

DIFFERENT HUNTING GROUNDS: AMERICAN INDIAN TRIBAL COLLEGE
STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF PREDOMINANTLY
WHITE INSTITUTIONS

by

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DEDICATION

The soul of this is dedicated to Clara May “Una” Birdhat Polacek, who told me to always learn, every day, learn, until the last moon “Akbaachimmaalaaché”. The bones, the perseverance to get through is dedicated to the Firecrackerman, my dad who would drive me through eternity in a van to get me anywhere I needed to go if it made my heart smile. The blood, sweat, tears, the heartbeat of this along with everything that came with it is dedicated to my one and only, my wife, my buffalo, Raeanna, who shows me every day what a real superhero is. It took a community to get me here, to my friends, my family and my friends who have become my family, thank you for pushing me, not letting me quit, not letting me move to Vegas, celebrating the small wins with me, taking the L’s with me, crying with me, fighting with me, dancing with me, running to and away with me, letting me talk and listening to me. This is for all Indigenous students everywhere, for time immemorial. For Betsy. For Dusty. For Barbara. Thank you to all of you, those who have passed, those here in my heart, those who will come, let us keep counting coup together for each other until the last moon.

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ABSTRACT

American Indian students who have attended tribal colleges have expressed gratitude, appreciation and pride in their educational and cultural experiences at these institutions. Most of the 37 tribal colleges and universities (TCUs) in the US and Canada currently offer two-year degree and certificate programs. Many American Indian students who wish to continue onto a bachelor degree program from a two-year TCU consider transferring to a predominantly white institution (PWI). This qualitative study was meant to better understand the perceptions that American Indian TCU students have of PWIs and what these students believe would be helpful for them to both transfer and succeed at a predominantly white four-year institution.

A phenomenological qualitative study was chosen to better understand the perceptions of PWIs and the needs related to attendance at a PWI by American Indian TCU students. Fifteen American Indian TCU students were interviewed at six TCUs in the state of Montana. There were two research questions that were used to guide this study, the first was what are American Indian TCU student perceptions of predominantly white institutions? The second was how do American Indian TCU students believe PWIs can better assist and support American Indian students who desire to matriculate to a PWI? Although a qualitative phenomenological research approach was chosen to approach the research questions and potential answers to those questions, my research was heavily focused on appropriately utilizing Indigenous research methodology in all areas of this study. It was of paramount importance for me as an Indigenous researcher to be responsible, respectful, reciprocal and relevant in all the relationships that were both enriched and created in this research endeavor. The stories shared with me from 15 American Indian TCU students resulted in six themes emerging from their collective interviews. Those themes were 1.) family and community, 2.) acceptance and acknowledgement of cultural identity, 3.) PWI support and excitement for new opportunities, 4.) TCU love/pride, 5.) Fear and isolation and 6.) Humor and relationships. The findings for this research have significant implications for all those interested in working with and for American Indian students, specifically for PWIs and their constituents.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides information about the study of perceptions and matriculation interests that current American Indian and Indigenous tribal college and university (TCU) students have of predominantly white institutions (PWI) specifically at four-year colleges and universities. This chapter includes an overview, a statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, a theoretical framework, research design, operational definitions and a chapter summary. In addition to these sections, an American Indian¹ student profile, a briefing of tribal colleges today, context of the study and an author reflexivity statement has been provided to help better inform the chapter sections.

Overview

There is not only great potential to increase Indigenous student participation at PWIs, but also to elevate the experience that those Indian students have while attending PWIs. This study will focus on the perceptions that current American Indian tribal college students have about predominantly white institutions or institutions of higher learning in which white students account for 50% or more of the student enrollment

¹ American Indian, Indian, Indigenous, Native, and Native American will all be used interchangeably in this proposal, unless specifically referring to an Indigenous individual/community located outside the US, in which case, the term Indigenous will be used. For a complete definition of American Indian, Indian, Indigenous, etc., please see the operational definitions section at the end of this chapter.

(Brown & Dancy, 2010). The study will look to gain further insight from those students who have had no prior experience with or attendance at a PWI. Perceptions and observations of PWIs by tribal college students will not be limited to any particular area but will include any and all areas related to the institution and educational experiences that the participants choose to share with the researcher. The reason that perceptions, information, and knowledge areas will not be limited is an effort to give the students the opportunity to share anything that they feel may be relevant to higher education that the researcher may have not considered prior to this study.

American Indian students attending TCUs have expressed feelings of gratitude, appreciation, pride, a sense of belonging/family and overall positive feelings and perceptions of their time spent in TCUs (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Pavel, 1999; Stein, 1992). It would be in the best interest of all those involved with TCU and PWI educational institutions if the sentiment above could be replicated to some degree for Indian students at non-tribal colleges and universities. This would be beneficial to both categories of institutions. Students transferring from TCUs to PWIs could continue their educational pursuits with a similar sense of belonging and pride at their new institutions. Tribal colleges in turn would see their alumni move forward and build relationships with institutions that future TCU students will continue to benefit from through increased familiarity and knowledge transmission through the community. It is important for American Indian tribal college students to have perceptions of PWIs that are both accurate and positive to better assist and promote future generations of AI TCU students who wish to matriculate to PWIs for advanced degrees not currently offered at their local

tribal colleges.

The intention of this dissertation is not to offer proof to PWIs that they should seek to duplicate the uniqueness that TCUs are able to offer their students. Duplicating the TCU structure, missions, strategies and content would not only be difficult but unnecessary. Tribal colleges and PWIs are different and unique from one another and serve a variety of needs and students that may have differing needs and desires. What this research offers is additional insight into the experience of Indigenous students who simultaneously attend a tribal college and who are part of and identify with a reservation, pueblo or rancheria community. 'Reservation' will be used not only for brevity in terminology but also per the participants' choice of words in the data collection phase when identifying with a local Indigenous community.

An additional factor to be considered for this study is the critical race theory tenet of interest convergence which states that the interests of a minority group in gaining equality have been accommodated only when those interests have converged with the interests of the majority (Taylor, Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2009). The benefits of increased information that could lead to improved support for Indigenous students in higher education, not only benefit the students and their communities but also the institutions that enroll, retain and graduate the students. PWIs have the opportunity to not only increase their enrollment, retention and graduation rates but also to meet many of their mission statements and/or policies regarding diversity, which could lead to not only an increase in positive public relations and other relationships, but could result in eligibility and award of new grants by the institution.

This study has the potential to help benefit American Indian students who may wish to matriculate to a PWI by informing both TCUs and PWIs on students' current perceptions about the PWIs. Consequently, PWIs may be better informed and able to assist, support and advise both potential TCU transfers and current Indian students attending PWIs.

Statement of the Problem

American Indian post-secondary graduation rates are not at parity with the graduation rates of their non-Native counterparts at PWIs (Fixico, 2013; Guillory, 2009; Jackson, 2003; Pavel, 1999). In 2013 the graduation rate for first-time undergraduate students who began at a four-year institution in 2007 was 59% for all races; the American Indian graduation rate was 42% for this same period (NCES, 2016, p. 108). Participation rates for Native American students versus non-Native students was noticeably lower in 2013; 40% for all races combined and 32% for American Indian students (NCES, 2016, p. 88). This participation rate is for total college enrollment, the actual percentage of American Indian students participating in four-year degree granting institutions is likely much lower due to the fact that a large percentage of American Indian students participate in tribal college institutions which are predominantly two-year degree granting institutions. The percentage of students receiving bachelor's degrees based on race for six categories (White, Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Two or More Races) "increased from 2012 to 2013 for all racial categories except

American Indians/Alaskan Natives” (NCES, 2016, p. 113). These students experienced a decrease in bachelor degree conferrals.

The unique culture of Indian students within predominantly white institutions (PWI) can sometimes put these students at odds with the institutional environment and systematic procedures of the dominant culture setting (Benjamin et al., 1993; Guillory, 2009; Pavel, 1999; Stein, 1992). Understanding what perceptions exist about PWIs by current American Indian students at TCUs has the potential to better inform those Indian TCU students who are interested in matriculating to a PWI and could also assist PWIs in improved, relevant and enhanced support in the transfer and matriculation processes of potential American Indian TCU students. The literature and research reviewed for this project does not differentiate between Indigenous student’s backgrounds. It is important to understand that a difference in perceptions, aspirations and needs in higher education may exist for American Indian students who have been part of their local reservation communities and who are products of the K-12 education systems that were available to them. Understanding the differences that may exist within American Indian student communities could assist PWIs in becoming better prepared to support a variety of Indigenous students with different needs rather than assuming that “one size fits all” strategy will suffice.

American Indian Student Profile

American Indian student participation remained stagnant and dismal in higher education until the inception of the first tribal colleges and universities (TCU). In 1932

there were “only 52 Indians in the United States with college degrees, fewer than 400 in college, and only five schools offering scholarships to Indian students” (Beck, 1999, p. 17). By 1962 there were 4,000 American Indians attending colleges but with a 97% drop out rate for American Indian students; in 1966, only 66 of those original 4,000 American Indian students had completed a degree program (Beck, 1999), which is just 1.7% graduation rate. In 1968 the first TCU was established by the Navajo reservation, at a time when there were very few American Indian students enrolled in and successfully participating in higher education (Stein, 1992). The participation rates of American Indians in higher education began to increase significantly after the inception of the first TCU. The tribal college establishments brought with them not only increased exposure and enrollment for Indian students in a culturally relevant higher education setting but also increased opportunity and access for those students to continue onto four-year PWIs. The increase in access and opportunity for Indian students at PWIs translates not only to the number of students transferring, but also to an increase in both retention and completion to degree at PWIs: Indian students who started at a TCU and then matriculated to a PWI had a 75 percent higher degree completion rate than those who did not attend a TCU and started out immediately at a PWI (Stein, 1992).

In 2011-2012 there were 232,929 American Indian undergraduate students attending institutions of higher education; approximately 30,000 of those students were enrolled at the 37 tribal colleges in the United States and Canada as of 2014 (National Indian Education Association, 2014; TCU, 2014; White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education, 2014). Almost 13% of all American Indian students

are currently attending a TCU; if PWIs are genuinely interested in supporting Indigenous students in higher education, then this 13% is a much larger number compared to its fractional representation. An example of genuinely supporting Indigenous students in higher education would include a commitment from PWIs leaders and policy makers to require admissions and enrollment offices to provide either a minority/American Indian recruiter(s) to visit specifically with minority populations to provide relevant information about PWIs and what services and opportunities exist there for specific populations (Thomas, 2009). An educated population is essential to a community's prosperity and sustainability (Cortese, 2003; Helliwell & Putnam, 2003), in this specific case, to American Indian communities. PWI's, TCU's and educators can help to increase the educational opportunities and outcomes of the individual and collective members of tribal communities.

Inequity of educational opportunities in mainstream society has led certain communities to experience higher rates of social immobility and lack of basic everyday needs to function in a healthy and productive manner (Boudon, 1974). Research has documented many of the benefits that come from earning a bachelor degree as compared to those who choose either not to attend or complete a college education program. Benefits of earning a bachelor's degree include improved health, enhanced self-esteem, less experience with unemployment and higher wages; "those older than the age of 18 with bachelor's degrees earned 53 percent more than those with only a high school diploma" (Thomas, 2000, p. 282). According to a recent study by the Pew Research Center, young college graduates earn an average of \$17,500 more than adults age 25-32

with only a high school diploma (Taylor, Fry & Oates, 2014). This same study by Pew also showed that 22% of adults age 25-32 with only a high school diploma are living in poverty as compared to 6% young college-educated adults.

The people in Indian country stay connected with one another due to geography, but also because of our unique systems of engagement through culture. In Indian country, every person either knows personally or is familiar with every other individual member through family name, the clan system, cultural events, sporting events, and through relationality (Wilson, 2008). Because of this close community engagement, relationships and sense of responsibility for one another there is a culture of support that exists for achievement. The concept of counting coup (earning/achieving an honorable accomplishment) in Indian country may have to be earned by different standards than in the past, but one of the contemporary means of counting coup is through education.

American Indian community members show great support for and work to emulate those who have counted coup within Indian country. The potential and possibilities for Indian communities greatly increase with each member that seeks an education by enrolling in college. The 13% of American Indian students attending TCUs have great potential and power to make a positive impact on their communities and serve as guides and “helpers” (Bigfoot & Funderburk, 2011, p.315) for others who may not have believed that a higher education was a realistic option for them. Unfortunately, American Indian student post-secondary enrollment, retention and graduation rates at PWIs are not at parity with their non-Native counter parts (Jackson, Smith & Hill, 2003; Lin, LaCounte & Eder, 1988). In 2003, “only 36% of Native American students have graduated within 6 years of initial

enrollment. Fifty-six percent of the total population graduates in the same time period” (Jackson, et al., 2003, p. 548).

Increasing and linking both enrollment and retention rates for American Indian students at PWIs benefits those Indian students, their families and their respective home communities (especially should they decide to return home after college). Many of the bachelor degrees offered by PWIs are not available to students attending TCUs, as only six of the 37 tribal colleges current offer four-degree options. The skills that come with earning a four-year degree in areas such as engineering, business, education, community, health, nursing, etc. can give American Indian students the ability to return to their communities to help in areas that have traditionally been underserved and underemployed by and for American Indians.

Having Indigenous students be part of the larger campus community benefits all students and constituents. Research on the benefits of diversity in higher education have provided evidence that cognitive, academic and social growth, identity construction, multiplicity of perspectives, deeper understanding, transitions to new contexts, civic engagement and other positive benefits are all stimulated when academic environments are diverse and include racial and ethnic identities, individuals and groups educational opportunities increase (Gurin, P., Dey, Hurtado, Gurin, D., 2002; Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004; His Horse is Thunder, 2012; Hurtado, 2007).

Research has suggested many factors that contribute to lower rates of matriculation and retention for American Indians while attending PWIs. Qualitative and phenomenological research has found that many American Indian students experience

feelings of isolation and otherness while attending PWIs and environments/settings that are culturally different from their own (Beck, 1999; Guillory, 1999; Jackson et al, 2003; Larimore & McClellan, 2005; Lin et al., 1988; Makomenaw, 2012). American Indian students have extended family obligations (Stein, 1992) and return to their home communities more often than their non-Native counterparts due to “family and ceremonial responsibilities” (Benjamin, Chambers & Reiterman, 1993, p.31). This singular example of the unique differences between American Indian and non-American Indian students is further evidence that there must be a deeper and more contextualized understanding of American Indian students’ experiences to increase access to and opportunities in higher education.

Tribal Colleges Today

Tribal colleges and universities (TCU) currently serve almost 30,000 American Indian/Alaskan Native students across the country and are individually unique in their mission statements: “To support and teach curricula, cultures and languages of their Indian nations” (Stein, 1999, p.262). TCUs traditionally are located on a reservation’s agency or near the reservation’s government offices, or what members of that reservation community refer to as *the heart of the Rez*². Dr. Wayne Stein in his study of TCUs (1999) described them as “tenacious institutions of higher education that serve the smallest and poorest minority group in the United States” (1999, p.259).

² Rez: short for Indian reservation refers to land that is primarily occupied by American Indian communities by treaty. Legislative action or executive order. The term is also one that is used by members of American Indian communities as a means of recognition, self-location, endearment, status, humor, honor and home.

Tribal colleges are unique institutions of higher education in that they serve American Indian students in their cultural space with cultural understandings, history, language and story at the core of each TCU mission statement. Tribal colleges strive to help develop individual students and prepare them for relevant work in their communities, but community resiliency and success is the primary goal, TCUs “are neither competitive nor meritocratic... generosity, reverence for the earth, and wisdom are basic values” (Krumm, 1995, p.7). They serve as informal places of socialization, community, family and support. Iris Pretty Paint’s “Family Educational Model” (2002) helps us to understand the connection between the individual and the community, “One of the greatest strengths of Native American society is that the individual and the tribe are intimately intertwined. In this relationship, the individual does not stand apart from the larger group, but is fundamentally defined by membership in the group” (His Horse is Thunder, 2012, p.13). This statement reflects the absolute necessity that TCUs place on emphasizing family and community in their curriculums. This is one of the primary differences that distinguish TCUs from PWIs.

American Indian students attending TCUs are the cultural, racial and ethnic majority in both the campus and community setting and are receiving structure and instruction that is dramatically different from that of the PWI. Tribal colleges are required to have enrollments of at least 51% American Indian/Alaskan Native students (F. Lefthand, personal communication, October 28, 2015). A Tribal College is designated as such if it meets the following federal requirements by law:

- (1) are chartered by the governing body of a federally recognized Indian tribe or tribes, or the federal government; (2) have a governing board

composed of a majority of American Indians; (3) demonstrate adherence to stated goals, a philosophy, or a plan of operation which is directed to meeting the needs of American Indians; (4) are accredited, or have achieved candidacy status, by a nationally recognized accreditation agency or association; or (5) are included in the list of TCU Land-Grant Institutions in the Equity in Educational Land-Grant Status Act of 1994 (7 U.S.C. 301 note). The U.S. Congress has designated thirty-three TCUs as land-grant colleges through the Equity in Educational Land-Grant Status Act of 1994. (His Horse is Thunder, 2012)

Tribal college expert, Indigenous researcher and former director of Native American studies at Montana State University, Dr. Wayne Stein, has spent a great deal of time researching tribal colleges and the students that attend them. Dr. Stein found that by measuring and better tracking “stop-outs” rather than drop-outs that the tribal college “retention rate is approximately 75-80 percent” (Stein, 1992). This is by a majority of institutional averages and standards, not only a phenomenal institutional retention number, but also significantly higher than the retention rate of American Indian students in PWIs. Clearly, increasing our understanding of TCU students, their experiences, and their perceptions is essential so that both the TCU and PWI can support American Indian students should they wish to matriculate at a PWI.

Campus Climate

The literature states that perceptions of a campus climate can greatly affect students and impact their academic careers (Makomenaw, 2012; Pavel, 1999). Research exploring what factors contribute to why students do not persist in college have centered on person-institution interaction and assimilation (Tinto, 1987). This research specifically states that the student must assimilate to the dominant institutional culture to

increase his or her chances of success and degree completion (Tinto, 1987). If students are expected to assimilate to a campus climate that does not welcome or value the student's own cultural identity and value system, it can be expected that that student would find more difficulty and less motivation in persisting toward degree completion. The theory proposed by Tinto is not incorrect or invalid with regard to student departure. However, the theory fails to consider how the additional factor of assimilation complicates and ignores the unique cultural environments, ways of knowing and ways of being that American Indian students bring with them to institutions of higher learning.

Current research has found that dual socialization (theory) is much more fitting for minority students when considering the effects that campus and environment have on individual students (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000). Dual socialization theory in short states:

The extent to which an individual finds it possible to understand and predict successfully two cultural environments and adjust his or her behavior according to the norms of each culture depends on the extent to which these two cultures share common values, beliefs, perceptions, and norms for prescribed behaviors. (Rendon et al., 2000, p. 148)

This theory, along with organization cultural research (Kuh & Love, 2001) and intercultural student persistence studies (Museus & Quaye, 2009) assist in the justification of increased responsibility by PWIs to work toward better understanding both the individual American Indian student and the environment from which that student is the most familiar with, i.e. reservation life/the rez. According to Kuh and Love, institutions can increase/enhance student persistence and graduation rates by, "Creating a campus in which students feel they belong and are valued, challenged, and affirmed by

their peers and teachers” (2001, p.112).

A study done in 2010 with tribal college students who had matriculated to a PWI in the state of Michigan found that students believed that they experienced ignorance and stereotypes that were not present at their previous respective institutions (Makomenaw, 2012). As mentioned previously perceptions of being culturally different from the majority of students on campus can contribute to institutional incongruence and work as a barrier for American Indian students in their quest to degree completion. The literature is laden with American Indian student experiences and their perceptions of PWIs. There is not a shortage of literature and research exploring the American Indian experience at predominantly white institutions. Much of that literature discusses students’ feelings, observations and perceptions of social isolation, hostile environments, perceived lack of support from the PWI, being stereotyped, overly competitive classroom environments and other undesirable or unfavorable characteristics of the PWI by American Indian students (Benjamin et al., 1993; Guillory, 2009; Jacket et all, 2003; Makomenaw, 2012; Pavel, 1999; Wilson, 2008). Hoffman’s research on American Indian students attending a predominantly white institution gives further evidence of the challenges that Native students face in their quest for higher education and degree completion (2005). Hoffman discusses both the cultural discontinuity hypothesis and macrostructural explanations as likely theoretical frameworks related to the cultural conflict experienced by culturally traditional American Indian students in college. Ultimately, Hoffman’s study discusses the success to degree completion that culturally traditional American Indian students attending a PWI have had through the process of transculturation. Transcultured

American Indian students have found success through navigating and balancing two cultural levels simultaneously, “successful performance in college requires dual operation at an American Indian cultural level and a college mainstream level” (Hoffman, 2005, p. 17).

In reviewing the literature as far back as 1987, the research regarding American Indian student perceptions of PWIs has explored only the perceptions of those students who have had direct experience at PWIs. The research has gathered perceptions and experiences of those American Indian students who have either attended only a PWI or students who had transferred from a tribal college to a PWI. There is no research on the perceptions of TCU students who have not matriculated to a PWI. This dissertation is intentional in gaining a better understanding of American Indian students who have not had any extended experience at a PWI campus, providing essential understandings of the perceptions of American Indian students who are the least familiar with PWIs.

This study will explore current American Indian students attending TCUs who have had no prior first-hand experiences with a PWI. Prior experience will include PWI enrollment and attendance, bridge programs and/or PWI campus sponsored and hosted camps such as the Montana Apprenticeship Program (MAP), GEAR UP or any programs that required that students stay for a duration of one week or longer on campus. The study will specifically look at what perceptions these American Indian tribal college students have of the PWI and its social and learning environment. Only current American Indian tribal college students who have attended secondary school on or near an Indian reservation or predominantly Indigenous community have been interviewed for

this project. Participants have been asked if they intend to transfer to a PWI at some point in their academic career. This was done to distinguish any potential difference in perceptions gathered through the research between those who do and do not desire to matriculate to a PWI. Indigenous research methodologies and the concept of relationality inform the theoretical framework for this study, as described later in this chapter.

Purpose of the Study

To reiterate, the purpose of this interpretive phenomenological (Gina, 2012) study is to explore the perceptions of predominantly white institutions (PWI) by tribal colleges/universities (TCU) students who have had no prior experience (matriculation, camp/program attendance, etc.) with a PWI and who also culturally identify with their respective Indigenous/reservation communities. I would like to gain a better understanding of what American Indian students believe to be true about PWIs and if these perceptions shape their interest in potential matriculation to a PWI. These perceptions will be explored to assist both types of institutions in better assisting and supporting those TCU students who may have the desire to matriculate to a PWI and also to better support current TCU transfers and Indigenous students in general who are attending a PWI.

The larger purpose is to increase access for American Indian students interested in PWIs. Previous research in this area has predominantly grouped all American Indian students together; this research will only look to share the perceptions and opinions of those students who self-identify as having strong ties/bonds to their specific Indigenous

communities. Work by Hoffman on the transculturation process refers to these types of students as traditional American Indian students (Hoffman, 2005). Participants will also have attended a majority of their K-12 experience on or near an Indian reservation or predominantly Indigenous community. If Indigenous scholars and educators are to look for solutions to what we believe are problems within our own unique communities, we must look with new eyes and in new places. Sto:lo scholar JoAnn Archibald reminds us of this in both story and form in her book *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body and Spirit* (2008).

COYOTE SEARCHING FOR THE BONE NEEDLE

Old Man Coyote had just finished a long hard day of hunting. He decided to set up his camp for the night. After supper, he sat by the fire and rubbed his tired feet from the long day's walk. He took his favourite moccasins out of his bag and noticed that there was a hole in the toe of one of them. He looked for his special bone needle to mend the moccasin but couldn't feel it in the bag. Old Man Coyote started to crawl on his hands and knees around the fire to see if he could see or feel the needle. Just then Owl came flying by and landed next to Old Man Coyote. He asked him what he was looking for. Old Man Coyote told Owl his problem. Owl said that he would help his friend look for the bone needle. After he made one swoop of the area around the fire, he told Old Man Coyote that he didn't see the needle. Owl said that if it were around the fire, then he would have spotted it. He then asked Old Man Coyote where he last used the needle. Old Man Coyote said that he used it quite far away, over in the bushes, to mend his jacket. Then Owl asked Old Man Coyote why he was searching for the needle around the campfire. Old Man Coyote replied, "Well, it's easier to look for the needle here because the fire gives off such good light, and I can see better here" (p.35-36).

As mentioned previous to the Old Man Coyote and Owl story above, this story of searching for a tool in the light of the fire in many ways mirrors my own search for Indigenous voices. It is much easier to look for voices, opinions and thoughts of those that are nearby and easy to see. Coyote teaches us lessons and guides us through his journey; many times he guides us by giving us laughter and showing us what may not be wise to do. He looks where the light is, where it is easy and he can rest his feet, where he

will not have to work hard to find his bone needle. Owl helps us to see why this is not a reasonable search effort. It is here where my journey takes me to the dark, with tired feet to retrace my steps and think of where there might be voices that I may have missed, to find the voices and the tools that may help in the journey to help my community count coup through education. The winds of change may shine the light of the story's fire in a different area tomorrow and the story may teach us different lessons at different times. Today, this is what it means to me.

Research Questions

- What are American Indian tribal college students' perceptions of predominantly white institutions?
- How do American Indian tribal college students believe PWIs can better assist and support American Indian students who desire to matriculate to a PWI?

Significance of the Study

Current knowledge and research on American Indian students' perceptions of PWIs have primarily been collected from those students who already have direct experience with a PWI setting. By exploring what perceptions Indian students with no prior PWI experience (matriculation, camp/program attendance) have at a PWI it is possible that a richer story or experience can be generated to help better inform and prepare American Indian students, TCUs and PWIs. An image of the knowledge transfer and sharing process has been provided (see Figure 1).

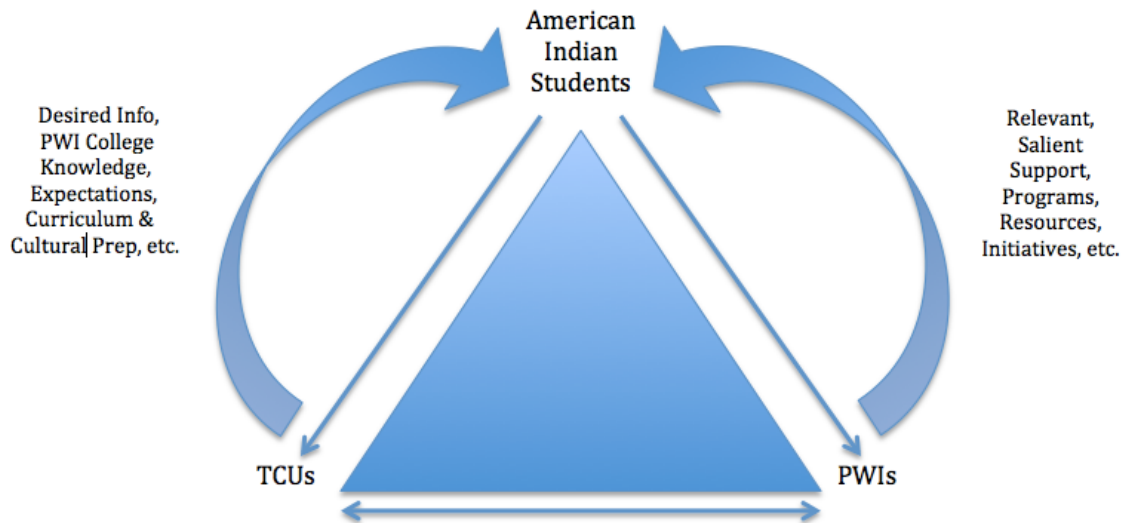


Figure 1. Knowledge transfer and sharing of information for/by AI students, TCUs, PWIs.

Potential benefits include increased knowledge for each of the three constituents to better assist one another in areas that may improve relationships, enrollment, retention, relevancy, respect, and desired outcomes. TCUs could potentially become better informed on what their students feel they are the least familiar with regarding matriculation to a PWI. TCU faculty and staff could offer informational sessions to prepare their students for a different environment and inform students what resources are available to them should they desire to matriculate. PWIs could potentially familiarize themselves with the various interests, needs and desires of the tribal college student and could use this knowledge to offer relevant incentives, opportunities and resources. Increased knowledge for PWIs could also help them understand how to make their recruitment and retention strategies more relevant to their current and potential American

Indian student population. Improved and expanded knowledge about American Indian students could lead to an increase in the recruitment and transfer of AI students and improved retention and graduation rates for AI students at PWIs. Additional benefits of increased knowledge could also help institutions to provide a richer and more relevant learning experience and salient and successful outcomes for individual AI students. Potential benefits to students include having their voices and stories heard, increasing opportunities and access to higher education and providing resources that are both relevant and accessible.

I exercise caution when using the term success/success rate, as this term can be problematic in higher education settings as it many times refers only to a student reaching degree completion at an institution of higher learning. Success then becomes defined only by the institutions rather than the students or their communities. Success can mean many things to many people and cultures; value systems on the reservation/communities leave room for students to be successful without a degree from college. I will continue this work with the assumption that the term success refers to degree completion in higher education for this project. Completion/success rates are much higher for AI students at the TCU than compared to that of AI students at the PWI. It is important for educators, instructors, student service personnel, administration and policy makers at both types of institutions to understand the perceptions and needs of American Indian students to better support those students and communities: increased access and knowledge about AI students can lead to improved educational opportunities for those students and communities.

Indigenous Worldview & Paradigm

My research project uses an Indigenous worldview and research paradigm. The theoretical framework for my study is informed by Indigenous methodologies in research, specifically that of relationality. The Relationality Medallion of Indigenous research much like many traditional beaded medallions has balance, equally spaced parts to represent the value of each to one another, and can be used for many occasions. Unlike the stitched beads of a medallion³, the Relationality Medallion can move both clockwise and counter clockwise to allow flexibility in time, environment, situation, context, resources and community. An image of the conceptual framework that I have created for this qualitative research project has been provided below (see Figure 2). This Relationality Medallion can be used not only for research with and for Indigenous tribal college students, but with Indigenous communities in general. All research relationships for both the Indigenous researcher and the participants must remain accountable or responsible to our Indigenous communities, be respectful and expect and practice reciprocity.

³ Medallion: In many Indigenous cultures, beaded medallions are worn traditionally as a necklace, visible at the front of the body; they are worn at ceremonies, special occasions, events and celebrations; it connotes honor, respect and community/family/tribe.

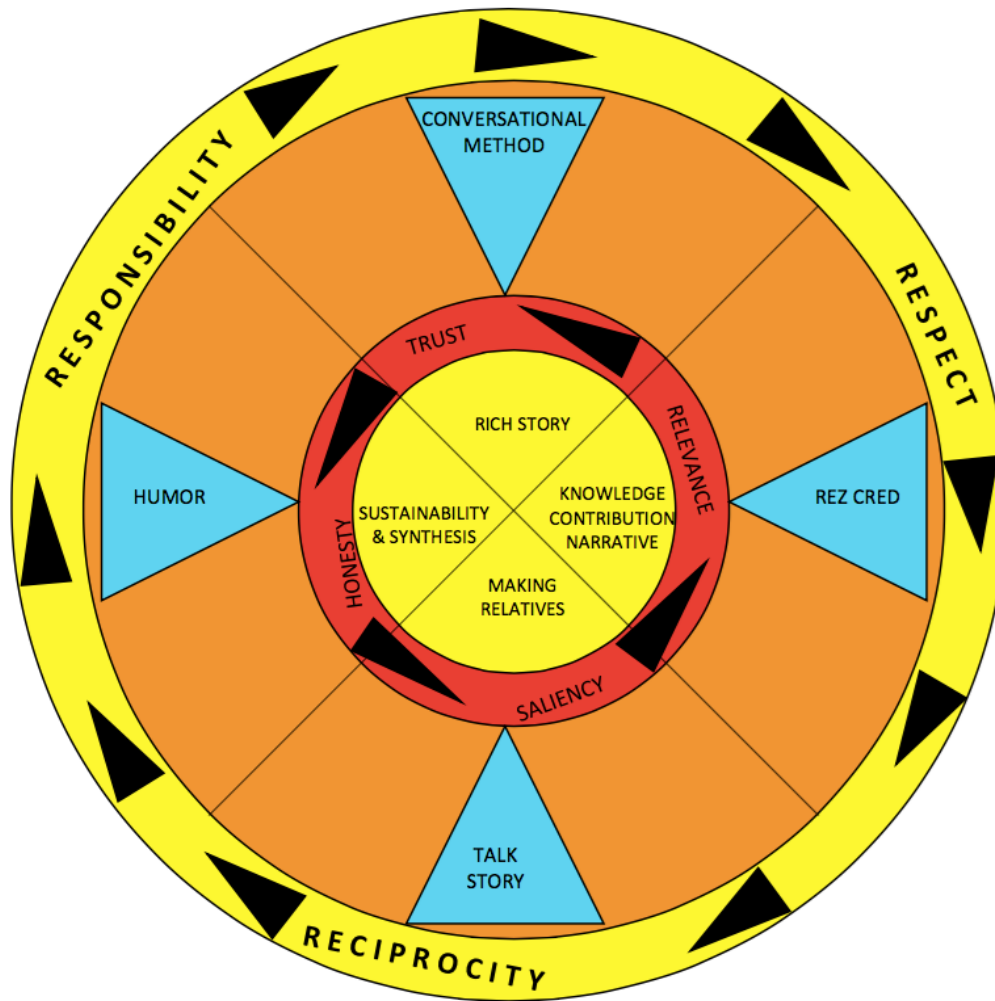


Figure 2. Relationality Medallion conceptual framework.

The research relationship can move forward when we use Indigenous research methods (IRMs) like the conversational method, humor, talk story/storytelling, and community/reservation credentials (rez cred⁴). These IRMs are an integral part of the

⁴ Rez cred: short for reservation credentials; when meeting other Indigenous people or communities, it connotes sharing with one another who you are, who your family is, where you grew up, tournaments, pow wows, schools, and other community activities that you have participated in that one another might be familiar with that is common activity with reservation communities.

process of research and relationality; without them we could not create the elements of the center of the medallion. The center must happen to make the research process meaningful and successful for all constituents. With all components being connected and flexible, we can make relatives to find and create together rich stories that form a narrative that contributes knowledge that synthesizes ways for our Indigenous communities to become sustainable in growth, culture and education.

The research project will blend phenomenology in American Indian student experience in higher education, the conversational method (Kovach, 2010), experiential knowledge (Taylor et al., 2009; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999) and storytelling or talk story (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2010). Indigenous researcher Maggie Kovach (2010) states:

Indigenous methodologies are a paradigmatic approach based upon an Indigenous philosophical positioning or epistemology. Thus it is not the method, per se, that is the determining characteristic of Indigenous methodologies, but rather the interplay (the relationship) between the method and the paradigm and the extent to which the method, itself, is congruent with an Indigenous worldview (p.40).

An additional theory that will be discussed briefly for this dissertation study will be Tinto's Student Departure Theory (Tinto, 1987). Tinto's departure theory has been critiqued and revisited intensely throughout the past two decades with much of the critique focusing on how valid the theory is regarding minority student departure from college (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2001). Tinto's departure theory is primarily "based on an assimilation/acculturation framework" (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000, p.128). For reasons mentioned above my dissertation study will not be focusing on assimilation as a means for American Indian students to find success in PWIs. Tinto's theory, however, does offer a foundation to understanding student

departure, the institution's commitment to students, and factors related to why students may not succeed in college. Although Tinto's original student departure theory did not specifically account for students varying institutional needs that factored in the student's race, ethnicity or culture, the theory is still important because it inadvertently speaks to many of the reasons why PWIs are not as appealing to many minority students versus non-minority students. An additional framework that my research will consider is Hoffman's Transcultural hypothesis which looks at how traditional American Indian students attending predominantly non-Indigenous institutions of higher education navigate two cultures by finding strength in their own traditional cultural identities (2005).

Research Design

The research design utilized a convenience sample of six tribal colleges and Universities in the state of Montana. In working to make this study as transferable as possible to TCU's in other parts of the United States, I attempted to gather perceptions of AI TCU students outside of Montana; two participants had attended a TCU in Kansas. Researcher resources and time were limited and this resulted in a limitation of the study; data collection and results were limited to TCUs located within the state of Montana and therefore are representative of only AI students currently attending TCUs in Montana. Seven of the 37 TCUs in the United States and Canada are located in the state of Montana; of the 19% TCUs located in Montana, I was able to visit six, or 16% of all TCUs for this research. To better understand potential student perceptions of a common

phenomenon about predominantly white institutions, an interpretive phenomenological qualitative research design was utilized using an Indigenous research methodology. The research design included both demographic and short answer, open-ended questions in a one-on-one interview/discussion format. Within the time allotted for this project, respecting the process of tribal college/community IRBs, distance between institutions, resources needed for travel and time needed to make visits, I could visit six tribal colleges and interviewed 15 current tribal college students from those institutions who shared their stories for this project. Internal Review Board (IRB) approval was received from the six TCUs that I visited. Informal interaction with the students and other TCU constituents were not recorded, but reflective notes were kept on all interactions at each institution. The official interviews were recorded with a digital, audio recording application on my personal computer. A paper survey was also distributed to each student prior to the interview to capture multiple levels of student perceptions and/or additional thoughts that students may have felt more comfortable sharing non-verbally.

A minimum of a full-day was spent at each location before and after interviewing students in attempt to better understand and absorb the TCU environments. Interviews varied in duration, from 20 minutes to over three hours. The average total time spent with students was around 90 minutes. I met first with those that I was familiar with at each TCU, teachers, staff, deans and other students. An important element of Indigenous research methodologies; natural relationship building, connecting, sharing, knowing, being and doing is what Shawn Wilson refers to as relationality (2008). This method of relationality was employed both intentionally and unintentionally and was very helpful in

gaining not only access to potential candidates for the interviews but also in helping myself and new students feel comfortable with one another through connections that we had already established to other individuals in our Indigenous community. I say unintentionally in the previous sentence because natural, organic relationships are created and sustained within Indian country continuously without any expectations or intention in almost all workings with the community. I used a semi-structured interview protocol with open-ended prompting questions with each student. These methods were utilized to keep the design and survey as close to Indigenous research practices as possible within my given time frame to complete this project. The Indigenous research method of relationality (Wilson, 2008), as mentioned previously, was intentionally and unintentionally employed in building and strengthening relationships prior to any data collection from participants. An additional component of Indigenous ways of being was the natural inclusion of humor as an avenue to build, create and strengthen relationships and establish identity (Deloria Jr., 1969; Pratt, 1996) with AI students. Sherman Alexie has stated that the use of humor can be “a passport into other people’s cultures. A temporary passport.” (Nelson & Alexie, 2010).

It is important for me as the researcher to practice relationality (Wilson, 2008), the conversational method (Kovach, 2010) and relational accountability (Kovach, 2010; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008) in staying true to my own bicultural accountability with regards to my academic and Indigenous membership groups. Maintaining accountability and respect for my own tribal identity and community is just as important as it is for the researcher to maintain academic accountability and institutional standards

in the research process. This is important because wherever we as Indigenous people go and however we choose to behave we will always be representing more than ourselves; we are representing our people of today and tomorrow and our ancestors of the past. We must always remember why we do what we do and who we do it for, which is our Indigenous communities.

A phenomenological study will be utilized to look at gathering individual perceptions that may be a common or shared perception(s) among American Indian students currently attending tribal colleges and universities in the United States. The research will try to determine whether or not there is a phenomenon among American Indians who both identify with a tribal community and who also attend TCUs with regards to how or what they believe to be true about predominantly white institutions that they may or may not be interested in matriculating to. A composite story based on participant's experiential knowledge (Taylor et al., 2009) will provide a synopsis of any shared experience(s) that the TCU students might have to better paint a picture of the story/phenomenon. After all interviews, surveys and stories have been transcribed, themed and coded, common words, thoughts, ideas, perceptions, and any other participant shared descriptions will be stitched together to tell their story and to share their collective voice.

Reflexivity Statement/Researcher Positionality

I am the primary researcher for this project and am both a self-identified and federally recognized member of the Apsaalooke Nation or the Crow Tribe of Indians.

The Apsaalooke are also referred to as simply Crow and our reservation is in Southeastern Montana. My role as an Indigenous researcher cannot be separated from the study itself, as it is with my lens that I will design, implement and interpret the research and all its connected components. I am a product of the secondary education system near the Crow Reservation. Although I have never been enrolled at a tribal college, I have interned, studied, coached, visited, laughed and learned at my reservation's tribal college, Little Big Horn College. My experiences growing up on the reservation and in being part of a larger cultural community where everyone is connected and accountable in our Native circle has served as my driving force to better serve my community through education and activism. Indian education, equality and equity in education, relevancy and saliency in teaching and methods, and representation of Indigenous histories, people and culture are passions that have shaped many of my perspectives. It is important for me to share and frame my experience for the research and the academic audience.

Operational Definitions

1. American Indian, Native American, Indigenous, Indian, Alaskan Native: are used interchangeably in this study to refer to individuals or members of groups or the group whom self-identify as descendants of any of the original inhabitants of North America. The researcher will predominantly use "American Indian" to avoid any confusion that may exist with individuals or groups who consider

themselves native with geographic respect, i.e. First Nations Indigenous of Canada, Maori of New Zealand, Aboriginals of Australia etc.

2. American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC): is the collective spirit and unifying voice of our nation's 37 Tribal Colleges and Universities; a network of member institutions who serve through public policy, advocacy, research and program initiatives to ensure strong tribal sovereignty through excellence in American Indian higher education.
3. Bicultural accountability: a term referred to by the Indigenous researcher/author of this paper as an obligation one has to both the Indigenous community of membership and the academic community; specifically, with regards to upholding and representing one's self in the most culturally appropriate/respectful manner while maintaining academic integrity and expectations of the predominantly white institutional community.
4. Conversational Method: a term and method used by Indigenous researcher, Maggie Kovach, as a means for gathering knowledge through story (Kovach, 2010).
5. Counting coup: In traditional American Indian culture(s) this was a great honor achieved in battle: a highly successful accomplishment.
6. Cultural Discontinuity Hypothesis: emphasizes the differing and opposing micro-level cultural elements that ultimately impact the educational performance of minority students. Examples include communication styles, social values, and interpersonal behaviors (Hoffman, 2005, p. 4).

7. Critical Race Theory: is an academic discipline focused upon the application of critical theory, a critical examination of US society and culture, to the intersection of race, law, and power.
8. Interpretive Phenomenology: an inductive qualitative research study that attempts to understand peoples' perceptions through their lived experiences and where the meaning of the phenomenon is looking to become better understood (Maxwell, 2012).
9. Federally recognized tribe/tribal affiliation: used to refer to an individual or group that is recognized by the United States government as a member(s) of one of the 566 federally recognized tribes as stated by the U.S. Department of Interior website under Indian Affairs FAQs (doi.gov).
10. Gifting: a traditional practice in American Indian culture where by an individual or group gives a gift(s) to another to show respect, gratitude, appreciation and honor for the recipient. Different American Indian cultures have variations of gift giving terms, protocol and items gifted. Potlatch and give-away are other terms for this practice and common, traditional items gifted include, but are not limited to blankets, material, money/currency, tobacco, sage, cedar, bare root and food.
11. Interest Convergence: A tenet of critical race theory that states the interests of Blacks/minorities in gaining racial equality have been accommodated only when they have converged with the interest of powerful whites/dominant society (Taylor, 1999).

12. Macrostructural Explanations: Assumes that social/structural forces beyond the realm of the individual are the source of cultural conflict (Hoffman, 2005, p. 5).
13. Native Academic Circle: a term used to describe the community of Indigenous educators, faculty, staff, students, friends and family that have been or are currently connected to each other through their interest, motivations, passions, employment, service or attendance to institutions of higher education.
14. Predominantly white institution (PWI): a term used to describe institutions of higher learning where whites account for 50% or more of student enrollment (Brown & Dancy, 2010).
15. Relationality: a term that Indigenous scholar, Shawn Wilson, defines as the shared aspect of an Indigenous ontology and epistemology; Wilson also states that a shared aspect of an Indigenous axiology and methodology is accountability to relationships (Wilson, 2008).
16. Reservation(s): the Bureau of Indian Affairs website refers to reservations as “an area of land reserved for a tribe or tribes under treaty or other agreement with the United States, executive order, or federal statute or administrative action as permanent tribal homelands, and where the federal government holds title to the land in trust on behalf of the tribe” (Indian Affairs, 2015). For a majority of the purposes that *reservation* is used within the context of this dissertation project, the term should denote feelings of warmth, home, family; where Indian students feel connected and are part of the cultural, land and community. Lower socioeconomic status, low employment rate and job opportunities and

underfunded school systems should also be considered in the use of reservation for the purposes of this research.

17. Transculturation: The process by which a student eventually finds success at a predominantly non-Indigenous institutions of higher learning through their own unique identity as American Indian and is able to draw strength from that identity. This process involves four stages which are initial alienation, self-discovery, realignment and finally participation (Hoffman, 2005).
18. Tribal College/University (TCU): Institutions of higher education created and controlled by American Indians/tribes as an alternate option to meet the educational needs of Indian people. Tribal colleges are the only institutions of higher education in the world that support and teach curricula, cultures, and languages of each of their respective Indian nations. One of the primary focuses for TCUs is to meet the specific needs of the tribal community through providing a relevant curriculum and programs.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

It is assumed that the researcher will gain access to student participants at six TCUs selected for the research sample and testable for future research for both the interview and survey distribution. Also assumed is that those participants from the selected sample of TCUs will display an array of perceptions that will be representative of the institutions that were not selected for this study. The research will also assume that there may be a common theme among perceptions of PWIs by TCU students that is

reflective of TCU students as a whole and that influences students' decisions and feelings about matriculating to PWIs. It will also be assumed that the researcher will have access to tribal college students who not only identify as American Indian but who have also had pre-college educational experience on or near one of the 567 Indian reservations located within the United States. It is assumed that these students may share similar pre-college and college experiences that may add to the body of literature on the American Indian student experience in higher education. The research process for this study also assumes that students will be willing to share and be open and honest about their perceptions in the data collection process.

Limitations include the possibility of skewed or limited perceptions with regards to geographic representation of the TCU students who were interviewed. Only six of the possible 37 tribal colleges are included in this study and those selected will be in the western portion of the United States. Perceptions may also be limited to those who are accessible at the TCU during the time frame that the researcher will be visiting the institutions. Time spent at each TCU and with each research participant was also a limitation to this study. In some cases I did not have as much time as necessary to build the relationship that I believe would contribute to the most meaningful discussions for the data collection process. The responses of the participants could be limited based on the individual or group's willingness to share their true perceptions about PWIs with the researcher with whom they may see as a direct representative of the PWI.

Delimitations for this study include the sample and the standard turnaround time for tribal IRB approval. I have chosen to visit six of the institutions most accessible to

me from a geographic standpoint. Institutions that I had chosen and was able to visit will included Little Bighorn College, Chief Dull Knife College, Salish Kootenai College, Stone Child College, Aaniiih Nakoda College and Fort Peck Community College. The standard processing and completion time to receive a decision on a submitted IRB application requesting to visit a TCU for research and data collection through the tribal IRB committee can take anywhere from three weeks to one year. I choose to conduct research at the TCUs whose IRB approval processes were timely with regard to my research schedule.

I chose to look for individuals at specific institutions where a relationship had already been established through the “Native Academic Circle” to create space for myself in a researcher position to enter (including IRB approval) and work with current TCU students in the data collection process. This research was only looking to capture the perceptions of those students attending a tribal college who identify as American Indian or Alaskan Native and who have attended any or all of grades K-12 on or near an Indian reservation. Near a reservation will help to include the perceptions of students who may have attended a school that is located in a border town where the at least 50% of the school’s enrollment consisted of American Indian students. An example of this would be current AI TCU students who had attended Hardin High School in Hardin, Montana. Hardin is in the same county as the Crow Indian reservation but the town and its three schools are located just outside the boundaries of the reservation. The Hardin primary school, middle school, and high school enrollment for American Indian students is at 63%, white students 20%, Hispanic students 11% and two or more races six percent.

Eighty-four percent of students enrolled in the Hardin school district are receiving free or reduced-price lunch (greatschools.org, 2015).

There is no pan-American Indian. Indigenous students cannot be put into one group that represents all of their beliefs and perceptions about PWIs. Students experiencing different needs in their K-12 years may not have access to resources that can better provide them with information about their educational options in the future.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to further explore and understand the perceptions and opinions that American Indian students currently attending tribal colleges have about predominantly white institutions. Although the literature is abundant with data/perceptions that American Indian students have about PWI's (Jackson et al., 2003; Makomenaw, 2012; Pavel, 1999), a majority of this data has been collected from students who have matriculated to a PWI. My research will work to better understand AI student perceptions that have not been shaped or influenced by matriculation, camp, or program attendance at a PWI. These student perceptions will also be limited to those whose pre-college experience was on or near a reservation that is home to 567 American Indian tribes in the United States (BIA.gov). The primary purpose of this research study is not only to gain deeper insight on American Indian student perceptions of PWIs, but also to do so in a culturally respectful way using an Indigenous research methodology.

As an Indigenous scholar and researcher, it is important for me to be accountable to all my relatives and to do research in a good way (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). This is why

I have chosen to conduct all the processes of this dissertation using Indigenous research methodologies. In doing research with and for Indigenous communities, is it important to remember why I am here, why I have the opportunities that I do and why I am doing what I am doing: for my people. I would not be in the position that I am today as an Indigenous community member and graduate student in higher education if it were not for those who have pushed me forward, reminded me of who we are as Indigenous people, showed me humility, perseverance, sacrifice, determination and the absolute importance of culture in the fabric of our souls. It is an honor to be accountable to my community and in that I must always practice respect, reciprocity, relevance, and responsibility (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991), a primary foundation of Indigenous research methodologies.

This research will contribute to the ongoing conversation about the recruitment, retention and graduation of American Indian students at PWIs. The findings from this study will contribute to and expand upon the current theories regarding AI students and higher education. Results, stories, experiences, thoughts and voices captured in this study will assist PWIs, tribal colleges, educators, policy makers, faculty, support staff and students to make a greater impact on policy and practice that affects AI students in all areas of higher education.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

An important aspect of understanding the current state of American Indian students in higher education is to have a foundational understanding of the history of American Indians with western education. It is relevant to this dissertation proposal that the linear path of the American education system regarding Indigenous people be discussed, including and emphasizing grassroots higher education from the reservations and Indian communities: the tribal community colleges and universities. If predominantly white institutions (PWI) wish to support Indigenous students should they desire to matriculate to institutions that are traditionally very different than the student's home community, reservation or tribal college/university (TCU), then understanding these student's individual and collective histories, experiences, motivations, challenges and culture(s) is imperative.

This chapter will focus on building understanding and awareness of the unique elements and history of the participation of American Indian students in the U.S. education system. Chapter two will also discuss the key role that TCUs have played in Indian student and community education. American Indian student culture, support, barriers and other elements important to matriculation and success in a PWI educational setting will be explored in this chapter as well.

History & Early Education

Prior to the year 1492, Indigenous people, communities, and tribes of the North American continent were free to practice their own ways of knowing, doing and being in their own language. “Thousands upon thousands of years before 1492, indigenous people had evolved their unique educational systems” (Benham & Stein, 2003, p.xvii).

Indigenous history and identity is in the language of each Indigenous nation (Archibald, 2000; Benham & Stein, 2003; Grande, 2004; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). Indigenous methods of learning came through observation, ceremonies, storytelling, apprenticeship and play (Reyhner & Eder, 2015). Children would learn through watching and imitating their mothers, fathers, aunties, uncles, cousins, older brothers and sisters, grandparents and other members of the tribe perform multiple tasks throughout the day and the seasons (Coups & Linderman, 2002; Lowie, 1935; Pretty Shield & Linderman, 1932). Tribal communities and individuals taught each other the old ways through story and ceremony. Tribal members were responsible and accountable to their whole community through actual and declared kinship: “kinship decreed that no one should want so long as anything remained to be shared” and that “one must be a good relative” (Utley, 1994, p.9). Each community/tribe functioned in a manner that would provide for every family to have sufficient food, shelter, weapons, horses and health (Lowie, 1935).

From 1492 into the 19th century, contact evolved into westward expansion and with that came a plethora of problems for the Indigenous people of this nation. With the perpetual westward expansion of Europeans and colonists new to this country, the Indigenous people of this land found themselves in a constant battle to maintain their

previously established ways of life. Indian communities and tribes literally began to lose ground/land and found themselves many times at the mercy of the United States government in countless legal, ethical, social, emotional and physical realms (Canby, 1999; Carney, 1999; Deloria & Lytle, 1983; Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999). Westward expansion brought with it ideas, religion(s), disease, agendas and expectations that American Indians could have not predicted would have affected them so devastatingly (Reyner & Eder, 2015). Missionaries and boarding schools that took children away from the influence of their Native communities “were designed, first and foremost, to serve the purposes of the federal government and only secondarily the needs of American Indian students” (Grande, 2004, p.13). American Indians were confronted with a foreign system of forced education; not only was this forced education irrelevant to their people’s customs, traditions and practices but it was also extremely unfavorable and undesirable in content and delivery methods. The following excerpt from *Native American Higher Education In The United States* (Carney, 1999) provides us with an example of not only the aggressive and authoritarian style of western education targeted at American Indians but also of the irrelevancy of the proposed (demanded) education. In 1744, Conassatego, an Onondaga-Mengwe chief stated the following regarding the request of six chief’s sons to attend William and Mary:

We must let you know we love our children too well to send them so great away, and the Indians are not inclined to give their children learning. We allow it to be good. And we thank you for your invitation: but our customs differing from yours, you will be so good as to excuse us.

Upon being pressured for the sons again to leave their people for a western education... Conassatego more bluntly and honestly responded with this: We know that you highly esteem the kind of learning taught in those

colleges, and that the Maintenance of our young Men, while with you, would be very expensive to you. We are convinced that you mean to do us Good by your Proposal, and we thank you heartily. But you, who are wise must know that different Nations have different Conceptions of things and you will therefor not take it amiss, if our ideas of this kind of Education happen not to be the same as yours.

We have had some experience of it. Several of our young People were formerly brought up at the Colleges of the Northern Provinces, where they were instructed in all your Sciences; but, when they came back they were bad Runners, ignorance of every means of living in the woods; unable to bear either cold or hunger; knew neither how to build a cabin, take a deer, or kill an enemy; spoke our language imperfectly; were therefor neither fit for Hunters, Warriors, nor Counsellors, they were totally good for nothing.

We are, however, not the less obliged by your kind offer, though we decline accepting it; and, to show our grateful Sense of it, if the Gentlemen of Virginia will send us a dozen of their sons, we will take Care of their Education, instruct them in all we know, and make Men of them. (p.30)

Almost three centuries after Conassatego delivered his people's thoughts on a western education and its lack of relevance to the survival and lifestyle of Indigenous people, a similar sentiment resonates in American Indian communities regarding mainstream, dominant society institutions of education.

The College of Henrico, Harvard University, The College of William and Mary, and Dartmouth College were all originally established institutions of higher education with charters that specifically stated that their existence was solely and/or primarily to educate the "savages" and "infidels" of this new country (Wright & Tierney, 1991). In 1690 Harvard's charter included, "the education of the English and Indian youth of this country in knowledge" (Carney, 1999, p.25) and William and Mary's 1693 charted had a similar sentiment with, "so that the Christian faith may be propagated amongst the Western Indians" (Carney, 1999, p.27). Dartmouth, along with its founder, Eleazar

Wheelock, were determined through the newly founded institution “in the prospects of saving Indian souls” (Carney, 1999, p.31) by taking Indian children from their natural environments and surrounding them with only the teachings and influences of the Puritan society.

Missionaries were established on and near reservations to educate the American Indian; with them, the original intention of educating Indians in ways similar to Whites took a quick turn toward a strictly vocational education. In 1879, the first government run Indian boarding school, Carlisle, was established and directed by the former military officer, George Pratt, whose personal and educational policy regarding the Indigenous people of this land was to “kill the Indian in him and save the man” (Trafzer, Keller, & Sisquoc, 2006, p.176). This time period for education, whether by the first colleges, missionaries or boarding schools, had the same blatant ideology: to Americanize the Indian with little or no regard for the unique cultures, languages and historical perspectives of the nation’s first peoples (Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999).

The motives of the institutions, their founders and participation rates of the American Indian tell a blunt, unequal and morose story of higher education with regards to Indigenous participation in predominantly white institutions. American Indians were not provided an equal education and were not allowed to be educated in any way that benefitted their culture, valued their history or acknowledged their contributions (Carney, 1999; Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999). The assimilation and termination eras were two separate but overlapping time periods within the history of Indian education. An important element to note for the purposes of this literature review is that education for

the American Indian during these time periods had characteristics that were unique to their physical place in chronological time, but theoretically they were almost identical in approach and goal. American Indians from contact through the reservation era consistently experienced physical and mental punishment, disenfranchisement, shame and cultural disregard. Educating Indians basically consisted of teaching us to be less Indian, more white, and forcing us to assimilate into mainstream society by making Indians individuals rather than members of tribal communities. The General Allotment Act of 1887 (Canby, 2009) was one of the first major initiatives by the federal government to attempt to transform American Indians from a communal system to individuals with no group identity. Included in this act was also the goal of moving Indian children into public schools. Not only was this idea counterintuitive to the legally established sovereignty of each federally recognized reservation (Canby, 1999; Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999), but it also forced Indigenous children to try and learn to be competitive and non-community oriented through the methods of western ideology in education, which was and is against our grain as Indigenous collectives (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999).

In 1928, the Meriam Report (Lewis, 1928) recommended that further teaching of American Indian children be conducted in a culturally appropriate way with emphasis on supporting our unique cultures and identities. Although the intentions of the Meriam report were moving in a more culturally responsible manner, those who received the report and who had authority to begin implementing change did not believe in a culturally sensitive and responsive American Indian education; assimilation views persisted

(Canby, 2009; Carney, 1999). The 1940's and 1950's was an era when the federal government began to terminate its trust relationship with American Indian tribes and offer incentives for them to relocate to urban areas to work and attend public schools (Canby, 1999). At this point in history, it is clear that the sovereign nations that still existed had little, if any, authority over their own people's education and educational opportunities.

A pattern of disturbing and insignificant participation in mainstream education remained the same for hundreds of years. From the original colonial institutions to the vocational programs and PWIs of more current times the goal for Indian participation has remained relatively the same... assimilation. If not blatantly stated as assimilation in a more recent context, than, "mainstream higher education's lack of attention to and failure to address the unique needs of American Indian and Alaskan Native students" (Benham & Stein, 2003). These external (to the Indian community) factors, along with internal to the community factors such as culture, location, socioeconomics and resources have contributed to low participation rates in higher education when compared to non-American Indian students in higher education at predominantly white institutions (Benjamin et al., 1993; Guillory, 2009; Jackson et al., 2003; Pavel, 1999; Reyhner & Eder, 2015; Wright & Tierney, 2010). The 1940's through the 1960's saw new and increased funding from the federal government in the form of the GI Bill, financial aid packages and scholarships, (Thelin, 2011) which did help to include a more diverse population within higher education but participation for American Indians had remained relatively low until the introduction and founding of the first Tribal College, Navajo

Community College in 1968 (Stein, 1999; Carney, 1999). This is not to say that American Indian participation rates skyrocketed after the introduction of the first tribal college, but American Indian participation in higher education and the quality of that participation began a slow trend upward (Pavel, Inglebret, & Banks, 2001; Benham & Stein, 2003).

Tribal Colleges & Universities

Early literature regarding tribal colleges and American Indian college students centered on a limited number of themes that did not provide a qualitative and cultural understanding of tribal colleges and universities (TCU) and their students. Historically, the themes that researchers focused on were pragmatic data collection such as course offerings, mission statements, number of students enrolled, demographics of students, graduation rates, credits taken, and other quantifiable types of data. As the number of TCUs and their student enrollments increased in enrollment during the latter half of their existence, the research content of TCUs and their students have also increased along with the number of Indigenous researchers, many of whom were/are products of TCUs. The increase in the number of TCUs, the number of American Indian student publications and in the number of Indigenous researchers have not only increased the amount of research done on Indigenous education but more importantly the quality of that research and literature. When doing the literature review for this project, it became noticeable that there was a positive correlation as the years went up chronologically with the number of articles and publications available on American Indians in higher education. Research

done by Indigenous researchers like Makomenaw (2012) and Pavel (1999) with American Indian students exploring their experiences, backgrounds, goals, challenges and support factors are examples of how the literature and research content has shifted from statistical factors to more salient qualitative data.

At the time of this dissertation tribal colleges have only been in existence for 48 years, of which the most recent 20-25 years have seen the number of TCUs grow to 37 institutions and significantly increase their student enrollments (AIHEC.org, 2015). In 1980 there were 2,000 students attending tribal colleges; by the fall of 1996 that number has risen to 16,689 students (AIHEC.org, 1998). The American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) web page states that more than 160,000 students are now enrolled at tribal colleges (AIHEC.org, 2017). More recent research on American Indian students and TCUs has expanded from a pragmatic focus to a more constructivist approach; research has been digging deeper into how TCUs function, the significance of culture within each TCU, why students attend and how students utilize TCU resources (Benham & Stein, 2003; Stein, 1992). The increased interest in TCU's by PWI's is an indicator that the non-Indigenous higher education system is interested in learning how to better support a wider array of students from multiple backgrounds in their systems (Benjamin et al, 1993; Brown, 2005; Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999; Tierney, 1991; Tierney, 1993; Wright & Tierney, 1991). Although PWIs are making efforts to better support a variety of students, sometimes these methods are lacking in a relational aspect or culturally appropriate delivery methods, relevance and saliency. An example of this includes the MSU "ski poster" that used to be utilized as a promotional

recruiting pamphlet at American Indian recruiting events at tribal colleges and high schools on reservations in Montana.

Tribal colleges offer students and communities places of hope, equality, access, and culturally based education (Stein, 1992). Dr. Henrietta Mann, esteemed elder, academic, friend, traditional Cheyenne woman, first endowed chair in Native American Studies at Montana State University and founding president of the Cheyenne and Arapahoe Tribal College helps us to understand the significant role that TCUs play in Native communities. Dr. Mann when asked about tribal colleges:

(they) “symbolize the enduring spirit of the first people/nations of this sacred homeland. They are places that honor and celebrate the dignity and cultural integrity of first nations, which are balanced with contemporary and innovative academic programs of educational excellence rooted in the archetypal of Great Mysterious Spirit.” (Benham & Stein, 2003, p. xviii)

It is from these tribal colleges, reservations, spaces of learning, the students who attend them and the communities who support them where non-Indigenous institutions of higher learning can find greater and more meaningful understanding of multicultural accountability in education.

Tribal College Statistics & Opportunities

Six years before the first TCU opened its doors there were only 4,000 American Indians attending institutions of higher education with a 97% attrition rate. By 1966, 66 American Indian students had completed a four-year degree (Beck, 1999). By 1995, 14,261 degrees were earned by American Indian students, and although that number and statement is much greater than 30 years previous, this number represents only .6% of all

degrees awarded that year (Pavel, 1999); the American Indian population in this country is estimated to be two percent (census.org, 2015). These numbers show us that the trend for American Indian student participation has been on the rise with the largest gains being made since the inception of the first TCUs (Benham & Stein, 2003; Stein, 1992; Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999). American Indians are still not represented in collective higher education institutions with regards to our statistical representation in the population, but our participation continues to grow as a direct influence of the creation of tribal colleges across the United States and Canada.

The establishment of TCUs brought with them not only increased enrollment and retention for American Indian students in culturally relevant higher education (Benham & Stein, 2003; Stein, 1992) but also increased opportunity and access to four-year PWIs.

AIHEC found that American Indian students who completed a course of study at a tribal college went on to complete a four-year degree program at a senior institution with a 75 percent greater success rate than American Indian students who bypassed tribal colleges and went directly to four-year institutions (Stein, 1992, p. 93).

Of the 232,929 American Indian undergraduate students attending institutions of higher education in 2011-2012, approximately 30,000 of those students were enrolled at the 37 TCUs in the Nation (National Indian Education Association, 2015; White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education, 2015). Almost 13% of all American Indian students enrolled in post-secondary education are currently attending a TCU. Tribal Colleges have contributed greatly to increased opportunity and access to higher education for American Indian students (Stein, 1992) at both the TCU and at four-year institutions by providing local, culturally appropriate, reasonably priced education

and a path for those who desire to matriculate to an institution beyond the TCU.

As mentioned previously current enrollment, retention and graduation rates at PWIs are quite different between American Indian students and their non-Native counterparts (Dana-Sacco, 2010; Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; Guillory, 2009; Pavel, 1999; Stein, 1992). Persistence-to-graduation rates within six years lists American Indian students at 36% and the general population at fifty-six percent (Guillory, 2009). There are currently 37 tribal colleges in our nation, this is not to say that only 37 of the 566 federally recognized tribes have a tribal college, as many of these TCUs serve multiple tribes. Collectively the tribal colleges have many differences and similarities. The following statement from Dr. Wayne Stein sums up much of what we need to know for this question to understand Tribal colleges in a snapshot.

These colleges serve a wide variety of tribes, but all adhere to several basic principles in their mission statements. Each has stated clearly that the will to preserve, enhance and promote the language and culture of its tribe is central to its existence. The colleges serve their communities through research on economic development, human resource development, and community organization. Each strives to provide quality academic programs for students seeking a two-year degree for transfer to a senior institution, and wherever possible, each provides the vocational and technical programs that help ensure that student will find decent jobs in their community on completion of the program. Of all the determinants that motivate the faculty, administrators, and staff in the tribal colleges, the single most important element is the students. Tribal colleges are dedicated to the success of their students. The programs developed to serve the special needs of the students, as well as individual acts of caring by tribal college administrators, faculty and staff amply demonstrate this dedication. (Stein, 1992, p. 89-90)

The above statement from Dr. Stein helps us to better understand the mission, culture and curricular emphasis of tribal colleges. We can see the commonalities in each sentence, factor, issue, goal of the statement above and that that appears to be community

and culture. Nothing is exclusive; all parts are connected and relate directly to the overall benefit of the community. The college exists because of the community and the culture and community are sustained and grow because of the college. The concept of “relationality” (Wilson, 2009) is represented in one of its truest forms at TCUs. It feels much like a circle or life cycle rather than a linear path. TCUs have not only the preservation of their individual cultures and languages at their center, but also access and success for their students. An example of this is provided below in the Little Big Horn College mission statement:

Little Big Horn College, a 1994 Land Grant Institution⁵, is the Crow higher education and cultural center that grants Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees and certificates in areas that reflect the developing economic opportunities and social needs of the Crow Indian Reservation and surrounding communities, offering instruction by traditional and distance education methods. The College is dedicated to the professional, vocational and personal development of individual students for their advancement in higher education or the workplace and inspiring Crow and American Indian Scholarship. The College is committed to the preservation, perpetuation and protection of Crow culture and language, and respects the distinct bilingual and bicultural aspects of the Crow Indian community. Little Big Horn College is committed to the advancement of the Crow Indian family and community building (Lbhc.edu, 2015).

Predominantly White Institutions and Support of American Indian Students

Indigenous researcher, Michael Pavel (1999) stated in his research with American

⁵ Land Grant Institution: A land-grant college or university is an institution that has been designated by its state legislature or Congress to receive the benefits of the Morrill Acts of 1862, 1890, and 1994. The Morrill Act was intended to provide a broad segment of the population with a practical education that had direct relevance to their daily lives. The third land-grant act conferred land-grant statues to Native American tribal colleges in 1994 (aplu.org).

Indian college students that institutions of higher education must provide better opportunities for Indigenous students, the fact is that many opportunities already exist within the university setting that can better support American Indian students while attending the institutions. “American Indians are not on parity with the rest of the nation in achieving enrollment in four-year degree institutions that may provide better opportunities for employment and graduate education” (Pavel, 1999, p. 245). The sentiment in this statement is ubiquitous within the literature in most searches paring the words American Indian and higher education (Guillory, 2009; Benjamin et al., 1993; Larimore & McClellan, 2005; Reyhner & Eder, 2015; Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999; Wright & Tierney, 2010). An increased capacity for understanding, accepting, acknowledging and appreciating difference and culture does not require additional resources outside an institution’s financial and physical realm.

According to an ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report, “One key to enacting diverse learning environments lies in understanding and developing programs and policies to improve the campus climate for racial/ethnic background” (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen & Allen, 1999). Consequently, this same report states that more research is needed on Native Americans, (Hurtado, et al. 1999). This is why it is important to understand what specific support American Indian students and communities believe they need to be successful by their own definitions.

Many predominantly white institutions (PWIs) have either transformed or added specific policies, plans and strategies in hopes of increasing opportunity and access for American Indian students (Benjamin et al., 1993; Brown, 2005). Researchers and

scholars have stated that American Indian college student enrollment, participation, experience and retention should have a positive correlation at institutions of higher education that provide and/or increase culturally relevant support for American Indian students (Brown, 2005; Makomenaw, 2012; Pavel, 1999; Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999). Institutions have begun providing tuition assistance, fee waivers, scholarships, support centers, academic and social resources, child care, mentoring programs and other unique cultural resources to assist American Indian students with their higher education goals (Brown, 2005; Garcia, 2008; Guillory, 2009; Martin, 2005; Pavel, 1999). This support and recognition of the unique culture and needs of American Indian students have contributed to the upward trend of pursuing a higher education. Unfortunately, this does not appear to be the case for a large majority of the institutions of higher learning in our nation as there are currently only 1.8% or 54 out of 2,968 four-year institutions that offer a bachelors or advanced degree in American Indian/Native American studies (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015). If institutions continue to work to understand the unique culture of American Indians and value their presence and contributions to their institutions and communities, there is a good chance that an increase in participation trend will continue into the future of higher education at PWIs.

When predominantly white institutions provide culturally specific support and/or services, it is essential that the individuals and communities who the PWI seeks to serve validate the institution support. Much like Indigenous research methodologies and community based participatory research, the community, the people should always have the most important voice in determining what is best for them (Christopher, Watts,

McCormick & Young, 2008; Kovach, 2010; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). Indigenous researcher, Michael Pavel, offers the following quote that echoes the importance of understanding the actual needs and desires of American Indian students in higher education.

Culturally specific academic and student support services are needed once the student gets into college... it is important to ensure that American Indians use and are satisfied with these services, hopefully reducing their anxiety levels enough to find comfortable niches on campus (Pavel, 1999, p.248).

This quote helps to us better understand that resources and services need to be relevant and salient to be meaningful and to achieve the desired effects for all constituents, but most importantly for the AI students.

Adequate financial resources are commonly listed as a primary factor for American Indian (AI) students in seeking a college education (Guillory, 2008; Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; Lin, LaCounte, & Eder, 1988). This essential resource is again echoed by Tierney in *Access and Financial Aid: How American-Indian Students Pay for College*, “Some American Indian students fail to complete their studies for financial reasons” (Tierney, Sallee & Venegas, 2007). Although adequate financial support is commonly listed as a major contributor and/or barrier to success in degree completion, there are other crucial non-monetary support factors that play a key role in American Indian student college matriculation (Makomenaw, 2012; Stein, 1992). Chapter 10 of the book *Next Steps: Research and Practice to Advance Indian Education* (Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999) lists detailed examples of how institutions can support their American Indian students in ways that are not simply financial. Advising, mentoring,

understanding cultural norms, respectful interactions, ways of knowing, high expectations, TCU site visits, community development programs, training, workshops and reciprocity are all mentioned as additional avenues of support by 4-year institutions in supporting American Indian students (Pavel, 1999).

A qualitative study conducted by Guillory (2009) comparing three institutions across Washington, Idaho and Montana explore how different strategies are offered to American Indian students and how these students perceive those strategies. This particular piece of literature articulates that although institutions of higher education have been enacting policy and procedure directed at American Indian students for years, gains/results have been minimal. Guillory clarifies why this may be the case, “It is, therefore, critical to understand, from the AI/AN student perspective, what strengthens their resolve to complete a college education and what institutions of higher education can do to assist in this effort” (Guillory, 2009, p.14). Recommendations that include both financial support and non-financial support are offered in this research article. Guillory states

The importance of family support, involved and supportive faculty, social support systems in the form of AI/AN student associations, multicultural offices, peer mentoring programs, academic counseling, institutional commitment and maintenance of an active presence in home communities and cultural ceremonies are crucial to college persistence (2009, p.15).

These recommendations appear to align with research that was conducted at the American Indian Higher Education Consortium conference in the spring of 2014, where over 100 AI TCU students were asked to answer questions about their college experience.

The next section of this chapter will further explore findings from the AIHEC research project.

AIHEC Conference 2014

A qualitative study was conducted in the spring of 2014 at the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) in Billings, MT that examined American Indian student perspectives about PWIs. Findings from this study indicated that cultural support, adequate financial resources, family support, institutional support, TCUs assisting students with their first college experience and the importance of culturally specific language and history courses were very important to American Indian TCU students (Windchief & Polacek, 2014). These findings were consistent and aligned with much of the literature in the earlier sections of this chapter. An additional finding in this study indicated American Indian TCU student's interest in acquiring information about the local non-academic environment that typically surrounds PWIs. This finding had not been previously indicated or referenced in any of the literature on American Indian TCU students. This is important to note because as indicative of the literature on support from PWIs for TCU and American Indian students, focus is primarily from the institutional perspective. Predominantly white institutions have made assumptions from the literature and research that American Indian students' greatest resources and challenges come from financial and cultural support directly related to the institutions that they are interested in matriculating to. Although the AIHEC conference research findings are also in alignment with previous research findings, there is a richer story offered. Students would

like to become more familiar with the institutions surroundings, environment and community so they may be able to bring their families, their support systems and their culture with them if and when they decide to matriculate to a PWI.

Chapter Summary

There is a need for culturally specific support for American Indian students in higher education. This necessity and importance of culturally specific support at predominantly white institutions (PWI) for American Indian students cannot be understated. The paper, *First Nations and Higher Education: The Four R's –Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, Responsibility* by Kirkness & Barnhardt asks the question from the collective dominant paradigm of non-Indigenous higher education to prospective Indigenous students, “Are you coming to the University vs. going to the University?” (2001, p. 2). Predominantly white institutions must remember that students must feel supported and have a sense of belonging and that their culture(s) are valued and acknowledged by the institution if the PWIs wish to truly support their non-majority culture students. Institutions cannot offer or expect success on any terms if they quietly demand that students leave their cultures behind and assimilate only to the foreign customs, standards and culture of traditional non-Indigenous higher educational settings. PWIs must be willing to accept, support and help Indigenous students to maintain and even grow their individual and collective identities and culture through the experience that they have should they choose to matriculate to a predominantly white institution.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY & PROCEDURE

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the research design, context of the study, participants and selection criteria for the study, data collection and instruments, procedure, how the data was analyzed, and how the study and methods align with the research questions. As mentioned in the previous chapters of this dissertation, this study was conducted utilizing Indigenous research methodologies. In this chapter I will emphasize my understanding, practice, and applicability of methods found within an Indigenous research framework for this study. It is important that all the research conducted and implemented for this dissertation study be guided by Indigenous research methodologies, as this will be of paramount importance to the findings and results of the final research product. The use of Indigenous research methodologies (IRMs) will shift the nature of the research by allowing for an expanded interpretation and analyzation of both the questions asked and the responses to those questions. Indigenous research methodology is flexible and organic in its nature; it allows for free-flowing conversation and storytelling and sharing by both participants (interviewer & interviewee). This less structured format of methodology when interacting with participants in an interview format has the ability to allow for increased dialogue and comfort which delivers a richer, deeper story.

Research Design

I will use a qualitative research design to gain a better understanding of American Indian students and their thoughts, perceptions and ideas about higher education, focusing primarily on their thoughts about PWIs and their own TCU experiences. Qualitative research is a process of understanding and researching problems addressing individual and group meanings through “the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes” (Creswell, 2012, p. 44). The qualitative research design that I will be utilizing for this dissertation study will be phenomenological research using an Indigenous research methodology and a transformative framework. The latter uses “knowledge construction to aid people to improve society” (Creswell, 2012, p. 26). In this case, a transformative framework includes the world of higher education as one society, and the American Indian (AI) population as another. These societies can be enriched through increased and improved communication, acceptance, and knowledge of one another. These concepts can help American Indian students and their families be better prepared to seek a degree at a PWI and in turn may also contribute to the home communities when and if students return. Indigenous research methods will include the conversational method, relationality and the use of story, counter composite story (Kovach, 2010; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008) and humor. Indian humor is a common thread of all Indigenous communities and is believed to be a “primary concept in cultural resilience” and (Benham & Stein, 2002, p. 235) social control, bonding (Deloria, 1996) and establishing cultural identity (Pratt,

1996). Indigenous research methodologies allow me to more accurately “describe the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon” (Creswell, 2012, p. 76) or the way that a community experiences something. My research will help scholars and practitioners to better understand the phenomenon of American Indian student tribal college student’s current knowledge and ideas that exist about what they believe to be true about predominantly white institutions.

Context of the Study

The literature review and historical data research were primarily located within a predominantly white institutional setting and a non-Indigenous environment. The data analysis was conducted at a predominantly white institutional setting/environment and multiple American Indian communities including my home reservation, Hardin/Crow, Montana. The data collection, relationship building and interaction with participants and community members took place at six TCU campuses on six different reservations in the state of Montana: The Crow Reservation, the Northern Cheyenne Reservation, the Flathead Reservation, Rocky Boy’s Reservation, the Fort Peck Reservation and the Fort Belknap Reservation. All interviews were conducted at tribal college campuses between the months of April and October of 2016. All phases of the research/dissertation process were informed by an Indigenous research perspective regardless of the physical/geographical location of each phase.

Participants & Selection Criteria

The term “participants” can be problematic depending on the type of research being conducted and how that research is conducted within communities. “Research participants” might convey that individuals were simply the victims of helicopter research, where data was collected from individuals or about them, after which the researcher (or research team) immediately flew away (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). It would be very difficult to submit this proposal without ever using the term “participants.” For the purposes of this study the use of the word “participant” makes the writing process much smoother and links together ideas within the research process itself. I will refer to those who are willing to help with my research and data collection process as both “participants” or “storytellers”, but they will encompass a much larger role than the traditional helicopter research participants. I consider those who helped me with data collection process for my dissertation to be co-researchers, collaborators, new friends, and part of the ever-expanding Indian academic circle. With that said, a total of 15 full-time American Indian students attending one of six tribal colleges in Montana were chosen through a convenience sample for participation in this project. Participants were also required to have attended secondary school on or near an Indian reservation or predominantly Indigenous community and self-identify as American Indian/Native American/Alaskan Native. Eligible participants in this research study had at least seven years’ experience attending schools with a minimum of fifty percent American Indian student enrollment at the time of their attendance. Participants also had to identify with having a personal/communal feeling of connection with a reservation community to be

eligible for the project. I believe it is important to this phenomenon that the participants have a connection to the reservation because it will highlight perceptions that have not been exclusively explored regarding predominantly white institutions.

Data Collection & Instruments

Before any formal interview or data collection process took place with a student, we sat and talked (Kovach, 2010). We talked about who we might know from each other's home reservations, what activities we enjoyed when we weren't in school, mutual friends, current events, cultural events, pow wows, basketball, future plans, weekend plans, frybread recipes, beading, jokes, music, family and many more topics. My goal was to create space for the participants and myself to build a level of trust and comfort with one another through conversation and story before proceeding to the data collection process. When time allowed, which was the case in 13 of 15 interviews, the stories that followed seem to be full of thick, rich description. The informal conversation and time spent with each student determined whether the student met the criteria necessary to continue as a participant for my research. After the initial meeting and conversation, a two-page, short answer, Likert scale survey instrument (20 questions) was distributed to each student prior to an interview to gather demographic information and to provide the student with an additional avenue to provide responses without responding orally and directly to me. The survey also worked as a guide for both the student and myself during the recorded interview that followed each completion of a paper survey. For the recorded interviews, an interview protocol instrument was utilized that asked semi-structured,

open-ended questions that closely match the paper survey. I had originally intended to only interview students if I believed that there had been sufficient time to meet with potential participants prior to the time needed to conduct the interview and survey. Through relationality (Wilson, 2008) and the conversational method (Kovach, 2010), participants were more willing to share with me their true opinions, perceptions and thoughts about predominantly white institutions (PWI) and higher education. I felt that I was successful in this goal for 13 of the 15 student interviews based on time spent with the participant and the general feeling of comfort level before, during and after the interview.

The survey had provided an opportunity for participants to share additional information that when paired with their individual interviews offered a richer story of their experiences, concerns and perceptions. The two paired did allow for richer interpretation of the data. There were a few instances in my student visits at TCUs where I found myself with less time than I would have liked to spend with each of the participants. I did feel that this lack of time may also have contributed to a lack of trust in the relationship, which may have limited the quality of responses that I was able to collect. The provision of an additional tool (paper survey) allowed me to still receive insightful and valuable information from the student. The survey also assisted in capturing responses that the students may have not felt comfortable sharing in an interview format. After all interviews were transcribed I sought respondent validation by utilizing “member checks” (Maxwell, 2012, p. 126) in hopes of not misrepresenting participant words and to seek authentic, original and reliable responses. A condensed

version of the electronic Tribal College Student Aspirations (Windchief & Polacek, 2014) survey that was distributed at the annual American Indian Higher Education Consortium conference in Billings, Montana in the spring of 2014 was referenced to create the survey tool for this project. A pilot study was conducted with three current and former tribal college students to check for accurate meaning and intention.

Procedures

My primary method for conducting research and gathering data for this study was using the conversational method (Kovach, 2010). Initial procedures involved starting up and/or continuing conversations with old and new friends in my Indian academic circle. I began a conversation with contacts that I had already established here at MSU, at TCUs and in higher education in general. These contacts have been established over years of participation in my reservation community and other reservation communities in the state of Montana. Relationships, “making relatives” (Bigfoot & Funderburk, 2011), stories and visits have all happened while participating in “The tournament trail,” “the pow wow circuit,” Big Sky state games, Little Big Horn Days, Crow Native Days, Crow Fair, Indian Education For All conferences, AIHEC, the annual MSU Pow Wow and Basketball tournament, hand games, “Rock’n the Rez,” MSU American Indian Council events and numerous other community activities and events. These opportunities have led to new and renewed friendships and conversations that can be picked up at any time to help move our Indigenous communities forward.

Relationality (Wilson, 2008) helped to extend these conversations to new members. The size and depth of my circle grew throughout my research travels through sharing and story in the academic circle. I was able to use new and old contacts, networking, and relationality in the established Indian academic circle to start a discussion about my research and the bigger picture of increased access for American Indian students in higher education. Although conversations began about my research and American Indian student education, I was able to remain flexible to a certain degree. My intention was to allow others in the circle to lead me, to be organic in the nature of collecting data and on the physical path that I followed in doing so.

My conversation began with the TCUs where I felt that I had established some very strong relationships: Little Big Horn College (LBHC) and Salish Kootenai College (SKC). I also spoke with students, faculty and staff at MSU who were both interested and connected to other TCUs to ask for suggestions and advice. I had planned to begin interviews during the winter of 2015 and complete the data collection process before the end of Summer 2016. To follow proper protocol by all institutions with whom I wished to visit, I had contacted LBHC, SKC, Chief Dull Knife, Montana-Wyoming Tribal Leaders Council, Aaniiih Nakoda College, Fort Peck Community College, Stone Child College and Blackfeet Community College to take the appropriate steps necessary to visit and do research with each respective tribal college. The process to gain IRB approval at all of Montana's tribal colleges was a much larger coup than I had originally anticipated. I was able to visit six of the seven TCUs in Montana between the months of April and October of 2016.

I began submitting IRB applications for review by the TCUs I had planned to visit from September 2015 to August 2016. I was granted approval to conduct research at my first TCU in mid-November 2015. Due to weather, resources and geographic distance, time to travel and road conditions, I was unable to travel for research until spring 2016. During this time, I continued to submit applications and application revisions to the remaining TCUs where I had not received IRB approval yet. Eventually I was granted approval by six of the seven TCUs in Montana and was able to complete campus visits and student interviews by October of 2016. Rather than creating a linear path of my TCU data collection process, I chose to follow the Indigenous methodology of allowing flexibility and organic relationality to occur naturally within the time frame that I could work with and visit the TCUs for this research project.

At each location, I spent between five and 48 hours strengthening my established relationships and creating new ones while “making relatives” (Bigfoot & Funderberk, 2011). This did not include time spent connecting and visiting via phone, social media, personal contact and through mutual acquaintances. In most cases (13 of 15) I felt confident that a level of trust and rapport developed between myself and the participant(s); that we had established “personal relations” (Kahakalau, 2004, p. 19), before the interview process began. Travel and work obligations for two students were factors in why all 15 interviews had not met my expectations in establishing a more personal connection before conducting the formal interview process.

I sought out recommendations from the TCU student center adviser and other staff members for students who might be willing to speak with me to determine whether

they would be eligible as a research participant. As I spent time at each TCU campus talking with people and attending local events, I was either directed to students from faculty and staff on campus or I randomly approached students to determine if they would be interested and met the criteria necessary for this project. After completing each student interview, I offered my gratitude in various ways. In a more traditional western sense, I thanked each student and spoke with them about my project and how they had contributed to not only my success but to many more AI students to come. I also offered thanks in a culturally appropriate way with generosity not only in time shared but also in traditional tokens of appreciation (Louis, 2007; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). This process was repeated in similar fashion at each TCU until the time allocated for the data collection portion of the research had concluded. Conclusion of the time allowed to collect data and visit TCU students was determined by Montana road conditions, weather, personal resources and time needed to complete chapters four and five before the spring 2017 dissertation deadline.

For this qualitative phenomenological research study, I visited six TCUs located in the North-Western part of the United States. As mentioned in chapter two of this proposal, there are 37 tribal colleges and universities in the U.S and Canada (36 in the U.S.), of which a majority (21) are located in the North-Western portion of the nation. There are seven tribal colleges in the state of Montana, North Dakota has five TCUs, Minnesota has four, South Dakota has three and Washington and Wyoming each have one TCU within their borders. Either the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) or the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) had accredited

nineteen of the aforementioned tribal colleges. Wind River Tribal College in Wyoming and Red Lake Nation College in Minnesota are both associate members and are current candidates for accreditation.

It is difficult to determine an exact sample size when doing qualitative research. There are no valid formulas or equations that determine with any level of confidence what sample size will be representative of the population under study (Creswell, 2012; Luborsky & Rubinstein, 1995). I had originally intended to interview 10-14 individuals based on “financial and personnel resources” (Luborsky & Rubinstein, 1995) and as a general “rule of thumb” for qualitative research seeking personal meaning and experience (Luborsky & Rubinstein, 1995). I attempted to locate two to three students from each tribal college visited. The sample size for both TCU and individual student participation were based on qualitative research sample strategies from researchers who conduct qualitative research (Morse, 2000; Marshall, 1996; Sandelowski, 1995).

A sample size can be selected based on the population of TCUs and the in-depth nature of both the interview and survey instruments for this study. The proposal for my study stated that it would be possible that the number of individuals interviewed for this project may have to extend beyond 14 students if a point of “theoretical or thematic saturation” or sufficiency did not occur during the data collection phase (Marshall, 1996, p. 524). Although I would have liked to have included participants from all seven of Montana’s tribal colleges, I did feel that thematic saturation had occurred in the fifteen interviews from the six TCUs visited. Theoretical or thematic saturation for purposes of

this research equate to a point when participant responses cease to contribute new themes to the research.

Minor changes and adjustments were made after each interview as I became more familiar with my own interview style and saw which questions could have been worded better for the students. I also learned from each student where to give more or less explanation for different questions and an appropriate amount of time for students to think about their responses. Each student participant along with others who helped with the visits and data collection process were presented with a gift to offer my respect in a traditionally acceptable manner. Traditional give-away items in many American Indian cultures include Pendleton blankets, material/cloth, money/currency, tobacco, sage and other items. The gifts that I offered were intended to mirror traditional give-aways on a smaller scale. These gifts included MSU Pow Wow Basketball t-shirts and hats, buffalo head nickels, a Pendleton coin purse, braided sweet grass and \$10 gift certificates to the *Firecrackerman's Fireworks*. These items were presented not only as a token of my appreciation but also to continue the practice of gifting in Indigenous cultures (Fixico, 2013; Komter, 2004; Lowie, 1935). Also in alignment with traditional group gatherings in Indigenous cultures and in expressing gratitude, I made sure to provide food for each of the initial meetings that I had with potential participants. Originally, it was planned that I would offer participants the option to choose a pseudonym or their real names as a method of validation within Indigenous Research methods should they qualify to participate in the interviews. Many of the committee members on the IRB at each of the TCUs where applications were submitted requested that I change this option before

approving my application. The critical race theory method of abstract coding, in this specific case, cultural/tribal abstract coding was utilized to give the student participants acknowledgment and ownership of their voices and stories. Their Indian names were used to name each of their stories. This method not only aligned with IRM but it also met the requirements of many of the internal review boards requests to protect the student's identities.

Native culture and ways of knowing will also ask of me to not say, "Good bye" but rather to instead say, "I will see you again". In the Apsaalooke language, we do not have a word that translates to the definitive meaning of good-bye, but have many words such as "diiawakaawiik" and "kahmaaleek" that express the idea that we will see each other again at another time. In an effort to ensure that we work to keep our old and new relationships alive, an invitation was extended to each student, participant, staff and community member to visit the MSU Pow Wow and basketball tournament in Bozeman, Montana in the spring, as it is important to "share and host people, be generous" (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999, p. 120).

The short interview and survey questions for this project were designed to gain a better understanding of TCU students through a variety of questions used in previous research with American Indian students (Guillory, 2009; Pavel, 1999; Windchief & Polacek, 2014). The questions were meant to further explore and describe the research participants' experiences and perceptions in an effort to understand the subgroups that exist within self-identified American Indian students, or whether there is an element of transculturation (Huffman, 2001) present.

The interview and survey questions asked about student's previous educational backgrounds, post-secondary experiences, current living/family/environment, financial and other resources, competing responsibilities, academic and social needs, and the importance of cultural identity. Questions regarding cultural identity asked the student to use a Likert scale to rank how connected she or he feels with a tribe or reservation, and whether they feel that attending a TCU has strengthened their cultural identity. The interview and survey were designed to better understand how important students feel Indigenous culture is in their daily lives both in and away from academia.

This research project and the data collection process were originally intended to be completed within the duration of six to eight months. The actual time needed to complete what I was able to was much longer, eventually taking 12 months. Flexibility and patience were of primary importance in completing this project. It was understood that I would be working within a window of time that I had set for myself to finish the fourth and fifth chapters of my dissertation. This meant that adjustments had to be made during the data collection process and site visits in order to complete at least 15 interviews before the end of the fall 2016 semester. Rushing through a research study with quick interviews and little time spent with participants and in communities is not something that I was interested in, especially given that my study also has the intention to do "research in a good way" (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999) and fit within the Indigenous research methodology framework (Kovach, 2010). I did everything in my power to proceed through the study with best practices, intentions and relational accountability. There were a couple of areas/factors in the research process that I felt were short-changed

with regards to Indigenous research methodologies. Time is the simplest of the two factors. Communication of and mutual understanding of Indigenous research methodologies and Indigenous researcher responsibility between all constituents was another factor that I felt had possibly affected both the methodology and results of this research. These two factors will be further examined in the discussion section of this dissertation.

Data Analysis

The data analysis begins by analyzing and describing the demographics of the collective group of research participants for this project. After an introduction that includes analysis of the group demographics, individual demographics of each participant will be shared along with an abridged copy of each of their interviews/stories. The content of the abridged collection of each participant's story was chosen based on thematic coding and participant's offering of original, unique, rich, thick descriptions. My intention for this research was to gain further insight into a specific group of tribal college students so that their perceptions, thoughts and opinions could be voiced through Indigenous research methodology. Previous research has typically explored Indigenous students as a whole and I am hoping to provide insight into Indigenous students who represent specific reservation communities, and who may have different needs than the perception of a pan-Indigenous student. The term 'Pan-Indigenous student' has been perceived as any or all students in higher education who may have self-identified at any level as Indigenous, American Indian, Alaskan Native, etc., but where the levels of

identification in reality greatly differ. Students may have self-selected on an institutional survey or may have been selected by someone other than themselves based on phenotype and/or physical appearance or affiliation. It may be inaccurately assumed that these students have similar needs, desires, resources, obligations, beliefs and so forth. Due to the idea that institutions and their constituents may be lumping together Indigenous students (pan-Indigenous), the institutions may not be providing resources, services, programs, and support that could be more effective and relevant. Expanded knowledge about Indigenous students could help to improve the relationships that students have with the multiple contexts of attending a predominantly white institution.

After I transcribed all of the interviews, the data was coded and grouped to identify themes (Creswell, 2012). The surveys were matched with their respective interviews to compare to participant's recorded interview responses. All but one participant's interview responses aligned with their respective survey responses. The discussion section will offer a hypothesis as to why this may have occurred and whether this incidence could be considered a theme or an outlier for future research. After multiple readings of the interviews and surveys, codes were created to categorize responses. All data was then coded and classified and emergent categories or "themes" (Creswell, 2013, p. 186) for ideas, thoughts, beliefs, desires and perceptions were identified. Themes were chosen based on the frequency that they appeared in the collective transcriptions. The data was then reassembled to interpret the themes in a more holistic manner. Many of these themes aligned with the literature review provided in chapter two and throughout the dissertation. Also analyzed were the methods in which

the responses/data were collected as compared to research methods used in previous research with American Indian students. The discussion section of this dissertation will further analyze the use of Indigenous research methodology in the data collection process. The form is of paramount importance to the findings for this research project, which was conducted using Indigenous research methodology.

Alignment with Research Questions

Indigenous research methodologies require that one should never be separate from the desire to be culturally appropriate, humble and respectful in all aspects of relationships (Kovach, 2010; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008) and to be accountable to the research and all involved or “critical introspection” (Dana-Sacco, 2010, p. 61). Indigenous researcher, Gail Dana-Sacco refers to this as “regular, rigorous, reflective self-evaluation process in which we consider our Indigenous research and scholarship practice in the context of our accountability to the collective” (Dana-Sacco, 2010, p. 61). There must be alignment throughout all components, including the development of research questions and the way they are asked in order for this project to come full circle in hopes of strengthening Indigenous communities.

The Likert scale questions included in the survey instrument for this research project were created after analyzing responses from an electronic survey that was completed by 106 tribal college students at the 2014 American Indian Higher Education Consortium (Windchief & Polacek, 2014). The survey asked TCU students to share their educational aspirations, challenges, support systems, demographic information and many

other questions regarding their tribal college experience and cultural identity. This information was utilized to create both of the data collection instruments for this research project: the paper survey and interview protocol and questions. The survey included open-ended questions, closed-ended questions and Likert scale questions. The interview protocol and questions were intentionally semi-structured and open-ended to align with Indigenous research methodology (Kahakalau, 2004).

The data collection instruments for this project included the elements necessary to allow the students to choose to share as much or as little as they would like. There is a natural and organic element to conducting Indigenous research methodology. Due to that aspect of this type of research, participant responses did not always directly answer the research questions posed. It was expected that responses might offer answers or solutions to questions that were not specifically asked in this research project. For this reason, I had left room in both the paper survey and the interview for participants to share or contribute anything that they would like to be considered regarding their educational experiences, perceptions and ideas. The following research questions were explored through the use of the survey and interview questions provided in this research project (see appendices).

- What are American Indian tribal college students' perceptions of predominantly white institutions?

- How do American Indian tribal college students believe PWIs can better assist and support American Indian students who desire to matriculate to a PWI?

The two questions for this research project are intended to explore and share the

voice of a unique group of students who strongly identify with a tribal or reservation community. A counter composite story (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) was created from the responses of all the participants who contributed to this research project. The survey questions and interview questions for this study were designed to allow participants to share their perceptions and/or beliefs about PWIs, cultural identity and express anything that they felt was important for both students and educators to know regarding Indigenous students and tribal college student experience. After the paper surveys and interviews had been transcribed and paired together, coding was utilized to further develop themes that emerged. Responses that did not fit into a theme or that I felt should be heard to further engage those whom would like to expand their knowledge of AI TCU student experiences, goals, perceptions and beliefs were shared verbatim from the student as quotes in their stories provided in chapter four.

Memoing was utilized to note my observations and thoughts about both the relationships and the interviews to assist in assembling a more holistic story. Triangulation was used in comparing both the transcribed interviews and survey responses to establish trustworthiness, or validity and reliability, in the findings (Creswell, 2012). I also utilized member checks to further establish validity in both the findings and interpretation of the findings.

Chapter Summary

The research questions listed above about perceptions, opinions, thoughts, support, knowledge location and interests were explored with a foundation based off

Maggie Kovach's conversational method (2010) and building relationships (Kahakalau, 2004) with participants so that a relaxed and open approach could be taken in exploring thoughts and feelings regarding higher education. The conversational method, which can either build off of relationality (Wilson, 2008) or help to create relationality, greatly contributed to this project's understanding of a group of students in their space and lived realities. A qualitative study that includes dialogue and physical, intellectual and spiritual space that allows for participants to share their stories and have their experience be acknowledged respects the nature of Indigenous research methodology. Stories were shared, relationships were developed and strengthened as we, participants and the Indigenous researcher, myself, worked to create a space where distinct voices could be heard. "The intricate involvement of the researcher in the research process is also a distinct feature of indigenous methodologies" (Kahakalau, 2004, p. 22).

CHAPTER FOUR

PARTICIPANTS' STORIES

Introduction

Fifteen American Indian students were interviewed for this research project. All 15 students who were interviewed for this project were attending a tribal college as full-time students at the time of the interviews. Six of seven Montana tribal colleges were visited to meet with students. In the order in which they were visited, this included: Little Big Horn College in Crow Agency, MT, Chief Dull Knife in Lama, MT, Salish Kootenai College in Pablo, MT, Stone Child College in Box Elder, MT, Fort Peck Community College in Poplar, MT and Aaniiih Nakoda College in Harlem, MT. Interviews took place between April and October of 2016 and were conducted on the tribal college campus where the student was attending in either the spring or the fall of 2016.

Total time spent with students during the interview ranged from 20 minutes to over three hours. The interviews consisted of ten female students and five male students ranging from 18 to 43 years of age, with an average age of 25.1 years. Ten different tribal affiliations were represented in the student interviews: Assiniboine, Blackfeet, Cree, Crow, Diné, Gros Ventre, Lakota, Northern Cheyenne, Salish and Kootenai.

Profile of Participants & Their Stories

It is important to this research and to each of the students who were generous with their time and their stories that I offer here a short description of who they are to not only honor them but also to help the reader along in becoming both familiar and feeling connected to them. Each student's Indian name will be presented in English and followed by a brief description of the connection and/or relationality between the student and myself. Information provided from each student on the survey tool along with details from the conversational method used before, during and after the interview has been utilized to help provide a very brief story for each student.

The One Who Is Fortunate With Horses

The One Who Is Fortunate With Horses, who I will call Fortunate With Horses for brevity purposes, was nineteen years old at the time of our interview together. He is Crow and also identifies as both male and two-spirit. Fortunate With Horses was a freshman at Little Big Horn College and interested in transferring to the University of Montana Western in Dillon, Montana to study in the natural horsemanship program. Fortunate With Horses has lived on the Crow Indian reservation his entire life, predominantly with his grandmother in the Black Lodge district where he also keeps many horses that he rides and works with every day. This was the first time that I had ever met Fortunate With Horses as an adult. I had seen him once when he was a newborn. His mother was a senior in high school when I was a freshman and his father attended another school near by and had a reputation as a skilled bull rider. Fortunate

With Horses also had an aunty that I knew who graduated from Montana State University, so although I had never technically met Fortunate With Horses, he did not feel like a stranger to me. Fortunate With Horses also had stated that he knew who I was because for several years he had watched the Ultimate Warrior Contest in which I had participated as part of the Crow Indian Days celebration that happens every summer on the Crow Indian reservation. We sat and talked about people we knew, rodeo, Ultimate Warrior, the first rain and many other things before we officially began the interview.

Fortunate With Horses answered “Strongly Agree” to numbers 10, 11 and 16 and responded with *Agree* on number 17 for the Likert scale questions regarding the importance of cultural identity and education. When asked about these responses during the interview, Fortunate With Horses said that his identity as a Crow Indian was very important to him and his family. He said this is why he keeps his hair long and speaks Crow fluently when he can and with his grandmother. He said although he believed that he already felt very connected to his identity as a Crow, he believes that that connection became stronger through attending Little Big Horn College due to the access, content and teaching methods of the school’s Crow culture and language classes.

When I had asked if Fortunate With Horses had any questions or comments about the paper survey he said that he did. He said that the question (number 16) that asks if it is important if a student chooses to attend a PWI, their culture and identity as an American Indian should be valued and acknowledged by the institution was very important to him. He told me a story about a school trip that he made in high school to a school to Miles City, Montana and what he had experienced from those living in that

town which influenced his responses to both the survey and interview. Fortunate with Horses stated, "I mean even in high school when we just went to Miles City, even though there so close to a reservation they virtually had no knowledge of Indian anything. They even asked us, you know, do you guys still live in teepees, do you guys have access to television, film or whatever... do you guys have roads." With regards to why he responded that he was interested in transferring to a PWI and why his culture is important in his education, he stated, "I'm purposefully trying to get off the reservation just so I can prove that I'm Indian and that I can do this just as much as anybody else can, because a lot of people think you're from the rez and you don't know anything or it's like ignorant to you. Because for me I look at it as advancing my own personal future while I'm also holding onto my culture and identity as an American Indian".

Although Fortunate with Horses grew up in a traditional household he did say that since attending Little Big Horn College he feels that he has become more connected to his identity as a Crow Indian. He spoke very highly of both his experience at LBHC and the college in general. He stated that LBHC does a great job of combining the cultural aspect with the traditional educational aspect in the classrooms and learning environment; "so you know you're understanding from a cultural side and from an educational side and I'd say that it's strengthened my cultural identity, you know, because in high school we never really learned anything from that (cultural) side".

When asked what PWI(s) he felt the most familiar with he said that he had been attending the MSU Bozeman Pow Wow "since he was little kid" and that if MSU had the equine program he was interested in with space for his horses he would rather attend

MSU because of “the strong native student population”. When I asked him how he felt about predominantly white institutions or what words or adjectives came to mind, his response included descriptions of local Montana schools along with these words, “Racist. Prejudice. Not welcoming. Culture shock. Party. Never taught about Indians. Religion.”.

When asked what Fortunate With Horses was the most excited about when he transfers, he stated that he was excited to start learning and working in his major. He expressed his biggest concerns for transferring to a PWI as finding a place to sleep at night, having appropriate finance to “make ends meet” and employment.

In closing the interview, I asked Fortunate With Horses if there was something that those at PWIs should know about TCUs and their students, what would it be; “Please be understanding of where we come from”. Fortunate with Horses explained that he wished that PWIs who received TCU transfer students would understand that there is a lot of poverty on reservations, many students do not have transportation, like himself, and that the TCU is a stepping stone for those entering a four year program. He also stated, “It’s hard to leave a something that we are so attached to” and that TCU students might need a little more assistance “to get their engines started”.

Black Wolf

Black Wolf was in his second year attending Chief Dull Knife College (CDKC) in Lame Deer, Montana at the time of this interview. Black Wolf was a 22 years old Cheyenne male living with his grandparents about an hour away from CDKC. This was the first time that I had met Black Wolf. I had met his cousin through the TRIO coordinator on campus whom I proceeded to interview for this dissertation research, but

it soon became apparent through our sharing of experiences that she did not meet the criteria to continue with the interview. She was very gracious with her time and walked me around campus until we found her cousin, Black Wolf, who walked me to the library so that we could talk some more in a quiet place. Black Wolf told me that he had a tough time in high school regarding identity because he didn't always feel like he was one of the Indian students, but eventually he became more connected to his identity as a Northern Cheyenne Man. He has since started growing his hair out and feeling more connected to his tribal community. Black Wolf took time after graduating from high school to work and was not sure if he was interested in pursuing a higher education, and when he did think about the possibility, he said that the local tribal college was not on his radar. He eventually decided to enroll at CDKC because it was close to family and was not as expensive as other higher education institutions.

Black Wolf responded with "Strongly Agree" on question number 11, which asks the student if they feel that they have become more connected to their identity as an American Indian through their TCU attendance. During the interview when we discussed this question and response, Black Wolf said that he felt like he was "white for a while... like one day I was just Indian" when talking about his time at Dull Knife. He said that he has much more pride in being Northern Cheyenne and that he "can feel it now".

Questions 16 and 17 on the student survey ask how important it is for the student's American Indian identity to be valued and acknowledged by the PWI and how important it is for the student to see faculty, teachers, staff and leaders that look like the student and who represent Native American culture. Black Wolf responded with agree

and strongly agree respectively. He said about his responses “it’s reassuring, like, it’s comforting seeing them and you know you’re not the only one” and added “ you see someone who is older than you and who has already done it and it’s working... and you’re like well he can do it, I can do it, it’s just wherever you draw your inspiration but it’s reassuring to see other Native Americans there (at PWIs)”. Black Wolf added that although he did have an interest at transferring to a PWI at some point to work on a master’s degree, he wanted to remain at a tribal college to finish a bachelor’s degree. When I asked why this was a specific interest that he had, he laughed and said that he really wants to continue to compete and win the knowledge bowl at the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) conference held annually for and hosted by tribal colleges. He laughed a lot about this answer and told me how he had competed last spring in the knowledge bowl with both his sister and cousin, who were also attending Dull Knife, and how they had lost by one point in the final round to Diné. He also said that he enjoys being around other natives and that he feels “relaxed” and “can come into a classroom and its really comfortable”.

When I asked Black Wolf about the time he took off from high school until college he said that he had originally applied to MSU-Billings but in the year following high school graduation his good friend, his grandpa and his cousin all passed away. He didn’t feel right starting school with all the loss he had experienced. He said that it was tough to think about leaving when “people need you or need your help”. When I asked him what he thought about PWIs he said “elite”. Black Wolf told me that he used to believe that only the “super smart or super educated” could go to school at places like

Bozeman, Missoula and other PWIs; “I’m at the bottom of a mountain, and this is the mountain [shows me with his hands]” as he explains to me how far it is to the top and compares that to getting a degree at a PWI. When I asked Black Wolf if there was anything that made him feel hesitant or excited about attending a PWI he said that he was worried about the possibility of people being prejudiced and hoped that wherever he went they would “be open minded”.

Black Wolf recommended that PWIs that have an interest in assisting tribal college students with both interest in and transferring to their universities should consider having a representative placed at TCUs regularly. In Black Wolf’s own words, “If they really want to have a better transfer rate, I would say have someone stationed here like you could actually talk to and actually fill out paperwork with”. He also added about the PWI representative that it would be important that they were at the TCUs “at least three times a week”.

Dances Among The Clouds

Dances Among The Clouds was a 26-year-old full-time student at Little Big Horn College with two part-time jobs at the time of this interview. Dances, for brevity, has lived on the Crow reservation her entire life and attended K-12 in Lodge Grass, MT. She lives in Crow with her six year old son, her mother, her husband and her mother in law. Since our interview together, Dances has graduated from LBHC and is now employed by the institution full-time.

Dances responded with “strongly agree” to question 11, which asks if the student feels more connected to their identity as an American Indian through tribal college

attendance. She also responded with “strongly agree” and “agree” to questions 16 and 17 regarding the importance of culture and identity being valued at the PWI and if it was important to see students, faculty, teachers and staff who both look like and represent Native American culture, respectively. When discussing these responses in the interview, Dances said, “It’s important for me to have... to be valued not only myself, but for the rest of my people to be valued and our traditions need to be acknowledged”. Her emphasis on this was for PWIs to have a better understanding of what certain tribal traditions and culture might hold the students accountable and responsible for both at home and at the institution. She discussed certain taboos that are both the same and different for men and women in her tribe and how that related to what they might experience that would be different for them at a predominantly white institution versus non-Native students. She felt that if PWIs had a better understanding of their Indigenous students’ culture(s) that it would be beneficial to the student not only in both being interested in staying at the school away from home but also increasing their chances of success and/or graduation rates.

When Dances was speaking of the importance of PWIs being better informed and aware of their Indigenous students’ cultural traditions, practices, responsibilities and taboos, she related this to how strongly those elements were acknowledged and practiced at LBHC. She said that this is how she felt more connected to her identity as a Crow woman through her TCU attendance; stories and oral traditions from local community members and elders were incorporated into both the teaching methods and content at LBHC. Dances had said that she did not have many family members growing up who

knew many of the stories of her people's history, "but when I came here they made it available to hear those oral traditions... the controversy of Yellowtail Dam... things that passed, even Old Man Coyote, Sundance, Sweat Lodge and beadwork". Dances said it would be a good idea for a PWI to offer some cultural classes in the evening for both their Indian students and their families and that this would be especially good for those who are away from and missing home.

When I asked Dances about her response of "strongly agree" to being interested in transferring to a PWI in the future to continue her education she explained that she felt she had to "so I can be what I never had". She spoke about Chief Plenty Coup and his vision regarding education and his people. She said that she believed that with education we could become equals with the white man but without it we would always be his victim, "education will get us there".

Dances said, "growing up, I was a child whose parents were drinking and they (siblings) were left alone all the time and bounced everywhere from aunts to uncles and grandmas and grandpas and you know... I hadn't had security, safety or anything like that growing up". She followed this with telling me how this led to a life of partying for her at a young age but that after giving birth to her son it changed her "whole mentality"; "I'm sure that children do change a woman's perspectives on education". She said that this is why she had to continue to get an education, so that she can provide a sense of security for her son and other children on the reservation through "an establishment for each age group of kids that are left because of drugs and alcohol... all my education is to bring back to my community". Dances also said that not only does she want to help with

her community's children, but she also wants to try to help working parents like herself because she knows that a majority of them do not have the support that they need to get an education.

When I asked Dances Among the Clouds about the first words or thoughts that popped into her mind when she heard the words predominantly white institution, she said, "City. Concrete. Crowds". She followed this with some thoughts about how the reservation is different than other places off the reservation. "I feel like you're going to be more watched. I feel like someone is going to be watching you more and you are going to be monitored (more) than here, that's how I feel". She also said that when and if she decided to move to continue her education that she was very concerned about housing, childcare, transportation and expenses in general. She said it would be helpful if places like MSU Bozeman would have a transfer coordinator that specifically worked with each TCU like LBHC on helping students transfer from that institution. She also said that this transfer coordinator could help with getting students to feel comfortable before they make that "big move". Dances also said if that individual could help with little things like helping students know how far certain buildings, like the library, were from the family housing area and where Indians could go to study with one another, it would help the student feel more familiarity and comfort with their new environment.

We finished up the interview with the final question regarding what advice she might have for both PWIs and those who were unfamiliar with TCU students who are currently in leadership positions at places like MSU and UM. She talked again about the idea of transfer coordinator but also about that coordinator being part of a team at the

PWI that could help with “simple questions that people are too afraid to ask... but I’m pretty sure a lot of people out there have those simple questions too”. Dances examples of what the “team” could do to help both transfer students and all Indian students included going on a tour of the campus together and finding each student’s classrooms before the first class. She also said locating a support system early on and helping Indian students find others that they have something in common with non-academic could help when a student was feeling homesick. Dances provided a specific example, stating that the use of “Crow language” or even hearing someone speak your language could alleviate some of the feelings of missing home. She also said that finding out what times would be good to go to certain places like the gym and the library might be more conducive for Indian students to go together. Assistance with the non-academic environment was recommended by Dances as well and she concluded with, “Hey, where’s the IGAs, is there even an IGAs here?”.

Holy Woman

Holy Woman was a full-time student at Salish Kootenai College (SKC) at the time of this interview. Holy Woman was 34 years old, an enrolled member of the Northern Cheyenne tribe and had attended K-12 at St. Labre Indian school in Ashland, MT. She had previously attended Chief Dull Knife College in Lame Deer, MT to earn her associates degree and was now living on the SKC campus with her husband and four children while working on a bachelor degree in nursing.

When I asked Holy Woman if she felt that her attendance at either of her tribal colleges had influenced or shaped her cultural identity she told me that she believed that

both had strengthened her identity. She said that before attending Chief Dull Knife she only knew a handful of words but through the language class she felt that she became stronger culturally. When we began to talk about which predominantly white institutions she was the most familiar with and if she had any interest in attending/transferring to one in the future or if she had always planned on getting her four-year degree at SKC, she said that she never really was interested in college prior to attending. Holy Woman said that after graduating from high school she immediately began working to earn money. She worked as a waitress back home on her reservation; “after working for a lot of years as a waitress for a white guy, I just couldn’t... I said heck with this, I’m going to school, I ain’t going to put up with this anymore ya know”. Holy Woman said that she had her first child in high school when she was 17 years old and that none of her family members had ever continued their education after high school and that she “wanted a better life” and that an education could provide that. Her son was three years old when she began college at Chief Dull Knife, she said the school made it less difficult for families because they provide daycare that is located right on campus. Holy Woman also worked at Dull Knife in the registrar’s office and was able to check on her son between classes.

After Holy Woman finished her associate degree at Chief Dull Knife College she enrolled at Montana State University-Billings. She was only able to register for online classes because “there was always kind of like too long of waiting lists for housing and stuff like that... it just scared me and so I decided to come here (SKC)”. She also checked with family graduate housing at MSU in Bozeman to see if there was housing available for her and her family if she transferred here and was told she could be put on a

wait list, this “discouraged me from even applying” to MSU. When I asked Holy Woman to tell me what first came to her mind when she thinks of PWIs like MSU, UofM, MSUB, she replied with “kind of scared”. She said it seems like there are too many people/students and that there isn’t enough time to have one-on-one with students, “like you’re just thrown into it and nobody really gets help”. She followed that up with a comparison to the TCU, “Whereas here there’s all kinds of people encouraging you, kind of looking out for you. The retention officer, when you fall below a certain level, she’s getting a hold of you and saying hey what’s going on, you know, it’s just people looking out for you”.

We talked about the importance of having support and people watching out for one another and how culture plays into that. Holy Woman also answered “Strongly Agree” to question number 17 on the survey which asked if it was important to see other students, faculty, staff and leaders who look like and represent Native American culture. Holy Woman said it feels like the PWIs don’t understand how Native Americans do things, “we kind of do things backwards (to them), ya know, we have kids first.” She also emphasized the difference in learning styles, “especially the learning... the learning part of it you know, Natives don’t learn the way white people do, we’re more hands on”. Holy Woman said it feels to her like Native students are not always sure what they want to do right out of high school but that confidence plays a major role in the decision to attend college.

Native people don’t always have that confidence to go to college, you know I think it stems back to historical trauma that happened to a lot of Natives and it just kind of trickles on down every generation. You know, me, I still kind of doubt myself like what am I doing taking this class, it’s

super hard, oh my god and then I start taking it and studying and passing and then I'm like HOOOOO what? I can do this now!

When we talked about how she knew became familiar with PWIs or which ones she might be interested in she said that she was interested in Nursing when she was at Dull Knife. Fredrica Lefthand would make visits to Dull Knife to talk to interested students about the college of Nursing at MSU and specifically told her about the Native nursing program called RAIN (now called CO-OP). She said that she was immediately interested but also instantly began doubting herself. She said that the idea of leaving the reservation for a bit sounded exciting but that she was scared and filled with doubt. "Nobody is going to care if I fall behind... I don't know, just like feeling like I'm not smart enough".

When I asked Holy Woman our final question of the interview about what she would like for someone who is unfamiliar with tribal colleges to know about them or her experience, she emphasized family, support, class sizes, different learning styles, and housing that would accommodate a student's family. She said that both Chief Dull Knife and Salish Kootenai College had been very accommodating for her and her family. "Step back and take a look" at tribal colleges and how they work with their Native students, this was specific advice that Holy Woman provided when asked how PWIs could increase interest and support for Native students interested in their schools.

Speckled Woodpecker

Speckled Woodpecker was a full-time student at Salish Kootenai College living on campus with her husband and her four children. She is Salish and her husband is

Northern Cheyenne. Speckled Woodpecker has lived most of her 25 years on the Flathead Indian reservation. She is currently working on her bachelor degree in chemical dependency from SKC. For the remainder of this interview I will refer to Speckled Woodpecker as Woodpecker for brevity.

We began our visit with small talk discussing Woodpecker's husband who is from Lame Deer, Montana. I did not know her husband, but knew his sister who I have played basketball with a few times during the last couple of years. After a few laughs and talking about the annual Kyiyo pow wow that was taking place at U of M the next day we began the interview with the question asking whether the student's tribal college experience has influenced her cultural identity. Woodpecker told me that she had grown up traditional and even though she felt she knew quite a bit about her Salish culture, attending SKC has taught her so much more. She has had the opportunity to learn new things at SKC that are not only academic and related to her degree but also about traditional stories, dance dress construction, teepee making and beadwork. Woodpecker said that going to school at SKC and/or tribal colleges was important for Indian people because "... we have to keep those traditions alive because they're dying now days and these are the things that are going to keep our traditions alive... spreading it, people learning it".

When I asked Woodpecker about what predominantly white colleges she was the most familiar with she said U of M because so many people from the area travel to and from Missoula. She also said she knew that other schools were an option for her but that since she could get a four-year degree at SKC and since her grandfather had worked there

she thought that this would be good place for her. When asked what she thought of and what words came to mind when I said predominantly white colleges she responded with, “it kind of scares me... am I going to go into lectures where my instructors not even going to know my name... that’s scary”. She said that something that helps her with school is that she sees at least one person that she knows everyday and that it would be strange to be going to a large PWI where you never saw anyone that you recognized and that she might feel “alone”. When we talked about if she would ever be interested in enrolling at PWI for an advance degree she said that it was a possibility because even though she was scared, “education should come first... it’s exciting to me because I want to further my education, I want to soak up as much schooling as I can, as much education as I can”.

When I asked Woodpecker if there was anything that she would like for those unfamiliar with tribal colleges to know about or about her experience at a TCU, she had many good things to say.

[At SKC] it’s really about communication and involvement you know. Here, my instructors are very involved... they know my name. I feel comfortable around them and I feel like I could go to them and they’re all so very helpful. Even someone that wasn’t even my advisor but was in the same building was like if you need anything, if you need help getting a book, if you need tutoring, like anything... even though I’m not your advisor you can come to me you know. And that makes me feel so good because that makes me feel like if I’m ever in a bind or if I need a book or tutoring, I can go to that person, or anybody on this campus. And, that’s what people want, they want to feel comfortable and like that can go to their instructors you know.

Woodpecker also said that PWIs should know how much family is a part of the lives of Native students. When asked what recommendations she might have for PWIs interested

in supporting American Indian students who would potentially be interested in enrolling at their institutions she spoke about family, activities and support for the family.

You're obviously not going to go to college and leave your kids behind. Housing is very important and other programs. You want to be able to go to school and get help with daycare. You want to be able to come here (school) and have different programs for your kids, for your family. My family is my biggest thing, if I didn't have support from my family or if I didn't know my family was taken care of first, I don't think I could have came back to school. When you're a college student you don't have a lot of money... being able to have your kids feel like this is their home is good. During the winter time they were giving kids snow pants, snow boots, snow hats, snow gloves... I wanted my kids to feel safe and like this was their home too. I wanted to make sure that before I can go on and do what I need to do you know, to better myself for them, I wanted to make sure that they're taken care of.

In closing, we revisited the survey portion of the interview to look at questions number 16 and 17 regarding the importance of culture and identity being valued at PWIs.

Woodpecker answered "Strongly Agree" to both questions. Woodpecker believed that it was very important for her as an American Indian student to feel valued and acknowledged at a PWI and that she also see other students, faculty, staff and leaders that represent Native American culture.

Fish Wolf Robe

Fish Wolf Robe was a 26-year-old full-time student and part-time employee at Salish Kootenai College (SKC) at the time of this interview. This was not the first time that I had met Fish Wolf Robe, whom I will refer to as Wolf Robe for the remainder of this participant story. Wolf Robe and I have played in many of the same Rez ball tournaments both in and around Montana for several years so our reintroduction was a comfortable and familiar one. Wolf Robe is Blackfeet and had originally attended

Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kansas on a basketball scholarship.

Wolf Robe lives in the northern part of the Flathead Indian reservation in a rental home with his girlfriend. He will be graduating within the next two semesters with a bachelor degree in business.

When I asked Wolf Robe how it was that he ended up transferring from Haskell Indian Nations to SKC he told me that although he loved Haskell and the local academic and social community that it was not enough for him. He had the following to say:

I felt like it wasn't worth being that far away and not having that relationship (with the land). That's what I valued and needed. The land... the land... I got very lonesome for it. Not being able to look west and see the mountains, so I would always start north and do a full circle and just kind of imagined that they were going to be there.

Following this statement made by Wolf Robe, I asked if his experience at either of his tribal colleges had influenced or shaped his cultural identity or Indigenous self. His response was "definitely". He referred to his survey portion of our interview in which he answered "agree" to numbers 16 and 17 about culture. The questions asked about the importance of identity and culture being valued and acknowledged by the institution and if it was important to see other Native American students, faculty, staff and leaders. He explained that he felt these were important for American Indian students not only because they can learn more about their specific tribal culture but because they should also learn about other tribes and how we are both different and the same. He said that it was very important for non-Native faculty and staff to understand the cultural differences between tribes as well so that they were not grouping together all Indians and believing that their experiences were the same, "if you look at us as just one people, it takes away from our

identity”. Wolf Robe also said that educators should understand that most Native American students did not grow up with “western views”.

When I asked Wolf Robe what words came to mind when he heard predominantly white institution he said, “The first thing that comes to mind is uncomfortable”. He also said that PWIs sound like a challenge and that for Indians, “stereotypes are going to follow you, you know the way you talk, the way you think, what you see as valuable, you’re going to be looked as different but take it as a challenge, own it, harness it ... make greatness out of it”.

He said that he had originally been recruited to play basketball for MSU-Billings right out of high school. He moved to Billings for the summer to begin practice and to try and get comfortable with the institution. After a couple of weeks the coach was let go for MSUB and he had not been able to create a feeling of comfort with his new environment yet. Around that same time the coach for Haskell Indian Nations contacted him to ask how things were going and “was very inviting”. The Haskell coach told him that if anything happened that he didn’t feel comfortable with or if he wanted to come to a school with more Native American culture that they had a place for him, “he really gave me confidence” to be a student, an athlete and to move “many states away to go to school”. He offered this:

You know things happen for a reason, creator would only give you these types of situations to help you grow and be who you are. So, that was really my direction, it took me to a Native American institution and I wouldn’t change it for the world because that’s where I identified myself with being who I really am. I wouldn’t have had that experience of everybody else from different reservations and being able to go back to their home reservations through basketball. Because you know everybody has a tournament so it was always come to my house and you get to meet

new families. (You) get to see how they were raised around their grandparents and mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles and really getting a feel for their reservations.

I asked Wolf Robe about his plans to pursue a master's degree and if he saw himself at a predominantly white institution in the future and if what elements of that experience he might be excited or hesitant for. Wolf Robe said that if he decided to attend a PWI for a master's degree that he would want to know that his "ideas and thoughts are going to be valued". He wants to be able to relate to his professors and "value what they're telling me, their life, what they have gone through... (I don't) want them to see me as just a statistic". He said that a positive he sees is what he could do for his family, "I want to give my offspring a better life than I ever even thought of... just the things for the future, my mom and her future".

The final questions of the interview for Wolf Robe brought together many of the earlier concepts that he spoke about, they will be summarized in the following paragraph. When asked what those unfamiliar with TCUs should know about them in order to better assist TCU students interested in attending PWIs, the following was offered by Wolf Robe:

You know from experience, coming from smaller colleges and having administrators, presidents and everyone talking about... really valuing you... well you shouldn't have to go through a chain of command just to say (hello). Having people who value you, it makes a difference in your confidence and being able to really believe in yourself.

When I asked what specific advice or suggestions he might have for PWIs that may be the recipients of TCU transfers he said that the PWIs should "embrace the Native American communities that are there. Let (us) be able to tell our stories because

culturally, you know, that's who we are, we're not written in books, we're oral, we're storytellers". He said that Indian students might feel uncomfortable but, "if you give us a chance, we're going to have that confidence to keep on going with it".

We skipped around a lot during this interview as basketball and its importance to education for Native Americans was a constant theme in our conversation. This was revisited by Wolf Robe after I asked the final question of the interview, which asked if there was anything that he would like for the leaders of PWIs to know about his TCU experience(s) that might affect or relate to attending a PWI. Wolf Robe said that small steps are important and that both the institutions and prospective students should familiarize themselves with each other. He said that he wished he was aware of what resources were available for school and that he was "not college prepped very well". He said that he probably would have never gone to college if it were not for the game of basketball and that the importance of basketball in Native communities should be embraced by PWIs. Playing made him proud, kept him motivated and allowed him to feel a connection to our past. Wolf Robe has this to say:

When I get the opportunity to play... it makes me feel, you know, proud that I could represent my people in almost a warrior way. You know what would our grandfathers be doing if... when they were growing up together and had to raid or hunt, you know they had to do it together, basketball is almost like that today... and everybody can play. Its inexpensive so... it can bring this warrior mindset of being to... you know, you don't really have a lot but you have this, you can represent. Your grandfathers were doing something like this back then, and now you are doing this, it kind of gives you that special feeling... spiritual feeling. So, without basketball I don't think I would be doing this (school). I wouldn't have this belief, this mindset, this... almost like a religion is what it feels like, I wouldn't be this person that I am. I (might) be everything that I don't want to be... I mean, would I even be alive?... how long?... how healthy would I be? I

wouldn't be this person that I am today without the game of basketball and what comes with it.

Rides A White Horse

Rides A White Horse was a 43-year-old full-time student at Little Big Horn College (LBHC) at the time of this interview. Rides A White Horse, or White Horse, is Crow and also works full-time off campus, has three children, is a grandmother and speaks fluent Crow and wants to eventually attend medical school. We began the interview by discussing her response to the first question on her survey which asked if the student felt connected to their tribe, reservation or culture as an American Indian. Rides a White Horse said that her first language was the Crow language and that it was the only language in her household when she was growing up. She speaks Crow as often as she can to her children and tries to encourage them to speak the language. Rides a White Horse is worried about the younger generations because they are growing up different than she did with regards to language. White Horse added, "It's very important for us to keep our language and culture. I'm not a traditional person, I'm Christian and I do respect the Crow traditions and would like my children to know who they are and where they come from".

When I asked White Horse if she felt that her attendance at LBHC had shaped or influenced her cultural identity she said that it definitely had been an influence for her and her family. White Horse spoke again about the importance of the language and said that although she was fluent she would like to learn to read and write in the Crow language and that she was now learning to do so at LBHC. She said that her classes in

Crow culture (history of the chiefs) was helping her better understand the history of the Crow people, “I would like my children and grandchildren to take those classes as well just to be more informed and ... I guess educate ourselves in our culture and heritage”. When I asked White Horse if she would ever consider transferring to a PWI, she said that she would but that it would have to be close to home or “within a shorter distance to another reservation”. When I asked White Horse what her first thoughts were of PWIs, she said she wasn’t sure, but that she was “hoping its more diverse, all races, not just white, but I’m eager to learn what they have to teach”.

As we moved through the interview protocol, Montana State University and the University of Montana came up multiple times, as White Horse stated that she felt that she was the most familiar with these two PWIs. When I asked how she became familiar with them she said that it was simply through word of mouth and from friends and family. White Horse also said that even though she is interested in eventually transferring to a PWI she was not sure what to expect. She said that being at LBHC and/or at TCUs in general that she felt very comfortable and supported. She expressed some concern when I asked her what she specifically might be hesitant about at a PWI. Both in the interview on her paper response she stated that she was worried about the “Indian Center”. Would the PWI have a support center for Native Americans and if so what would that support entail were questions White Horse posed. She also stated that she was worried about being able to feel familiar with the instructors and knowing other students, or learning about them as well. “I would like to identify with them, it makes me more comfortable to ask questions” was added when discussing PWI professors and students.

She spoke very highly of the support and “encouragement” that she had been given at LBHC from numerous instructors, support staff and other students. White Horse said that she hoped she would have a similar experience at a PWI like MSU or UofM.

We concluded the interview with the final question which was what advice or suggestions would the student give to the leaders of PWIs who were interested in better supporting Native American students. White Horse responded with “have more staff that are Native American that we can identify with and are more comfortable with. Just seeing a familiar face... it doesn’t even matter what tribe they are, if they are Native American you just feel like you’re at home”. We did not get a chance to talk specifically about numbers 16 and 17 from the paper survey, but White Horse did respond “Strongly Agree” to both questions about the importance of culture and identity should be valued at the PWI and that it and was important to see students, faculty, staff and leaders who represent Native American culture.

Brave Heart

Brave Heart was a 19-year-old full-time Crow student at Little Big Horn College (LBHC) at the time of this interview. Brave Heart had attended K-12 at three different schools on two separate reservations, graduating from Hardin High School in 2015. Brave Heart was raised traditionally by her grandmother, participating in the Sundance, attending sweat regularly and dancing traditional Crow style at pow wows. She currently lives with her four-year old daughter splitting residences between her grandmother and mother’s houses.

When asked whether Brave Heart felt that her attendance at LBHC had influenced or shaped her cultural identity she responded enthusiastically. Brave Heart said “going here and the research I have done has made me want to learn my language more, I mean I can understand it but not really speak it right now... I feel like I’m pretty saturated with being Indigenous”. When asked if she would be interested in attending a PWI in the future and which PWIs she felt the most familiar with, she stated that the only school she was both interested in and familiar with was MSU Bozeman. Brave Heart is interested in transferring to MSU to pursue a degree in medicine. She also stated that she heard that MSU “has a really active Indian club” and that this has helped to influence her decision to transfer in the future. Brave Heart said that research opportunities, meeting new people and making connections were what she looked forward to most at a PWI. She stated that her primary concern about transferring is moving away from her family.

What I’m hesitant for is being away from my family for long periods of time, even a month is so long. I see everyone in my family like every day... like at lunch I’ll go see my dad or go see my grandpa... the lack of people who will know your family or where you come from and your situation at home at a larger predominantly white institution (scares me), because like my advisor here knows everything about me, she help fix my issue because she knows everything going on at home.

Brave Heart also stated that she felt that even the non-academic communities were different between Indian and non-Indian communities. She expressed worry over a new community not being as supportive as an Indian community and stated that it was important for her to have connections and have a shared “humor between” other people.

When asked what PWIs should know about American Indian students interested in attending their institution(s) and what she might want to tell them about her TCU experience, Brave Heart offered this:

That's a hard question. I mean I feel like it really helps to be around Indians, makes you more Indian, just kidding! I do think they need to know more about us because it's completely different than like white person attending a PWI, like we come from completely different backgrounds. I feel like being Indian separates you from a lot of people because of like how close we are to our families... and our culture. Sundance, sweats and ceremonies are really close to my heart... I don't know, I feel like our values are different. Being here (LBHC) I know a lot of people's hesitation to go (to a PWI) sometimes is because they won't be as close to their family. I don't know, maybe PWIs could like make an extra effort to show new students and prospective Indian students what resources are available to maybe make their own community.

Brave Heart summed up her suggestions for PWIs by restating that open communication, informality, personnel connections and laughing were very important for Indian students to feel comfortable in any environment. She said that "being formal with communication scares me more than being informal, you need to be able to be funny with someone and laugh about the same things". Brave Heart said that she has heard from students who have transferred to PWIs who have said that they didn't talk with their advisor and that they were "scared because she (advisor) didn't seem to have any emotions". Brave Heart said that it would be helpful if they (PWI professors/staff) would "make an effort to know about geography in Montana and where the Indians are from because we're not all the same... from state to state we're all very different".

Brave Heart responded "Strongly Agree" to question numbers 16 and 17 on the survey that asked about the importance of culture and identity being valued and acknowledged and about the visibility of faculty, staff, leaders and students representing

Native American culture at PWIs. As I thanked Brave Heart for her time and her story, she wanted to add to her interview the reason why she was going to major in premed at MSU and why she wanted to come back to the reservation after finishing medical school. She spoke of the recent passing of her stepfather due to complications from diabetes. She stated that she originally wanted to attend medical school “for my own selfish reasons, I wanted to cut people open (laughing), but after what happened to (step dad’s name), I was like I need to come back to the IHS for long term health care reform”.

The Lady Who Spins

The Lady Who Spins was a 22-year-old full-time student at Stone Child College (SCC) on Rocky Boy’s reservation living with her cousin her cousin’s husband’s family. The Lady Who Spins also played for SCC’s women’s basketball team, was the local high school volleyball coach and worked part-time in the enrollment office at SCC. I will refer to The Lady Who Spins as Spins for the remainder of this story. Spins is Diné from the Navajo Indian reservation and has attended two tribal colleges; Haskell Indian Nations University and Stone Child College currently. Spins had spent her entire life on the Navajo reservation before deciding to accept a volleyball scholarship at Haskell where she spent just over a year before a car wreck put both her athletic and academic endeavors on hold and took her back to her home in New Mexico. While spending time with her family back home she contemplated returning to Haskell when she recovered from the car wreck, but was concerned about missing family and the challenges that come with leaving home.

Spins had a cousin who had moved North to Montana and who was going to be attending Stone Child College on both an academic and athletic scholarship and with the encouragement of her father, she decided to move with her cousin to Rocky's Boy reservation to attend school as well. Spins stated that even though she had not lived on her own reservation for a few years that the Navajo culture was strong and had instilled great pride that she took with her regardless of her physical location. Spins stated that "on the Navajo reservation there's a lot of elders who like enforce our culture, cultural values... I don't think we'll ever lose our language because even young ones are growing up with their grandparents speaking Navajo to them". She also said that the elders and the community make sure that all (tribal) members know where they come from, "know where we come from and our traditions, my grandma says know your clans, language and traditional values".

When I asked Spins about her response (Strongly Agree) to the survey question asking if attendance at her TCUs had helped her to feel more connected to her identity as an American Indian, she spoke about both of her TCU experiences and how and why they had "made me feel more Indian". Spins had said that Haskell "was like a home away home because there was so many Navajos and I would always hear the language and we would talk and communicate that way". Spins also said that it was comforting and that she "appreciated" still being able to experience "Navajo humor". On Navajo humor, Spins also added, "just like having that humor the way it is back home... it made me feel better to be able to joke and laugh around" while away from home. Spins said that although her experience was different at SCC and that she had originally felt "out of

place” she began to learn more about the Chippewa and Cree and became very involved in the local tribal community.

When I asked Spins which PWIs she felt the most familiar with and if she would ever consider transferring to one, she talked about an experience she had attending a predominantly white high school when she was younger. She began by saying that she felt the most familiar with the University of Arizona because she had grown up near that institution and that she also felt familiar with MSU in Bozeman because of the Pow Wow basketball tournament and some of her friends and cousins in the Native nursing program (CO-OP). Spins had said that she had attended a language immersion school on her reservation when she was younger but transferred to a predominantly white school to try and gain more exposure for athletics. She expressed anxiety about attending a “white school” again; “when I went to school off the reservation... they were really, really racist, they would treat Natives different, we would keep to ourselves, we didn’t get no awards for anything, all the awards were given to the white people”. She said that although she might be interested in transferring to a PWI someday, her previous experiences had made her “nervous to go” and that she did not want to be “judged”. She did say that although she was hesitant about attending a PWI and was worried about being “homesick” that getting her degree “would help me go back and help my people on the reservation and that just makes me that much more excited”. She was also excited to have more access to lectures and “speakers... like Dan Rather (laughing)”.

I asked Spins if she would like to share something with the leader of PWIs about her TCU experience that would be important for them to know to help better understand

tribal colleges and she spoke of connections and the importance of culture. She said that her TCU experience had helped her not only to embrace her Diné identity but also gave her the opportunity learn about other Native traditions, beliefs, languages and culture. She said that there is “a family feeling” at the TCUs. Spins said that even when you leave you still have the connections, “when I go back to visit, I will have people who will welcome me into their home... and people here (Rocky Boy) will welcome you into their home too”.

I asked Spins what specific advice she might have for the leaders of PWIs who were interested in helping to better support prospective tribal college transfer students. She stressed the importance of acceptance and acknowledgement.

Making a big move, like coming from the reservation and going a long way to school you would want to feel welcome. (We should) be able to practice what we believe in and be (encouraged) to speak our language. Sometime we would cry together because we would miss home, having like an organization for Native American students is like a big thing I would like, especially at an all-white school... knowing that I would have those connections.

I asked Spins if she in the future she made that jump to a PWI if she thought anyone would go with her and she said that she would most likely go by herself but that if her dad would want to continue his education, she would take him with her. She told me that her dad had a bachelor's degree and “he could have furthered it but he ended up starting a family”. She also said that her father's college experience at a PWI was a culture clash as he was unable to practice at peyote meetings because it was a violation of school policy to utilize tobacco and that he also got into trouble for “drinking caffeine (coffee). Spins finished up this story by stating that PWIs should try to “feel more like home”.

Rainbow Woman

Rainbow Woman was in her third year attending Stone Child Community College (SCC) at the time of this interview. Rainbow Woman was a 25-year-old Chippewa Cree female living with her four-year-old daughter and her parents on Rocky Boy's reservation. Prior to enrolling at SCC, Rainbow Woman had been on active duty in the military since graduating from high school. Although this was her only experience with any institution of higher education, Rainbow Woman was very familiar with the University of Montana in Missoula as two of older sisters had played college basketball for one to four years for the lady Griz. Rainbow Woman's father was also a University of Montana alumni.

I had played basketball in the Native tournament circuit both against and with Rainbow Woman's three older sisters over the past twelve years. There was even a time around 11 years ago that Rainbow Woman played with her sisters when she was fourteen years old at the Montana State University Pow Wow Basketball Tournament. I remember her demeanor very differently than now. Rainbow Woman stated that she had never been very interested in attending an institution of higher education for academics or sports. After fulfilling her military duties and moving back to the reservation she became involved in things that she did not feel were healthy or moving her forward in life. She decided that she wanted to attend college for the first time and began as a full time student at SCC. She also works part time in the Dean of students office as a registrar's assistant at Stone Child.

According to the Likert Scale questions answered by Rainbow Woman, she does feel connected to her tribe and reservation although she did state in our interview that growing up her family was more “involved with the church instead of ceremony” and that that was part of the reason that she did not feel “One-hundred percent connected”. She said that attending SCC has allowed her to learn more about the Cree language, culture and history, the Sundance, pow wows and about the effects of trauma. She had responded with “Strongly Agree” on question number 11 of the survey, which asked if the student felt that they had become more connected to their identity as an American Indian through tribal college attendance. Rainbow Woman responded with “Agree” to both numbers 16 and 17, which asked about the whether it was important in attending a PWI that both culture and identity as an American Indian be acknowledged and valued by the institution and that in the student’s educational path it is important that he/she see students, faculty, teachers, staff and leaders that both “look like me” and who represent Native American culture.

When asked what words or ideas came to mind when thinking of a predominantly white institution like MSU, UofM, etc., she responded with “nerve racking, huge classes, packed and less one-on-one with teachers”. Rainbow said that with regards to what makes her hesitant or worried about the possibility of attending a PWI, she was “nervous about housing and bringing her child with her” but that she was “excited because she likes a challenge and for what resources might be available (to help)”.

As stated in previous participant descriptions, the final two questions (9 and 10) of the interview protocol asked the student if they would like to share anything about

their tribal college experience that would help those unfamiliar with TCUs in understanding more about the TCU experience and how it might relate to transferring to a PWI. The second part of the question (10) asks them to be a little more specific by providing an example to PWI leadership about what or how to better support American Indian students who might one day be interested in transferring to a PWI. Rainbow woman had stated that since it was a “better deal financially” to attend a TCU, that if the PWI could help those interested in attending with a transfer plan and information on what credits would be needed, that students could take those available at the TCU to save money on their education. She also said that sufficient family housing for students with children and families would ease her worries and those who would not be traveling to the PWI alone. Rainbow said that it would also be very helpful to know what resources were available before arriving at the PWI. She also offered the idea of a big brother big sister mentoring program with a current student attending the PWI. Her idea was that another American Indian student who was majoring in the same area as a potential TCU transfer could use Facebook or social media to help mentor and guide that student while they were at the TCU.

Red Day Woman

Red Day Woman was an eighteen-year-old full-time student at Fort Peck Community College (FPCC) at the time of this interview. Red Day Woman was residing with her grandparents whom she had been living with since birth in Poplar, Montana. She enrolled full-time at FPCC the fall after graduating from high school. Red Day, as I will refer to Red Day Woman for the remainder of this interview was the only respondent

that did not reply “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” to the survey question asking if the student felt connected to their tribe, reservation and/or cultural identity. When I asked if Red Day could better explain why she choose the response “Neutral” for this question, she stated that “It’s important but I didn’t grow up like knowing about my culture”. Red Day also explained that her great-grandmother was very traditional and “traveled from pow wow to pow wow and went to sweat lodge” but that she did not have the opportunity to spend much time with her.

Red Day’s grandparents are not traditional and she felt that this was part of the reason she did not understand much of her Indigenous culture. Red Day left the survey question asking students to list their tribal affiliation blank, as she stated after the interview that she was unsure. When I asked Red Day if she felt that her attendance at FPCC at had influenced or shaped her cultural identity she said that yes it had felt “like it had embraced her” and that she felt like she had learned more about herself as an American Indian at FPCC.

Red Day was taking courses at FPCC that she believed would be helpful when she transferred in the future to get a nursing degree. When we discussed whether she would be interested in transferring to a predominantly white institution she said that she was interested in transferring to either Montana State University in Bozeman or to Salish Kootenai College in Pablo, MT. I asked Red Day what words or thoughts came to mind when she thought of predominantly white institutions (PWI), her responses included, “scary, big... getting lost somewhere” and “I would feel out of place”. When asked, what made her excited or hesitant about the thought of transferring to a PWI, she said that

she was excited to “further her education” but that she was most afraid of “failing” at a PWI.

Red Day said she only chose to attend FPCC directly out of high school because of the first-year free tuition program. She also said that she was very happy that she ended up starting her college career at a tribal college and recommended that everyone should start at a tribal college. In addition to recommending that students should start at TCU before a large university, Red Day also added in her suggestions for PWIs, that connecting with professors was important to TCU students because tribal college students were used to having regular communication and interaction with their teachers due to smaller class sizes. Red Day was also the only student who responded “Neutral” to question number 16 which asked if it was important that a PWI value and acknowledge American Indian students’ culture and identity. However, she responded “Agree” to question 17 which asked if it was important to see students, faculty, teachers, staff and leaders who like look students (Native American) and represent Native American culture.

Bear Elk

Bear Elk was a 21-year-old sophomore enrolled full-time at Fort Peck Community College (FPCC) at the time of this interview. Bear Elk lives with his parents about 12 miles from the college and uses the college transit to get to the campus daily. Bear Elk was in his third year of college FPCC with plans to transfer after receiving his associate degree. Bear Elk would like to transfer to Montana State University in Bozeman and eventually earn a degree in computer engineering.

When I asked Bear Elk if he thought that his attendance at FPCC had influenced or shaped his cultural identity, he said that it had, “it gave me a perspective of American Indians in higher education”. He also added that going to school at FPCC “showed me that there are a lot of opportunities for Native Americans that I didn’t know about or know there were before”. Bear Elk said that he felt that he was more prepared to attend a PWI now (through TCU attendance) than he was before attending FPCC. He also mentioned that even though he felt better prepared to attend a PWI that he was also “hesitant because I’m coming from a tribal college institution and tribal college institutions are every unique compared to other universities and schools and I just feel like uh. It will be like going into a whole other world”. I asked what words or thoughts came to mind when he thought about PWIs. Bear Elk’s response was “it’s just a step, one step closer to me helping my family and my reservation”. He also said he would look at it as a challenge that he could “potentially conquer”.

We discussed what elements of transferring to a PWI made him feel excited and or hesitant. He spoke about his family, finances, employment and giving back. Bear Elk:

My family, rather it be leaving them or deciding what to do there. Income because I know money will be a factor, money and tuition and a job, all those things will be a factor in going to a different school away from home. What makes me excited or the best part is getting closer to my degree and my aspirations of a good career. Being able to provide for others, help others, you know just do what you can to play my part and give back to my community and the others who have helped me become what I am today.

I asked Bear Elk after his response that when he decided to transfer to a PWI if anyone would go with him, he said yes, his mother and his sister.

When asked if there was anything that he felt PWIs should know about TCUs and his experience as a tribal college student he spoke about the “family aspect” of TCUs. Bear Elk responded with “So typically with the instructor, it’s more personal... you’re not afraid to ask questions or tell something personal, I don’t think it’s like that at a PWI”. I asked Bear Elk if he had any suggestions or recommendations for the leaders of PWIs who were interested in better supporting potential TCU transfer students. Bear Elk said that it would be helpful if PWIs “would be open to accepting this new form of student, (we come) from a different college but it also offers a quality education. Be open minded and not be biased toward these/us group of people”. Bear Elk also said that an orientation specific to tribal college transfers would be very helpful. He also offered this about “mentors or student advisors”:

I think it would be great to have former students or alumni... students or people there to help assist you on your journey because you’re going to have a lot of questions, you’re going to have a lot of issues, a lot of problems because it might be the first time away from you family or in a bigger school. It might be a harder curriculum, maybe your work ethic isn’t up to par so it’s going to be good to have others who have been through that experience.

Bear Elk said that a student mentor or advising program like the one he spoke about above could help Indian students transferring from a TCU to a PWI and the students who did the mentoring or advising “feel more valued” by the institution. When I asked Bear Elk if he would like to add anything to his interview before we finished up he said yes and offered this, “I’m very proud to have been able to attend a tribal college and I don’t think I would have had it any other way. It’s something I hold with great pride and respect”.

Bear Raven

Bear Raven was a thirty-year-old full-time student attending Aaniiih Nakoda College (ANC) at the time of this interview. Bear Raven lived in Fort Belknap with his ten-year-old daughter and his girlfriend. This was Bear Raven's second year attending ANC, he had already received a certificate in welding during his first year and was now working on a degree in computer information systems. Bear Raven said that after he had graduated high school in 2005 he had wanted to attend college in Arizona for computer bracket design but ended up working for a couple of years and "then I got into some trouble so I got sent away for a couple of years". When he was able to come back home he began working at the local Quick Stop and decided to enroll at ANC because "I wanted to do something better".

Bear Raven said that he felt very connected to his community not only because had he lived there his entire life, but also because he liked and regularly attended community events like "pow wows, feeds, stick games, you know social events". I asked Bear Raven if he felt that his tribal college attendance had allowed him to feel more connected to his culture of Aaniiih and he said that it had. Bear Raven said that his grandfather had worked at ANC and knew the language well, but that Bear Raven "regrets not being close to him and learning our native language". Bear Raven said that going to school at ANC has now given him the opportunity to learn his language.

When I asked Bear Raven if he would be interested in transferring to a PWI and if so would made him hesitant or nervous and what made him excited about the possibility. He said that he would like to get a four-year degree and would look forward to a new

experience and getting a “different outlook on life”. He said that the cost of living and housing would be a major deterrent in moving for school and that a closer four-year institution would be very helpful. Bear Elk about ANC, “It’s just more convenient here for school, I don’t have to move, I don’t have to find a new job and get all set up again”. He also said stated that if he were to move to attend a PWI he would be “worried about my daughter because her and her grandma are really close, she would be leaving her family too”. I asked him what words or thoughts first came to mind when he heard the words predominantly white institution. He replied with “a lot of students... less one-on-one time you know because I don’t think the teacher could get to all the students... it seems like they’re doing an assembly line you know, just get them in and get them out”.

I asked Bear Raven if there was anything that he thought PWIs should know about the experience of TCU students and what advice or suggestions he might have for PWIs interested in better supporting TCU transfer students. He said that they should know that tribal college students he said that he wasn’t sure because there was a lot but that time spent with TCU teachers and staff was important for students especially non-traditional students who have not attended school for a while. Bear Raven said that PWIs should have enough family housing for students who would be bringing family with them to go to school and have student support centers for transfer students. To conclude our interview, I asked Bear Raven if there was anything else that he would like to add about his TCU experience. Bear Raven concluded with a final thought on his ANC experience, “Well the reason I came here is because I been out of school for so long I needed help to

build up that confidence to get through classes, you know to get back in there, yup, they work with you here”.

Red Earth Woman

Red Earth Woman was a nineteen-year-old full-time student in her second year at Aaniiih Nakoda College (ANC) at the time of this interview. Red Earth Woman is an enrolled Assiniboiné living with her parents on the Fort Belknap reservation. Red Earth, as I will refer to her for the remainder of her description, said that she feels connected to her reservation community because it is the only place that has ever lived and that she has always attended community events such as sporting events and pow wows. Red Earth answered “Agree” for the survey question asking if the student felt that their tribal college attendance has made them feel more connected to their identity as an American Indian. When I asked Red Earth about this in the interview, she said that before talking an Assiniboiné and Lakota language at ANC, she knew very little of the language but that the course had helped her to understand much more.

Red Earth said that the PWI that she felt the most familiar with was MSU-Northern in Havre. She stated that this was because of its proximity and because her father had attended school there. She also said that a college representative had visited ANC along with a couple other representatives, of which MSU was the only school that she could recall. Red Earth said that she was very interested in attending a PWI in the future to earn a bachelor degree. When I asked Red Earth if she felt more prepared to attend a PWI since attending a TCU then before, she said, “I feel more prepared now because I kind of got a taste of what (college) is like here”. When I asked Red Earth

what the first words or thoughts were that came to her mind when she heard the words predominantly white institution, her response was, “that they’re big”. The next question(s) in the interview asked Red Earth to discuss if there was anything that her made her excited or hesitant about the possibility of transferring to a PWI. Red Earth said that she was worried about “finances, like paying for school and everything” and “housing” but that she was excited “to get a bachelor’s degree”.

I asked Red Earth if she thought that there was anything that would be important for PWIs to know about tribal colleges or tribal college students. She that it would be helpful for them to understand how a TCU is different from PWI regarding size and relationships, “classes are smaller so they (teachers) are more one-on-one like you can just ask them questions”. When asked if she had suggestions or recommendations for PWIs to help better facilitate TCU transfer students, she said helping set up study groups would be helpful for new students. Red Earth also responded “Strongly Agree” to questions 16 and 17 which focused on culture, identity and representation of American Indians at predominantly white institutions.

Green Grass Woman

Green Grass Woman is a 19-year-old woman attending a tribal college in Northern Montana. She is in her second year as a full-time student taking 19 credits at her TCU. She eventually would like to transfer to Montana State University in Bozeman, Montana and major in ethno botany: she wants to work with traditional plants to improve the natural medicinal field. Green Grass Woman currently lives with her mother and has spent all her life between both Rocky Boy’s reservation and the Fort Belknap reservation.

Green Grass Woman stated that upon graduating from high school she had wanted to go directly to Montana State University but that the size of the institution, the cost to attend, no reliable transportation and the distance from her family were the main factors that lead her to choose the local tribal college over Montana's largest PWI. Green Grass Woman stated that the local TCU was not her first choice but that her perceptions have changed with how she believed her tribal college experience would be. She spoke very highly of her experience at the TCU and said repeatedly that the support and resources that have been available to her have been extremely helpful. Green Grass Woman said that the relationships that are created among the faculty, staff and students at the TCU have been amazing and have helped her very much in becoming better prepared to attend a PWI in the future. When asked if she believed that attending the TCU had influenced or shaped her cultural identity she responded with "Agree" on the Likert scale question and verbally responded in the interview protocol by replying that she definitely has been influenced because she had not been raised very traditional but since attending the TCU she knew much more about the history of the Nakoda people and was also learning the language. She also responded with "Agree" in that she feels that she has become more connected to her identity as an American Indian through attendance at the TCU.

The Likert scale questions (numbers 16 and 17) regarding the importance of the representation, value and acknowledgement of American Indians at PWIs showed that Green Grass Woman believed that it was important for her to have her culture and identity be valued and that it was important to her education path that she see others who look like her or represent Native American culture at the PWI. "Agree" was her response

to both of these questions. When asked what her first thoughts were (number 6 on the interview protocol) about PWIs, she responded with “Big, Scary, Unfamiliar, Alone”.

When I asked Green Grass Woman if there was anything that she would like to add to her interview after our final question in the interview protocol, she said the help and financial resources at her TCU were amazing but that the relationships and close knit community made her feel very supported. She closed with this statement:

More Natives kids should try starting out at tribal college because it's like their main goal here is basically to just get you prepared for university level so that you are hopping into it and getting lost and you know, getting discouraged and dropping out right away. They want to help you succeed and help as much as they can here (ANC) before going to a university.

Introduction of Themes

After student interviews were transcribed, each individual interview was evaluated multiple times to create codes that represented the student responses. After student responses were systematically coded and categorized, those codes were counted and tallied in each individual interview. A summation of all codes for every interview was tallied to get a total number of codes for the interviews as one set. The highest number of codes resulted in six themes being selected for the emerging themes of the data set. The interviews resulted in the following six themes: family and community; fear and isolation; PWI support and excitement for new opportunities; acceptance and acknowledgement of cultural identity; tribal college love; and relationships and humor.

Theme One – Family & Community

Family and community arose as a theme in every student interview. The theme of family and community was multifaceted in its meaning for each student. Family and community was the primary concern for many in deciding whether they could transfer to a PWI. Sufficient resources for the family's comfort in the form of adequate housing, finances and daycare were of great concern for many students.

The same theme was also a primary motivating factor for why a student wanted to obtain a degree at a PWI, as they felt that this would benefit their family and community. Many students said that they wanted to get a degree so that they could go back to their home reservations and help their families and local tribal community. Family and community came up 134 times throughout the fifteen interviews.

Theme Two – Acceptance & Acknowledgement of Cultural Identity

Students in all but one interviewed replied “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” to the question asking whether they believed that it was important that their culture and identity be valued and acknowledged by the institution. The same students who responded in the affirmative to this question also believed (Strongly Agree/Agree) that it was important in their educational path that they see students, faculty, teachers staff and leaders that look like them and who represent Native American culture.

During the interview, many students took the opportunity to express their concern that their culture, their practices, beliefs and Indigenous identities be accepted and acknowledged by a PWI if they chose to attend. A related concern within the theme was that students did not want to sacrifice their culture and/or leave their families to attend a

PWI and that differences should be embraced by the institution. Students also expressed the different ways that Native Americans do things versus a non-Indigenous culture and that even though it may seem different to others, that it should be respected and not used to make them feel different or unequal. The theme of Student cultural identity, the desire to be accepted, valued and/or acknowledged came up in 111 instances in the sum of all interviews.

Theme Three – PWI Support & Excitement for New Opportunities

The theme of support from the PWI was present in every student interview. The importance of the predominantly white institution supporting both TCU transfer and other American Indian students was evident in the coding, but varied greatly in what that support should entail. Some interviews expressed specifically how the institution could better support TCU students while others offered a general idea of what support should mean. While general support related to helping students graduate, students were very specific in stating that they would like to feel “comfortable” (stated specifically in 11 of 15 interviews) in their new environments. The theme of PWI support also emerged in the form of statements regarding how PWI leaders, professors and staff could work to better understand and learn about American Indian students as members of different tribal communities. Specific PWI support also included the idea of an additional or separate orientation program to assist TCU students in the transfer process. Program specific support systems that help students adjust to not only academic life but also to off-campus necessities for students and student’s families were a theme within a theme.

Students expressed feelings of enthusiasm and excitement at the possibility of new opportunities that they believed exist at PWIs. Students were very specific when describing opportunities such as their desire and goal to obtain a “bachelor degree” and being “the first to graduate from college” as a “first generation college student”.

Although many students said that they believed it would be very “challenging” to attend a new and large predominantly white college, many also stated that they looked forward to that challenge and the opportunities that it would bring with it. Predominantly white institutional support and excitement for new opportunities emerged 89 times in the interviews.

Theme Four – TCU Praise

All student interviews spoke very highly of their time spent at their respective tribal colleges. The theme of TCU Love can also be referred to as TCU props. Every single student interviewed for this project expressed great gratitude, appreciation, love, recognition and respect for their tribal colleges and their constituents. The terms “family”, “familiar”, “love”, “care”, “comfort”, “embrace”, “help”, “one-on-one” and a host of other adjectives were used multiple times by students in expressing how they felt about their tribal college experience. These feelings of safety and value at TCUs were also used to relay what and how students believe PWIs should work toward better embracing Native American students. In many of the interviews students talked about how PWIs could practice some of the methods that their respective TCUs practice to show their students how important they are to fiber of the school. The theme of

expressing gratitude and giving props to tribal colleges occurred 71 times in the 15 interviews.

Theme Five – Fear & Isolation

A theme that became evident in words specifically used by the students interviewed revolved around fear and isolation pertaining to thoughts about attending a predominantly white institution. The descriptive words “big”, “scary/scared”, “not comfortable”, and “alone” were brought up by many of the students interviewed when asked what words or thoughts came to mind when they heard the words predominantly white institution. Several of the interviews stated that they were afraid of attending an institution that they did not believe would provide “one-on-one” teaching and assistance. “Afraid to ask questions” was directly related to the fear that students both explicitly and implicitly implied when discussing the possibility of them transferring to a predominantly white institution. Additional implicit and explicit student worry related to fear included the idea of being “alone”, homesick, prejudicial treatment and missing home, community and family. There were 65 separate instances of negative connotations related to student’s thoughts and perceptions about predominantly white institutions.

Theme Six – Humor & Relationships

Humor emerged or was present in two different but related aspects as a final theme for the data (stories/interviews) analyzed for this research. Many students mentioned that they feel comfortable when they can “just talk” and “laugh” with teachers, students and leaders in their educational settings. Sharing and connecting with others to

feel a sense of belonging and comfort in any environment arose as a key component in the relationships theme. Getting to know professors and professors knowing the students as “more than a number” or a “statistic” was paramount for a positive relationship that emerged in this theme. In 14 out of 15 student interviews, the importance of either connecting with others, feeling comfortable, being able to laugh, shared humor, Indian humor, informal relationships was a theme throughout the stories.

Humor was not only mentioned specifically within building and maintaining relationships with both Native and non-Native American students, faculty and staff, but it was also a theme in the communication of the actual interviews conducted. The transcribed interviews were coded in both words used and in all pauses, laughs, and non-verbal communication(s). Each individual laugh that occurred within the interview between the student and myself was recorded. There were a total of 159 laughs shared in fifteen interviews, for an average of 10.6 laughs per student/researcher interaction. This does not take into account the time spent informally (unrecorded both before and after the interviews).

Summary

The perceptions, beliefs, goals, values, desires, relationships and ideas related to predominantly white institutions and tribal college experience shared by the fifteen students resulted in the six themes listed above. All six of the themes that emerged in the findings of the stories appear to be related in one way or another. Family and community took on a primary role in responsibility, pride, comfort, support and concern for students

when discussing what was most important to them should they choose to transfer to a PWI. Students expressed concern in both leaving family and community and also in bringing family in the case that they physically moved to a new environment. The family/community culture directly related to students' concerns about being accepted and acknowledged by a predominantly white institution. Students expressed their concerns about what they believed was true about PWIs and how they believed that this might not match up with some of their ways of doing and knowing. The students offered suggestions and ideas on how the PWI might help better support them, their families and other American Indian students like themselves. They gave examples of what they appreciated, enjoyed and utilized at their respective TCUs and recommended that PWIs become familiar with and possibly even practice some of the methods and relationship models employed at TCUs. Students shared their stories with me and did so with great humility, pride and respect. We laughed many times together, shared both Indian humor, old and new. The student's desire for less formal, more natural and genuine relationships with those around them was evident in both the content and nature of the interviews and sharing that unfolded in the TCU visits.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, DELIMITATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion of Themes

The purpose of this study is to increase access and opportunity through increased and expanded knowledge of American Indian tribal college student perceptions of PWIs. The research questions for this dissertation were designed to help locate potential answers or solutions that may contribute to the purpose of the study. The data that emerged from the storytellers created a story that both supports and extends knowledge that we know to be true about American Indian students and higher education. The research process and design for this study utilized Indigenous research methodologies to locate six themes that emerged as an outcome of listening to (interviewing) 15 full-time American Indian tribal college students in six different tribal colleges located in the state of Montana. The six themes that developed from tribal college students' stories shared in chapter four were: family and community; acceptance and acknowledgement of cultural identity; PWI support and excitement for new opportunities; TCU love/props; fear and isolation and Relationships and humor.

Family & Community

As stated in chapter two of this dissertation project, the literature emphasizes the importance of multiple forms of non-financial PWI support for American Indian students. Raphael Guillory offers this:

The importance of family support, involved and supportive faculty, social support systems in the form of AI/AN student associations, multicultural offices, peer mentoring programs, academic counseling, institutional commitment and maintenance of an active presence in home communities and cultural ceremonies are crucial to college persistence (Guillory, 2009, p.15).

The theme of family and community emerged as the most mentioned theme throughout all the student interviews. It was evident that this theme was in alignment with the literature on success strategies for American Indian college students. The need for American Indian students to feel comfortable in their decision to move away to attend school at a predominantly white institution was heavy on their collective identities to home and family. Although students were excited at the possibility of continuing their education, they would only do so at minimum sacrifice to their connection to home and family. Students desire to bring their families or a family member with them to school and have assurance that those family members would be comfortable and welcomed was repeatedly expressed in the interviews. Hoffman's Transcultural Hypothesis states that traditional American Indian student's chances of success at PWIs increase when we can begin to navigate two cultures by finding strength in their own traditional cultural identities. I believe that a student's connection to family and community is a method of navigating two cultures; the PWI academic environment and AI student cultural, social, emotional and spiritual environment.

Acceptance & Acknowledgement of Cultural Identity

The theme of student's desires for their cultural identity and their ways of knowing, being, and doing to be accepted and acknowledged by predominantly white

institutions was also in alignment with the literature provided in chapter two. Vincent Tinto's student departure theory may not relate directly to cultural barriers and challenges for American Indian students at PWIs but the theory does hold water for its attention to factors affecting student departure that do relate to AI students. Degree of integration within an institution, social systems, congruency between the student and the environment of the institution, extracurricular activities and interactions with faculty have all been listed as factors affecting whether a student will persist in college. To fully integrate into a new environment would equate to assimilation, something that we as Indigenous people should not be asked or expected to do in order to obtain a college degree at a PWI. Social systems are much different for a variety of students on PWI campuses, but those differences may become more apparent when a non-traditional aged AI student, a culturally traditional student or a student with a family is unable to locate support and social interactions that both engage and welcomes them. Predominantly white institution leaders, policy makers, faculty, staff, students, department heads and constituents can help build environments that welcome and celebrate diverse students and their identities rather than systems that only allow them to succeed if they assimilate.

PWI Support & Excitement for New Opportunities

As stated above American Indian students have continuously expressed their desire to be accepted and acknowledged as individuals and as members of their tribal communities. This extends to not only acceptance and acknowledgement but also to PWI support of American Indian students. Students specifically stated that additional and

relevant support than what they were currently aware of would be beneficial to them should they decide to transfer to a PWI. The theme of support in the interviews came up often in several forms, varying from academic to social and extracurricular. Students stated on numerous occasions in their interviews that they were excited to learn more and to continue their education at PWIs but that support in the form of tutoring, daycare, family housing, TCU and/or AI student specific orientation programs, community activities and social engagement opportunity information, American Indian student centers and application and financial aid assistance would be beneficial for AI students. Relevant and salient support for American Indian students at PWIs are in alignment with what the literature says about success strategies for AI students. What that support entails can be an exhaustive list which includes many of the ideas expressed in this theme that emerged from the student's collective interviews. The one specific support idea that I did not find in conducting the literature review for this dissertation was the idea of an exclusive orientation program tailored to the specific needs and interests of American Indian students transferring from tribal colleges.

TCU Praise

The literature review for this dissertation had an entire heading on the importance and relevance of local tribal colleges and their significant impact on community and culturally appropriate education (Stein, 1992; Stein, 1999). The familiar, comfortable and close knit community feeling of tribal colleges was not only a factor expressed by students in the literature review but also by all the student participants in this research

project. The individual and collective stories of all the students in this research project expressed great appreciation for their respective tribal colleges. Students spoke of the love they had for their institutions and how they had learned more about their tribal cultures, histories and languages through their attendance at their TCUs. In short, students gave respect and props to their TCUs. This was in alignment with in that I was actually able to hear the student's words, see their smiles and feel their energy.

Fear & Isolation

Also in alignment with the literature review findings was the theme of fear and isolation regarding American Indian student's concerns and perceptions of PWIs. Students were worried that PWIs student population size, campus size and classroom sizes would be overwhelming and that there would be no "one-on-one" opportunities for teaching and learning. American Indian students expressed anxiety and/or fear that they would be alone and the only Indian in their classrooms. They felt that if they were not able to connect with other American Indian students that they might begin to feel isolated and "lonely". These factors also align with Tinto's student departure theory in the form of incongruence between the student and the institution.

Relationships & Humor

The importance of comfortable, informal and sincere relationships with faculty, staff and students as a theme was in alignment with the literature review findings in both the areas of Indigenous research methodologies and in increasing student retention and

graduation rates for American Indian college students. In the section of my literature review regarding humor (Deloria Jr., 1969; Pratt, 1996; Nelson & Alexie, 2010) for this dissertation research, I was able to find a few articles that directly spoke about Indian humor. Many more stories that I located used the method of humor in their storytelling and referred to humor that is familiar and specific to American Indian communities. What I was unable to find in the literature that became a relevant theme in my research was both the specific statements of the importance of humor for AI college students and the actual practicing or existence of it in the methodology used by previous researchers working to better understand AI students and higher education.

Implications for Practice

Implications for practice or contributions to knowledge have developed from the six themes that resulted from this research with American Indian tribal college students with an aim to become more culturally attuned and validating for American Indian students. These themes have several implications for relevant constituents of higher education institutions. These relevant constituents include but are not limited to American Indian TCU students and family, TCU faculty, staff and community; PWI faculty, staff, policy makers, leaders, recruiters, admissions, financial aid officers, cultural support center directors, family-graduate housing resident directors, orientation leaders and anyone interested in American Indian student success, access and opportunities in higher education. The implications for this study relate to the importance of family, cultural acknowledgement and representation; American Indian orientation

program(s); tribal college connections and PWI representatives and the need for relationships.

Family, American Indian Cultural Acknowledgement & Representation

As stated earlier in the literature review section for this research, American Indian students attending TCUs have expressed feelings of gratitude, appreciation, pride, a sense of belonging/family and overall positive feelings and perceptions of their time spent in TCUs (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Pavel, 1999; Stein, 1992). This sentiment felt by AI TCU students brings me to my first implication for practice which is for PWIs to create welcoming environments for AI TCU students' families. Both the literature review and the students' stories strongly emphasized the importance of family. Family responsibilities, the support of family members, the pursuit of an education to take care of family and many other family related factors played into student's desire and/or ability to attend a predominantly white institution.

Predominantly white institutions could better accommodate and welcome prospective tribal college transfer students by extending this to the student's families. Providing assurance that there will be adequate housing available for the student and his/her/their family would be one way to better support American Indian students. However, it is not enough to say that there will be a place for students and their families should they decide to attend an institution that is both physically and culturally far from their homes and communities. Institutions must show American Indian students that there is more than just a physical place for them; that they will be acknowledged and valued.

PWIs could better include student's family by offering reduced pricing for passes or membership to facilities and events traditionally only available to students. Examples of this include but are not limited to campus gym membership, intramural activities, sporting event tickets, lectures, meal discounts on and around campus, discounted campus (the Procrastinator) movie tickets, and homecoming activities. As an American Indian, you are one part of many in your community. When our family is happy, we are happy, when our family is welcome, we are welcome, we are only home when our family is home. Predominantly white institutions must work to become home to students and their families not simply move them in and out like a product on "an assembly line" as one student so poignantly stated in chapter four.

As expressed in 93% of the survey responses to question number 17, it is important in American Indian student's educational path that they see students, faculty, teachers, staff and leaders who look like us and represent Native American culture. Institutions can make improved efforts to increase both the number of professional and support staff on their campuses. Current and new American Indian employees/representatives of the PWIs should be made accessible, visible and known to American Indian students, if possible, before classes begin. Encouraging AI student employment in visible areas around campus through more broad and targeted advertisement would help to increase the visibility and representation of AI students on campus.

The same 93% agreed or strongly agreed that should the student choose to attend a PWI, their culture and identity as an American Indian should be valued and

acknowledged by the institution. As stated in the literature review institutions can increase and enhance student persistence and graduation rates by, “Creating a campus in which students feel they belong and are valued, challenged, and affirmed by their peers and teachers” (Kuh & Love, 2001, p.112). Leaders and representatives of PWIs should specifically communicate and genuinely express that American Indians cultures, beliefs, ways of knowing, being and doing will be accepted and understood. Supporting activities that represent AI students and their respective cultures could make a significant statement about the PWIs value and concern for Indigenous students. Understanding cultural practices, such as smudging, gifting, humility, morning, respect for elders and many more would help to support, value and strengthen communication and sense of belonging at PWIs for AI students. Supporting AI students through activities and events that effect AI students and their communities would also show support for us. An example of a failed opportunity for support for collective identity by a PWI this academic year was the failure of a PWI’s student senate to pass a vote to support the institution’s American Indian student’s official letter of request to deny a pipeline through a reservation’s primary water source (DAPL).

PWIs also can support their Indigenous student communities by advocating for inclusive and culturally appropriate, representative days of recognition and holidays. An example of this could include PWIs derecognizing Columbus Day and replacing it with recognition of an Indigenous awareness and celebration focus. Walkways, student union buildings, residence halls, fitness/activity centers, support services offices/departments, cafeterias and other locations with high visibility could also display a variety of images,

stories, and quotes that paid tribute or recognized American Indian culture and contributions to society/community. The images below were photographed at my TCU visits in the spring and fall of 2016 (see Figure 3). These images were not rare or unique in their cultural representative nature, but were ubiquitous on all six tribal college campuses. I felt a sense of pride in seeing art, language, pictures, leaders, students, support, activities and other culturally relevant material so visible in the everyday environment of higher educational institutions.

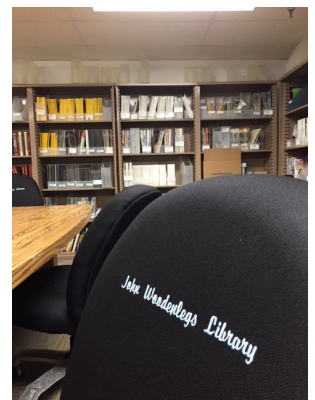


Figure 3. Montana TCU images.



Figure 3. Montana TCU images Continued.

Promoting both traditional and non-traditional activities that AI students and families participate in both on off campus would also indicate that PWIs were invested in their AI students culture and identities. Providing information and awareness about local and relevant opportunities and resources such as child care facilities, community organized races, basketball leagues, sweat lodge, hot springs, hiking, hunting, bingo, craft stores, family night discounts for movies, meals and events.

American Indian Student Orientation

Orientation is one element of PWI support, but is listed here separately due to its importance, detail and student participants specifically stating the need for this type of support. Orientation should be valuable, salient and relevant to American Indian tribal college transfer students. The average age of AI students interviewed for this project was 25.1 years of age. As a former orientation program leader for a PWI, I am familiar with the focus of programs for new students to the PWI. This emphasis of the information and activities in general orientation programs are primarily focused on residence hall living,

alcohol/tobacco use penalties, greek life, core curriculum, campus dining hall meal plans, residence hall policies, floor homecoming group activities, dating, and other information directed at young adults aged 17-18 years old who identify with the majority population. It is problematic to accept the idea that this type of orientation would be beneficial and relevant to AI TCU students. American Indian Students of non-traditional PWI age with college credits and/or associates degrees, many with families and who will not be living in campus dorms or residence halls could benefit from a separate orientation that was more inclusive and representative of their needs as a transfer student.

This orientation should encourage the attendance and participation of the student's family members. A tour of the campus should include spaces that are visited on a regular basis by AI students such as the American Indian Center, the American Indian in Science and Engineering Society (AISES) study room, Caring for Our Own Program (CO-OP), daycare centers on campus, fitness centers and sauna, student health, popular study locations, the library floors, financial aid offices, and other areas where current and former AI students visit frequently on campus. Orientation should also include an off-campus tour to help to familiarize new students to locations and services that other AI students have traditionally visited. Local grocery stores, daycares, community centers, YMCAs, health care facilities, hot springs, sweat lodge locations and contacts, employment services, human services, parks, trails, family activity centers, counseling centers, and other locations/services deemed appropriate through an assessment of current and past AI students off campus interest and needs.

Tribal College Connections & Representatives

Predominantly white institutions should increase their presence on tribal college campuses to better inform faculty, staff, students, families and the community of PWI support, resources and interest in potential TCU transfer students. TCU campus visits by PWI representatives should not be quick drop-ins but should be treated more like visits with relatives. Time should be allocated listening, speaking, sharing stories, food, information, ideas, knowledge and making relatives. Representatives should plan for longer visits that include visiting TCU students, staff, faculty, classrooms and attending community events. PWIs could increase efforts to help assist TCUs in bringing their AI students to the PWI for campus visits.

In a similar fashion as the AI focused orientation discussed above, PWI representation on TCU campus could be organized and promoted like a traveling early orientation. An American Indian tribal college transfer student traveling orientation would be host a prospective orientation fair at tribal college campuses. This traveling orientation program would show videos and pictures of the campus, family housing, current AI students, AI student and AI student's family friendly activities and the local environment. Support programs, campus resources, community resources, financial aid and tuition waiver information, admissions applications both hard copy and electronic would be available at the traveling orientation program. The program could provide food and drinks to both current students and alumni of the TCU and extend the invite to family and community members. This would allow for AI students, family and community to get a feel for the PWI and to see how the institution values and supports their educational

endeavors. It would also create an opportunity for goodwill, relationality, and for questions, concerns and comments.

Relationships

I believe that if we look and we listen with no intention except to learn from our environment, that we will always see that all things are connected. It was important for me to list relationships as an implication for practice not only because I believe that everything we do hinges on them, but most importantly because the students said this in all their stories. Relationships, good ones, sincere ones, informal and respectful ones, relationships that support, encourage, share and celebrate one another and always laugh together, those are the relationships that build bridges and create a simple, meaningful and magic connection. The intent of PWI support for AI students at any level, accepting, acknowledging and celebrating culture and identity, creating a sense of belonging, visiting and sharing is building and strengthening relationships. It was once said that too much emphasis was placed on form over findings, this is not true in our Indigenous communities; much like this dissertation study, the form was primary and necessary to even be able to look at and understand the findings. If PWIs wish to better support their current and prospective American Indian students, the implication listed above, of which all relate to relationships is of paramount importance to the success of AI students and to those interested in the success of the students and their communities.

Delimitations

There are several delimitations in the research for this project. This study was meant to better understand current American Indian tribal college student perceptions, beliefs and thoughts about PWIs and how those students believed PWIs could better support them should they choose to transfer. Delimitations in this study included geographic location/distance between locations, student's level of experience with the TCU, distinctive state funding opportunities for AI students, and survey/protocol organization.

The participants chosen for this survey were selected from TCUs located in Montana. Although there are seven TCUs located within the state of Montana, student representation of perceptions, thoughts, beliefs, desires may vary by geographic location of the TCU and therefor were limited in this research project. The study was limited specifically to American Indian students attending TCUs only in the state of Montana. Montana is a rural state with a population barely exceeding one million people. Montana's largest minority population are American Indians and the state also has the largest number of TCUs within its borders, these factors may contribute to different perceptions from those AI students attending TCUs in other states.

I chose to require that AI students be attending their institutions as a full-time student during the semester that we sat down for interviews. This study is limited to the experiences and perceptions of students attending their respective TCUs for any duration of time. Participant criteria should have required that students have at least one year or two semesters of experience/enrollment at a TCU to be selected for my research project.

This could have resulted in responses that were more realistic to what student's thoughts about what they may need to succeed at a PWI should they decide to transfer. This additional requirement for participation in the study could have also provided richer, more detailed descriptions of TCU experience and academic goals and desires.

The Montana University system currently offers multiple waivers for tuition at its state public institutions of higher education. One of the tuition waivers extends to "persons of one-fourth (1/4) American Indian blood or more or are enrolled members of a state recognized or federally recognized Indian tribe which is located within the boundaries of the State of Montana are eligible for a waiver upon demonstration of financial need" (Montana University System, 2017). The experience and needs of AI students attending TCUs in a state that offers a tuition waiver at a public PWI may greatly differ from those AI TCU students who do not have access to tuition waivers at PWIs within their own state boundaries. Although support in the form of monetary assistance, scholarships, etc. were listed in chapter two of this study as one of the greatest needs listed by AI students for support in higher education, my research did not record the participant's responses for financial resources often enough to justify an emerging theme. Responses may better align with the literature on AI TCU students who live in and attend schools located in states that do not have tuition waivers or assistance specifically for American Indian students.

An additional delimitation included survey/protocol strategy and content. This delimitation of the study may have affected the detail and significance of the student responses asked during toward the end of the interview. The topic of the question asked

in the interview was not only unaligned with the survey, but was never actually mentioned anywhere in the survey. The question asked students what they believed the leaders of PWIs should know about American Indian TCU students. This seem to come as a surprise for many students as they appeared to be taken by surprise. I also asked the students to think of the question in terms of what would they like to tell PWIs that would help them should they decide they were going to transfer to a PWI in the future. Students were genuinely interested in providing a meaningful response to this question as evidenced by their reactions immediately following the questions. Students paused anywhere from a few seconds to a couple of minutes before providing a response. Although there were many well thought out, original, unique and thought provoking responses, it is possible that with more time to think about the question, it is possible that responses could have been more personal, rich in detail, and clear. Simply providing a notice that the students would be asked for their feedback to this question so that they had time to process their ideas and thoughts more fully would have been beneficial to the students and to the findings. Stronger alignment of the survey and protocol questions could have been improved upon.

Recommendations for Future Research

Further research into the perceptions, beliefs and needs of American Indian tribal college students is needed to better understand how to increase access and opportunities for American Indian students in higher education. The following five recommendations

for future research with American Indian tribal college students could help to improve the future of American Indian education. My recommendations for future research include:

1. Incorporating a wider variety of American Indian students by visiting additional tribal colleges not included in this research.
2. Improved alignment with the survey instrument and interview protocol questions.
3. More time allocated for student sharing.
4. More clearly specifying criteria necessary to participate.
5. Increased sharing of both methodology and resources with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities associated with educational institutions.

Future research focused on American Indian tribal college students' perceptions of predominantly white institutions could broaden the scope of student participants by including tribal colleges not represented in this research project. An effort was made to visit with students at each of the seven tribal colleges within Montana and with one TCU in Wyoming, Washington and one in North Dakota. Due to time constraints, unpredictable weather conditions, distance between TCU locations, miscommunication with varying constituents within internal review boards, limited personal resources and other factors, only six TCUs were visited during the data collection time frame. Including American Indian students from a wider variety of TCUs located in multiple geographic areas could provide a richer story that may more closely represent the perceptions and desires of American Indian TCU students.

The survey instrument utilized for this research could be improved upon in both efficiency and clarity. The survey included three questions (13, 14, & 15) that could have been combined and condensed as an effort to decrease redundancy and confusion for the participants. A comment could have been added to the survey asking the student to think about two questions that would be included in the interview protocol. The interview protocol asked students what they would like to share about their TCU experience that might help those unfamiliar with a TCU to better understand the student's experience or how it might affect attending a PWI. The second part of this question asked students to provide a suggestion or recommendation to the leaders of PWIs that would help those types of institutions be better able to support potential TCU transfer students. These two questions seem to have taken the students by surprise as many of them asked for time to think about the question and their response. Students were asked to take a survey before beginning the interview. Future research could provide a layout of the interview protocol for students to review before the student began to share in the audio recorded format.

Most of the students interviewed for this research were more than generous with their time and stories, sharing and laughing continued in many cases for much longer after the audio recorded portion of the interview (protocol) had ended. In other cases, the interview felt slightly rushed as the student may have not been fully informed about the time involved to complete both the survey and the interview. Future research should consider providing a more accurate description of the steps involved in the interview. Although surveys and interviews could be completed with prodigious detail within 30

minutes, all participants should be allowed a full hour for additional sharing and visiting that could add to the richness of the interview experience.

Future research may want to consider only interviewing American Indian TCU students with at least one full year of tribal college experience. Students with less than one year experience attending the TCU may not have had opportunities to fully explore their institutions and in turn are unable to provide a richer description of that experience for the benefit of others who have not had TCU experience.

My final recommendation is one that involves the communication of methodology by Indigenous researchers in doing work with and for Indigenous communities including institutions of higher education. Communication and familiarity with Indigenous research methodologies continues to grow in understanding, acceptance, acknowledgement, celebration and utilization. Although familiarity with Indigenous research methodology and Indigenous researchers and scholars are gaining a foothold in academia, I found through my experience in this project that many gatekeepers were unfamiliar with Indigenous research methodology. Gatekeepers such as members of internal review boards and tribal college faculty and staff who can determine whether contact with TCU students will be allowed for research were for the most part very kind, generous, excited and helpful in my communications with them. However, there seemed to be a misunderstanding in some cases of what Indigenous research methodology (IRM) is and what methods are included in an IRM framework. This unfamiliarity led to challenges in acceptance of my methodology and access to students at TCUs. The sharing of resources with gatekeepers in advance of any IRB application or request to

visit with TCUs could be beneficial to future research. Materials could be offered to members of IRB committees and preliminary discussion of the unique methods practiced within IRM could help to improve the research process.

It should be communicated by Indigenous researchers working to learn more about our Native communities that this is our responsibility and shared commitment to the past, present and future generation of our Indigenous people. Responsibility, respect, relevance and reciprocity should be communicated not just as a practice but as the fiber who we are as Indigenous researchers who work to better our own Indigenous communities through culturally appropriate practices. It is imperative to the research purpose, findings and most importantly to those sharing their stories that their voices be heard. Strengthening gatekeeper relationships through the sharing of relevant materials and resources could assist with our voices being included in the larger narrative of higher education.

Chapter Summary

A synopsis of each of the fifteen stories that were shared with me for this project was provided in chapter four. I would like to offer a story that summarizes the student's words to bring together all the stories as one collective voice, that voice will be called "Akbaachimmalaaché".

Akbaachimmalaaché lives with her family, friends and community in a place that is full of good hunting, clean water, and generous land. The land provides food, shelter and stories for Akbaachimmalaaché and her people to live and thrive together.

Akbaachimmalaaché is very happy and content, until one day the quiet stories that have been whispered around the fires become less quiet to her. She becomes curious about the stories, which speak of a different hunting ground that is far from her home. This new or different hunting ground or land, which she has never been to or seen, sounds exciting to her. The stories of the different hunting ground speak of fertile land where fruits and vegetables she has never tasted grow and where strangers learn and teach new trade and crafts to one another.

Akbaachimmalaaché's curiosity and interest grow with each new story she hears about the different hunting ground. She wants to go; she wants to hunt in a new place. She wants to learn to grow new foods, find new spices, hunt new animals and bring things back to her home that will enrich her people's community. She wants to learn from the new hunting ground and return home to contribute to her people's way of life... but she is scared. The stories of the different hunting ground are exciting to her, but they are also full of descriptions of the dangers that live there. The stories told by those who have attempted the journey in the past speak of an animal that Akbaachimmalaaché is unfamiliar with. The animal is described as "big" and "scary". The animal is said to be unkind and powerful and is everywhere in the new hunting grounds. Stories speak of those looking to hunt in the unfamiliar land as getting lost and falling prey to the animal. After considering the challenges of making the journey to the new hunting ground, Akbaachimmalaaché decides that the benefit should overshadow the fear and that she can make the journey for her people. She believes that with the right tools, support,

communication and guidance she can navigate the new hunting ground and the animal that has caused fear can be understood.

She does not plan to make the journey alone as she knows that her soul is intricately intertwined with that of her family. With the help of her family and with a fuller, more detailed story of the animal and how to work with it rather than to fear it, she knows that others in her community would want to make the journey as well. She does not want other hunters and warriors to make the journey feeling afraid of what they have not seen only to return home with broken feathers. She wants those that live in the different hunting ground to accept, understand and learn from her and her people too. She wants to share with them and be able to ask them questions without fear. She wants them to visit her home and her people and to understand them and to share stories that will help other hunters and warriors on the journey to the hunting ground.

She wants to change the story to one that includes successful hunting parties, good trades, new skills in crafts, new plants, herbs and animals and how they can be understood for the greater good of the people and the land. The stories should talk of new friends, laughter and new experiences to light the fires of the next who wish to walk in the path toward the new hunting ground... a new place to count coup in a different way. She understands that the resources she needs to succeed at changing the story already exist. She only wants to know how to utilize the resources and to know that she is not alone in her journey. She begins her journey and she is scared, but with her family pushing her forward she keeps advancing, knowing that her success is their success. Just

when the fire that lights her path feels like it is beginning to fade... she sees something up ahead... it looks like... owl and coyote are looking for something...

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

**SUBJECT CONSENT FORM FOR
PARTICIPATION IN HUMAN RESEARCH FOR
MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY**

Indigenous Tribal College Student Perceptions of Predominantly White Institutions

Cheryl Polacek, Graduate Student Researcher
139 Reid Hall, 406-599-1311
runccp@gmail.com

Participation:

You are being asked to participate in a research study of student perceptions and opinions related to higher education. The purpose of this study is to further understand the experience that American Indian tribal college students have about predominantly white institutions. Results from the study may help to identify factors and/or qualities that predominantly white four-year colleges and universities can provide in promoting and contributing to the success of American Indian Tribal college students. The survey responses may help us to better understand what factors contribute to the support of American Indian students in higher education. Participants for this study were selected using a convenience sample. Eligibility requires the participant to be a self-identified American Indian currently attending a tribal college. Participants must be 18 years of age or older to participate in this study. **Participation is entirely voluntary** and you can choose to not answer any questions you do not feel comfortable with and can stop at any time. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to fill out a short paper survey and to participate in a 10-20 minute interview that will be electronically recorded. The recorded interviews will then be transcribed verbatim. You may choose to have any information that might identify you personally be removed from the transcription. Only the interviewer will have access to the recording of your interview. You may **choose to have your survey and interview remain anonymous** and a pseudonym will be provided **or you may choose to attach your name to your interview, it is entirely up to you.**

Benefits/Risks to Participant:

By providing information about your current and past academic experiences, initiatives can be made to better support present and prospective Native American students at predominantly white institutions should they have the desire to matriculate. Loss of personal time due to participating in the survey and interview are the only foreseen risks. Should you experience discomfort from the survey or interview at any point in time, you may choose to stop the survey/interview with no questions asked. Upon completion of the survey and interview you have your choice to select one gift as a token of appreciation for your time, energy, stories and participation today. Gift options will include an MSU Pow Wow Basketball tournament t-shirt or hat, a buffalo head nickel necklace, a Pendleton coin purse or a \$10 gift certificate to The Firecrackerman's Fireworks.

If you have questions regarding this research project you may contact Cheryl Polacek at 406-599-1311 or runccp@gmail.com. If you have additional questions about the rights of human subjects you may contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, Mark Quinn at (406) 994-4707 or mquinn@montana.edu.

Statement of Consent:

AUTHORIZATION: I have read the above information. I am comfortable with proceeding. I, _____ (name of participant) understand I can call or email and ask any questions I had regarding the survey. By responding to the survey and returning it I am implying my consent to participate.

Signature of Participant: _____

Investigator: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND PROTOCOL

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol Project: Tribal College Student Perceptions of Predominantly White Institutions

Location of Interview:

Date:

Time:

Interviewee/participant:

Interviewer: Cheryl Polacek

Time spent with participant before conducting interview (my notes):

Project Description: Two to three current full or part-time tribal college American Indian students will be interviewed individually at a location of their choosing; the interview will immediately follow a short paper survey that the student will be asked to complete. Participants will be asked in the interview to share their perceptions, opinions and thoughts about predominantly white institutions and if the student has any desire to matriculate to a PWI in the future. The purpose of this study is meant to understand the perceptions of self-identified American Indian students attending tribal college. The Interviews will be 10-20 minutes in duration and will be recorded electronically on my personal computer. The recorded interviews will be transcribed and stored in a password-protected folder. Upon completion of the research and dissertation project, all data will be erased and/or destroyed.

Protocol & Questions:

- 1.) **Briefly look over paper survey and ask any questions that might help to better understand where the student attended K-12, previous TCU's, vocational tech, job core, GED, etc. And, how much time was spent in these learning institutions. This procedure will help for me to feel confident that the participant meets the criteria for this dissertation project.**
- 2.) **Ask the student about their response to the Likert scale question regarding cultural identity and tribal or reservation affiliation/connection.**
- 3.) **Do you feel that your Tribal College experience influenced or shaped your cultural identity (Indigenous self)? And if yes, how so? If no, why not?**
- 4.) **What predominantly white institutions do you feel the most familiar with? Why do you feel you are most familiar with this one? Do you have any interest in attending/transferring to any of these institutions in the future? Why or why not?**

- 5.) Do you feel any differently about attending a PWI now as opposed to before you attended (fill in the blank with the respective TCU)?... (like when you were in high school?)
- 6.) In general how do you feel about predominantly white institutions, like MSU, UofM, etc.? (can help prompt by asking if for the student to use describing words that come to mind)
- 7.) Where do you get your information about predominantly white institutions? (exam: friends, family, classes, media, etc.)
- 8.) Is there anything specific that makes you hesitant or excited for... should you decide to attend a predominantly white institution in the future?
- 9.) Is there anything else that you would like to share about your tribal college experience that would help those who have never attended one to understand more about the experience and how it might relate to or affect attending a PWI?
- 10.) If you could tell the leaders of predominantly white institutions about you and your tribal college experience and previous educational experiences, what would it be? What do you think they need to know about American Indian students who might be interested in attending a predominantly white institution?
- 11.) Give thanks to the individual for participating in the interview. Ask the participant if they would like to provide their real name or if they would like to remain anonymous and assure them that all of their responses will be confidential. Inform the student that they have the option to review his/hers full interview after it has been transcribed. And, that the student also can omit or add anything to the transcribed interview so that it more accurately reflects their experience, perceptions and thoughts. Give them a culturally appropriate gift to acknowledge their time and contributions to the project: Pendleton coin purse, buffalo head nickel necklace, MSU Pow Wow t-shirt/hat or \$10 gift certificate to *The Firecrackerman's Fireworks* at Crow Park.

APPENDIX C

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

By providing your initials below you agree to participate in this survey. All of your responses will remain anonymous, unless you choose to provide your Indian name.

1.) What is the name of the tribal college that you are currently attending?

2.) Are you currently a full-time or part-time student? _____

3.) Please circle your gender. Female Male Other

4.) Please circle the category below that best describes your age group?

18-25 26-35 36-50 51-61 62+

5.) Are you a member of a federally or state recognized tribe or a tribe that has had its recognition terminated? Yes No Unsure

6.) If you answered yes to the above question, what is your tribal affiliation?

7.) Did you attend any of your K-12 education at a school on or near a reservation? If yes, where was your school located and how long did you attend? _____

8.) Have you ever attended or taken credits at another college? _____, if yes, at which colleges/institutions have you attended?

9.) While attending tribal college, where and with whom do you primarily reside?

Using the scale below please circle the option that most closely reflects how you feel about each of the statements provided in this part of the survey.

10.) *I feel very connected to a tribe or reservation and to my culture as an American Indian.*

Strongly Agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly Disagree.

11.) *Since attending tribal college, I feel that I have become more connected to my identity as an American Indian.*

Strongly Agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly Disagree.

12.) *I am interested in attending a predominantly white institution (PWI) to earn a bachelor degree at some point in the future.*

Strongly Agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly Disagree.

13.) *I am interested in attending a predominantly white institution (PWI) to earn a master degree at some point in the future.*

Strongly Agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly Disagree.

14.) *I am interested in attending a predominantly white institution (PWI) to earn a doctorate degree at some point in the future.*

Strongly Agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly Disagree.

15.) *I am interested in attending a predominantly white institution (PWI) to earn a bachelor, master or doctorate degree at some point in the future.*

Strongly Agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly Disagree.

16.) *It is important to me that should I choose to attend a PWI, my culture and identity as an American Indian should be valued and acknowledged by the institution.*

Strongly Agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly Disagree.

17.) *It is important to me in my educational path that I see students, faculty, teachers, staff and leaders that look like me and who represent Native American culture.*

Strongly Agree. Agree. Neutral. Disagree. Strongly Disagree.

18.) *If you decided to attend a PWI away from your home, would anyone accompany you? And if so, who would be going with you?*

19.) Please list anything that you are hesitant about should you decide to go to school at a predominantly white institution.

20.) Please list anything that you are looking forward to should you decide to go to school at a predominantly white institution.

This is the end of the survey. Thank you for your time today. Please let me know you have completed this part and we will both move onto the interview together.

APPENDIX D

SKC IRB PROTOCOL



Salish Kootenai College

P.O. Box 70
Pablo, MT 59855
Ph. (406) 275-4800
Fax (406) 275-4801



November 16, 2015

Ms. Cheryl Polacek Birdhat
3401 Fallon, #1D
Bozeman, MT 59718

IRB Protocol #2015_16

Title of Project: Tribal College Student Perceptions of Predominantly White Institutions

Dear Ms. Birdhat:

This letter serves as official notification of the approval of your project by the Salish Kootenai College Institutional Review Board. Your project Your protocol was reviewed via an expedited review process and is in compliance with Salish Kootenai College's Institutional Review Board policies, this institution's Federal Wide Assurance FWA00010681 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46).

You are authorized to implement this project as of the date of approval listed below.

The date of approval for your project is:	11/16/2015
This approval is valid until:	11/15/2016

As the principal investigator, you are responsible for reporting to this Institutional Review Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:

- Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to reoccur;
- Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the project participants;
- Any serious event that in the opinion of the local researcher was unanticipated, involved unexpected risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures.

The SKC IRB must be notified of any changes to the approved protocol. Continuing review is required for projects that continue beyond one year from the approval date. Your approval will expire or require continuing review on the date indicated above. The principal investigator must also advise the Board when this study is finished or discontinued. The form for reporting completion of the project can be located on the Salish Kootenai College Institutional Review Board website, <http://irb.skcc.edu/>.

If you have any questions, please contact Stacey Sherwin, IRB Administrator, at (406) 275-4931 or stacey_sherwin@skcc.edu.

Stacey Sherwin, Ph.D.
SKC IRB Administrator.

APPENDIX E

LBHC IRB APPROVAL LETTER



LITTLE BIG HORN COLLEGE

Institutional Review Board (IRB) FWA 00017400

8645 S. Weaver Drive • PO Box 370

Crow Agency, MT 59022

(406) 638-3158

www.lbhc.edu

"Education is your greatest weapon. With education you are the white man's equal, without education you are his victim and so shall remain all of your lives. Study, learn, help one another always. Remember there is only poverty and misery in idleness and dreams - but in work there is self-respect and independence."
- Chief Plenty Coups

President

Dr. David Yarlott, Jr.
davidyarlott@lbhc.edu
(406) 638-3107

Dean of Administration

David Small
smalld@lbhc.edu
(406) 638-3110

Dean of Academics

Frederica Lefthand
lefthandfv@lbhc.edu
(406) 638-3131

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Te-Atta Old Bear
oldbear@lbhc.edu
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Chief Finance Officer

Aldan Good Luck
goodluckav@lbhc.edu
(406) 638-3152

Chief Information Officer

Franklin Cooper
cooperf@lbhc.edu
(406) 638-3161

Human Resources

Shaleen Old Coyote
oldcoyotes@lbhc.edu
(406) 638-3148

February 24, 2016

Cheryl Polacek
3401 Fallon, #1D
Bozeman, MT 59718

LBHC IRB #: 2016-02-01

Project: American Indian Tribal College Student Perceptions of Predominantly White Institutions, A Qualitative Study.

Approval Date: February 24, 2016
Expiration Date: February 23, 2017

Category: EXEMPT

Dear Ms. Polacek:

This letter is to officially notify you of the decision of your application. The Little Big Horn College IRB has APPROVED the research protocol that was submitted on December 18, 2015; American Indian Tribal College Student Perceptions of Predominantly White Institutions, A Qualitative Study.

For projects which continue beyond one year from the starting date, the IRB will request continuing review and update of the research project. There is no grace period beyond one year from the last approval date. In order to avoid lapses in approval of your research and the possible suspension of the subject enrollments, please submit your Renewal request at least four (4) weeks before the protocol's expiration date of February 23, 2017. It is your responsibility to submit your research protocol for continuing review, renewal, or updates.

You must report any unanticipated or adverse events of a serious nature resulting from implementation of this protocol to the IRB office immediately, within five (5) working days.

You must report any proposed changes or protocol modifications for IRB approval at least four (4) weeks before you want to implement them. All protocol deviations must be reported to the IRB within five (5) working days.

The investigator must also advise the IRB when this study is finished or discontinued by completing the proper forms. Please submit a close-out form no longer than two (2) weeks after ending your research protocol.

Please include the assigned IRB number on the Informed Consent Forms and submit a copy of the forms to the IRB office with the number included.

If you have any questions, please contact Mandy Plain Feather, IRB Administrator, at 406-638-3108 or email at mandy@lbhc.edu with a cc to takeshorses@lbhc.edu & lefthandfv@lbhc.edu.

Sincerely,

Frederica Lefthand
Frederica Lefthand,
Chair for the IRB

Accredited by Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

APPENDIX F

CHIEF DULL KNIFE IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Chief Dull Knife College
Behavioral and Social Science Institutional Review Board
1 College Drive, Lame Deer, MT 59043
FWA Number 00020985

November 23, 2015

Protocol Title: American Indian Tribal College Student Perceptions of
Predominantly White Institutions, A Qualitative Study.

Type of Review: Initial Review—Exempt

IRB Staff Contact: Joan Hantz Phone: 406 477 8293 email:
jhantz@cdkc.edu

The Behavioral and Social Sciences IRB approved by exempt review, as
indicated below.

Date of IRB approval: November 23, 2013

Research has been approved for 6 months from the date of IRB review. A
final report must be provided to the IRB and all records relating to this
project. A final report must be provided to the IRB and all records relating
to the research (including signed consent forms) must be retained and
available for audit for at least 3 years after the research had ended.

It is the responsibility of the investigator, Cheryl Polacek Birdhat and
research staff to promptly report to the IRB any serious, unexpected and
related adverse events and potential unanticipated problems involving risks
to subjects or others.

This approval is issued under Chief Dull Knife College's Federal wide
Assurance #00020985.

Joan Hantz



IRB Chair
Chief Dull Knife College

APPENDIX G

STONE CHILD COLLEGE IRB APPROVAL LETTER

STONE CHILD COLLEGE

8294 Upper Box Elder Road
Box Elder, MT 59521

Phone: (406)395-4875
FAX: (406)395-4836

April 1, 2016

Cheryl Polacek Birdhat
3402 Fallon, #1D
Bozeman, MT 59718

Dear Ms. Birdhat,

We have reviewed your application entitled, "American Indian Student Perceptions of Predominantly White Institutions," and have determined that your brief written survey and oral follow-up is exempt from a full IRB review. We note that the written survey requires no identifiers which would identify a particular student and that the questions asked are of a general nature. Although the questions center around how the respondent regards PWIs, it does not appear that the answers would in any way adversely affect the respondent.

As for the personal interview, the discussion would seem to be an extension of the written survey. Obviously, because the oral interview is less highly structured than the written survey, it is important that the interviewer adhere to the prescribed questions and not ask questions outside of the protocol.

Further, we see no need for any subject to give the researcher his/her name, even though you have made it optional.

Should there be any major changes in the protocol, or the written survey questions, we request to be informed. In addition, please provide us a final report showing the results of your survey.

We look forward to your report and if we can do anything to help facilitate your work here at Stone Child College don't hesitate to ask.

Sincerely,


Nathaniel St. Pierre, Ed. D.
President

APPENDIX H

AANIIH NAKODA COLLEGE IRB APPROVAL LETTER



AANIIH NAKODA COLLEGE



July 21, 2016

Cheryl Polacek Birdhat
208 N. Terry
Hardin, MT 59034

RE: IRB Request

Ms. Birdhat,

Thank you for the submission of your IRB request for your research entitled, "American Indian Student Perceptions of Predominantly White Institutions." Members of ANC's IRB have evaluated your application and we have concluded that the research be approved for one year to this date of July 21, 2017.

We would like to emphasize the importance of the protection of any data from this study. Additionally, in order to establish and maintain trust, our relationship will demand that we keep an open avenue of communication throughout the course of this study, as well as, the use or reporting the data found in the research.

If there are any additional changes to your research protocol, study focus, or other aspect to your study, please notify the ANC IRB so that we can ascertain whether a full review is necessary. Upon completion, the IRB also requests the sharing of your conclusions of your research. If your research goes beyond one year, it will be necessary to seek IRB approval to continue at that time. On behalf of Aaniiih Nakoda College, I wish you the best of luck in completing your research.

Sincerely,

Sean Chandler, Chair
ANC Institutional Review Board
Aaniiih Nakoda College
406-353-2607 ext. 295
schandler@ancollege.edu

APPENDIX I

FORT PECK COMMUNITY COLLEGE IRB APPROVAL LETTER



Fort Peck Tribal Institutional Review Board

For the Protection of Human Subjects
FWA00019355

Fort Peck Community College
Box 398
Poplar, MT 59255
406-768-5555

Chair: Robert McAnally
406-768-8377
rmcassin@gmail.com

Administrator: Joy Toavs
406-768-5555
jtoavs@fpcc.edu



MEMORANDUM

TO: Cheryl Polacek Birdhat

FROM: Robert McAnally *Robert McAnally*
Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

DATE: October 13, 2016

SUBJECT: Tribal College Student Perceptions of Predominantly White Institutions

The above proposal was reviewed by expedited review by the Institutional Review Board on October 13, 2016. This proposal is now approved for a period of one-year and also granted a fee waiver.

Please keep track of the number of subjects who participate in the study and of any unexpected or adverse consequences of the research. If there are any adverse consequences, please report them to the committee as soon as possible. If there are serious adverse consequences, please suspend the research until the situation has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board.

Any changes in the human subjects' aspects of the research should be approved by the committee before they are implemented.

It is the investigator's responsibility to inform subjects about the risks and benefits of the research. Although the subject's signing of the consent form, documents this process, you, as the investigator should be sure that the subject understands it. Please remember that subjects should receive a copy of the consent form and that you should keep a signed copy for your records.

In one year, you will be sent a questionnaire asking for information about the progress of the research. The information that you provide will be used to determine whether the committee will give continuing approval for another year. If the research is still in progress in 5 years, a complete new application will be required.

Note that the IRB requests opportunity to review for cultural appropriateness all manuscripts or presentations resulting from this research project. Please provide a draft at least one month prior to publication. Also, Fort Peck Tribes request a copy of all publications and products deriving from research projects to be submitted to the FPCC Library Archives.