



The first semester experiences of American Indian transfer students  
by Cindy Ann Dell

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment Of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of  
Education

Montana State University

© Copyright by Cindy Ann Dell (2000)

**Abstract:**

American Indian College students have lower persistence rates than all other minority groups. A qualitative study was conducted to better understand the experiences of seven American Indian students as they transferred from a Montana tribal college to a Montana university. The goal was to understand how their experiences related to persistence factors, including background characteristics, academic integration, social integration, environmental pull, organizational variables and attitudes. Personal determination appeared to be an important component related to background characteristics. It was also found that students who acquired effective study and learning strategies performed better academically and developed positive attitudes about themselves and their continued enrollment. Social integration was less important, since they depended upon their families for social, emotional and financial support. Environment pull was a factor for the participants, but all persisted regardless of the difficulties they experienced. It appeared that students experienced a four-part adjustment to the transfer, including (a) Expectations and Apprehension, (b) Acclimation, (c) Reality, and (d) Adjustment vs. Discouragement. It was concluded that first semester experiences were important for persistence, but that a longitudinal study should be conducted to understand implications of attitudinal development toward the University, which ultimately leads to the decision to depart or remain. A quantitative approach to determine the validity of adjustment phases should also be conducted.

THE FIRST SEMESTER  
EXPERIENCES OF AMERICAN INDIAN TRANSFER STUDENTS

by  
Cindy Ann Dell

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree

of  
Doctor of Education

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY – BOZEMAN  
Bozeman Montana

April, 2000

D378  
D38

APPROVAL

of a dissertation submitted by

Cindy Ann Dell

This dissertation has been read by each member of the dissertation committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citations, bibliographic style and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies

Dr. Richard Howard *Richard Howard* April 12, 2000  
Signature Date

Approved for the Department of Education

Dr. Gloria Gregg *Gloria Gregg* April 12, 2000  
Signature Date

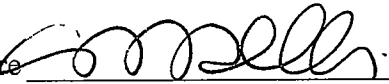
Approved for the College of Graduate Studies

Dr. Bruce R. McLeod *Bruce R. McLeod* 4-17-00  
Signature Date

## STATEMENT OF PERMISSION TO USE

In presenting this dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a doctoral degree at Montana State University, I agree that the Library shall make it available to borrowers under rules of the Library. I further agree that copying of this dissertation is allowable only for scholarly purposes, consistent with "fair use" as prescribed in the U.S. Copyright Law. Requests for extensive copying or reproduction of this thesis should be referred to Bell & Howell Information and Learning, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor Michigan, 48106, to whom I have granted "the exclusive right to reproduce and distribute my dissertation in and from microform along with the non-exclusive right to reproduce and distribute my abstract in any format in whole or in part."

Signature



Date

April 13, 2000

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Problem .....	2
Purpose of the Study .....	5
Theoretical Framework .....	6
The Longitudinal Model of the Type of Factors that Affect Retention Decisions .....	7
Research Questions .....	9
Significance of the Study .....	10
Assumptions .....	10
Limitations .....	10
Format of Study .....	11
Summary .....	12
2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .....	14
Retention and Persistence .....	14
The Model of Institutional Departure .....	15
The Longitudinal Model of the Type of Factors that Affect Retention Decisions .....	20
Persistence Factors .....	26
Adult Students .....	28
Commuter Students .....	30
Institutional Interventions .....	32
Overcoming Barriers .....	34
Summary .....	36
Minority Student Persistence .....	37
Individual Characteristics .....	38
Institutional Interventions .....	40
Success Among Minority Students .....	47
Summary .....	49
Persistence of American Indian Students .....	50
National Trends for American Indian Enrollment and Completion .....	51
American Indian Enrollment and Completion Trends in Montana .....	53
Considering American Indian Persistence .....	54
Institutional Interventions .....	58
Experiencing Success .....	60
Summary .....	62
Two-Year Colleges .....	62
Enrollment Patterns .....	63
Transfer and Retention Issues .....	64
Benefits of Community Colleges .....	66

Tribal Colleges.....	67
The Transfer Process at the Montana University.....	71
Summary.....	72
<b>3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>75</b>
Statement of the Problem, Purpose and Research Questions.....	75
The Qualitative Approach to Research.....	76
Case Study.....	76
Grounded Theory.....	77
Research Design.....	78
The Overall Strategy for the Research.....	79
The Participants.....	81
Entering the Field.....	82
The Role of the Researcher.....	89
Methods to Collect the Data.....	91
Data Management.....	92
Strategies for Data Analysis.....	92
Trustworthiness of the Research.....	96
Timeline to Conduct Research.....	99
Summary.....	99
<b>4. INDIVIDUAL PROFILES AND ADJUSTMENT.....</b>	<b>102</b>
Individual Profiles.....	102
James.....	102
Marie.....	107
Karen.....	110
Charles.....	115
Maggie.....	117
Theresa.....	122
Susan.....	126
Group Profile.....	131
Phases of the Semester.....	132
Phase One: Expectations and Apprehension.....	132
Phase Two: Acclimation.....	135
Phase Three: Reality.....	137
Phase Four: Adjustment or Discouragement.....	143
Final Adjustment.....	146
<b>5. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS.....</b>	<b>149</b>
Theoretical Framework.....	150
Background Characteristics.....	151
Organizational Variables.....	160
Academic Integration.....	163

Social Integration .....	173
Environmental Pull .....	185
Attitudes .....	189
Institutional Fit and Commitment.....	194
Intent to Leave .....	195
Conclusion .....	196
Modifications to the Model.....	198
Background Characteristics .....	198
Environmental Pull .....	201
Organizational Variables .....	202
Academic Integration.....	202
Social Integration.....	202
Institutional Fit and Commitment.....	203
Summary .....	205
How are students' first semester experiences related to social or academic integration? .....	205
Do environmental pull factors relate to their decision to remain or depart? .....	206
Do background characteristics relate to their decision to remain or depart?.....	206
6. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION .....	208
Summary of the Problem, Methodology, Results and Conclusions .....	208
Important Findings.....	209
Role of Personal Determination.....	209
Changes in Grade Point Averages .....	210
Learning Skills.....	210
Environmental Pull .....	211
Importance of Extended Family.....	211
Social Integration.....	212
What Lessons Have Been Learned? .....	213
Effective Learning Skills Must be Acquired .....	213
Family Support is Profoundly Important to American Indian College Students .....	213
Expectations of Racism.....	214
Classroom Activities.....	214
Value of Work and Life Experiences.....	215
Personal Determination Contributes to Success .....	215
Phases of Adjustment Emerged .....	216
Limitations of the Study.....	216
Recommendations.....	217
Future Research .....	217
Modification to The Longitudinal Model of the Type of Factors that Affect Retention Decisions .....	219
Implementation of Findings.....	220

Summary ..... 221

REFERENCES ..... 224

APPENDICES ..... 236

    APPENDIX A. Interview Questions..... 239

    APPENDIX B. Informed Consent..... 244

    APPENDIX C. Personal Data Sheet..... 247

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1-1. Comparison of White and American Indian Transfer Student First Year Persistence at Montana University, 1990-1995 .....	4
1-2. Percentage of White and American Indian Transfer Students Attending Only One Term, 1994-1999.....	5
2-1. High School and College Graduates Among American Indian and US Population Rates in 1990 .....	52
2-2. College Graduation Rates at NCAA Division I Institutions, 1995-1996 .....	52
2-3. Comparison of American Indian and Overall Montana Student 1990 Graduation Rates.....	54
3-1. Timeline to Conduct Research .....	100
4-1. Group Characteristics .....	133
5-1. High School, the Tribal College and Montana University Grade Point Averages .....	152
5-2. Degree of Change in Grade Point Averages between High School, the Tribal College and Montana University.....	154
5-3. Components of Personal Determination.....	158
5-4. Summary of Background Characteristics .....	159
5-5. Expressed Satisfaction with Classroom Performance .....	168
5-6. Effective Study and Learning Strategies .....	169
5-7. Amount of Transfer Shock .....	170
5-8. Making New Friends in Class .....	179
5-9. Utilization of Old Friends.....	180
5-10. Expanded Friendships Beyond the Classroom or Campus.....	181

1-A. Stage One Interview Questions .....	238
2-A. Stage Two Interview Questions.....	239
3-A. Stage Three Interview Questions.....	240
4-A. Stage Four Interview Questions.....	241
5-A. Stage Five Interview Questions for Returning Participants .....	242
6-A. Interview Questions for Withdrawing Participants .....	243

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
2-1. A Model of Institutional Departure .....	18
2-2. Longitudinal Model of the Type of Factors that Affect Retention Decisions .....	25
3-1. Contact Summary Sheet .....	93
3-2. Components of Data Analysis .....	94
4-1. Factors of Adjustment .....	148
5-1. GPA Patterns Since High School .....	153
5-2. Factors that Contributed to Academic Integration .....	174
5-3. Factors that Inhibited Academic Integration .....	175
5-4. Factors that Contributed to Social Integration.....	183
5-5. Factors that Inhibited Social Integration .....	184
5-6. Sources of Environmental Pull .....	187
5-7. Sources of Positive Attitudes.....	192
5-8. Sources of Negative Attitudes .....	193

## ABSTRACT

American Indian College students have lower persistence rates than all other minority groups. A qualitative study was conducted to better understand the experiences of seven American Indian students as they transferred from a Montana tribal college to a Montana university. The goal was to understand how their experiences related to persistence factors, including background characteristics, academic integration, social integration, environmental pull, organizational variables and attitudes. Personal determination appeared to be an important component related to background characteristics. It was also found that students who acquired effective study and learning strategies performed better academically and developed positive attitudes about themselves and their continued enrollment. Social integration was less important, since they depended upon their families for social, emotional and financial support. Environment pull was a factor for the participants, but all persisted regardless of the difficulties they experienced. It appeared that students experienced a four-part adjustment to the transfer, including (a) Expectations and Apprehension, (b) Acclimation, (c) Reality, and (d) Adjustment vs. Discouragement. It was concluded that first semester experiences were important for persistence, but that a longitudinal study should be conducted to understand implications of attitudinal development toward the University, which ultimately leads to the decision to depart or remain. A quantitative approach to determine the validity of adjustment phases should also be conducted.

## CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Colleges and universities across the United States are experiencing an increase of American Indian<sup>1</sup> students on their campuses. From 1976 to 1994, institutions of higher education witnessed a 67 percent increase in American Indian student enrollment, compared to a 30 percent increase in overall student enrollment. During this time, the six-year graduation rate for American Indians was about 36 percent, compared to 56 percent overall. More American Indians are enrolling in higher education, but their persistence rates are much lower than the general population (Pavel, Skinner, Farris, Cahalan, Tippeconnic, & Stein, 1998).

The enrollment patterns in Montana mirror those of the nation. Between 1984 and 1995, Montana public colleges and universities saw a 58 percent increase in American Indian student enrollment, but American Indians earned only two percent of all bachelors degrees granted in Montana in 1996 (Pavel et al., 1998). These statistics reveal that more American Indians are enrolling in Montana's institutions of higher education, but like the nation in general, few persist long enough to earn bachelor's degrees.

---

<sup>1</sup> There are several names that may be attached to particular groups. For the purpose of this study, American Indian refers to the groups of people who identify themselves with any of the Indian Tribes. Unless the term "Native American" is used within a quote from another researcher, American Indian will be used consistently throughout the paper.

These circumstances are also reflected at a university located in south central Montana. Montana University<sup>2</sup> (MU) serves the surrounding region of Eastern Montana and Northern Wyoming. Enrollment at Montana University averages 3,700 students per semester. Because of its location, it serves students who transfer from community colleges in Montana and Wyoming, including Montana's seven tribal colleges. Between 1994 and 1999, an annual average of 687 students transferred to Montana University -- about six percent of those came from tribal colleges.

### Problem

Evidence regarding American Indian students at Montana University reveals a problem of low persistence. Between 1990-1994, the first year persistence rate<sup>3</sup> for white students at Montana University was 68 percent, while 57 percent for American Indians (Montana University Institutional Report, 1996). Meaningful statistical comparison between these groups was confounded and statistically troublesome since the number of American Indian transfer students was much lower than that of white students. As seen in Table 1-1, the persistence rates for American Indian students at Montana University were very inconsistent and on average lower than for white transfer students. Although

---

<sup>2</sup> Montana University is a pseudonym for the actual institution being studied.

<sup>3</sup> Although most studies use persistence as a long-term concept, such as persistence from year-to-year or completion of a degree, for the purposes of this study persistence is defined as a student's continued enrollment from the time of acceptance to enrollment the second semester.

there was not a significant difference between the two groups ( $\chi^2 = .125$ ,  $df = 1$ ), persistence rates were lower for American Indian transfer students.

Of particular concern is the number of transfer students who enroll for one semester and do not return. Tinto (1998) maintains that the first ten weeks of initial enrollment are the most critical period for students entering a college or university. It is during this period that students are making the necessary adjustments, and acclimating to a new environment.

To explore this problem, Montana University transfer student data from fall, 1994 to spring, 1999 were examined. The database obtained from the University included only those white or American Indian students who had transferred from area two-year colleges. The colleges included were the three Montana community colleges, three Wyoming community colleges, and the seven Montana tribal colleges.

The database was broken down into two groups. Group One consisted of white students from all of the included colleges. Group Two included American Indian students who transferred from any of the tribal colleges. The groups were examined to determine the number of students who attended only one semester. As seen in Table 1-2, 11 percent of white students and 21 percent of American Indian students attended only one term. There was a significant difference between the groups ( $\chi^2 = 4.49$ ,  $df = 1$ ). American Indian students who transferred from a tribal college were twice as likely to drop out after one semester than were white students.

Table 1-1. Comparison of White and American Indian Transfer Student First Year Persistence at Montana University, 1990-1995\*

Year Returned	White Students Persisting	American Indians Persisting
1991	69% N=143	80% N=4
1992	66% N=157	37% N=8
1993	71% N=166	60% N=15
1994	66% N=170	50% N=8
1995	68% N=187	61% N=13
Average	68%	57%

\* $\chi^2=.125$ ,  $\alpha=.05$  (not significant)

Research regarding American Indian college students is expanding. Nonetheless, it is still not fully understood how transfer from a tribal college to a four-year institution college affects them. Therefore, the problem this study addressed was that 21 percent of American Indian students who transfer from Montana tribal colleges to Montana University do not persist beyond the first semester, and the experiences that lead to a decision to depart or remain are not fully understood.

Table 1-2. Percentage of White and American Indian Transfer Students Attending Only One Term, 1994-1999\*

Students	Total Number of Transfers	Attended Only One Semester	Percent
White Students	2795	302	11%
Tribal College Transfers	224	47	21%

\* $\chi^2 = 4.49$ ,  $\alpha = .05$

#### Purpose of the Study

American Indian students have goals and ambitions just as any other students attending a university. However, very little research has been conducted regarding how

well American Indian students fare when they transfer from tribal colleges to four-year institutions.

The purpose of this study, therefore, was to gain an understanding of first semester experiences of American Indian College students as they relate to persistence factors, including background characteristics, social, and academic adjustment, institutional factors and attitudinal development. This was achieved through a qualitative research design. The approach to this problem did not lead to a comparison of groups, but asked what occurred and how events were experienced by American Indian transfer students. It allowed the researcher to explore the problem in detail, and in a natural setting (Creswell, 1998). Each participant's view was taken into account and analyzed, seeking a personal perspective of their experiences. The intent was to discover if their reactions to the experience of transfer impacted their decisions to persist or depart

### Theoretical Framework

There is insufficient understanding regarding persistence of American Indian students in higher education. Many researchers have utilized Tinto's Model of Institutional Departure (1975, 1987), which attempts to explain persistence for college students (Murguía, Padilla & Pavel, 1991; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Stoecker, Pascarella, & Wolfle, 1988; Williamson & Creamer, 1988). The most salient factors shown to be related to persistence among all students are social integration, academic integration, goal commitment and loyalty to the institution (Cibik & Chambers, 1991; Cleveland-Innes, 1994; Dell, 1991; Freidlander, 1981; Metzner & Bean, 1987;

Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Stoecker, Pascarella & Wolfle, 1988; Tinto, 1975, 1982, 1987; Vellella & Hu, 1991). According to Tinto (1987) the fit or congruency<sup>4</sup> between the student and the institution is crucial to persistence, and social and academic integration strongly mediate that congruency.

There are conflicting results, however, with regard to minority student persistence, particularly for American Indians. Several researchers have questioned the usefulness of the model to predict persistence among those groups. Mayo, Murguía & Padilla, (1995) suggested that social integration may not be as important for American Indian students, and Pavel and Padilla (1993) maintained that academic preparation was not as predictive for American Indian students as it was for other groups of students.

#### The Longitudinal Model of the Type of Factors that Affect Retention Decisions

A theoretical model developed by Bean (1990) may be appropriate for use with American Indians (Figure 2-2). Bean maintains that the ideal model is one that is most useful to the problem at hand. "Models are simplified versions of reality in which the minutiae and detail are stripped away, leaving what are assumed to be important factors and the relationship between these factors. Models are important because they tie theory to specific situations" (p. 150). The Longitudinal Model of the Type of Factors that Affect Retention Decisions developed by Bean (1990) is a synthesis of the research on

---

<sup>4</sup> Tinto (1987) explains that a student's academic and social integration interact and determine how well a student fits in at the institution. The better the fit, between the student and the social and academic atmosphere of the institution, the more likely the student will be committed to the institution.

attrition<sup>5</sup> and persistence, based on the work of Spady (1970) (as cited in Bean, 1990), Tinto (1975, 1987) and Metzner and Bean (1987). The model is

a complex longitudinal process that begins with the background characteristics of students. Students interact with the college or university organizationally, academically, and socially. The environment represents a simultaneous factor that could influence students to decide to leave the school. Organizational, academic, and social interaction lead students to develop attitudes about the school. These attitudes affect institutional fit and loyalty -- both potent predictors of continued enrollment. (Bean, 1990, p. 154)

Bean (1990) concluded that several variables affect persistence. These include background variables, organizational variables, academic integration, social integration, environmental pull<sup>6</sup>, attitudes, and intent to leave. These variables represent experiences or beliefs and how based on those beliefs, a student makes the decision to persist or depart.

Although Tinto's (1975, 1987) model has been used for various studies on retention<sup>7</sup> and persistence, Bean's model utilizes an important factor that may be useful to understand the American Indian experience in higher education. Much of the literature suggests that environmental pull is an important factor for American Indians (Naretto,

---

<sup>5</sup> Attrition occurs when a student discontinues their enrollment at a particular university. This can be in the form of total withdrawal from the higher education system, or transfer to another institution.

<sup>6</sup> Most students have commitments outside of the university, including family and work. Financial resources and choice of major may also have an influence on the decision to remain. This is environmental pull (Bean, 1990; Naretto, 1995; Richardson and Skinner, 1992; Towles and Spencer, 1993; Villella and Hu, 1991).

<sup>7</sup> An institutional measurement of the continued enrollment of its students defines retention. Many researchers have described retention programs aimed at assisting students to remain enrolled (Bean, 1990; Henderson, 1991; Mayo et al., 1995; Richardson and Skinner, 1992; Tinto, 1982).

1995; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Towles & Spencer, 1993; Villella & Hu, 1991). As examples of environmental pull, Bean (1990) includes lack of finances, significant others being in another location, the opportunity to transfer, the role that work may have, and family responsibilities. Since a close family system is central to American Indian culture (Davis, 1992; Herring, 1990; LaCounte, 1987; Oppelt, 1989; Wenzlaff & Biewer, 1996), as are heightened financial difficulties (Herring, 1990, Cibik & Chambers, 1991; Davis, 1992; Dodd et al., 1995; Huffman, et al., 1986; LaCounte, 1987), the use of Bean's (1990) model may be more useful to explain American Indian persistence. Therefore, the Longitudinal Model of the Type of Factors that Affect Retention Decisions (Bean, 1990) was used as a theoretical framework for the study.

### Research Questions

The overarching question, and subquestions to be addressed in this study were as follows:

What are the experiences of American Indian students as they transfer from the Tribal College to Montana University?

- a) How are these experiences related to social or academic integration?
- b) Do environmental pull factors relate to their decision to remain or depart?
- c) Do background characteristics relate to their decision to remain or depart?
- d) Does their interaction with the university organization relate to their decision to remain or depart?

### Significance of the Study

This qualitative study is an important contribution to the research related to American Indian college students. However, because it was a qualitative design, generalization of the results are not possible. Nonetheless, the findings serve as a starting point for understanding the experiences of American Indian College students as they transfer from a tribal college.

The findings are also important for Montana University. If the trend in Montana continues, increasing numbers of American Indian transfer students will be entering the University. It is important to have a better understanding of how American Indian students encounter the organization, social and academic culture at Montana University, and the environmental pull they experience.

### Assumptions

An important assumption in the study was the willing cooperation of the participants. It was not within the scope of this study to insure honesty on the part of the students, so it was assumed that they were forthright in their interviews and conversations with the researcher.

### Limitations

Due to the nature of qualitative research, this study had the following limitations:

1. Qualitative research results cannot be generalized to the larger population (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The findings of this study are not applicable to the American

- Indian student population, locally, statewide, or nationally. However, through the provision of detailed description the reader can determine its applicability to their particular situation (Creswell, 1998; Marshal & Rossman, 1999; Merriam, 1998).
2. Although an understanding of experiences was sought, a complete understanding was not achieved. Therefore, the reader is cautioned not to assume that other college students in a similar setting will share the experiences of the participants of this study.
  3. Because the researcher was the primary instrument to collect data, researcher bias was not eliminated. Using member checking and an independent auditor to check analysis, researcher bias was reduced, and trustworthiness of the study was enhanced (Creswell, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

#### Format of Study

The following chapter leads the reader toward an understanding of the problem of American Indian persistence through an in-depth review of current literature surrounding the problem. A general understanding of retention and persistence is discussed, culminating in an analysis of issues surrounding minority and American Indian student persistence. Included in the discussion are issues and research specific to two-year colleges, including tribal colleges.

Chapter three explains how the research was conducted. An overview of qualitative research methodology is included. A description of the participants and the process and stages of data collection is provided, with emphasis on how the theoretical model was utilized in the formation of questions for the interviews.

Chapter four describes the participants' individual stories of adjustment. The first section describes the participants of the study. Each person's background and experiences are described. The second section explains the four phases of adjustment experienced by the group.

Chapter five details analysis and results in four sections. The first two are explanations of how those experiences are understood in relation to the theoretical framework and its various factors in relation to persistence. The last two are an overview of the findings and suggestions for how a revision of the model might explain the experiences of the group.

Chapter six is a discussion of the results and recommendations for implementation of findings and future research.

### Summary

Over the past two decades, enrollment of American Indians in college has been increasing at a greater rate than that of the overall college student population over the last two decades. Although a similar trend exists in Montana, only two percent of the four-year degrees earned were by American Indians. Locally, persistence among American Indian students at Montana University is low, especially for the first semester after transfer.

There is a need to understand the dynamics of the first semester and how American Indian students experience and perceive it. Of particular interest is whether those experiences are related to persistence factors included in the theoretical model

developed by Bean (1990). The Longitudinal Model of the Type of Factors that Affect Retention Decisions provided a theoretical framework for the study, and research questions were derived from the model. This study utilized a qualitative approach to develop an understanding of the experiences of a group of American Indian students transferring from the Tribal College, to Montana University, and how those experiences relate to decisions regarding persistence or departure. It is through this understanding that Montana University can begin to assist American Indian College students as they transfer to the institution.

## CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature review has four main sections. The first explores theory regarding retention and persistence, including popular models used to explain persistence and departure, and related individual and institutional factors. The second section examines the research specific to minority student persistence and the individual and institutional actions that have been recommended by various researchers. Section three narrows to American Indian persistence, and the relevant individual and institutional aspects. The final section explores community and tribal colleges and how theories of persistence are applicable in those settings. A summary of the chapter is also included.

Retention and Persistence

*“One fairly constant finding is that students leave school because they do not fit in”*

*(Bean, 1990, p. 149).*

Research on retention and persistence is plentiful, as institutions of higher education have determined the need to maintain enrollment and to control costs for the institution and the individual (Metzner & Bean, 1987). There are both individual and institutional factors and characteristics that can influence students' decisions regarding enrollment in higher education. A review of the relevant literature highlights some of the issues surrounding retention and persistence decisions, including explanatory models.

### The Model of Institutional Departure

One of the most widely used means to explain persistence and departure in higher education is the Model of Institutional Departure developed by Vincent Tinto (1975, 1987). According to Tinto, a student's decision to persist or depart depends on the level of social and academic integration a student develops while at the institution. Mediated by background characteristics such as academic preparation and family background, the levels of academic and social integration lead to the level of commitment or loyalty to the institution as well as commitment to pursue the career goal. Tinto explains that the higher the level of integration, both socially and academically, the more likely students are to persist (Figure 2-1).

Many researchers have relied on Tinto's model to explain the factors that impact a student's decision to withdraw from college. Since Tinto's model was designed to explain traditional age, majority status students, many researchers tested its effectiveness to explain minority and nontraditional status persistence. Using Tinto's model as a benchmark, several researchers (Murguía et al., 1991; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Stoecker et al., 1988; Williamson & Creamer, 1988) evaluated the ability of Tinto's model to cross cultural boundaries and its application to African American, Hispanic American, Asian American, and American Indian students, and provided recommendations for accommodating ethnicity and nontraditional student status.

Stoecker et al. (1988) concluded that, for minority students, Tinto's model had "reasonable power to explain persistence-withdrawal behavior over a nine-year period" (p. 205). The authors found that the most effective intervention for persistence was

faculty contact, which Tinto (1982, 1987) noted in his research as well. The authors concluded that “academic and social integration were the most important collegiate determinates of persistence . . . [and that] strategies focused on enhancement of academic and social integration for specific groups may enhance persistence” (p. 208).

Murguía et al. (1991) conducted a qualitative study to check the application of Tinto’s model to minority student retention. The authors interviewed 24 junior and senior Hispanic and American Indian students, investigating the degree of social and academic integration they were experiencing, and how ethnicity was related to their level of social integration. They found that ethnicity was important in matters of connection to students’ families and friends, but because of their ethnic identity, socialization was predominately within their own ethnic group, especially during the initial adjustment to campus. Once an initial ethnic-centered group was formed, minority students often used these groups as the foundation from which to expand into more homogenous social groups. For those reasons, the authors stressed the importance of clubs and other organizations, which can serve as a social foundations for minority students.

Murguía et al. (1991) maintained that Tinto’s model was generally applicable to minority student persistence, but offered recommendations to strengthen the model to more effectively understand minority student retention. They suggested the consideration of ethnicity within the model, based on the possibility that it may limit access to the social structure of an institution. Administrators should assess the availability of appropriate enclaves or groups that a student may become involved.

Social and academic integration, according to Williamson and Creamer (1988), were student-based factors, not institutionally based, and institutions had less impact on the decision making process of the student than Tinto's model suggested. Because they used a slightly different definition of persistence than most researchers, they found that social integration was less of a factor for minority students, many of whom finished after more years than most. In the samples used for comparison, they included stop-in and stop-out behaviors of community college students. Stop-in and -out students are those that temporally interrupt their enrollment until a more opportune time arrives for them to attend. The researchers also allowed for 20 months of disenrollment before they defined students as dropouts. Background characteristics had more to do with persistence, and they contend that institutions have less control over a student's decision, even though programs are in place to prevent attrition.

This implies that the ability of Tinto's model to explain persistence is sensitive to changes in the definition of persistence. This may mean that, as the definition of college dropout changes from one who simply fails to re-enroll for a particular semester to one who fails to re-enroll for a specified length of time, the ability of academic and social integration to explain persistence diminishes. (p. 216)

Williamson and Creamer (1988) believed that Tinto's model was useful in explaining persistence at the institutional level, particularly when considering academic and social integration within the institution. However, the authors asserted that background characteristics held more predictive power for long-term persistence. These findings have profound implications for the study of American Indian college students, as

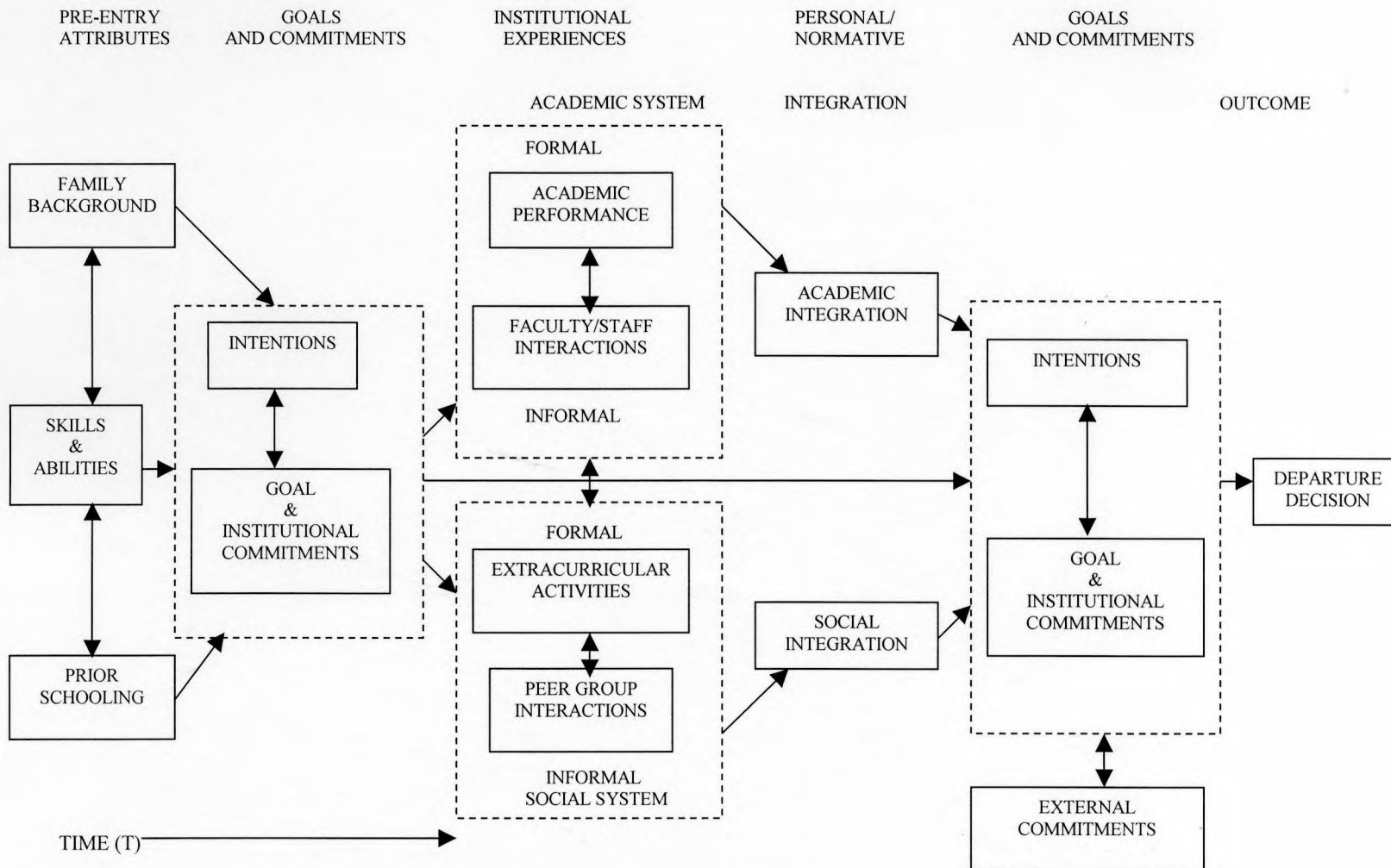


Figure 2-1. A Model of Institutional Departure (Tinto, 1987, p. 114)

they tend to be stop-in and-out students, and have more pre-enrollment risk factors than white students (Dodd et al., 1995; Richardson & Skinner, 1992).

In contrast, other studies have found Tinto's Model to be less satisfactory in explaining the adjustment process. Naretto (1995) reported that although Tinto's model was defensible for use with adult students, background characteristics were less of a factor than institutional interventions. A caring and supportive environment endorsed by the institution was significantly related to persisting adult students' decision to maintain enrollment.

Towles and Spencer (1993) questioned the application of the Tinto model for use in retaining adult students in a distance education program. They found that 60 percent of the adult dropouts they studied wanted to re-enroll, but could not because of family and/or job-related responsibilities. They also asserted that faculty contact was not as important to adult students as suggested by Tinto (1982, 1987), and that some faculty contact with freshmen was actually detrimental, seen as pushy or invasive. They concluded that faculty may be, in some respects, a hindrance rather than a help in retaining students. Therefore, they declared that the model does not consider nontraditional status.

Tinto's model (1975, 1987) may not be as useful for setting retention policy, since it was based on experience within a college setting, and did not consider the many external factors that nontraditional students in distance programs may face. Towles and Spencer (1993) asserted that there was a reliance on social aspects of college, and not enough emphasis on student characteristics such as goal orientation or the natural concern

for the family. They suggested that the model be modified to accommodate adults attending in a nontraditional mode. Tinto (1987) considered goal orientation very important, but did not include environmental pull as important to institutional departure.

In summary, most researchers have found Tinto's model useful in understanding patterns of departure. Recommendations for improving the model include consideration of ethnicity, adjustment to the definition of persistence to include stop-out behavior and consideration of family matters for nontraditional students. Contradictions in the literature confound the understanding of American Indian persistence. Questions regarding the importance of background characteristics and environmental pull remain unanswered.

#### The Longitudinal Model of the Type of Factors that Affect Retention Decisions

Another theoretical model, developed by Bean (1990), may be appropriate to understand persistence among American Indians (Figure 2-2). The Longitudinal Model of the Type of Factors that Affect Retention Decisions, is a synthesis of the research on attrition and persistence, based on the work of Spady (1970, as cited in Bean, 1990), Tinto (1975, 1987) and Bean and Metzner (1985, as cited in Bean, 1990). Like Tinto's model, Bean's work was based on traditional, majority status, full time students. Unlike Tinto's model, the importance of background characteristics and environmental pull are highlighted. The model provides for an understanding of the interaction among importance variables such as academic, social and organizational constructs. According to Bean the model is

a complex longitudinal process that begins with the background characteristics of students. Students interact with the college or university organizationally, academically, and socially. The environment represents a simultaneous factor that could influence students to decide to leave the school. Organizational, academic, and social interaction lead student to develop attitudes about the school. These attitudes affect institutional fit and loyalty -- both potent predictors of continued enrollment. (p. 154)

Bean explains that in general, students leave college because they feel they do not fit in, "socially, academically, religiously or economically, or for some other reasons" (p, 149). Fitting in is a process that occurs in degrees over time. In addition, if a student has a poor match in one area, a good match in another may offset it.

An individual's behavior is the result of a cyclical process in which beliefs affect attitudes that lead to intentions that lead to the behavior in question. Hence, students' beliefs about their experience in school lead to attitudes toward the school (such as whether or not to stay) that affect the student's intent to stay (or leave) followed by actual attrition or retention. (p. 151)

Factors outside of the institution, or environmental pull, can also affect a student's decision to persist or depart. Logically, the institution has no control over environmental pull, and Bean insists that sometimes the decision to depart may be a positive decision for the student (see also Tinto, 1987).

Bean explains that there are several variables to consider regarding student persistence, which he integrates into the model. These include background variables, organizational variables, academic integration, social integration, environmental pull, attitudes, and intent to leave. These variables are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Background Variables. Bean maintains the most important background characteristics that impact persistence are academic success in high school, high but reasonable educational goals, college educated parents, financial wealth, and parental support. These variables give a student a good start on a university education.

Organizational Variables. Many colleges and universities have designed and implemented special programs to increase retention at their institutions. Bean explains that successful programs provide interventions that target those students who are most likely to drop out. However, all students interact with the organization, and that may be either positive or negative for students. The admissions office, classes and curriculum and how they are scheduled, rules and regulations, academic and social services, and financial aid are noteworthy. Financial aid is essential for most students on campus, but many students persist in the face of financial difficulty if they find the match at the university to be positive (see also Tinto, 1987).

Academic Integration. The better a student performs academically, the more likely he or she is to persist (Bean, 1990). For most students this requires good study habits and skills, positive attitudes, a value for scholarship and academic integrity. In addition, informal contact with faculty is one of the most robust factors related to student success.

Social Integration. Bean maintains that students must develop their social niche. Here they can find friendship, social support, and mutual concern for one another. Like informal faculty contact, socialization on campus is very important to persistence behavior, especially for traditional students who do not have social contacts outside the campus. Students must feel that someone cares about them as a person, and not as a number or a source of tuition.

Environmental Pull. Bean explains that eliminating all attrition is not possible, nor desirable. He maintains that colleges should not spend their resources in an attempt to affect things over which the institution has no control. Bean lists five sources of environmental pull. These are a perceived lack of finances, important friends or family that live outside the area, the opportunity to transfer, work and family responsibilities (especially among nontraditional students).

Attitudes. Bean maintains that students with positive attitudes are more likely to persist. The student's attitude about the university is especially important. When a student arrives with positive attitudes toward the school and has positive organizational, academic and social experiences, these positive attitudes are likely to be maintained or increase. When a student arrives with negative attitudes

and has negative experiences, the student is likely to leave....Satisfaction with the school, feelings of self development, a sense that the education they are receiving has a practical value for securing employment, and a sense of self-confidence as a student are a core block of attitudes positively affecting retention. Stress, on the other hand, reduces the likelihood of students remaining enrolled. (p. 165)

Intent to Leave. Bean incorporated this variable into the model because “intentions are hypothesized to intervene between attitudes and behavior” (p. 166). He explains that intent to leave is the best predictor of drop out. When asking students if they plan to return the following semester, an institution will immediately know who is at risk for dropping out.

In conclusion, Tinto’s model (1975,1987) has been used for various studies on retention and persistence. However, Bean’s model utilizes an important factor that may be useful to understand the American Indian experience in higher education. Much of the literature suggests that environmental pull is an important factor for American Indians (Naretto, 1995; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Towles & Spencer, 1993; Villella & Hu, 1991). As examples of environmental pull, Bean (1990) includes lack of finances, significant others being in another location, the opportunity to transfer, the role that work may have, and family responsibilities. Since a close family system is central to American Indian culture (Davis, 1992; Herring, 1990; LaCounte, 1987; Oppelt, 1989; Wenzlaff & Biewer, 1996), as are heightened financial difficulties (Herring, 1990; Cibik & Chambers, 1991; Davis, 1992; Dodd et al., 1995; Huffman Sill & Brokenleg, 1986; LaCounte, 1987), the use of Bean’s (1990) model may be useful to explain American Indian persistence.

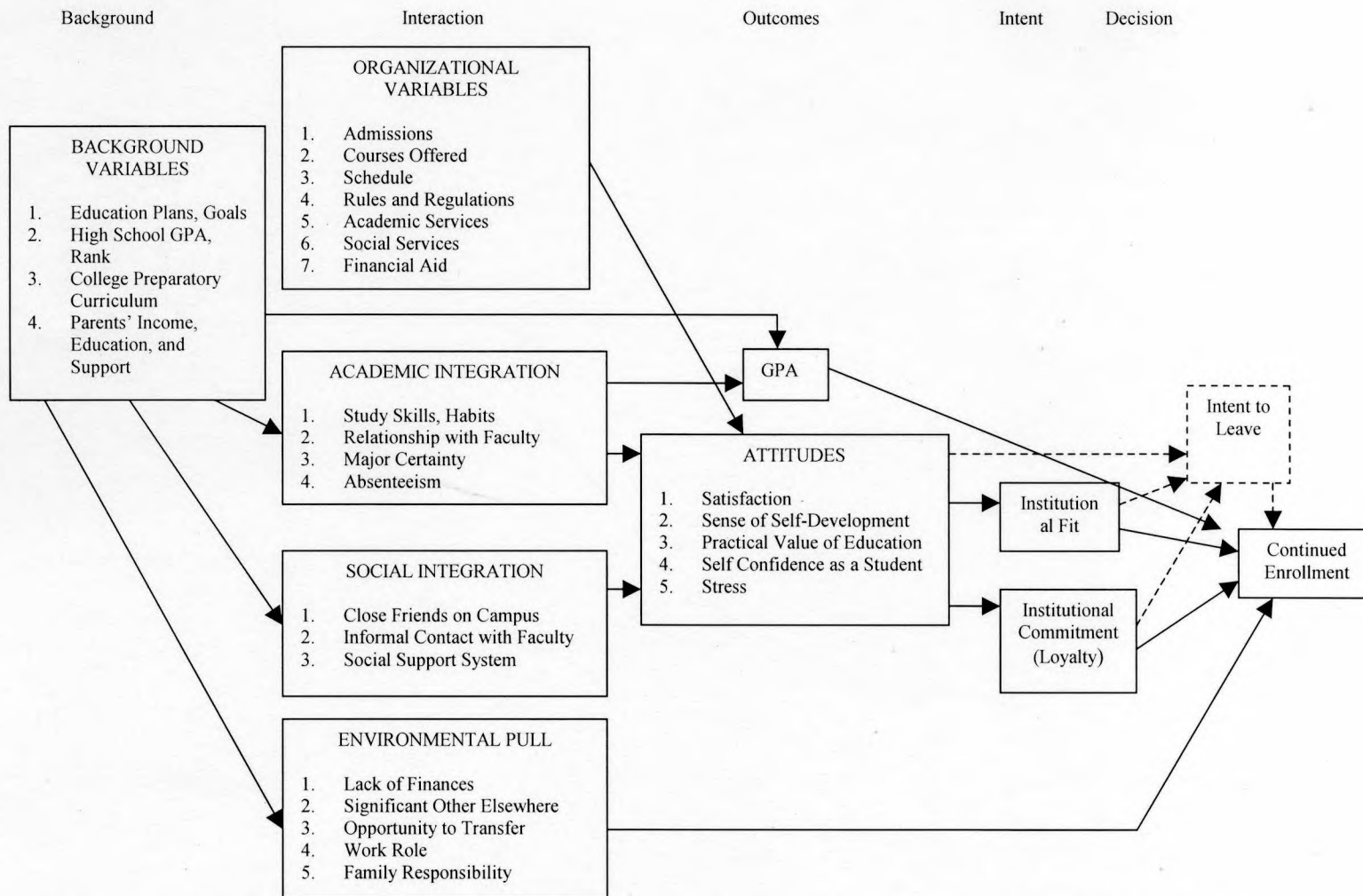


Figure 2-2. A Longitudinal Model of the Type of Factors that Affect Retention Decisions (Bean, 1990, p. 152)

### Persistence Factors

Utilizing models such as Tinto's (1975, 1987) and Bean (1990), as a theoretical framework, many researchers concerned with student persistence have shown how individual and institutional characteristics prompt a student's decision to persist or depart. In spite of barriers to success, many at-risk students persist. The following highlights the findings.

Individual Characteristics. A review of the literature on persistence provides insight on the most salient individual characteristics related to risk factors for attrition. These are:

- Low academic preparation (Cibik & Chambers, 1991; Cleveland-Innes, 1994; Freidlander, 1981; Metzner & Bean, 1987; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Stoecker, Pascarella & Wolfle, 1988)
- Lack of social integration (Cibik & Chambers, 1991; Cleveland-Innes, 1994; Dell, 1991; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Stoecker, Pascarella & Wolfle, 1988; Tinto, 1975, 1982, 1987)
- Lack of academic integration (Cibik & Chambers, 1991; Cleveland-Innes, 1994; Dell, 1991; Freidlander, 1981; Metzner & Bean, 1987; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Stoecker, Pascarella & Wolfle, 1988; Tinto, 1975, 1982, 1987; Vellella & Hu, 1991)
- Mode of enrollment (Kempner & Kinnick, 1990; Richardson & Skinner, 1992)
- Multiple personal roles (Naretto, 1995; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Towles & Spencer, 1993; Vellella & Hu, 1991)

- Minority status (Metzner & Bean, 1987; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Tinto, 1982, 1987)
- First generation status (Metzner & Bean, 1987; Richardson & Skinner, 1992)
- Financial status (Cleveland-Innes, 1994; Metzner & Bean, 1987; Stoecker, Pascarella & Wolfle, 1988; Tinto, 1982, 1987)
- Level of motivation and commitment (Cleveland-Innes, 1994; Metzner & Bean, 1987; Naretto, 1995; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Tinto, 1987)

Several studies have highlighted the effects that these characteristics have on persistence behavior. Kempner and Kinnick (1990) discussed the importance of a student's mode of enrollment. They claimed that a window of opportunity exists for students entering higher education, and that those who enrolled directly after high school tend to complete four year degrees were at a much higher rate than those who delay entrance.

Financial difficulties have been problematic when students are deciding on their continued enrollment (Cleveland-Innes, 1994; Tinto, 1982). However, Tinto (1982) maintained that "when students' experiences are positive, they are more likely to accept financial burdens in order to continue attendance than when experiences are unsatisfactory" (p. 690). This is particularly true if a student is of upper division status, and close to completing their degree.

### Adult Students

Adult students often have different concerns than traditional aged students. They tend to have multiple roles beyond that of just being a student. Many have families, employment, and tend to commute to the campus. Scheduling and study time can be difficult for adult students who must juggle their time between school and their other responsibilities. Time constraints and academic expectations can cause a nontraditional student to experience stress and dissatisfaction, and higher likelihood of departure. (Cleveland-Innes, 1994; Villella & Hu, 1991).

Adult students, however, tend to be more goal directed and possess a stronger commitment to finishing a degree program. Testing Tinto's model to explain departure decision among nontraditional students, Cleveland-Innes (1994) reported that level of commitment was more important than academic or social integration. She maintained that adult students must "counteract the difficulties of inadequate role preparation and role overload with a level of academic integration necessary to sustain a certain degree of commitment to the goal of graduation and to the institution" (p. 438). She concluded that Tinto's model was more useful to explain traditional student enrollment than nontraditional student patterns.

Metzner and Bean (1987), in their study of nontraditional student retention, found that adult students experience lower levels of social integration due to the multiple responsibilities they have outside of the university. However, this was not necessarily problematic for nontraditional students, and that satisfaction with their role as a student was more important than making social contacts (see also Dell, 1991). The best

predictors of withdrawal for nontraditional students were low GPA, the intent to leave, a utility for coursework (see also Dell, 1991) and the number of credits carried. In contrast to Tinto, they reported that goal commitment, stress and social atmosphere were not significant predictors of withdrawal.

Naretto (1995) challenged the notion that successful nontraditional students do not integrate socially because they maintain multiple roles off-campus. She reported that nonpersisting adult students received more off-campus support than did persisters, and concluded that "a supportive college community environment appears, then, to be a critical factor in adult degree completion" (p. 97).

Dell (1991) in a study comparing attitudes of continuing and withdrawn nontraditional students reported that the two groups showed no difference in the amount of family support, satisfaction with advising services, use of student services and value for a college education. In contrast, there were significant differences in attitudes related to social and academic integration. Withdrawn students saw little utility for their coursework and had negative feelings about being a student. Continuing students, however were more positive about these factors. Adult students must feel the time they spend at the college is worthwhile, that they are working toward a goal, and that the social atmosphere is positive.

Richardson and Skinner (1992) maintained that persistence is related to opportunity orientation. The extent to which one values their role as a student and subsequently sets educational goals related to that role is instrumental in persistence behavior. The mode of a student's enrollment is also contributory. Traditional or

nontraditional status, full or part time enrollment patterns, and additional personal roles and responsibilities also contribute to opportunity orientation and ultimately influence degree attainment in students. This is particularly relevant for nontraditional, first generation and minority students, who do not necessarily understand the higher education culture and are more likely to have an alternate mode of enrollment, such as part time status, or maintain multiple roles.

### Commuter Students

Commuter students compose between 70 and 80 percent of college campus populations, although most campuses are set up for residential students (Ortman, 1995; Stewart, Merrill & Saluri, 1987). Ortman defines a commuter students as “all those students who do not live in institution owned housing” (p. 2). They attend college for various reasons and have differing enrollment modes. Most are nontraditional students, attend part time, are minority, and are employed at least part time. Many enroll at the urging of their employers. They may be attending to obtain a degree, or gain job-related skills.

Commuting students face certain risk factors, such as transportation and consequent time management issues, multiple life roles, and less time to develop faculty-student relationships. Most of them rely on the support of their families while attending college (Ortman, 1991).

Conflicting reports on commuter students makes understanding difficult. It was originally thought that commuter students were not engaged in the process of education,

had ill-defined goals, were less academically able, and unwilling to commit to degree obtainment (Stewart et. al, 1987). However, there is no real evidence to support these myths. Although they face difficulties with travel time, multiple roles, and support systems, they are not less committed to the process than originally thought (Likins, 1991; Ortman, 1995). In addition, Inman and Pascarella (1997) reported that there were no differences between commuters and residential students in terms of their cognitive development and academic abilities.

Several accommodations that institutions of higher education can make encourage success for commuter students. Flexible class scheduling, late afternoon campus events, such as concerts, films, lectures and noncredit special interest classes allow commuter students to attend popular activities at convenient times. Offering part time jobs on campus, specialized orientation and advising services, targeted mentor programs, and on-campus child care centers also provides essential support (Stewart et. al, 1987).

Ortman (1995) stresses that college campuses should encourage commuter students to establish roots. Lockers and lounges should be furnished, and faculty should institute flexible office hours for students who have limited time on campus. She also suggests expanded course offerings to include evening and weekend classes. On campus childcare is another advantage, as are satellite bookstore and food facilities. Late night library hours are helpful to students who need to study late away from home.

Commuter students endure certain challenges, such as travel and time management, multiple roles, and less time on campus to develop important relationships and networks. However, 70 to 80 percent of all college students are commuter students,

and are not necessarily less committed or academically able than residential students. Because of their vast numbers, college campuses should assess their programs, and made appropriate accommodations to support commuter students.

### Institutional Interventions

Does the institution have the ability to retain students? The answer, for many researchers, is yes. Although Tinto (1975, 1982, 1987) maintained that a student will ultimately make decisions based on personal gain or loss, the institution can contribute to a general level of support and encouragement that a student may experience.

Institutions should address both academic and social concerns of students. Naretto (1995) explained that among adult students, a decision to remain or withdraw is heavily influenced by the degree of support and encouragement a student feels when enrolled. She asserted that there is more involved in persistence than just academic progress. "Negative experiences and influences were balanced out by positive expressions of support and encouragement" (p. 96), and that socialization and connection were very important in the decision to maintain enrollment. She concluded that "a supportive college community environment appears, then, to be a critical factor in adult degree completion" (p. 97). As well, Tinto (1982) postulated that the more time and effort faculty put into their students, the more likely students will be to succeed.

Specific interventions that institutions can implement may contribute to the overall supportive environment on campus. Richardson and Skinner (1992) discussed the importance of ease of transfer from a community college setting. This intervention is

something an institution can vigorously promote with promising outcomes.

Collaboration between community colleges and four-year institutions is essential in the development of bridge programs designed to provide academic and transitional support until the student is firmly established at the main institution. Richardson and Skinner (1992) stressed that the development and implementation of a bridge program is the most successful strategy an institution can employ to insure retention rates of transfer students.

Additionally, Dawson and Dell (1997) developed transfer guides for use at a targeted community college in a western state, and tested its effectiveness with retention. More than an articulation guide, it included personal support, advisement and a contact person before, during and after transfer. Students were made aware of classes to take and whom to contact with questions. Faculty members at the community college were involved in decision-making, and regularly collaborated with faculty from the four-year. Personal contact with students was also an important component of the program.

After five years, persistence was significantly greater for students who utilized the services of the transfer program. Students from the targeted community college had an 80 percent retention rate, while students from other regional community colleges had 69 percent. Prior to the transfer guides, retention from the target college was 64 percent. The comparison group included students from colleges who also had articulation guides in place, but did not have the personal support that the target college had. Dawson and Dell (1997) attributed the success to the personal support by the advisor at the University and the collaborative efforts with faculty at the community college.

In conclusion, institutions can encourage both social and academic integration through positive climate from faculty and staff, as well as the development of bridge programs for transfer students.

### Overcoming Barriers

Students succeed in spite of barriers they face. Researchers have reported that students encounter problems related to lack of academic integration, lack of social integration and low levels of motivation. Many researchers have suggested that students who persist tend to develop one or more of the following coping skills:

- Seek out and utilize support services, both academically and socially (Naretto, 1995; Richardson & Skinner, 1992)
- Utilize informal support groups, such as campus activities and peers (Naretto, 1995; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Tinto, 1982)
- Focus on studies, find utility for their course work, and set goals related to degree attainment (Conti & Fellenz, 1991; Dell, 1991; Henderson, 1991; Richardson & Skinner, 1992)
- Rely on faculty and staff for support and encouragement (Dell, 1991; Henderson, 1991; Layton, Blair, & Rokused, 1990; Lee, 1991; Naretto, 1995; Scott, 1986; Stoecker et al., 1988; Tinto, 1982)
- Have high levels of personal motivation (Naretto, 1995; Richardson & Skinner, 1992).

In a study comparing persisting and non-persisting adult students at four Midwest universities, Naretto (1995) reported that personal characteristics between groups were significantly different, and all of the adult students had "pull" from their environments off campus, because they had multiple personal roles. It was common for adult students to be a spouse, parent, employee, and student. The significant difference between the two groups was the amount of support each reported experiencing from the university. Support came in the form of encouragement from faculty or staff, and student support services, such as academic help or social support centers. She also found that students from both the persisting and non-persisting group experienced difficulties and distracters from school, but "persisters showed remarkable capacity to cope with the diversions" (p. 95).

Richardson and Skinner (1992) reported that social support was helpful to students as they progressed through the system. They determined from their study that when a student was able to find a location to be comfortable and visit with friends, the physical intimidation of a university was reduced, and the campus was viewed as a reasonably safe place.

Successful students also set goals and focused on their studies to meet those goals (Richardson & Skinner, 1992). They utilized faculty, advisors, and friends for assistance. They also used support facilities and academic departments for assistance, both academically and socially. Richardson and Skinner also found peer support very important. Friends worked together to negotiate the bureaucracy, and develop study skills and habits. The authors also maintained that personal determination was a factor in

degree attainment. Students' desire for a good job, and expectations from their families played an important role in developing determination.

Stoecker et al. (1988) conducted a nine-year longitudinal study investigating retention. They designed a stratified sample including 5,240 white men, white women, black men, and black women. They found that the best predictors of success in students depended on their family's economic status, high school achievement, college achievement, interaction with faculty and social leadership activities. They recommended that student affairs program include faculty in their normal operations, and create opportunities for students to be involved in leadership activities.

### Summary

Two models of student persistence and departure were reviewed (Bean, 1990; Tinto, 1987). Both models stress the importance of background characteristics, academic and social integration, and institutional loyalty. Bean includes organizational variables and environmental pull, and stressed the role of student attitudes, which may be helpful in understanding persistence behavior among American Indian students. These variables, according to Bean, ultimately impact a student's decision to persist or depart.

Research on persistence has shown that background characteristics such as level of preparation, personal roles, mode of enrollment, first generation status, financial status and minority status may influence persistence decisions. These factors, which cannot be controlled by the institution, must be recognized as possible attributions to attrition.

Students who can overcome these barriers and become socially and academically integrated may be more committed and motivated to persist (Tinto, 1987).

Institutions can assist students by designing programs that involve academic skill development, and offer a level of support and acceptance on campus. If students feel they are part of the institution and can perform academically, they are more likely to persist. This is true of persistence in general, but are these factors relevant to minority and specifically, American Indian students? The following section will address the unique factors related to minority student persistence.

#### Minority Student Persistence

*All first generation students are uncertain climbers. Minority students in particular need ladders with every rung in place in order to provide them with a fair opportunity for overcoming incomplete preparation, nonspecific education objectives, and nontraditional modes of college attendance.*

*(Richardson & Skinner, 1992, p. 41)*

Tinto (1982) recognized that at-risk and/or minority students might have special circumstances surrounding their decision to withdraw.

Work on group-specific models of dropout can have important policy implications. Studies of dropout among specific groups of students, especially among the disadvantaged, may aid in the development of institutional and system policies designed and targeted to assist the educational continuance of particular subpopulations within the student body. (p. 692)

Bean (1990) verified the unique circumstances of minority students. He claimed that minority students, like nontraditional students, are not a homogenous group.

Although he believed that theories of persistence may be applied to minority students, “some factors probably are more important for minority students than for majority students” (p. 167).

Several studies have been directed toward understanding minority student persistence. As with all students, individual characteristics of minority students also factor into persistence behavior. Consequently, students may bring risk factors with them as they enter the university. Level of academic preparedness, personal and familial expectations, support systems (including family and friends) and social integration are important factors related to minority student success (Kenny & Stryker, 1996; Richardson & Skinner, 1992).

Institutional factors also play a role in minority student retention. Some successful intervention programs developed include bridge programs, designed to decrease the impact of transfer from a community or tribal college, faculty mentoring, designed to support students who are at-risk, minority student support centers, and retention programs, such as intrusive advising directed toward at-risk and/or minority students. The following section addresses important individual characteristics that impact minority student persistence and departure as well as effective institutional interventions.

### Individual Characteristics

The same individual characteristics that affect students in general also impact minority students. However, minority students seem to be more susceptible to risk

factors at both the individual and institutional levels. Individual characteristics most prevalent among low persisting minority students include:

- Low academic preparation (Cibik & Chambers, 1991; Richardson & Skinner, 1992)
- Lack of social and academic integration (Cibik & Chambers, 1991; Livingston & Stewart, 1987; Mayo et al., 1995; Murguía et al., 1991; Richardson & Skinner, 1992)
- Multiple personal roles (Richardson & Skinner, 1992)
- Financial difficulties (Cibik & Chambers, 1991)
- Nontraditional status (Richardson & Skinner, 1992)
- First generation status (Cibik & Chambers, 1991; Richardson & Skinner, 1992)

Academic Preparation. Level of preparation for college life has been a significant challenge for minority students (Cibik & Chambers, 1991; Richardson & Skinner, 1992), which includes not only academic preparedness, but social preparedness as well. Most minority students reported not being prepared for the ethnic isolation they experienced, and often felt disconnected from the campus. As nontraditional students, most did not experience social integration since they had multiple full time roles, such as student, employee and parent (Richardson & Skinner, 1992).

Typical predictors of college success do not necessarily apply to minority students. Overall, minority students tend to have lower high school GPA performance than whites upon entrance to college, especially among African American students. However, all things being equal, high school GPA remains a more robust predictor of college success for Caucasian students than for minority students. When adjusted

statistically, only African American students perform as predicted by their high school GPA. Minority students also tend to be at a disadvantage in making progress toward a degree in their first year. A Caucasian student with an equivalent GPA is more likely than a minority student to earn an average of four more credits their first year (House & Keely, 1997; Lunneborg & Lunneborg, 1986).

Motivation. Personal determination is an important personal characteristic among those who have high levels of persistence (Richardson & Skinner, 1992). The desire for a good job, along with expectations from the individual, family, and institution, can contribute to a student's level of determination.

In conclusion, individual characteristics are important considerations for minority students. Personal determination, academic preparation, financial resources and personal background all influence a student's ability to adjust to college life. Institutions have little control over these factors.

### Institutional Interventions

Researchers studying minority student retention have made several recommendations to improve programs for minority students. Richardson and Skinner (1992) maintained that many students can overcome the institutional and social challenges related to college. "Preconceptions that the limited potential of minorities, however, can turn into self-fulfilling prophecies, restricting the achievement of all minorities regardless of preparation" (p. 34). Institutions should focus their retention

efforts for minority students by providing opportunities for student to integrate both socially and academically. These include:

- Academic skill development programs (Levin & Levin, 1991; Richardson & Skinner, 1990)
- Minority support centers (Dodd et al., 1995; Henderson, 1991; Lee, 1991; Wright, 1992)
- Intrusive advising (Garnett, 1990; Glennon, Baxley & Farren, 1985; Glennon, 1975; Lopez, Yanez, Clayton & Thompson, 1988)
- Bridge programs (Henderson, 1991; Richardson & Skinner, 1992)
- Faculty support and mentoring (The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, 1995; Cartledge, Gardner & Tillman, 1995; Leon, 1993; Mayo et al., 1995; Redmond, 1990; Terrell, Hassell & Duggar, 1992).

Academic Skill Development. Levin and Levin (1991) conducted a comprehensive review of minority retention programs. Successful programs had several things in common, including proactive interventions directed toward at-risk students, such as small group tutorial sessions. They also determined that quality instruction and commitment from the faculty promoted the retention of at-risk minority students. In this study, faculty tended to have high expectations and were able to motivate students.

Richardson and Skinner (1990) conducted an extensive qualitative study to understand how institutions accommodate diversity and promote minority achievement on their campuses. They visited 24 campuses where they interviewed faculty, staff,

administrators, and students. They discovered that some institutions are better than others at encouraging participation among minority students. Many of the institutions surveyed typically waived admission requirements for minority students who did not meet the specified criteria. However, if there were no services in place to support those students who were not academically prepared, attrition rates increased dramatically. They provided an example of a large university in the south, which granted waivers for admission to 75 percent of African American students. Only 10 percent of white students were given similar admission waivers. This led to an unequally prepared freshman class, and inordinately high attrition rates among African Americans.

Richardson and Skinner (1990) recommend that a balance between minority participation and achievement be reached. They stated that “the most effective strategies for enhancing student diversity go far beyond the waiver of regular admissions standards and incorporate concurrent attention to strengthening achievement and motivation both before and after matriculation” (p. 503). If universities do not provide the necessary support to students whom they know are at-risk, students are “preordained to fail” (p. 508).

Minority Support Centers. Support centers for minority students can provide a means for transition from the reservation to the college (Dodd et al. 1995; Henderson, 1991; Mayo et al., 1995). They provide help with counseling, scheduling, scholarship, financial aid, and language difficulties. They also established student organizations like Indian Clubs, which add to the social integration. Henderson (1991) explained that

being part of a group gives the students support, develops pride and confidence, and encourages them to be active in college-wide activities. The club helps to foster the participation of many American Indian students in other student organizations that focus on academic or vocational programs... This involvement helps increase retention rates of minority students. (p. 50)

Dodd et al. (1995) also reported that “special activities and organizations such as Indian clubs and campus Pow Wows also help students maintain their identities while embarking on new studies and careers” (p. 74).

Intrusive Advising. Intrusive advising is an exemplar concept in advising practice. Glennon et al. (1985) stated that

To be intrusive in advising means to be duly concerned about the academic affairs of one’s students... It takes an aggressive approach in requiring the students to come in for advising at frequent intervals. It does not wait for students to get into academic difficulty, but continually checks on their progress and provides academic support in the form of developmental course work and/or tutoring assistance” (p 336).

Lopez, et al. (1988) maintained that “intrusive advising requires that the advisor take an active role and seek contact with students rather than waiting for students, once in academic difficulty, to come to the advisor” (p. 196) .

Intrusive advising, introduced by Glennon (1975), contributed to positive results among freshmen, increasing grade point averages, and retention. Glennon et al. (1985) then applied the concept to minority students. There was a 25 percent reduction in attrition and a six-percent increase in minority graduates during their three-year study. As strong advocates of intrusive advising for minority students, they believed that if minorities are going to be recruited into higher education, institutions have the obligation to “provide services to enhance their chances of success” (p 338).

Lopez et al. (1988) developed an intrusive advising program based on Glennon, Baxley, and Farren's work. All at-risk freshmen were required to be in the program. Minority students made up 10 - 20 percent of the group. Advisors assisted these students with scheduling, review of all class assignments, study habits, and graded work. Students met weekly with a professional advisor and a peer advisor twice each week. They were also required to enroll in an academic study skills class. Over a six-year period, mean GPA rose to 2.40 (up from 2.15 upon matriculation), which was equivalent to overall freshmen GPA. Retention rates for this group was between 70 - 85 percent, compared to 62 percent for the entire university. Students in this program were *taught* how to survive in college.

Garnett (1990) also demonstrated that an intrusive advising program, aimed at probation and suspended students, resulted in reduced attrition rates and higher GPAs among participants. First, students were required to attend an advising session. The program was explained and a rationale given to each students as to why they were required to be in the program, and how it might facilitate their success. Then, during each semester, students were required to visit the Counseling Center at least twice, visit with an advisor three times, conference with each professor with whom they were enrolled, participate in two study sessions per week, and submit a report each week about their activities. Garnett felt that this routine would develop discipline and responsibility in the students involved.

After the first semester, 50 percent of the students in the program achieved the 2.00 GPA required to maintain their admission, and that rate rose to 61 percent after two

semesters. After five years, the probation rate fell from 10.2 to 8.2 percent, and the suspension rate fell from 5.8 to 4.7 percent. The retention rate increased by 22 percent and the population of the senior class increased by 30.3 percent. Retention rates for freshmen increased 21.8 percent over the five-year period.

Bridge Programs. Henderson (1991) reported on the importance of a supported transition to the university for minority students. He maintained that when students transfer from a community college, they must not be penalized by having to repeat a class, and that they know clearly what is expected of them upon transfer. He advocated bridge programs that provide assistance in transfer, utilizing mentors to assist students before they leave the community college, and are available during the first year at the four-year university.

Richardson and Skinner (1992) affirmed that "the most effective programs involve collaboration among universities, community colleges and public schools to provide support for underprepared students by developing bridge programs and by providing systematic and comprehensive academic support services...until a student was firmly established..." (p. 39).

Faculty Support and Mentoring. Most studies of minority student retention highlight the benefits of the relationship with faculty members (Mayo et al., 1995; Tinto, 1987, Wenzlaff & Biewer, 1996). Mayo et al. (1995) found that the relationship with a faculty member was the most important determiner of social and academic integration for all minority students, especially if there were minority members on the faculty. They

were quick to point out, however, that non-minority faculty can be very effective if they understand and have empathy for the minority student. Minority faculty members were less important in their study for American Indian students, who benefited from all positive faculty relationships.

Faculty mentoring has also been shown effective for increasing retention for at-risk and minority students. Redmond (1990) defined mentoring as "the act of providing wise and friendly counsel" (p. 188). As Tinto (1987) explained, a connection with faculty is one of the major factors affecting retention. It stands to reason that a personal relationship with a respected faculty member would help minority students to bridge the gap between alienation and connectedness. Many such mentoring programs have been described in the literature (The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, 1995; Cartledge et al., 1995; Leon, 1993; Redmond, 1990; Terrell et al., 1992). Most programs described were in their initial stages of implementation, and few conclusive results have been published. However, the initial evaluations of programs show retention ranging from 60 to 98 percent.

In conclusion, interventions that institutions can implement have been found to assist minority students. Support centers for minority students provide a safe enclave to develop social foundations, especially during the initial period of adjustment. Intrusive advising for at-risk students provides support for students who may not understand the educational systems on the campus. They also serve to provide study skills training for those who are academically underprepared and are at risk of low academic integration. Bridge programs make the transfer process easier and more predictable for students, and

provide needed support for minority students. Pre-transfer contact with faculty may contribute to academic integration. Faculty mentoring programs provide one-on-one contact with a faculty member, who takes an active role in the minority students' life, academically, socially and personally. All of these institutional interventions have improved academic and social integration among minority students.

### Success Among Minority Students

The problem of minority student retention can be partially explained by both Tinto's (1987) Model of Institutional Departure, and Bean's (1990) Longitudinal Model of the Type of Factors that Affect Retention Decisions. Social and academic integration, goal commitment, loyalty to the institution and background characteristics all tend to be important. Evidence of environmental pull is also found in the literature.

According to Richardson and Skinner (1992), many minority students have overcome the challenges they faced when entering and progressing through a college degree program. In a qualitative study of successful minority students, Richardson and Skinner found that persistence was most related to students' attachment to the university, individual determination and social climate. Most of the minority students in their study were following a non-traditional route to education. A majority was composed of first generation college students who did not immediately understand the educational bureaucracy of the institution. They were able to overcome the barriers to success, tended to have high levels of motivation, and enjoyed the encouragement and support offered by the institution, chiefly from faculty. Successful minority students also had a

tendency to acquire a role model who had been to college. A friend who had attended was able to model behavior viewed as successful, and eased the insecurity of the experience. This appeared to reduce the intimidating effects of the institution.

Richardson and Skinner (1992) also found that the value a minority student placed on being in college was directly related to their success. Successful students set goals, such as academic and career goals, and were able to work through and meet them.

Family support is an important factor in realizing success among minority students. Kenny and Stryker (1996) concluded that minority students found family support more important than friends, while white college students found more support with friends. Kenny and Stryker attributed this to the possible discriminatory social and academic climate at the university, and that the family was a safe haven for many minority students.

Mayo et al. (1995) investigated the relationship between social integration and academic success (measured by GPA) for minority students. The most important conclusion was that the groups were so different that they should never be considered homogenous, since what may have been true for one ethnic group was not true for others. The only consistent significant factor was the relationship students had with faculty and staff. Faculty support was most likely to affect academic achievement, and was the strongest predictor of success identified in the study.

Mayo et al. also found what might be important for Caucasian students' success was not necessarily true for minority students. Caucasian and Hispanic students were assisted through memberships in academically oriented student organizations, but African

American and American Indians students realized no benefit from those organizations. Informal social integration was also less of a factor in minority student success. In fact, it was actually detrimental to African American students, whose GPA went down in relation to the amount of socializing they did. They also discovered that relationships with one's own ethnic group was not important, and that most minority students sought membership in all ethnic groups, including Caucasian groups.

### Summary

Variables that affect persistence behavior for the general college student population also tend to affect minority student persistence. However, because many minority students already possess several risk factors, those variables may have a greater impact on minority students. Many minority students are not prepared academically or socially for university study. They may have fewer financial resources, and typically experience substantial environmental pull such as multiple personal roles, or be of first generation or nontraditional status. Because of this, minority students may find social or academic integration more difficult.

Institutions can assist minority students, mediating some of the risk factors. Successful attempts to retain minority students have included academic skill development, minority support centers, intrusive advising programs, bridge programs for transfer students, and faculty support or mentoring.

Many minority students persist in higher education, and reach the goal of a four-year degree. Those who were successful tended to integrate socially and academically, as

well as developed loyalty to the university. A variety of factors have been shown to influence persistence behavior among minority students, including seeking role models, and developing strong ties to faculty and staff. Students were also committed to the process of obtaining an education, and actively pursued their goals. Many minority students found that family support was very important, as it served as a safe haven from the sometimes difficult environment of the university.

Mayo et al. (1995) in their study of minority students concluded that minority groups should not be lumped into one group when researching student persistence. What may be true for one groups is not necessarily true for another. Therefore, the research specific to American Indian persistence is addressed in the following section.

#### Persistence of American Indian Students

Although understanding minority student retention is beneficial to discern the problems associated with American Indian students, specific focus on issues directly related to American Indian enrollment patterns must be addressed. This section of the literature review is directed toward a specific definition of the problem of low enrollments and completion rates nationally, as well as in Montana. Also addressed are the attempts that have been made to understand and correct the problem of low enrollment and completion rates among American Indians, as well as successful interventions directed specifically toward American Indian students.

### National Trends for American Indian Enrollment and Completion

The problem of low enrollment in higher education among American Indians has occurred at both the national and local levels. The National Center for Educational Statistics (Pavel et. al, 1998) reported that in 1990, 66 percent of American Indians had graduated from high school. Nine percent had earned a baccalaureate degree, and three percent had earned a graduate or professional degree. In comparison, 75 percent of the total population of the United States had graduated from high school, 20 percent had completed a baccalaureate degree, and nine percent had earned a graduate or professional degree (see Table 2-1).

Academic preparation in the high schools appears to be improving for American Indian students (Pavel et al., 1998). The number of American Indian high school students taking college preparatory classes increased from six percent in 1982 to 31 percent in 1992, compared to the increase of 13 to 47 percent for the total population. During that time, SAT scores for American Indian students rose by 42 points, while only seven points for the total population. At present there are more American Indians enrolled in college than have been in the past (Pavel et al., 1998). There has been a 67 percent increase in American Indian student enrolment, compared to a 30 percent increase of the total population. Most of the gains have been among American Indian women (a 98 percent increase), especially at the community college level. Eight percent of American Indian college students are enrolled at a tribal college.

Although there has been an increase in their enrollment, American Indian students face four or more risk factors at a higher rate than the total population. Thirty-five

percent face delayed enrollment, part time attendance, financial independence, having dependents, single parenthood, full time employment, or earning a GED; only 22 percent of the total population face the same risk factors as they enter college (Pavel et al., 1998).

Table 2-1. High School and College Graduates among American Indian and US Population Rates in 1990

	High school graduation rates	College graduation rates
U.S. population	75%	20%
American Indian population	66%	9%

Once American Indian students enroll in institutions of higher education, they exhibit lower persistence rates than the total population. During the 1995-1996 academic year, the graduation rate for American Indian students enrolled at public NCAA Division I universities was 33 percent, while white students had a 53 percent graduation rate (Pavel et al., 1998). "Since the majority of American Indian students are enrolled in public institutions, these graduation rates indicate that many American Indian students were not completing their college education, or were taking longer to complete their education than the majority of students overall" (Pavel et al., 1998, p 3-25). (Table 2-2)

Table 2-2. College Graduation Rates at NCAA Division I Institutions, 1995-1996

	College Graduation Rates
U.S. Population	53%
American Indian Population	33%

Recently, baccalaureate degree attainment by American Indians has increased by 86 percent, compared with a 27 percent increase for the total population. Thirty-three percent of those started at a two-year institution, compared with 17 percent for the total population. Although progress has been made within the American Indian population, “the share of degrees awarded to Native Americans remains less than their share of the U.S. population and less than their share of college enrollers” (Pavel et al., 1998, p. 4-33). Although American Indian students are better prepared for college and are increasing their enrollment rates in higher education, graduation rates do not reflect those of the entire population. Nationally, there is a problem with low enrollment and completion rates among American Indians.

#### American Indian Enrollment and Completion Trends in Montana

American Indian students are enrolling in Montana’s colleges, but fewer of them complete baccalaureate degrees, compared to white students (Pavel et al., 1998). In 1990, six percent of Montana’s population consisted of American Indian residents. Sixty-eight percent of them had graduated from high school, but only eight percent had earned degrees. This compares to 82 percent of all Montanans earning a high school diploma, and 20 percent earning baccalaureate degrees. During this time, American Indians made up nine percent of Montana college enrollment, but earned only eight percent of all baccalaureate degrees (Pavel et al., 1998). (Table 2-3).

Table 2-3. Comparison of American Indian and Overall Montana Student 1990  
Graduation Rates

	High School Gradation Rates	College Graduation Rates
Montana Overall	82%	20%
Montana American Indians	68%	8%

#### Considering American Indian Persistence

Enrollment and completion rates among American Indian students continue to be lower than white students. Many of the factors that impact persistence behavior in overall populations also factor into persistence behavior among American Indians. The following is a review of the literature regarding individual characteristics and institutional interventions that affect persistence for American Indian students.

Individual Characteristics. American Indian college students have been shown to be the least successful at entering and moving through the higher education system and completing baccalaureate degrees (Benjamin Chambers & Reiterman, 1993; Henderson, 1991; Tierney, 1995). The typical young, white pre-adult track is not appropriate for all students, especially American Indian students (Benjamin et al., 1993; House & Keely, 1997; Lunneborg & Lunneborg, 1986).

The factors associated with persistence and attrition for students in general also affect American Indian students; most face at least four risk factors as they enter college (Pavel et al., 1998). Researchers studying the problems associated with retention of

American Indians in higher education have concluded that in addition to the risk factors that affect all students, further or compounded barriers to success for American Indian students include:

- Lack of academic preparation (Benjamin et al., 1993; Cibik & Chambers, 1991; Davis, 1992; Dodd et al., 1995; Herring, 1990; Hoover & Jacobs, 1992; LaCounte, 1987; Ridone, 1988; Wells, 1989, 1997)
- Adjustment culturally and socially (Beaty & Chiste, 1986; Benjamin et al., 1993; Cibik & Chambers, 1991; Huffman et al., 1986; LaCounte, 1987; Wells, 1989, 1997; Wenzlaff & Biewer, 1996)
- Financial difficulties (Herring, 1990, Cibik & Chambers, 1991; Davis, 1992; Dodd et al., 1995; Huffman et al., 1986; LaCounte, 1987)
- Racism (Dodd et al., 1995; Hanson & Rouse, 1987; Herring, 1990)
- English as a second language (Davis, 1992; Dodd et al., 1995; LaCounte, 1987).
- Family difficulties (Davis, 1992; Herring, 1990; LaCounte, 1987; Oppelt, 1989; Wenzlaff & Biewer, 1996)
- Level of traditionalism (Davis, 1992; Huffman et al., 1986; Wenzlaff & Biewer, 1996)

Although individual characteristics may be compounded by cultural characteristics, all American Indians cannot be categorized into one group, since each tribe or regional group has their own cultural attributes (Oppelt, 1989). There are some common characteristics shared by most groups however, including time perspective, high value placed on sharing of resources with friends and family (even at the risk of

impoverishing themselves) group cooperation versus competition, spiritual needs and the concern for family (Herring, 1990; Oppelt, 1989).

Oppelt (1989) explained that certain barriers to achievement in higher education are also common among most American Indian groups. Lack of financial resources, poor academic preparation, present orientation (as opposed to goal setting with the future in mind), lack of appropriate role models, English as a second language, and adapting to mainstream culture are typical characteristics of American Indians (Herring, 1990; LaCounte, 1987; Tan, 1995; Wells, 1987, 1997).

American Indians also face racism on college campuses (Hanson & Rouse, 1987). Historically, "Indians were viewed as the zero point of human society, serving as the symbolic benchmark from which Euroamerican society could measure its own growth and progress" (p. 36). Attitudes have changed over time, and seem to be improving in recent years. However, stereotypes, both positive and negative, still exist. Generally, attitudes have shifted from the perspective of American Indians as savages to a much more positive view of American Indian cultures.

Most people acquire their attitudes of American Indians from television and movies, as well as other reading material, both fiction and non-fiction (Hansen & Rouse, 1987). Since American Indians are not as visible as other minorities, mainstream attitudes tend to be stereotypical, highly inaccurate, and negative. Some still view American Indians as "warlike and primitive people" (Hansen & Rouse, 1987, p. 57) and that American Indians are to blame for their economic and social difficulties, although

this was not the overall feeling of respondents. Negative attitudes still exist, but the trend seems to be shifting to more positive views of American Indian people.

Family relations tend to be very important to American Indian students (Benjamin et al., 1993; Cibik & Chambers, 1991; LaCounte, 1987). Students should not have to choose between family and school, since it is often more important for an American Indian student not to miss important family events, than it is to miss class.

Going home tends to be a widespread pattern among American Indian students. Cibik and Chambers (1991) reported that 57 percent of the American Indian students in their study said that they had the need to go home to help with family matters at some point during the school year. This figure was high when compared to other minority students and white students. Thirty-two percent of black students, 24 percent of Hispanic students, and 17 percent of white students reported the need to go home to help with family. This activity can be very disruptive for college students and, compounded by academic under-preparedness, social and cultural pressures and other risk factors, can increase the likelihood of departure.

In conclusion, research specific to American Indian students has shown that they face the same risk factors of all minority students. Lower levels of academic preparation, racism and lack of finances are consistently shown to affect persistence. In addition, Indian students have fewer role models who have achieved four-year degrees. They often experience language difficulties, since many maintain their tribal language. The American Indian family is of the utmost importance to Indian students. At times they may not have the support of their families and must choose between the family and

school, or may spend extended periods at home away from classes. Adapting to the dominant culture at the institutions may also be difficult.

### Institutional Interventions

Institutions can employ specific interventions to help retain American Indian College students. Besides the interventions that assist minority students in general, the institution should:

- Take on the attitude of acceptance and provide high expectations (Benjamin et al., 1993)
- Make attempts to integrate the extended family within the institutional structure and activities (LaCounte, 1987; Pavel & Padilla, 1993)
- Provide rich cultural events highlighting American Indian culture (Dodd, et al, 1995; Huffman et al., 1986; Pavel & Padilla, 1993)

Huffman et al. (1986) explain that

For white students, the college setting is simply an extension of the educational social institution of their culture.... White students are not entering an alien cultural milieu, but rather are moving deeper into the milieu of their own culture.... Native American students, on the other hand, tend to bring to college a strong sense of their cultural identity and are generally... oriented toward a set of values and goals are different from those institutionalized in the college or university. (p. 33)

The need to adjust to a foreign culture often hinders American Indian students' success at college. "Enrollment in college is frequently the first long-term exposure to a non-Indian environment" (LaCounte, 1987, p. 66). Nevertheless, students must adopt new traits at the university, while maintaining their traditional ways (Benjamin et al.,

1993; Huffman et al., 1986). Ideally, students should not be persuaded to conform, but be allowed to maintain their identity and culture while enrolled.

American Indian students thrive under conditions that promote their success (Henderson, 1991). Faculty should be aware of cultural differences and accommodate those students who exhibit them. These may include a lack of response during class and lack of eye contact (signs of respect). Faculty may misinterpret cultural differences as lack of intelligence or respect, as they tend to reward more Western-like behaviors.

Programs directed toward American Indian students should be highly personal and employ follow-up measures to assist in their adjustment. "The goal of assisting the whole person, and not just meeting specific needs, is a basic premise of the American Indian culture" (LaCounte, 1987, p. 70). Interventions need to involve faculty, and student organizations, as well as a student's family. She also suggested that institutions sponsor rich cultural events such as Intertribal Pow Wows, so that American Indian students may experience important cultural events while on campus. Family members often attend these events, and viewing the campus as an inclusive and supportive environment is important to them as well as to the student.

Pavel and Padilla (1993) found that Tinto's Model did not satisfactorily explain attrition in American Indian and Alaskan Native students. They found that prior schooling did not affect American Indian students' success to the same degree that it does for white students. Normal predictors of success, such as GPA (high or low) did not satisfactorily predict American Indian student success. However, Pavel and Padilla established that satisfaction with social and cultural climate of a university did contribute

to American Indian student success. The best predictors of success for American Indian students were family background, post secondary intention and social and academic integration.

Pavel and Padilla suggested that college officials work with parents and other family members to assist students with their early commitments, and goals, with high schools to improve academic preparation, improve support programs at the university, and implement aggressive retention programs. The university should sponsor cultural events, provide academic support, and train faculty and advisors in the understanding of cultural issues. They also recommend that staff working with American Indian students recognize and deal with homesickness.

In conclusion, institutions can encourage American Indian student persistence if attitudes of acceptance and high expectations are extended. Since extended families are important to Indian students, it is advised that they be included in the educational process, and that cultural activities for American Indians be scheduled into the calendar of events. If implemented, these suggestions may provide support and encouragement for American Indian students

### Experiencing Success

Although American Indian students face a multitude of challenges and risk factors, many succeed. Early goal setting, personal determination, and coping mechanisms (related to dealing with racism) were found to be common characteristics among those who graduated with four-year degrees (Benjamin et al., 1993; Cibik &

Chambers, 1991; Dodd et al., 1995). "Only a tremendous desire for learning and personal growth propels the student into so foreign and uncomfortable environment. Only great effort by both student and institution make retention possible" (LaCounte, 1987, p. 67).

Dodd et al. (1995) interviewed 24 American Indian seniors enrolled at a public institution in Montana. The group reported that their success was enhanced through goal setting, determination to succeed, and the development of coping mechanisms (as related to racial and cultural differences experienced on campus). Furthermore, they concluded that encouragement from family, educational background and support systems all contributed to student success.

Huffman et al. (1986) found that the maintenance of tribal traditions was very important for Sioux students in South Dakota. They reported that tribally traditional American Indian students were more successful than assimilated or bicultural students. They also reported that participation in the college environment was not related to success for American Indian students. Neither family background nor educational aspirations were related to success.

In conclusion, successful American Indian students set goals early, and are determined to reach them. They tend to maintain their tribal traditionalism, and experience support from both faculty at the institution and their families at home.

### Summary

American Indian college students typically experience difficulty when embarking upon a four-year college education. They face risk factors and challenges not typically faced by most college students, such as cultural and social differences, language barriers, low level of academic preparation, and racism. Nevertheless, American Indian students can be successful. Support from the institution in the form of specialized retention programs, encouragement from faculty and college sponsored support services can encourage success. Individual students can gain support from family, faculty, and informal groups of other American Indian students to feel welcome at the university, and overcome discrimination and racism. Personal determination, goal setting, and support from faculty and family can enhance the educational experiences of American Indian college students.

### Two-Year Colleges

*"The existing body of evidence on the impact of community colleges constitutes little more than the initial charting of the most rudimentary landmarks in unexplored terrain."*

*(Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998, p. 157)*

Two-year colleges aim to serve the community by providing educational programs in several areas, including adult basic education, lifelong learning opportunities, certificate programs and freshmen and sophomore studies programs that may lead to associate of arts degrees. Those credits may then be transferred to a four-

year institution toward the completion of a baccalaureate degree (Foote, 1997). The community college, for many students, serves as a beginning point for post secondary education, especially if they cannot immediately leave their geographic location to attend a four-year institution (Hendrickson, 1995). The availability of a community college increases access for many students, including those with limited financial resources, minority students, and students with lower academic ability or preparation (Cohen, 1988; Piland, 1995).

#### Enrollment Patterns

Community college enrollments vary by geographic location, usually reflecting the population they serve. The trend, however, includes an overrepresentation of minority students. Community colleges enroll 42 percent of all freshmen. Seventy percent are white, 11 percent are African American, 11 percent are Hispanic, five percent are Asian American, and one percent are American Indian. Forty-six percent of all minorities enrolled in post-secondary education attend two-year colleges (Foote, 1997).

Many students, including minority students, enroll in community colleges to improve their life in terms of economics and life style (Nora, 1993; Weis, 1982), envisioning them as a gateway to the four-year institution. Students at a community college tend to vary their enrollment patterns, attending part time one semester and full time the next. Successful students, however, tend to stop "milling around" (Piland, 1995, p. 42) when they enter the four-year institution.

### Transfer and Retention Issues

Although a community college serves multiple roles for educational opportunities within the community, the role of transfer preparation is most relevant for the purposes of this research. With this role in mind, community colleges have been criticized for not reaching the goal of high transfer and retention rates, especially among minority students. Although most minority students report they attend a community college to prepare to attend a four-year institution, only 5 – 15 percent of those students actually graduate with a baccalaureate degree (Nora, 1993).

Researchers studying retention and transfer issues of two-year colleges reported consistent results. In general, students who begin their studies at a two-year are less likely to graduate with a bachelor's degree than those who begin at a four-year college, even if their original intent was to complete a baccalaureate degree (Nora, 1993; Pascarella, Smart & Ethington, 1986; Piland, 1995). The many adjustments that students make after transfer may contribute to a drop in grade point average, referred to as transfer shock (Dawson & Dell, 1997; Diaz, 1992; Hills, 1965; Keeley & House, 1993). In contrast, students who are academically and socially integrated at the two-year college are more likely to persist at a four-year (Nora & Rendon, 1990; Pascarella, et al., 1986), although social integration may not be as critical to community college students (Nora, Anastasia & Matonak, 1990). Students are also more likely to persist at a four-year college if they earned at least 60 credits at the two-year college (Best & Gehring, 1993). Students who are academically prepared when entering the two-year also persist at a higher rate (Clagett, 1996).

Minority students are generally over-represented at two-year colleges, but many are successful if they are socially and academically integrated, have strong determination and experience institutional fit (Nora, 1993). Using the two-year college as a stepping stone toward ultimate degree attainment is a key to success (Nora & Rendon, 1993).

The preparation community colleges provide students contributes to student success at the university, and although few actually transfer from the community college, those who do, tend to be successful (Piland, 1995). Nora (1993) explained, however, that achievement among transfer students from community colleges are generally among those who are more motivated and have higher levels of academic preparedness than those who do not obtain bachelor's degrees, including those of minority status. Most minority students who transfer from two-year institutions, however, do not obtain a baccalaureate degree.

Community college students tend to be most successful if they have high levels of commitment to educational goals and to the institution, high levels of social and academic integration, and their parents have high levels of academic achievement. Successful students also tend to have a strong commitment to use the community college for four-year degree attainment. Ethnicity has no direct effect on success or failure among community college students (Nora & Rendon, 1990).

In conclusion, research has shown that students who begin a degree attainment program at a community college are less likely to graduate. However, if a student transfers 60 or more credits, has a high level of commitment to the degree and is

academically integrated at the two-year college, they are more likely to persist to a four-year degree.

### Benefits of Community Colleges

Pascarella and Terenzini (1998), in their analysis of 20 years of research on the affects of college on college students, considered the increasing importance of the community college within the higher education system. Although they found relatively little research regarding the community college experience (as compared to four-year institutions), they stressed that community colleges are an important part of the post secondary education process, because their enrollments are increasing.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1998) discovered that developmental impacts provided at community colleges were similar to those provided at four-year institutions. They listed improvements in reading comprehension, mathematical skills, critical thinking, writing ability, scientific reasoning skills, enjoyment of intellectual pursuit, and the development of attribution to academic success, as among the benefits of attendance at a community college. The advantages of community colleges include small class size, high quality instruction, and personal attention from the faculty. These factors give students the skill and confidence they need to be successful once they transfer to the university (Piland, 1995).

In conclusion, a community college can be a good starting point for students if it provides students the opportunity to develop academic skills, and encourage positive

attitudes about learning. Small class size, high quality instruction, and attention from the faculty are all positive factors that can assist students as they pursue a degree.

### Tribal Colleges

Tribal colleges have become an important component of the higher education system in this country. The Navajo Community College in Arizona was the first tribal college in the United States. The goal of the college was to improve economic conditions on the Navajo reservation. The guiding principle that supported the curriculum was the perpetuation of the Navajo culture. Today, tribal colleges serve populations of 100 to 1200, and offer vocational programs, certificates, paraprofessional programs, transfer programs, adult education, community interest classes, and literacy programs. Some offer degree programs, including associates, bachelors and masters programs. In general, tribal colleges are less concerned about transfer programs, and focus more on local needs. Tribal colleges enroll mostly American Indian students, primarily female. Many of the students are single parents. Most are not attending school to eventually leave home, but to continue working on the reservation (Hill, 1995).

Transfer from Tribal College. The research on transfer students from tribal colleges is beginning to emerge, although several contradictions exist within the literature. Some studies suggest that persistence rates among students from tribal colleges are comparatively low (Brod & Carlisle, 1996; Henderson, 1991; Zaglauer, 1993), and do not lead to high levels of academic preparedness (Henderson, 1991).

Henderson claimed that transfer students from tribal colleges tend to have low self-esteem related to low academic skills and possible dropout.

In contrast, Wenzlaff and Biewer (1996) developed a Native American Secondary Teacher Education Program at tribal colleges in South Dakota. They claimed that "experiences at the tribal colleges allowed students an opportunity to build the self-confidence needed to transfer to a larger institution" (p. 42). They believed that this experience also enhanced social integration at both the tribal and four-year institutions.

The need for more comprehensive research is evident. Wright and Weasel Head (1990) studied Montana tribal college graduates. Of the respondents to a survey regarding postgraduate activities, 23 percent reported continuing their education at a four-year institution. Most of them (64 percent) were enrolled in a specific program at the college, and 13 percent claimed they had problems transferring from the tribal college. There was no report, however, on the number of students who completed a four-year degree.

Zaglauer (1993), in a study of persistence among Salish Kootenai Indians who attended a university in Montana, showed that traditional aged students who had transferred from an area tribal college had higher grade point averages and graduation rates than those who entered the university as freshmen, although the differences were not significant. He discovered non-traditional students had higher grade point averages and graduation rates, regardless of whether they transferred from the tribal college or enrolled directly at the University as freshmen.

Brod and Carlisle (1996) also studied American Indian transfer students at the University of Montana. They discovered that prior to 1991, American Indian students who transferred from a tribal college were less likely to graduate than were all other American Indian students. However, those figures shifted dramatically after fall of 1991. Brod and Carlisle report that, after this date, American Indian transfers to the University of Montana were more likely to graduate than all other American Indian students. They offered no explanation for the shift, although they suggested further study.

St. Pierre and Rowland (1990) reported that a high concern among tribal college administrators was the need for articulation agreements between their institutions and the four-year units in the Montana University System. Based on recommendations of Henderson (1991) and Richardson and Skinner (1992) regarding bridge programs, this may be a key to improving persistence among American Indian students.

Research regarding tribal college transfer student persistence is unclear. Some research suggests that transfer from a tribal college provides a boost, and prepares students to achieve academically (Brod & Carlisle 1996; Zaglauer, 1993), a factor that encourages persistence. Other studies suggest that this is not the case (Henderson, 1991). The need for research exploring how Tribal College contributes to four-year degree attainment is evident.

The Tribal College. The Tribal College (TC) involved in this study was a public two-year tribal college in Montana. The college offers nine associate of arts degrees,

with the primary charge of influencing economic and job opportunities on the reservation (On-line: [www.LBHC.cc.mt.us](http://www.LBHC.cc.mt.us)).

The student body is comprised primarily of local tribal members (90 percent). The Tribal College has an open admissions policy and as a public institution enrolls any adult 18 years of age with a high school diploma or GED. Because there are no facilities for student housing, all students commute to the college. Three-fourths of the students speak the indigenous language as their first language.

Mission Statement. Tribal colleges generally serve three main purposes. They aim to serve the community by providing educational opportunities of varying extent. They also hope to support the culture of the reservation they occupy and offer native language, history, and other cultural aspects from the tribe. They also serve as a beginning point for transfer to other educational institutions for associate and baccalaureate degrees (Hill, 1995). The Tribal College targeted for this study strives to meet those goals as well. The following is the mission statement of the Tribal College:

Purposes include establishing, maintaining and operating educational institutions at the post-secondary level on the... reservation, with educational, vocational and technical programs and curricula leading to degrees and certificates that may be granted by the college. [TC] is the [reservation's] education and cultural center that provides Associates of Arts degrees and certificates in areas that reflect the developing economic opportunities of the ... reservation community. The college is dedicated to the professional, vocational and personal development of individual students for their advancement in the workplace or in higher education. The college is committed to the preservation, perpetuation and protection of [native] culture and language. [TC] respects the distinct bilingual and bicultural aspects of the ... Indian Reservation community, aspects that are foundations of strength for the [local] and American Indian community. [TC] is committed to the advancement of the... Indian family through understanding and knowledge of pertinent issues and participation in community building. [TC] vitalizes [local]

and American Indian Scholarship, thus strengthening the unique, self-governing Tribe of Indians. (On-line: [www.LBHC.cc.mt.us](http://www.LBHC.cc.mt.us) paragraph 4).

### The Transfer Process at the Montana University

Montana University (MU) is a public, open enrollment university. If a student is in good standing from another college or university, they are admitted as transfer students. Students who are not in good standing can petition the Registrar's Office for provisional admission.

Montana University has designed and maintains articulation agreements with all state and many regional colleges and universities, including the seven tribal colleges in Montana. The guides consist of listings of all available classes at the college or university, and how they will transfer to Montana University. In some cases, classes will transfer in as required courses, and some transfer as electives.

All transfer students are required to have their transcript evaluated by an advisor in the Advising and Student Support Center. Each course on the transcript is either accepted as a requirement for the degree sought, or delegated as an elective. The student is then advised as to courses they should enroll in, and a file is established in the Advising Center. Students typically remain with the advisor until completion of the first or second semester, when they are then assigned to a faculty member for advising. The exception is for business majors, who remain with the business advisor at the center.

### Summary

A great deal of attention has been given to the issue of college student persistence. Most studies have found that both personal and institutional characteristics influence a student's decision to depart or persist. Individuals who persist tend to integrate socially, perform well academically, receive support from the family and friends, and have enough money to attend.

In an overview of research on retention, Tinto (1998) maintains that the most important factor in student persistence is involvement. Tinto believes that both social and academic involvement (or integration) are critical to persistence, and that the two factors interact to influence a student's decision to remain or to depart. Tinto believed, however, that in most cases, academic integration has the most impact on that decision, especially at two-year colleges.

Tinto (1998) stressed that the first year of college is the most important in terms of social and academic integration, "especially during the first ten weeks when the transition to college is not yet complete and personal affiliations are not yet cemented" (p. 169). He recommended that colleges and universities structure their pedagogical organization to include socialization along with academics, to increase the opportunity for students to integrate socially while integrating academically. Collaborative learning, as well as cooperation between departments should be encouraged.

Most of the research on minority students has explored experiences of African American students in higher education, and more is being done with Hispanic students, since their enrollment numbers are increasing. However, Mow and Nettles (1990)

maintain that “from the research on minority students, we know the least about American Indians, and what we know is not very illuminating. American Indians are found to have higher dropout rates than Blacks and whites, possible because they, like Hispanics, are more likely to attend two-year institutions” (p. 88). They also conclude that high school pre-preparation is highly correlated with success of American Indians, in that poor academic preparation is related to low persistence rates.

Minority students, and American Indian students in particular, have lower persistence rates than white students. Minority students face compounded risk factors, including lower levels of academic preparedness, lack of finances, first generation status, multiple roles, and less social integration.

American Indians face these factors as well. A few researchers have documented the problem of low persistence rates among American Indian college students; a problem that exists at Montana University. Because so few studies have been conducted regarding American Indian persistence, the level of understanding needed to design and implement programs directed at their success is inadequate.

Although recognizing barriers and effective retention strategies that can assist with institutional efforts to encourage American Indian student success, much is left unexplained. What role does a tribal college play in assisting American Indian students to adjust to the new college environment? How do social and academic integration affect persistence behavior among American Indian students? In light of Tinto’s (1998) belief that the first ten weeks are most important, institutions need a better understanding of what the first semester is like for American Indian transfer students.

Based on the research regarding persistence, and employing Bean's (1990) model to frame the research, a qualitative study was conducted seeking such understanding. Such important factors such as academic and social integration, organizational variables, environmental pull, and educational attitudes were addressed. The following chapter demonstrates how this study was conducted.

## CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGYStatement of the Problem, Purpose and Research Questions

The rate of persistence among American Indian transfer students at Montana University (MU) is low when compared to other transfer students. Many do not return after the first semester. The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the experiences of American Indian college students from the Tribal College (TC) during their first semester at Montana University and how those experiences relate to their attitudes toward the University, which may lead to their decisions to persist or depart.

The overarching question and subquestions addressed in this study were as follows:

What are the experiences of American Indian students as they transfer from the Tribal College to Montana University?

- a) How are these experiences related to social or academic integration?
- b) Do environmental pull factors relate to their decision to remain or depart?
- c) Do background characteristics relate to their decision to remain or depart?
- d) Does their interaction with the University organization relate to their decision to remain or depart?

### The Qualitative Approach to Research

This study was approached from two qualitative perspectives, the case study design coupled with grounded theory analysis. The following section describes each perspective and how they were applied to this study.

#### Case Study

A case study, according to Merriam (1998) is an analysis of a "bounded system" (p. 27) or a single entity or unit, which has well defined boundaries. A case, or the bounded system being studied, can be a person, a program, a group, a community, or a policy. There is a limit to the number of people who can be interviewed, and usually a finite time for data collection. In this instance, the case included seven of ten American Indian students who transferred from the Tribal College to Montana University during the fall semester, 1999. The timeline included the two weeks prior to the beginning of the semester, through final examination week at the University. A follow-up interview was also conducted to determine if and why a student returned the spring semester of 2000.

Creswell (1998) recommends that data collection for a case study include various sources of information, including documentation, records, interviews, observations, participant observations, and physical artifacts. He suggests the use of thick description<sup>8</sup>,

---

<sup>8</sup> When describing a phenomenon in qualitative terms, the goal is for the reader to understand that phenomenon as it took place. Events, conversation, attitudes and physical surroundings can all be included in the narrative, which lead to deeper understanding (Geertz, 1973).

theme analysis and interpretations be employed to analyze the data. In this study, the data collection included interviews with participants and the review of participants' high school and college transcripts. An academic advisor, an instructor for the Tribal College, and a Financial Aid Office staff member were also interviewed to clarify issues that arose during the series of interviews.

### Grounded Theory

The aim of grounded theory research, according to Creswell (1998), is to develop or generate theory that reflects the phenomenon being studied. "The theory, developed by the researcher, is articulated toward the end of the study and can assume the form of a narrative statement, a visual picture, or a series of hypotheses or propositions" (p. 56). The grounded theorist conducts between 20 – 30 interviews to gather as much information about the phenomenon as possible. Creswell calls this saturation.

During data collection, constant comparative analysis<sup>9</sup> takes place to direct future interviews and elicit member checking. Statements from the interviews are subsequently coded into categories, subcategories or properties, where axial coding, or cross checking for themes or relationships can take place. The results explain causal conditions of the phenomenon, locates the actions or interactions that take place, and identifies the influences on and consequences of the interactions. A selective coding analysis should

---

<sup>9</sup> Constant comparative analysis requires that data be compared continuously throughout the data gathering process. This allows the researcher to analyze the data when it is still fresh in her mind. More importantly, through the continuing analysis of new data to old, new patterns may emerge which can prepare the researcher for the next round of data collection (Merriam, 1998).

then be conducted whereby the researcher forms a story line to explain the phenomenon. The result of this type of analysis is a “substantive-level theory, written by the researchers close to a specific problem or population of people” (Creswell, 1998, p.57-58). The new theory is then subjected to further empirical analysis.

This study employed a qualitative design, utilizing a combination of case study and grounded theory techniques for data collection and analysis. The intent was to understand the experiences of American Indian transfer students, and how they contributed to the decision to persist or depart, based on the theoretical framework. Because a pre-existing model served as the framework for the research, no new theory was generated. Instead, suggestions for modifications to the model were made.

### Research Design

Designing qualitative research, according to Marshal and Rossman (1999), ought to include three major objectives. The design must present a plan on how the study will be conducted, show that the researcher is capable of conducting the study, and that there is flexibility within the study. To meet these objectives, eight topics are covered in the remainder of this chapter. These include (a) the overall strategy for the research, (b) the participants, (c) the researcher’s role, (d) methods to collect the data, (e) strategies for data management, (f) strategies for data analysis, (g) trustworthiness of the research and (8) a timeline to conduct the study.

### The Overall Strategy for the Research

There is limited understanding of the experiences of American Indian college students as they transfer from a familiar environment of a tribal college to a four-year institution. Before attempting to test hypotheses and theories related to that experience, we must first understand the experience and perceptions of the student. To accomplish this, the researcher went directly to the source, in this case the American Indian students themselves.

The focus of this study was the individual experiences of students transferring from the Tribal College to Montana University. The course of this research consisted of five stages characterized by four in-depth interviews and a final follow-up session upon the start of the spring semester, 2000. Data collection also included transcript analysis, and demographic information.

Incentive to Participate. To encourage participation, each participant was given a \$50.00 gift certificate from the merchant of his or her choice. Each was promised that they would receive the incentive when they either completed or withdrew from the study. It was made clear that if they chose to withdraw prematurely from the University, they must interview with the researcher prior to receiving the incentive. None of the participants withdrew early (although one stopped attending class), and all were given the incentive after the last interview round was completed.

Structure of Interviews. Although an in-depth interview is generally more conversational and open-ended (Fontana & Frey, 1994), the interviews were conducted

individually in a semi-structured format, with pre-determined questions related to their experiences during the first semester of school. These questions were derived from the theoretical framework. Follow-up questions were tailored to individual participants as themes and issues arose. The questions that were asked during each of the interviews may be viewed in Appendix A. Constant comparative data analysis was employed to check for emerging patterns and prepare for the subsequent stages of data collection.

Stage One. A group of students from the Tribal College planning to transfer to Montana University were contacted and asked to meet individually with the researcher prior to their transfer. The first meeting included an informed consent, permission to view transcripts and ACT or SAT scores (see Appendix B), collection of demographic information (see Appendix C), and in-depth interviews with each of the participants. Constant comparative analysis was initiated.

Stage Two. A second round of interviews characterized stage two. These in-depth interviews were conducted with all of the participants during the second week of enrollment at Montana University. Constant comparative analysis continued.

Stage Three. The third round of interviews occurred between the sixth and eighth week of the semester. These in-depth interviews were conducted with all but one of the participants and included follow-up questions to patterns that emerged during the previous two stages. Constant comparative analysis continued.

Stage Four. The fourth round of interviews was conducted the week before final examinations. In-depth interviews were employed and covered the general categories related to persistence, as well as follow-up questions to other patterns that emerged during previous stages. Constant comparative analysis continued.

Stage Five. Final checks of all the participants and the evidence of returning to the University for spring semester characterized stage five. All students were interviewed at the beginning of spring semester.

### The Participants

The participants for the study included seven of ten American Indian students who transferred from the Tribal College to Montana University in the fall of 1999. These students were identified through communication with the Dean of Student Affairs at the Tribal College and Montana University Admissions Office, and an Academic Advisor in the Office of Advising and Student Services. Each participant was asked to complete a personal data sheet for providing demographic information (see Appendix C). Each participant's class status (number of earned college credits), ethnicity, age, gender, grade point average, and financial aid information are included in the results section. The participants are anonymously described in detail in the analysis section of the paper.

### Entering the Field

The following section explains how the participants were located, contacted and interviewed. It is written in a thick description and in a first person format to allow the reader to understand the process.

The first attempt to identify students was through the Dean of Students at the Tribal College. She provided names and phone numbers or addresses of three people who were transferring to Montana University fall semester. In one case, a student did not have a phone, and the Dean indicated that she would have the student contact me for initial contact.

In order to check the accuracy of the list, the Montana University Registrar's Office was contacted. The names of the students provided by the Dean of Student at the Tribal College were on the list, along with seven others. The records were checked to determine their eligibility for the study. They were all first semester transfer students, but one had not registered for classes and another was only enrolled for six credits. Unfortunately, this list of students was not generated until after school had started, and first round interviews were not possible, but the remaining students were contacted and asked to interview. One did not respond, and two declined to participate.

In addition to the official reports, colleagues on campus provided names of other Indian students who had transferred from the Tribal College. Nineteen additional names were discovered through this process. However, when their records were checked, only

one was actually eligible for the study. The last participant was located after school had started, and was referred to the researcher by a colleague.

Two participants had attended Montana University previously. One had attended in 1991-1992, and was suspended due to low grades. The other attended earlier as well, but withdrew in the middle of the semester. Although they had previously attended, it was believed they had important perspectives to the transfer processes, since they had spent a considerable time away from Montana University and had attended the Tribal College before re-entry. All of the students in the final selection were in their first semester of attendance after transfer, and enrolled full time.

Contacting Participants. The first person contacted was Karen<sup>10</sup>. She had spoken to the director of a student services program on campus who had been a teacher of hers in high school, and they discussed this research project. She appeared happy to participate and helped to provide names and phone numbers of other students. Arrangements were made to meet at the Tribal College and she agreed to contact the other people as well. At the time, only three participants had been identified.

Upon arrival at the Tribal College, the receptionist led the way up an open set of steps to the commons area, where recording equipment could be set up. The commons was a large open area. There was a row of long brown tables lined up along an open corridor. A variety of chairs were arranged casually among the tables. Staff offices were

---

<sup>10</sup> The names of all of the participants have been changed.

situated along one wall, and the bookstore was settled on the opposite wall. Large murals of important chiefs from the past brightened a third wall.

After waiting for 30 minutes, the receptionist announced that Karen called to say that her car had broken down and that she would not make it in for the interview.

Another 30 minutes went by while waiting for the other two participants, Maggie and Charles. Neither arrived. I packed up my equipment. While on my way out I spoke to the receptionist about reaching the other two students. Maggie did not have a phone, and Charles worked in the Technology Center, for which she gave me the telephone number.

After returning, about an hour's drive, I called Charles. Several attempts had already been made to contact him. This time he was there and we spoke about the research project. He was very hesitant. I explained that if he wanted to meet me, I would pay for his mileage and lunch, which would come to \$50.00. I also gave him the option of meeting with me at the Tribal College instead. He agreed to meet with me the following week.

I then called Karen and presented the same offer. We set up some time as well.

I wrote to Maggie and explained the research and that I would like her to participate. I asked her to call me collect at home, and that if she wanted to come to meet me, I would pay her mileage and lunch, or we could meet at the Tribal College. Maggie called a few days later and agreed to drive to meet me.

First Interviews. Charles was the first to interview. I met him in the Student Union Building at MU and we walked back to the conference room where the interview

would take place. Charles was very shy, but friendly. On the way to the interview location we talked about the web site he designed for an upcoming reservation-wide event. The interview went well, although Charles was very nervous and did not speak much. The interview lasted about 15 minutes.

Maggie came in next. She knew the way to my office, but I met her in another building, since there was construction and re-routing taking place. She brought her two preschool children, the youngest a boy age three, and a girl age five. The little girl brought a little plastic purse filled with small toys, and some hard candy. When we arrived at the conference room, I brought a box of toys for them to play with and gave them some stickers.

Maggie's interview went well also, although she was quite concerned about the confidentiality and anonymity, asking if the recorded material would be destroyed after the project was complete. I assured her that it would be and that her privacy would be protected as much as possible. Her children played with the toys for about three-quarters of the interview, and then began to run around the room, playing tag. Maggie told her daughter to play with the toys, which she did for a few minutes, and then resumed the game with her brother. The interview with Maggie lasted about 30 minutes.

Karen was also scheduled for that day. However, she called to say she could not make the trip from home because she did not have the car as her mother had promised. We rescheduled for the day before classes started.

Karen came to pay her fees the day we were scheduled and, since the lines were long, was three hours late for her appointment. The interview, however, went well, and lasted about 30 minutes.

Discovering Other Students. Two weeks before classes were to begin, a report was ordered from the Registrar's Office that would indicate the students who were first time transfer students from the Tribal College. Since Montana University had been implementing a new computer system (BANNER), the person in charge of that report had placed it at the lower end of her priority list. Unfortunately, the inquiry about the report was made the Monday after classes had started. When she asked when it was needed, I explained that it was actually needed the week before. The report was e-mailed within the hour.

There were seven new names on the list. I reviewed their records to make certain they were first time transfers, and were in full time attendance. One had not enrolled, and one was only registered for six credits. The other five, however, were contacted.

I was able to contact four of them either by phone or by leaving a message. I made an appointment with two, Marie and James, for two days later, and another made an appointment through my secretary. The fourth person did not have a telephone, so correspondence was sent explaining the project and inviting him to participate.

One of the men did not come in as scheduled, but accompanied another who was also scheduled. I brought them both into the conference room so that I could explain the project more thoroughly, and again invite them to participate.

Neither of the young men appeared comfortable. They sat at the far end of the table, slouched and arms folded. Neither one wanted to make any eye contact with me. They did not smile. The purpose and scope of the project was explained, along with timelines, and the incentive for participation. They did not respond, and continued to either look at the table or at each other. I asked them if they would be interested in participating. Again, I got no response. They would occasionally glance at one another, but not at me. I then explained that their activity in the project was strictly voluntary, and that they did not have to participate. I then told them that I would, however, like to know, so that I would stop pestering them. One of them cracked a smile. I then asked if they would like to think about it. They agreed, and I asked them to let me know in two days. We set up a time for them to come in again and let me know. Neither showed up for the scheduled appointment. The third did not respond to my letter.

Marie and James, a married couple, agreed to participate and arranged to meet me in my office later that week. They arrived early for the interview, and insisted on being interviewed together, a practice they continued throughout the project.

The following day, an advisor in the advising office was contacted. She is a member of the local tribe, and said that she could provide names of students who had transferred from the Tribal College. She provided nineteen additional names of students whom she knew to be enrolled for fall semester. Records for each student were researched and dates of transfer determined. One additional person, Theresa, was found to be eligible.

Theresa was contacted, and an interview set up. However, she did not keep her appointment. She was contacted once more, and another time established. She made the second appointment.

Soon after, a colleague brought a young woman, Susan, to my door. She was a transfer student from the Tribal College, and wondered if I should be interviewing her. She had experienced difficulties with financial aid, which prevented her from starting classes until ten days into the term.

The interview with Susan was both enjoyable and disturbing. She had been denied financial aid a week prior to the beginning of the semester, and had given up on her dream of getting her degree in teaching. At the last minute, however, she was granted some funding from her tribe and was back on campus to catch up on the work she had missed the previous ten days. Although her perspective prior to enrollment at Montana University was missed, her interview was fascinating and told a story of persistence and dedication to education. In spite of the rudeness she experienced, she explained that she “was not here for them,” but for herself.

Difficulty Making Contact. During the first week, I attempted to reach Maggie, who had been interviewed two weeks prior. Maggie did not have a phone, so I wrote to her at the address she provided, asking her to call me or stop by for the second interview. When I did not hear from her, I wrote again, using an attractive note card with a kitten on it. Maggie still did not respond. I wrote again, telling her how valuable she would be to the study, and how her information could lead to improved assistance for other American

Indian students. I still did not hear from her. I contacted an academic advisor who works closely with Indian students to see if she knew if Maggie was still in school. I had not heard from either of them by the end of the sixth week.

Toward the end of the seventh week, I finally made contact with Maggie, who had connected her telephone. She was having a difficult time with financial aid, and was unable to keep the appointments we had made. We agreed to a telephone interview, which was conducted over a speakerphone that evening and recorded.

For the final interviews, all participants were contacted. Karen had disconnected her phone and two letters were sent to attempt to set an interview. She was unable to call, and dropped by my office the week before finals for the final interview.

Charles, James, and Marie were very reliable when scheduling interviews. They did not miss interviews, nor were they late for appointments. However, it was common for Susan, Theresa, Karen, and Maggie to not show up for their scheduled time. Numerous attempts to keep the interviews on schedule were made, and for the most part, that task was accomplished.

Altogether, Karen and Charles were the only participants interviewed five times. Susan, Maggie, Marie, and James were interviewed four times, and Theresa was interviewed three times.

### The Role of the Researcher

The main instrument utilized in qualitative research is the researcher. This brought strategic, ethical and personal issues to the study (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Participation by the researcher was essential in this study, although direct contact in the lives of the participants occurred only during the interview process.

An additional issue related to the researcher's participation in the research was revealedness (Marshall & Rossman, 1999), or the degree to which participants were informed of the research process and intent. A continuum of revealedness exists which ranges from full disclosure to total secrecy. The intent and goal of the research were explained to each of the participants. If students had questions regarding the intent or process of the study, it was explained to them. All of the students expressed an interest in reading the final paper.

The possibility that a change may occur in a participant because of involvement in a study is always a concern of researchers. The fact that a student may have taken his or her enrollment more seriously while being studied was a possibility. One participant, who was having a very difficult time in a class, commented that she now understood why the research was being conducted, and understood its importance. However, no harm to the participants was anticipated, and every attempt to protect the participants was made by the researcher.

Marshall and Rossman (1999) stress that an effective qualitative researcher should have certain qualities. These include organizational and communication skills. The researcher possessed excellent communication skills. She held a master's degree in counseling and was a Nationally Certified Counselor. She had eleven years of experience as an academic counselor, and three years as a college instructor in education. She also

understood the basics of the local Indian culture, and had experience counseling American Indian students.

Ethical Considerations. During the first meeting, an informed consent agreement was provided to each of the participants in the study. The role of the researcher and the responsibilities of the participants were provided and issues of confidentiality were addressed. The researcher guaranteed privacy to each of the participants, and stressed that all audio recordings taken for the study would be destroyed<sup>11</sup> after the completion of the dissertation. All participants were involved on a strictly voluntary basis, and knew they could withdraw from the study at any time (see Appendix B).

#### Methods to Collect the Data

The methods to collect data included four in-depth interviews, one short follow-up interview, demographic data collection and transcript analysis. All of the interviews were audio taped with permission from the participants. Field notes were taken during the interviews and a contact summary form was employed to summarize the meeting (see Figure 3-1).

In order to provide structure and consistency during the interviews, specific questions were asked. All questions were related to the theoretical framework or were a

---

<sup>11</sup> It was important to the participants that the recordings be destroyed. However, transcripts of the interview were preserved, with pseudonyms attached to maintain anonymity of the participants.

follow-up to emerging themes or checking accuracy of interpretations with participants, to clarify issues from previous interviews.

### Data Management

Huberman and Miles (1994) define data management as “the operations needed for a systematic, coherent process of data collection, storage and retrieval” (p. 428). Accordingly, each interview was transcribed immediately onto a word processing program (Microsoft Word) and backed up onto a floppy disk. After each interview, the data were then summarized, coded, placed into categories and subcategories. The data were then cross-checked, and conclusions verified. A contact summary sheet was utilized after each interview to synopsize the event, allowing the researcher to recall the themes of the interview (Figure 3-1). The NUD•IST (QSR NUD•IST, 1997) computer program was used to code and categorize the data.

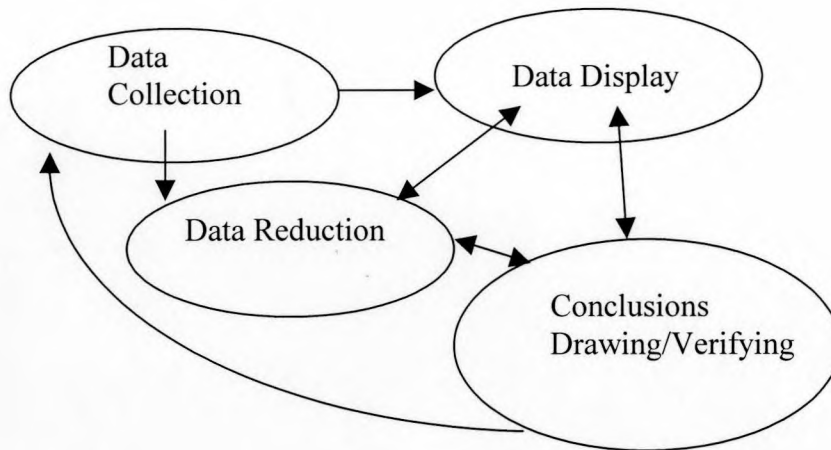
### Strategies for Data Analysis

Huberman and Miles (1994) define data analysis as an interactive process. Data collection should lead to display and reduction, while drawing conclusions and verifying those conclusions throughout the course of the study. Accordingly, analysis for this study included data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification, which took place during and after any collection of data. These processes occurred during the design and planning processes as well as before during and after data collection (Figure 3-2).

Data Reduction and Interpretation. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), data are reduced by means of the theoretical framework. Data display, an organized and compressed layout of the data, is organized so that conclusions may be made regarding its meaning. Conclusion drawing and verification are the interpretations made by the researcher. This involves comparing and contrasting data, discovering themes and patterns within the data, and configuring through the use of triangulation, looking for negative cases, following up upon an unexpected datum, and checking back with respondents on their responses. The model in Figure 3-2 illustrates the iterative process and that each segment of the analysis can take place at any point from design to final analysis.

<b>Interview Summary Form</b>	
List of Participants _____	Date _____
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What were the main issues or themes that impressed you during this interview session?</li> <li>2. Summarize the information you got (or failed to get) on each of the target questions you had for this interview</li> </ol>	
Information _____	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Did anything else strike you as salient, interesting, illuminating or important during this interview?</li> <li>4. What new or remaining target questions do you have considering the next interview round?</li> </ol>	
Adapted from Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 53	

Figure 3-1. Contact Summary Sheet



Huberman and Miles, 1994 (p. 429)  
 Figure 3-2. Components of Data Analysis

Prior to data collection, the NUD•IST (QSR NUD•IST, 1997) program for qualitative data analysis was formulated to code data into specific categories set forth in the theoretical framework. These predetermined categories included academic integration, social integration, environmental pull, attitudes, organizational variables, background variables, intent to leave, and institutional commitment. As data were reviewed, they were placed into appropriate categories or nodes, as referred to in the NUD•IST program. A datum could be placed in more than one category as appropriate. If a datum was not appropriate for placement into one of the predetermined nodes, it was placed in a free node, or emergent category for future reference or follow-up.

Data display was an important process during analysis. Each coding category was reviewed for content, and statements were considered for each category. Large pieces of tag board and colored markers were used to develop web models. As the process

continued, important themes emerged and were placed on the web models. Web models were further clarified using Novak's (1998) notion of concept mapping to provide graphic illustration of the important components of the theoretical framework. Novak explains that concept maps are useful to organize and present information. Not only does it enable the researcher to view qualitative data in an organized and meaningful fashion, but also assist the reader in their understanding of the presentation of complicated structures. Novak recommends that a concept map be built by placing the most important concepts on the map, and subconcepts placed below. Concepts should be connected by lines, labeled with one to two linking words so that statement regarding their relationships is formed. Novak's method of concept mapping was used to develop each of the web models in the analysis and presentation of results in Chapters 4 and 5. The process continued until all persistence variables were analyzed. Web models were verified , cross-checked, reviewed by the independent auditor and finalized.

Methods of Analysis. Marshall and Rossman (1999) recommend that the analysis of qualitative data consist of six stages, including (a) organization, (b) categorization (c) coding, (d) testing emergent understanding, (e) searching for alternative explanations and (f) writing the report. They also recommend that a schema be developed as soon as possible to keep the process streamlined. These stages, in an inductive, iterative manner, were followed during data analysis.

Analysis for this study consisted of transcribing data, coding and clustering them into patterns and themes in relation to the theoretical framework of persistence. Enough

flexibility, however, was maintained to allow for emergent categories. Using the constant comparative method of analysis, an inductive approach was taken beginning with each interview. Existing and coded data were compared to other data taken from each interview, and compared with new data as the study progressed. These comparisons, coupled with content analysis, led to tentative categories. Tentative categories were then compared to each other and cross-checked as they emerged (Creswell, 1998).

The NUD•IST (QSR NUD•IST, 1997) computer program for analyzing qualitative data was utilized during analysis. Creswell (1998) explains that NUD•IST is useful for storing and organizing data, searching for and crossing themes, diagramming, creating visual templates, and analyzing and reporting data. All of these functions were utilized during analysis.

Content charts, matrices and networks were also utilized during analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These displays of categories in the form of a network or map in graphic form, showed the relationships among the categories, and assisted in understanding and theorizing. Each coded element of the model was analyzed and web models developed to illustrate patterns and themes.

### Trustworthiness of the Research

Creswell (1998) maintains that verification and trustworthiness are strengths of a research design. Merriam (1998) explains that validity or trustworthiness can be addressed through attention to the theoretical framework and how the data are collected,

analyzed and interpreted. Therefore, the utmost care to maintain accuracy and represent the perceptions of the participants was taken during the collection and analysis stages of the research.

Internal Validity. Internal validity in qualitative research relates to how closely the findings match reality. Has the researcher measured, observed and understood what actually was there, and how do we know that it is accurate? Creswell (1998) describes credibility as a form of internal validity. He suggests that extensive time in the field and triangulation increase the credibility of the study.

Because the researcher serves as an instrument for data collection, interpretations of reality are filtered through personal perception. Consequently, researchers must check their interpretation of reality to reduce personal bias. Therefore, triangulation was used in the interpretation of the data. This included member checks when questions arose, checking other sources for verification (advisors, instructors, and financial aid personnel), and a review of high school and college transcripts for verification of academic performance after the semester had concluded.

Transferability. A concern among most consumers of research is a study's applicability to their specific situation. Since qualitative researchers do not claim to have generalizable results or external validity, the results may be viewed as less valuable. However, if concepts and models guide the research, such as in this study, others may use the same concepts and models to conduct another study, or test the findings in a similar study (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Thick description leads to increased transferability (Creswell, 1998; Marshal & Rossman, 1999; Merriam, 1998). According to Merriam, thick description provides enough detail to the reader that they can determine if their own situation matches that in the research, and the findings may be transferred. This method of reporting was employed in chapters four and five to describe events, participants, and interpretations.

Dependability and Confirmability. Creswell (1998) includes dependability and confirmability as means to increase trustworthiness of a qualitative study. Dependability is the qualitative equivalent of reliability, and is difficult to achieve, since results are subject to change, and are unstable. Confirmability, related to objectivity in quantitative research, establishes the value of the data. Creswell recommends the use of an independent auditor to review the data analysis for consistency of categorization, which should be adjusted accordingly by the researcher.

In order to achieve dependability and confirmability, an independent auditor was utilized throughout the analysis of the data. Dr. Sharon Hobbs is an associate professor in Educational Foundations at Montana University. She has performed qualitative research, and understands the process of coding and constant comparative analysis. After each interview was transcribed and coded, it was delivered to Dr. Hobbs for review. After each review, a discussion concerning possible changes was conducted, and appropriate coding adjustments were made. Dr. Hobbs made valuable contributions to the analysis, and provided suggestions for emergent themes and alternative explanations of events. Dr. Hobbs was extremely valuable in the process, and aided in the analysis of

emergent themes. She provided graphic displays as a way to view the data (as suggested by Miles & Huberman, 1994). These displays have been utilized throughout the analysis process.

### Timeline to Conduct Research

A timeline was constructed to provide a general overview of the activities and probable timeframe (see Table 3-1). This timeline was followed, although some of the interviews were conducted a week later than planned, because of scheduling difficulties among participants.

### Summary

Qualitative research is a complex form of inquiry that includes multifaceted collection and analysis of data. The analysis for this study included, sorting, coding, verifying, cross checking and interpretation. This chapter described how these elements of analysis were utilized to study the experiences of students transferring from the Tribal College to Montana University in the fall of 1999. Included in the chapter were specific steps, stages, and methods to analyze data, in order to create meaningful information. A timeline to guide the process was also included.

The following chapter provides detailed descriptions of the participants' first semester at Montana University, and four phases of adjustment that took place.

Table 3-1. Timeline to Conduct Research

Schedule of Activities for Proposed Study

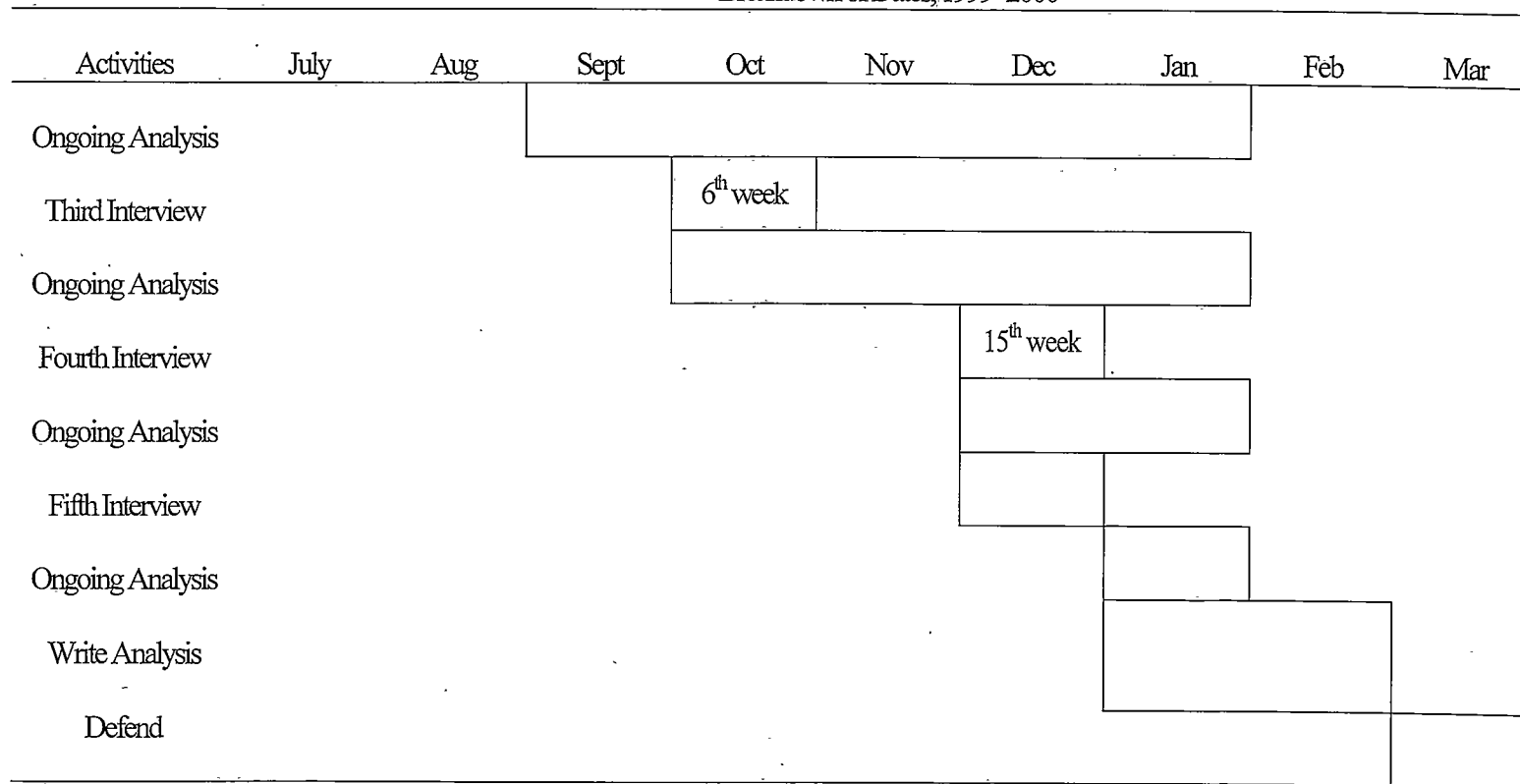
Breakdown of Dates, 1999-2000

Activities	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Defend Proposal									
Human Subjects									
Gain Access									
First Interviews									
Ongoing Analysis									
Second Interview			1st week						

Table Continues

Schedule of Activities for Proposed Study

Breakdown of Dates, 1999-2000



## CHAPTER 4

INDIVIDUAL PROFILES AND ADJUSTMENT

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with details of the participants of the study and how adjustment took place during their first semester at Montana University. The following passages are detailed descriptions of each participant, with excerpts from their interviews. Knowledge of each participant's experience is important to understand the analysis of the data. The stories reveal the uniqueness of each individual along with the struggles and triumphs experienced during their first term. To insure confidentiality and privacy, names and places have been altered, so that possibility of identification is reduced.

Individual ProfilesJames

James is a 23-year-old man, married (to Marie) with two small children, ages two and four. The family lives on the reservation with James's grandparents, whom they depend on for room, board and childcare, as well as moral support and encouragement. They enjoy close family ties and James maintains that they could "not survive without them". He is a shy man, but has an easygoing manner and is soft spoken. He is a man with strong Christian beliefs.

James graduated from a public high school on the reservation. He then attended Montana University as a freshman and “flunked out”. A few years later he enrolled at the Tribal College and attended three quarters to prepare for transfer back to Montana University. He earned a cumulative GPA of 3.797 at the Tribal College. His goals were to teach elementary-aged children and serve as a basketball coach. A former teacher and coach encouraged him to become an educator. His father, a teacher himself, also encouraged him in this direction. He would like to teach on the reservation, but will go “wherever I will fit in.”

Ironically, he hated the Tribal College as a high school student, ridiculing it with his friends. However, he now has a great appreciation for the Tribal College. He stated that the instructors there helped him develop college level math and writing skills and gave him the confidence he needed to transfer to the University. James has accompanied his wife Marie through school. As they go through college together, they enroll for most of the same classes, sharing books, notes and perspectives.

James struggled socially, academically and personally his first semester back at Montana University. He stated that he tends to shy away from becoming involved in classes and felt uncomfortable entering a classroom where there were only white people. He did not like class participation and, although he thought he had good ideas, he chose not to share them with his classmates or professors. The following passage illuminates:

...Especially EDF [an education class]. It was kinda hard for me. The first day, I walked in there, because -- I was kinda mad, 'cause we had to introduce ourselves to like 20 different new people. Especially 'cause there were non-Indians in there. If they were like Indian, I would probably be all right. I'd feel more

comfortable. But being Indian and coming into a class with no Indians -- it was pretty scary for me.

His attitude about socialization within the classroom did not change by the end of the semester. After additional questions about his level of comfort at the end of the semester, he stated that: "I feel accepted, but I still keep my distance."

His original goal was not to attend Montana University. "Personally my goals were to go to Rocky and play basketball there, but mainly my wife wanted me to come [to Montana University]. One of the teachers back in Pryor always told me that, 'Basketball never puts food on the table. Education will help you.' That's why I'm trying to get a degree in education."

By the end of the term, James' goals were somewhat diffused and non-directed. His statements suggested that he attended to please others and not necessarily himself. He revealed that he had learned to cook at a pre-release center, enjoyed it and may someday want to become a chef. He also showed increased interest in playing basketball, this time for Montana University, and was planning to approach the coach about that possibility. He loves kids, however and his experience as a coach may assist him in his pursuit.

Academically James also struggled. Although he believed the Tribal College had given him essential academic skills, he was nervous about the beginning of the term. As the semester progressed, he found himself failing several courses. He missed a few classes while shopping for a new pickup. He also longed to be at home with his children or playing basketball at the gymnasium. He claimed to study four to eight hours a day.

However, he dropped his mathematics class after the six-week interview session; a move that he says “really lightened the load.” His GPA went from 3.66 at the Tribal College to 1.75, a drop of 1.91 points.

James’ study habits were not self-directed; he relied on his wife for assistance. For example, his psychology professor suggested he try using flashcards to study for tests. When asked if he had discovered any new study strategies during the semester he replied:

Ya. Flashcards! It’s a new thing I really know to help. Flashcards. I never knew them before, but she [Marie] says she done them before, you know. I never knew what they were. I used to just go over my notes; there’d be just a bunch of notes.

He had never before utilized flashcards and thought they would be helpful.

However, instead of making his own flashcards, a task that would encourage additional learning and processing, he asked his wife, Marie, to make them up for him. When asked if he would continue to use flashcards, he stated: “Ya. She’s [Marie] pretty much done all the writing (laughs). Have her do all the writing, while I pretty much read and watch TV.” Although his grade in psychology went from the low 30s to a 58 after using flashcards, he missed a potential chance at processing the information in a more effective way than memorization.

James also had a personal setback, one that his wife Marie shared. Because of past felonious behavior, and possible inability to be certified as a teacher, he was turned down for a scholarship in November. This event was discouraging for James and

precipitated feelings of self-doubt and extreme personal stress. When asked what the worst thing that had happened during the term was, he replied:

Probably being shot down in that interview. I was -- that was kinda hard to swallow there, 'cause I -- I never -- just through my criminal history, you know. Actually it's not really a history, it's just that one deal there and there's a lot of obstacles. It seems that every time I'm achieving a goal, there's something that's set in front of me. I just barely climb over and barely look over and another one pops up. Just like education right now. I'm barely getting -- getting -- pursuing my degree and now I'm almost done with my probation and here's another one. Another one put before me. When I get past me, (sic) -- I'm sure there'll be another one (laughs).

He stated that after the interview he just wanted to quit school altogether. I asked what made him stay.

Just to know that I can do it. That was the thought that came to my mind. I told her [the chair of the scholarship committee] everything. I told her, "I'm gonna quit. The heck with this. If they're not gonna let me be a teacher or something that I want to do, I'm just gonna quit school." I said, "There's no use of staying in school. I may as well just go home. Live on the reservation. Work a tribal job. Or I can go to vo-tech and maybe receive some sort of vocational education there." But it's just something that I want to do is to be a teacher. There's other options too, you know. But my probation officer, he really encourages me too, to stick in this major. He said, "There is a way for you. There's not a doubt in my mind that you can get in there." So that's really help me to just stick in there.

Overall, James appears to be a dedicated husband and father, who enjoys basketball and would like to play for the Montana University men's team. He wants to be a teacher but perceives many obstacles in front of him, both personal and academic. His goals are to become a teacher, but he is willing to consider alternative occupations. James stated that he wants to be successful. He wants to "be somebody." Although he had a difficult semester academically, socially and personally, he returned the following

semester. When asked why he decided to return, he stated that he wanted to meet the challenge of completing a college degree.

### Marie

Marie is a young woman of 23 and married (to James). She has two children, ages two and four. She attended a private high school for three and one-half years, and transferred to a public high school on the reservation where she graduated. It was not until after she was married and had children that she decided to become an elementary school teacher. She took two years off from school prior to her enrollment at the Tribal College. She enrolled at the Tribal College to refresh her writing and reading skills prior to transfer to Montana University. Her grandmother, also a teacher, encouraged her to follow her example. Marie sees her grandmother as an important role model in her life and took her advice.

Because of her interest in elementary education, Marie was invited to participate in an internship at a private elementary school on the reservation, which she accepted. She is learning a great deal there, even from "the white ladies" who teach there. She believes it is important for Indian children to have positive Indian role models, but also appreciates the skill and kindness of the non-Indian teachers at the school.

Marie is a bubbly young woman and is dedicated to her husband and children. James and Marie often interviewed together and she had a young, flirtatious air about her as she spoke of their shared experiences and commitments. They have enrolled in college together, taking the same classes and sharing books. She described the values

that she shares with her husband: a strong Christian faith, a dedication to her family and their common desire to serve the children of the local tribe.

Marie started the semester with tremendous self-confidence. She was an "A" student at the Tribal College and was excited to continue working toward her goal of becoming a teacher. She said she was accustomed to working hard and turning in assignments. She was confident in her abilities as a student. However, like most of the participants, the academic adjustment was not as easy as she had expected. By midterm she had failed exams in history and psychology and was working to bring her grades from Ds to Cs. The unexpected amount of reading and difficulty of the tests appeared to overwhelm her.

C: How are things going for you at school?

Marie: Okay. (Giggling)

C: Just okay.

Marie: Just okay.

C: Tell me about it.

Marie: Well, I have two classes -- well I thought psychology, I was flunking, big time. But now I found out I have a high C, so now I feel good about that, but it's history, Western Civilization. The lectures are real interesting and everything, but I can't put the lectures and the test together... The notes are like so thick and you study so much. And when the exam came there was a total of five questions on the exam. So.

When asked if classes were more difficult or less difficult than she had expected, she explained that they were

More difficult I guess. 'Cause -- 'cause the way they write the questions. They write with these real fancy words, you know. Doctors...

By the end of the semester, Marie was more discouraged. When asked how the semester went for her, this was the exchange:

Marie: I don't know. I just, I thought I could whiz through. A lot harder than I thought. So.

C: Were the classes harder, or what do you mean by it was a lot harder than you thought?

Marie: No, the classes in general weren't harder, just the testing. A lot. They were a lot harder. Most of your grade reflects on your test. At [the Tribal College] probably like half or 25 percent of your grade came from the test, 'cause a lot of in-work going on and your attendance, that's what the remaining grades were. 'Cause they said it wasn't fair to just have your grade be on two tests. I thought that was cool, but it wasn't like that here.

C: So the grading is a lot different. It doesn't matter if you're in class or not.

Marie: Ya. I don't think it's fair. 'Cause I have perfect attendance, almost. I'm not doing as good as I thought I would be.

Marie experienced a marked decline in GPA from the Tribal College. Her final quarter GPA at the Tribal College was 4.00. She dropped 1.75 grade points to 2.25 GPA at Montana University.

Marie also reported that she was challenged with the adjustment to her roles of mother, wife and student. When asked if she was able to establish a balance in her life, she was unsure about her ability to establish the equilibrium she thought was essential. She reported that her children were her priority and developed time management skills to find time to study without neglecting her children. Her extended family was also instrumental in making sure her children were cared for.

C: How do you balance your roles as mom, wife and student?

Marie: Like, I'm a student, and like, when I go home, my time to be a student is when I put the kids to bed at 9:00. And from 9:00 to 12:00 is when I do my homework. And in-between, when I get home, I don't know, 2:00, 3:00, 4:00; I don't know. I get home and that's my time with the kids. And in-between, I do my homework, here and there. I read when the kids are playing. And then when he's out at gym, I'm at home with the kids playing. So....

Marie did not appear to integrate socially. She explained that she was “not the socializing type,” and chose to go home to be with her family instead of meeting with friends.

Marie did not perform as well academically as she had expected, although she initially indicated confidence in her study abilities and work habits. I asked her during the first interview how she felt about being at Montana University, she said, “I feel good. I’m somebody. Going to school. I’m somebody.” Although she was somewhat discouraged by the end of the term, she maintained a positive attitude and returned the following semester. When asked why she decided to return, she stated that she was doing very well, and that she wanted to continue so that she could provide a better life for her children, stating that, “They are everything”.

### Karen

Karen is an outgoing young woman with a bubbly personality. Her smile and sense of humor brought lightness to the interview process. She is married and has two children ages three and seven. Her children attend elementary school and Head Start on the local reservation, where the family lives. Karen’s goals, although not well formulated, were to complete her degree in accounting and obtain a job she would be satisfied with.

Karen attended high school on the local reservation, and then the Tribal College. She originally intended to earn an associates degree in business accounting, but the college terminated her financial aid, explaining that she had too many credits at the junior

college level. That precipitated her decision to transfer. She explained that she "didn't want to waste time on an associates" so she transferred to Montana University to earn a bachelor's degree in accounting.

Karen experienced both academic and personal difficulties during her first semester at Montana University. She was overwhelmed with all of the work involved, especially the reading. She failed her first series of examinations in accounting and statistics, which shook her confidence. She had been an accounting tutor for two years at the Tribal College and was initially certain of her abilities in accounting. She discovered that she could not maintain the low level of effort that she had put forth at the Tribal College, and could no longer be "lazy." She enlisted the help of a tutor for statistics but struggled with accounting.

Karen: Well, I had a test in accounting on ... Wednesday... and we got our tests back on Monday and I flunked it.

C: Oh.

Karen: And I was feeling really bad, because that's supposed to be my major and I thought that, you know -- but then the instructor said that a lot of people failed, so he had a make-up. Like a test, a 20-point make-up thing. And we had that today and I think I did okay on that. But, um, that. And then my stats test I flunked too, (little laugh and smile) and that was, that made me kinda upset, but then, I don't know how well I'll do in there 'cause I just got a tutor today... But I just always get mixed up when I go to class (little laugh).

She eventually dropped her accounting class. When she spoke to other students majoring in accounting they told her that it only got worse. She subsequently changed her major to finance, hoping to work for a bank, or in personal finance. Her other classes appeared to go well and she especially liked a Social Issues of the Native American class,

although being in class with approximately 70 other students initially intimidated her.

She was accustomed to 10 to 15 students in a class.

She explained that it all just "clicked" when the statistics tutor explained it to her. When asked what the best thing that had happened to her this semester, she immediately announced that she had earned a B in statistics. It was a great accomplishment for her. Her first semester GPA was 2.00, down a half a point from the 2.5 GPA she earned during her last quarter at the Tribal College.

Karen performed well academically in light of the personal problems she experienced during this time. At the beginning of the term she gave an indication of trouble with her husband. She explained that he had been in the military reserves while she attended the Tribal College and it was during that time that she did well in school.

When he was gone I did real well (laughs). And then he came back and I don't know. We weren't doing good and then I ended up quitting spring quarter and then I went back again in the fall and I went for a whole year and then that's how I got here.

The conflicts continued with her husband all semester. He wanted more attention from her, yet she knew she had to study. She often went to the library or stayed late at Montana University to get her work done; an activity her husband did not approve of. The couple thought of moving closer to Montana University, but Karen did not want to disrupt her children's lives in the middle of the school year.

As she described the situation with her husband, she appeared to be very stressed. She rubbed her face and was close to tears many times during the conversation. She laughed a little at times, but it appeared to be more out of nervousness than inappropriate

laughter. She explained that her husband cheated on her the year before and she was nervous about it reoccurring. He, in turn, accused her of having a "boyfriend" at Montana University.

Ya, I told him -- 'cause I was telling him when I flunked them tests -- that's the first thing I told him when I seen him that day. But. I don't know, last year when I was going to school at [the Tribal College], um, he was cheating on me. Did I tell you? I was doing real good up till then. And then I got two D's I think, that one time. And that just messed me up. And then I think that kinda is like, in the back of my mind that it could happen again (laughs). But I don't know. I'm just thinking of how school is real important to me right now and I can't quit for anybody or anything.

Through all her difficulties, she reconfirmed her intention to complete a degree. Although she was discouraged by her performance in accounting and statistics, she appeared even more determined. She verbalized resolve to work harder in accounting and acquired a tutor for statistics.

Karen explained that going to school was her top priority, even over her marriage. I wondered at the time if she would have to choose between her husband and college. At the final interview that question was answered.

C: How did things go with your family?

Karen: Well, let's see. I made my husband leave.

C: You did.

Karen: Ya. I think it was on November first. 'Cause I was -- I don't know. I felt like I had to choose him or my school. And I was getting like really bad headaches. For like three weeks there and I thought it was from coffee...I don't know, I kinda knew something bad was gonna happen, 'cause I just wasn't feeling good with him. And so that Monday I got mad when he didn't want to pay the rent, 'cause he said he had to save his money. And so I just told him to leave. And he left. And he took my daughter but then he brought her back the next day. And then I just -- the headaches went away. I quit getting headaches....And I don't know, I'm into school now. I'm doing better in school... I kinda feel bad, but I would rather feel like this than have to, you know, get him back, 'cause I'll just be wasting my time if I try to get him back. He'll just slow me down. So.

C: You mentioned last time, I asked you if you put your marriage or your school as a priority and you said your school. You still feel that way?

Karen: Ya. I have to.

C: You have to?

Karen: He was just holding me back. Now that I think of it, I was held back ever since I met him, you know. My family tells me that too. So. I don't know. I guess it's for the best.

Karen made a choice. Her motivation was strong. She viewed education as the path to a better life for herself and her children. But her self-confidence was diminishing. She uttered the phrase "I don't know" twice during the first interview. During the last two interviews, she said it 35 and 37 times respectively. She appeared to be unsure of her abilities in school and the stability of her family. We had the following exchange during her third interview six weeks into the semester.

Karen: I feel better this week than I did last week (laughter). It didn't make me feel like quitting, but it just made me feel like, "Oh. I have to go to class" (with dread in her voice) but I just make myself go.

C: How did you do that? How did you make yourself go. Tell me more about that.

Karen: Well, every time I feel like quitting or something, I just think of my kids, I guess, and I think they need, or I need to have a steady job or something you know, where they can be safe financially. And I think I just have to go to school and keep on going until I'm done.

All told, Karen had a traumatic first semester. Her confidence in her academic abilities was shaken and her family broke apart. She maintained resolve, however and was determined to spend as much time and put in as much effort as it took. The thought of a better life propelled her forward. She returned the following semester. When asked why, she reaffirmed her commitment to improve her life and the life of her children, by finishing her bachelor's degree.

Charles

Charles was a shy young man of 23 years. He did not elaborate on answers and provided as few words as possible to questions. He lived on the local reservation and commuted daily to attend classes. He was married with no children.

Charles attended high school on the local reservation and then the Tribal College for three years. He earned 149 credits with a 3.6 cumulative GPA. His major was Information Systems. He wanted to own a business someday, but expressed that he did not want to stay on the "res." He also had valuable experience with computers. He was able to build and program them, design web pages, perform data base functions, and has sold them through a program at the Tribal College.

Charles had a stable and successful semester. His biggest challenge was a business communications class, where he had to make several public speaking addresses to the class. Because he is a shy person, it was difficult for him. Charles had a calm demeanor, however, and simply put his mind to doing what needed to be done and was successful at most everything, including public speaking. He was also unsure of a class in database management, thinking that it would be difficult and that he may require assistance with it. He did not need to seek help with the class, however and earned an A for the semester.

He, like all the participants, was intimidated by the new setting, both geographically and academically. But he appeared to adjust quickly.

C: Up until now, what have your experiences been like with MU?

Charles: It's been really good...I thought it was going to be really hard to like, find things, but it's been really simple.

At the end of the first interview, I asked him if he had anything else to say.

Charles: Umm... (pause). It's kind of scary too. I don't know what it's going to be like. I just want to see how it goes at first. I just want to see how the classes are. The way people tell me it seems kind of hard, I guess.

Charles appeared to keep to himself during the term. He rarely met with friends during the term, but, as with most of the participants, there was not much time for socializing. Charles indicated that his wife was his primary source for socialization and was an unfaltering motivator for him. I had the following conversation with him about his wife:

C: You haven't really mentioned your wife at all. How does she feel about you going to school?

Charles: She wants me to (big smile from Charles and a little chuckle and he brightens a bit). She's like my main supporter.

C: What does she do to support you?

Charles: She always tells me to come every day and tells me to do my work, whatever homework I got and when I don't want to come, she forces me to come and stuff.

C: So she's a slave driver.

Charles: Ya (laughter). She wants me to finish college. She always tells that to me.

Charles appeared to sail through the term. Nothing shook him. He exhibited a great deal of self-confidence and said that his classes were "pretty easy compared to what I thought it would be." Although he failed a test in economics, his final grade was a B.

An expression that describes Charles may be calm resolve. During the semester, he exhibited an ability to succeed with school in an independent manner. Even the public

speaking assignments did not undermine his confidence and each success improved his self-assurance.

Charles was philosophical, yet practical at the end of the semester. I asked him if he had any advice for students thinking of transferring to MU. He said, "Just that it seems kind of overwhelming, like its bigger than the community college you're used to, but work hard and don't miss any class. Try not to miss. That's the only advice I can give."

Based on his interviews and grade point average, Charles had a successful first semester at Montana University. He reported no difficulty academically or personally. He took things as they came, figured out how to adjust and did, experiencing a slight drop in grade point average. His final quarter at the Tribal College ended with a 4.00 GPA, while at Montana University he earned a 3.25, a drop of .75 points. He was eager to continue, and returned the following semester, stating that he was working toward getting a good job and a better life.

### Maggie

Maggie is an intelligent, thoughtful woman of 29, married with three children, ages 13, 9 and 5. She was excited about attending Montana University and "ready for a challenge." She attended the Tribal College for three years and did well academically. The last year, however, she became bored and her grade point average dropped slightly. She was disillusioned by the Native Studies classes that she was required to take and looked forward to expanding her horizons at Montana University.

Maggie had come a long way in life. At sixteen she became a single parent and dropped out of high school. A few years later she earned her GED and entered the Tribal College where she gained the skills and confidence she needed to transfer to a university.

She was strongly encouraged to attend by her husband, who appeared to be her biggest supporter. Her goal was to earn her degree in accounting and own a hotel and restaurant complex on the local reservation. She intends to capture the tourist trade that passes through the area. She believes there is a "gold mine" on the reservation and wants to capitalize on it.

Maggie was noticeably goal directed and focused during her first interview. Her response was positive when asked what she thought of the Tribal College, but she was also excited about her future. She stated, "I think it was a good start for me. I've been there for three years, though, and I'm getting kind of tired of it. I'm ready for a bigger place with more challenge. I want to leave the reservation. It's more exciting here."

Although she was initially eager to begin the term, Maggie faced a tremendously difficult semester, financially, socially, personally and academically. Because she applied for financial aid late, her loan money did not arrive before school started. She and her family found themselves out of money by mid-semester. There were many days when Maggie could not afford gas to come to class. She did not have a phone, and contacting her for an interview was troublesome. I wrote to her three times, asking her to call or stop by. A second interview was not conducted until the end of October. At that time she was in the midst of her financial crisis and was not coming to Montana

University on a regular basis. We agreed to a telephone interview one evening. This was the opening exchange:

C: How are things going in school right now?

Maggie: Not so good.

C: Not good. With school itself, or other things?

Maggie: Ya, with school and financial aid. Um, I was depending on my loan for gas money, for going back and forth, commuting, both Monday through Thursday.. Everything's just been put on hold. I don't know, my loans -- I'm just having problems. I'm not sure exactly what's going on, but I haven't been able to get it.

C: So you missed a lot of days because of no money and gas and stuff?

Maggie: Ya.

Maggie: They already sent my money to the school and it should arrive there by Monday. So hopefully it does and I hope that I have the chance to pass my classes.

Despite the difficulties she was having with financial aid and simply getting to class, Maggie expressed that she enjoyed her classes.

Maggie: Ya, I'm really enjoying them. My marketing class -- I didn't think I had any interest in marketing, but now that I know what it's about and stuff, I really like reading about it and I really enjoy that class.

C: Do you think your classes are more or less difficult than you expected?

Maggie: Less. Mostly reading and I understand the reading very well, so its not - I'm kind of surprised myself, because it just seems less. Just because it's the University, I expected it to be harder. But it's not. I can do the work and it's just -- what's hard about it, because of the commuting, I just don't have much time to sit down and really do my work the way I should. But other than that I understand what's going on in them.

Maggie did not pass her classes. Although she was granted two emergency loans by the University, she stopped traveling to Montana University in November and failed all four of her classes. She made a special trip for the concluding interview the week of finals. She had completely stopped coming to school and was feeling rather low.

Despite her turbulent fall semester, she was optimistic about spring semester classes.

Maggie also had a difficult time socially. She, like all the other participants, mentioned that she was the only Indian in most of her classes. It was particularly unsettling for her and may have contributed to not wanting to continue her enrollment.

C: Have you made many new friends on campus?

Maggie: No I haven't. I haven't made any new friends. It's hard adjusting to this whole new thing. At [the Tribal College] there was mostly [local tribal] people, you know. Mostly Indian people. I fit right in, you know. I transferred to this big school and in some of my classes I'm the only Indian in my class. I didn't think it would be as hard.

Maggie also struggled to balance her responsibilities as a mother and her academic requirements. She reported that her priority rested with her family and she missed spending time with her little ones, as she had the previous summer. Her teenage daughter caused her concern as well and she felt she was not meeting her responsibilities as a parent:

C: How did things go with your family? You mentioned with your kids, you had kind of a rough time adjusting. Can you sum that up?

Maggie: Mmm. Well, they were getting used to it, the middle part there. But then my oldest daughter -- I don't know, she kinda was doing things out of the ordinary, (laughs) just like not coming home and I kinda figured it was because I wasn't giving her enough attention. 'Cause usually I was right there when she gets home from school and everything and it was like, she had too much freedom, you know, me not being there.

C: She is like 14?

Maggie: She's 13 and all of a sudden she was like getting this attitude that just 'cause I'm not here, she doesn't have to come home, you know. So that there I had to deal with that and she was grounded for a few weeks there and then I had to be on top of that too and then, I don't know, just uh -- I could just see, my kids, they just weren't getting enough attention from me. And I just didn't like that at all. So.

Maggie's husband, who had urged her to complete her degree, was disappointed when she suspended her attendance.

He was kinda upset, but yet, he understood after I showed him everything. He understood and he encouraged me to come back next semester. So I'm glad that he did. 'Cause, I mean, sometimes I want to give up, but yet I -- you know -- I only have a year left. If I complete next semester and then go through the summer, I'll be done by -- after next fall semester. So that's -- that's what's keeping me going.

Of all the participants, Maggie appeared to have the most difficult time adjusting. Because of financial, social and personal struggles, she did not have the time it took to adjust, or do well academically. The situation with her family, however, appeared to be the most important factor in her decision to stay at home.

When asked if things would have been different if she would have gotten her financial aid on time, she said:

Yes, because I could have been here everyday and, uh, that would have made a really big difference, missing out on -- they go through a whole chapter in class. And that was another thing that kinda scared me was the beginning of the semester the instructor said we would be covering a chapter a day and I said, "Oh my gosh," you know, 'cause we didn't do that at [the Tribal College]. More like a chapter a week, (laughs) and so that was scary there. But ya, if my money was here on time it would have made a difference. I could have been here everyday and knew -- and another thing I learned about myself. Like at [the Tribal College] I could miss a day and it wouldn't really affect me because we don't cover that much. And even then I could go to the instructor or tutor and say, "Can you go over this with me?" But here it's like you have to be in class every day and um, that I learned too. And um, you know, it was like I wanted to be here, though, but the money wasn't here and that was really frustrating.

Maggie's semester was characterized by turmoil, financially, academically, socially and personally. Despite the difficulties, she was confident in her abilities as a student and received encouragement from her husband. She returned the following semester, stating, "I didn't see it as a failure, but as a learning experience." She stated that she "really liked going to school", and that things were going much better for her.

She received her financial aid, and classes were going well. When asked why she decided to return, she stated that she wanted to “finish school and get a good paying job and provide a better life for my family.”

### Theresa

Theresa, the youngest member of the group at 21, is a spirited person, with well-formed opinions about the world. She is not married, nor does she have children, but lives with her mother and two brothers on the local reservation. Her youngest brother has a disability and her older brother is on the rodeo circuit. Her father is close by, but lives “on his own.” She describes herself as a “mommy and daddy’s girl” and wants to remain close to her family. However, she reported tiring of the commute to Montana University and wanted to find a place close to the University, which she did the following semester. She stated a desire to become an elementary school teacher. She has experience as a substitute teacher at a local elementary school on the reservation and worked at Head Start.

Theresa had never set foot on the University campus prior to August, 1999 when she came to register for classes. However, she had unique experiences beyond the reservation. She ventured to Washington D.C. over the summer to participate in an internship program for minority students. There she met a variety of people from all walks of life, with many different ethnicities and cultures. She broadened her perspective and can better appreciate her own culture now that she has seen others. She explained that white people were actually in the minority, which she seemed to relish.

Theresa spoke openly of racism and how difficult it was for her. Most of the racism she experienced was shrouded and difficult to identify. However, the subtle rudeness, glances and "run-around" she perceived at the University put her on the defensive. She described a class where she was the "only Indian there," and did not want to explain her perspective.

A few times in my class, before, like the first weeks, I was like, this one lady always brought up, "And Native Americans too! And Native Americans too!" And I was like -- I just sat there and I thought, "If I say something nobody's going to understand me 'cause I'm the only Indian in the class and they won't understand where I'm coming from."

She appeared to adjust quickly, however, and within six weeks found that she connected well with the white students in her classes.

So far in my classes it's been good. The students and stuff. They all know I'm Native American. 'Cause the teacher will say, "Well, Theresa, you're Native American. What do you think about it?" 'Cause we're in education, they probably want to hear a lot from a minority. So I just give them my opinion and they all treat me okay, -- the students and the education teachers. They're all pretty cool. Different from what I hear from these students in science and business. Sociology, whatever. I don't know. I think the education teachers are real nice. No professor ever did me wrong. So far. And that one [instructor] she's pretty cool. 'Cause I told her on my interview paper, we had to interview one of our grandparents. And my grandma, she speaks pure fluent [native language]. When you ask her a question, she tells us, and we try to write it down, but like in [our native language]. When you use a sentence and then it's all switched around and you try to write it and then you try to read it and you say, "Oh, my gosh, this has bad grammar!" (Laughing) And I told her if it's like not too perfect, to excuse it, 'cause my grandma still speaks [the native language] and then you have to like, translate it. She's like, "That's okay, I understand. Send it in the way it is." Oh, that's cool. And then she understands that we don't have that good of English, 'cause we still have our other language.

Theresa maintained camaraderie with her Native American friends, but made friends with many white students as well. She also traveled to Bozeman and California

over the course of the semester and hoped to participate in the internship in Washington D.C. again in the summer of 2000. She explained that she loves to travel and hopes to see all fifty states and tour Europe as well.

Academically, Theresa experienced the least amount of transfer shock, or drop in grade point average after transfer. Her last quarter GPA from the Tribal College was 2.67, which dropped to 2.5 her first semester at Montana University. Like all the participants, she was nervous about the new setting and the academic challenges, but her expectations appeared to be more realistic than the others. She had heard from her sister and some faculty at the Tribal College that it would be difficult and much more work would be required. But she appeared to meet the challenge and did well in all but one of her classes, for which she earned a D.

She explained that she had "messed around" at the Tribal College, not taking school seriously and not putting in the effort that was needed. She stated that she had spent three years at the Tribal College. "I probably could have finished real fast if I hadn't messed around," she explained. "But good thing I did my messing around at [the Tribal College] rather than at a university (laughing)." She also described three of the faculty at the Tribal College that expected more of their students.

Theresa: I think they're -- okay. I learned how to -- I -- there's this one teacher at TC [an instructor]. He's kinda strict. And [another instructor], they're pretty strict. And we would always say, "Ohhh, come on, help us!" and you know, "Don't give us too much!" And they would always say, "You're gonna thank us when you get to a bigger university." It's true. What they give us is like the kind of work that we get here. But the only thing less is that we did at TC is there's a lot less reading. And then I think there should be more.

C: You think they should require more reading.

Theresa: Umm hmm. Even in high school. 'Cause when I went to high school -- this summer was the first time I read a book-- or last spring. Last spring was the first time I read a whole book and that was in [a third instructor's] class too.

As with most participants, the amount and complexity of reading required appeared overwhelming for Theresa. But she kept with it and read the four books that were required for various classes. She explained that, "I finished all my books I had to read. I had to read four this quarter. (Smiles) So I finished that and that's probably the most I read in my life. But I finished and I -- and then for study reading, I'm getting pretty better, too." Despite the lack of preparation in reading, she developed effective study habits that helped her succeed the first semester at Montana University.

Theresa lost her grandfather the week before Thanksgiving. They were very close and she became tearful during the conversation.

C: You mentioned that you had a funeral. Your grandfather died. Did you have to miss school because of that?

Theresa: Hmm, they told me not to miss, just to keep coming.

C: Who told you that?

Theresa: My dad. But I missed Wednesday. He died Tuesday. Like night, 'bout 2:30 in the morning. But I didn't feel like coming to class that day. So I just spent time with my family, but I came Friday. But that was the only class I missed the whole semester.

C: Did it affect your grades?

Theresa: No, but I got behind in Society Schools and Teachers. I got behind but I caught up that Thanksgiving weekend.

She explained that losing her grandfather was the worst thing that had happened during the term.

'Cause he was um -- he was always there and whatever we did he would say, "Itchik" (in a whispered tone). That means good. "Itchik." Always just sit there and -- I don't know. It's different. It's the only bad thing I think.

Theresa reported having a good semester. She made new friends, adjusted to the fact that she was the “only Indian in the class,” and considered herself successful by the end of the term. She was philosophical by the end of our final conversation and when requested to describe what she had learned about herself, she had this to say:

Theresa: What I learned about myself, is that I’m a minority, that there is opportunities out there, to get to that level that are equal to the white man’s ways and you can do that opportunity, only if you take that chance. ‘Cause that opportunity is like wide opened. That’s what I think.

C: So you’re going to go for it.

Theresa: Try. Try my best. I’m not gonna just say words.

Theresa returned the following semester. When asked why she decided to return, she stated that she had almost transferred to another university in Montana, but received two substantial scholarships from Montana University and decided to return. She stated that the reason for her persistence was because she was doing very well in college, was pleased with her progress, and was motivated to move forward.

### Susan

Susan is a cheerful woman of 23 who loves working with children and has her mind set on completing her degree in elementary education and teaching on the reservation. She lives on the local reservation with her second grade daughter. She worked for Head Start on the reservation and was offered a supervisory position there, which she turned down. She said, “I was recommended for a supervisor’s position for this year, but I’ve had -- getting the degree was more important than being the supervisor.” She was excited about beginning her program at Montana University and planned her transfer carefully.

She reported that her experience at the Tribal College was a positive one. She earned two associate degrees, one in medical transcription and one in information systems. She enjoyed the individual attention available at the Tribal College and often mentioned that "one-on-one" assistance was beneficial. When asked about her experiences there, she replied, "Just a lot of tutoring, that um, a lot of one-on-one. I thought that was good."

Susan experienced a major challenge as she began her fall semester transfer to Montana University. She told how she was denied financial aid the week before classes started. She had telephoned the Financial Aid Office every week during the summer, only to be told it would be processed the following week. Repeatedly, she attempted to confirm her financial aid status, but was consistently put off. She was then informed that she would be denied fall semester funding because she had been suspended from the University in 1992. She explained to the staff that she had since completed two associate degrees at the Tribal College and believed she deserved consideration based upon that.

She did not complain during the interview and politely explained the discouragement she experienced. Although she was troubled by the news of no funding, she was even more bewildered by the treatment she received at the Financial Aid Office. She described rude and unprofessional behavior from personnel there. Susan explained that the blow would have been softened by kind words.

Susan: And I guess if they had told me sooner, you know, I would have been better prepared, but, I just had my mind set on school ever since last year when I was teaching at Head Start and I did not re-apply at Head Start, thinking I was coming to school and when I found out I couldn't come to school, Head Start had already started. I was just -- didn't know what to do. (Laughing)...I found out

yesterday that I did get a scholarship and it will help me pay for my classes and I have appealed for financial aid and hopefully I will get that. And um, financial aid, when I tried to talk with them, find out what's going on, um, it was really -- (hesitant) they were really rude to me. I asked them to fill out a needs analysis and she um, the lady there just took it and, "Okay, we'll fill it out." And she put it under her desk. And I said, "Can I have it filled out now, I need it." And her attitude was just, "Sigh." I don't know, she just sighed and just umm, I don't know. Made me feel like I was taking up her time or something. And um, another lady there -- I asked her what the policy was on suspensions; it's been nine years since that suspension and I asked her about that and she got real offensive about that, offended, I guess, I don't know. Said, "Well, if you want to come back HERE, you're gonna have to PAY for one semester on your OWN." (As she quoted the person, her tone was adamant and demeaning). And she said -- and I told her, "Well I have an associates and um, since the suspension, I have gone back to school and I have an associates from another school and I want to come back here." And she said, "We need to know if you can make it at THIS school." I don't know what she meant by that, but.

C: What do you think she meant?

Susan: Uh -- (long pause). I don't know, meaning the other school I went to must have been -- she put that other school beneath this school or something. And then, I went to try to find out about my suspension, what happened -- and I found out that my transcripts from TC had never been sent here and um, I was trying to get that taken care of. And I asked the ladies in financial aid exactly why I was suspended. My grade point average was below a 2.0 and I didn't pass some percent of the credits I attempted. And those classes I took in '91 here I went back to TC and passed them. And when my transcript was sent, those grades changed. Those letter grades changed. And I went back to Financial Aid and asked them, "Um my grade point average has gone up and um, is your policy still the same?" And the lady that I talked to before would not come out and talk to me, she sent a work study girl or something up front and I said can I talk to her and the girl went back and came back and said, "She's busy." So. Then I just felt that I -- dead end (laughing).

She eventually received funding from the local tribe to attend fall semester, but not until 10 days after classes started. As soon as she was informed of the award, she quickly traveled back to Montana University to see if she would be allowed to continue. She reported that her instructors were understanding and supportive of her efforts and encouraged her to continue her enrollment, which she did.

Susan was upset about the situation, but took an understanding attitude toward the Financial Aid Office. She maintained that, "They were really busy during that time, too and um, I should have been on top of things, too, trying to. Maybe next time in the spring I will start asking for my award letter -- about my file, looking into it, maybe double check and hopefully get things squared away, rather than the month before school (laughing)." Despite all the frustration, she explained that she was here to get her education and did not want the experience to discourage her from her goal.

I guess I could have let them -- the way they treated me affect me and say something like I don't want to go back to that school at all, or something. But I don't know what problems they're having there, or what's going on, but, I'm here to get my education and I'm not here for them. So that kind of helped me coming back.

Susan reported that her professors were understanding and helpful as she worked to get caught up in all of her classes. None were discouraging, which fostered trusting relationships with her instructors at Montana University. She further expressed a desire to be a role model for other Indian students, especially her daughter and her younger cousin. She felt that she had been through a great deal, learned from it and will be able to assist others along the way.

Like the other participants, Susan mentioned that she was often the only Indian in her class. She viewed that situation from a different perspective than the others. She reported the shortage of Indian and bilingual teachers on the reservation and saw the low number of Indians in classes at Montana University as unfortunate, since the need is so great.

Academically, Susan expressed enthusiasm for all of her classes. She found the discussions and assignments in her education classes to be stimulating and rewarding. Having worked at Head Start, she was able to use the background knowledge she had acquired to assimilate new information. She also was able to apply her new knowledge of reading and learning to her seven-year-old daughter, who was starting to read. She was fully engaged in the learning process and enjoyed discovering new concepts along with her classmates.

Socially, Susan flourished. Although she reported not having much time for old friends and family, she found new friends in classes and socialized while working together on group projects. She was surprised to find that others had the same interests in learning and enjoyed their group activities and discussions.

Susan also experienced personal tragedy during the fall semester. A close friend was killed in a car accident. Since she had spoken to the friend the previous evening, she was shaken by the experience of a dear friend suddenly not being there. She had a difficult time in school the following two weeks and did not perform as well on a group project as she had hoped.

Overall, Susan had a tumultuous semester. Having set her sights on attending college, her hopes were initially dashed because of the lack of funding, only to be awarded a scholarship ten days into the term. She worked diligently to catch up and enjoyed working with others to learn what was extremely interesting to her. Personal tragedy temporarily interrupted her studies, but she was soon back on track and working to finish the semester. Although Susan considered herself to have a successful semester,

her grade point average dropped 1.51 points. She earned a 3.76 GPA her last full time quarter at the Tribal College, but that dropped to 2.25 at Montana University.

Nonetheless, Susan returned the following semester, and decided to earn a double major in both elementary and special education. When asked why she decided to return, she stated that she wanted to “reach the goal of becoming a teacher. I know it’s tough, but I want to keep going.”

The participants for this study faced many difficulties, including personal, financial, social and academic problems. They all, however, returned the following semester, a persistence rate of 100 percent.

Each participant has a unique story and separate experiences. However, they also share experiences. The following section describes the participants as a group and shows how they are alike as well as how they differ.

#### Group Profile

The participants were somewhat homogenous. They are all members of a local tribe and have attended the Tribal College to prepare for transfer to Montana University. Each of them traveled from their hometown to attend classes. Two were not married and two did not have children. One of the men worked (although he lost his job mid-semester) and three of the women had internships. Five of the seven had at least three life roles, such as parent, spouse and student. Two had earned an associates degree at the Tribal College. Four of the seven had exhibited stop-out behavior at the Tribal College (withdrawing from college and returning at a later time). Four were majoring in

education, two in accounting and one in information systems. Two had 40 credits, two had 90 – 100 credits and three had over 129 credits. Their tribal college transfer GPAs ranged from 2.8 to 3.9. Five of the seven will be the first in their immediate family to earn a bachelor's degree. A summary of the similarities and differences of the group can be seen in Table 4-1.

### Phases of the Semester

As participants interviewed and the semester progressed, patterns of adjustment emerged. Labels for each of the phases were taken from the common reactions and attitudes that become evident during the interviews. The following section will describe the pattern and illustrate the four phases of adjustment, including:

- Phase One: Expectations and Apprehension
- Phase Two: Acclimation
- Phase Three: Reality
- Phase Four: Adjustment or Discouragement

#### Phase One: Expectations and Apprehension

Expectations and apprehension characterized the period prior to the beginning of fall semester. Although only three of the seven were interviewed prior to classes starting, all seven reported having similar feelings of apprehension and gave an indication of what they expected prior to the first day of classes.

Table 4-1. Group Characteristics

	James	Karen	Charles	Maggie	Theresa	Susan	Marie
Commute	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Married	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Children	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Work	Yes/No	No	No	No	Intern	Intern	Intern
Roles	3	3	2	3	2	2	3
Degree	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Major	Educ	Acct	Info Sys	Acct	Educ	Educ	Educ
TCGPA	3.79	3.20	3.62	2.94	2.85	2.87	3.9
Stopout	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Credits	40	92	149	129	94	155	40
1 <sup>st</sup> in Family	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Gender	M	F	M	F	F	F	F
Fin Aid	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No/Yes	Yes

Academically, most of the participants expected their classes to be difficult. Several had spoken to friends or relatives who had been disconcerted with the difficulty of the academic programs at Montana University. All of the participants reported academic confidence, however, and thought that the Tribal College provided the opportunity to prepare for university work. Most were satisfied with their study skills and habits and liked their schedule of classes.

Two of the women were particularly excited to begin. Maggie remarked, "I think [TC] was a good start for me. I've been there for three years, though and I'm getting kind of tired of it. I'm ready for a bigger place with more challenge. I want to leave the reservation. It's more exciting here." Marie proclaimed, "I was just excited to come. I wasn't scared, I was just excited."

Apprehension accompanied excitement. Most were worried about the large numbers of people who would be on the campus. There would be more students than they were accustomed to at the Tribal College. The word most used to describe their feelings was "scary." They were anticipating the possibility of large classes, difficulty finding their way around campus and entering an unfamiliar cultural environment. Theresa admitted she was unsure about what to expect from her classmates. She stated, "... 'Cause I don't know none of 'em and some of them [are from] pure redneck towns like [nearby communities] or some places and I didn't know what to expect."

All of them had registered for classes prior to the first week and were anxious about how they would effectively resolve the personal details of their lives. Childcare

was an important issue with the five parents in the group and the commute from reservation communities was also anticipated, with statements such as, "I'm sure I'll be tired of driving back and forth."

Most had resolved issues with financial aid, although a few reported difficulties. James did not receive financial aid, since he had been previously suspended from Montana University and Susan was initially turned down for financial aid for the same reason. However, Charles, Karen and Theresa had finalized their aid packages, although Theresa stated that she got "the run-around" from the Financial Aid Office and her mother had to assist her to clear it up. Maggie stated that she thought that financial aid was the easiest aspect of the transfer. However, she did not receive her loan check until late in the semester, an event that drastically changed the course of her semester.

The first phase was full of anticipation and excitement, accompanied by some intrepidation. For the most part, however, they were ready to begin the transition at Montana University.

### Phase Two: Acclimation

Most of the participants displayed minor attitudinal changes the week after school started, including an altered outlook toward the level of academic difficulty, and the social atmosphere of the campus. For the most part, however, they settled into new routines and were getting down to the business of university study.

Academic Adjustment. Academically, most of the participants reported that school was not going to be as difficult as they had expected, although they all reported

that there would be much more reading than they were accustomed. Some of the statements used to describe the first week included the following:

- Marie: 'Cause right now I have a good attitude that I'm gonna do good...
- James: It's pretty um, actually, it's not overwhelming or anything...
- Karen: As long as I finish my homework and stuff, then I'll feel okay...
- Susan: I like it. The busy-- keeping busy. The subjects that I'm studying just keeps me going. So I like it...
- Theresa: Overall? It's like okay. It's not what I had expected when I came. I thought that I would struggle more. Like I would have more harder time doing the work, or the curriculum, but it was okay. ... And um, it's like a lot more better than what I had expected. Maybe think of the worst, it might be better.

Social Adjustment. Most participants were confident in their academic abilities, but remained apprehensive about their social situation, particularly within the classroom. Most mentioned that they were "the only Indian in my class," which for most was intimidating.

- James: It was kinda stressful, it was kind of scary. I had butterflies all week just comin' to class I hoped that they didn't make me do some group project or anything, or make us introduce ourselves or something like that.

- Charles: Um, it was kinda scary at first, but I got used to it....Um, not knowing anybody. Um, thinkin' about how much people are gonna be in my classes...compared to at [the Tribal College].
- Theresa: Um, the first couple weeks it was like, hard. I kept saying, "Hey, mom. I don't know if I can handle being around all those--white people."

Overall, the majority of participants were acclimating to the new environment. They appeared to feel at ease with their academic abilities, yet not as confident socially. Their perceptions changed six weeks into the semester as they faced increased academic demands.

### Phase Three: Reality

The Reality Phase, which emerged at about six weeks into the semester, was characterized by students overwhelmed by the academic requirements, and failure on tests. Socially, students discovered that students and faculty accepted them, even though they were the only Indians in the class. Personally, students were attempting to manage their time effectively, given the multiple roles they held.

Academic Reality. At the six-week interviews, most students reported being astonished by the amount of schoolwork and reading required. They often commented that the level of work was different from that expected at the Tribal College. All but one had failed at least one test and all indicated continued amazement at the amount of required reading. There were many more papers and other assignments that were due on

a continuous basis. Professors were covering chapters in a single day, rather than in a week, as often was the case at the Tribal College.

Many students discovered that their level of processing and old study skills were no longer useful. One student discovered that a critical review of a journal article was not just a summary, but an opinion was to be formed regarding the article and the research. Others found they were required to spend more time studying than they had anticipated, and the amount of reading continued to be a source of stress. The following statements regarding academic adjustment were typical during stage three:

- Karen: At [the Tribal College] it didn't seem I went all out, you know, and I still did good. And then I come here and I tried to be like that -- but I couldn't. Now I know, so I'm trying to get my act together.
- Marie: I am keeping up with it, but I don't like it either. But I'm keeping up with it. I have really bad reading skills, but I can read, but I forget most of the stuff that I read. I guess that's my weakness.
- Susan: [Classes are] more difficult. A lot of -- a lot of material required. More than [the Tribal College]. Assignments, essays, reaction papers -- there's a lot more. And I had to kind of get the reaction paper down. I thought it was just a summary; that's how I took it. And it's not a summary it's a -- part of it a summary, but also your opinions and what I was doing at first was just summarizing the articles and I didn't get very much points for it... I thought did a good job on the assignment, but I got a low score.
- James: Ya. It's a lot more than [the Tribal College]. Most of the stuff we did at [the Tribal College] was like, kinda like assignments -- like worksheets. Here it's not even like that. Here it's like, you're assigned so much pages to read at one time and write a little summary about it and hand it in at -- at a certain time.

History classes seemed particularly difficult for those enrolled in them.

Consolidating the vast amount of lecture notes into a synthesis of the class was troublesome.

- James: Uh, the one I just got out of, I don't know, it's kinda, kinda shaky there. With a History of 1648 or something like that. Western Civilization. That one I -- I still can't get that. I just can't understand some of the -- I don't know, there's so many countries in on it and so many wars and certain parts that you have to study about it. Oh, man, I just get stressed just thinking about it, just taking notes and just I just don't like it. It's like three different books we have to read.
- Marie: It's history -- Western Civilization. The lectures are real interesting and everything, but I can't put the lectures and the test together.

Juggling the time required for each class was often difficult as well. Some did not know how to manage several difficult classes simultaneously. Time management was important for others.

- James: Ya, I'm doing better in my psychology, I know that. The first part I wasn't doing very good at all. I wasn't studying or anything. I was just focusing on a couple of classes, I wasn't giving time to those other classes at all. I was having a hard time there.
- Marie: Like, I'm a student, and like when I go home, my time to be a student is when I put the kids to bed at 9:00, and from nine to twelve is when I do my homework. And in-between, when I get home, I don't know, 2:00; 3:00; 4:00. I don't know, I get home and that's my time with the kids. And in-between, I do my homework, here and there. I read when the kids are playing.

Midway through the semester, most of the participants were discouraged, since they thought they understood the content they were studying. Karen in particular did poorly in her accounting class, which was her major, and although she had taken statistics, she described being lost until she obtained a tutor.

- Karen: Well, I had a test in accounting on Monday... and I flunked it... And I was feeling really bad, because that's supposed to be my major and I thought that, you know.... My business ethics I'm doing real good in, I think I am. I don't know, I have to take it week by week here. 'Cause some days can be real bad and I can get real discouraged and then I start talking to people and I feel better. But, let me see. And Social Issues of the Native Americans, I got a B on my first test. Stats I got a B on my first test, but my next test after that I flunked it. But um, I'm pretty sure I can do good in accounting, but that's the one I need to work extra hard in. And stats. But I don't know. I feel better this week than I did last week (laughter). It didn't make me feel like quitting, but it just made me feel like 'oh. I have to go to class!' (with dread in her voice) But I just make myself go.

Social Acceptance. Socially, several of the participants were surprised to find they were accepted socially while in the classroom. Life inside the classroom was very important socially and, at times the only form of on-campus socialization. Since all but one had spouses and/or children at home, they did not have time to socialize outside of class. Their family was a priority and they were either rushing to class, or went directly home after their day on campus was complete. Nonetheless, some students found acceptance from classmates, especially if there were group learning activities.

- Susan: Yes, lots of new friends and uh, in the education classes we have group work, a lot of groups of four or two, for group presentations that we have to do and I've made a lot of friends through that. It was real interesting that we had a lot of the same ideas about education and where it was going and where we were going and that was just real interesting to me. I don't know why, but there is someone who thinks like me.
- James: Ya, I've made quite a few [friends]. Just some of the people like I've seen at stores, like at West Park Plaza, he's a manager there and he's in my math class and he was and actually I used to just hate him, 'cause he didn't help me or anything. But like when I walk into the store, now, he's well, "Hey, why don't you come over and I'll give you some discounts and stuff."
- Charles: Ya, in some like I just talk to my partner like in an assignment or -- now we just kinda talk and stuff.

Maggie, however, had a difficult time adjusting socially. By the middle of the semester she felt more comfortable than at the beginning, but was still struggling with being the only Native American in her classes.

- Maggie: I haven't made any new friends. It's hard adjusting to this whole new thing. At [the Tribal College] were there was mostly [local tribal] people, you know? Mostly Indian people... I fit right in, you know. I transferred to this big school and in some of my classes I'm the only Indian in my class. I didn't think it would be as hard.

Theresa, the only single student, made new white friends in class, whom she would see off campus. During a weekend trip to Bozeman she encountered a classmate in a tavern and they visited with each other. When asked if she was making new friends she replied:

- Theresa: Ya, just white. The Indian students I know already. And the white kids in my class, they associate with me and I associate back. Wherever they see me they say, "Hi Theresa." And I say, "Hello." And sometimes I forget their name, but most the time I remember. Like I see this one girl at [the car wash]. She gave me a discount. She said, "Oh, you're my friend." And I say, "Oh, okay. Thanks." It's good to see them around. And I see them at Bozeman, too. Some students. When I went there for homecoming, we went to [a local tavern]. It's like a bar. I saw this one student from my class. And we talked for awhile there. It was cool. Where I go, I know other people, not just Indian. It's cool.

The classroom was the connection that bolstered social integration, not the campus as a whole. One student joined American Indian Science & Engineering Society (AISES) but only attended one meeting. Two attempted Indian Club, but did not attend meetings. Although many were involved in clubs and organizations at the Tribal College, campus social units and organizations were of little importance to them at Montana University. They did not have the time.

- Maggie: Well, I was thinking about getting involved in AIBL (American Indian Business Leaders) but I'm not sure now that I fell behind and stuff. I wanted to because I was involved in that over at [the Tribal College] and I really liked it. Now I don't even know if I'm gonna have the time for that.

Personal Adjustment. Outside the classroom, the family tended to serve as the primary social unit for most of the participants. Many students felt pulled between family and school.

- Marie: I just put so much pressure on myself; I constantly worry about things. Like what if, what if I'm not spending quality time with my kids, like I better go home. And I don't have enough money to do that, I can't do that.
- Maggie: It's been hard. Tough. Financial we're having a hard time and it's taking its toll on the family. Haven't been doing very well. But we're trying to work things out. And me being away from home. Not coming home until evening. They're just having a hard time adjusting to that too.

A few students described experiences of racism. Most of those experiences were related to classmates or university staff. Incidences of racism were subtle and some participants questioned whether they were actually racially motivated, or their own misperceptions. The overall reaction to racism was that of indifference. Most stated that it bothered them at times, but, for the most part, they chose to ignore it.

- James: Ya, said it [a textbook] was too racial, and he just didn't like the way his culture was being put down I guess. Other than that I just haven't really noticed anything. There probably was something, but I just didn't pay attention to it. I'm kinda used to it now. (little laughter) Especially here in Montana, there's a lot of it.
- Maggie: Racism. Um I haven't really noticed. I don't know. I wouldn't. All my instructors are really understanding. I more or less would expect it from them, but... that was my concern with my instructors. But anybody else, it doesn't really bother me. Mostly my instructors I want to get along with. Other than that, no I haven't really experienced anything that has bothered me.

- Karen: Um, no. I don't know. I don't even pay attention to how people act or anything. I don't even pay attention to.... But I don't know. I don't really pay any attention to that.

The Reality Phase of the adjustment process was characterized by academic difficulty beyond students' expectations, and many found the need to manage their time more effectively. In contrast, the socialization process was better than expected, where students found that students and faculty accepted them. Personal adjustment was difficult for some. Incidences of racism were few, and if experienced, most chose to ignore them.

#### Phase Four: Adjustment or Discouragement

A division into two distinct groups characterized the final phase which emerged at the end of the term. One group seemed to adjust well both academically and socially, the other group was not as successful in either area. It is important to note that the same participants who adjusted well academically, also adjusted well socially.

Academic Adjustment. By the end of the semester, three students had adjusted well and four had not. Academically, if a student had developed new, more effective learning strategies, they increased the likelihood of academic success (although Charles did not establish new strategies and had the highest grade point average). Newly acquired strategies included flashcards, study guides and rules for reading. If the new strategy did not lead to increased level of processing, it was not effective.

For example, James discovered flashcards to memorize material for psychology and history. However, he asked his wife to write them all out for him, diminishing the

potential for meaningful exposure to new information. Rather than looking up the information, organizing it and elaborating on it, he simply memorized the cards. His grades did improve slightly, but not enough to bring his final GPA above 1.75.

Other ineffective strategies were mentioned, such as disorganized study guides and pre-highlighted textbooks.

- Karen: I started [studying] for my two tests I have today I did like a study guide thing, where I put them in different topics like the names and dates and stuff like that and I did it all that way. And it makes me go over the notes over and over. 'Cause I go back and look for certain things.
- Marie: Oh, the books that I purchased are already highlighted (giggles). So that was easy for me. But I -- I just -- no I don't have no new strategy.

In contrast, Susan discovered that taking what she learned in an education class and applying it to something she already knew helped her to retain it. Recalling her work at Head Start, and helping her daughter with her reading, helped her to retain what she was learning in classes. She found meaning in new material and encoded it more effectively. She also found that reading for understanding and focusing on the main points of a chapter was much more effective than trying to remember every detail of a passage. A professor provided learning strategies such as this, which helped Susan to process the information at a much more effective level.

- Susan: Yes, my Sped 260 class.... She gives us a lot of information about tests. Study guides, how to um, make study guides ourselves and she gives us hers. I thought that was real great for a teacher to um, give us those pointers. I wish somebody had told me about that when I first started. 'Cause a lot of that stuff I did not know.  
C: What does she include? When you make a study guide, what you do?  
Susan: She has us focus on the main points of the chapter. Sometimes I just - - I guess I want to know, instead of focusing on the main points, I just want to know everything; afraid I'll miss something. And I just want to remember

everything. And that sometimes is overwhelming. And then I forget most of it anyway. So focusing on the main points is something that really helped. Go through the chapter and take notes as I'm reading.

Theresa also learned to read for meaning:

- Theresa: Hmm hmm. I have to learn, I guess coming from TC, they make you have poor study habits. Real poor. Real poor. 'Cause when you come up here you go, "Oh my god, man!" 'Cause you have to actually read and actually um, write good notes, so you understand what's going to be on your next exam. I learned how to read and then at the end of the chapter summarize and... just like the main points that they're talking about and um, definitions; and like you read certain parts in the chapter and you write down the main subjects of those parts. And um, just go through the study guide. 'Cause that NAS gives us a study guide. I highlighted the important parts in red and highlighted what appeared important to me, what would be on the test. And it helped me on my second exam. Following his study list. I got an 89 or something like that. The first one I got a 43.

Social Adjustment. Socially, a few participants came to feel included in their classes, while embracing their American Indian heritage. Theresa initially stated that she was intimidated by the fact that she was in a class full of white people. But through experience, she realized that she was accepted and enjoyed her classmates.

- Theresa: After you start knowing people it's almost better. You don't, -- they -- you don't know people so they tell you, "Okay, we did this in class." Like that day I missed, they told me what we had to do, without me asking, they tell me and I was like, "Oh, thanks."

C: Are things different than what you thought they would be before you started?

Theresa: At the beginning I expected it was gonna be like, "Oh my god, I'm at a university! And I'll be competing against white man's world. How in the hell am I gonna turn out? (Laughing) How am I gonna be? How is it gonna be?" And just a bunch of questions. After this first semester I kinda see how it is. And it's been -- I kinda answered all my own questions. Like how are the people? How are the classes going to be? Or like maybe think it's hard, or but they turn out pretty alright -- like I understand.

Personal Adjustment. Personal adjustment was important in the final phase.

Time management continued to be an important aspect for integrating personal and academic responsibilities. Many of the participants made strict schedules for themselves and planned time for study and family responsibilities. They often studied along with their children, although some needed to be away from their children to study.

- C: How did you balance the other things in your life with school?

Marie: I um, instead of going over the max hours of studying, I gave myself a limit on each subject, like, 'cause when I get home there will be time to be with my kids till like 10:00 and from like 10:00 to 12:00 there will be study time. And that really worked out. 'Cause 12:00 or 1:00, I try to be in bed by then. And it really works out well.

- Susan: Well...I would have to manage my time wisely and try to, what I want to do is a much work as I can before I go home.

### Final Adjustment

Final adjustment depended on three interrelated aspects of a student's life: academic, social and personal adaptation. Although the most important aspect was academic integration, poor adjustment in one area often affected adjustment in the others. A web model, Factors of Adjustment (Figure 4-1), was developed based on this emergent pattern. Each spoke in the model was taken from responses made by participants, in relation to the three areas of adjustment. The process was interactional, with important links connecting the three areas together. These links were being open to new experiences and time management.

Being Open to New Experiences. If a student was open to new experiences, academically and socially, they seemed to adjust better. Socially, they made friends with white students and expanded their circle of friends, which appeared to affect them personally. Academically, if a student acquired new study strategies they also performed better.

Time Management. Since students were busy with family matters, it became important for them to balance their time between personal and academic responsibilities. For the most part, those who managed their time well appeared to adjust better both personally and academically.

In conclusion, for these students, first semester adjustment took place in four phases. During Phase One: Excitement and Apprehension, students were both excited and anxious. They were happy to be starting at the University, but felt nervous about the change, the adjustment, the amount of work and the larger campus. During Phase Two: Acclimation, students perceived that many of their anxieties were unfounded. They stated that the social and academic aspects would not be as difficult as they had anticipated and acclimated to the size of the campus. During Phase Three: Reality, students were failing tests and struggling with the unexpected amount of work required, particularly reading. During Phase Four: Adjustment or Discouragement, some students had adjusted more successfully than others. If students acquired more effective study strategies, made new friends and developed new time management skills, they appeared to be more successful.

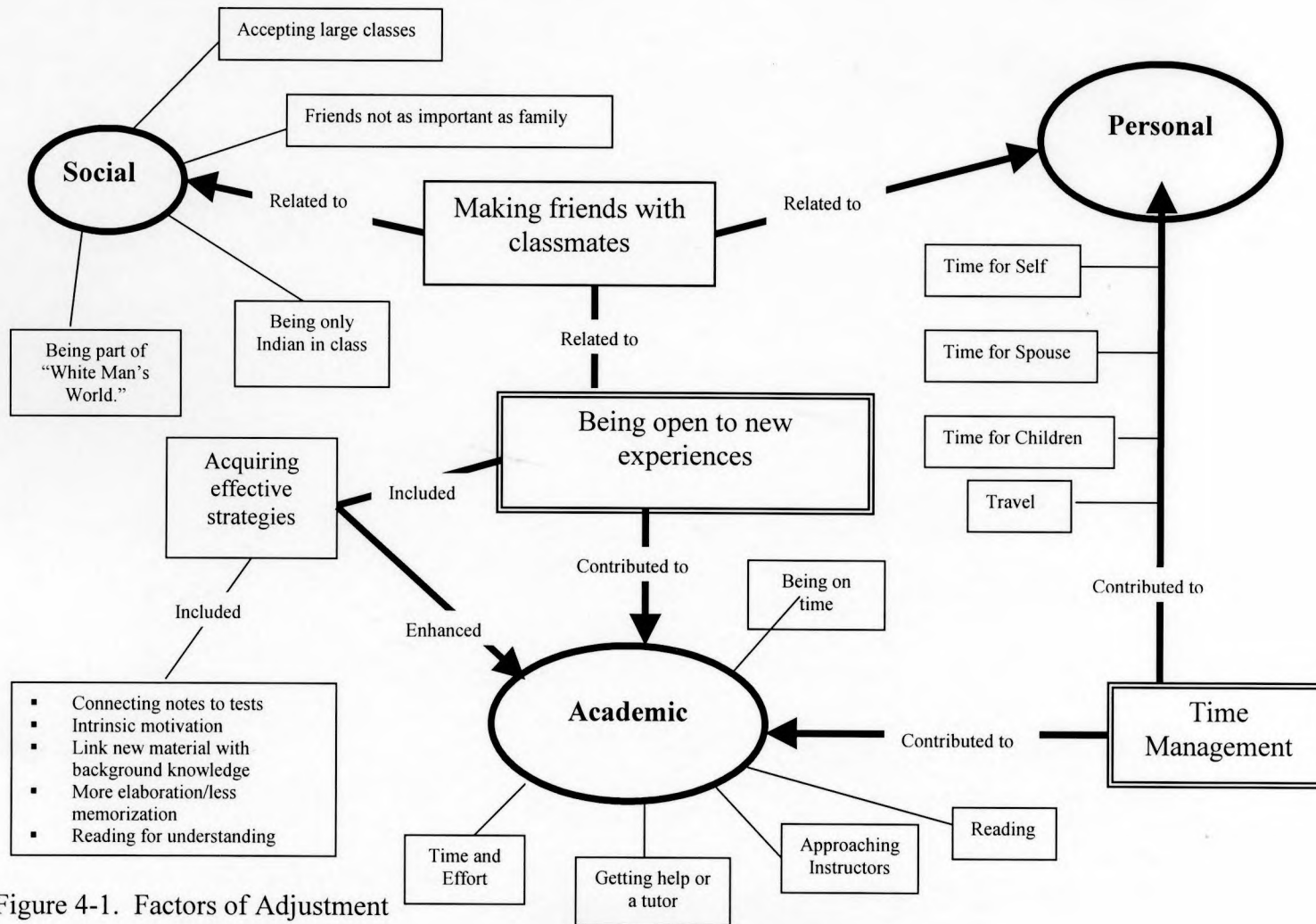


Figure 4-1. Factors of Adjustment

## CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

*I thought it was gonna be really hard... but some people make things hard because they're lazy. But if you do what you're supposed to do it's not that hard. And I thought it was gonna be, and I think I was kinda lazy when I first came. And I thought it was gonna be real hard. But it's not if I do the work. And a lot of reading. I did a lot of reading.*

-Karen

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the experiences of a group of American Indian students as they transferred from a Tribal College (TC) to a Montana University (MU) and how those experiences related to factors of persistence.

The research questions guiding the study were:

What are the experiences of American Indian students as they transfer from the Tribal College to Montana University?

- a) How are these experiences related to social or academic integration?
- b) Do environmental pull factors relate to their decision to remain or depart?
- c) Do background characteristics relate to their decision to remain or depart?
- d) Does their interaction with the University organization relate to their decision to remain or depart?

In order to fulfill the purpose and answer the research questions a qualitative design was utilized. This chapter is an explanation of the analysis and results of the research in relation to the theoretical framework, based on The Longitudinal Model of the Type of Factors that Affect Retention Decisions (Bean, 1990) and the research questions.

The first section examines how participants' experiences are understood in relation to the theoretical framework and its various factors in relation to persistence. Section two offers suggestions for how a revision of the model might better explain the experiences of the group. Section three concludes the chapter with an overview of the findings.

### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study utilized The Longitudinal Model of the Type of Factors that Affect Retention Decisions. The model illustrates how students' attitudes are affected by the interaction between background variables, the external environment and the institution. Attitudinal development ultimately culminates with the decision to withdraw or depart. Central to the development of attitudes are academic integration, social integration and organizational variables. According to Bean,

The environment represents a simultaneous factor that could influence students to decide to leave the school. Organizational, academic and social interaction lead student to develop attitudes about the school. These attitudes affect institutional fit and loyalty -- both potent predictors of continued enrollment. (p. 154)

The next section addresses each of the sub-questions beginning with the importance of background characteristics, organizational variables, academic integration and social integration, followed by a discussion of environmental pull and how attitudes were affected by these variables.

### Background Characteristics

Bean explains that students' background characteristics influence academic and social integration, as well as environmental pull. Educational background, life and work experience, parental level of income and support and educational goals all had an impact on how this group adjusted to the University. Background characteristics of the participants, how those characteristics affected their adjustment academically and socially and how they were related to environmental pull are described in the following paragraphs.

Academic Background. Since the participants had all transferred from the Tribal College to Montana University, they all had prior college experience. However, they varied in terms of high school and college GPAs. Participants' performance at each level of education, including high school, tribal college and university grade point averages, can be viewed in Table 5-1.

For this group, high school GPAs more closely resembled Montana University GPAs than did those of the Tribal College. As illustrated in Figure 5-1, each student's grade point average spiked at the tribal college, and dropped again after the first semester at Montana University. Susan's and Charles' GPAs changed the least over time; James' and Marie's averages changed the most. All of the participants except Theresa had a lower Montana University GPA than that of high school. Maggie was not included in Figure 5-1 since she earned a GED and failed all of her Montana University classes her first term.

Table 5-1. High School, the Tribal College and Montana University Grade Point Averages

---

	High School GPA	TC GPA (cum)	MU GPA
Charles	3.44	3.617	3.25
Susan	2.76	2.87	2.25
Karen	2.48	3.202	2.00
James	2.45	3.794	1.75
Marie	2.34	3.897	2.25
Theresa	2.24	2.85	2.5
Maggie	GED	2.94	0.00

---

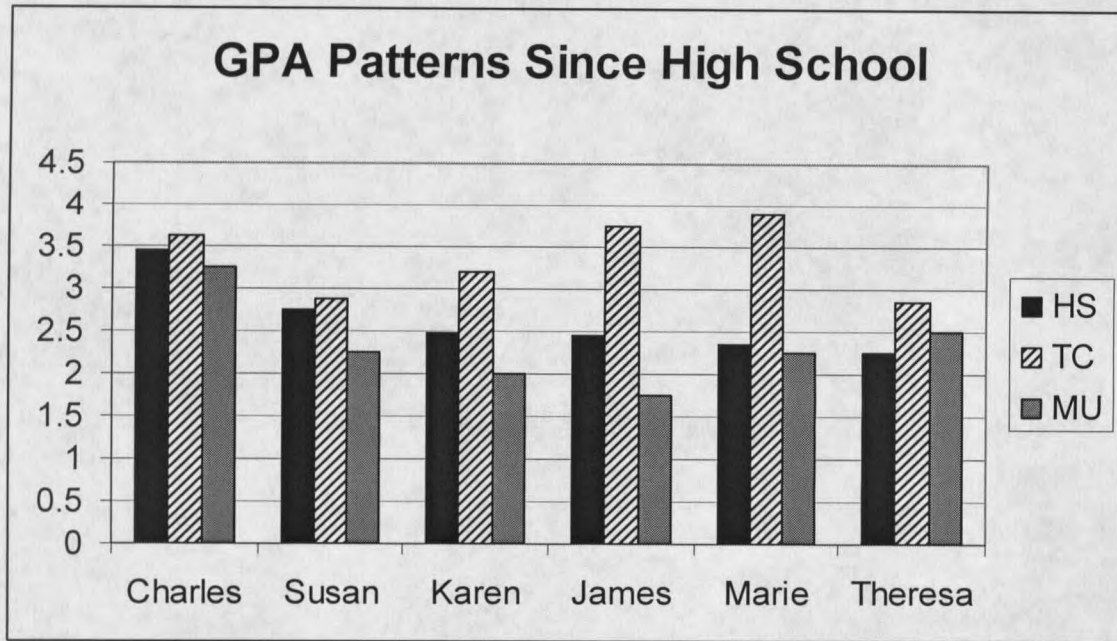


Figure 5-1. GPA Patterns Since High School

In addition, changes in GPA from high school to the Tribal College, from the Tribal College to Montana University and from high school to Montana University were calculated (see Table 5-2). The average increase in GPA from high school to the Tribal College was 0.76 grade points, with a range of 1.45 points. The change in GPA from the Tribal College to Montana University was greater, with an average decrease of 1.07, and a range of 1.69 points. However, the change from high school GPA to Montana University GPA was much lower, with an average decrease of 0.29 points and a range of 0.96. It is important to understand that this information can only be described and not explained, and that this is an important area for future research.

Table 5-2. Degree of Change in Grade Point Averages between High School, the Tribal College and Montana University

	Degree of Change in GPA		
	High School to TC	TC to MU	High School to MU
Charles	+0.23	-0.37	-0.19
Susan	+0.11	-0.62	-0.51
Karen	+0.72	-1.02	-0.48
James	+1.34	-2.04	-0.70
Marie	+1.56	-1.67	-0.09
Theresa	+0.61	-0.35	+0.26
Average Change	+0.76	-1.07	-0.29
Range	1.45	1.69	0.96

Overall, the participants in this study experienced an increase in grade point average when they attended the Tribal College, and a subsequent drop in grade point after their first semester at Montana University. High school grade point averages were closer to Montana University GPAs than were those earned at the Tribal College.

Life Experience. Several students had work or life experiences that may have contributed to their academic achievement. Charles worked in a computer lab at the Tribal College, building and programming computers, developing web pages, and marketing and selling computers. Susan had work experience teaching children at Head Start. Theresa worked as a substitute teacher. These experiences contributed to their ability to understand new material they learned in classes.

Theresa reported rich life experience. She traveled to Washington D. C. and learned to appreciate people from other cultures. This may have contributed to her high level of social integration. She also had experience substitute teaching, which appeared to contribute to the development of her goals and certainty about her major in education. Marie was involved in an internship at an elementary school. James had worked as a coach. Karen had experience as a tutor, which gave her self-confidence in her major, accounting. However, her self-confidence was adversely affected when she decided she could not perform well in her accounting class.

Family Background and Support. All of the participants reported support from their families, which came in the form of money, housing, childcare, encouragement and advice. Although Karen apparently had no support from her spouse, she was strongly supported by her parents and extended family.

Most of the participants had a relative who had attended college, but only James had a parent who had a bachelor's degree. Susan had an aunt and an uncle who had earned masters and doctorate degrees. Marie spoke of a grandmother who earned a

teaching degree. Family support and encouragement appeared to impact attitudes directly (as opposed to affecting only academic integration as the model suggests) specifically the value of education. The family members who had degrees were the most influential encouragers.

Personal Determination. The persistence rate for this group of students was 100 percent. An important factor related to persistence appeared to be personal determination. For purposes of this study, personal determination included four components that emerged during individual interviews. The components most related to personal determination were (a) goal definition (well- vs. ill-defined), (b) motivation (intrinsic vs. extrinsic), (c) commitment to achieve the goal and (d) self-efficacy. In this study, students with well-defined goals who were intrinsically motivated with a high level of commitment also had a high level of academic integration. Self-efficacy, or the degree to which a student took control and responsibility for their circumstances, seemed to also contribute to personal determination.

The development of personal determination for each participant can be viewed in Table 5-3, which illustrates the positive and negative factors related to personal determination. If a participant had three or more positive factors, they were considered to have strong or very strong personal determination. One person (James) had two positive and two negative components, thus was noted as having a neutral level of personal determination. No one was found to have low personal determination. It is important to

note that the components of the personal determination models were not weighted, but used for illustrative purposes only.

Summary. Background characteristics varied among participants. Some students experienced more academic success over time than others and four of the seven had life experiences (authentic learning) that they brought to Montana University, enabling them to relate what they were learning in classes. All had strong family support in the form of material and emotional backing. Students' level of personal determination varied, depending upon definition (ill- or well-defined), intrinsic or extrinsic motivation and level of commitment. The manifestation of these factors appeared be related to academic integration.

To determine the overall effects of background characteristics for each participant, four components were considered: (a) did a family member (immediate or extended) hold a bachelor's degree or above; (b) was the participant's high school grade point average above a 2.5; (c) did the participant receive support, emotional or material, from his or her family; and (d) did the participant have life or work experience? Personal determination was not included among the components, since it was considered an important enough factor to be considered separately. The results of the compilation are illustrated in Table 5-4.

Table 5-3. Components of Personal Determination

	Goal Definition	Motivation Factor	Commitment	Efficacy	Overall Level
Marie	Well-Defined	Intrinsic	High	Low	Strong
James	Ill-Defined	Intrinsic	Low	Low	Neutral
Charles	Well-Defined	Intrinsic	High	High	Very Strong
Maggie	Well-Defined	Intrinsic	High	High	Strong
Karen	Ill-Defined	Intrinsic	High	High	Strong
Susan	Well-defined	Intrinsic	High	High	Very Strong
Theresa	Ill -defined	Intrinsic	High	High	Strong

Table 5-4. Summary of Background Characteristics

---

	Family Member with BS	High School GPA	Support from Family	Life or Work Experience	Overall Effect of Background
Marie	Yes	2.34	Yes	Yes	Positive
James	Yes	2.45	Yes	Yes	Positive
Charles	No	3.44	Yes	Yes	Positive
Maggie	No	GED	Yes	No	Negative
Karen	No	2.48	Yes	Yes	Neutral
Susan	Yes	2.76	Yes	Yes	Positive
Theresa	No	2.85	Yes	Yes	Positive

---

### Organizational Variables

Bean maintains that organizational variables contribute to the attitudes students develop about the institution, which in turn, contribute to the decision to depart or persist. Interaction with various offices and departments on campus can be perceived as a help or a hindrance. Other factors such as course schedules, rules and regulations and services available can also be perceived as positive or negative, depending upon the experience of the student. For these students, organizational variables affected attitudes in the form of satisfaction.

Ease of Transfer. For most of the students in this group, access to Montana University was easy and convenient. All but Maggie liked their schedules, which, in some cases, meant they only had to travel to Montana University four days per week. The Bookstore and Admissions Office were considered easy to work with. All members of the group verbalized satisfaction with advising services. The two advisors students worked with were helpful, especially when major problems arose. Some confusion occurred when classroom locations were changed at the beginning of the semester, but students adapted easily.

Financial Aid Office. Theresa, Susan and Maggie described problems with the Financial Aid Office. Theresa was convinced that once the Financial Aid Office discovered that a student was Indian, they pulled the file and held it, giving extra scrutiny to the application. Susan reported a similar perception, providing examples of Indian friends whose financial aid had been delayed.

Susan reported being put off for weeks by the Financial Aid Office regarding the progression of her status. It was not until the week before school started that she was informed that she would not receive financial aid, since she had been placed on academic suspension in 1992. She reported rude behavior from staff in the office and a general unwillingness to work with her. She also reported that the people were much easier to work with after the semester had started. She decided that they must have been over worked and had short tempers during a busy time. She also explained that she had learned from the process and would be more careful in the future.

Maggie also had complaints about the Financial Aid Office. She claimed that personnel there did not tell her everything she needed to know about submitting final loan papers, which delayed the process and the check did not arrive until November. Having substantial financial difficulties, Maggie's advisor introduced her to the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, who was very helpful and provided emergency loan money for Maggie. The following exchange took place regarding the situation:

- C: How did you find out about the emergency loan?  
Maggie: My advisor.... She's the one that told me about it.  
C: Has she been helpful for you?  
Maggie: She's been really helpful. As a matter of fact, she's about, -- I was 'gonna say, she's about the only one that's helped me. But there's been other people that helped me out there. Dr. P. I was surprised when I spoke with him, 'cause he just sounded like he really wanted to help me. You know? I mean I guess, you don't really know, in that building where the advisors are, you don't approach people. People who I approached there weren't really all that helpful. Especially in the Financial Aid Office. They were just; it's more or less talking to robots when you go in the Financial Aid Office.... I don't know if its racist or not, but one of the financial aid ladies, I asked her to help me with my promissory note and um, she didn't -- she um, um -- I was in a hurry, too, to just fill it out and send it back. But yet, she just didn't give me all the information, you know. And I'm sure she's helped hundreds of people

fill those things out, but she just didn't give me all the necessary information I needed. I don't know if she did that or not, but I was kind of upset about that.

When asked about the best thing that had happened to her this term she replied:

- Um, best thing. (Pause) Probably when I talked to the, I don't know, is his name Dr. P.? When I talked to him I realized that somebody did care and he was so helpful and um, it was just a relief that someone up there is willing to help and willing to listen. 'Cause he told me if I ever had any problems just to go talk to him and he knew.

- Maggie also said she learned from the experience. She resolved that she would save enough money for school in the future and encourage others to do the same.

James also experienced stress from the organization when a scholarship he applied for was denied, which left him teetering on the decision to remain or depart.

Maggie stopped going to class. Susan, however, was even more determined to persist, stating that she was there for an education and would not let the problems with financial aid keep her from pursuing her goal. In these instances, the organization caused stress in students.

Overall, the attitudes that developed about the University were generally positive and came in the form of satisfaction. Transfer went well, advising was viewed as positive and the Admissions Office was helpful; the transfer was described as satisfactory. However, the perception of racism coming from the Financial Aid Office is of concern. Students had complaints about policy, procedure and personnel in the Financial Aid Office.

Policy issues involved financial aid suspension for those who had experienced academic suspension. The procedures for determining Indian student financial aid status

were explained by personnel in the Financial Aid office at Montana University. The policy states that students must pay for one semester and perform well academically in order to be considered for future financial aid. The problem for Susan was that the transcript from the Tribal College had not been received in the Admissions Office, and she was considered to be on academic suspension.

According to personnel in the Financial Aid Office, Indian students must show eligibility for Indian Fee Waivers and work through their tribe to obtain Higher Education Grants. This may be seen as a delay in the process, especially since it was so easy at the Tribal College.

There were also stated difficulties with personnel from the Financial Aid Office. Susan was somewhat understanding, stating that she thought the person in the office was under a great deal of pressure during a busy time, and was simply abrupt. Maggie and Theresa, however, felt that they were not treated fairly, and that this treatment was racially motivated.

Not all of the students held a negative view of the Financial aid Office. Karen, Charles, James and Marie all had positive experiences with the administrative offices on the campus, and had no complaints.

### Academic Integration

Academic integration has been found to be an important factor for understanding American Indian student persistence (Cibik & Chambers, 1991; Cleveland-Innes, 1994;

Freidlander, 1981; LaCounte; 1987; Livingston & Stewart, 1987; Mayo et al., 1995; Metzner & Bean, 1987; Murguía et al., 1991; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Tinto, 1987). Academic integration appeared to be an important factor for the participants in this study as well. The model proposed by Bean denotes four major factors that are considered relevant to this group. These are (a) study strategies and habits (including time management), (b) relationships with faculty, (c) absenteeism and (d) major certainty (including interest in classes). The following sections describe how these factors contributed to participants' levels of academic integration.

Learning Strategies and Habits. The most effective learning strategies utilized by these participants encouraged deeper processing of new information, which was applied to background knowledge about the topic. Students may have acquired essential background knowledge while participating in authentic learning experiences, such as internships or relevant work experience. Study guides, at times provided by faculty, were also effective, especially if they aided in the organization and elaboration of new material. Susan described how one professor taught her to read more effectively by anticipating the main points of the chapter, as opposed to memorizing minute details. She abandoned a less effective strategy for a more effective one.

Some ineffective strategies were either maintained, or acquired. Karen attempted to create study guides, but they were poorly designed and disorganized and did not lead to increased academic performance. Marie was content to use a book that was already highlighted, since she did not have to re-do it. She assumed the important information

was already highlighted. This may have prevented her from reading for understanding. James's use of flashcards helped to raise his test grades slightly, but since he did not create the flashcards himself, he missed meaningful exposure to new material.

Time management skills and study habits also appeared important to academic integration. Both Marie and Susan found it helpful to categorize their days, leaving time for family, travel and study. This allowed for extended period of study, rather than many brief study episodes. Karen, as well, realized the importance of spending time by herself to study, but her family situation often hampered it.

Major Certainty and Interest in Classes. Another component related to performance was interest in class, especially as it related to major certainty. Students who described a lack of interest toward their classes demonstrated poor academic integration. James, who showed poor academic integration, verbalized ambivalence toward a history class. Susan, in contrast, who showed a high level of academic integration, exhibited a strong interest in her education classes. When asked what was motivating her to be in college, she explained that the material she was learning was so interesting, that it made her want to go to class to learn. Although she experienced notable transfer shock, that may have been related to absenteeism or some other factor that contributed to lower grades.

An exception was Maggie, who experienced the lowest level of academic integration, yet expressed interest in her classes. She maintained that she enjoyed the classes and understood them. Maggie may have integrated successfully if other

mediating factors had not been present, since she exhibited other factors that may have led to her success academically, including interest in classes, positive relationships with faculty, desire to obtain a tutor and reading for meaning.

Relationships with Faculty. Faculty had a substantial impact on all of the students. Because of students' apprehension toward being the only Indian in class and in some cases expecting discrimination from faculty, they were reluctant to approach and interact with faculty as they were accustomed to at the Tribal College. However, the participants reported no evidence of racism from faculty. To the contrary, the participants found that they could approach faculty with questions and concerns and that professors were helpful and courteous, which contributed to students' academic integration. This is consistent with Bean (1990), although for this particular group, it is important to note that they were expecting to have negative relationships with faculty and were surprised when they discovered that was not the case. In some instances, faculty tempered the racism that may have been occurring in the class, particularly with Theresa, James and Marie.

Absenteeism. Absenteeism was a factor that may have inhibited academic integration, although it is unclear from participants' statements if that was actually the case. A majority of the students were absent several times over the term. Many stayed home with sick children or a spouse, such as Karen, Susan and Charles. Others experienced the death of a family member or a friend, as in the case of Charles, Susan and Theresa. Karen remained at home for a week after asking her husband to leave the

family home. Marie and James traveled to a church activity in another state and missed two days. James spent time out of class shopping for a new pick-up truck. Those who did not miss a great deal of class time, such as Theresa and Charles, seemed to have higher levels of academic integration. Maggie, James and Karen, who had missed a number of class periods, were less academically integrated. Marie missed very little, however and was low on the continuum. Susan missed more, but was higher on the continuum. Of interest is that only Susan and Maggie were realistic about the time spent away from class and how it affected their grades. Susan admitted that the time she spent at her friend's funeral and the time she spent grieving, negatively impacted her grades. Maggie knew that she would fail her classes because she missed so much class. The others maintained that their absence from class did not negatively affect their grades.

In conclusion, there were varying levels of academic integration experienced by this group of students. The factors related to integration were those shown by Bean (1990) such as relationships with faculty, study habits and skills, major certainty and absenteeism. Other factors are evident from this study, including choice of learning and study strategies and lack of realization of the amount and level of work and reading that would be required. Students reported confidence in their academic skills until the middle of the term, when they found themselves struggling. Also important in relation to faculty was that students' expectations of discrimination did not hold true and they found themselves utilizing professors as a resource. Absenteeism seems to also be an important factor, especially if students missed a great deal of class. Realistic attitudes regarding

Table 5-5. Expressed Satisfaction with Classroom Performance

---

	Satisfaction	Dissatisfaction
Maggie		X
James		X
Susan		X
Marie		X
Charles	X	
Karen	X	
Theresa	X	

---

Table 5-6. Effective Study and Learning Strategies

---

	Effective Strategies	Ineffective Strategies
Maggie		X
James		X
Karen		X
Marie		X
Charles	X	
Susan	X	
Theresa	X	

---

Table 5-7. Amount of Transfer Shock

---

	TC GPA	MU GPA	Change
Maggie	2.94	0.00	-2.94
James	3.66	1.75	-1.91
Marie	4.00	2.25	-1.75
Susan	3.76	2.25	-1.51
Charles	4.00	3.25	-0.75
Karen	2.5	2.00	-0.50
Theresa	2.85	2.5	-0.35

---

missing class were important as well. Interest in class, related to major certainty, also appears to be an important component of academic integration.

For purposes of this study, a student was considered to be academically integrated if they (a) expressed satisfaction with their academic performance, (b) acquired effective study and learning strategies and (c) experienced less than .75 drop in transfer GPA or transfer shock. All students experienced some degree of transfer shock. The following tables represent each student's level of satisfaction with classroom performance (Table 5-5), study and learning strategies (Table 5-6) and amount of transfer shock (Table 5-7).

Learning skills were also important. Effective study habits and processing skills contributed to academic success. Academically successful students were able to appreciate discussions, developed meaningful reading skills and utilized background knowledge (from past authentic learning experiences) to process new information.

Factors Contributing to Academic Integration. To illustrate the patterns of academic integration, a web model was developed utilizing Novak's (1998) concept mapping method (Figure 5-2). Each of the relevant components and the number of responses that were related to those factors are included as spokes and connected by dashed lines and linking words explaining their relationship. The three most distinguishable factors that contributed to academic integration appeared to be (a) faculty, (b) learning skills and (c) major certainty.

Relationships with faculty were important for these students, especially since they did not expect faculty to be approachable. The respect students gained for their teachers

strongly influenced attitudes about themselves and their ability to achieve academically and socially.

Major certainty and subsequent interest in classes were also important to academic success. Susan, Theresa, Marie, Maggie and Charles were certain of their majors. James was unsure about his direction in college, and Karen changed her major at the end of the term.

A few students sought tutoring or assistance from faculty, which, for those individuals, contributed to better performance in class. An exception was James who asked for help from his mathematics instructor, but dropped the class when he could not keep up with the requirements.

A second web model, Factors that Inhibited Academic Integration (Figure 5-3), is also useful to understand the components that negatively impacted academic integration in the participants. Each of the relevant components and the number of responses that were related to those factors are included as spokes and are connected by dashed lines and linking phrases. Ineffective learning and study skills and less major certainty were important factors for students who did not have high levels of academic integration. Less integrated students tended to retain ineffective strategies and processing skills. In general, students were not prepared for the increase in reading required, but those who were not successful were unable to compensate for it. Absenteeism may have also had an influence, since students who missed a lot of class did poorly academically.

For the participants in this study, a student's level of academic integration appeared to influence their attitudes. If they successfully integrated, they tended to have

higher levels of satisfaction, a sense of self-development and higher self-confidence. Tinto (1987) maintains that academic integration is strongly associated with social integration and together they determine the congruency between the student and the institution. The following section will examine the levels of social integration experienced by the participants.

### Social Integration

Bean's model includes three important factors related to social integration: (a) a social support system, (b) informal contact with faculty and (c) close friends on campus. Close friends on campus were utilized by three of the participants. Theresa and Karen occasionally met with old friends, but the others were not interested in socializing either within the classroom or outside the classroom. None of the participants reported informal relationships with faculty.

Social Support. A student's level of social support was important, but not always as a source on campus. Maggie, Marie, James and Charles depended largely upon their families for social support. James and Marie stated that they relied upon their grandparent's support for "survival" and stayed at home with their children as much as possible. Being married, they were with each other almost the entire school day, taking all but one of their classes together. They were a social unit unto themselves, and provided mutual encouragement and support to one another. Maggie as well, was more dedicated to her family than to school. Karen appeared to have minimal support from her husband. Her extended family, however did offer their assistance.

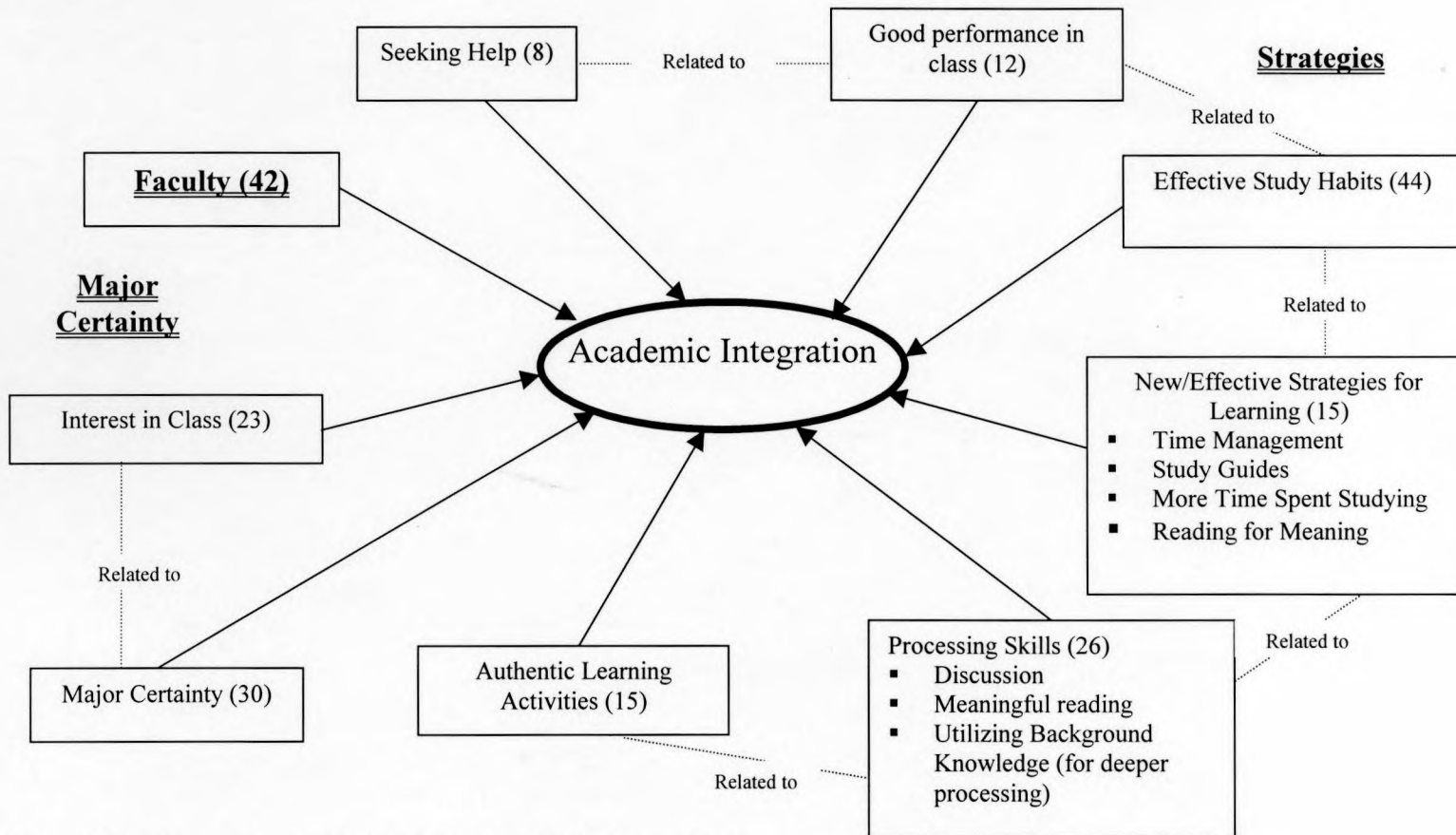


Figure 5-2. Factors that Contributed to Academic Integration

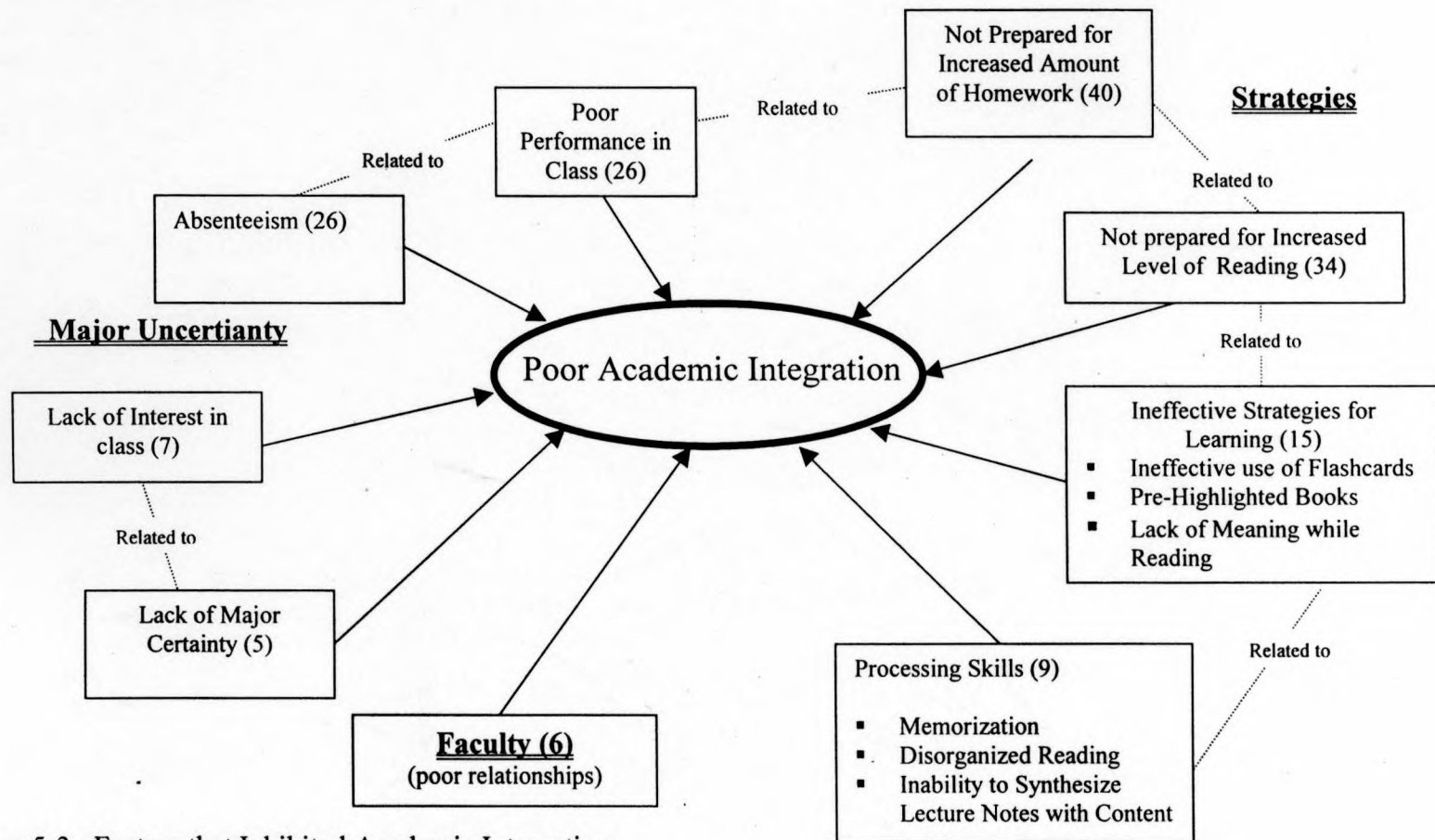


Figure 5-3. Factors that Inhibited Academic Integration

Informal Faculty Relationships. Informal contact with faculty was not a component of socialization with this group of individuals. Although faculty were of great importance in the classroom and in the level of academic integration achieved, they were not utilized as a source of socialization. Susan related a story about a professor whom she respected, since he was dealing with the illness of a family member. However, she did not indicate that they had a personal conversation regarding the illness; only that the professor was able to carry on in a professional manner while dealing with personal difficulties. In contrast, it should be noted that students did enjoy informal contact with faculty at the Tribal College. Informal relationships may take more time than one semester to develop and could be an important source of social support for Indian students.

Close Friends on Campus. Theresa and Karen were the only participants who associated with close friends on campus. Theresa enjoyed socializing with old friends, and Karen occasionally met with old friends for lunch. Marie stated that she had "tons of friends" on campus, but preferred not to socialize. The others did not maintain social relationships with people on campus.

Levels of Social Integration. Social Integration did not appear to be an important factor for the participants in this study. All but one of the students were nontraditional students and had less inclination to socialize. The socialization that occurred had three characteristics. For purposes of this study, a student was considered socially integrated if they (a) made new friends within the classroom setting, (b) utilized old friendships and

(c) cultivated new friendship beyond the classroom and campus. Table 5-8 illustrates students' level of making friends, Table 5-9 the utilization of old friends and Table 5-10, expanding friendships beyond class or campus.

Only two students were considered socially integrated. However, the level of social integration did not appear to be related to academic integration for any of the participants except Theresa, who is a traditional student with no outside responsibilities such as families or children to care for.

With regard to social integration, it was important for participants to make new friends within the classroom, meet old friends on campus and have the willingness to expand new friendships to off-campus activities. Only one participant, Theresa, was successful at all three. Although she entered the University with a defensive attitude about white people and the possibility of "rednecks" being in class, she soon discovered that she was accepted and befriended by her fellow classmates. She explained that she made many new friends, not Indian but white, and socialized with them off campus. She also maintained her relationships with her Indian friends, whom she had known for years. In addition, she traveled to California during a break to visit with an old friend and her husband, and was looking forward to participating in an internship that would again take her to Washington D.C., as she had the previous summer.

Susan, as well, expanded socially and enjoyed new friendships with classmates who shared her love of learning and children. They worked together during class time, as well as after class to socialize and study. She did not, however, utilize existing friendships on campus.

Contributions to Social Integration. For this group, the most critical factor related to social integration appeared to be the initiative it took to expand beyond their level of comfort, making friends with non-Indians and feeling positive about developing those friendships outside the classroom. While Karen had friends that she interacted with between classes, she did not develop new friendships either in the classroom or outside of it. Susan enjoyed the new relationships she developed, and expanded those relationships to outside the classroom, especially within study groups. Theresa was the most social, utilizing old friends, making new ones in class, and cultivating them outside of class and even beyond the campus. Both Susan and Theresa enjoyed the friendships that were developed. Maggie stated as well that she thought she would have done better if she had made new friends.

Impediments to Social Integration. Factors that inhibited social integration included reluctance to make friends, feeling isolated in the class due to being the “only Indian in the class,” being intimidated by larger classes and lack of time to spend with friends. It is interesting to note, however, that all of the students had time constraints and family responsibilities, with the exception of Theresa. However, Susan had the farthest distance to travel and was a single parent. In spite of time and familial constraints, she was able to make friends and develop friendships outside the classroom.

Table 5-8. Making New Friends in Class

---

	Made New Friends	Made No New Friends
Susan	X	
Theresa	X	
James	X	
Maggie		X
Marie		X
Charles		X
Karen		X

---

Table 5-9. Utilization of Old Friends

---

	Utilized Old Friends	Did Not Utilize Old Friends
Karen	X	
Theresa	X	
Maggie		X
James		X
Susan		X
Marie		X
Charles		X

---

Table 5-10. Expanded Friendships Beyond the Classroom or Campus

	Expanded Friendships	Did Not Expand Friendships
Susan	X	
Theresa	X	
Maggie		X
James		X
Marie		X
Charles		X
Karen		X

In contrast, James and Marie clung to each other, remained withdrawn within the classroom and expressed reluctance to interact with the rest of the class. James explained that he had been ridiculed as a child and did not feel comfortable sharing his ideas. Marie

acknowledged that she was not the social type, although she said she had “tons of friends” in attendance at Montana University. Charles interacted with a partner for a public address and occasionally spoke to him, but otherwise remained shy and appeared to rely solely on his wife for socialization. Maggie would have liked to make friends and stated that she would have done better in school if she had made some new friends. Her financial and family circumstances, however, prevented her from spending any additional time on campus.. Karen interacted only with her old friends.

Importance of Social Integration. Contrary to Bean’s model, social integration did not appear to be important for the majority of the participants in this study. Most had families, who either filled the gap or took up the extra time it would have taken to cultivate new relationships. Theresa was most successful at socialization, possibly because she had fewer constraints on her time and energies. For this group of students, however, social integration was not linked to their success their first semester at Montana University. This is consistent with the literature regarding nontraditional student persistence (Dell, 1991; Metzner & Bean, 1987; Richardson & Skinner, 1992).

Levels of social integration may have influenced students’ attitude, although the results are unclear. Those who developed new friendships in class reported greater satisfaction and self-development as students. However, those who did not have high levels of social integration, such as Charles and Marie, expressed positive attitudes. The impact of low social integration on Indian student persistence is unclear from this study, but worth further investigation..

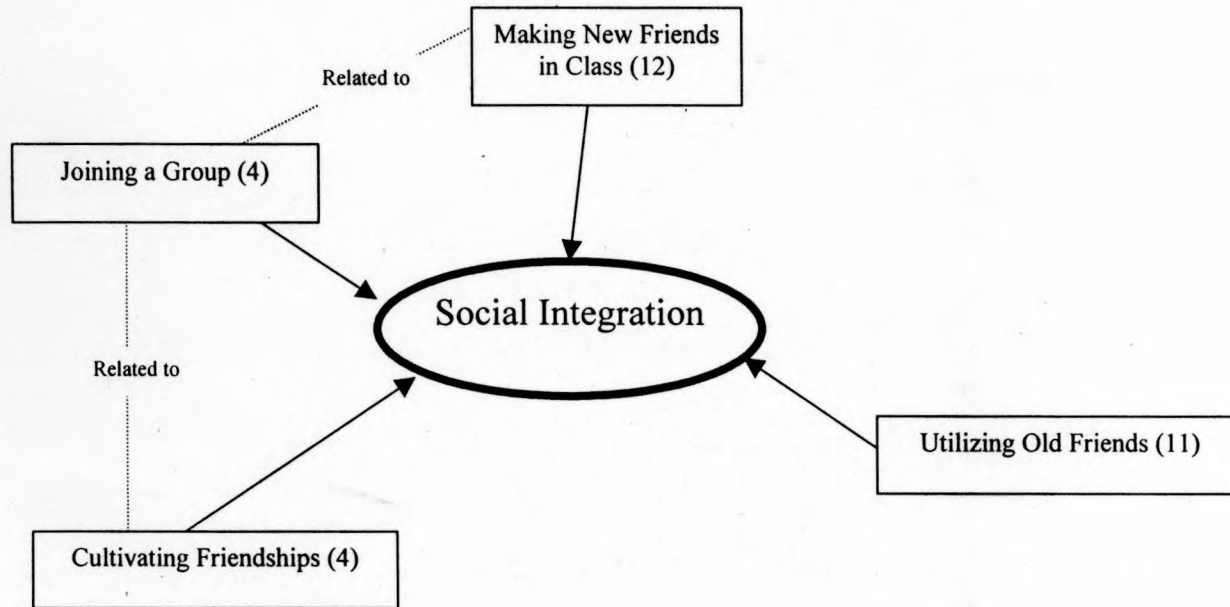


Figure 5-4. Factors that Contributed to Social Integration

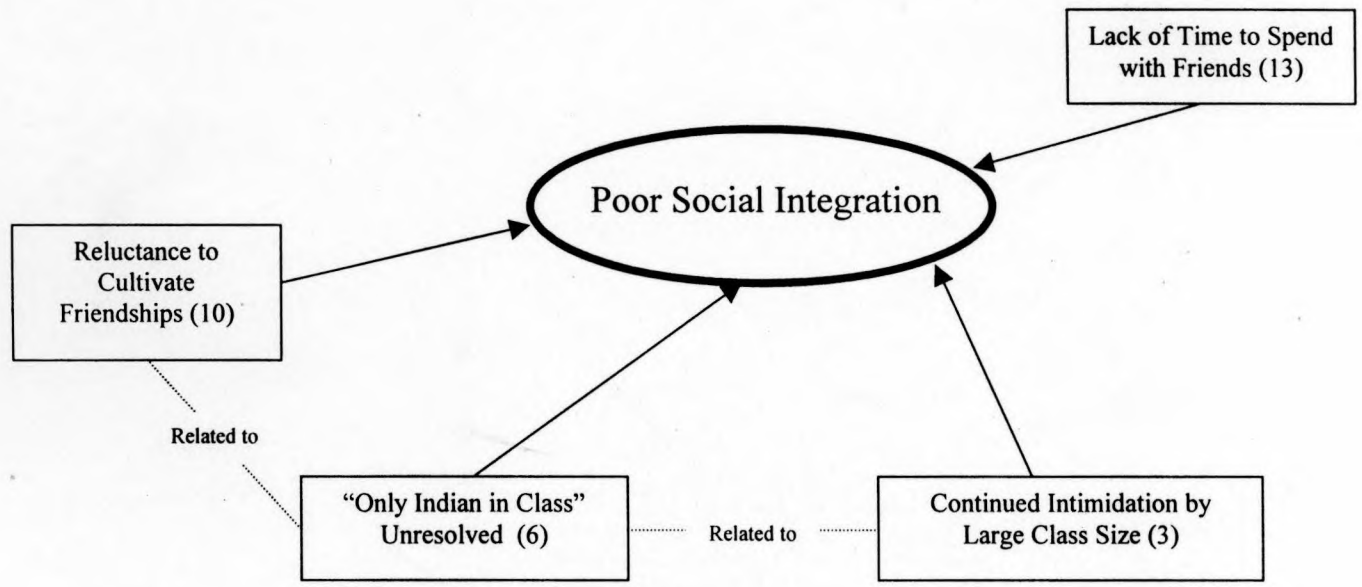


Figure 5-5. Factors that Inhibited Social Integration

### Environmental Pull

According to Bean (1990), environmental pull has a direct impact on the decision to depart or persist. If enough pressure is exerted from sources outside the University setting, such as financial or family difficulties, a student will likely make the decision to depart. He provides five important sources for environmental pull, including lack of finances, significant others elsewhere, the opportunity to transfer, work roles and family responsibility.

This group of students experienced environmental pull from four major sources, two of which are part of Bean's model. These sources included (a) travel, (b) lack of financial resources, (c) family responsibility and (d) multiple roles among the participants. Neither significant others elsewhere, the opportunity to transfer nor work roles were a factor in environmental pull, as Bean suggests. None of the students planned to transfer and all of their families lived in the local vicinity. No student had significant others living elsewhere that would cause them to relocate. One of the students, James, was employed during the term, but only mentioned it when his employment was terminated. Three students, Karen, Theresa and Marie had internships as part of their school responsibilities.

To illustrate the sources of environmental pull, a web model was developed (Figure 5-6). Each of the relevant components and the number of responses given that were related to those factors were included. The model shows the three major sources of

environmental pull, travel, lack of finances and family responsibilities and the various roles that participants sustained

Travel. Travel time was something that most of the students verbalized as difficult. Susan and Theresa both traveled 260 miles a day, four days a week to attend classes. Maggie, Charles and Karen traveled 140 miles per day and Marie and James traveled 70 miles per day. All but Marie, James and Charles were considering a move closer to Montana University, but chose to remain in their current homes to accommodate their families, especially their children. Theresa moved to the city the following semester.

Lack of Financial Resources. Financial difficulties were described by three of the participants, Maggie, James and Marie. Maggie submitted financial aid paperwork late, did not receive appropriate information on completing the application process and her loan money for the semester was delayed until November. This prevented her from attending class many times and put the entire family under financial and emotional strain. Her husband lost his job in the middle of the term. Consequently, she could not afford gas to come to Montana University.

James and Marie lived with his grandparents, sharing the cost of living, although the grandparents had secure income from various sources. James stated that he did not feel they could survive without them. Although room and board were provided, their financial situation was difficult, especially since James was not receiving financial aid and lost his job in the middle of the term. The other participants had enough financial aid

to pay for school and some expenses, but none of them were employed. Karen’s husband made only \$6.00 per hour and that income was lost when she asked him to leave. She had bills that needed to be paid, especially since her husband refused to pay them, even when they were together.

Family Responsibility. A compelling source of environmental pull was family responsibility, primarily for children. James, Marie, Karen and Maggie had preschool-aged children, all who needed childcare (which compounded the financial situation) and Susan and Maggie had school-aged children, who needed their attention as well. Maggie had a teenager who was beginning to exhibit typical adolescent behavior, in the form of rebellion.

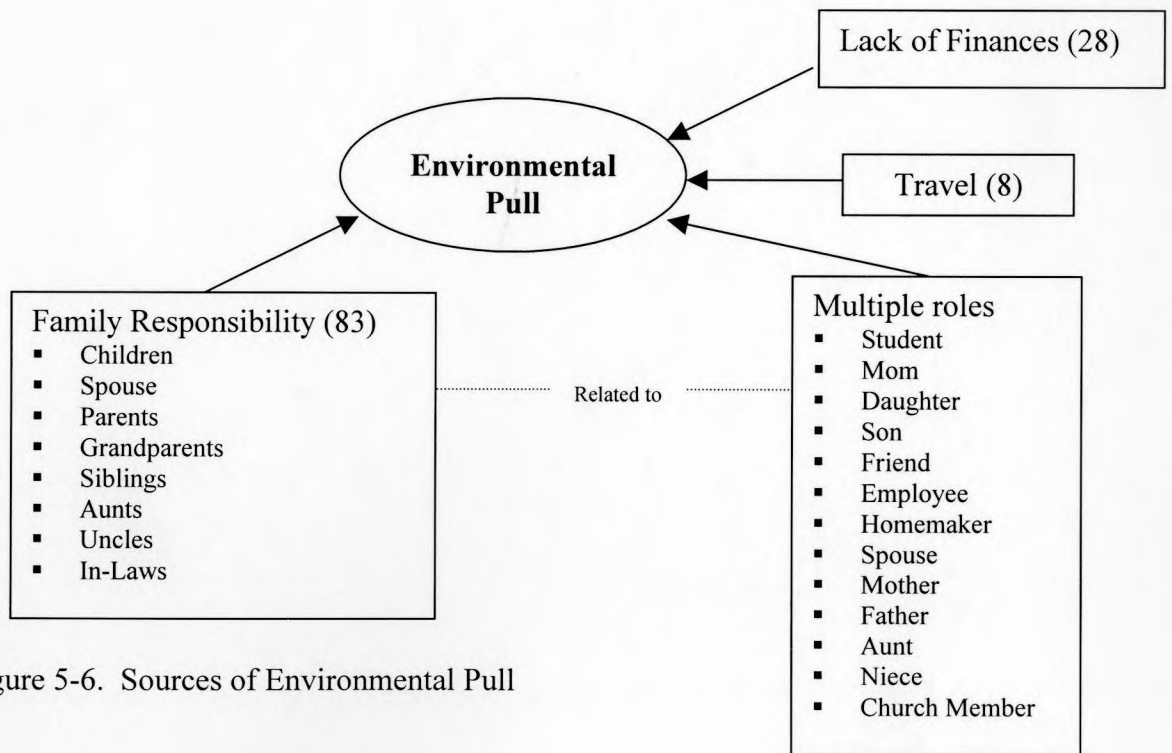


Figure 5-6. Sources of Environmental Pull

Maggie appeared to experience the greatest degree of environmental pull, both financial and familial. Her financial situation was dire; in addition, she longed to be with her children. She expressed that she was not providing them with everything they needed, especially in the form of her time. She admitted that she was unable to establish the balance she needed to perform all of her roles, especially as a spouse and parent. Combined with the travel, it became too burdensome and she terminated her attendance.

Karen was also affected by environmental pull. She stated that her spouse did not support her attendance at the University and resented the time she spent studying. She acknowledged, however, that school was her priority and that he was "getting in my way." She asked him to leave in November. This precipitated an additional strain, as her four-year-old daughter suffered from the loss of her father and Karen missed a week of school. She also had to find childcare, since the children's father was no longer there to watch over them as she studied. She considered moving closer to Montana University in January and leaving the children with relatives during the week, so that she could devote more time to her studies. Karen was subject to considerable environmental pull, but was determined to maintain education as her priority.

Multiple Roles. Five of the seven students had more than three life-roles<sup>12</sup> in addition to the role of student. Balancing those roles became important for them as the

---

<sup>12</sup> Nontraditional students tend to have many responsibilities, or roles, besides that of being a student. These may include parent, spouse, and employee, along with others.

academic requirements increased. Families remained a top priority for most of the students. This included not only children and spouses, but extended family as well, including grandparents, parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews and in-laws. The participants relied upon their immediate and extended families for moral, emotional and financial support and in turn took time out to do what was needed for them as well. This led to reduced social integration as well as absenteeism.

Environmental pull was a major factor for all of the students, affecting some participants more than others. All had some traveling requirements, all had some degree of financial difficulty and all had familial responsibilities to fulfill. Karen, Maggie and Susan all reported traumatic experiences. Karen elected to reduce her distractions, Maggie chose to terminate her attendance and Susan's grades dropped. Nonetheless, all three returned the following semester.

### Attitudes

Bean maintains there are three factors that directly affect student's attitudes toward the institution, which ultimately lead to a decision to persist or depart. These factors are organizational variables, academic integration and social integration. The particular attitudes that develop include satisfaction, a sense of self-development, a practical value for education, self-confidence as a student and stress.

For this group, the three factors suggested by Bean did influence attitudes, but sources from the environment also had an impact, particularly in the form of stress. Most of the positive attitudes were expressed in terms of academics. Self-confidence, value for

an education and self-development as a student were attitudes expressed most often, especially by those who experienced higher levels of academic integration.

Positive Attitudinal Development. Organizational, social and environmental variables were also sources of positive attitudes, but were mentioned less often than academic sources. Satisfaction, stemming from interaction with the institutional variables, and self-confidence in relation to social sources were occasionally spoken of. Positive attitudinal development also appeared to be influenced by environmental sources. Positive attitudes regarding the value of education came from the family, a source external from the institution. Encouragement and the philosophy that education would improve their lives and the lives of their children, were stressed by the extended family. Although they all experienced stress from the environment, they remained positive about education and saw Montana University as the source of goal fulfillment (Figure 5-7).

Negative Attitudinal Development. The most prominent sources for negative attitudinal development came from either environmental or academic sources. Those with considerable environmental pull, such as Karen, Marie and Maggie, expressed stress exclusively. Attitudes related to academic sources were stress and expressions of low self-confidence as a student, chiefly among those who had low levels of academic integration. Attitudes related to social sources included low self-confidence and stress. The attitude expressed in relation to organizational sources was also stress (Figure 5-8).

Although the web models provide an overall illustration of attitudinal development, they are not accurate representations. Some students developed more positive attitudes than others did. Susan, for instance, expressed six of seven responses of self-development. She enjoyed her education classes and they inspired her to learn more. When statements of self-confidence were expressed, 17 of the 25 responses came from Susan, Charles and Theresa, who exhibited higher levels of academic integration than the others.

As seen by the web model in Figure 5-8, stress was experienced by all of the participants, the major source being the external environment. Lack of finances and family difficulties were consistently experienced by most of the students. Although Bean did not attribute environmental sources to attitude development, there is evidence from this study that it may be a contributor. By the end of the term, Maggie stated that she was depressed and not motivated to perform in her classes. She was the only participant who expressed that she did not like the University. When asked if she hated it here, she replied, "No, I don't hate it, I just, um. I wouldn't say hate it -- it's just, um. (pause) It's really not like I'm overjoyed to be here (laughing)." She was highly motivated and positive at the beginning of fall term. Although her lack of finances was attributed to more organizational variables (her loan money being late), the pull from her family contributed to her low motivation.

Statements of positive and negative attitudinal responses were balanced (52 positive and 53 negative). Most of the positive attitudes were influenced by academic orientations, especially from Susan, Charles and Theresa. Academic sources were also

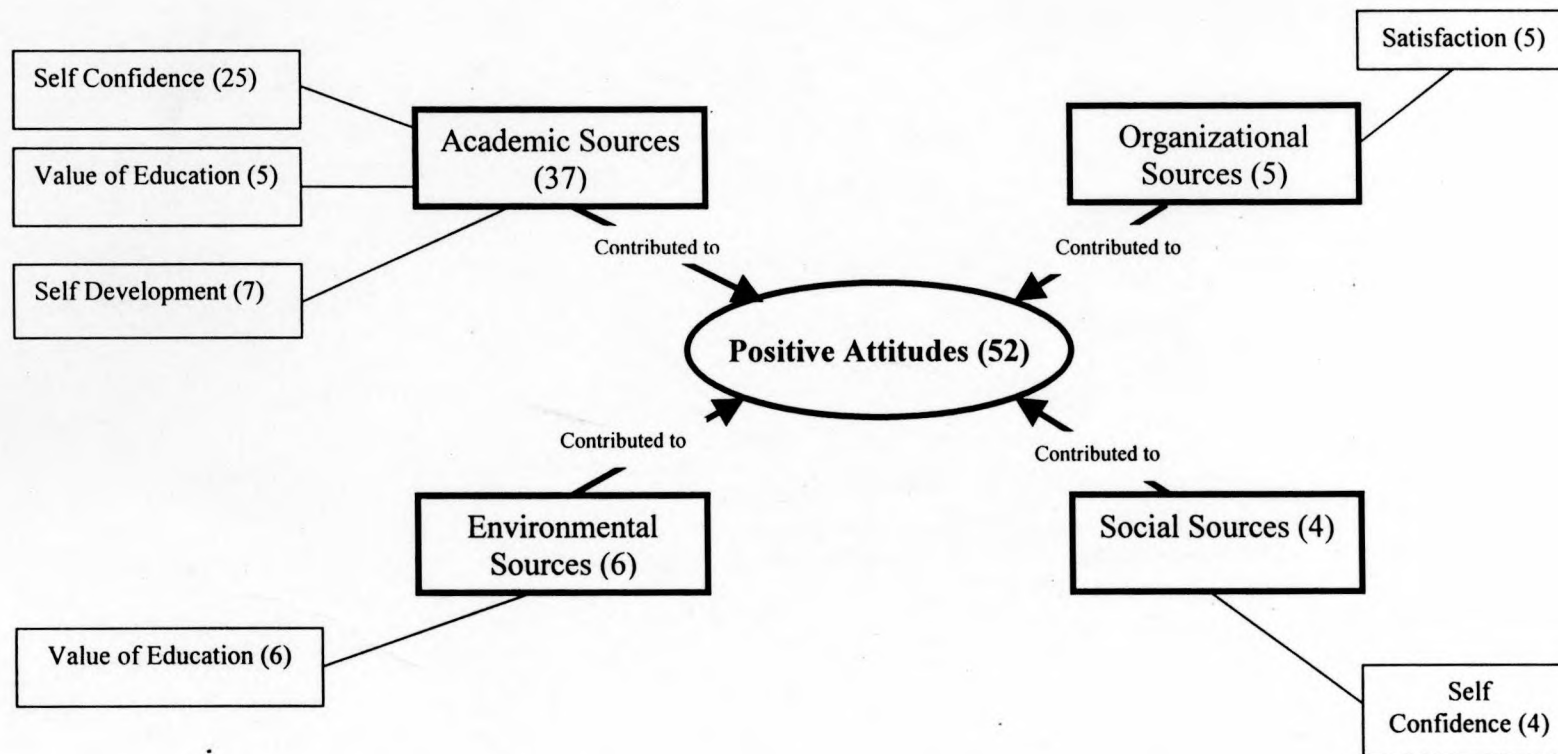


Figure 5-7. Sources of Positive Attitudes

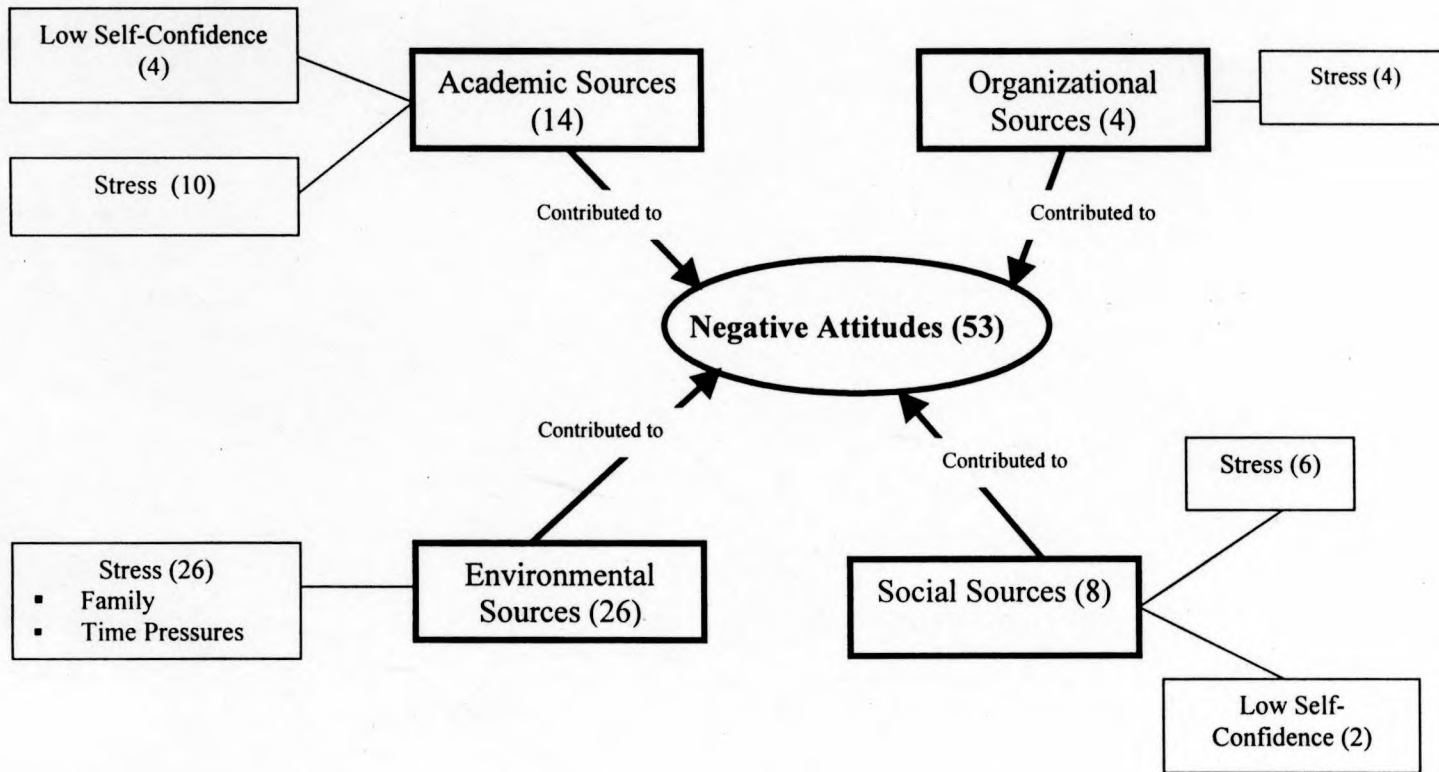


Figure 5-8. Sources of Negative Attitudes

important, in terms of developing attitudes of low self-confidence and stress, if students did not perform well in class.

#### Institutional Fit and Commitment

All of the participants expressed commitment to the Tribal College. The common theme was that they viewed it as providing them with a good start toward obtaining a four-year degree. They spoke of the approachability of the instructors, the one-on-one assistance they received and the solid preparation for transferring to a four year-institution.

It was difficult to ascertain the fit and commitment that the group developed toward Montana University. All but Maggie expressed that they liked Montana University, but not to the extent they liked the Tribal College. Perhaps one term is not enough time to form the bonds that Bean (1990) and Tinto (1987) highlight. Perhaps as well, these students are committed to remain in their homes and they see Montana University as the only option for a four-year degree. Participants in this study reported that they are attending Montana University because they have heard positive things about it from their relatives or friends and because it is close to home. However, their loyalties appeared to remain with the Tribal College. This does not necessarily conflict with the loyalty they may develop in the future and may enhance their allegiance to both colleges, as the literature suggests (Nora, 1993; Pascarella, et al., 1986; Piland, 1995).

Intent to Leave

Bean's model indicates that intent to leave, a strong determinant of actual departure, is influenced by attitudes, institutional fit and institutional commitment. There was some evidence of intent to leave, but appeared to be related to environmental pull (such as family responsibilities) or organizational factors (such as lack of financial aid), not limited academic or social integration. Regardless of students' intent to leave, all participants persisted.

The participant who terminated her attendance, Maggie, had suffered from extreme environmental pull. Her family lacked the finances for her to sustain her attendance, and her loyalties were with her family, not Montana University. Maggie may have integrated better academically and socially if she had received her funding on time, since she maintained her confidence as a student, liked her classes and professors, and expressed a strong interest in returning the following term.

James threatened to quit due to organizational variables related to his background. A grant project offering scholarships to American Indian students did not offer him a scholarship because of his criminal record, stating that he would be denied eligibility for a teaching certificate. Consequently, he intended to leave but later changed his mind.

When asked why, he stated:

Just to know that I can do it. That was the thought that came to my mind. I told her everything. I told her, "I'm gonna quit. The heck with this. If they're not gonna let me be a teacher or something that I want to do, I'm just gonna quit school." I said, "There's no use of staying in school. I may as well just go home. Live on the reservation. Work a tribal job. Or I can go to vo-tech and maybe receive some sort of vocational education there."

James' levels of academic and social integration were not high, yet he persisted.

Although his reaction of stress as a response to the organization was intensified, it did not ultimately lead to the decision to depart. Perhaps the support he received from his wife, Marie, and the value his extended family assigned to an education, are factors that influenced his decision to persist.

### Conclusion

The participant's experiences as they progressed through the semester have been analyzed. Factors extracted from Bean's model were utilized to guide the analysis and interpret the results. Each of the factors appeared to influence the development of attitudes toward the University and the academic process.

Background characteristics appeared to be related to academic integration, especially in the form of personal determination, life experiences, family background, and academic background. A notable finding was the spike in grade point averages at the Tribal College, and subsequent decrease in GPA at the University. High school grade point averages were closer to university GPAs than those earned at the Tribal College. Life experiences contributed positively to the learning experience, and the participant's level of personal determination as it related to their decision to return.

Organizational variables appeared to affect attitudes, both negatively and positively. Although the transfer process was viewed as positive, the Financial Aid Office, whether it be policy, procedure or personnel, was considered a source of stress for

three of the students. However, all three of students persisted despite the difficulties they experienced with financial aid.

Environmental pull was a multifaceted variable, affecting not only attitudes, but also academic and social integration. Social support was important for the participants, although not in the form of social integration, but from the extended family. Students were considered socially integrated if they cultivated new friendships within the classroom, extended those friendships beyond the classroom, and had a reliance on pre-established friendships. One student achieved all three criteria for social integration, and another achieved two of the three. Social integration, however, did not appear to be as important for these students, as Bean (1990) or Tinto (1987) suggest.

The development of attitudes toward the University appeared to be influenced by organizational variables, academic and social integration and environmental pull. Unexpectedly, environmental pull appeared to affect attitudes directly, an element not present in Bean's model. According to the model, the development of attitudes toward the institution determines the degree of institutional fit and commitment. It is unclear from this study how those attitudes have affected institutional fit and commitment. It may require more time than one semester to develop strong commitment to an institution. All of the participants reported a strong level of commitment to the Tribal College, and experienced close relationships with faculty there, both formally and informally, which seems to have contributed to their loyalty to the Tribal College. An extension of this study may provide a better understanding of the level of commitment to Montana University as time progresses.

### Modifications to the Model

The model proposed by Bean (1990) is somewhat useful in understanding the experiences of the participants in this study. Academic and social integration, environmental pull, background characteristics and organizational factors were evident in their experiences. However, differences that emerged appear to vary from the model and therefore it does not satisfactorily explain persistence for this group of American Indian college students.

It appears that, given a limited span of time, the adjustment process may not be a linear event, but an interactional process. Components from four areas, personal (or environmental pull), social, academic and organizational, affect not only specific attitude development, as suggested by Bean, but also interact together to affect levels of persistence. The following section suggests modification to the model, based on the analysis of statements provided by the participants. These modifications may better explain the decisions of persistence for the American Indian participants in this study.

#### Background Characteristics

Background characteristics were instrumental during the adjustment process for the students in this study. Background knowledge, personal determination, academic preparation, and family background each impacted the adjustment process.

Background Knowledge. It appeared that background knowledge acquired through work and life experience impacted academic integration and subsequent attitude

development regarding the value of an education and self-confidence as a student. Bean does not address this characteristic in his model.

Personal Determination. Personal determination was also important in the adjustment process, especially how it affected academic integration and the sense of self-confidence. Bean does not directly address these characteristics in his model.

Academic Preparation. It is also important to note that academic preparation was important to academic integration, and the subsequent development of self-confidence as a student. Because so many American Indian students are underprepared academically (Benjamin et al., 1993; Cibik & Chambers, 1991; Davis, 1992; Dodd et al., 1995; Herring, 1990; Hoover & Jacobs, 1992; LaCounte, 1987; Ridone, 1988; Wells, 1989, 1997), it is imperative that they acquire effective learning and study strategies. With regard to American Indian students, Bean does not give acquisition of study and learning skills appropriate attention.

Family Support. The dependence on extended family members for material and emotional support, unique to American Indian cultures, plays an important role in the development of goals and attitudes. Although Bean discusses parental characteristics, the importance of the extended family is not mentioned. The family support experienced by the participants directly affected their value for education. Material and emotional support, provided by parents, spouses, children, grandparents and extended family, was

important to the participants and may have reinforced attitudes present prior to enrollment at Montana University.

Family support also influenced the level of social integration among participants. Because of the responsibilities they had for the welfare of their families, social integration may have been inhibited. In addition, social integration appeared to be less important to these American Indians students, since their extended families provided high levels of social, emotional and material support. Bean does not address the importance of extended family support in his model.

Background characteristics are not fully considered within Bean's model. If a student had previous work experiences related to what they were learning in the classroom, new information became more meaningful, leading to deeper processing. Bean does not highlight background characteristics, such as personal determination, academic or family background and how they directly influence attitudinal development. But, as in the case of these participants, it is an important variable that must be considered, especially in light of the evidence reported by Kenny and Stryker (1996) that American Indian students do not break away from their families in the manner that white students do upon matriculation. Accommodation of these components of background should be included in a model to explain persistence among American Indian students. Therefore, the importance of background characteristics, including personality characteristics, academic background, and family background should be expanded in the model in order to highlight their importance.

### Environmental Pull

In Bean's model, environmental pull is situated within the interaction construct, along with organizational variables, academic integration and social integration. However, for these participants, environmental pull directly affected academic integration, an interaction not noted by Bean. Students with high levels of family responsibility were less able to spend time studying and were less likely to perform well academically.

Bean's model does not indicate that environmental pull is a source of attitudinal development. However, for this group, environmental pull had a strong and direct impact on attitude; it was the primary source for stress. Although it was a major component of the interaction construct within the model, it may be appropriate to consider as a background characteristic as well as an interactional variable, which also contributes to attitudinal development. Combined with stress, environmental pull may be a direct link to an intent to leave, as exemplified in the case of Maggie, who was besieged by many dilemmas, including family responsibilities, financial limitations, lack of social integration and academic failure.

In order to accommodate these findings, the model should reflect the impact that environmental pull has on the ability to integrate socially and academically, and that it can affect attitudes directly, especially in the form of stress.

### Organizational Variables

Organizational variables were linked to students' attitudinal development in either the form of stress or satisfaction. In general, schedules, the Admissions Office, advising services, and to some extent the Financial Aid Office were sources of satisfaction toward the University. However, the Financial Aid Office was also a source of stress for three of the students. This is, for the most part, consistent with the model. No modifications of the model are recommended regarding organizational variables.

### Academic Integration

Academic Integration was an influential factor on attitudinal development, which is consistent with Bean's model. The level of integration influenced attitudes of satisfaction, a sense of self-development and self-confidence, either negative or positive. Those who had a high degree of academic integration also held a high value for education, although the major sources for valuing education resulted from previous work experience and pre-existing familial attitudes about education. No modifications of the model are recommended regarding academic integration.

### Social Integration

Social integration, or the lack thereof, did not appear to be influential on positive attitudinal development, except for Theresa and Susan, whose level of social integration contributed to their levels of satisfaction and confidence as a student. For those who had lower levels of social integration, socializing in class was at times a source of stress especially as it related to expectations of racism. A reflection of how social interaction

among some American Indian students can be a source of stress may be an addition to Bean's model.

#### Institutional Fit and Commitment

The next level of Bean's model explains the development of institutional commitment and fit. The findings in this study are unclear, and modification to the model incomplete. It appears that if students were satisfied, had a sense of development as a student and became more self-confident, they began to develop commitment toward the University. However, those who did not develop these attitudes did not indicate that they were not committed. Given time, this may prove to be a greater factor with these students.

The Tribal College experience, however, was viewed as positive by all of the participants; hence they had a stronger sense of commitment to the Tribal College than to Montana University. Since this study spanned only one semester, strong institutional commitment and fit toward Montana University was not demonstrated. A modification to the model for this group should accommodate their commitment to the Tribal College, especially since research supports the idea that commitment to a community college can lead to institutional commitment at the four-year institution (Nora, 1993; Pascarella, et al., 1986; Piland, 1995).

Upon analysis of the interviews, it appeared that the model was useful as a theoretical framework to provide direction for the interview process. It was also useful during the analysis of the data, providing pre-existing themes for which to code

statements. However, Bean's model appeared to be inadequate to explain persistence among this group of students, since he does not address important background characteristics, such as life and work experiences, personal determination, and acquisition of learning skills. Also Bean does not address the importance of immediate and extended family for American Indians. This stands to reason, since the model was based on traditional aged, white college students, and not designed to explain the experiences of American Indian or nontraditional students.

The process of adjustment during the first semester cannot be viewed as a linear event, but an interactional process whereby many factors interact. Attitudinal development is still viewed as an important outcome, but there appear to be a multitude of components that may cause a student to come to attitudinal conclusions.

In addition, the model does not address how a student who continuously faces racism (albeit decides to ignore it), social isolation, daily travel, ranging from 70 to 240 miles, poor academic skills, family and financial constraints, yet still persists. Although the students who participated in this study experienced tremendous difficulties, they all persisted. In light of this fact, personal determination, as reported by Richardson and Skinner (1992), may be a much more important consideration for explaining persistence among American Indian students. Students in this study drew strength from their families, hoping for a better life through the acquisition of a college education. Bean does not address these important factors.

### Summary

This chapter reintroduced the purpose and research questions that formed the foundation for this study. The purpose was to gain an understanding of the experiences of a group of American Indian students as they transferred from a Tribal College to a Montana University. Specifically it addressed how those experiences related to persistence factors. The remaining portion of the chapter details how the research questions were answered. Each component of Bean's model was addressed, describing how participants' level of academic integration, social integration, environmental pull and reaction to organizational variables were experienced. The following explains how the research questions were answered

#### How are Students' First Semester Experiences Related to Social or Academic Integration?

It was demonstrated that academic integration was an important variable related to participants' experiences. Students were more likely to integrate academically if they acquired more effective study and learning strategies, had positive relationships with faculty, had authentic learning experiences from their backgrounds and were certain of their major.

Social integration was not determined to be as important as Bean's model suggests. Most of the participants had external environmental issues such as family responsibilities and did not have time for socialization. Alternatively, most students chose to be with their families (children, spouses, parents and grandparents) in lieu of socialization on campus.

Students who did integrate socially utilized established friendships, made new friends in classes, or expanded new friendships beyond the classroom setting. Only one participant experienced all three criteria for social integration.

Do environmental Pull Factors Relate to their Decision to Remain or Depart?

Environmental pull was determined to be a substantial factor for the participants. All but one had financial difficulties and family responsibilities. Nevertheless, all but one participant completed the term and all continued their enrollment the following semester. Therefore, environmental pull factors have not been shown to be related to the decision to persist or depart.

Do Background Characteristics Relate to their Decision to Remain or Depart?

Background characteristics had an impact on academic and social integration and environmental pull. These components in turn affected attitudinal development. However, students persisted regardless of background characteristics, most likely due to personal determination. Therefore, background characteristics, especially personal determination, have been demonstrated to be related to the decision to persist or depart.

Does Interaction with the University Organization  
Relate to their Decision to Remain or Depart?

Organizational variables were also determined to be an important factor. Frustration with the Financial Aid Office and denial of scholarship money had a strong influence on attitudes, particularly in the form of stress. However, students persisted despite the stress associated with the organization. One student terminated her

attendance, because of a delay in funding, but returned the following semester. Another student persisted although she was denied funding. Therefore, organizational variables have not been demonstrated to be related to the decision to persist or depart.

The following chapter is a discussion of the results and their implications in light of the research questions, and provides recommendations for implementing the findings. Suggestions for future research are also included.

## CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

*What I learned about myself, is that I'm a minority, that there is opportunities out there, to get to that level that are equal to the white man's ways, and you can do that opportunity, only if you take that chance. Cause that opportunity is like wide opened. That's what I think.*

*Theresa*

Summary of the Problem, Methodology, Results and Conclusions

The problem addressed in this study concerned low persistence levels among American Indian college students. This problem exists on both a national and local level. One-fifth of the American Indian students who transfer to Montana University from Montana tribal colleges do not persist beyond the first semester.

College student persistence is a complicated process. The experiences that lead to a decision to depart or remain are not fully understood. There are various models and theories used to shed light on the adjustment process such as The Longitudinal Model of the Type of Factors that Affect Retention Decisions (Bean, 1990), and the Model of Institutional Departure (Tinto, 1987), but it remains unclear how well these models explain American Indian persistence.

To better understand persistence factors among American Indian students at Montana University, a qualitative study was conducted. During the fall semester, 1999, seven American Indian students who transferred to Montana University from a Montana Tribal College were contacted and interviewed. A series of four in-depth interviews were

conducted at predetermined times during the semester. Each interview focused on specific factors relating to The Longitudinal Model of the Type of Factors that Affect Retention Decisions (Bean, 1990), which served as the theoretical framework for the study. These factors included background characteristics, organizational variables, academic integration, social integration, and environmental pull. Interview questions were designed to obtain information about students' experiences, and to reveal attitudinal development among them. Emergent themes were also investigated during subsequent interviews so that relevant topics could be taken into account during analysis.

#### Important Findings

There are important findings as a result of this study. These findings include the (a) the role of personal determination in persistence among these American Indian college students, (b) variability in their grade point averages from high school to tribal college to university, (c) the importance of adopting effective learning skills, (d) the effects of environmental pull, (e) the role of the American Indian extended family, and (f) the diminished importance of social integration.

#### Role of Personal Determination

All of the participants experienced some degree of hardship their first semester after transfer. Despite the difficulties with finances, academics, family, travel, racism, and social isolation, they all persisted. Personal determination, or the strong desire to complete their education, was evident in all of the participants. Most students explained that they wanted to make life better for their families, which was the driving force behind

their determination. Even James, who was considered to have a neutral level of personal determination, claimed that he was ready to meet the challenge, in spite of earning a 1.75 grade point average his first semester at Montana University.

### Changes in Grade Point Averages

A pattern of variation in grade point average was found among all of the participants. Grade point averages consistently increased from high school levels when students attended the Tribal College, and then dropped again after transfer to the Montana University. High school grade point averages were more reflective of first semester term at Montana University than those from the Tribal College. More investigation needs to be done to examine this pattern. Is this a common pattern for students transferring from this particular tribal college, or from other Tribal Colleges? Can this pattern be detected for students transferring from other two-year institutions? These questions should be addressed in a more comprehensive study.

### Learning Skills

A compelling finding from this study is the importance of acquiring effective learning skills, specifically effective study strategies and processing skills. Academically integrated students learned to read for meaning, used background experience to assimilate new knowledge, and utilized study guides that encouraged organization and elaboration of new material. It appeared that if a student acquired more effective learning skills, they were more likely to integrate academically. This is consistent with a report from Levin and Levin (1991) who maintained that teaching test taking and study skills were the most

important component of retention programs for at-risk minority students, especially if they were domain specific and integrated into regular classes.

The retention of ineffective strategies may have inhibited academic integration for participants of this study. Because academic integration has been found to be a primary factor leading to persistence among American Indian students (Cibik & Chambers, 1991; Cleveland-Innes, 1994; Freidlander, 1981; LaCounte, 1987; Livingston & Stewart, 1987; Mayo et al., 1995; Metzner & Bean, 1987; Murguía et al., 1991; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Tinto, 1987), exploring the necessity of acquiring effective learning skills is worth further investigation.

#### Environmental Pull

Another important finding was the impact of environmental pull. This component not only affected academic and social integration, but also appeared to directly influence attitudinal development, especially in the form of stress. Environmental pull appeared to interact with background characteristics, such as family support, in such a way that it may be considered not only an interactional construct in the model, but also a pre-existing background characteristic. This is consistent with literature that suggests that environmental pull is an important factor for American Indians (Naretto, 1995; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Towles & Spencer, 1993; Villella & Hu, 1991).

#### Importance of Extended Family

For this group, family was not only a source of environmental pull, but also a source of support, motivation, and attitudinal development. Participants received both

emotional and material support from members of their extended families. Attitudes were also influenced by family members, especially in the form of their value for an education. Extended family members who had earned bachelors, masters or doctorate degrees were the most influential members of the family, and appeared to contribute to students' personal determination.

### Social Integration

Social integration did not seem to be important to this group. Six of seven participants were nontraditional students, only Susan was considered socially integrated. Theresa, the only traditional student, was also considered to be socially integrated. This is consistent with the literature indicating that social integration is less important for nontraditional students (Metzner & Bean, 1987; Nora, et al., 1990; Williamson & Creamer, 1988).

Families were important sources of support and socialization. The students in this study did not appear to separate from their families, as is the norm in the mainstream culture, but became more reliant on them. It appeared that immediate and extended families took the place of friends on campus for five of the seven participants. This is consistent with research conducted by Kenny and Stryker (1996), who reported that minority students found family support more important than friends, while white college students found more support with friends. This could also explain why socialization with the family was more important than social integration for the participants in this study.

### What Lessons Have Been Learned?

There are important lessons learned from the participants of this study. Most prominent of these appear to be related to acquisition of learning and processing skills, importance of the American Indian family, unfounded expectations of racism, prominence of in-class activities, merits of life and work experience, levels of personal determination, and the possibility of adjustment phases during the first semester.

#### Effective Learning Skills Must be Acquired

For the most part, students did not come equipped with effective learning strategies when they transferred to Montana University<sup>13</sup>. Although the reasons are unclear, it appears that the expectations for academic achievement at the Tribal College were different than what students experienced at Montana University. Some Montana University instructors provided direct instruction of learning skills, including study strategies, which encouraged more organization and elaboration, both important for deeper processing and learning (Eggen & Kauchak, 1999; Levin & Levin, 1991). Direct instruction by faculty of such study strategies could benefit students planning to transfer from a tribal college.

---

<sup>13</sup> It is important to note that the mission of a tribal college is not only to prepare students for transfer. Many students at a tribal college attend for life-long learning opportunities or cultivation of the native culture.

### Family Support is Profoundly Important to American Indian College Students

Families, both immediate and extended, provided housing, food, money, childcare and emotional support. Some students believed they could not survive without the assistance from their families. Additionally, the development of goals, motivation, and commitment appeared to originate with the family. The extended family was important to all of the participants in this study.

### Expectations of Racism

Many of the participants entered Montana University expecting to experience discrimination in the classroom. However, most discovered that they were not singled out, but accepted by non-Indian students and instructors. This may have promoted adjustment, as they discovered that the amount of discrimination was contrary to their expectations.

### Classroom Activities

Joining campus-sponsored groups, such as American Indian Business Leaders (AIBL) and American Indian Science & Engineering Society (AISES), was not important to these participants during their first semester at Montana University (although several expressed the desire to joining an on-campus organization). Because of travel requirements and families at home, there was little time for socialization outside the classroom. However, the friendships that were formed with classmates were for some, the most salient factor for on-campus socialization, especially if there were group work

and discussions occurring in class. Instruction was also instrumental to student success, especially when it involved teaching study strategies.

Developing relationships with faculty was also important for academic integration. Positive interaction with others, both faculty and students, appeared to reduce the isolation of being the only Indian in class, and fostered motivation and self-confidence. This is consistent with Tinto's (1998) belief that "involvement in the classroom becomes a vehicle for involvement beyond the classroom" (p. 169).

#### Value of Work and Life Experiences

Students who had the benefit of previous work or life experience appeared to better assimilate new information, and integrated academically. Background knowledge enhances the learning process, and encourages deeper processing into memory. Authentic learning experiences, from both inside the classroom and the work environment may be useful for students as they enter classes within their majors. It allows them to refer back to knowledge they already possess and assimilate it into an existing schema (Eggan & Kauchak, 1999).

#### Personal Determination Contributes to Success

Many participants faced tumultuous semesters, but all persisted in spite of the difficulties they experienced. Richardson and Skinner (1992) explained that personal determination is an important characteristic among those who have high levels of persistence. It appears that personal determination, based on goal setting, level of commitment and self-efficacy, contributed to these students' success, since goals are

more likely to be reached if level of commitment and self-efficacy is high (Eggen & Kauchak, 1999).

#### Phases of Adjustment Emerged

Students had expectations prior to entering the University. They were fearful of the work, yet confident that they had the skills that were required to succeed. They were also fearful of the size of the campus and the number of students that would be in the classroom. After the first week, expectations were altered. After attending classes for a week, participants determined that it would not be as difficult academically as they expected. They also adjusted quickly to the size of the campus and increased numbers of fellow students. Six weeks into the term, their grades were falling and self-confidence, for most, was faltering.

Academic adjustment was achieved by some and not by others. By the end of the term, two dropped a class, and one terminated attendance. Although three integrated academically, others continued to struggle the remainder of the term.

#### Limitations of the Study

A primary limitation of this study was the uniqueness of the participants and the size of the sample. Since there were only seven students, all coming from the same institution and the time frame spanning only one semester, the results of this study cannot be generalized to any other groups. The purpose was not to gather information to apply

to another setting or group of American Indian students, but to better understand how this particular group of students experienced their first term at Montana University.

Additionally, three male students from the Tribal College chose not to participate in the study. Their experiences would have been useful to consider as well, especially since one failed all his classes, and two completed the semester, one with a GPA over 3.00. It is unfortunate that these men's experiences were not included in the study.

Finally, the short period spent studying the participants limits the longitudinal implications and information that could be acquired. Since the group was only followed for one semester, the results regarding institutional fit and commitment are inconclusive. To increase understanding of their experiences, one would need to follow this group for two to four years. Questions regarding persistence and attitudinal development cannot be fully understood without more time in the field.

### Recommendations

#### Future Research

The purpose of this research was to gain an understanding of experiences of American Indian students and how those related to academic persistence. Although a better understanding has been achieved, it is far from complete. It is recommended that this study be continued for two to four years. A longitudinal view will be more informative. A grounded theory approach should be continued so that further comparisons to existing models of persistence may be made.

Variability in Grade Point Averages. An interesting finding was the shift in GPA from one institution to the next. High school GPAs were close to those earned at Montana University. However, the GPAs from the Tribal College were not in line with those of high school or Montana University. A deeper investigation of this anomaly should be conducted, examining not only GPA patterns for students from the Tribal College, but all Montana Tribal, and state and regional community colleges.

Learning Skills. Further investigation regarding acquisition of learning skills will be important to understand academic integration of American Indian students. Many American Indian students are not academically prepared to study at a university level (Benjamin et al., 1993; Cibik & Chambers, 1991; Davis, 1992; Dodd et al., 1995; Herring, 1990; Hoover & Jacobs, 1992; LaCounte, 1987; Levine & Levin, 1991; Ridone, 1988; Wells, 1989, 1997). However, it would be important to determine if academic achievement increased as a result of learning skills taught at the Tribal College or for first semester transfer students at the University.

Institutional Commitment. Perhaps because this study spanned only one semester, the level of commitment to Montana University, and the development of informal relationships with faculty were not observed. Research examining links between level of commitment at Tribal Colleges and development of commitment to the University would be helpful. It may be important to build stronger relationships between faculties from both institutions, and expose students to university faculty prior to their

transfer, since bridge programs that include faculty have been found effective transfer services for American Indian students (Henderson; 1991; Richardson & Skinner, 1992).

Personal Determination. Students in this study persisted regardless of difficulties they experience. Evidence from the literature, however, shows persistence rates are low for American Indian students. Further study regarding differences of personal determination among persisting or non-persisting American Indian students would be important.

Validity of Adjustment Phases. The results of this study suggest that four phases of adjustment may exist among American Indian students the first semester after transfer from a tribal college. Further investigation to check validity of these phases would be very important for universities and tribal colleges. If phases specific to American Indian students exist, steps could be taken to educate them to the phases of adjustment, and services put in place that would support students their first semester.

#### Modification to The Longitudinal Model of the Type of Factors that Affect Retention Decisions

Although Bean's model was designed for the purpose of understanding persistence among traditional, non-minority students, with modifications as recommended, its usefulness may be expanded to understand persistence of American Indian students. Recommendations for seven modifications include the following:

- Persistence, especially during the first semester, should be viewed as a more interactive occurrence, and less as a linear event. The findings of this study suggest

there was more interaction between environmental pull and social and academic integration.

- Expand the notion of background characteristics to include individual attributes such as personal determination and life experiences.
- Highlight the importance of academic preparation and the acquisition of effective study and learning strategies.
- Emphasize the importance of the extended nature of the American Indian family, and its relationships to environmental pull as well as emotional and material support.
- Include environmental pull as a source of attitudinal development, specifically as it relates to stress.
- Highlight that, for American Indian students, socialization may actually be a source of stress, especially if they are expecting or experience racism among faculty and students.
- Provide for the possibility that commitment to a previously attended Tribal College may enhance institutional commitment and fit within the new university.

### Implementation of Findings

Continuing the Study. The foundation for a longitudinal study has been formulated. It is the intent of the researcher to continue studying this group of students for two to four years. The purpose and approach will remain the same. It is anticipated that increased understanding will improve the ability of institutions to understand and assist American Indian students as they progress toward their degrees.

Design and Implement a Study Skills Course. A study skills course should be designed and implemented at either the Tribal College or the Montana University. The course should be directed toward students who plan to transfer to a university or have transferred from a Tribal College. Either setting has potential. The level of comfort students have at the Tribal College may contribute to students' willingness to enroll for the course. As well, if students took the class while they were active in the first semester at the University, it may be more relevant to them. Levine and Levine (1991) reported that a current frame of reference was most helpful for students when learning academic skills. Regardless of the setting, a course may be important and could lead to research assessing the effectiveness of such instruction for American Indian students.

Design and Implementation of a Bridge Program. A more ambitious project would be to build upon an existing transfer guide created for the Tribal College, and expand it to create a bridge program (as recommended by Henderson, 1991 and Richardson & Skinner, 1992). Within the bridge program should also be an intrusive advising component (as recommended by Garnett, 1990; Glennon, 1975; Glennon et al., 1985 and Lopez et al., 1988). Study skill acquisition should be a major component in the program.

### Summary

Research on American Indian persistence is limited and contradictory. At times, researchers do not know the correct questions to ask. A qualitative study is often the

departure point to decide what questions ought to be addressed. The students who participated in this study shared their lives, goals and ambitions, as well their fears, misfortune and discouragement. Through their willingness to share their experiences, a better understanding of the issues of American Indian students has begun.

A prominent finding in this study was the importance of acquiring effective study and processing skills. Because many American Indian students are academically unprepared, it seems essential for them to learn and use effective strategies while studying. Improved processing skills, such as reading for meaning, organization and elaboration of new information, and utilizing authentic learning settings, also appeared to be important for academic achievement. Capitalizing on this finding by teaching new strategies and skills to American Indian students could prove to be beneficial. Additional research should be conducted to determine if this is the case.

The family was, essentially, the center of these American Indian students' lives. Children, spouses, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, and a multitude of other extended family members add richness, motivation, meaning, and support to their lives. For most, creating a better existence for themselves and their family was at the center of their motivation. An understanding of the American Indian family is crucial to understanding success as a college student. Building on this research could lead to greater achievement for more American Indians in the future.

Personal determination was key to these students' persistence. They all maintained their enrollment despite facing financial, familial, academic and personal

hardship. Exploring this construct is important to future research centering on American Indian student persistence.

Adjustment was difficult for these students. Most struggled; some succeeded. Many were apprehensive about the transition. Theresa's words capture this apprehension:

At the beginning I expected it was gonna be like, "Oh my God, I'm at a university! And I'll be competing against white man's world. How in the hell am I gonna turn out? How am I gonna be? How is it gonna be?" And just a bunch of questions. After this first semester I kinda see how it is. And ... I kinda answered all my own questions. Like, how are the people? How are the classes going to be? Or like maybe -- think it's hard. But they turn out pretty alright.

American Indian students have goals, ambitions, hopes and dreams. Although the students in this study struggled socially, academically, financially and personally, they all returned the following semester. The personal determination they possessed was inspiring. It is hoped that the findings in this study will enlighten personnel working with American Indian students, and provide guidance for future research.

REFERENCES

Bean J. P. (1990). Why students leave: Insights from research. In Hossler, D. & Bean J., P. (Eds.). The strategic management of college enrollments. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Beaty, J. & Chiste, K. B. (1986). University preparation for Native American students: Theory and application. Journal of American Indian Education, 26 (1), 6-13.

Benjamin, D.P., Chambers S. & Reiterman, G. (1993). A focus on American Indian college persistence. Journal of American Indian Education, 32, (2) 24 - 40.

Best, G. A. & Gehring, D. D. (1993). The academic performance of community college transfer students at a major state university in Kentucky. Community College Review, 21 (2), 32-41.

Brod, R. L. & Carlisle, R. S. (1996). American Indians in higher education-graduation and academic performance: A summary of the University of Montana 1990-1995 Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) data. Missoula Montana: University of Montana, Educational Opportunity Program.

Cartledge, G., Gardner, R. & Tillman, L. (1995). African Americans in higher education special education: Issues in recruitment and retention. Teacher Education and Special Education, 18 (3), 166-178.

Cibik, M. A. & Chambers, S. L. (1991). Similarities and differences among Native Americans, Hispanics, Blacks and Anglos. NASPA Journal, 28 (2), 129-139.

Clagett, C. A. (1996). Correlates of success in the community college: Using research to inform campus retention efforts. Journal of Applied Research in the Community College, 4 (1), 49-68.

Cleveland-Innes, M. (1994). Adult student drop-out at post-secondary institutions. The Review of Higher Education, 17 (4), 423-445.

Cohen, A. M. (1988). Degree achievement by minorities in community colleges. The Review of Higher Education, 11 (4). 383-402.

Conti G. J. & Fellenz, R. A. (1991). Teaching adults: Tribal colleges must respond to the unique needs - and talents - of adult students. Tribal College, Journal of American Indian Higher Education, 2 (4), 18-23.

Creswell, J. W. (1998). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among the five traditions. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Davis, J. (1992). Factors contributing to post-secondary achievement of American Indians. Tribal College, 4 (2) 29-30.

Dawson, E. C. & Dell C. A. (1997). Meeting the needs of rural students through distance advising: The role of transfer guides in three measures of student success. NACADA Journal, 17 (1) 40-54.

Dell, C. A. (1991). Engagement in adult students: Attitudinal differences between continuing and withdrawn adult students. Unpublished manuscript, Montana State University-Billings.

Diaz, P. E. (1992). Effects of transfer on academic performance of community college students at the four-year institution. Community/Junior College Quarterly, 16, 279-291.

Dodd, J. M., Garcia, F. M., Meccage, C. & Nelson, J. R. (1995). American Indian student retention. NASPA Journal, 33 (1) 72-78.

Eggen, P & Kauchak, D. (1999). Educational psychology: Windows on classrooms (Fourth Edition). Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Fontana, A. & Frey, J. H. (1994). Interviewing: The art of science. In Denzin, N. K & Lincoln, Y. S. (eds.), Handbook of qualitative research. Thousand Oaks California: Sage.

Foote, E. (1997). Community colleges: General information and resources. Los Angeles CA: ERIC Clearinghouse for Community Colleges. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED 411 929 [On-line]. Available: [http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC\\_Digests/ed411929.html](http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed411929.html)

Freidlander, J. (1981). Why don't poorly prepared students seek help? Community/Junior College Quarterly, 6, 29-38.

Garnett, D. T. (1990). Retention strategies for high-risk students at a four year university. NACADA Journal, 10 (1), 22-25.

Gauchupin, M., Wilson, A., Lee, A. & Hernandez, N. (1995). Meeting the challenge, overcoming the odds. Canadian Journal of Native Education ,21 (supplement), 70-82.

Geertz, C. (1973). *Thick Description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture*. In C. Geertz, The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays, p. 3 – 32. New York; Basic Books.

Glennon R. E. (1975). Intrusive college counseling. College Student Journal, 9 (1), 2-4.

Glennon, R. E., Baxley D. M., & Farren, P. J. (1985). Impact of intrusive advising on minority student retention. College Student Journal, 19 (4), 335-338.

Hanson, J. R. & Rouse, L. P. (1987). Dimensions of Native American stereotyping. American Indian Culture and Research Journal, 11 (4), 33-58.

Henderson, J. C. (1991). Minority student retention. New Directions for Community Colleges, 74, Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, 47-55.

Herring, R. D. (1990). Understanding Native-American values: Process and content concerns for counselors. Counseling and Values, 34, 134-137.

Hill, M. (1995). Tribal colleges: Their role in U.S. higher education. New Directions for Community Colleges, 90, 41-41.

Hills, J. R. (1965). Transfer Shock: The academic performance of the junior college transfer. Journal of Experimental Education, 33 (3), 201-215.

House, J. D. & Keeley, E. J. (1997). Predictive validity of college admissions test scores for American Indian students. The Journal of Psychology, 131, (5), 572-574.

Huberman, A. M. & Miles, M. B. (1994). Data Management and Analysis Methods. In Denzin, N. K & Lincoln, Y. S. (eds.), Handbook of qualitative research. Thousand Oaks California: Sage.

Huffman, T. E., Sill, M. L., & Brokenleg, M. (1986). College achievement among Sioux and white South Dakota students. Journal of American Indian Education 25, (2) 32-38.

Inman, P., & Pascarella, E. (1997). The impact of college residence on the development of critical thinking skills in college freshmen. Paper presented at Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education. Albuquerque, NM. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 415 821)

Keeley, E. J. & House, J. D. (1993). Transfer shock revisited: A longitudinal study of transfer academic performance. Chicago: Association of Institutional Research. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 357 774)

Kempner, K. & Kinnick, M. (1990). Catching the window of opportunity: Being on time for higher education. The Journal of Higher Education, 61 (5), 535-547.

Kenny, M. E. & Stryker, S. (1996). Social network Characteristics and college adjustment among racially and ethnically diverse first-year students. Journal of College Student Development, 37 (6), 649-658.

LaCounte, D. W. (1987). American Indian students in college. In D. J. Wright (Ed.), Responding to the needs of today's minority students: No. 39. New directions for student services (pp. 65-79). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Layton, J. , Blair, N.& Rokused, C. (1990). The recruitment and retention of minority trainees in university affiliated programs. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED 323 032)

Lee, C. (1991). Achieving diversity: Issues in the recruitment and retention of underrepresented racial/ethnic students in higher education: A review of the literature. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED 338 941)

Leon, D. J. (1993). Mentoring Minorities in Higher Education: Passing the Torch. Washington D.C.: National Education Association, (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED 365 195)

Levin, M. E. & Levin, J. R. (1991). A critical examination of academic retention programs for at-risk minority college students. Journal of College Student Development, 32, 323-334.

Likins, J. M. (1991). Research refutes a myth: Commuter students do want to be involved. NASPA Journal, 28 (1) 68-74.

Little Big Horn College Website (2000), [On-line]. Available:  
[www.LBHC.cc.mt.us](http://www.LBHC.cc.mt.us)

Livingston, M. D. & Stewart, M. A. (1987). Minority status on a white campus: Perception is truth. NASPA Journal, 24 (3), 39-49.

Lopez, M., Yanez, M., Clayton, R. E., & Thompson, D. A. (1988). Intrusive advising with special student populations. NASPA Journal 25, 159-201.

Lunneborg, C. E. & Lunneborg, P. W. (1986). Beyond prediction: The challenge of minority achievement in higher education. Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 14 (2), 77-84.

Marshall, C. & Rossman, G. B. (1999). Designing qualitative research (Third Edition). Thousand Oaks California: Sage.

Mayo, J. R., Murguía, E. & Padilla, R. V. (1995). Social integration and academic performance among minority university students. Journal of College Student Development, 36 (6), 542-552.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). Qualitative research and case study applications in education. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Metzner, B. S. & Bean, J. P. (1987). The estimation of a conceptual model of nontraditional undergraduate student attrition. Research in Higher Education, 21 (1), 15-38.

Miles, M. B. & Huberman, A. M. (1994). Qualitative data analysis (Second Edition). Thousand Oaks California: Sage.

Montana Commissioner of Higher Education (1999). [On-line] Available: <http://www.montana.edu/wwwoche>

Mow, S. L. & Nettles, M. T. (1990). Minority student access to, and persistence and performance in, college: A review of the trends and recent literature. In J. Smart (Ed.), Higher education: Handbook of theory and research. New York: Agathon Press, p. 35 -105.

Murguía, E., Padilla, R. V. & Pavel, M. (1991). Ethnicity and the concept of social integration in Tinto's model of institutional departure. Journal of College Student Development, 32, 433-439.

Naretto, J. (1995). Adult student retention: The influence of internal and external communities. NASPA Journal, 32 (2), 90-97).

Nora, A (1993). Two-year colleges and minority students' educational aspiration: Help or hindrance? Higher Education: Handbook of theory and research , Vol. 9. New York: Agathon Press.

Nora, A, Attinasi, L. C. Jr., & Matonak, A. (1990). Testing qualitative indicators of precollege factors in Tinto's attrition model: A community college student population. The Review of Higher Education, 13 (3), 337-356.

Nora, A. & Rendon, L. I. (1990). Determinates of predisposition to transfer among community college students: A structural model. Research in Higher Education, 31 (3), 235-255.

Novak, J. D. (1998). Learning, creating, and using knowledge: Concept maps as facilitative tools in schools and corporations. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Oppelt, N. (1989). Cultural values common among tribal American Indians: A resource for student services administrations. NASPA Journal, 26 (3), 67-74.

Ortman, J. (1995). Commuter students in colleges and universities. Urbana-Champaign, Illinois. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 398 779)

Padilla, R. V. & Pavel, D. M. (1994). Using qualitative research to assess advising. The Review of Higher Education, 17 (2), 143-159.

Pascarella, E. T. & Terenzini, P. T. (1998). Studying college students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: Meeting new challenges. The Review of Higher Education, 21 (2), 151-165.

Pascarella, E. T., Smart, J. C. & Ethington, C. A. (1986). Long-term persistence of two-year college students. Research in Higher Education, 24 (1) 47-71.

Pavel, D. M., Skinner, R. R., Farris, E., Cahalan, M., Tippeconnic, J., & Stein, W. (1998). American Indians and Alaskan Natives in postsecondary education. (National Center for Education Statistics No. 98-291). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Pavel, D. M. & Padilla, R. V. (1993). American Indian and Alaska Native postsecondary departure: An example of assessing a mainstream model using national longitudinal data. Journal of American Indian Education, 32 (2), 1-23.

Piland, W. E. (1995). Community college transfer students who earn bachelor's degrees. Community College Review, 23 (3), 35-44.

QSR NUD•IST (Revision 4). [Computer software]. (1997). Melbourne Victoria, Australia: Qualitative Solutions and Research Pty. Ltd.

Redmond, S. P. (1990). Mentoring and cultural diversity in academic settings. American Behavioral Scientist 34 (2), 188-200.

Richardson, R. C. & Skinner, E. F. (1990). Adapting to diversity: Organizational influences on student achievement. The Journal of Higher Education, 61 (5), 485-511.

Richardson, R. C. & Skinner, E. F. (1992). Helping first-generation minority students achieve degrees. In New directions for community colleges: No. 80 (pp. 29-43). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Ridone, P. (1988). Achievement motivation and academic achievement of Native American students. Journal of American Indian Education, 28 (1), 1-8.

St. Pierre, N. & Rowland, F. C. (1990). Educational issues in Montana's Tribal colleges. Adult Literacy and Basic Education, 14 (3). 212-219.

Stewart, S. S., Merrill, M. C. & Saluri, D. (1987). Students who commute. In L. Noel, R. Levitz & D. Saluri (Eds.), Increasing student retention (pp. 162-181). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Stoecker, J., Pascarella, E. T. & Wolfle, L. M. (1988). Persistence in higher education: A 9-year test of a theoretical model. Journal of College Student Development, 29, 196-209.

Tan, D. L. (1995). Perceived importance of role models and its relationship with minority student satisfaction and academic performance. NACADA Journal, 15 (1), 48-51.

Terrell, M. R., Hassell, K & Duggar M. (1992). Mentoring Programs: A blueprint for personal growth and academic development. NASPA Journal, 29 (3), 199-206.

The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (1995). Student Mentoring: Responding to the LaRoche challenge. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No ED 364 280)

Tierney, W. G. (1995). Addressing failure: Factors affecting Native American college student retention. Journal of Navajo Education, 13 (1) 3-7.

Tinto, V. (1975). Dropouts from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. Review of Educational Research, 45, 89-125.

Tinto, V. (1982). Limits of theory and practice in student attrition. Journal of Higher Education, 53, 687-700.

Tinto, V. (1987). Leaving college. University of Chicago Press: Chicago.

Tinto, V. (1998). College as communities: Taking research on student persistence seriously. The Review of Higher Education, 21 (2), 167-177.

Towles, D. E. & Spencer, J. (1993). The Tinto model as a guide to adult education retention policy. Community Services Catalyst, 23, (4), 18-22.

Villella, E. F. & Hu, M. (1991). A factor analysis of variable affection the retention decision of nontraditional college students. NASPA Journal, 28 (4), 334 -341.

Weis, L. (1982). Minorities in the two-year college sector: A case study. Community College Review 9 (4). 28-35.

Wells, R. N. Jr. (1989). A survey of American Indian students. New York. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. 311 778)

Wells, R. N. Jr. (1997). The Native American experience in higher education: turning around the cycle of failure II. New York. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. 414 108)

Wenzlaff, T. L. & Biewer, A. (1996). Native American students define factors for success, Tribal College Journal, 7 (4) 40-44.

Williamson, D. R. & Creamer, D. C. (1988). Student attrition in 2- and 4-year colleges: Application of a theoretical model. Journal of College Student Development, 29, 210-217.

Wright, B. & Weasel Head, P. (1987). Tribally controlled community colleges: A student outcomes assessment of associate degree recipients. Community College Review, 18 (3), 29-33.

Wright, B. (1992). American Indian and Alaska Native higher education: Toward a new century of academic achievement and cultural integrity. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED 343 771)

Zaglauer, H. P. (1993). The role of tribal college in the academic performance of American Indian students. Unpublished master's thesis, University of Montana.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Table 1-A. Stage One Interview Questions

Questions	Possible Persistence Factors
1. Tell me about your experiences at TC.	Organizational Variables Student-Environment Fit Academic and/or Social Integration Attitudes
2. How would you describe your study habits?	Academic Integration
3. What made you want to transfer to MU?	Background Characteristics (College Preparation, Goals) Attitudes
4. Up until now, what have your experiences with MU been like?	Organizational Variables
5. Are any of your friends going to MU this fall?	Social Integration
6. What does your family think about your going to MU?	Environmental Pull Background Characteristics
7. What do you see yourself doing in five years?	Background Characteristics (Goals)
8. Is there anything else you think I should know?	

Table 2-A. Stage Two Interview Questions

---

Questions and Probes	Possible Persistence Factors
1. How was your first week of school?	Organizational Variables Environmental Pull Academic Integration Social Integration
2. Tell me about how things went with registering for classes.	Organizational Variables
3. Overall, how did the transfer process go?	Organizational Variables Environmental Pull

---

Table 3-A. Stage Three Interview Questions

Questions and Probes	Possible Persistence Factors
1. Tell me about how things are going with school.	Organizational Variables Environmental Pull Academic Integration Social Integration
2. How are classes going?	Academic Integration
3. Are you making new friends?	Social Integration
4. Are you involved in any campus activities?	Social Integration
5. How are things going back home?	Environmental Pull
6. Have you gone back home to visit (If so, how did that go?)	Environmental Pull
7. Tell me about how you balance your family, job, other with your classes?	Environmental Pull
8. Follow-up question regarding emerging themes from first interview.	
9. Is there anything else you think I should know?	

Table 4-A. Stage Four Interview Questions

Questions and Probes	Possible Persistence Factors
1. Overall, how did your first semester go?	Organizational Variables Environmental Pull Academic Integration Social Integration
2. What did you think of your classes?	Academic Integration
3. What did you think of your teachers?	Academic Integration Social Integration
4. How did things go with your friends?	Social Integration
5. How have things been going with your family?	Environmental Pull
6. How many times did you go home and why?	Environmental Pull
7. Did you miss any school because of going home? (if returned home)	Environmental Pull Academic Integration
8. Did going home hurt your grades at all, or did it help that you were able to go home? (if returned home)	Academic Integration
9. How did you balance the other things in your life with school?	Environmental Pull
10. What do you think of MU now that your first semester here is about over?	Organizational Variables Environmental Pull Academic Integration Social Integration

Table Continues

Questions and Probes	Possible Persistence Factors
11. Do you plan to return next semester? Why or why not?	Organizational Variables Environmental Pull Academic Integration Social Integration Background Characteristics (plans, goals)
12. Overall, how did your first semester go?	Organizational Variables Environmental Pull Academic Integration Social Integration
13. Follow-up on emerging themes.	
14. Is there anything else you think I should know?	

Table 5-A. Stage Five Interview Questions for Returning Participants

Questions and Probes	Possible Persistence Factors
1. What made you decide to return?	Organizational Variables Environmental Pull Academic Integration Social Integration
2. What made you decide not to return?	Organizational Variables Environmental Pull Academic Integration Social Integration
3. Follow-up on emerging themes.	
4. Is there anything else you think I should know?	

Table 6-A. Interview Questions for Withdrawing Participants

---

Questions and Probes	Possible Persistence Factors
1. What made you decide to leave school?	Organizational Variables Environmental Pull Academic Integration Social Integration
2. Emergent Theme Follow-up.	
3. Is there anything else that you think I should know?	

---

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

## INFORMED CONSENT

## FOR DISSERTATION RESEARCH PROJECT PARTICIPATION

Date

Dear Student,

I am a graduate student at Montana State University-Bozeman and work in the College of Education at Montana University. I would like to invite you to participate in a project about the experiences American Indian students have as they transfer from the Tribal College to Montana University. Your help in this project may be very valuable for students in the future. The interviews we will do will give me a better understanding of what students from the Tribal College go through when they transfer, and perhaps make it easier for students in the future. As an incentive to participate, I will give you a \$50.00 gift certificate for movie theatre tickets that you will receive when you complete the study.

You will be asked to allow me to analyze your transcript from the Tribal College, check your ACT or SAT scores, fill out a Personal Data Sheet, and talk with me in an interview four different times over the semester, and once after fall semester is over. All of the interviews will be either video taped, or audio taped and I will take notes during the interviews.

The first interview will be before you transfer to Montana University. The second, third and fourth will be during the first week of school, the sixth week of school and the last week of school before final exams. The last interview will be in January after spring semester starts. You have the right to withdraw from the study any time. I ask that you let me know if you decide not to finish the semester, so that I can ask a few questions of you. Even if you decide to leave early, you will be given the gift certificate, as long as you contact me before you leave.

What you say to me during any of the interviews or on the Personal Data Sheet will be kept private. Your ACT or SAT scores and what is on your transcripts will be kept confidential. There is a chance that others reading the study may recognize you, but

I will do my best to make sure your privacy is protected. I will never mention your name, and keep all information confidential throughout the study, and when I write the final paper. I will check with you if I have any confusion about what you have said to me during an interview. After I am finished analyzing the information you give me, it will be destroyed. I will give you a copy of the final paper if you would like one.

This study will be shared with my dissertation committee, but even they will not know your name. The results of this study will be published and kept at the Renne Library on the campus of Montana State University-Bozeman.

I appreciate you giving time to this study, which will help me learn about students who transfer from the Tribal College to Montana University. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to call me at 656-9366 at home, or 657-2393 at work. Or you may contact my committee Chairperson, Rich Howard at 406-994-6035.

Thank you,  
Cindy Dell

Please sign below to release transcripts and ACT or SAT scores and if you are willing to participate in the project.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Print Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

(Adapted from Marshal and Rossman, 1999)

APPENDIX C

PERSONAL DATA SHEET

PERSONAL DATA SHEET

Please complete this form and return to Cindy Dell

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Major \_\_\_\_\_

Married or Single \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Children and ages \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Are you receiving Financial Aid \_\_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_\_ no

Are you currently employed? \_\_\_ yes \_\_\_ no; Number of Hours \_\_\_\_\_

How many miles per day will you travel to get to school? \_\_\_\_\_

Which Tribe are you a member of \_\_\_\_\_

Goals \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Note: All of this information will be kept confidential, and destroyed after the research project is complete.

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY - BOZEMAN



3 1762 10335654 7