



SINTE GLESKA UNIVERSITY

SICANGU LAKOTA OYATE

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ACCREDITED BY THE
THE HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION 1983

RECOGNIZED AS A
1994 TRIBAL LAND GRANT INSTITUTION

ESTABLISHED DECEMBER 1970

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Lionel R. Bordeaux, Wakinyan Wanbli, President of Sinte Gleska University for 50 Years, Departs for Spirit World

Known Worldwide, Bordeaux Was Longest-Serving University President in United States

Mission, S.D.—November 21, 2022—Lionel R. Bordeaux, Wakinyan Wanbli, (Thundering Eagle), age 82, an enrolled member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribal Nation in South Dakota and the President of Sinte Gleska University, departed for the Spirit World on November 16. This is a tremendous loss for his family, Sinte Gleska University, the Rosebud Lakota Nation, and Indian Country. For all who knew him, he was a grounding force in stormy times; a paragon of goodwill, solidarity, and wisdom; and the heart and soul of the Tribal College Movement to which he was fiercely devoted.

Lionel R. Bordeaux was born in 1940 and raised by his grandfather, Alex Bordeaux Jr., and his grandmother, Mary Jordan Bordeaux. His mother, Ella, had moved to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, to work and eventually own her own business. Lionel attended the Horse Creek Day School, St. Mary's School in Winner, South Dakota, and a public school in White River, South Dakota. He later attended public schools in Lincoln, Nebraska, returning to the Rosebud Reservation where he graduated from St. Francis Indian Mission, a Roman Catholic boarding school. He went on to enroll at Black Hills State Teachers' College where he earned a B.A. in composite history and social science, with a minor in psychology. Bordeaux later took classes at Adams State College in Alamosa, Colorado, and George Washington University in Washington, D.C. He eventually transferred to the University of South Dakota where he completed a master's degree in guidance and counseling.

Lionel's career included working for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) as a counselor on the Jicarilla Apache Reservation in Dulce, N.M., a job he credited with giving him good early career experience. From there he joined the BIA's management training program and relocated to Washington, D.C., where he trained in various federal agencies. His experience in D.C. was later instructive in his role at Sinte Gleska, helping him pursue passage of federal legislation to support tribal colleges and universities.

Wahohpi ungluwasakapi kte hecel Oyate ki Wolakota gluha tokatakíya yuha unyapi kte
Reinforcing our Foundation for our people to go Forward in the Lakota Way of Life

After transferring to Dallas, Texas, Lionel learned about the needs of Native people living in cities due to the federal government's relocation program.

Lionel relocated to Pine Ridge, South Dakota, and taught guidance and culture classes at high schools and grade schools in various communities. He shared with *Tribal College Journal* in an interview that his goal was to finish his career as a superintendent in Rosebud and later serve as the BIA area director in Aberdeen. It was while living in Pine Ridge that he completed his master's degree at the University of South Dakota.

Lionel continued his graduate studies at the University of Minnesota where he completed his doctorate coursework in educational administration. Before completing his dissertation, Stanley Red Bird Sr., founder of Sinte Gleska College, approached Bordeaux and told him traditional healers had held spiritual ceremonies and directed Red Bird to seek out Bordeaux, who knew the tribal language and history of the Sicangu Lakota people, and request him to withdraw from his doctoral studies and return to the Rosebud reservation to serve as president of Sinte Gleska College. Bordeaux consulted with his wife Barbara, who told him that if that was their calling, they must follow it. Shortly thereafter, Bordeaux and his family returned home where on February 3, 1973, twelve Lakota medicine men inaugurated Lionel R. Bordeaux as president of the college, a position he held ever since. President Bordeaux's career, and indeed his passion, for the next 50 years, was focused on culturally based Native higher education and serving his community, making him the longest serving college or university president in the United States.

Known as the "Dean of the Tribal College Movement," President Bordeaux oversaw the expansion and development of Sinte Gleska College into the first tribal university. Throughout his career there, he worked to strengthen Lakota culture and language. He also forcefully advocated locally, regionally, and nationally for Native peoples' educational sovereignty over curriculum and a tribally based accreditation body rooted in spirituality and traditional laws. Family, kinship, spirituality, and culture were the driving forces in everything he did.

President Bordeaux attributed the success of Sinte Gleska University and his long-term presidency to the spirituality provided by prayer and ceremony by medicine men and the tribal nation that the institution represents.

In addition to his role as a tribal university president, Bordeaux had a long-established history in the Tribal College Movement. He was a founder of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), which serves as the voice of the 35 tribal colleges and universities in Washington, D.C. He was also a founder of the American Indian College Fund, the World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium, and *Tribal College Journal*.

President Bordeaux also served in leadership roles as a councilman in the Rosebud Sioux tribal government; chair of the tribal education committee and education board; board member of the

South Dakota State Education and Planning Commission; board member of the Native American Rights Fund; board member on the Phelps Stokes Fund; regent of the Haskell Indian Junior College in Lawrence, Kansas; and president of both AIHEC and the National Indian Education Association.

He also received presidential appointments to serve on the National Advisory Council on Indian Education and the Advisory Board of the White House Initiative on Tribal Colleges and Universities. Bordeaux co-chaired the historic White House Conference on Indian Education.

President Bordeaux is and was among the most honored Native American educators in the United States. President Bordeaux's generosity went beyond the borders of the Rosebud Reservation by providing support to relatives on other Lakota and Dakota reservations. This included assisting tribes like Lower Brule and Ihanktonwan in achieving their dreams of having a tribal college.

Among the many honors President Bordeaux received include Outstanding Administrator of the Year (Black Hills State College in affiliation status with Sinte Gleska College), Outstanding Educator of the Year (South Dakota Indian Education Association) and Tribal Government (the National Congress of American Indians), Outstanding Indian Educator of the Year (National Indian Education Association, 1978), American Indian Distinguished Achievement Award (American Indian Resource Institute), Human and Civil Rights Award (South Dakota Education Association/National Education Association), First Lifetime Achievement Award (National Indian Education Association), Living Legend Award (National American Indian Enterprise Development), and Living Legend Award (National Indian Gaming Association).

President Bordeaux also earned the Outstanding Alumni Award from the University of South Dakota and was named as one of the Top 100 and Top 25 graduates in the history of Black Hills State University in South Dakota. He received two honorary doctorate degrees, one from South Dakota State University and another from Augustana University in South Dakota.

The tribal holiday "Lionel R. Bordeaux Day" was named in his honor on the Rosebud Reservation, and President Bordeaux served on the Rosebud Sioux Tribal Council for 14 years. He held many other Tribal and state positions and was inducted into the South Dakota State Hall of Fame.

In July of 2017, President Bordeaux spoke at the World's Indigenous People's Conference on Education in Toronto, Canada, where he was presented with an honorary doctorate degree by the World's Indigenous Nations Higher Education University in Hawaii. In October of 2017, his alma mater, Black Hills State University, named a residence hall on its campus the "Lionel R. Bordeaux Residence Hall" in honor of his many lifetime achievements. In 2018, Bordeaux was

also among the inaugural inductees into the Native American Hall of Fame for his educational leadership.

The State of South Dakota issued an Executive Proclamation from the Office of the Governor, Dennis Daugaard, proclaiming February 9, 2018, as Lionel R. Bordeaux Day.

Carrie Billy, president and CEO of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, said, “President Bordeaux was the heart—the drumbeat—of the Tribal College Movement. We feel his loss profoundly, but his songs and stories will never leave us. His legacy will endure for generations and that gives us peace and hope for the future of the Tribal College Movement. Please say a prayer for President Bordeaux’s wife, Barbara, his children, grandchildren, and the students, faculty, and staff at the college he loved so profoundly Sinte Gleska University. I pray that the Holy Ones watch over all of us.”

Many people who worked with President Bordeaux throughout his career have shared their messages of congratulations and gratitude for his service over the years illustrating his legacy. Dr. Justin Guillory, President of Northwest Indian College wrote on his 45th anniversary, “The TCU movement is alive and growing stronger because of warriors like you who paved the way for us.”

John Forkenbrock, who first met President Bordeaux when Forkenbrock served on the staff of the House Labor and Education Committee under the leadership of Representative Michael Blouin of Iowa, who headed the Advisory Study Group on Indian Education, wrote, “Your role in the passage of the Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act was instrumental. If not for your continued optimism and your continued efforts at keeping the House committee’s efforts moving forward, I know without hesitation that this legislation would not have crossed the finish line.”

President Bordeaux said in a 2012 interview with *Tribal College Journal*, “I see tribal colleges and universities standing alone, as other institutions do not have the same calling or vision to strengthen tribal nations as we do. We are undoing the damage that was previously done and rebuilding nationhood according to tribal prophecy and the dictates of the four directions, *aho! Waste’ yelo!*”

In addition to President Bordeaux’s remarkable legacy as an educator and activist for Native higher education, his legacy is no less strong in the loving and devoted family he created, including his wife, Barbara, who survives him, his daughter, Debra, and sons, Shawn and Brian, all of the Rosebud Reservation along with eleven grandchildren, and eleven great-grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his beloved son, Scott, his brother, Lynwood Fallis, his daughter-in-law Jodie and granddaughter, Jordan.

A celebration of life is being held at the Wakinyan Wanbli Multipurpose Student Center on December 1, 2022, at 10:00 AM located on the Sinte Gleska University Lake Campus. For more details, please visit the Sinte Gleska University website at <https://www.sintegleska.edu/>. President Bordeaux's services will be live streamed with the link accessible on the University's website.

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About Sinte Gleska University—Sinte Gleska University (SGU), with its main campus located in Mission, South Dakota, is a four-year tribal university chartered by the Sicangu Lakota Tribe and serves the Rosebud Sioux Reservation in Mission, South Dakota. Named for the Brulé Chief Sinte Gleska or Spotted Tail, SGU endeavors to provide each Sicangu Lakota person the opportunity to pursue an education in a way that is relevant to their career and personal needs. The University is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC – formerly the North Central Association) since 1983 and offers certificate programs along with associate, bachelor's, and master's degree programs. SGU also hosts the annual Northern Plains Indian Art Market held in Sioux Falls, South Dakota in the fall of each year.

In August 2022, SGU received accreditation from the World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium (WINHEC).



President Lionel R. Bordeaux, Sinte Gleska University. © Sinte Gleska University.