**Teaching Notes**

**Tribes and the Covid-19 Pandemic: Impacts and Responses**

By

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**Learning Objectives**

1. Ability to explain the basic role of epidemiology in tribal health and the importance of access to accurate data
2. Gain an understanding of historical precedents in recognizing the possibilities and limitations of federal agencies to provide adequate health care to Tribes during a pandemic
3. Explore the role of cultural practices and traditional knowledge in indigenous public health
4. Increase knowledge of the relationships of Indian Tribes with state and federal organizations, private organizations and nonprofits in the current pandemic
5. Ability to discuss the benefits of tribally based advocacy and use of all forms of media to attain resources
6. Ability to demonstrate a basic knowledge of the importance of tribal sovereignty expressed through self-governance as an effective weapon against Covid-19
7. Attain a basic understanding of the issue of trust in Native American health care and services
8. Knowledge of effective tribal responses as exemplified by tribal actions to reduce the impacts of a pandemics

**Audience:** Suitable for college students, undergraduate through graduate studies. This case is especially useful for study in Public Health, Public Administration, Tribal Studies, Political Science, Sociology, Social Justice, Nursing and Medicine.

**Implementation:** The case can be taught in a single class session by assigning students to read it as homework and come prepared to discuss a selection of the discussion questions. It may also be taught over multiple class sessions by teaching it as an interrupted case, e.g., first reading and discussing the sections through Part I and then reading and discussing the rest of the sections beginning with Part II. Small group discussions are especially useful for addressing the key questions in the case. Unless it is an advanced class, it is best to start with Level 1 questions and progress through selected Level 2 questions. Encouraging students to do additional research is also recommended. This topic has extensive online resources. Level II questions are particularly adaptable to further written research assignments. Additional written assignments may be added on relevant topics like public health partnerships, detailed analysis of the relationship between Tribes and various federal agencies, tribal-state relations with regard to health, the role of nonprofits in Indian health care, tribal governance systems and culture, data sovereignty, and community and collaborative types of relationships and research. A list of research questions follows

**Discussion Questions: (organized by level of complexity with Level I questions emphasizing facts)**

**Part I History and Impact of Public Health Programs on Tribes**

**Level I**

1. What epidemics impacted Tribes in history and what was the government’s role?
2. Name three kinds of organizations or institutions involved in Public Health programs for Tribes and describe their roles, responsibilities and funding sources.
3. What is the mission of the Urban Indian Health Institute and what activities do they perform?
4. List six vulnerabilities that impacted Tribes during the pandemic.
5. Describe a recent ethical injustice committed by researchers against a Tribe.
6. What important relevant and accurate component of a public health response were Tribes missing during Covid-19?
7. What are three important components of the tribal response to Covid-19?
8. How did sovereignty enable the tribal response to the pandemic?
9. Why is the element of trust important in a pandemic that impacts Tribes?
10. Why is culture important to the tribal response to the pandemic?
11. What kind of actions to manage Covid-19 have characterized tribal responses?

**Level II Questions**

1. How does history affect tribal responses to the pandemic?

2. Why are some kinds of organizations more or less effective in providing Public Health services to Tribes?

3. What are some of the problems for Tribes when they need to access relevant and accurate data in a health emergency?  
 4. What are the functions of the United Indian Health Institute and why are they important? How does indigenous knowledge expand the boundaries of medical science ?

5. Why is it so difficult to achieve efficient sharing of critical data needed to respond to a pandemic? What is needed to achieve data sovereignty?  
6. How does an understanding Covid-19 tribal impacts and responses become an issue that increases understanding of the resilience and positive elements of tribal self-governance?   
7. If the Navajo Nation, for example, pursues a path of creating partnerships, with state agencies what are some potential common goals?   
8. Why is sovereignty an important foundation for fighting the pandemic?  
9. What kinds of problems occurred in Tribes receiving and effectively using   
federal funds? What improvements should be made?

If the class has access to the Internet, they may enhance their responses to questions and scenarios by checking out websites of the agencies and organizations mentioned in this case or by the websites of specific Tribal Nations. This can encourage further research and creativity.  
  
  
**AN ALTERNATIVE WAY TO USE THIS CASE**

Scenarios where small groups work on specific problems and decisions can extend the case through more than one class session and open up more opportunities for research and understanding.

Background Scenario.

If the scenarios are done as a role play, they may enact an actual meeting or activity. They may also done as a problem-solving team without direct role play by team members simply presenting and analyzing a particular position or perspective. Small group learning promotes teamwork and problem-solving skills and deepens understanding.   
  
Depending on class size, the goal is 4-8 teams of about 4-6 members. The meeting itself is the crucible for generating the topics for further research. Is more knowledge needed about how traditional knowledge is important to restoration? Is more information needed for interagency coordination—perhaps a strategic plan? Or should a team research the legalities of the situation to define legal responsibilities? The participants make their determination as to the topics and questions the teams will research.  
  
Team Assignments. In step two of the role play or problem-solving team, each team is assigned to do research on their chosen area and prepare a presentation. It is also possible for them to be assigned a 3-4 page paper to complete after class and post online for the class to read. If the team is assigned to do a paper, it is important that they identify what needs to be done and who will do it in preparing the paper. Five possible team scenarios are outlined below with accompanying questions. More than one team may use the same scenario, opening up the possibility to discuss differences and similarities in their responses. Generally teams need about 45 minutes of class time to complete their responses. If the case is done online, it is important to establish dates for posting responses in advance.   
  
Team I: Consultation of Academic Team with Tribal Representatives. The participating interdisciplinary faculty and tribal representatives conduct a consultation to develop a strategy for incorporating different agencies in a plan to get better, reliable data. Second, the group lists steps needed to support Tribes in their efforts to develop structures and capacities to conduct operations to produce tribally-generated data. They present their findings on a poster in class or a short paper if the class is responding online. They may receive feedback in a final class discussion or in comments online.

1. What two agencies/organizations should you prioritize in your strategy to get better, more reliable data for Tribes? Why did you select those two?
2. What topics will you discuss for an initial consultation with these agencies?
3. What structures (agreements, commissions, fiscal arrangements etc.) do you recommend for the first agency you prioritized that would support the goal?
4. What structures (agreements, commissions, fiscal arrangements, etc.) do you recommend for the second agency you prioritized that would support the goal?
5. What tribal capacities (funding, new positions, agreements with colleges, technology, etc.) will you advocate for in your discussions with your priority agencies/organizations?

Team II: Researchers at the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) Meet to Discuss Pandemic Responses. Researchers and policy analysts at NCAI identify and review the actions of tribal leaders during the pandemic and how Tribes used their sovereign rights to fight the pandemic. In addition, they identify potential actions and opportunities for leadership to improve tribal pandemic response in the future. They list current actions and potential future actions on a poster for class. If they are posting a paper online, they cover the topics in a short paper.

1. What tribal leaders and/or organizations were effective in communicating with the media and what were their key points?
2. How does sovereignty improve tribal responses through governance?
3. How can culture improve the response to the pandemic? Share at least two examples.
4. What are three or more things tribal leadership, including community leadership did to improve tribal responses to the pandemic?
5. What are three or more opportunities for future leadership to engage with and act to improve response to the pandemic in the future?

Team III Members of the Seattle or other Regional Indian Health Agencies meet to discuss projects . Identify and prioritize projects that need to be completed in the tribal battle against Covid-19. Describe the projects and what would be needed to complete them. Consider the wide variety of activities conducted by an Indian Health Board in selecting priority projects. Write up your list of projects and activities on a poster. If the team is posting online in an after-class writing assignment, post a short paper online in your designated class system.

1. What are three projects that the Seattle Indian Health Board can do or is doing to support the tribal battle against Covid-19? Write a short description of the projects.
2. What steps within the mission of the Indian Health Board are needed to complete the first project?
3. What steps within the mission of the Indian Health Board are needed to complete the second project?
4. What steps within the mission of the Indian Health Board are needed to complete the third project?
5. How are each of the projects to be funded?

Team IV: Inter-Tribal Committee to Review Actions of Organizations Engaged in Tribal Covid-19 Health Activities. The team reviews the activities of at least three agencies or organizations involved in tribal health. Consider their resources, engagement and trust level with Tribes, funding streams, and mission in terms of how effective their actions are likely to prove to be. Based on its review, the Review Committee identifies at least one of the most effective agencies or organizations.

1. Identify three agencies or institutions engaged in tribal Covid-19 health activities. What are their missions and status (federal or state government, nonprofit, quasi-governmental)?
2. What are the likely resources, funding streams and engagement with Tribes for each of the three institutions?
3. What are the major contributions of each agency and why are they important?
4. Which of the institutions is best positioned for advocacy? Funding? Close relationships to Tribes? Other roles or opportunities?
5. In your evaluation, which institution seems most important to supporting the tribal response to the pandemic? Explain why you chose it

Team V: A Group of Tribal Cultural Experts and Elders Meet. This group discusses how tribal cultures and indigenous knowledge can be used in the fight against Covid-19 and prepares a list of cultural components with examples that can be most effective. Next, they discuss and list ways that culture can be supported and transmitted to future generations for future public health epidemics. They write up their findings on a poster to share with class. If the team is working online after class, they post a short paper on the topic.

1. What is one example of how indigenous knowledge and culture contributed to the tribal response to Covid-19?
2. How do cultural relationships like kinship and family contribute to the response?
3. What are the effects of culturally-based knowledge and community on the characteristics of trust listed in this case?
4. What are ways that cultural/indigenous knowledge are integrated into the implementation of the tribal response to the pandemic by Tribes? Can you envision additional opportunities to do this? Make a list of these.
5. What can leadership and tribal cultural, natural resource and medical experts do to ensure indigenous knowledge is integral to the tribal response and transmitted to the next generation?

Team VI: Hearing for the US Congress-Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs . Senators discuss problems with implementing congressional legislation in the tribal context including delayed funding, strict categories, inflexibility, bureaucratic delays in responding to complex grants and government requirements, agency rather than tribal priorities, and inappropriate government formulas that don’t respond to tribal needs and demographic realities. They list the problems and prepare responses to improve future legislation for each problem.

1. Who should set priorities for the tribal response to the pandemic? Why?

2. What kind of spending categories for congressional funding might be most helpful to the tribal response to the pandemic and who should be consulted in making them up? (Housing, water supply or just all combined under “infrastructure” for example.

3. How should funding to support Tribes in the pandemic be split up? What percentage should go to tribal government? To the CDC? To Tribal Epidemiology Centers? To states? Others? Make a diagram showing percentages and be prepared to discuss your decisions.

4. How should Congress respond to the fact that the majority of Native Americans now live off-reservation, many in urban areas?

5. Make a list of problems and responses for Congress to consider in improving legislation to support Tribes in responding to the pandemic.

**Assessment:**  
To assess student learning through this case the instructor might have students write research papers, position papers, do power point presentations, or write short in class responses to several set questions about the case.  Contributions to the group discussion can also be assessed through evaluation forms.

**Additional Resources**

National Indian Health Board

Regional Indian Health Boards

Webinar/Video: Covid-19 and Native American Health: How Tribal Leaders are Beating Back the Virus *US News and World Report*

Video: What is a Epidemiology Center by Southern Plains Tribal Health. May 18, 2020. Posted at rmtlc.org (Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders Council) or U-Tube. .