p. 3) proclaims that part of its purpose “is to provide an international forum and support for indigenous peoples to pursue common goals through higher education,” most of the HEIs that have received WINHEC accreditation are located in English-speaking countries (e.g., Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States), with Norway providing the lone exception. In other words, having positioned itself as an international leader that attends to global concerns surrounding indigenous higher education, the Consortium should increase the efforts to incorporate institutions in more countries outside the former British Empire to other parts of the world, such as Africa, Latin America, South Asia, Oceania, and other Pacific Islands.

Lack of quality assurance follow-up. If the accreditation review process is positive, the WINHEC Accreditation Authority Board approves a HEI for a 10-year period. However, that accreditation window is perhaps too long, due to the relative newness of the programmes and institutions seeking accreditation. There is no clear process to assure that, once accredited, institutions or programmes can maintain their quality. This may prevent indigenous peoples from receiving the best possible learning opportunities. Nonetheless, several efforts could be done to help strengthen institutional quality assurance capacity building, especially after WINHEC accreditation is first received.

From 2005 to the present, the majority of articles in WINHEC-sponsored journals have been written by authors from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States, which creates an imbalance of focus on worldwide indigenous higher education portrayed in the academic literature. WINHEC’s goal of becoming a leading organisation representing indigenous peoples and societies from around the world is hampered when its major publication outlets have such a dearth of contributors from outside former British colonies of settlement. This imbalance may be a consequence of the small number of country representations sitting in the WINHEC executive board members and founding members.

Although WINHEC provides various routes for creative expression in indigenous arts, it has not made parallel efforts to encourage quantitative content areas in higher education. Consequently, various indigenous learners, especially creative ones, may be prevented from accessing such content areas.

Opportunities

Through conferences, publications, and advocacy, WINHEC is an ideal hub within which indigenous people and their non-indigenous allies can meet, collaborate, and work toward shared goals. It provides opportunities for indigenous students with common perspectives “to draw strength from each other” (Ambler, 2005, p. 20).

Potential accreditation for all HEIs. The WINHEC accreditation process is not limited to indigenous-oriented HEIs; it also welcomes mainstream institutional applications, giving it (potentially) a broad influence upon HEIs throughout the world. It also provides an arena in which institutions and programmes seeking to become more involved with indigenous issues can do so.

Internationalisation of local indigenous HEIs. Accreditation promotes cooperation between local indigenous HEIs and other HEIs worldwide. This international synergy approach enables WINHEC to help HEIs preserve and promote indigenous academia. Table 1 shows the WINHEC Annual General Meeting as an example of WINHEC branching out to additional locations. The Consortium could continue to hold its meetings in an even wider variety of countries to help spread its influence and outreach potential beyond the former British colonies of settlement.

Table 1. Locations of WINHEC Annual General Meetings, 2003-2013

Year	Institution	City/Country
2013	Navajo Technical University	Crownpoint, NM, USA
2012	National Dong Hwa University	Hualien, Taiwan
2011	Sonesta Cusco Hotel	Cuzco, Peru
2010	Sámi University College	Kautokeino, Norway
2009	First Nations Technical Institute	Brighton, ON, Canada
2008	La Trobe University	Melbourne, Australia
2007	Chaminade University	Honolulu, HI, USA
2006	Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College	St. Cloquet, MN, USA
2005	Glenview International Hotel and Conference Centre	Hamilton, New Zealand
2004	Griffiths University	Brisbane, Australia
2003	University of Hawai‘i – Manoa	Honolulu, HI, USA

Sources: Adapted by the authors from the WINHEC Archive of Annual General Meetings (2012) and *Tribal College Journal* (2013).

WINHEC has a unique and potentially important opportunity to advocate on behalf of many indigenous peoples worldwide. It is already able to reach out to local and national governments with regard to indigenous higher-education issues, and thus potentially to other matters of indigenous interest as well. Articles 12, 13, 14, and 15 of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* emphasise that states should acknowledge and protect the rights of indigenous peoples in preserving and fostering their languages, cultures, and worldviews (United Nations, 2007). Since the legitimacy and formal recognition of indigeneity often emanates from governmental policy, WINHEC should take into consideration the roles that governments and policymakers play. Furthermore, indigenous peoples should be actively engaged in policymaking processes, especially but not exclusively, where the policies in question are being established to serve them.

Another viable area for expansion is the development of a higher-education network linking employers with indigenous students. WINHEC could also consider developing an internship programme involving its accredited HEIs, partner industries, and government agencies. It could also establish an international

scholarly exchange programme, with the long-range aim of creating or becoming the world's premier archive and/or digital library of indigenous writings, scholarship, and media.

Challenges

Diversity of languages and cultures. Regarding the question of language accessibility for the rising indigenous generation, Meyer (2005, p. 5) notes that WINHEC's accreditation reviewers "want to hear what has inspired students, in whatever language they choose." The WINHEC accreditation process is an indigenous ideal whereby indigenous cultures, languages, and traditions can be recognised and promoted; the challenge is how best to preserve and promote this ideal. While in theory WINHEC supports advocacy and preservation of all indigenous languages, it is very costly to include an indigenous language in the accreditation process. It takes a great deal of time, money, and energy to select qualified review-team members who have the contextual language fluency and who are also familiar with the local cultures. As a result, there are only relatively few indigenous languages that have been examined by WINHEC during the accreditation processes to date.

Varying legitimacy perspectives on the WINHEC accreditation process. Because higher-education accreditation is well-developed in many countries, some scholars and peoples may view the WINHEC process as too non-traditional, even to the point of questioning its legitimacy. Such criticisms come from both internal and external sources, and will be a continuing challenge.

Articulation agreements. One of the challenges that WINHEC-accredited HEIs face is making articulation agreements with other, predominantly mainstream, HEIs. As a result, there is a possibility that some courses taken by students at an indigenous HEI may not transfer to other HEIs internationally, or even within the same country. WINHEC does not currently deal with this issue in its accreditation process.

No single institution serves as a global higher-education reservoir of indigenous knowledge; and WINHEC has the unique challenge as well as potential opportunity that accompany this important leadership role. Information is essential to conduct quality research on, and disseminating accurate information about, indigenous peoples' languages, cultures, and traditions. How and where to house this information reservoir is a challenge that needs to be addressed. It is possible for WINHEC to further expand the publications section on its website to include an archive of indigenous education research based on thematic topics of interest that serves higher-education stakeholders. Such an indigenous archive would prove valuable to students, faculty members, policymakers, and indigenous-education advocates worldwide. This recommendation is closely aligned with several of WINHEC's goals, especially Goal 6, to "create a global network for sharing knowledge through exchange forums and state of the art technology" (WINHEC, 2012).

Conclusion

The results of our SWOC analysis suggest that the primary advantages of WINHEC include its ability to promote self-determination of indigenous higher education, the reconstruction of indigenous subjectivity, and indigenous higher education sustainability. Yet, we also found out that the lack of any figures on how many accreditations have occurred, or what percentage of indigenous HEIs this number of accreditation represents, could be seen as a flaw in the SWOC analysis. Additionally, the accreditation process is threatened by a lack of sufficient financial resources, transparency, and on-going quality assurance, especially after accreditation is granted. WINHEC's membership is drawn from relatively few countries, possibly as a result of linguistic barriers. However, the many possibilities that exist seem to outweigh the Consortium's weaknesses and challenges. WINHEC members are faced with both the challenge and opportunity of building a worldwide indigenous network capable of boosting indigenous peoples' causes through higher education channels to many diverse nations. This outreach potential is especially important when the application of the Consortium's accreditation addresses institutions and programmes within countries that have many indigenous groups and peoples. Within this framework, WINHEC would be better positioned to address difficulties in seeing how to best work in countries like Guatemala that have many indigenous languages, all of which are not recognized within the formal education system. Although

encountering these difficulties, it is fair enough for us to argue that the WINHEC accreditation is a successful and legitimate process that is imperative for the development of indigenous higher education at local, national, and international levels.

In this article, we have ascertained that WINHEC helps fill a tremendous organisational gap in promoting indigenous higher education throughout the world. It is especially relevant in advocating the cause of indigenous peoples within higher-education systems, from which they have been traditionally excluded. In its attempts to preserve and promote indigenous cultures, languages, identities, and knowledge systems, WINHEC can energise and enliven almost any field of endeavour in which an indigenous or non-indigenous person may be interested. Our SWOC analysis points to several recommendations for WINHEC leaders to consider as they expand their organisation's higher education outreach and influence potential among all human beings. Additionally, WINHEC can minimise or overcome the weaknesses and challenges that it currently faces and will undoubtedly face in the future. The SWOC analysis has outlined multiple areas for improvement and change. Despite its already impressive successes, WINHEC is a relatively new organisation. It will take time until it realises its full potential.

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