RMC EXTENDS DEBATE PROGRAM TO TRIBAL COLLEGES

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BILLINGS – Montana tribes have a stake in many important social, political and environmental issues and knowing how to debate those issues is important, yet no debate program exists on the tribal colleges. To remedy that situation, a Rocky Mountain College professor has been awarded a $34,000 grant to launch a pilot debate program, beginning on three tribal campuses.

Shelby Jo Long-Hammond, RMC assistant professor of communication studies and RMC debate coach, hopes the grant will establish sustainable programs at Little Bighorn College, Dull Knife College, and Flathead Community College. Eventually, she hopes the program will extend to other tribal colleges in Montana and Wyoming.

The grant was awarded by Open Society Institute through International Debate Education Association (IDEA), an organization that has been in existence for over 20 years working with young people from all over the world. Long-Hammond is part of IDEA and has taught at camps in Bosnia, Slovenia and Mexico. She will teach at an IDEA forum in Ireland this summer.

“Montana is so rich with political debate about the Keystone XL Oil Pipeline, coal and coal-bed-methane mining, water quality, subsidies for agriculture, grain export, and many other environmental policies. Many of these debates are centered on the Native American reservations in Montana,’ said Long-Hammond. “But, currently, there isn’t a debate program accessible to the tribal college students.”

A debate network in these tribal schools would provide an opportunity for college students to develop argumentation, critical thinking, public speaking and professional communication skills before they enter a career field, she said.

“With site visits, traveling workshops, mini tournaments, student and coach training, I can help provide the foundation of a debate programs at these
tribal colleges," she said.

There would be a benefit for RMC students as well.

“A local network for debate competition in Montana would help my students at with regional competition, developing debate training programs and exposure to these tribal communities,” she said.

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