

March 27, 2024

Dear Colleagues,

I recently learned of Northland College's financial emergency that was announced on March 11th, 2024. This news is both saddening and mobilizing. This small college on the shores of Gichigami (Lake Superior) is important to a sustainable and indigenous future. Through this statement, I add support and draw attention to the grassroots efforts of students, alumni, staff, faculty, administration, and community members to save an institution that is very important.

Northland College students, alumni, faculty, and staff engage in the community, both on behalf of the college and as individuals. They are environmental advocates, voices on Indigenous issues including conflicts with energy companies over pipeline routes, and participants in water-protector activism, which is critical for a region defined by the largest freshwater lake in the world. Very few colleges bring environmental science, Place-based learning, and social justice together in such a way.

My personal interactions with Northland College have been very positive. In 2015, I had the honor of serving as Northland's commencement speaker ([link](#)) and previously visited campus to give a lecture associated with the Sigurd Olson Award in 2013. On both occasions, I was so impressed by the passion and excellence in education that I witnessed. I don't know of many other institutions who are so deeply embedded in place-based education in this truly holistic way. The integration of Anishinaabe ways of knowing, leadership and learning is extraordinary, putting Northland at the cutting edge of transformative educational models. The tribal relationships that have been forged in the community are so rare and valuable. Learning on the land, from the land is a hallmark of education to be celebrated and launches students into the world equipped with the tools and experiences to protect and advocate for the land. This is the kind of education that this country needs, if we are to forge a sustainable future. I join with countless others in sending my appreciation and gratitude to this unique college, with hopes for a flourishing future.

Since its beginning, Northland College has been engaged in Indigenous autonomy in the northwoods. The institution's founding in 1892 was rooted in the long-standing relationship between the Wheeler family, early Congregational missionaries, and the Ojibwe people. Edwards Wheeler, the college's first president, grew up among the Ojibwe and was a life-long advocate for their rights. This stance was born and has persisted through various eras of U.S. popular opinion, federal Indian policy, and land-use policy that were not always friendly to Indigenous sovereignty. Northland's commitment intensified in the 1970's, when the college adopted an environmental focus into its mission and curriculum. Northland believes that an empowered Ojibwe culture is necessary for a sustainable future in their region.

These values can be exemplified by historical honors, like the entrusting of Midewiwin Grand Medicine Lodge's "Spirit Stone" to the college in 1927, or college president Joseph Brownell's adoption into the Bad River Tribe in 1932. However, what matters most is what the college continues to do with this legacy, and its plan for the future. Under the leadership of late Bad River tribal elder and Northland professor Moka'ang Giizis (Joe Rose Sr.), Northland

launched Native American Studies (NAS) in its curriculum in 1972 (current faculty includes Dr. Kyle Bladow, Dr. Emily Macgillivray, Bizhikiins Dylan Jennings [Bad River], and April Stone [Bad River]). This program has been critical for creating a broader understanding of treaty rights, Indigenous history, Black Ash basketry, and Indigenous governance. It is also one of the very few higher education programs offering classes in Ojibwemowin (the Ojibwe language). Likewise, the Northland College Annual Spring Powwow, founded in 1974, was the first college-based powwow and is an event colored by indigenous community building. The Native American Student Association (NASA) has been an active club at the college since 1975. Recently, Northland began offering the Moka'ang Giizis scholarship, which provides an 85% tuition coverage for "citizens of one of the Ojibwe Tribal nations whose reservations were created by the 1854 Treaty of La Pointe or whose reservations are located within territory ceded by the 1837 Treaty of St. Peters or 1842 Treaty of La Pointe." Under the leadership of the Assistant Dean of Inclusive Excellence, Barb Lundberg (Bad River), Northland's Indigenous Culture's Center "supports and focuses these activities under one umbrella as a way to continue to honor the commitment we made at our founding."

As an Indigenous scholar and educator, I especially appreciate the nourishing learning environment you have created. The educational model you have created which combines environmental science, social justice and Indigenous ways of knowing is an extraordinary accomplishment to be celebrated far and wide. I hope that the strength of community, partnerships and commitment to transformative place-based education will carry Northland through these difficult times.

With gratitude for your efforts,

Dr. Robin Wall Kimmerer
Citizen Potawatomi Nation
SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor of Environmental Biology
Center for Native Peoples and the Environment
SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry