

Minnesota Inclusive Higher Education Technical Assistance Center

Annual Report • October 1, 2026

INSTITUTE on COMMUNITY INTEGRATION | UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

MINNESOTA
INCLUSIVE HIGHER EDUCATION
CONSORTIUM 



Scott, a first-year student at Lake Superior College, wants to become a truck driver and is exploring a career in auto mechanics.

The Minnesota Inclusive Higher Education Technical Assistance Center (MIHEC), hereafter referred to as the Center, is part of the Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities. The Center provides advisory services and technical assistance to all Minnesota higher education institutions exploring, planning, or offering inclusive higher education initiatives. Additionally, the Center monitors federal and state legislation related to inclusive higher education and communicates legal changes that may impact these initiatives.

Additionally, the Center informs students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), their

families, and local education agencies across Minnesota about inclusive higher education options, training, resources, professional development, and mentoring opportunities.

The primary goal of the Center is to expand access to high-quality, inclusive postsecondary education for individuals with IDD. The Center wants all Minnesotans to have college choice, earn meaningful postsecondary credentials, work in competitive integrated employment, earn higher wages, and lead self-determined lives.

Author

Mary Hauff, Director, MIHEC
612.626.1774
hauff004@umn.edu

This report is legislatively mandated. As requested by Minnesota Statutes, section 3.197, this report cost approximately \$1,610 to prepare, including staff time.

Minnesota Inclusive Higher Education Technical Assistance Center

Institute on Community Integration
2025 East River Parkway
Minneapolis, MN 55414
Email: MIHEC@umn.edu

MN Statutory Requirements

[Section 135A.161](#)

[Subd. 5. Reporting](#)

The director must evaluate the development and implementation of the Minnesota inclusive higher education initiatives receiving a grant under section [135A.162](#). The director must submit an annual report by October 1 to the commissioner and the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over higher education policy and finance on the progress toward expanding Minnesota's inclusive higher education options for students with intellectual disability. The report must include statutory and budget recommendations.

Inclusive Higher Education Landscape

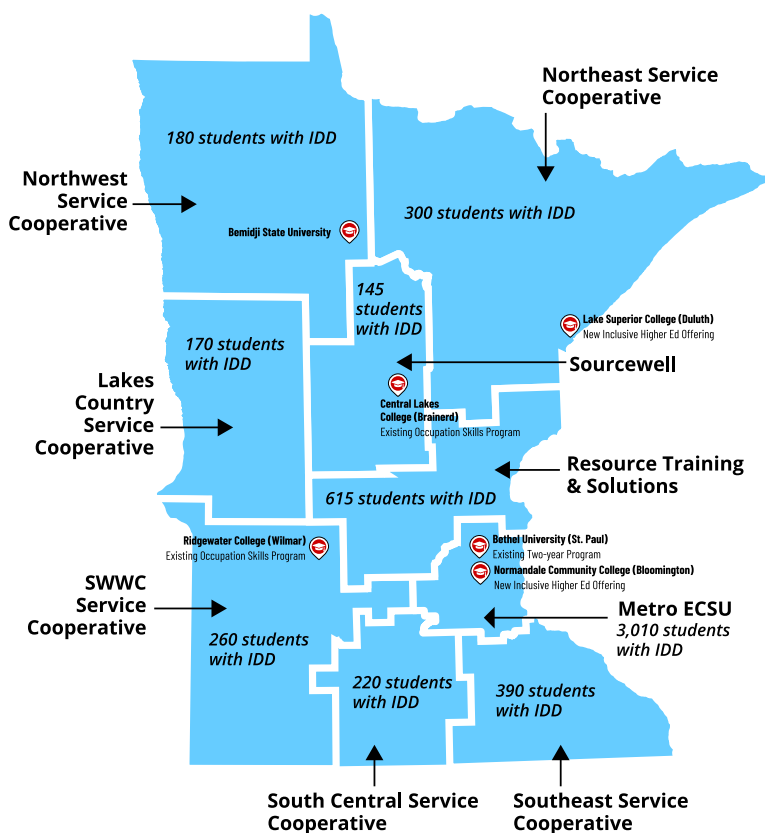
Current Enrollment Options

Minnesota currently has three colleges and universities—Bethel University, Central Lakes College, and Ridgewater College—that enroll students with IDD and hold a Comprehensive and Transition Postsecondary (CTP) designation. This designation allows enrolled students with IDD to apply for, and be considered for, federal and state financial aid. Together, these three institutions can enroll 82 students with IDD.

In 2026, Lake Superior College and Normandale Community College, grantees in a start-up phase, enrolled 10 students with IDD in the fall semester. Normandale applied for the CTP designation in August 2026. Lake Superior College staff intends to apply for and obtain the CTP designation as soon as possible. Once colleges have the CTP designation, students with IDD pursuing the inclusive higher education credential will be eligible to apply for and be considered for federal and state financial aid.

Prospective College Students with IDD

Each year, approximately 1,000 Minnesota students with IDD complete 12th grade. Currently, an estimated 5,000 college-age Minnesotans (18-22 years old) with IDD could pursue postsecondary education. The number of potential college-age Minnesotans with IDD is based on the Minnesota Department of Education Child Count Totals report as of December 1, 2025. Additionally, many older Minnesotans with IDD are also seeking educational opportunities. Limited postsecondary education options within the state create barriers. Many students with IDD are not continuing in



Minnesota Inclusive Higher Education Landscape: Prospective College Students with IDD and Inclusive Higher Education Offerings

postsecondary education. Other Minnesota students with IDD leave the state to pursue postsecondary education.

Building Capacity: New Initiatives' Competitive Grants

In April 2026, the third round of competitive grant Request for Proposals (RFP) was released, and three colleges applied for funding. In June, the review committee recommended grants for Lake Superior College (LSC), Normandale Community College, and Bemidji State University (BSU). LSC is completing its third year of grant funding and enrolled a cohort of students with IDD in the 2026 fall semester. LSC has already received 5 student inquiries for the 2027 academic year. Normandale was awarded a second year of grant funding and is in the initiative's start-up phase. Normandale enrolled the first cohort

of three students with IDD for the 2026 fall semester. Normandale has experienced strong interest for the 2027 academic year. To date, 7 prospective students have asked about the application process, and 3 have already visited Normandale for a campus tour.

Bemidji State University anticipates enrolling a pilot cohort of students with IDD in the 2027 spring semester. Within the first week of the grant award announcement, BSU faculty received 15 inquiries from families and students with IDD who are interested in continuing their education through college. Community businesses and organizations have also offered robust support to UBelong@ BemidjiState.

The new inclusive higher education initiative also fills a geographic gap. The nearest Minnesota two-year college with an inclusive higher education option is a two-hour drive,



Grace Ferdinandt, Megan Fitzgibbon, Jacquelyn Mol Sletten and Mary Hauff at the Dual Training Pipeline All-Industry Forum in June.

and four-year institutions are even farther away. The closest four-year Minnesota university that accepts students with IDD is 3.5 hours from Bemidji.

Over the next few years, the enrollment capacity of the three grantee colleges and university will increase from 10 students with IDD in the 2027 fall semester to 100 students with IDD once each institution reaches full enrollment capacity. As additional Minnesota colleges and universities expand enrollment to include students with IDD, the state's enrollment capacity will increase.

The three new initiatives will more than double the Minnesota inclusive postsecondary education enrollment opportunities for students with IDD. The increased enrollment capacity translates into greater access to postsecondary education for Minnesota students with IDD, increasing enrollment of college students with IDD from 82 to 182. This is good progress; however, there is more work to do. To put the increased access and opportunity into perspective, Minnesota has a postsecondary education attainment goal: 70% of Minnesotans aged 25 to 44 will obtain a postsecondary

credential. This is important because Minnesota has the second-highest percentage of jobs that require a postsecondary education credential. In addition, the [Georgetown University Center on Education and Workforce](#) projects that by 2031, 72% of jobs will require a postsecondary education credential. Increasing access to postsecondary education for Minnesotans with IDD will address the gap between the current enrollment capacity and the attainment goal.

In addition, more inclusive higher education initiatives in Minnesota will give more Minnesota students with IDD access to postsecondary education and help them remain in the state. With the geographic diversity of campus locations, access to college increases for students with IDD across Minnesota.

The fourth round of the competitive grant RFP is anticipated in spring 2027. In addition to existing grantees, several staff members from Minnesota institutions of higher education have expressed interest in applying for the grant funding. These grants provide initial funding for institutions to establish or expand inclusive higher education initiatives.

The Center collaborates with the Minnesota Office of Higher Education to streamline the grant application process, identify priorities, and improve document clarity. The Center offers community-of-practice gatherings, webinars, one-on-one consultations, and open office hours to support faculty and staff who are leading or interested in planning an inclusive higher education initiative.

High-Quality Initiatives

The expansion of inclusive higher education across the state is steady and intentional work. The focus is on establishing and sustaining high-quality initiatives that follow best practices. As part of the Center's responsibilities, an annual independent evaluation is completed with each grantee. The independent evaluations are conducted to assess the grantee's early implementation, alignment with the Minnesota Inclusive Higher Education Framework, and readiness for future national accreditation. The evaluation also identifies areas for continued development as programs mature, including formalizing institutional processes, strengthening employment and internship infrastructure, documenting student outcomes, and planning for long-term staffing and financial sustainability. Findings will establish a baseline for future evaluation cycles and support ongoing continuous quality improvement, implementation fidelity, sustainability, and accreditation readiness.

Initial findings from the independent evaluations of Lake Superior College and Normandale Community College demonstrate meaningful progress in establishing the core infrastructure needed to support inclusive higher education, including institutional partnerships, person-centered planning, academic and student supports, peer supports, and efforts to integrate programming into existing campus systems.

Student Spotlight



Matthew is a first year student at the University of Iowa and sees college as the next step toward the life he imagines.



Betsy wants to study physical education in college and become a gym teacher and coach

Outreach and Awareness

A key component of the Center's work is outreach and awareness. The outreach efforts target two key stakeholder groups: (1) students, families, and educators, and (2) university faculty and staff. This year, the Center released the [Needs Assessment Survey Report](#) for students, families, and educators. The survey report summarizes the results and recommendations. Four key takeaways from the report include:

1. Continue to expand access to high-quality, inclusive postsecondary education options across geographic regions.
2. Continue outreach and awareness efforts to inform students with IDD, families, and educators that college is an option. A key to the outreach is increased engagement to better understand needs and concerns.
3. Strengthen educator and school staff awareness and provide actionable tools and resources in support of students with IDD to prepare for and pursue a postsecondary education. This is recommended through professional development offerings on inclusive postsecondary education pathways. Presentations include resources and tools for educators and staff to use to support students with IDD.
4. Offer tools and resources to students with IDD and parents to guide their preparation and pursuit of postsecondary education.

The Center staff immediately incorporated the survey findings and recommendations into their work. They continue to build relationships and connections to raise awareness of inclusive higher education options and provide actionable resources for

college preparation and the college search.

The Center staff offers a variety of resources as part of its outreach and awareness.

• Communication Tools and Resources

Between July 2025 and June 2026, the Center's website received 4,972 visits and 10,316 pageviews. The Momentum newsletter was published quarterly. The newsletter distribution list remains strong, with 1,157 contacts, a 99% delivery rate, and a 45% open rate. The newsletter engagement metrics surpass industry averages.

• Professional Development and Training

The Center developed and offered three public webinars. The webinar topics were selected with the primary audience of students, parents, and educators. Additionally, the TA Center organized and facilitated Community of Practice gatherings for faculty and staff. The gatherings were offered five times over the past year and include informal networking opportunities and specific topic presentations. The TA Center also shared information about the State of the Art conference, the national inclusive higher education conference, and webinar and capacity-building offerings through Think College, Inclusive Higher Education Regional Alliances, and State Technical Assistance Centers.

• Community Presentations

The Center staff presented at 14 community events, including engagements with Normandale Community College and Bemidji State University, the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, the Career and Technical Education (CTE) Summit, and the Minnesota Self-advocacy Conference. Staff

also presented at the Minnesota Social Services Association Conference, the Minnesota Special Olympics Inclusive Career Fair, the Minnesota Down Syndrome Association Conference, the Charting the C's Conference, and the Minnesota Developmental Adapted Physical Education (DAPE) Conference. The Northern Lights Interagency Council invited the TA Center to present at their Gathering of Great Minds, Transition Summit, School Counselor workshop, and the Principal's Academy events. In addition, Mary Hauff made a guest appearance on the [Heartbeats of Adapted PE](#) podcast on April 3rd. Hauff joined host Jen Heebink and BSU faculty member Sherry Holloway.

Center staff held introductory meetings with each of the nine [Minnesota Service Cooperatives](#) and shared updates with staff and educators through several of them. The Center is exploring opportunities to collaborate with Service Cooperative staff. The Center staff are also connecting and participating in Community Transition Interagency Committee (CTIC) meetings and events.

In 2026, the Center staff began connecting with Minnesota businesses and community organizations, such as the [Minnesota Chamber of Commerce](#) and [DisabilityIN](#), to foster relationships. Minnesota businesses are key stakeholders and benefit directly when Minnesota students with IDD earn meaningful credentials and enter the workforce.

• Annual Conference

On September 29, 2026, the Center hosted its third annual conference, with 100 attendees registered. The conference was an in-person event co-hosted by Metro State University.

The conference theme was Workforce Ready. Prospective students, families, educators, college students, faculty and staff members, business representatives, state agency staff, and representatives from disability advocacy organizations attended the conference.

Technical Assistance

The Center provides technical assistance to students, families, educators, faculty, staff, and other interested community members seeking information on inclusive higher education, preparing for college, conducting a college search, application processes, and financial aid. Close collaboration with the Office of Higher Education staff, who administer the competitive grant program and grants for students with IDD occurs.

The Center's services include supporting faculty and staff as they explore expanding enrollment to include students with IDD, prepare to apply for competitive grant funding, or become grantees. Part of the resource offerings is the Community of Practice for faculty and staff. The gatherings are safe spaces to learn from one another and practitioners from across the country. The gatherings are an opportunity to network and collaborate. The Center also provides follow-along support for grantees and facilitates the independent evaluation required of them.

An extensive network of colleagues from across the country who are leading experts and practitioners in inclusive higher education is engaged with Center staff. MIHEC leverages its network of colleagues to connect Minnesota faculty and staff with those who have gone before them and are following best practices. This creates a pathway that shortens the learning curve for faculty and staff as they plan

and establish the inclusive higher education initiative on their campus.

National Resources

Think College - National Coordinating Center

The National Coordinating Center (NCC) provides technical assistance, resource development, and training related to postsecondary education for students with intellectual disability. It offers support, coordination, and evaluation services for Transition and Postsecondary Education Program (TPSID) grantees. The NCC shares resources through several dissemination channels, including its website (www.thinkcollege.net), social media, and a newsletter. This past year, there has been limited consulting available to faculty and staff, and statewide technical assistance centers, unless they are TPSID grantees. Think College is transitioning to a fee-for-service model to access consulting services and online professional development resources.

Think College - Inclusive Higher Education Network

The Inclusive Higher Education Network, funded through the *Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disability – National Technical Assistance & Dissemination (PPSID-NTAD)* grant, was discontinued by the U.S. Department of Education. The funding ended September 30, 2025, but there was a no-cost extension through September 30, 2026. The Network's aim was to build awareness, translate research into practice, develop strategic partnerships, and increase regional capacity. The network activities and focus areas are being incorporated into the [Inclusive Postsecondary Education \(IPSE\) Association](#).

Inclusive Postsecondary Education Association

Practitioners from across the country have established the Inclusive Postsecondary Education (IPSE) Association—an organization of dues-paying professionals and advocates committed to including people with intellectual disability in postsecondary education. The association's purpose is to increase access to quality, inclusive postsecondary education for people with intellectual disability by building community, advancing knowledge, supporting advocacy, and developing leaders. The association, which is still in its start-up phase, is continuing the work previously done by the Think College Network.



Staff from various Minnesota colleges attended the 2025 State of the Art Conference to learn best practices in inclusive higher education.

State of the Art Conference

The [State of the Art Conference \(SOTA\)](#) provides opportunities for colleges, universities, researchers, program staff, parents, and self-advocates to learn about the current state of research and practice in inclusive higher education and to network with each other. The 2025 conference was attended by over 500 faculty and staff, parents, self-advocates, and other experts, who shared effective practices.

Recommendations

Minnesota Statutory and Budget Recommendations

The Center has identified and recommended amendments to the state statutes for the 2027 legislative session to make the statutes current, incorporate lessons learned from the first three rounds of competitive grants, and eliminate barriers and open opportunities for students with IDD.

Inclusive Higher Education

- Update the **Grants for Students with Intellectual Disabilities Statute 136A.1215** to include a maximum family income limit as an additional criterion for students with IDD eligibility.

Minnesota Inclusive Higher Education Act - Technical Assistance Center, [Statute 136A.921](#)

- Update the statute language to reflect the establishment of the Inclusive Higher Education Accreditation (IHEA) Council for the National Accreditation Standards and Application Process.
- Adjust the state appropriation allocation between the Center and competitive grants to reflect the Center's increasing workload and align with the increased number of grantees. The proposed new allocations for each fiscal year are \$400,000 (\$800,000 per biennium) to the Center and \$600,000 (1,200,000

per biennium) to the Competitive Grants Special Revenue Account.

Minnesota Inclusive Higher Education Act - Competitive Grants [Statute 136A.922](#)

- Update the statute language to reflect the establishment of the Inclusive Higher Education Accreditation (IHEA) Council for the National Accreditation Standards and Application Process.
- Change the competitive grant funding period from one-year grants to two-year grants. This will ease the administrative burden on the Office of Higher Education and the institutions applying for funding, and recognize that the initiatives are long-term projects.
- Reduce each grantee's eligibility period for competitive grant funding from 10 years to 6 years. This aligns with the time required for peer institutions to achieve self-sustainability across several states (e.g., Colorado, New York, Oklahoma).

- d. Amend the competitive grant award amounts to more accurately align with the funding amount grantees have needed over the first three years of grant funding.
- e. Adjust the state appropriation allocation between the Center and competitive grants to reflect the Center's increasing workload and align with the increased number of grantees. The proposed new allocations for each fiscal year are \$400,000 (\$800,000 per biennium) to the Center and \$600,000 (1,200,000 per biennium) to the Competitive Grants Special Revenue Account.

Higher Education

- [135A.012 Subd. 5](#): Include disability-type disaggregation in reporting on higher education attainment goals.
- [136A.096](#): Report on Free Application for Federal Student Aid filing rates for students with disabilities by disability type, ensuring disaggregated disability-type data.

K-12 Education

- [120B.125](#) & [120B.307](#): Amend the statutes to ensure that students with disabilities with individualized education programs (IEPs) can access initiatives connecting K-12 schools, higher education institutions, and workforce partnerships, including career and college readiness. Statute 120B.125 excludes students with IEPs. The definition of students who are college- and career-ready is too narrow under statute 120B.307. The definition should be expanded to include students with IDD who are eligible for college through inclusive higher education initiatives and are not required to take remedial courses.

- [124D.09](#): Review and amend the Postsecondary Enrollment Options statute to eliminate barriers for students with disabilities.

The Center director works with the University of Minnesota Government Relations staff members who focus on state public policy. In addition, the director serves on The Arc Minnesota's public policy committee and receives public policy updates from the Minnesota Council on Disability to stay informed about state public policy that may impact students with IDD and inclusive higher education.

Federal Legislation, Actions, and Court Rulings

The Center director monitors Congressional activity, budget proposals, and policy changes. The following federal actions, with implications for inclusive postsecondary education, are currently being monitored.

U.S. Department of Education

The U.S. Department of Education still accepts and processes institutions' applications for the Comprehensive Transition and Postsecondary Education (CTP) program designation for federal financial aid eligibility. This is good news for Minnesota's inclusive higher education grantees and the students with IDD planning to pursue postsecondary education at these institutions.

Reforms and changes may affect inclusive postsecondary education initiatives. The U.S. Department of Education is reforming the higher education accreditation framework. The reforms are still unfolding, and the full impact is not yet known.

The organizational changes at the U.S. Department of Education are

being monitored, and impacts on students with IDD and inclusive higher education initiatives will be communicated as additional information becomes available.

Pell Grants

There is a significant projected shortfall in Pell Grant funding. This is due to the rising number of eligible students and the larger Pell Grant awards. Congress has not passed legislation to address the projected shortfall. In addition, the U.S. Department of Education is updating the Pell Grant, and the changes may affect institutions' overall Title IV eligibility standards. The changes are still in process, and the full impact on institutions and students is not yet known.

Workforce Pell Grants

Beginning July 1, 2026, the [Workforce Pell Grant](#) expanded eligibility for the federal Pell Grant. The Workforce Pell Grant allows eligible students to receive need-based financial aid for programs lasting between eight and 15 weeks and totaling 150 to 599 clock hours.

Congress paired expanded eligibility with an extensive set of accountability measures intended to ensure federal dollars support programs that produce strong employment outcomes.

Programs must lead to stackable, portable credentials; prepare students for high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand occupations; and articulate into additional certificates or degrees. Programs must also demonstrate strong outcomes, including at least a 70% completion rate and a 70% job placement rate before qualifying for aid.

The published [Rules and Regulations in the Federal Register](#) include the comments and adjustments made to reflect Comprehensive Transition and Postsecondary Programs

(CTP) for students with intellectual disability. There is an exemption from the earnings premium measure. That said, many of the inclusive postsecondary education programs and credentials will not meet the Workforce Pell grant criteria because the programs are longer than 15 weeks. However, although earning a postsecondary education credential improves employment outcomes for individuals with intellectual disability, the types of employment are not likely to be high-skill, high-wage occupations.

It is possible that colleges and universities will amend current credentials or offer new credentials that meet the eligibility and accountability criteria. In addition, students with intellectual disability may be able to enroll in a program offered by the colleges and universities that does meet the Workforce Pell grant eligibility and is approved by the Governor and the Secretary.

At this time, the Workforce Pell grants are just rolling out and there are no approved Workforce Pell eligible programs offered in Minnesota yet. This is a developing area to continue monitoring and reviewing opportunities for students with intellectual disability.

Workforce

The *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Reauthorization* has not passed in 2026, and federal workforce programs continue to operate under current law.

The *Transformation to Competitive Integrated Employment Act (TCIEA)* legislation was reintroduced (S.2438/H.R.4771) to phase out subminimum-wage payments and provide technical assistance to service providers to transition away from such payments. The legislation has been referred to committee and is awaiting legislative action.



Mary Hauff was hosted by Jennifer Bertram at the Minnesota Social Service Association conference in March 2026, presenting on expanding inclusive higher education.

Medicaid

Medicaid changes are being implemented under federal legislation passed in the summer of 2025. For students with IDD who have waiver funding, may have more difficulty getting approval to use their waiver funds to pay for college-related expenses.

University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities

The U.S. House and Senate **Health and Human Services fiscal year 2027 appropriation bills** include level funding for the University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities. This is the base funding for the Institute on Community Integration, which is the Center's home.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act

On June 18, 2026, the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Legal Counsel issued a memorandum reinterpreting the scope of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the U.S. Supreme Court's 1999 decision in *Olmstead v. L.C.* The memo concludes that neither the ADA nor Section 504 requires states to provide services in the "most integrated setting appropriate" or creates a broad legal obligation to offer home- and community-based services. Instead, it argues that *Olmstead* held only that states may not unnecessarily institutionalize individuals with disabilities without adequate justification, and that the decision did not establish a general "integration mandate." This guidance memo may shape federal agency action and federal enforcement priorities.

On August 31, 2026, the Justice Department and five states requested

the federal court to strike down multiple longstanding provisions of the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Section 504 regulations relating to the integration mandate. The joint motion was filed in the *Texas, et al. v. Kennedy* case.

The Center director serves on the Association of University Centers on Disabilities' Policy Committee and the National Down Syndrome Congress' National Down Syndrome Advocacy Coalition. Both organizations provide current information on proposed federal legislation, including policy and funding. The director attends the regular meetings and receives the organization's newsletters and action alert communications. The director is included in communications with the staff members who monitor federal public policy for the University of Minnesota's Government Relations office.

The University of Minnesota is an equal opportunity educator and employer. This document is available in alternate formats upon request.

The University of Minnesota stands on Miní Sóta Makhóche, the rightful homelands of the Dakhóta Oyáte. We recognize the U.S. did not uphold its end of these land treaties. It is the current and continued displacement of the Dakhóta Oyáte that allows the University to remain today.