



Embracing the best of two worlds : Native American college graduates of the University of Great Falls  
by Pat Alan Beu

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education  
Montana State University

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Abstract:

At the University of Great Falls in central Montana the retention and graduation rate of Native American students, the state's largest minority population, is small. However, few efforts have been made to understand the influences that impact Native American student success. This study explored the experiences of Native American graduates as well as the involvement UGF played in their success. The purpose of this study was to describe factors that contributed to the success of Native American students attending UGF.

For this descriptive case study 18 Native American UGF graduates were interviewed. The investigation of the educational experience of these graduates was categorized into five analytical areas. These areas included a general profile of the graduates, an examination of their commitment and involvement in cultural activities as a student, the impact UGF had on their educational experience, cultural behaviors and values of the graduates, and barriers to success experienced by the graduates.

Several conclusions were drawn for each of the five areas regarding the factors that influenced the success of these graduates. Recommendations were provided for each of these areas. Collectively, the testimony of the graduates clearly revealed that they were focused on their educational goals. The support of family members contributed to their success. They were proud of their Indian heritage and were involved in cultural and spiritual practices that displayed that pride. Their education was an overall positive experience and yet most did experience some form of prejudice. Many also perceived barriers that inhibited academic success.

Recommendations include: (a) improve collaboration between UGF and community and tribal colleges regarding educational and financial opportunities, (b) improve efforts to sustain, support, and maintain a multi-cultural program on the UGF campus, (c) improve campus support services for Native American students, (d) increase recognition of faculty members that impact Native American educational experiences, (e) increase efforts by UGF to hire qualified Native American faculty and support staff, (f) support efforts to foster self determination in Native American students, and (g) improve communication between Native American students and campus entities, especially the administration.

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of the requirements for the degree

of

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/

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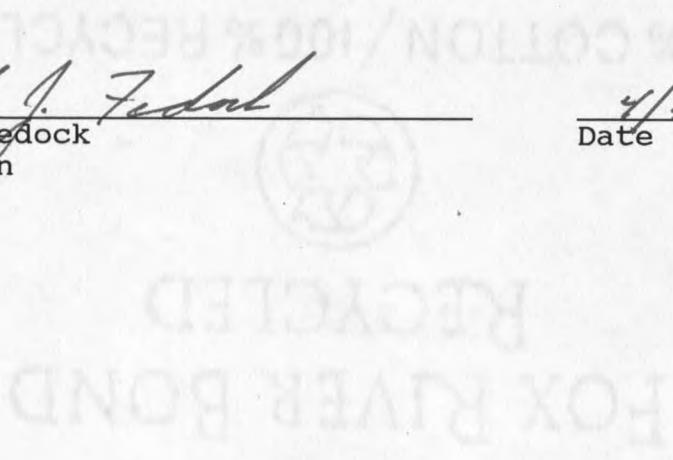
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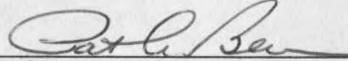
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In such a cynical age it is tempting to ask why God would care. My response is that he has a vested interest in the success of each one of His children. Regardless of our background, social status, financial ability, race, or skin color, we represent His faith in the future. My success, like the success of each graduate interviewed in this study, represents a better and brighter world.

As I feel gratitude for the help and support of so many, I extend my humble and heartfelt thanks to my God. It is to Him that I am most grateful.

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## ABSTRACT

At the University of Great Falls in central Montana the retention and graduation rate of Native American students, the state's largest minority population, is small. However, few efforts have been made to understand the influences that impact Native American student success. This study explored the experiences of Native American graduates as well as the involvement UGF played in their success. The purpose of this study was to describe factors that contributed to the success of Native American students attending UGF.

For this descriptive case study 18 Native American UGF graduates were interviewed. The investigation of the educational experience of these graduates was categorized into five analytical areas. These areas included a general profile of the graduates, an examination of their commitment and involvement in cultural activities as a student, the impact UGF had on their educational experience, cultural behaviors and values of the graduates, and barriers to success experienced by the graduates.

Several conclusions were drawn for each of the five areas regarding the factors that influenced the success of these graduates. Recommendations were provided for each of these areas. Collectively, the testimony of the graduates clearly revealed that they were focused on their educational goals. The support of family members contributed to their success. They were proud of their Indian heritage and were involved in cultural and spiritual practices that displayed that pride. Their education was an overall positive experience and yet most did experience some form of prejudice. Many also perceived barriers that inhibited academic success.

Recommendations include: (a) improve collaboration between UGF and community and tribal colleges regarding educational and financial opportunities, (b) improve efforts to sustain, support, and maintain a multi-cultural program on the UGF campus, (c) improve campus support services for Native American students, (d) increase recognition of faculty members that impact Native American educational experiences, (e) increase efforts by UGF to hire qualified Native American faculty and support staff, (f) support efforts to foster self determination in Native American students, and (g) improve communication between Native American students and campus entities, especially the administration.

## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Background

Education in general and post-secondary education specifically have been identified by Native Americans as a key vehicle for individual and tribal self-sufficiency (Peregoy, 1981, p. 35). Yet, statistics indicate that only 9% of Native American adults have completed four years of college compared to 20% for the total U. S. population. Furthermore, 53% of Native American students enrolled in colleges or universities leave after the first year. Only 25% complete their college degree programs and Native Americans have the longest time lapse from baccalaureate degree to doctorate (14 years) compared to all races (American Indian Research Opportunities, 1993). It has also been noted that less than 50% of Native Americans adults living on the 10 largest reservations had a high school diploma in 1980 (Carter & Wilson, 1991, p. 1). American Indians and Alaska Natives are "extremely underrepresented" in higher education; little progress is being made in increasing their college enrollments; and between 1986 and

1988, American Indians experienced the smallest enrollment gain of all groups (p. 5).

Unfortunately, because of the small number of American Indians included in the High School and Beyond study and the low rate of entrance into four year colleges (of 200 students in the study, only 30 entered four year institutions on a full-time basis), it was not possible to obtain reliable estimates of their four year persistence or degree attainment rates. (p. 7)

Frequently, college graduates at all degree levels are only among a handful from their tribe who have tasted such success. Challenges and difficulties are varied and diverse. In sharing the complexity of the obstacles necessary to overcome, one proud doctoral graduate explained that in his community on the reservation he is only one of three individuals that he knew who had reached this high level of educational achievement. He acknowledged that:

I am a risk taker. It is not cool to be "outside the circle." In Indian cultures, it is valued to stay inside the circle and help others. If you leave the circle, you may not be allowed back in. (St. Pierre, personal communication, 1997)

This is the situation for many Native American college students. Many who are attending four-year colleges and universities around the country see obtaining their college degree as an opportunity for a better quality of life and into the possibilities of middle and upper-class America. Yet, in the United States today, the Native American people

continue to be among the most economically deprived of all Americans. In spite of an

Abundance of natural resources of land, timber, wildlife, and energy, Indian reservations remain among the most impoverished areas of the United States. Citing the 1990 census, 22 percent of Indian households on reservations had incomes of less than \$5,000 per year compared with 6 percent of the overall U.S. population. At the other end of the income distribution, only 8 percent of reservation households had incomes greater than \$35,000 compared with 18 percent of the nation as a whole. In 1990, 31 percent of Indian households received public assistance income, and 23 percent were below the poverty line. Between 1979 and 1989 unemployment rates rose from 27 percent to 40 percent on reservations while the unemployment rate for the nation hovered between 5 and 7 percent. (Anderson, 1995, p. 1)

In the state of Montana, several reservations have unemployment rates above 50% (Office of Public Instruction, 1992).

The poor socioeconomic conditions of Indian reservations have been attributed to a number of variables ranging from a lack of physical and human capital to cultural differences between Indians and western society (Anderson, 1995, p. 1). This raises the question of how can successfully educating Native Americans make an impact on enabling them to rise out of their impoverished condition. Furthermore, it is a legitimate concern to ask how Native peoples can become self-sufficient members of a twenty-first century American society while maintaining their unique and rich cultural distinctions. The continued improvement of

educational opportunities and resources for Native Americans is a key ingredient to impacting the economic condition of those who live on reservations and those who are closely attached to the reservation.

Whether living on the reservation or in nearby towns and cities, many Native Americans are still tied to the reservation because of family contacts and obligations. This attachment, on the one hand, richly blesses their lives with familial, historical, and cultural connections. Unfortunately, however, this connection to the reservation also often impacts in negative ways the independence of tribal peoples by placing them in a community with few economic opportunities, widespread drug and substance abuse, and deeply ingrained poverty. The reservation represents for many a powerful magnet that is difficult to escape from--it is their home and even if they leave it, it is still home. It is not only extremely difficult to leave but to do so frequently requires individuals to turn their backs on their community, family, and heritage. When a Native American leaves the reservation and goes away to college, some of the personal risks assumed for leaving that culture include (a) the dilemma of making the choice of accepting the "white man's world" at the expense of the Indian way of life, (b) the potential assimilation into that world and loss of one's "Indian-ness", and (c) the inevitable question

as to whether a "successful" graduate can return to the reservation and contribute to the way of life and economic status of the people.

However, with the increasing importance of tribal colleges and the successful entrance of more Native Americans into colleges and universities, educational attainment is slowly having a positive impact in the lives of Native Americans (Boyer, 1989, p. 1). Many are finding that education leads to more personal and economic opportunity; that obtaining an education does not mean becoming something they are not; and that they have much to give to their people, their heritage, and their families.

#### Retention of Native American Students

The establishment of two-year tribal colleges and increased enrollment in four-year universities are keys to impacting the economic conditions of Native Americans.

Today, Indian nations are at risk because:

1. Schools have failed to educate large numbers of Indian students and adults.
2. The language and cultural base of the Native American is rapidly eroding.
3. The diminished lands and natural resources of the American Indian are constantly under siege.
4. Indian self-determination and governance rights are challenged by the changing policies of the administration, Congress, and the justice system. (Indian Nations At Risk Task Force Report, 1991, p. iv)

As the education of Native American students is considered, it must be remembered that educational practices, resources, and success have been highly questionable throughout the last 150 years. Perhaps the most glaring example of the predominant, white America societies' inability to adequately meet the challenge of providing quality education to Native Americans is the low attainment of educational success as defined by graduation with a bachelors degree. For instance, in addition to a drop-out rate for Native American high school students that exceeds 65%, the post-secondary drop-out rate is estimated somewhere between 75% and 93% (Hill, 1991). This indicates a number of things. First, Native American high-school-age students are entering the work force ill-prepared to compete with the majority of their peers for jobs that provide more than minimum wage pay. Second, there is but a small number of fields in which these students can qualify to work, thereby perpetuating the reliance on federal and state welfare assistance. Third, many of these students choose as adults to return to the educational environment because they see education as the only way to empower their lives and impact their economic well-being. Finally, because of being ill-prepared for the rigor of a college education, many of these students fail to complete their educational goals and

drop out of college; this can negatively impact their self-esteem and contribute to their cycle of poverty.

Whether Native American students enter college after graduation from high school or as adults, many drop out. Reasons for this are varied and diverse. Perceptions toward high school preparation, quality of course instruction, personal views toward attending college, and study skill abilities are factors impacting retention in college (Hoover & Jacobs, 1992). Family background, skills and abilities, and prior schooling affect a student's postsecondary intentions, goals, and commitments prior to entering a higher education institution (Tinto, 1987, p. 113). Departure prior to degree completion occurs when there is an incongruency between the student's pre-entry attributes, intentions, goals, and commitments and the campus environment (p. 113).

A strong feeling of isolation based on a perception of hostility from a white campus community has been found to influence attrition of some Native American students (Lin, LaCounte, & Eder, 1988). Poor educational preparation, especially in verbal and language skills, is ranked high among obstacles to college completion for Native American students (Wright, 1985).

In research on Native American students in social work programs, findings indicated three factors that posed the

most difficulties for students: Difficulties in acculturation, problems associated with being a non-traditional student, and the need for more supportive faculty (Tate & Schwartz, 1993). This research also suggested that the lack of high school graduates, the lack of administrative support from college institutions, faculty misconceptions and stereotyping, poor student relations with the college institution, and the choice of careers based on the potential for monetary gain contributed to low success rates of Native American students.

Studies on retention efforts and programs for Native American students have received an increasing amount of attention in recent years. Several factors have been identified which are important in promoting the retention of Native American students. Extended families are primary in providing support while Native American students are in college (Dodd, Garcia, Meccage, & Nelson, 1995). Also, having respectful, complimentary, and caring teachers is noted as the strongest influence on the student's educational experience. In addition, specific organizations and support services can assist in the retention of Native American students (Hoover & Jacobs, 1992). Guidance and counseling related to career selection and support groups within major fields of study are another influence to successful retention.

It is important for support programs to be in place to enhance social and academic integration of Native American students into academic life (Pavel & Padilla, 1993). The following support services have been found to be influential in retaining Native American students.

1. Academic support services, including remedial basic skill courses for credit
2. Counseling support services, especially by American Indian counselors
3. Ethnic studies programs, which attract the educationally disadvantaged into the college or university and provides them with a sense of cultural identity and pride
4. Student centers and organizations, which promote a sense of community, help students learn about the system, and foster culture identity
5. Efforts to hire, promote, and tenure minority faculty members, administrators and counselors to serve as positive role models, advisors, student advocates, monitors of institutional policies and practices...and liaisons with the minority communities. (Wright, 1985, pp. 1-6)

#### Biculturalism and Native American Student Retention

Several studies have begun to shed light on the impact that biculturalism has on the retention of Native American students. Biculturalism is the "ability to live simultaneously in two cultures" (Schiller, 1987, p. 2).

"Biculturalism implies the maintenance of cultural identity as well as the movement to become an integral part of a

larger societal framework" (p. 9). Such maintenance of cultural identity includes an ability to speak native languages, the continued participation in native cultural events such as pow-wows and sweats and continued level of comfort in celebrating Native American events. A bicultural Native American college student can participate in these events while at the same time feeling comfortable in a college educational environment and having friends from both cultures.

In a 1978 study of students attending Haskell Indian Junior College in Lawrence, Kansas, a new cultural "hybrid" of Indian student was explored (Carroll, 1978). The traditional students were identified as those who maintained much of the culture identity that make them "Indian", and the nontraditional students were characterized as those who assimilated into the "white" culture because of their upbringing in a white, urban environment. However, the "marginal" student was the result of the traditional student who begins to "put off" some Indian characteristics and the nontraditional student who begins to act and behave more Indian in certain settings. "Such a person is defined as marginal because he or she lives on the margin of two societies, never quite able to break with past traditions and yet never quite accepted in the second society" (p. 11).

Other studies have emphasized a need for bicultural approaches to educating native students. The replacement of native culture and language with the English language and culture contributes to the failure of minority students, and yet educational programs that teach English language and culture in addition to the native language and culture create conditions for students to succeed in their schoolwork (Reyner, 1992).

An ability to adopt new traits while maintaining a traditional perspective is common among Native American students who persist in college (Benjamin, Chambers, & Reiterman, 1993). The results of a research study of 11 Navaho students suggested that higher education's insistence on a conformity to the dominant culture may contribute to a high attrition rate. Interviews soliciting Native American student's perceptions of campus social and academic life revealed five groups relative to cultural orientation. These groups were placed on a continuum which included the areas of "traditional", "bicultural", and "acculturated". Results suggested that those students defined as acculturated were least successful while bicultural and traditional students were most successful in school.

Levels of biculturalism were examined in Schiller's (1987) study of Native American students attending Northern Arizona University. She identified four levels of

acculturation: (a) bicultural, (b) Anglicized, (c) American-Indian oriented, and (d) marginal. Her results suggested that bicultural students demonstrated better psychosocial adjustment in academic factors, social factors, psychological factors, and culture factors.

Research has been conducted using the orthogonal cultural identification theory and the cultural identification of minority adolescents (Oetting & Beauvais, 1991). As opposed to theories that support the assimilation of minorities into a majority culture to ensure "success" (i.e., school achievement or financial security), the orthogonal cultural identification theory holds

That identification with different cultures is orthogonal. Instead of cultures being placed on opposite ends of a continuum, cultural identification dimensions are independent of each other, and increasing identification with one culture does not require decreasing identification with another. (p. 655)

The orthogonal cultural identification theory maintains that it is possible to identify simultaneously with more than one culture and that identification with any culture has positive implications for health and social issues (Weaver, 1996). Further, the theory holds:

- 1) that cultural identification can be assessed reliably,
- 2) that it is essential to assess identification with any culture independently of identification with any other culture,
- 3) that any identification with any culture may serve as a source of personal and social strength,
- 4) that culture-specific attitudes and behaviors are

linked strongly to identification with that culture and weakly, if at all, to other cultures. (p. 678)

Studies related to orthogonal biculturalism are currently being conducted by McDonald of the University of North Dakota. McDonald maintains that biculturalism is the key to determining why Native American students are retained or drop out of college. Though his studies are not yet conclusive, his hypothesis is that the independent variable of level of biculturalism is a better predictor of academic success than other factors such as background, financial aid, grade point average, or academic preparation (McDonald, personal communication, 1996).

#### Statement of Problem

Various studies suggest that numerous factors impact the success of Native Americans in higher education. These include such things as institutional racism, academic preparation, knowledge of basic academic skills and especially language, and availability of support services. Many Native American students, however, have an adequate academic background, are well integrated with services at colleges and universities, but still drop out after struggling with the systems that are inherent to higher education in the majority culture. The system assumes that if students are adequately prepared academically from any

culture, they can or should succeed in college. American higher education is rigid in the expectations which it has for student performance. Dealing with conformity to core requirements, admissions standards, placement test cut-off scores, and grading on the curve all represent some of the subsystems with which an individual has to comprehend and negotiate in order to be successful in American higher education.

The Native American student is perhaps more challenged than other students. Many traditional age students arrive at college from the reservation where many high schools have less than 30 in their graduating class. Many of these students are overwhelmed in an impersonal environment where a freshman level class can easily be 10 to 50 times larger than classes attended in high school. For the adult non-traditional students who have left the supportive environment of a tribal college to continue their education, problems related to balancing school with the demands of children, extended family, and a part-time job in an unfamiliar community make graduation a difficult goal to accomplish.

#### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to describe factors that contribute to the success of Native American students at the

University of Great Falls (UGF). The school, which is a small, private liberal arts university in central Montana, is within 200 miles of three Native American reservations and in the community that is home to over 2,000 Native Americans from various tribal backgrounds. UGF has satellite campuses on several reservations and articulation agreements with four tribal community colleges. Factors that relate to a student's bilingual tendency, their participation in native cultural or spiritual activities, and affiliation with their tribe were especially examined. Successful Native American students who had completed at least a bachelor's degree were interviewed to elicit information related to the impact of values and behaviors that played a part in their success in college. In order to do this, successful Native American graduates were interviewed and asked about their preparation for college, factors that seemed to make a difference in their preparation, how they confronted challenges inherent to the system of "white" colleges and universities, and their feelings about what made a difference in their successful academic experience.

#### Research Questions

The research questions that address the factors that influenced academic success for Native American college

students who attended the UGF of Great Falls include the following.

1. What is the profile of a successful Native American student?
2. How does a student's bilingual characteristics, tribal affiliation, or participation in cultural events relate to this profile?
3. How does being in a college setting contribute to or take away from a Native American student's pride in one's culture?
4. What are culturally ingrained behaviors and values that impact the successful Native American student?
5. What barriers did successful Native American students face in their educational pursuits, and how did they overcome these barriers?

#### Significance of Study

The history of the United States is replete with examples of injustice to the Native American people. Nowhere is this more evident than in the economic and financial conditions among Native American peoples and on their reservations. It is only through successfully supporting the education of Indian people and by providing opportunities that their standard of living will improve and that their bands of poverty and dependence on the federal government will be broken (Indian Nations at Risk Task Force Report, 1991). If common themes or threads for educational success can be found by listening to individual histories of

Native American graduates, these threads hold the potential for educating greater numbers of Native Americans who attend predominantly white colleges and universities.

Information related to characteristics of successful Native American students can be utilized by administrators in student services and academic affairs to more effectively eliminate potential institutional bias and program educational support services. Retention rates can be improved as cultural sensitivity is integrated into academic curriculums and student services. Colleges and universities can redirect their focus from expecting Native Americans to conform to the predominantly white culture of higher education to concentrating on helping college and university personnel become more culturally sensitive and accepting of the learning styles of Native American students.

Reaping the greatest benefit of such a study will be the Native American students themselves who will have a greater insight into what makes a successful college graduate. From a culture that stresses individual personal stories as a learning method, these interviews can be especially helpful to provide them with meaningful insights related to college success. In order to truly impact the success of Native American students, those who were successful must be asked how they did it, what made a difference in their experience, and how they think that this

can be incorporated in the learning experiences of other Native American students.

This study recommends programmatic suggestions of which colleges and universities may wish to consider for enhancing the cultural atmosphere that contribute to the success of Native American students. If by interviewing successful Native American college graduates it is determined that increased support for cultural activities and fostering the cultural identity of Native American students is an influence on that success, then programs can be designed and established which can enhance such characteristics in other students. These results can impact such diverse departments as admissions and recruitment to placement and career development. Currently, many Native American students are recruited and enrolled in college; most have the academic capability and even the support that is adequate for success. Yet, retention in college and academic success is so difficult to obtain for most Native American students. As a consequence, many Native Americans discontinue their college education prior to graduation and return to the reservation, inhibiting the individual growth and progress of a great people. Information that can change this pattern can be helpful to those within the college community working with Native American students.

Definition of Terms

American Indian and Native American: There are 580 federally-recognized tribes with each having its own definition for tribal membership. Most of these broadly address two criteria including if a person has origins in any of the peoples of North America and if that person maintains cultural identification through tribal affiliations or community recognition (St. Pierre, pp. 19-20). Of importance is an individual's perception of personal racial identity. In this study, self-identification as Native American was determined by each participant. Also, for the purpose of this study, the terms Native American, American Indians, native people, tribal people, or Alaska Natives are used interchangeably.

Barrier: A factor that restricts either by design or by accident individuals from reaching their desired goal or accomplishment. In a higher education setting, a barrier can be an institutional policy, a class that restricts enrollment, or an attitude that blocks potential success.

Biculturalism: The "ability to live simultaneously in two cultures" (Schiller, 1987, p. 2). Biculturalism implies the maintenance of cultural identity as well as the movement to become an integral part of a larger societal framework (p. 9).

College: An institution of higher learning with educational programs that lead to associate, bachelor, or other accredited degree.

Graduation: Successful completion of all institutional requirements that qualify a student to receive the appropriate degree.

Higher Education: Learning activities pursued at accredited institutions which offer programs leading to selected degrees.

Independent college: An institution of higher education supported by an organized church or other private benefactor which does not rely on public support.

Private college/university: An institution of higher education supported by independent benefactors without financial assistance from state or local government.

Public college/university: An institution of higher education established and supported by state authorities and funded by tax dollars.

Self-determination: A guiding principle for a group or organization that allows the membership to establish its own policies and procedures.

Success: As determined by this study, success indicates individuals who have completed the requirements for a bachelors degree.

### Assumptions

At the core of this study was the assumption that participants brought with them a rich history that influenced their ability to be successful Native American college students. All had a background of personal motivation and need that prompted them to stay with their education until they graduated. Since the attainment of a bachelors degree is so difficult for many Native Americans to accomplish, this is a unique characteristic of their people.

Another assumption was that since academic success to these graduates was so important they would be able to reflect on their various experiences as well as describe them. This also included the assumption that since they had reflected on their experience they would trust the

researcher enough to describe in detail feelings and impressions that impacted the quality of the experience.

#### Limitations

This study was limited to students who indicated on their college application forms that they were American Indian/Native American and then graduated with a bachelors degree from academic year 1992 to 1996. This implies that some students had varying degrees of Indian blood. As the admission form was being filled out, some students with a Native American heritage may have chosen "white" (or other race) because they were not 100% or even more than half Native American. Some Native American graduates may not have been contacted for an interview because they did not indicate that they were Native American.

Because this study was limited to only those who graduated from UGF, it should be noted that each student attended the university accepting major differences between UGF and other institutions of higher education in the state of Montana. For example, students at UGF paid tuition of nearly two to three times that of other Montana state colleges and universities. These students may not reflect the same perceptions and views of those who attend the other institutions of higher education.

A limitation of this research is how the reader defines success. As noted in the definitions section, success is defined in this study as college completion with a bachelors degree. It should not be interpreted to imply that students who do not graduate with a bachelors degree are not successful. Many examples can be cited of individuals who are successful in life without ever graduating from a four year university. For the sake of the goals and purposes of four year universities such as UGF, however, success is defined as successfully completing the requirements to receive a bachelors degree.

## CHAPTER 2

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The experience of Native American college students attending predominantly white colleges and universities has been well documented (Benjamin, Chambers, & Reiterman, 1993; Conti & Fellenz, 1988; Dodd, Garcia, Meccage, & Nelson, 1995; Hoover & Jacobs, 1992; Pavel & Padilla, 1993; Rindone, 1988; Schiller, 1987; Tate & Schwartz, 1993; Warner & Brown, 1995). Much of the research acknowledges the historical, cultural, and academic challenges facing Native Americans as they arrive at college. Particularly, a review of the Native American experience is valuable, in as much as it shows that many Native Americans can be successful college students. Unfortunately, this success occurs only after negotiating a virtual minefield of personal adjustments that impact the quality of the collegiate experience.

There are four basic areas that need to be reviewed to give an accurate portrayal of the experience of Native American students who attend the University of Great Falls (UGF). The first area relates to factors that effect the learning experiences of any Native American student. This

review, largely historical, paints a portrait of the challenges Native American students have experienced throughout the past 200 years as the United States has largely ignored the existence of native peoples and their educational needs.

A second area is a review of retention and attrition issues influencing American college students. In American higher education many factors effect whether students leave the college setting prematurely or continue through to graduation. Are these issues similar to or different from the experience of a Native American student who leaves one culture and goes to another?

This leads to a third issue--the experience of a Native American college student who leaves one culture to attend a college that primarily reinforces and supports the culture of the majority student body. Are there barriers that inhibit Native American college success? Can Native American college students overcome cultural differences and feel comfortable in the new culture while attending college? Both of these issues need to be examined in a bicultural context.

A final area of examination is that of UGF itself. What are the current and historical foundations of UGF and how has it dealt with Native American students? This factor has a tremendous impact on potential student retention and

graduation. The integration of these four areas provides a basis whereby research can be conducted on the factors that impact the potential success of Native American students attending UGF.

### Formal Education and the Native American Learning Experience

Efforts to provide education to the Native American have been influenced a great deal by historical precedent. This precedent required that a completely autonomous race of people become converted to an Old World, European belief and behavior system. This belief and behavior system, that was completely at odds with the system lived for centuries by Native Americans, was the primary initial motivation for providing formal education to the native peoples on the American continent. In order to convert Native Americans to Christianity, it was deemed necessary to teach at least some of them to read and write. An objective closely related to Christianization was to teach the Native Americans European modes of dress and behavior so they would look and act like "civilized" people (Oppelt, 1990, p. 1). However, efforts by the Jesuits, Franciscans, and Protestants to educate Native Americans had little influence on Native peoples and met with little success (Clark, 1992, p. 29). Private schools such as Harvard and Dartmouth, which were newly























































































































































































































































































































































