

A CHIPPEWA CREE STUDENTS' COLLEGE EXPERIENCE:
FACTORS AFFECTING PERSISTENCE

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
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of

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in

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ABSTRACT

Educators working with Chippewa Cree students need to understand how the students' precollege experiences, college experiences, and cultural backgrounds influence their success in higher education in order to design learning environments, procedures, and policies that will increase the graduation rate of this population. The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explore factors that help or hinder successful completion of a bachelor's degree by students from the Chippewa Cree Tribe. Data was collected in face-to-face interviews using a peer-reviewed interview protocol consisting of open-ended questions for graduates and student services personnel determined by the concepts identified after examination of related literature. Thirty graduates from the Chippewa Cree Tribe and 5 student services personnel from two state colleges in Montana were interviewed. Factors that the graduates found most relevant to their success were family, personal goal, friends, institutional support, and academic preparation. The greatest obstacles they reported were finances, loneliness, commuting, life responsibilities, discouragement, unpreparedness for college work, lack of study skills, and lack of time-management skills. Suggestions to improve the graduation rate for new students included persistence, responsibility, preparation for the transition from high school to college, time management, willingness to leave their comfort zone and develop their social skills, study skills, class attendance, willingness to ask for help, lack of discouragement, academic preparedness, and completion of school work. Recommendations include designing recruiting and retention strategies to meet the specific needs of the Native American student, collaborating with K–12 schools and the community to develop programs that encourage early preparation for college, establishing and advertising Native American centers on campuses, organizing professional development seminars on diversity issues designed to give faculty and staff a safe environment to explore different cultures, encouraging increased faculty–student interactions, creating an advisory committee charged with increasing Native American student retention, recognizing and giving appreciation for success, developing a comprehensive college finance and budgeting workshop that includes the student's whole family, and developing and maintaining an up-to-date data base within the Chippewa Cree Tribe to collect data on educational and cultural issues.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

At a time in our history when education promises opportunity, social mobility, and economic progress, a deep-rooted problem exists. A disparity between college enrollment rates and graduation rates exists for all student populations, but the gap is greatest for Native Americans (U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, 2005b). Retention researchers Swail, Redd, and Perna (2003) contend, “Educational opportunity and success are uneven in the United States by income and race/ethnicity, [and] . . . Native American students continue to earn degrees at substantially lower rates than whites and Asians” (p. 11). Multiple researchers have determined that the most primary concerns with enrolling and retaining students in higher education are academic preparation and integration, campus climate, institutional fit, and financial aid (Lau, 2003; Padilla, 1999; Rendon, 1994; Swail et al., 2003; Tinto, 1998). Additional researchers found family support, connection to culture, social integration, precollege preparation, and perceived racism as additional factors affecting Native Americans persisting in college (Belgarde, 1992; HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002; Huffman, 2001; Larimore & McClellan, 2005; Pavel & Padilla, 1993).

During the 1970s and 1980s, improvements in higher education were focused primarily on access, with federal and state legislation aimed at reducing barriers to higher education. In the 1990s the focus moved to issues of affordability and persistence (Swail et al., 2003). Even today, many consider it a major accomplishment to gain entry to college, as

explained in the following quote from a graduate who is from the Navajo reservation. Alvord (1997) wrote, “As a child, I never dreamed of becoming a doctor, much less a surgeon. We didn’t have Navajo doctors, lawyers, or other professionals. I grew up in a poor community of working-class families. When I reach back in my mind to my childhood, my past would not have been a predictor of future successes” (pp. 232-233). Alvord further explained, “I learned you had to be ‘smart’ to go to schools like these [Dartmouth], and I didn’t feel all that smart” (p. 236). Continuing, she surmised, “I entered medicine as a way to help my people, and, at the time, I thought that meant help in the most literal form, to fight disease. Now I find that my career is helping my people in ways I never imagined, for as they see my success, they are better able to realize their own potential” (p. 228).

Despite evidence of academic ability, Native American college students have higher drop-out rates than any other minority (Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003). A recent national report by the U.S. Department of Education, *Status and Trends of the Education of American Indians and Alaska Natives* (2005b), notes that enrollment of American Indian/Alaska Native students in degree-granting institutions has more than doubled in the past 25 years, yet American Indian/Alaska Native students were less likely to earn a bachelor’s or higher degree than their peers. Peers were defined as 1992 High school graduates who had completed a bachelor’s degree by 2000, including the racial and ethnic groups of White, Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaska Native (Freeman & Fox, 2005). The high rate of Native American nonpersistence in college and Native Americans’ lower representation in the general college student population is troubling, especially considering they earn SAT and ACT scores comparable to other ethnic minority groups and also have high school graduation

rates equivalent to other ethnic minority groups (Reddy, 1993; U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

Access to higher education for Native American students has been increased by the development of tribal colleges. These colleges, which were founded as part of the American Indian self-determination movement that began in the 1960s, seek to provide affordable and culturally relevant postsecondary education, especially for geographically isolated reservation communities. In 1994, with the passage of the Equity in Education Land Grant Status Act, tribal colleges gained land grant status, which in turn strengthened the linkages between tribal colleges and other land grant institutions. Even with the development of tribal colleges, the numbers of Native American students graduating from 4-year colleges is not increasing proportionately to the numbers of white students graduating (Laden, Millem, & Crowson, 2000; Pavel, Skinner, Farris, Calahan, Tippeconnic, & Stein, 1999; Swail et al., 2003).

In 1999, The Montana Board of Regents of Higher Education developed a policy to promote multicultural diversity and achievement of American Indian and other minority students in Montana. The Board pledged its cooperation to enroll and graduate American Indians and other minorities in proportion to their representation in the state's population (Montana University System, 2005). Data from the 2000 census shows 6.2% of Montana's population is American Indian/Alaska Native (Montana University System, 2005). Yet, almost 6 years later, the Montana University System (MUS) stated in its latest diversity report that "clearly MUS has not achieved the goal of participation for

American Indians in the same percentage as Montana's population" (Montana University System, 2005).

In 2005, MUS reported that in 2000-2003 an average of 3.5% of the MUS student population was American Indian/Alaska Native. Although these figures show over the last 6 years that Native American enrollment in Montana may be increasing slightly as a percentage of the total student population, the 2005 percentage is barely half of the Montana Board of Regents goal of 6.2% (Montana University System, 2005).

Parallel to the topic of enrollment is retention. In Montana, both the percentage and the total number of bachelor's degrees awarded to Native American students in 2003-2004 declined from 3% for the previous year to 2.7% (Montana University System, 2005). Using data from the same report, the average completion rate from 2000 to 2007 was 2.7%, which isn't half of the MUS's proposed goal. Clearly, many Montana Native American students are not fulfilling their dream of a bachelor's degree.

Multiple theories and models have been developed to explain why students depart without finishing a degree (Anderson, 1985; Astin, 1984; Bean & Eaton, 2000; Belgarde, 1992; HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002; Huffman, 2001; Ortiz & HeavyRunner, 2003; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Swail et al., 2003; Tinto, 1993). Consistent within many of the models is that a multitude of variables affect a student's decision to leave without completing a degree, such as lack of academic preparation and lack of involvement.

Even though the attrition of Native American college students is a documented statistic, much uncertainty remains about the factors and forces that influence these students' decisions to persist with college or to drop out (Larimore & McClellan, 2005). Research on the experiences of Native Americans in higher education is abundant

(Boyer, 1997; Clark, 2002; Garrod & Larimore, 1997; Larimore & McClellan, 2005; McClellan, Fox, & Lowe, 2005; Tierney, 1991), yet much of the information comes from databases that contain insufficient representation of Native Americans in national and longitudinal research studies (Benjamin, Chambers, & Reiterman, 1993; Pavel & Padilla, 1993). The aforementioned studies describe an intertwined meshing of individual characteristics and institutional factors that influence student persistence. Individual factors include precollege academic preparation and planning, social and academic integration, and finances. Institutional factors reported include student and faculty interactions, connection with student services, and integration into the campus environment. In a 2-year ethnographic study about problems Native American students face in college, Tierney (1991) reported that while factors such as lack of academic preparation or loneliness are common to students from all backgrounds, factors like needing to return home for ceremonies or potential conflicts between Western science and traditional ways of knowing may be unique to Native Americans. He encouraged institutions to stop seeing how they can change the student to fit the environment and instead reorient the environment to make the student welcome. He further argued that it is time to make concern for cultural diversity a central issue at all institutions.

Additional research indicated that family, spirituality, and validation are the most important influences on Native American persistence (Clark, 2002; Jackson et al., 2003; Larimore & McClellan, 2005; Oritz & HeavyRunner, 2003; Saggio & Rendon, 2004). However, there is a scarcity of studies that take into account students' tribal and cultural backgrounds as possible factors related to persistence (Belgarde, 1992; Benjamin et al.,

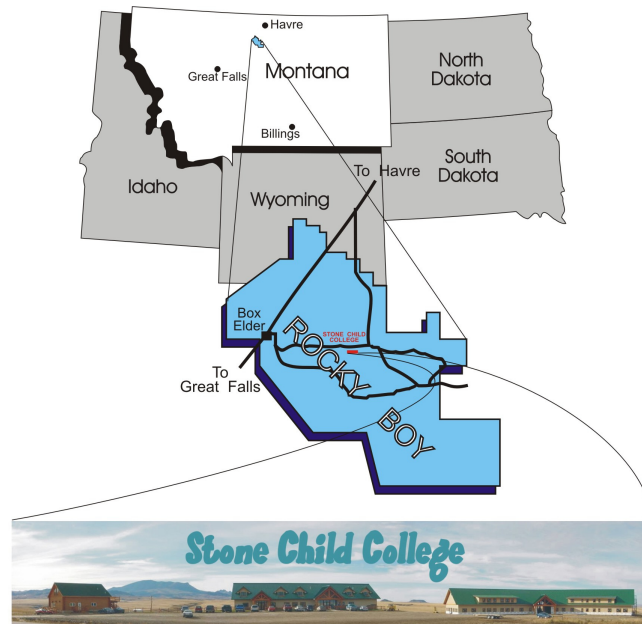
1993; Murguia, Padilla, & Pavel, 1991; Pavel & Padilla, 1993; Tierney, 1992; Wright, 1990, 1991). These same studies reported inadequate academic preparation, lack of strong vocational goals, finances, and cultural differences as barriers to successful persistence.

Further research is needed to better understand what factors may affect the retention of Native American students. This study addresses what factors have influenced a selected group of Native Americans' college experience.

Setting of the Study

Participants in this study are members of the Chippewa Cree Tribe, whose home is the Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation, which is located 14 miles from Box Elder in north-central Montana. Almost 96% of the people living in Box Elder are Native American. The reservation has one of the highest rates of unemployment and poverty in the state, as confirmed by the U.S. Census (Simpson, 2007). It was established in 1916 south of Havre in the Bears Paw Mountains of north-central Montana. The Chippewa Cree Tribe is a mixed group of Native Americans in Montana, among the last to come into the state. They are descended from Cree who came south from Canada and from Chippewa who had moved west from the Turtle Mountains in North Dakota. According to the official Web site of the Chippewa Cree Tribe, approximately 3,500 Chippewa Cree tribal members live on Rocky Boy's Reservation with 2,500 tribal members living off the reservation (Chippewa Cree Tribe, 2007). Participants in this study may or may not currently live on the reservation; however, all are members of the Chippewa Cree Tribe, whose home is the Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation. The reservation is home to Stone

Child College, which is one of seven tribal colleges in Montana. As seen on the map below, the closest towns with colleges that award bachelor's degrees are Havre at 25 miles away and Great Falls at 105 miles away.



Statement of the Problem

Educators working with Chippewa Cree students need to understand how the students' precollege experiences, college experiences, and cultural backgrounds influence the students' success in the college environment in order to design learning environments, procedures, and policies that will increase the success rate of this population.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explore factors that help or hinder successful completion of a bachelor's degree by students from the Chippewa Cree Tribe. Through this research, their experiences were described and a model began to emerge that may be used to address some of the difficulties and problems faced as well as to identify supportive measures encountered in order to increase chances of persistence for this population. The results of this study may be used by educators at all levels who work with the Chippewa Cree population or similar students to increase their knowledge about their students' experiences so they may be more effective in teaching and advising them at both the high school and college levels, thus increasing their chances of success.

Research Questions

This study focused on the following question: How do successful Native American college graduates from the Chippewa Cree Tribe feel they were helped or hindered during their college experience? The following subquestions were used to guide the development of methodologies:

1. What factors do these Native American graduates think helped their educational journey until successful completion?
2. What factors do these Native American graduates think hindered their educational journey towards successful completion?
3. What recommendations towards successful completion of a degree would these Native American graduates give other Native American students,

teachers of Native American students, and administrators working with Native American students?

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

The literature-based conceptual framework of this study is based on four areas related to retention of Native American college students. These four areas are (a) factors related to persistence before entering college, (b) issues related to student persistence and institutional retention during college, (c) factors specifically related to persistence of Native American students, and (d) strategies for increasing student persistence and retention.

Some of the precollege factors include academic preparedness, access to a college, and affordability. Many students are ill-prepared for college coursework and require remedial courses in reading, writing, or math (Carey, 2005; Hoffman & Lowitzki, 2005; U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). Many families and students are forced to borrow money to finance their education, and more students are graduating with greater debt than ever before (Berkowitz & Jentleson, 2006). Financial aid has not kept pace with rising costs, and many students are discouraged from even attending due to rising costs (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Due to lack of finances, many students never even consider the possibility of attending college (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

Many models have been developed to understand student retention (Anderson, 1985; Astin, 1984; Bean & Eaton, 2000; Rendon et al., 2000; Swail et al., 2003; Tinto, 1993). Tinto's model suggested that the student's institutional experiences determine

whether the student will remain in school. The more positive the experience, the more likely the student will persist. Bean and Eaton likewise asserted that a student's academic and social connections affected the decision to persist but added that a student's coping skills and attitudes also influenced the decision to remain. Rendon et al. expressed a concern with the previous idea and did not believe minority students would disassociate enough from their cultural and family values to become integrated into the college environment and instead found that validation, through encouragement and affirming their ability to learn, enabled minority students to persist. Anderson's force field model explained the many external and internal influences a student faces and suggested that the decision to persist is determined by whichever force is strongest at the time. Swail et al.'s model depicted the dynamics between cognitive, social, and institutional factors and argued that the interaction of these factors influences the student's decision to persist. Astin's theory stated that the greater the physical and emotional investment a student has to a campus, the more chance that he or she will stay.

Even though a student enrolls in college, it does not mean that he or she will graduate with a degree. Researchers have identified institutional and student factors that can affect students' continued enrollment during their college experience. Institutional factors such as academic integration, preparedness, campus climate, institutional fit, and finances affect a student's decision to persist (Lau, 2003; Padilla, 1999; Rendon, 1994; Swail et al., 2003; Tinto, 1998). Finances and being academically prepared for the rigor of college courses remain at the top of the list of factors affecting student retention (Swail et al., 2003). In addition, students may leave if they are unhappy with the education they are

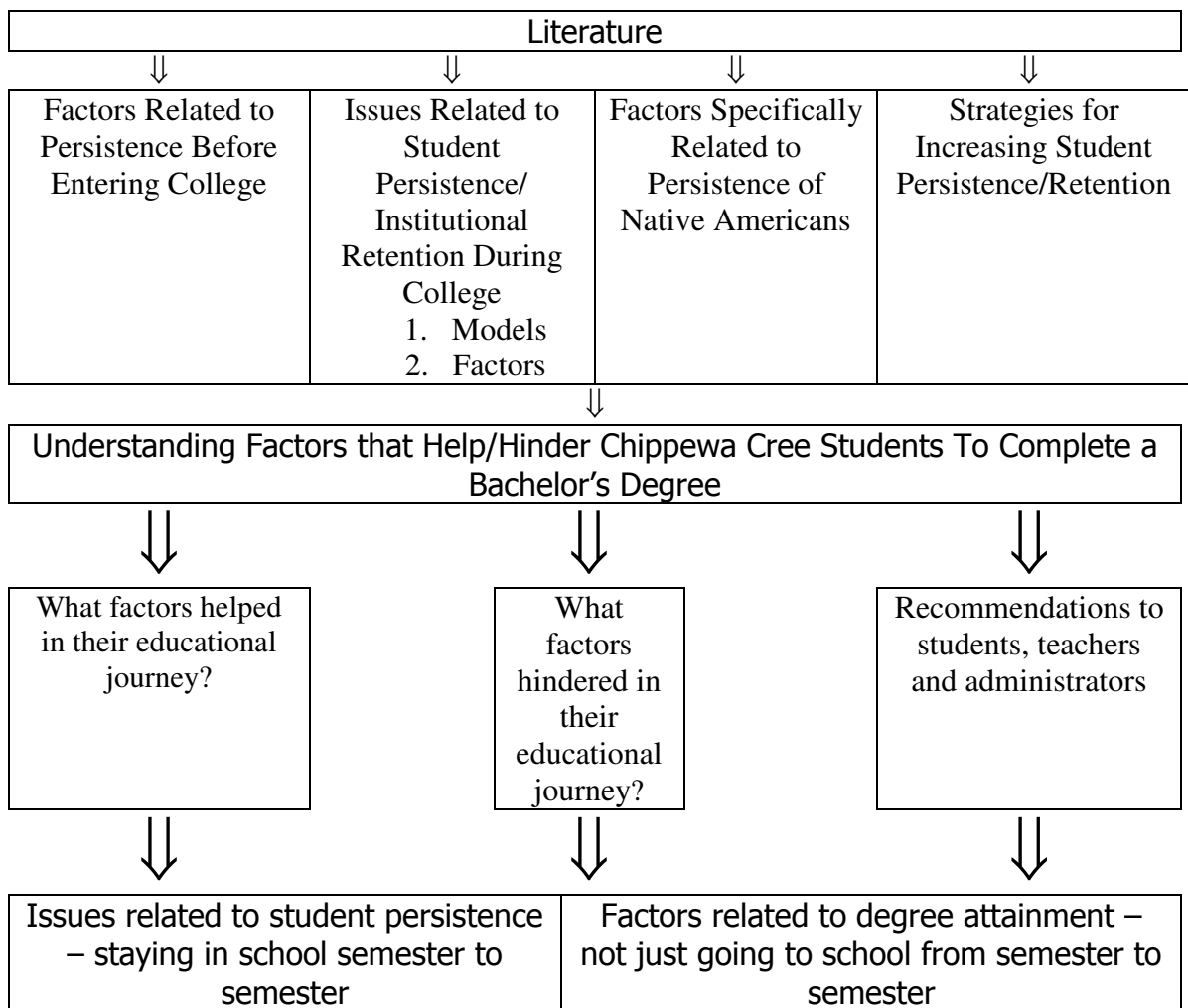
receiving and if they are unable to connect with their peers (Lau, 2003). Tinto (1998) stated that students must feel a sense of belonging in the first year and encouraged institutions to help students to transition to college in the first 10 weeks. Rendon (1994) explained that many nontraditional students may not get involved socially and academically the same way as traditional students, but staff and faculty can help these students by supporting them in their academic work and adjustment to college through validation. This validation may be the key to their remaining in school.

Some students may leave for reasons that are more personal. Topping the list again is finances. If a student is in financial difficulty, he or she may work too many hours, which in turn can affect social connections and academic status (Lau, 2003). In addition, students who have clear goals and support from family and friends are more likely to persist (Swail et al., 2003; Tinto, 1998). Howell (2004) concluded from a study of adult women that those who were most resilient and could overcome obstacles were the ones most likely to persist due to their perseverance. Many students are caught between a job that will provide money immediately and the value of completing a degree that will expand job opportunities (Padilla, 1999).

Literature, which specifically concerns Native Americans, reports that the lack of retention of Native American students in higher education does not begin at the postsecondary level. Tierney (1992) reported that fewer than 60% of Native American students complete high school, and the U. S. Department of Education reports that of those who decide to attend college, only 25% will complete a degree (2005a). Tierney estimated that for every 100 Native American students entering ninth grade, only 3 will

earn a college degree. In essence, from ninth grade through completing a bachelor’s degree, around 97% of Native American students opt out of education for one reason or another. Garrod and Larimore (1997) gave voice to the loneliness, difficulties, and pain shared through the stories of many Native American college graduates. Additionally, multiple authors stressed the importance of the relationship between teachers and students (Jackson et al., 2003; Padilla, 1999; Rendon, 1994; Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999). These four areas were the framework of this study and are illustrated below:

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Successful College Completion



Method

This grounded theory study used a one-on-one partially structured interview protocol to discover participants' perceptions as to what helped or hindered them during their college experience. Participants were chosen by their willingness to provide information and perspectives about their college experience (Gay & Airasian, 2000). Fellow educators volunteered names and contact information of prospective participants who they believed would be willing to share extensively about their college experiences. The researcher obtained additional names from the graduates, employing snowball sampling. The researcher did not experience any difficulty in finding 30 willing participants. Participants were informed that participation was voluntary and that confidentiality could be secured by identifying them with a pseudonym. Shank (2006) explained that grounded theory is used to look at interrelationships to build theory that enables the researcher to understand the meaning of an experience for a particular group. This qualitative approach gave the researcher opportunity to address with the participants what they felt about their experience in the college setting. Gay and Airasian (2000) explained that qualitative researchers are not concerned simply with describing the way things are, but they also wish to provide insights into what people believe and feel about the way things are. By using one-on-one interviews, the researcher listened for voice inflection and watched for body language that might indicate a need to probe deeper for additional information. Interviews were conducted during spring semester 2008 with Chippewa Cree graduates who had successfully attained a 4-year degree during the past eight years. For triangulation purposes, the researcher conducted interviews with

personnel from the Student Services departments at two different colleges that had worked with the participants to identify what factors they perceive as helping or hindering Chippewa Cree students. The Student Services personnel were identified during the student interviews by asking the students to volunteer names of staff they felt might be willing to share their experiences with Chippewa Cree students. Data was sorted, compared, and analyzed on a continual basis as the researcher identified theoretical categories (Creswell, 1998; Gay & Airasian, 2000; Glacer & Strauss, 1967). Glacer and Strauss, the authors of grounded theory, suggested using this constant comparative method of joint coding and analysis to “generate theory more systematically” (p. 102). By using this method, the researcher began to build a new theory that will add to the understanding of what this group of Native American students experienced in college.

Limitations

One limitation of this study was that participation was voluntary and therefore attracted responses only from the most motivated, leaving out those who might have had valuable information yet were not the type to eagerly respond to requests of participating in a study. Another limitation was that names of participants were generated by the researcher requesting names from anyone and everyone who might know someone from the Chippewa Cree Tribe who had graduated with a bachelor’s degree in the past eight years. The researcher admits that it is quite possible that graduates who were not identified may have had pertinent information to the evolving theory.

Delimitations

Many students have a goal of completing an associate degree because it is an appropriate degree for their career. Although these students are successful, in order to narrow the focus of this study, only those who had a goal of completing a bachelor's degree were included. As Gay and Airasian (2000) recommended, "because qualitative data are typically voluminous, the researcher should try to narrow the focus of the study to facilitate analysis" (p. 272).

About the Researcher

The researcher has taught classes and advised students at Stone Child College for 22 years. She is a non-Native and has gained knowledge of Chippewa Cree culture through trainings, ceremonies, and faculty development opportunities. Evident in her teaching style, she is focused on building relationships that allow students to gain the skills and knowledge needed in their chosen profession. She encourages students to empower themselves and to strive for their goals. She has high expectations of her students and provides the tools and support needed to meet those expectations. She not only imparts knowledge, but also learns from her students. She is grateful for the experiences with her students and cherishes the opportunity she has been given to be part of this community and its' culture. As a researcher, she was well aware that all people may have biases and attempted to walk the fine line between being involved and being unbiased by staying aware of this challenge and making every effort to minimize any effects of personal biases by conscientiously recording thoughts, feelings, and reactions

about what was observed. Qualitative researchers, however, do not claim that they can eliminate all biases (Gay & Airasian, 2000). The researcher used verbatim accounts of the interviews with tape recordings and detailed notes including quotes. Member-checking was employed by e-mailing the typed transcript to the participants to ensure that what was written in the transcript was what they meant to say. Larimore and McClellan (2005) warned non-Native scholars to recognize that all people have biases and that they should be especially careful to conduct research that is culturally sensitive. The researcher sought to do this by allowing enough time for each interview session so that participants could share about their experiences in any way that was comfortable for them. For example, some Native Americans chose to share information through a story format. This format took more time than Western culture's question-and-answer format yet allowed for a deeper understanding of their experiences in higher education. In addition, the researcher provided an office setting that was comfortable and free of interruptions so that participants could tell their stories without being disturbed. The researcher listened without judgment in an effort to understand the experience from the participant's point of view. The researcher kept a journal of her insights and questions throughout the interview sessions. The interview protocol was peer-edited by a fellow educator who is a Chippewa Cree tribal member and who is experienced in research.

Significance of the Study

Why is learning about this small population important? As a teacher of more than 22 years at a tribal college who continuously struggles with retention questions, the researcher sought to discover ways to increase retention rates for the students she teaches

by gaining a deeper understanding of what was helpful to graduates in reaching their goal of earning a bachelor's degree and what the challenges were that they faced in their educational endeavors. The researcher, from personal experience, wholeheartedly agrees with Swail's (2000) statement, "Education has a profound impact on both the individual and society at large, and it is one of the surest ways to increase one's social and economic level and overcome the barriers of poverty and deprived social conditions" (p. 4). It is her desire to see more students become empowered through education so they can take care of their families and fulfill their dreams through the opportunities that an education brings. It's important that educators working with Native American students understand how the students' cultural backgrounds and experiences both before entering college and during college influence their ability to successfully complete a bachelor's degree. This information can be used to design learning environments, procedures, and policies that will increase the number of Native American students who are successful in reaching their goal of earning a bachelor's degree. In a recent article surveying the literature on Native American student retention, Larimore and McClellan (2005) recommended that academic institutions integrate the research of multiple studies on Native American student retention "to develop a culturally rooted and culturally responsive plan for enhancing success for students who are Native American" (p. 27).

Although the study is about college graduates of the Chippewa Cree Tribe, the findings may be helpful to those who work with other Native American students or minorities who are interested in increasing retention rates.

Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions apply:

1. “Attrition” means dropping out of school before the bachelor’s degree is completed.
2. “Dropping out” is to stop attending school, whether formally withdrawn or not.
3. “Minority” is used here in the way that it is commonly used in higher education, referring to people who are members of an ethnic minority (McClellan et al., 2005, p. 7).
4. “Native American” refers to people who identify as Native American, Alaska Native, or Native Hawaiian.
5. “Persistence” is when a student remains in school despite obstacles.
6. “Retention” is when a student remains enrolled in the program of study until degree completion.
7. “Stopping out” is when a student takes a pause in their education, but does not initiate formal withdrawal procedures.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explore factors that helped or hindered Chippewa Cree graduates towards successful completion of a bachelor’s degree. Chapter 1 presented the background, setting of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, and research questions, followed by the conceptual framework. In

addition, limitations, delimitations, researcher information, significance of the study, and definitions were also included.

Chapter 2 will present a review of the supporting literature on the topic of student retention. The literature will be presented in four categories: factors related to persistence before entering college, issues related to student persistence and institutional retention during college, factors specifically related to persistence of Native American students, and strategies for increasing student persistence and retention.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Educators working with Chippewa Cree students need to understand how the students' precollege experiences, college experiences, and cultural backgrounds influence their success in the college environment. The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explore factors that help or hinder successful completion of a bachelor's degree for students from the Chippewa Cree Tribe. Through this research, their experiences were described and an emerging model developed that may be used to address some of the difficulties and problems faced as well as to identify supportive measures encountered in order to increase their chances of persistence. Literature for this research encompasses the general student population and the Native American student population in four areas of study. First, what are the precollege factors that contributed to college success? For example, were the students academically prepared, did they feel they could afford college, and did they have access to go to college? Second, what factors contributed to persistence in college while the students were attending? For example, Tinto (1998) believed the more integrated students are academically and socially, the more likely they will continue in school, while Rendon (1994) believed that it is not involvement that increases persistence but validation of their ability to learn. Additional questions to consider are whether there is an institutional fit, whether students are integrating into the campus climate, whether they are committed to their educational goals, and whether they

are surviving financially. Third, what does the research say about Native American students specifically in each of the above areas? For example, is social integration the same for Native American students, or do they struggle between resisting assimilation and fitting into the campus environment (Larimore & McClellan, 2005)? Fourth, since this study is about increasing persistence and retention rates, recommended strategies from previous researchers for increasing student retention both in the general population and specifically for Native American students were reviewed.

Criteria for Selecting the Literature

The literature review explored a multitude of previous research to provide a synthesis of relevant information from previous work in the effort to understand why some students persist in college and why some do not. Literature reviewed was from established researchers in the area of student retention as well as less established researchers, especially those researching issues concerning retention of minority students such as cultural identity and validation. Recently published studies and older studies were reviewed to gain perspective on the breadth of factors that appear consistently when studying student retention. Multiple studies confirming previous conclusions as well as uncovering new concepts by the same researcher were reviewed.

Within this review, literature on persistence and retention factors before and during college for the general population was abundant and saturated. In addition, retention literature concerning minority students was good, but Native American and non-Native American scholars were encouraged to continue with additional research in specific areas such as the experiences of Native American students in postsecondary

education. For example, Larimore (Dean of the College at Dartmouth) and McClellan (Vice President for Student Development at Dickinson State University) recommended, “Scholars have done valuable work to date; and new developments, such as the work on cultural identity and resilience and other approaches rooted in indigenous perspectives, are promising” (2005, p. 27). They concluded by saying, “the available literature indicates that scholars have made progress in understanding the complicated topic, but there is clearly still a great deal yet to do” (p. 28). Literature on Chippewa Cree students was almost nonexistent except for occasional statistical inclusions in larger reports and in the reports conducted by Boyer (1997) about tribal colleges and a few private reports done for the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (1999, 2000). Literature was available on strategies for increasing student retention, including literature specifically about Native American students, but the literature was minimal in the area of family, spiritual, and cultural influences.

Factors Related to Persistence and Retention Before Entering College

Within the topic of college retention, research reveals that a student’s success can be affected by previous educational experiences before he or she enters college (Carey, 2004; Montana Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, 2004; U.S. Department of Education, 2003). The three most common factors affecting retention before students enter into college are academic preparedness, access, and affordability.

Preparedness for Attending College

Research indicated that one predictor of success in college is being academically prepared to enter college (Byrd, 2006; Carey, 2005; Hawkins, 2005; Hoffman & Lowitzki, 2005; Montana Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, 2006; National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2006; Quint, 2006; Swail et al., 2003). In 2007, the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) reported that the overall high school graduation rate for the United States was just shy of 70% (NCHEMS, 2007). Even so, many students graduate from high school underprepared for college-level work. The National Center for Education Statistics found that 28% of first-time college students took at least one remedial course in reading, writing, or mathematics (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Students taking remedial courses are much less likely to graduate, especially if they are in remedial reading courses (Carey, 2004).

Robert McCabe (2000), a founding board member of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, reported that only 43% of students graduate high school with college-entry skills. This situation is causing a dilemma because 80% of jobs in our knowledge-based economy require education beyond high school. Research funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the James Irvin Foundation explored these disturbing issues. From this research, Quint (2006), one of Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation's (MDRC) leading researchers, reported that "a postsecondary credential is now virtually indispensable for jobs paying middle-class wages." (p. 44). She continued to explain that teens from urban high schools may be

disadvantaged by their low income, marginal academic skills, and lack of personal counseling from guidance counselors informing them about college entrance requirements and financial aid options. MDRC reports on its Web site that its mission “is dedicated to learning what works to improve the well-being of low-income people. Through our research and the active communication of our findings, we seek to enhance the effectiveness of social policies and programs” (Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, 2007).

Poorer school systems do not have access to computers, or have very limited access, and this creates a disadvantage for minority students coming to college and leaves them intellectually disenfranchised, as computers have permeated all levels of higher education (Daniel, 1997). Many students believe that college is not affordable for them and so they feel little reason to prepare for it (Callan, 2006).

Montana Trends. NCHEMS (2007) reported that the high school graduation rate for Montana in 2004 was 78.6%, which is almost 10% above the national level. Also reported was that Montana students, including separate measurements for low-income students, scored above the national average in math, science, and reading but slightly below the national average in writing. A recent national study reported, “large proportions of Montana’s 11th and 12th graders take and score well on college entrance exams” (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2006, p. 3). Approximately 21% of the Montana students who take the SAT/ACT college entrance exam scored in the top 20% (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2006). ACT (American College Test) studies have shown that students who have taken

college preparatory courses tend to score higher on the ACT assessment, earn better grades in college, and complete degrees in less time than those who do not complete the core courses. Verifying these findings, in 2006, Montana students who had taken the core courses had higher scores on the ACT assessment (Montana Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, 2006). Although a good number of Montana high-school graduates are prepared to enter college, some are not. In 2006, about half (57%) of Montana students graduating from high school took the ACT Assessment, and only about one quarter (26%) of them met all four of the ACT College Readiness Benchmark Scores. The ACT is the only college readiness test designed to measure what high school teachers teach and what college entry-level instructors expect students to know (ACT, 2006). Additional data shows that during the fall of 2004 and 2005, just under one-third of Montana students who had recently graduated from high school enrolled in at least one remedial course while attending colleges in Montana (MUS Data Warehouse, 2005).

In summary, data shows that although many Montana students are prepared, some—probably between 25% and 30%—are not prepared in all areas.

Affordability of College

Rising costs and shrinking access are pushing higher education out of reach for millions of young Americans (Callan, 2006; National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2006). Financial aid has failed to keep pace with rising college costs, limiting access for low-income families. Families are borrowing more money to finance a college degree and students are leaving college with more debt than ever before. Campus Project—part of the Center for American Progress, which is a nonpartisan research and

educational institute dedicated to promoting a strong, just, and free America that ensures opportunity for all—reported that between 2001 and 2010, an estimated 2 million young people will forgo higher education because of the prohibitive costs of college. In addition, whereas most federal aid used to come in the form of grants, now only 40% does. Today, 67% of students borrow money to pay for college (Berkowitz & Jentleson, 2006). Along similar lines, the U. S. Department of Education reported that “too many students are either discouraged from attending college by rising costs, or take on worrisome debt burdens in order to do so” (2006, p. 2). From 1995 to 2005, average tuition and fees at public 4-year colleges and universities rose 51% after adjusting for inflation (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). The same report stated that tuition continues to outpace inflation, health care costs, and family income levels. Even though PELL grants have increased 50% over the past 5 years, the financial aid system is in need of repair. In addition, the report identified that families need a streamlined process to help prepare, plan, and finance college.

U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings stated, “There are too many Americans who want to go to college but cannot—because they either are not prepared or cannot afford it” (U.S. Department of Education, 2006, p. 1). The Commission on the Future of Higher education wrote, “Access to American higher education is unduly limited by . . . inadequate preparation, lack of information about college opportunities, and persistent financial barriers” (U.S. Department of Education, 2006, p. 1). The Lumina Foundation (2007) reported that thousands of capable and motivated students face formidable roadblocks to a college education. Those roadblocks include financial need,

inadequate academic preparation, and insufficient information, guidance, and encouragement.

Montana Trends. Many Montana students cannot afford to attend college (Byrd, 2006; National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2006). A recent report by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2006) stated concern that Montana's "underperformance in educating its young population could limit the state's access to a competitive workforce and weaken its economy over time" (p. 3). The report also noted that "college in Montana has become less affordable, particularly for low-income families" (p. 9). It added that "the state's investment in need-based financial aid is very low when compared with top-performing states, and Montana does not offer low-priced college opportunities" and that "undergraduate students borrowed an average of \$3,471 in 2005" (p. 8). Both Senator Baucus and Congressman Rehberg have expressed concern over the high cost of attending college in Montana, and both have responded by sponsoring legislation to address the problem (Baucus, 2006; Rehberg, 2003). Baucus (2006) also remarked that the average Montana student leaves college owing around \$21,000. Rehberg (2003) noted that Montanans are paying a higher percentage of their incomes to attend college than are individuals in other states, and he sympathized with parents and students in saying, "Paying for college is becoming increasingly difficult" (para.7). In a press release in 2006, Governor Schweitzer announced, "Our Montana kids should have the opportunity to go to college—affordability is a barrier that we have to address. . . . Montana's families have been priced out of an education. Our most talented

should have the opportunity to attend college in Montana and be the engines that drive our state's future economic growth" (Schweitzer, 2006, para. 1 & 3).

At MSU Bozeman, 43% of students who applied for financial aid have unmet need (Montana Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, 2004). A recent article in the *Billings Gazette* reported that George Dennison, president of the University of Montana, said money is a significant barrier in keeping students from staying in or going to college (Byrd, 2006). Montana scored an "F" for affordability in a recent national report (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2006). In the report, affordability is measured by whether students and families can afford to pay for higher education, given income levels, financial aid, and the types of colleges and universities in the state. The average annual cost of attendance at MSU-Bozeman and UM-Missoula is \$15,000, including tuition and fees, books and supplies, on-campus room and board, and other living expenses (Montana University System Data Warehouse, 2006). The same data bank reported that 35% of Montana high school graduates enroll in the MUS (Montana University System) immediately following graduation; 4% attend tribal colleges or private institutions in-state, while 16% enroll out-of-state. In addition, 69% of first-time, full-time freshmen return for a second year at the same institution, and 41% of students graduate within 6 years of entering as freshmen. Approximately 80% of first-time, full-time freshmen in the MUS received some sort of financial assistance in 2005, and more than half of these students took out student loans to cover their expenses, yet less than one-quarter received any grants or scholarships from the state of Montana.

Montana appropriations for need-based aid are approximately \$97 per student as compared to an average of \$210 per student in other western states (Montana University System Data Warehouse, 2006). The Montana Board of Regents Access Committee reported at a meeting in 2004 “that rising tuition and low average incomes have put higher education out of reach for many Montanans” (Montana Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, 2004). One of the greatest obstacles faced by Chippewa Cree students is lack of financial resources. In 2005, the Montana Department of Labor and Industry reported an unemployment rate of 20% for the Rocky Boy Reservation, which is five times more than the overall county rate (Montana Department of Labor & Industry, 2006).

Access to College

Although affordability greatly affects access, multiple models and reports indicate that student goals and motivation play a major role in students entering into college. Students must want or expect to continue their education and make plans and take appropriate steps to enroll in college (Anderson, 1985; Astin, 1984; Bean & Eaton, 2000; U.S. Department of Education, 1998; Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007; Tinto, 1993). A recent 35-year study by the Higher Education Research Institute, *First in My Family: A Profile of First-Generation College Students at Four-Year Institutions Since 1971*, reported parent encouragement, preparation for graduate school, and being able to make more money as motivations for going to college (Saenz et al., 2007). The ACT’s College Planning site recommended starting the process in the freshman year of high school with career exploration, advanced course selections and foreign language

study. During the sophomore year, The ACT's College Planning site suggested beginning to compare colleges and continuing to take advanced courses. In the junior year, the same site recommended preparing for the ACT exam and developing a portfolio to highlight talents and special skills. Finally, in the senior year, the preparation gains intensity with taking the ACT exam early, leaving room to retest if necessary, continuing to get good grades, applying for admissions to multiple colleges, completing financial aid forms, watching deadlines, and continuing to visit campuses. Considering the list of suggested planning procedures, many students may find themselves with an access problem due to a lack of planning (ACT, 2007; U. S. Department of Education, 1998; Saenz et al., 2007). They may be able to afford it but are not "prepared" to go to college due to a lack of planning. This lack of planning may be linked to not having had the goal of attending college 2 or 3 years earlier.

A student's proximity or geographical closeness to a college may also influence his or her access to a higher education. The Higher Education Research Institute reported that students considered the close proximity of an institution to their home a very important reason for choosing that institution, and making that choice may be influenced by the financial outlook of the student or his or her family (Saenz et al., 2007).

Montana Trends. The Montana Board of Regents (2007b) stated in its *Strategic Priorities of the Montana Board of Regents* presentation that Montana needs to make higher education accessible. One of the goals listed in the 2006-2010 Strategic Plan is to "increase the overall educational attainment of Montanans through increased participation, retention, and completion rates in the Montana University System"

(Montana Board of Regents, 2007a). It proposes meeting this goal through implementing a college affordability plan, increasing access and participation at 2-year institutions, establishing and implementing a K-12 collaboration, and enhancing and coordinating distance education (Montana Board of Regents, 2007a).

In summary, research indicates that academic preparedness, access, and affordability are the top factors affecting a student's success when entering college both nationally and at the state level for Montana students.

Issues Related to Student Persistence/ Institutional Retention During College

Over the last couple of decades, a variety of models have been developed to try and describe retention and attrition for students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Rendon, 1994; Swail et al., 2003). Several theories, expressed as models of departure, are presented here to develop an understanding of the dynamics between the student, the institution, and the interaction between the two that influences whether a student quits or persists. Additional factors affecting students will be discussed after the models and theories are presented.

Models Related to Student Persistence/ Institutional Retention During College

Tinto's (1993) Attrition Model suggested that the student's institutional experiences determine whether the student will remain in school. The more positive the encounters are that the student has with formal and informal academic and social systems, the more likely it is he or she will integrate into those systems and remain in

school. The model depicted five indicators to determine persistence or departure as follows: (a.) student pre-entry attributes, (b.) student goals and commitments, (c.) institutional experiences, (d.) personal/normal integration, and (e.) student goals and commitments. Overall, the model portrayed that the greater the integration, the more chance that the student would remain in school. Students' pre-entry attributes included family background, skills and abilities, and prior schooling. The academic system included academic performance (formal) and faculty/staff interactions (informal). The social system included extracurricular activities (formal) and peer-group interaction (informal) (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Swail et al., 2003). Tinto noted that a lack of integration into the college campus might also result from students' inability to separate themselves from past associations in order to make the transition to the new community.

In more recent research, Tinto (1998) encouraged faculty and administrators to take the research on student persistence to the practice arena. He stated, "One thing we know about persistence is that involvement matters" (p. 2). He advocated for organizational reform that (a.) adopts a community model of academic organization that promotes involvement through the use of shared, connected learning experiences among its members, students and faculty alike, (b.) reorganizes the first year of college as a distinct unit with its own underlying logic and pedagogical orientation, and (c.) reorganizes faculty to allow them and their students to cross the disciplinary and departmental border that now divide them. In doing this, the social and academic systems would automatically be integrated, allowing for students to spend more time learning with other students and thus learning more, building friendships, and creating connected

learning experiences, which enhances the quality of learning and, in turn, validates their learning, as described by Rendon (1994). Each of these increases the likelihood of the student persisting. Tinto (1993) developed three principles of an effective retention program. First, the program must be committed to the students it serves. Second, an effective retention plan must be committed to all the students, not just some. Third, the plan must include developing supportive social and educational communities on campus. These three principles will ensure social and academic integration of students, which is, according to Tinto, the most important factor in student persistence.

Researchers Bean and Eaton (2000) agreed with Tinto that the level of academic and social connection to the institution clearly affects a student's persistence, but they enhanced Tinto's model by adding a psychological component in which a student's attitude and coping processes are also figured into the decision to persist or not to persist. Not only does the level of connection matter, so does the student's attitude about college, and both tend to influence whether a student persists or drops out.

Rendon et al. (2000) disagreed with Tinto's early research and argued that is unlikely that students, especially students of color, will disassociate from their culture, belief system, and family support network to become integrated. In addition, Rendon (1994) expressed a concern that Tinto's theory is limited when applied to minority students. She stated,

Nontraditional students often have to negotiate a new landscape, learn how to step in and out of multiple contexts, engage in double readings of social reality, and move back and forth between their native world and the new world of college—all at an accelerated pace. Nontraditional students live in multiple realities and lead cyclical lives that demand a high degree of biculturalism. (p. 19)

Instead, Rendon found that validation, not student involvement, had enabled minority students to become powerful learners. She described validation as active interest by someone, inside or outside the classroom, who encourages the student in his or her academic studies and ability to learn.

Anderson's Force Field Analysis of College Persistence Model used a circle to explain the many external influences and internal forces a student faces to persist in college. In this model, persistence is determined by which forces, internal or external, negative or positive, are strongest at a given time. For example, negative internal forces such as loneliness, fear of failure, and career indecision along with negative external influences such as lack of money and rejection may cause a student to choose to not persist in college if those forces are greater than the student's positive internal influences of academic skills and enjoyment of learning (Anderson, 1985).

Similar to Anderson's model is Swail's Geometric Model of Student Persistence and Achievement (Swail et al., 2003). This triangular model demonstrated the dynamics between cognitive, social, and institutional factors. Examples of social factors are the ability to interact effectively with others, personal attitudes, and cultural history. Examples of cognitive factors include academic rigor, study skills, and time management. Examples of institutional factors are financial aid, student services, curriculum and instruction, and recruitment. If the three areas are in equilibrium, then the student will grow, develop, and persist. If the balance is broken, the student is at risk of stopping or dropping out (Swail et al., 2003). This model is different from the others because it places the student at the center of the model and provides a simple method to look at what the

student brings to campus and what the institution can do to help increase the chance of degree completion. Swail believed that the three forces of cognitive, social, and institutional factors account for the entire spectrum of student outcomes. His geometric model placed the institutional factors on equal ground with cognitive and social factors, illustrating the importance of campus participation and knowledge in students' social and academic development.

Astin's Student Involvement Theory is often referenced in the literature. His theory stated that as students increase their physical and emotional investment to a campus, their retention rate increases (Astin, 1984). He argued in order for student learning to take place, students need to be actively engaged in their environment.

Overall, each of these models is useful in illustrating the problems and processes relating to student persistence, yet they still don't give definitive answers to why students drop out of college. These theories are similar in that each agrees that there is no one factor that ensures the student will persist or choose to depart. The theories are differentiated by the key element of the creator. For example, Bean and Eaton added the factor of self-efficacy to Tinto's integration model, and Rendon et al. questioned Tinto's theory about minority students disassociating from their culture to become more integrated.

Although the theories and models do not provide a blueprint for retaining students, they are helpful in understanding the factors that affect students' persistence in or departure from college. This study seeks to explore factors previously described in the

literature with regard to the specified population, especially those factors pertaining to culture and family.

Factors Related to Student Persistence/ Institutional Retention During College

Not all students who begin college finish with a degree (Lau, 2003). A multitude of research has been conducted to try and understand this phenomenon from the perspectives of both the successfully retained student and the dropout (Lau, 2003; Padilla, 1999; Swail et al., 2003; Tinto, 1998). Researchers Swail et al. (2003) stated, “There are a number of factors related to retention, and researchers have found differences as well as similarities between white students and students of color” (p. 51). Padilla (1999) explained, “While it is necessary to understand why some students fail to complete their programs of study so that students and institutions can be told what to avoid, it is crucial to understand what accounted for students’ success when they do complete a degree program, so the students and institutions can be told what to do” (p.132). In the following paragraphs, factors related to student persistence will be examined from the institution and student perspectives, both of the successfully retained student and those who dropped out.

Institutional Factors Affecting Student Retention

Academic integration and preparation, campus climate, institutional fit, and financial aid are primary concerns in the area of retention (Lau, 2003; Padilla, 1999; Rendon, 1994; Swail et al., 2003; Tinto, 1998).

Academic Integration and Preparedness. A significant body of literature shows that high school grade point averages and scores on standardized tests such as the SAT or the ACT are generally strong predictors of student success in college for students of all races (Hoffman & Lowitzki, 2005). Consistent findings on the SAT-I show that ethnic minority and low-income students score well below White and Asian students (Swail et al., 2003). In addition, the academic intensity of the student's high school curriculum counted more than anything else in precollegiate history in providing momentum toward completing a bachelor's degree (Adelman, 1999). Furthering this thought, Hoffman and Lowitzki (2005) concluded from their study, which was focused on predicting college success using high school grades and test scores, that "prior achievements, as measured by high school grades, coupled with satisfying validation experiences better enable nonmajority students to find and create their own way than do their natural abilities or aptitudes, as measured by standardized tests" (p. 456). In addition, where students of color are not the minority and are not subject to culture shock, standardized tests were stronger predictors of academic success (Hoffman & Lowitzki, 2005). Dr. Lau (2003) found that students who lack fundamental skills, especially in math and writing, find it difficult to cope with the average college workload. She emphasized the importance of students taking course prerequisites before taking higher-level classes so that they are prepared for the advanced coursework. She also highlighted the importance of students developing a good working relationship with their academic advisors as a mechanism to help them progress through their educational program in a timely manner.

Campus Climate and Institutional Fit. Tinto (1998) argued that students must be integrated academically and socially into the campus culture if they are to persist. He further noted that involvement matters most during the first year of college and that nearly half of all leavers depart before the start of the second year, so it is especially important to help students transition to college in the first 10 weeks. Furthering Tinto's work on sense of belonging, researchers Whatley, Bos, Kennedy, Smith, and Woods (2003) found that a sense of belonging to the institution stemmed from the student's feeling valued by the institution through supportive peer relationships that aid students in meeting the challenges of a new environment and the belief that faculty are compassionate and see them as individuals, not just another face in the crowd. Research clearly suggests that the single most important factor in advising students who are at-risk is helping them to feel that they are cared for by the institution (Heisserer & Parette, 2002; Tinto, 1993).

In the article "Institutional Factors Affecting Student Retention," Lau (2003) identified three factors that affect attrition:

First, some students leave for reasons that may be beyond institutional control, such as lack of finances, poor student-institution fit, changing academic or career goals, or unrelated personal circumstances. Secondly, many more students leave because the institution has failed to create an environment, inside or outside the classroom that is conducive to their learning and educational needs. These students do not return to their college because they are unhappy with the education that they are receiving. Thirdly, the inability to manage normal school work or to assimilate within the student population could discourage some students from returning for another year of torture. Students who lack the basic and fundamental skills, especially in mathematics and writing, are finding it difficult to cope with normal course workload. (p. 127)

Researchers Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) have shown that (a.) increased out-of-class interactions with students, (b.) small institutional size, (c.) full-time attendance and living on campus, and (d.) faculty emphasis on teaching and student learning have a great influence on student learning. In addition, many nontraditional students reported needing career counseling, stress management training, and childcare (Bauman, Wang, DeLeon, Kafentzis, Zavala-Lopez, & Lindsey, 2004).

Somewhat different from Astin's and Terenzini's research in which participation in extracurricular activities and informal, out-of-class interactions with peers and faculty members increased students' chances to succeed, Rendon (1994) argued that validation is the key for some students to feel capable of learning. She explained that involvement is defined as time, energy, and effort devoted to learning mostly on the part of the student doing it on his or her own, yet not all students can be expected to learn or get involved in the same way. For example, many nontraditional students do not have the skills to involve themselves with the social and academic infrastructures of an institution, and they express having doubts about their ability to succeed. Rendon explained that through validation, faculty and staff can transform these students who might otherwise leave college. Once again, Rendon described validation as someone, in or out of class, taking an active interest in the student by taking the initiative to lend a helping hand, by affirming the student as capable of doing academic work, or just by supporting the student in the adjustment to college. For example, a faculty member who treats students equally or who structures learning experiences to allow students to experience themselves as capable of learning are participating in activities that validate a student. Rendon

explained that many nontraditional students perceive involvement as someone taking an active role in assisting them, not as the students themselves taking the initiative. Finally, Rendon noted, “involvement in college is not easy for nontraditional students, and validation may be the missing link to involvement and may be a prerequisite for involvement to occur” (p. 37).

Carey (2005, p. 2) reported that research from the most successful institutions shows the following four items that really matter for increasing graduation rates:

1. It matters whether institutions focus on getting their students engaged and connected to the campus, particularly in the critical freshman year.
2. It matters whether there is a genuine emphasis on the quality of undergraduate teaching and learning, because academic success and degree completion go hand in hand.
3. It matters whether administrators and faculty monitor student progress, taking advantage of new data systems to tease out patterns of student success.
Successful schools use that information not only to help individual students but also to make needed changes in policies and practice.
4. It matters a lot whether campus leaders make student success a top institution-wide priority—and when they stick with that priority over multiple years.

Quality advising ensures that students have a clear sense of what is expected of them and what path to follow (Braxton & Mundy, 2001; Carey, 2005; Lau, 2003). High quality academic advising has demonstrated positive impacts on grades and satisfaction

as well as a negative effect on intent to depart from an institution (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Financial Aid. Funding needs to include scholarships that allow students to work less and study more (Lau, 2003). For most students to persist—particularly low-income and minority students—the benefits of attaining a degree usually must be greater than the direct, indirect, and opportunity costs required to attend an institution. For many low-income and minority students, enrollment and persistence are driven by the availability of financial aid (Swail et al., 2003). College has become less affordable, and little gain has been made in the proportion of students completing degrees (Carey, 2004; Hawkins, 2005; National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). According to Margaret Spelling, U.S. Secretary of Education, “There is little to no information on why costs are so high and what we’re getting in return” (U.S. Department of Education, 2006, p. 2). In the same call-to-action report, she stated that tuition outpaces inflation and that although Pell Grants have increased nearly 50% over the past 5 years, the financial aid system remains in urgent need of reform. Continuing within the report, the Commission of the Future of Higher Education pointed out the following facts: Average tuition and fees at public colleges and universities rose 51% after adjusting for inflation, student median debt levels were more than \$15,000, and state funding growth for higher education has fallen to its lowest levels in 20 years. In its summary, the report outlined proposals to make higher education more accessible, affordable, and accountable to students, parents, business leaders, and taxpayers.

Student Factors Affecting Persistence

The role of the student cannot be overemphasized. Students must be accountable for participating actively in the learning process, which includes setting their own goals and expectations to do well in classes, and they must be motivated to attempt all sorts of learning techniques to facilitate improvement in their own learning. In a study conducted by Lau (2003) addressing factors affecting student retention, she found self-determination and motivation as the most essential factors in student success, followed by support from friends and family, support from college instructors, and support from college support staff. Some students leave for reasons that may be beyond institution control, such as lack of finances, working too many hours while attending college, lack of connection to peers and institution, and unrelated personal circumstances (Landry, 2003; Lau, 2003; Polinsky, 2003; Swail et al., 2003; Tinto, 1993). The following paragraphs will explore student factors affecting their persistence.

Student Goals, Expectations, and Motivation. The stronger the goal commitment, the more likely the student will graduate (Astin, 1984; Bean & Eaton, 2000, Lau, 2003; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003; Tinto, 1993). Astin (1984) found that students whose academic majors corresponded with their career goals were much more likely to achieve their goals than those students who did not identify their goals. Likewise, Tinto (1993) claimed that the students' educational or occupational goals correlated positively with the probability of degree completion. Lau (2003) reported, from her study on institutional factors affecting student retention, that students who do poorly in their freshmen year tend to drop out of school, so freshmen need to develop motivational skills by learning to

set clear goals for academic success and working towards completion of those goals. They need to visit career and learning centers to increase their self-awareness and path to personal academic success. They must understand there are consequences for poor behavior and poor grades.

Padilla (1999) reported that successful college students are academically talented, have a high level of motivation, are committed to their educational goals, exert effort in their studies, integrate academically and socially into the campus, and feel that their previous knowledge and experiences are valued.

Support From Family and Friends. Nontraditional students (25 years of age and older) reported receiving strong support, both financially and emotionally, from family and friends (Bauman et al., 2004; Chao & Good, 2004). In a recent study, nontraditional students expressed a sense of hopefulness about their future. This perception impacted the management of their education, employment, family, and interpersonal relationships and gave them a resilience to overcome whatever difficulties surfaced in their path while completing a degree (Chao & Good, 2004). This hopefulness provided the self-efficacy and resilience for them to believe they could overcome their difficulties in each of these five areas. Padilla (1999) concluded that a lack of family support and understanding was one of the major barriers keeping minority students from completing a degree.

Connectedness to Peers and Institution. Rendon (1994) stated that validating a student's experiential knowledge is important in providing him or her with a positive learning environment where new knowledge can be obtained. After carefully analyzing the data from the Transition to College Project, whose primary purpose was to study how

student learning was affected by student involvement, she determined that getting involved is only part of the learning story. Some students came to college expecting to fail, and through acceptance and validation both inside and outside the classroom, they discovered their innate capacity to learn and become successful college students. In other words, for some students, validation would need to occur before the student felt able to get involved and thus “being transformed into full members of the college academic and social community” (Rendon, 1994, p. 51).

Padilla (1999) explained that barriers to students—such as problems transitioning from a small town to an urban setting, learning to be on their own, cultural issues, lack of minority role models, and perceived low student expectations from faculty—all lead to a lack of motivation and connectedness to the institution for minority students. In addition, he noted that racial isolation, lack of visibility of minority support programs, and lack of minority issues or materials in the curriculum also increase the likelihood that students will not persist. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) documented in their research that faculty members’ contact with their students, inside and outside of the classroom, has a profound influence on student learning and connectedness to the institution. Lau (2003) wrote that “students who are satisfied with the formal and informal academic and social systems in a college or university tend to stay in school” (p. 127). From this, Lau encouraged faculty to form cooperative learning groups that consist of a mix of students from various disciplines and academic levels to increase student retention, satisfaction, cognitive skills, and active participation, leading to more connectedness to peers and the institution.

Finances. Polinsky (2003) reported that many students stated a need to take time off from college to work more because they could not otherwise afford to continue with their education. Many minority students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, tend to have financial issues resulting from unique problems not generally faced by White students (Landry, 2003). Financial aid is a critical part of persistence, and for students from low-income backgrounds, finances are a make-it-or-break-it issue (Swail et al., 2003). Both the lack of money and problems with the financial aid system are major resource barriers for many students (Padilla, 1999).

Personal Reasons. Many students who leave college before graduating are doing well academically but simply have too much going on in their lives (Bers & Nyden, 2001; Polinsky, 2003). Many students expressed difficulty in trying to work and complete an education simultaneously (Bers & Nyden, 2001; Lau, 2003; Polinsky, 2003). Landry (2003) reported that many minority students spend the first year struggling to find their niche on campus and spend a greater amount of time and energy than anticipated trying to meet academic demands. Padilla (1999) reported that the difficulty in choosing between the value of an immediate job and the long-term value of an education is a barrier that many minority students must overcome to be successful in completing a program of study.

College student departure poses a puzzle to college and university administrators. The different theoretical perspectives—economic, organizational, psychological, and sociological—that higher education organizations use to understand college student departure illustrate the complexity of the puzzle. Just as the problem is complex, so is the

solution. No one approach, but many, need to be implemented by those serious about retaining students (Braxton & Mundy, 2001; Lau, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Swail et al., 2003; Tinto, 1998).

Factors Specifically Related to Persistence of Native Americans

Participants in this study belong to a single Indian tribe, the Chippewa Cree Tribe, and very little literature exists concerning students from this tribe, so other available literature concerning Native Americans will be investigated to build an understanding of the Native American college student's experiences.

Factors Related to Persistence of Native Americans Before Entering College

The problem of retention does not begin with college enrollment. Tierney (1992) reported that more than 40% of Native American students who entered secondary education nationwide left without a high school diploma. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that Native American high school students who graduated in 2000 were less likely to have completed the core academic track than their peers of other racial/ethnic groups. On average, Native American students who elected to take the SAT college entrance exam in 2004 scored below the national average on both the verbal and mathematics sections of the exam (NCES, 2005b).

Not only do Native American students drop out of high school at a higher rate than the general population, but they are not as successful in completing a college degree (U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, 2006b; Jackson & Smith, 2001; Jackson et al., 2003; Lowe, 2005; Montana University System Data

Warehouse, 2005; National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2006; Swail et al., 2003). Statistics revealed that for every 100 Native American students entering ninth grade, 60 will graduate from high school, 20 will enter a postsecondary institution, and perhaps 3 will earn a 4-year college degree (Tierney, 1992). The U.S. Department of Education reported the following:

Despite more American Indians/Alaska Natives enrolling in college and university than ever before, American Indians/Alaska Natives composed only about 1% of the total college and university enrollment in 2002, an increase from 0.7% in 1976. College and university enrollment became much more diverse over these years. Minorities, including American Indians/Alaska Natives, represented 16% of the total enrollment in 1976, whereas they represented 30% of the total enrollment in 2002. In 2003, American Indians/Alaska Natives between the ages of 18 and 24 were less likely to be enrolled in a college or university than their White, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Black peers. Eighteen percent of American Indian/Alaska Native 18- to 24-year-olds were enrolled in a college or university, compared with 42% of Whites, 60% of Asian/Pacific Islanders, and 32% of Blacks. (Freeman & Fox, 2005, p. 98)

These sobering statistics are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Percentage of Persons Ages 18 to 24 Enrolled in Colleges or Universities, by Race/Ethnicity: October 2003

Race/ethnicity	Enrolled (by percent)
Total ¹	37.8
White, non-Hispanic	41.6
Black, non-Hispanic	32.3
Hispanic	23.5
Asian/Pacific Islander	60.3
American Indian/Alaska Native	17.7

¹ Includes other race/ethnicity categories not separately shown.

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), October 2003.

In 2003, 42% of American Indians/Alaska Natives had attended at least some college. Thirty-five percent had finished high school without continuing on to postsecondary education, and 23% had not finished high school. The percentage of American Indians/Alaska Natives who had not finished high school was lower than that of Hispanics (43%), but higher than that of Whites (11%) and Asian/Pacific Islanders (12%). A lower percentage of American Indians/Alaska Natives completed a bachelor's degree (9%) than all other racial/ethnic groups except Hispanics. A lower percentage of American Indians/Alaska Natives achieved a graduate degree (4%) compared to other racial/ethnicity groups except Blacks and Hispanics, whose percentages were similar (5% and 3%, respectively) as seen in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Percentage Distribution of Adults Ages 25 and Over, by Highest Level of Educational Attainment and Race/Ethnicity: 2003

Highest level of education	Total	White, non- Hispanic	Black, non- Hispanic	Hispanic	Asian/Pacific Islander	American Indian/ Alaska Native
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
High school dropout	15.4	10.6	19.7	43.0	12.2	22.8
High school completion	32.0	32.9	35.4	27.4	20.7	35.2
Some college	17.2	17.6	20.1	13.0	11.5	22.2
Associate's degree	8.2	8.8	7.5	5.2	6.8	7.3
Bachelor's degree	17.9	19.7	12.3	8.3	30.7	9.0
Graduate degree	9.3	10.4	5.2	3.1	18.1	3.6
Master's degree	6.6	7.4	4.0	2.1	12.2	2.7
Doctoral or professional degree	2.7	3.0	1.1	1.0	5.9	0.9

Note: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. (2004). *Educational attainment in the United States: 2003*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Montana Trends. The graduation rate for Native Americans from the Montana University System for Fall 2005 was only 2.7% compared to a 40.9% overall Montana graduation rate (Montana University System Data Warehouse, 2005). The 2006 Montana

ACT Report stated that only 5% of Native Americans graduating from high school in 2006 tested ready in all four areas measured to enter college— reading, mathematics, science, and English (ACT, 2006). In comparison, 26% of total graduates in the state were ready.

In order to gain an understanding of the current trends in retention of Native American students, Stein (1999) recalled the history of American Indian education as follows:

American Indian education, like so much of the Indian world, had been destroyed by the time of the twentieth century and replaced with an education system designed and managed by European Americans to convert Indians into pale-brown imitations of themselves. It took the upheaval of the mid-twentieth century—with the Great Depressions of the 1930s, World War II in the 1940s, and the Civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s—coupled with more enlightened legislation concerning American Indians to lay the groundwork for change in American Indian education. But serious change for American Indian education began when councilmen Guy Gorman and Allen Yazzie, Navajo Nation Chairman Raymond Nakai, and educators such as Ned Hatathli, Robert Roessel, and Ruth Roessel founded Dine, Inc., with the intention of taking control of the education of Navajo students. Higher education was one area of Indian education that the founders of Dine, Inc., desired to affect immediately. An attrition rate of 90 percent or more experienced by Navajo students attending off-reservation colleges demanded innovative solutions . . . within this historical tradition, tribally controlled colleges made their appearance on the U. S. higher education scene. (pp. 261-262)

In the early 1990s, Tierney (1992) noted that “Native Americans are one of the smallest ethnic minorities of the United States population, and American Indian students are among the most underrepresented groups in academe. In part because of both of these factors, there is little research about Native American undergraduate experiences in higher education” (p. 1). Research on current trends tells us that although access to college has increased, a lower percentage of American Indians completed a bachelor’s

degree than all other racial/ethnic groups except Hispanics (American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 2000; Benjamin et al., 1993; Carey, 2004; Montana University System, 2005; Freeman & Fox, 2005; Larimore & McClellan, 2005; McClellan et al., 2005). Sanchez (2000), Director of Health Careers Opportunities Program in Northern New Mexico Community College, concluded,

Minority students are coming to colleges but are not completing degree programs at rates that give them broad access to higher-paying employment and economic status. Instructors who structure their classrooms to consider minority students' "cultural tools" (preferred learning strategies and styles) will allow them to become socially and academically integrated and enable them to make sense of what is happening in the classroom in terms of their own culture and real-life situations. (p. 48)

In addition, by using a wide variety of instructional activities and technologies, an environment can be developed that encourages active participation. From this, deeper learning will occur in students and will result in higher retention levels of minority students (Sanchez, 2000).

Factors Related to Persistence of Native Americans During College

By comparing previous studies, researchers Jackson et al. (2003) defined three factor categories that explain why Native American college students may not succeed at college: sociocultural factors, academic factors, and personal factors. Sociocultural factors included isolation, lack of accommodation for Native American culture, lack of ethnic identity, various family influences, and lack of or negative interactions with faculty members. Academic factors included poor high school preparation or possession of a GED. Personal factors that may contribute to nonpersistence included lack of

confidence in oneself, low levels of financial support, and stressful family situations such as being a single parent.

Reyhner and Dodd (1995) synthesized multiple research and writings on the subject of recruiting and retaining American Indian and Alaska Native students, including the results of a study of 24 successful American Indian college students at a state college in Montana. From this work, they identified obstacles to college success as prejudice, finances, language, and alcohol. In addition, they noted that students reported being helped in their college career most frequently by caring and understanding faculty. Examples of this included faculty members' making it easier to learn by showing willingness to answer questions, by providing examples from their personal experience, by relaxing time requirements, and by being culturally sensitive. In addition, these same students stated that faculty members hindered their learning by having negative attitudes towards the class, failing to overcome communication and language barriers, not keeping office hours, being inconsiderate, being rigid and defensive, and lecturing without an opportunity for questions and answers. When the same group of students were asked why some American Indian students were more successful than others, their responses indicated that they see education as a way to set and reach a future goal. In addition, they cited maturity, determination, ability to cope with racial and cultural differences, family encouragement, ability to adjust to new situations, parents and their educational background, and support systems as reasons why some students are more successful than others (Reyhner & Dodd, 1995).

Garrod and Larimore (1997) provided one of the greatest contributions to the literature for understanding Native American students by providing a book that gave 13 Native American college graduates an opportunity to tell their life stories in their own way. Native American students described the difficulties they faced and the experiences they had, painting a compelling portrait of anguish as they discussed the difficulty of finding balance between tribal values and the demands of campus life. Students told of the need to justify the existence of their own cultures to other students and to the White institutions they had joined. Within their stories, they described the cultural discontinuity they experienced as they went from their home community to a college community and how they attempted to reconcile these disparities. Through these personal essays, they explored issues of Native identity and they shared their desires to give back to their own Native community by applying the skills they acquired through higher education.

Cultural dissonance, academic setbacks, financial difficulties, and assaults on identity and self-esteem often cause depression in Native students. One contributing author wrote that if no intervention takes place, depression can rapidly lead to a variety of self-defeating behaviors, most commonly alcohol and drug abuse, fighting, rape, suicide, reckless driving, unsafe sexual activity, impulsive theft, and truancy (Fleming, 1997). Of the 13 graduates included in the book, most spoke of support from strong mothers and grandmothers, many described themselves as avid readers, and all wished to use their higher education to help their home community and expressed a deeply rooted desire to contribute to their communities' cultural survival. Garrod and Larimore (1997) stated, "For some, the desire to pursue a college education came as much from a love of learning

imparted to them by childhood role models as from a deep-seated need to disprove racist stereotypes of Native Americans as underachieving, unintelligent, and alcoholic” (p. 4).

One student, Alvrod (1997) articulated the clash of cultural values in this way:

Navajos have social taboos against competing as individuals and attracting undue attention to themselves. . . . Native societies try to orient children toward such traditional values as cooperation, harmony, and humility. From this cultural perspective, the competitive behavior encouraged and even required in many college classrooms is immodest, inappropriately aggressive, and even selfish because it works against the group’s (versus the individual’s) efforts to master new skills. (p. 6)

Another student, Bennet (1997) wrote, “Native students are made to feel like invited but unwelcome guests of the college” (p. 9). Chamberlain (1997) offered, “I always thought that if I could combine my cultural heritage with Eurocentric standards of success, I could succeed. I was right; and yet I lost sight of that my freshman year when I locked my spirit and heritage away in an effort to fit in” (pp. 155-156). These statements offer a glimpse into the ways Native students negotiated the difficult journey between home and college, tribal culture and dominate culture (Garrod & Larromore, 1997).

Padilla (1999) argued that student success, not failures, should be the foundation for college student retention efforts. He stated that the factors can be duplicated from successful students to help other students succeed at the same campus. Although the study focused on Chicano students from the southwest United States, it also included the research efforts of more than a decade on minority students, making it applicable to Native Americans. The thick description of this qualitative research indicated similarities of student experiences and made consideration of the research worthwhile. For example, Padilla stated that there is clear evidence that the educational pipeline is leaky for

Chicano students, and this is also true for Native Americans (Carey, 2005; Hunt, 2006; McCabe, 2000). Once enrolled in college, Chicano students are more likely than majority students to leave college without completing a degree, as are Native Americans (Tinto, 1993). Padilla concluded that to be successful, the students at this particular institution had to be able to overcome the following four barriers: (a.) discontinuity, (b.) lack of nurturing, (c.) lack of presence on campus, and (d.) resource barriers. Examples of a “discontinuity” barrier might be adjusting from a small town atmosphere to an urban setting or deciding to take a job instead of continuing with education. “Lack of nurturing” barriers included lack of minority role models, perceived low expectations of students by faculty and staff, and lack of family support. “Lack of presence” barriers were similar to nurturing barriers and included cultural isolation and lack of visibility of minority support programs. Another area, “resource barriers,” included lack of money and problems with financial aid. If students were able to maneuver through these barriers, then they were successful. By identifying these barriers within individual institutions, solutions may be found and made available to all students, allowing for more students to overcome the barriers and complete their degrees (Padilla, 1999).

One of the impediments to success for Native Americans is the pressure felt to be cultural emissaries. Often they are expected to be spokespersons for their culture, to all be alike, to conform to stereotypes, and to represent everyone in their tribe. If two Native American students are in the same class, they are expected to agree with one another, and when this is not the case, it often causes stress for those students. In addition, Native American students are taught to be active listeners and to only participate when they have

something significant to say. This cultural-based behavior can be a problem in the classroom when participation is one of the graded requirements (Rodriguez, 1997). Additionally, Rodriguez reported that for generations of Native American students, education represents a loss of language, family, and culture due to the boarding-school experience which forced assimilation and acculturation on them” (Rodriguez,1997). Also, Native American students who are not grounded in their culture may feel pulled between two worlds and have more problems staying in school. Lowe (2005) added that Native American students feel pressure from the beginning about whether they will succeed or leave and that the success of one Native student brings success to a larger group. “Native Americans take great pride in the success and achievement of their students, who are being looked on as leaders for the future,” noted Lowe (p. 39). Yet this puts the students in a uniquely stressful position, because their success or failure will affect their family, tribes, and communities (Lowe, 2005).

In a qualitative study conducted by Jackson and Smith (2001) in which 22 recent high school graduates from the Navajo Nation participated, data showed that the “transition during the first 2 years of college is critical to the success of American Indian students” (p. 2). Through analysis the following themes emerged: family connections, discrepancy between high school and college learning environments, focus on faculty relationships, vague educational and vocational constructs, and connection to homeland and culture.

Within the theme of family connections, the subdivisions of family pressure, family financial problems, family conflicts, and family encouragement were listed. For

example, participants reported family pressure to perform academically or to stay close to home in this category. Participants reported having felt pressure to return home to help if conflict arose in their families, even if it meant leaving in the middle of a semester and probable academic failure.

In the area of discrepancy between high school and the college environment, one student described the difference as that between a nurturing mother and a demanding father. Many participants were surprised by the difficulty of college after having done well in high school.

In the area of faculty relationships, participants reported both positive and negative experiences. Jackson and Smith's study supported the importance of positive faculty relationships in postsecondary adjustment and a need for positive experiences with potential mentors, especially those from the students' own culture.

In the area of vague educational and vocational constructs, participants showed limited understanding of postsecondary education and its relationship to specific careers. Students expressed low self-efficacy regarding career decisions and felt restricted in what careers were available to them. If a career was not available on the reservation, participants were less likely to see it as an option.

Many students demonstrated strong ties to their homeland and culture and felt uncomfortable being away from home, even if they had friends and family at college. Some felt confused about whether to leave the reservation and be successful or to maintain their traditional connection to the tribe, land, and culture.

Recommendations from the researchers were to increase strategies that help students make the transition from the high school environment to the college environment. They suggested enriched curriculum, study-skills training, faculty mentors, culture support groups, and culture-specific transition courses (Jackson & Smith, 2001).

Swisher and Tippeconnic (1999) emphasized that the relationship between teachers and students and the teaching-learning process is paramount in understanding how Native American students learn. They asserted, “This relationship is the most basic interaction that takes place in schools each day and one that determines whether students will persist or not. A mutually respectful and caring relationship is essential to educational success” (p. 302).

Aragon (2002) conducted a study that examined the learning styles of American Indian students. He noted that the purpose of the research was “the development of a conceptual framework of learning for American Indian/Alaska Native postsecondary learners by identifying the environmental and social factors that influence and maintain classroom motivation” (p. 12). Aragon explained that without adequate motivation, learning would not occur. Based on the results of this study, he determined four conclusions. First, Native American students prefer a teacher-structured environment where the teacher serves as the source of structure and support for the various learning activities. This conclusion supports previous research that Native Americans, within their culture, value and exhibit respect for the rank and authority of the instructor within classroom settings (Aragon, 2002). Second, the social factors that were found to add to the maintenance of motivation within the teacher-structured classroom included feedback

from the teacher, an opportunity to participate in as much of the course activity as possible, and media presentations. However, the essence of competition within the classroom was a concern due to the fact that Native American/Alaska Native cultures have been found to be primarily noncompetitive. Third, interpersonal and collaborative learning, self-paced learning, and opportunities to think for themselves also increased motivation within the student-structured environment. From the study results, Aragon noted the following implications for practice: Faculty should give students written feedback often, active-learning styles should be used, and students should have choices in topics studied and methods used.

Researchers insist that attaining social integration with faculty can be crucial to the educational persistence of Native American students and that a positive correlation exists between a warm and caring faculty and persistence (Jackson et al., 2003; Pavel & Padilla, 1993). In addition, researchers argue the importance of recruiting and retaining Native American faculty, who can serve as role models, as a strategy to recruiting and retaining Native American students (Stein, 2003; Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999; Tippeconnic & McKinney, 2003).

Multiple studies state that Native American students have a better chance of succeeding at a mainstream institution if they attend a tribal college first (American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 2000; Brown, 2003; Dell, 2000; Nichols & Monnette, 2003; Ortiz & Boyer, 2003; Ortiz & HeavyRunner, 2003). In fact, Boyer (1997) found that Native American students who had attended a tribal college before transferring to a 4-year institution were four times more likely to complete a 4-year

degree than those who entered a mainstream institution as freshmen. In addition, Boyer reported, “Students at tribal colleges expressed high satisfaction with the staff, instructors, and curriculum. Furthermore, these students indicated that job training, affordability, personal interactions with faculty and staff, and support services were important factors in the satisfaction they felt with their college experience” (1997a, p. 20).

Native American researchers HeavyRunner and DeCelles (2002) sought to understand the conditions that plague Native American students’ by exploring the many issues that burden Native American students on a regular basis. Some of the burdens faced daily by Native American students were found to include high morbidity rates, breakdown of the nuclear family, a high suicide rate, high alcohol-related deaths, increasing number of single-parent households, intense poverty, no transportation, lack of day care for children, and, last but not least, drug abuse (HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002). In order to contribute to the Native American students’ educational persistence and mitigate the previously listed deteriorative affects, HeavyRunner and DeCelles recommended increasing student retention by replicating the extended family structure (explained in more detail in the next section) within the college culture to enhance students’ sense of belonging.

The heart of the matter is that student departure can be very detrimental to students, their family, and their community (HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002). In the following paragraphs, researchers explained some of the difficulties Native American students experienced which caused them to depart from the college experience. Native

American students often face a double- or triple-jeopardy situation as they endure two or three disadvantaged statuses at the same time, including being ethnic minorities, being at a low socio-economic level, being computer illiterate, and so forth (Garrod & Larimore, 1997; HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002). In addition, Huffman (2001) explained that Native American students may have intense feelings of alienation and recommends addressing this by establishing campus events that recognize Native American accomplishments and by developing a culturally appropriate counseling programs. He and other researchers concluded that Native American students who are able to draw strength from their cultural identity while adapting to college life are more likely to succeed academically than those students who either assimilate or never feel comfortable on campus (Belgarde, 1992; Pavel & Padilla, 1993; Tierney, 1992).

There is an abundance of literature pertaining to retention and persistence of Native American students in college. As summarized by researchers Ortiz and Boyer (2003),

Native American students are much more likely to succeed in four-year institutions where they find supportive networks of Native American faculty and staff, a sufficient number of Native American students, integrated student service units, non-Native faculty and staff committed to the success of Native American students, the use of collaborative learning techniques, and cultural continuity. (p. 44)

Institutional Strategies for Increasing Student Retention

Special programming efforts to increase minority student retention include bridge programs, structured campus residences, mentoring, and other ethnic and cultural programs (Brown, 2005; Garrod & Larimore, 1997; Jackson & Smith, 2001; Lowe, 2005;

Swail et al., 2003). In addition, institutional practices should integrate students into the campus culture early and help them clarify career and academic goals through extensive and collaborative academic and career counseling (Brown, 2005; Lau, 2003; Lowe, 2005; Swail et al., 2003). Lau (2003) added that programs need to enable students to connect simultaneously with the student body, administrators, and faculty. Services need to be coordinated to best support the student and to provide financial assistance, academic support, diversity awareness, and physical facilities. In addition, academic support needs to include learning centers that provide tutoring and equalizing resources to help disadvantaged students, freshman year programs that help students to adjust to campus life, and honors programs that group students together for increased learning. Brown (2005) wrote, “Native Americans have unique needs related to their culture and socioeconomic background that necessitate a center of their own” (p. 87). In addition to the above, she emphasized promoting a variety of educational and cultural programs that send the message that Native American students are welcome and an important constituency on the campus. “Therefore, to provide activities and opportunities for Native American students is not to give them an advantage over other students; rather, such programs and services are a means to get Native American students on the same playing field” (Brown, 2005, p. 93).

Rendon et al. (2000) recommended institutions take an active role in fostering validation, which is described as showing students you know they can learn. One suggestion for implementing this was to train faculty, counselors, coaches, and administrators to take the initiative to reach out to students by designing activities and

policies that promote active learning and interpersonal growth among students, faculty, and staff. Continuing in the active learning realm, Rendon and Hope (1995) argued that in order to reform higher education policies to better serve the increased minority populations, research is needed to assess how students of color learn best in order to implement policies and practices that better serve minority students.

Multiple researchers pointed out that the first year away from home and friends can be very scary for many college students, but for minorities, particularly first generation students, feelings of isolation and loneliness are common, and many minority students, even top-notch students, are unprepared for the workload of college—not just the increased difficulty, but the volume of work expected. By understanding these factors and implementing retention policies like faculty/student mentoring programs, multicultural centers, summer transition programs, women’s centers, and gender equity in the classroom, a greater feeling of comfort and support will enable this particular group to persist in their education (Landry, 2003; Lowe, 2005; Rendon & Hope, 1995).

Padilla (1999) reasoned that instead of studying those students who leave without completing a degree, institutions need to develop a qualitative survey that asks students to identify the barriers the students on that particular campus face and develop ways for students to overcome them. Using data, Tinto (1998) advocated for college faculty and administrators to take research on student persistence from theory and put it into practice through reorganizing the academic and administrative side of higher education. He proposed (a.) development of learning communities which encourage student services staff and faculty to work more closely together in helping students with class work and

the requirements for making it through college, (b.) classroom reorganization that connects learning experiences and working interdependently with other group members, promoting learning and retention plus developing citizenship and responsible participation, (c.) reorganization of the first year of college as a stand-alone academic unit that would allow faculty and staff to organize their work in ways that best serve their students, and (d.) restructuring of the academic organization to connect the faculty as learners so that they too can gain from being shared, connected learners.

Carey (2005) described that Florida State University, an institution that graduates White and African American students at about the same rate, stated their success is in part because they employ professional full-time advisors who contact students at least three times a semester. The advisors are wherever the students are—in the library, in the student union, or in residence halls.

The Family Education Model (FEM) can be used to increase retention of Native Americans and mitigate the multiple negative effects of poverty, alcoholism, domestic abuse, drug abuse, nuclear family breakdown, and so forth. This model builds an extended family structure within the tribal college environment, enhancing the student's sense of belonging and empowerment (HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002). By using the FEM, families are helped to identify and develop their strengths, rather than to passively receive services designed and delivered by professionals. The program consists of nine principles developed to increase the support for students through intense involvement by their families.

Fox (2005) recommended the following to non-Native student affairs professionals and faculty: Network with Native American faculty and staff on campus, learn something about Native American students attending your institution and the tribal nations they represent, do not generalize about Native Americans or promote stereotypes in your classrooms or programs, become familiar with the support services for Native American students on your campus, use the resources of Native American studies programs, hire and promote Native American faculty and staff in all areas of the institution, do not assume that mainstream teaching methods are appropriate for Native American students, encourage academic disciplines in your institution to recruit and admit Native Americans for the degree programs, integrate more Native American content into curriculum and programming, partner with tribal colleges and Native American organizations, and place value on diversity in action as well as words.

Conclusion

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explore factors that help or hinder successful completion of a bachelor's degree by students from the Chippewa Cree Tribe. The literature review provided the theoretical framework and background necessary for understanding student persistence and retention at the college level. The review covered four areas: (a.) factors related to persistence before entering college, (b.) issues related to student persistence and institutional retention during college, (c.) factors specifically related to persistence of Native American students, and (d.) strategies for increasing student persistence and retention.

Chapter 3 presents the methods that were used to gather information from Chippewa Cree graduates. Graduates were asked to share, in-depth, their stories explaining what helped or hindered them during their college experience as well as what they believed would help other Native American students to be successful students.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Background and Purpose

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explore factors that help or hinder successful completion of a bachelor's degree by students from the Chippewa Cree Tribe. There is a difference between the student who seeks a 4-year degree and one whose goal is met by completion of a 2-year degree. This study did not address the success of a student meeting the goal of a 2-year degree attainment. Instead it focused on students whose goal was to complete a 4-year degree. This chapter will present the methods used to obtain information from Chippewa Cree graduates who have graduated during the last eight years. This chapter describes the participants, design, and procedures used to obtain the data. The research questions that were addressed in this study were:

1. What factors do Native American students of the Chippewa Cree Tribe think helped their educational journey until successful completion?
2. What factors do Native American students of the Chippewa Cree Tribe think hindered their educational journey towards successful completion?
3. What recommendations towards successful completion of a degree would these Native American graduates of the Chippewa Cree Tribe give other Native American students, teachers of Native American students, and administrators working with Native American students?

Research Design

Members from each individual Native tribe bring unique cultural experiences and perspectives to the classroom, and increasing the understanding of this particular population is important in increasing its graduation rates. In order to understand what students from the Chippewa Cree Tribe experience on their path to completing a 4-year degree and how they perceive the factors that helped and hindered their progress, a grounded theory approach will be used. Glaser and Strauss (1967), the pioneers of generating grounded theory, described the theory thus:

Grounded theory is a strategy for handling data in research, providing modes of conceptualization for describing and explaining. The theory should provide clear enough categories and hypotheses so that crucial ones can be verified in present and future research; they must be clear enough to be readily operationalized in quantitative studies when these are appropriate. The theory must also be readily understandable to sociologists of any viewpoint, to students, and to significant laymen. (p. 3)

The researchers further explained, “one generates conceptual categories or their properties from evidence; then the evidence from which the category emerged is used to illustrate the concept” (p. 23).

Gay and Airasian (2000) stated, “Qualitative research seeks to probe deeply into the research setting in order to obtain understandings about the way things are, *why* they are that way, and *how* participants in the context perceive them” (p. 16).

Shank (2006) explained that grounded theory is a method of building theory from the ground up and that the role of any theory is to make sense of what is happening in a particular setting. He asserted that the focus in grounded theory is to unravel elements of experience and use interrelationships to build theory that enables the researcher to

understand the nature and meaning of an experience for a particular group of people in a particular setting. The researcher constantly reviews field notes and attempts to provide explanations to guide future interviews. These interviews then confirm or disconfirm the explanation. There is a constant shift from interviewing and collecting data to analyzing. With this in mind, the process of grounded theory was used for this study to discover what students from the Chippewa Cree Tribe perceived as making them successful in their educational endeavor, where so many fail.

Participant Criterion and Selection

Participant criteria were simple: (a.) Participants must have been enrolled members of the Chippewa Cree Tribe, and (b.) they had to have graduated with a bachelor's degree within the last eight years. Glaser and Strauss (1967) explain that “theoretical sampling is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges” (p. 45). Furthermore, the initial decisions for collection of data are based on a general subject or problem area. Creswell (1998) noted, “For a grounded theory study, the investigator chooses participants based on their ability to contribute to an evolving theory” (p. 118). He further noted that theoretical sampling, to help the researcher form the theory, is customary in grounded theory research. In following these guidelines of theoretical sampling, fellow educators volunteered names and contact information of prospective participants who they believed would be willing to share extensively about their college experiences and who would provide different perspectives across the population. The

researcher obtained additional names (of other graduates and of student service personnel) from the participants during the interview process, employing snowball sampling. There was no master list of all bachelor degree graduates from the Chippewa Cree Tribe, but personnel in Stone Child College's Foundations and Research department provided an extensive list of contacts. In discovering grounded theory, sampling is not as preplanned and controlled as it is in studies that collect facts and test hypotheses (Glacer & Strauss, 1967). Instead, sampling is based on saturation of categories allowing for theory to emerge and become stable in the development of properties (Glacer & Strauss, 1967).

Once approved by the MSU-Bozeman human subjects review board, potential participants were contacted by phone and e-mail requesting their voluntary participation. Upon agreement, graduates were asked if they were enrolled members of the Chippewa Cree Tribe. If so, arrangements to meet for an interview were made. All interviews were face-to-face and held either in the researcher's office, the participant's office or the Hilton Garden Inn in Missoula, MT. The location was dependent on what was comfortable and convenient for the participant.

Data Verification

Gay and Airasian (2000) wrote, "Triangulation is another important and powerful approach used to establish the credibility of a qualitative research study. Triangulation is a form of cross-validation that seeks regularities in the data by comparing different participants, settings, and methods to identify recurring results" (p. 252). For triangulation purposes in this study, in addition to interviewing the graduates, the

researcher interviewed five student services staff from two separate colleges. Student services personnel participants were identified by asking graduates, during their interview, to volunteer names of student services personnel that were particularly helpful to them. From this list, five student services personnel agreed to participate in the study. Each was interviewed in their own office, on their respective campuses, using the same procedures as with the graduates.

In addition to triangulation, the researcher employed the following efforts, in combination, to maximize validity and reduce researcher bias:

1. Three peer auditors were employed to verify the trustworthiness of the collection and analysis of the data. One, who is employed with the Chippewa Cree Tribe, has earned a doctorate degree and is familiar with qualitative research, reviewed and made suggestions that were used for developing the interview protocol. The second two peer auditors, both work with Native Americans as teachers and administrators and have research experience. Both were briefed on the study, method of data collection and storage, and any questions were answered. One reviewed the data and how the themes were developed, randomly tracing themes back to the transcripts for verification, as well as looking for possible missed themes. The other reviewed the themes for accuracy and cultural relevancy, as well as, confirming that the themes were legitimately drawn from the data gained from the manuscripts. Written accounts were kept for each of these meetings.

2. The researcher made a concerted effort both to obtain participant trust and comfort by giving each participant ample time to adjust to the interview setting and procedure and to eliminate interruptions during the interview process, thus providing opportunities to collect more detailed and honest information from participants.
3. Through the use of member checking, participants were given the opportunity to verify whether their thoughts and observations were being adequately and accurately depicted in the collection of the data. The researcher used verbatim accounts of interviews, including quotes, by collecting and recording data with tape recordings. Interviews were transcribed within a week of the interview and sent to the participant to check for accuracy and message intent. All but two transcripts were verified for accuracy, with only minor editing on a couple. Several attempts were made to contact the two graduates who did not verify their transcript, but no response was received.
4. The researcher recorded in a journal her reflections, concerns, and uncertainties during the study and referred to them when examining the data collected (Creswell, 1998; Gay & Airasian, 2000).

Data Collection

This grounded theory study used a one-on-one partially structured interview protocol to discover participants' perceptions as to what helped or hindered them, or the Chippewa Cree students they worked with, during their college experience. Participants were interviewed individually using a peer-reviewed interview protocol form that had 10

open-ended questions for graduates and 5 open-ended questions for student services personnel (Creswell, 1998). The same protocol and similar questions were used for all interviews. Questions were slightly reworded for student service personnel to make them more applicable. The primary questions were determined after preparing the literature review and concluding that it is unclear why the retention rate of Native American students is so much lower than that of other populations. A copy of the questionnaire form for graduates can be found in Appendix D. A copy of the questionnaire form for student services personnel can be found in Appendix E. All participants agreed to the interviews being recorded and the researcher made descriptive and reflective notes immediately following each interview, as recommended by Creswell (1998). These notes were reviewed to verify voice inflections and pauses on the tape during transcribing in an effort to identify strong emotion or extensive thoughtfulness on a topic.

The researcher began the interviews by building a sense of comfortableness by explaining confidentiality issues, the purpose of the research, and answering questions. After answering any questions, the researcher obtained a consent form to participate, which included an additional signature agreeing to be recorded. A copy of the graduate and student services consent form can be found in Appendices B and C respectively. Next, interview questions were asked without attempting to guide answers and the interviewer used some impartial prompting and clarifying questions as needed to encourage to participant to fully respond about the research topic, as recommended by Creswell (1998) to “be respectful and courteous and offer few questions and advice” (p. 125). In an effort to wind the interview down slowly, participants were asked to choose a

pseudonym that they would like to be identified with. Next, demographic information for participants was collected. For graduates it included address, gender, age, marital status, whether or not the participant speaks a Native tongue, whether the participant has children at home, the educational attainment of his or her parents, the degree earned by the participant, degree granting institution, if and where the participant transferred from. In closing the interview, the participants were reminded about the importance of reviewing their transcript for accuracy and asked how they would like to review their interview transcript. All participants chose e-mail and thus, e-mail addresses were collected. Finally each participant was thanked, assured again of the confidentiality of their comments, and asked to respond about the accuracy of the transcript in a timely manner. Following the interview, the researcher immediately made notes in the journal, including notes about voice inflections or pauses that signaled increased emotional expression or additional thoughtfulness on the topic discussed. The researcher also made notes on needed changes to the interview protocol. After each individual interview, the researcher transcribed the interview, made reflections on the protocol, and noted needed changes. Once the interview was transcribed, the researcher immediately sent a copy to the participant for verification of its accuracy. If a response was not received within a week, a reminder was sent. Thirty-three out of 35 transcripts were verified.

Data Management and Storage

The researcher electronically backed up all of the transcripts and printed two paper copies. One was locked in a file cabinet for safe keeping with the tape. The other

was put in a working file for the first reading session. All working documents were kept confidential and stored in a locked file cabinet.

Data Analysis

The intent of this grounded theory study was to generate a theory that may or may not be tested through further research. Grounded theory is used to study how people interact, take actions, or respond to a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). This is done by collecting data through in-depth interviews, making multiple visits to the field, developing categories of information, seeing how these categories are related, or not, and then proposing a theory, hypothesis, or visual diagram explaining the theory (Creswell, 1998). At this point, the study may end, or additional purposeful interviews may be conducted to clear up a “fuzzy” picture.

After transcribing two interviews, the researcher began open coding to form initial categories of information. The researcher used a “zigzag” process—out to the field to gather information, analyze the data, back to the field to gather more information, analyze the data, and so forth (Creswell, 1998). This procedure continued through the data collection process. Within each of these steps, the researcher employed constant comparison methodology in which she constantly compared new data from transcripts with previously collected data for new topics or concepts. Multiple sources were used to corroborate the data, with the most common source being other interview respondents, which included graduates and student services personnel, as well as the researcher’s journal.

For this study, the researcher followed the standard process described by Creswell (1998) for data analysis:

1. The researcher used open coding to form initial categories. After obtaining three or four transcripts, the researcher found a quiet place and did a first reading to become familiar with the data. During the first reading, the researcher got a feeling for the data while making notes in the margins, highlighting important sections, and underlining issues that seem important. Next, the researcher carefully read each transcript paragraph by paragraph to identify emerging themes or threads. These were noted on the bottom of the transcripts in red pen. Data was transferred onto 3x5 cards so that topics could be sorted into groups identifying themes as the researcher looked for properties to further understand the category. The researcher did not use predetermined categories.
2. After concepts were initially categorized, the researcher moved to the next level of analysis to determine if there was a relationship between categories or if a condition might have resulted from a category. The data on the cards were moved around and looked at in different ways and explored with a peer as the researcher looked for central themes and explored what influenced or caused that theme. This step is called axial coding.
3. The next step is selective coding, in which the researcher identified a core category and integrated the other subcategories around it. At this point, Glaser and Strauss (1967) recommend writing a story that integrates the categories

from the axial coding procedure. This story will explain the conditions that influence the phenomenon, specify strategies or actions that result from the phenomenon, and identify the context or conditions that influence the strategies for this phenomenon (Cresswell, 1998). From this, the researcher integrated all the subcategories to the core category to identify and explain how they are related, thus answering the question of what factors helped or hindered graduates from the Chippewa Cree tribe in their educational experience.

In summary, the researcher continually collected, analyzed, and compared data until themes became saturated and no new information was found. Crazy Bull (1997) suggested that data and conclusions be discussed before being reported to make sure there are no misinterpretations or exploitations of participants. The data was discussed with two peers. One reviewed the data and how the themes were developed, randomly tracing themes back to the transcripts for verification, as well as looking for possible missed themes. The other reviewed the themes for accuracy and cultural relevancy, as well as, confirming that the themes were legitimately drawn from the data gained from the manuscript.

Conclusion

This study explored factors that help or hinder successful completion of a bachelor's degree by students from the Chippewa Cree Tribe. Graduates were asked to share in great depth about their college experiences. In addition, they were asked to share advice that might help other Native American students during their college experience.

The researcher attempted to build a theory through analyzing the data using the processes of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. For reliability and validity, peer review of question protocol, data analysis, themes, and conclusions were employed. In addition, member checking, thick and rich description, and triangulation were used.

Chapter 4 will present the findings from the interviews.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explore factors that helped or hindered successful completion of a bachelor's degree by students from the Chippewa Cree Tribe. From this information, a theory may be developed about what factors are significant for success from the perspective of the Chippewa Cree student. This theory may then be used to better understand the college experience of Chippewa Cree students and to develop policies and programs that will increase the success rate for this population. As mentioned earlier, there is a difference between the student who seeks a 4-year degree and one whose goal is met by completion of a 2-year degree. This study focused on those students seeking a 4-year degree and what they believed helped them to be successful as well as what hindered them. The three research questions addressed in this study were:

1. What factors do Native American students of the Chippewa Cree Tribe think helped their educational journey until successful completion?
2. What factors do Native American students of the Chippewa Cree Tribe think hindered their educational journey towards successful completion?
3. What recommendations towards successful completion of a degree would these Native American graduates of the Chippewa Cree Tribe give other

Native American students, teachers of Native American students, and administrators working with Native American students?

This chapter presents qualitative findings obtained through 35 face-to-face interviews with the participants. Thirty of the participants were college graduates and 5 were student services personnel whose names were provided by the graduates.

Participants

This chapter begins by presenting demographic information about the 35 participants of the study. Demographic data concerning graduates is presented first, followed by demographic information for the student services personnel.

Graduates

Of the 30 graduates, 11 (37%) were male and 19 (63%) were female, and they ranged in age from 24 to 55 years old with the average age being 34 and the median being slightly younger at 30 years old. All graduates completed their degrees between 2000 and 2007 with 20 (67%) completing degrees since 2005. The range of grade point averages reported was 2.4 to 3.9 with the average being 3.17 and the median and mode being 3.2. Twenty-eight (93%) of the graduates reported being employed or continuing in their education. When asked about marital status during their college experience, 13 (43%) reported being single, 11 (37%) reported being married, 3 (10%) reported cohabitating, and 3 (10%) reported being divorced. Twenty-two (73%) said they had children at home while they were completing their degree. Twenty-five (83%) of the graduates reported that their parents had completed high school, and 12 (40%) of those

also reported that one or both of their parents had completed at least a bachelor's degree. Twenty-eight (93%) of the graduates transferred between institutions, and 24 (80%) of those attended Stone Child College at some point in their college experience. Six (20%) reported being able to speak their Native language. The table below summarizes the above demographics:

Table 3. Summary of Graduate Demographics				
	Number/%	Range	Average	Median/Mode
Males	11/37%			
Females	19/63%			
Age		24–55	34	30
Male		25–55	38	34/27
Female		24–46	31	30/24
Yr. Deg. Com		2000–2007		2005/2006
2000	2			
2001	1			
2002	1			
2003	5			
2004	2			
2005	5			
2006	10			
2007	4			
GPA		2.4–3.9	3.17	3.2/3.2
Employed or cont. educ.	28/93%			
Marital Status				
Single	13/43%			
Married	11/37%			
Cohabit.	3/10%			
Divorced	3/10%			
Children	22/73%			
Ed. of parents				
High School	25/83%			
Bachelor's	12/40%			
Transferred betwn instit.	28/93%			
Attend. SCC	24/80%			
Spk. Nat. Lg.	6/20%			

Almost three quarters (73%) of the graduates had children at home while they were attending college, and the female students were on average 7 years younger than the males. For convenient reference, a table identifying graduates by pseudonym, gender, and age range is presented below:

Pseudonym	Gender	Age Range (in years)
Aiden	M	20-29
Albert	M	40-49
Beej	F	30-39
Betty	F	20-29
Bridget	F	20-29
Carly Jr.	F	30-39
Day	F	30-39
Eagle Sees Him	M	50-59
Gem	F	40-49
George	M	50-59
Geronimo	M	50-59
Hubbard	F	30-39
Jayci	F	20-29
Jim	M	50-59
Joe	M	30-39
John Doe	M	20-29
Julie	F	30-39
Liz	F	30-39
Mary Jane	F	20-29
Merck	F	20-29
Moses	M	20-29
Patricia	F	40-49
Patrick	M	20-29
Peter	M	20-29
PJ	F	20-29
Sally	F	20-29
Shelby	F	20-29
Shelly	F	20-29
Sweetie	F	30-39
Tricia	F	30-39

Student Services Personnel

All student services personnel who participated in the study were female and had worked in their positions for at least 7 years. All are employed at 4-year institutions within the Montana State University system. Two were employed in Havre and 3 were employed in Missoula. Job titles ranged from multicultural advisor to financial aid director, and each described her job duties as helping students to be successful in their educational endeavors. The table below lists specifics for each student services personnel participant:

Pseudonym	Job Title	Years of Experience
Jane	Financial Aid Director	18
Karen	Scholarship Coordinator	7
Leah	Associate Director of Admissions and Multicultural Coordinator	11
Mary	Multicultural Advisor	16
Terri	Associate Director of Financial Aid/Enrollment Services	17

Results

This section will present the study's results and define the themes and subthemes that emerged from careful analysis of the collected data in each of the three main categories. The themes will be introduced in the form of an outline and followed by a more expansive description of each theme and subtheme.

RQ 1. Factors that helped in completion of a college degree

a. Theme 1: Family

i. Subtheme A: Emotional support

- ii. Subtheme B: Family expectations
 - iii. Subtheme C: Desire to provide for family
 - iv. Subtheme D: Financial support
 - b. Theme 2: Personal Goal
 - i. Subtheme A: Self-motivation
 - ii. Subtheme B: Desire to have better for self and family
 - iii. Subtheme C: Determination
 - c. Theme 3: Friends/Social Support
 - d. Theme 4: Institutional Support
 - i. Subtheme A: Teachers
 - ii. Subtheme B: Financial aid
 - iii. Subtheme C: Peer mentoring and tutoring
 - e. Theme 5: Academic Preparation
 - i. Subtheme A: Stone Child College
 - ii. Subtheme B: High school
- RQ 2. Factors that hindered completion of a college degree
- a. Theme 1: Personal Issues
 - i. Subtheme A: Finances
 - ii. Subtheme B: Loneliness
 - iii. Subtheme C: Stress of commuting
 - iv. Subtheme D: Life responsibilities
 - v. Subtheme E: Discouragement

- b. Theme 2: Academic Issues
 - i. Subtheme A: Academic unpreparedness for college work
 - ii. Subtheme B: Lack of study skills
 - iii. Subtheme C: Lack of time-management skills

RQ 3. Suggestions that might improve the success rate for new students

- a. Theme 1: Personal Factors
 - i. Subtheme A: Persistence
 - ii. Subtheme B: Responsibility
 - iii. Subtheme C: Preparation for transition from high school to college
 - iv. Subtheme D: Time management
 - v. Subtheme E: Willingness to leave comfort zone and develop social skills
- b. Theme 2: Academic Factors
 - i. Subtheme A: Study skills
 - ii. Subtheme B: Class attendance
 - iii. Subtheme C: Willingness to ask for help
 - iv. Subtheme D: Lack of discouragement
 - v. Subtheme E: Academic preparedness
 - vi. Subtheme F: Completion of school work

Factors Helpful in Completing a College Degree

Within this section of Chapter 4, factors that helped graduates complete their college degrees will be discussed. Graduates were asked what or who helped them to be

successful in completing their college degree. In turn, student services personnel were asked what kinds of things help Native American students to be successful in completing their college degree. Through data analysis, the following five themes, which are listed in order of most frequent responses, emerged: family, personal goal, friends, institutional support, and academic preparation. For each theme, the findings from the graduates will be presented first, followed by the student services personnel findings. The findings are listed below from most frequent responses to least frequent responses.

Theme 1: Family

Graduates. Twenty-four (80%) of the graduates in the study indicated that family, in some way or another, was a major factor in helping them to be successful in completing a college degree. Family helped by providing emotional support, sharing expectations, motivating students' desire to provide, and offering financial support. Family members included parents, grandparents, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, and surrogate moms described as "not my real mom, but the woman who raised me."

Emotional Support. Twenty-four (80%) of the graduates described the emotional support they received from their families. Betty stated, "It had a lot to do with just having family and friends that were really supportive and really encouraging." PJ reported, "My family was a huge part of it, I believe, because they pushed me." Mary Jane said, "I'd say my main support was from my family—mainly my mom and dad, who have always been big on education, always pushed me." Albert noted, "Probably my wife, she more or less

pushed me; she said, you need to get your 4-year degree.” Shelby simply stated, “Definitely would have to be just the support from my family and friends.”

Family Expectations. Twelve graduates (40%) shared that family expectations helped them persevere in their education. Aiden referred to his family’s expectations, saying, “I didn’t want to disappoint [my parents] and I didn’t want to be a loser in their minds or be someone that failed. . . . That probably was the biggest factor.” Betty noted her family’s expectations as she emphatically stated, “It was always understood that I would go to college . . . from basically everyone, from me, from my mother. . . . It was just a given.”

Other graduates not only felt expectations from living family members, but they also shared that they persevered towards degree completion in order to fulfill the wish of a family member who had passed on. Geronimo stated:

In the back of my mind, I’ve always wanted a 4-year degree just because of my mother; she was always after us to get some kind of an education, whether it be trade school or some other kind. . . . She wanted us to be educated and to get a 4-year degree of some type. She is the one who kind of provided the drive. . . . I give a lot of credit to her. . . . She passed away when I was just starting U of M, and the day I found out I was going to graduate . . . she was the first person I thought of. Even though she’s not around, I still thanked her that she had a lot to do with that, getting my education. In fact, I prayed, you know I was praying and it made me cry knowing that, and I still said thank you Mom for all of this, for all you’ve done. If it wasn’t for you, I’d probably still be at home taking it easy and having no drive.

Patrick shared,

Freshman year, my grandmother, who is like my mother, passed away. . . . It was hard for me, but my grandma always said no matter what happens in our family, you stay in school and keep a smile on your face because the more you cry, the more you mourn, it’s not going to do anything for

me. You have to look up at the sky, or star, or cloud, and just smile. I think I took that to heart.

Desire to Provide for Family. Nine (30%) of the graduates not only shared how family supported them, but they expanded the picture as they described their need to provide for their children and their desire for a better life. Tricia said, “I’ve always been a real motivated person because I know education is very important. I can’t take care of my family if I don’t have my education.” Jayci stated, “What made me actually go back and finish was when I found out I was having a baby. Then I knew I had to get my stuff in check so I could have things for my kids, for my family—just so I can give them a better life and provide for my family and not be on any assistance programs.”

Sweetie contended:

I never wanted to depend on anybody or any kind of programs. Being a self-starter, I was motivated to do the work, even when I hated it . . . but my education put me somewhere I thought I’d never be . . . able to take care of my family, feed them, cloth them, give them other things. My kids rope, are team ropers, so horses and hobbies. We are able to do these things, whereas if I didn’t have a job, we wouldn’t do much of anything.

Day shared her feelings about the responsibility of her child in the following statement: “I knew I had a child and that I was going to have to get the degree to get a better job to help support her. My dad made me realize that ‘you have a child now; you have to try to finish this education.’”

When Shelley was asked what helped her to be successful, she quickly replied, “My daughter. [I] just wanted to be able to provide her the best that I could give her. I thought getting my degree would help it out more.”

Carly Jr. responded to the same question saying, “I had to have a lot of emotional support because I wanted to give up a lot. . . . I didn’t want to be stuck in a job. You can’t advance if you don’t have an education. So that was a motivating factor and my kids, wanting things for them, you know, wanting them to be well taken care of and happy.”

Financial Support. Seven (23%) of the graduates reported that the financial support they received from their families helped them complete their degree, as is seen in Patrick’s praises for his family: “My family, they were really supportive, my grandparents in particular. They were very excited. I am the first one to attend college, a first generation student. They saved up a lot of money for me to go to school.” Shelby also felt gratitude to her family, saying, “I don’t know where I would have been today, without their support and helping me in raising my daughter and their financial support.”

As seen in the above statements, graduates not only considered family supportive in their success, but as actively taking a role in the success by “pushing” them to continue with their studies.

Student Services Personnel. One (20%) student services participant talked directly of the importance of family support; below is Mary’s reflection:

Well, I think sometimes, if they don’t have strong family support—and I want to preface this by saying, this can happen to any kid, but this is something I can certainly say about Native kids—if they don’t have strong family support . . . in those families, it’s harder for the students when they do run into some difficulties, as everybody does in pursuing a degree; it’s just harder for those kids. Also, I think in their cultural transitioning, if they have a rough time for whatever reason, its easier for them to give up and decide that trying to adapt to this peculiar way out here isn’t worth it.

Theme 2: Personal Goal

Graduates. The second most frequent theme that emerged as being helpful to study participants in completing their college degrees was having a personal goal to complete the degree. Twenty (67%) of the graduates reported they had set a personal goal to complete a college degree. Some recall setting the goal when they were children; others said it was always just assumed. The intensity and self-understanding of this theme was seen throughout the 20 transcripts as participants shared stories about wanting better for their families and believing that a college degree would assure that they would be able to provide for their children.

Self-Motivation. Not only did they have a goal to complete a degree, but 10 (33%) of the graduates described themselves as being self-motivated to complete their degree. The strength of their self-motivation can be seen through the depth and abundance of the following memories.

Sally didn't hesitate a second to comment:

Ever since I was in sixth grade, I said, "As soon as I finish high school, I'm going to take a year off, [then] I'm going to go to Stone Child, get my 2-year, and go to Northern and get my 4-year." I did everything I said I was going to do. I kept those goals since sixth grade. Even after I had my baby, I kept the same goals.

Beej said,

Yes, I guess it was something that was expected of me, not just by my family, my immediate family, but myself. I remember talking to my classmates when we were younger growing up and I actually remember telling, making a bet with this other kid in my class about how I was going to be a lawyer by the time I was 24 or something like that. . . . It was something I had always thought of and I always wanted to do.

Patrick relayed the following:

I did have a goal to go to school. My mom said that from when I was a young boy, I always had books in my hand, never played with toys hardly. [I] was always really smart and she always thought—I guess I always told her—I wanted to be a lawyer. . . . She said that from the day I said that, [she knew] I was going to go to school. From high school she knew it, and I just can't imagine life without school.

Sweetie asserted, “Oh yes, I never lost sight of getting my bachelor’s. It did take a while, but I never lost sight of it. It was always a goal and something that I always wanted to do because I just felt like a lot of people in my family doubted me, and I knew I could do it.”

Moses shared, “I knew I wanted to go to college my whole entire life. My father graduated with his bachelor’s degree and then moved on to his master’s degree, so that furthered my determination.”

Desire to Have Better for Self and Family. Seven (23%) of the graduates shared a desire to provide better for their families, referring either to their status before attending college or to their childhood background. These recollections are seen in the statements below.

Bridget stated, “My goal was to go to college. We grew up with limited resources so I knew that I wanted my life to be different. I always knew I needed to go to college.”

John Doe explained:

I think college was always the plan. My parents never went to college, and they instilled into all my brothers and sisters that it was what we did after high school. They always instilled . . . the importance of college. That’s the only way we’re going to make something of ourselves. That wasn’t the only way, but that was the way, if we wanted to live a certain way, if we didn’t want to have to go through the struggles they went through. It was

kind of imposed on us [and] we just accepted that college was going to be the next step.

Determination. Five (17%) of the graduates felt that their personal determination helped them complete a degree. The first thing Moses said when he was asked what helped him to be successful was “determination, number one.” John Doe assessed himself, saying, “I was very driven internally.” Jim said, “I guess my own persistence; I’ve always wanted a higher education degree.” Hubbard immediately replied “It was my determination to do it” when asked what or who helped her to be successful in completing a college degree.

Student Services Personnel. All five (100%) of the student services personnel agreed that when students are self-motivated and have determination, it is more likely they will persist through their course of study, especially if it is divided into manageable steps. Leah, one of the student services personnel, whose background is similar to that of many of the graduates, keenly pinpointed this strategy in the following statement:

I think it’s [having goals] absolutely essential to success, especially in our first year. You’ve got to be able to, and you know, we as Native people, we don’t think in terms of what’s going to happen a year from now, 2 years from now, 3 years from now. . . . I don’t know if we are taught to not think that way, or it’s just part of our culture. So when a freshman comes in, they can’t see beyond that first semester of school, and that is why developing a plan of study helps them to see that once I finish this semester, I’m going to be taking these classes [next semester]. If they don’t see that, they have a hard time establishing those goals and how to get from point A to point B, all the way through graduation.

Theme 3: Friends/Social Support

Graduates. Third in frequency of responses, 12 (40%) of the Chippewa Cree graduates emphasized that their friendships were very supportive during their college experience. Friends ranged from an individual person to a tight-knit group as well as people who shared the same racial background. The graduates recalled studying together, encouraging one another, sharing gas money by driving together, giving emotional support, and enjoying social time. The significance of friends can be seen in the following comments.

Julie said, “My friends support[ed] me in going, and myself, [we were] taking the same classes . . . drive together, study together.”

Betty noted, “I think at the beginning, it had a lot to do with just having family and friends that were really supportive and really encouraging.”

Shelby answered, “Definitely would have to be just the support from my family and my friends” when asked.

Tricia recalled:

I had a lot of good friends . . . the Natives that were around there and staying in school helped me a lot too. . . . When I first got there [college], I didn’t feel comfortable and I just wanted to come home; I didn’t want to say there and they helped me work through all of that. . . . Then after [the first year] I felt fine. After you get through all of those little rough spots, then you are able to know where to go and what to do after that. You know there are people out there to help.

Student Services Personnel. None of the student services personnel mentioned the importance of friends specifically as a persistence factor, but three identified the importance of social support through advice like “join student groups,” “become involved

and get connected,” and “make contacts.” Delving deeper into the importance of friendships, as expressed by the graduates in the above paragraphs, Mary, a student services participant, said,

So if they come here as freshman, one of the things that really helps them to succeed is to get a sense of belonging and to find their niche. One of the reasons that any university doesn't retain students is if they don't feel they belong. So I encourage my students, in general, to look for other people who are interested in the same things. Look at the student groups that are available to really explore things with their classmates to find things in common. . . . So for Native people, it's often an issue of, there are different kinds of adaptation, but it's often a sense of not being alone because kids who come from reservations do come from communal situations. . . . I also think that some of the ways that Indian students become successful is if they find strong mentors . . . people who can say not only “this is how things work around here,” but you know, “here are some strengths I see in you.”

Theme 4: Institutional Support

Graduates. Mentioning it at the same frequency level, 12 (40%) of the graduates reported that teachers, financial aid, peer mentoring, and tutoring were important in their successful completion of a degree. Since these items were described as being generated through faculty or student services personnel, they were categorized under the theme of institutional support. Less formal study groups, made up of friends, were considered the support of friends and were discussed above within that theme.

Teachers. Twelve (40%) of the graduates shared stories of how their teachers were a positive force in their successful completion of a degree. Students expressed a common feeling of appreciation and gratitude for the attention given to them by their teachers. For example, Betty said, “As I got further into my degree, there were professors

that I really liked and really trusted and I would go . . . and talk to them about problems, and not just with that class, but really, with everything. . . . They were willing to really put their time in.” George concurred, “You know, all the Northern teachers were pretty helpful. They really wanted to see everybody that was in the teacher program to succeed, so they did a lot to help. If you were behind, they kind of helped you along.” Patrick praised his teacher by saying,

She taught me a lot about myself, [she] put on potluck dinners for the students, and it was really good to go to her home and feel, have a home to go to, because we were so far away from home. . . . We were in that awkward stage of being adults, but not really being an adult and being away from the reservation. . . . She or we would cook pizza, or we would all cook pizza together . . . and plan for some kind of other event we would want to do so we could be together. . . . She would offer her home up, she would leave it unlocked if you needed to go do laundry, if you needed to just go and sit.

Tricia appreciated the help she received from faculty in Native American studies, explaining,

When I first got there it was, I didn’t feel comfortable, and I just wanted to come home. I didn’t want to stay there and they helped me work through my financial aid because I wasn’t getting a Pell grant, so I didn’t know what to do, I couldn’t cover the cost and stuff. They helped me work through all of that. They told me where to go and what to do, you know, just their staff, even though they have to run the department for the degree, but they also helped the Native American students as much as they can. That helped a lot, just sticking it out.

Financial Aid. Eight (27%) graduates expressed that the financial aid they received helped them be able to complete their degrees. Their gratitude can be seen in the following comments.

Patrick praised, “They are willing to help out a lot, so I’m very thankful for those two ladies in financial aid.”

Joe expressed appreciation for funding he received through the Tribe, adding that it “helps relieve some of the financial pressure . . . lets you concentrate on school a little bit more, instead of working on finances and paying bills.”

John Doe articulated, “Financially, the Tribe played a big role in it too because we are not a very rich tribe but they gave me quite a bit of money to go to school, and it helped with a lot of my expenses.”

Beej said, “I got that scholarship [David and Lucille Packard Foundation Scholarship] and it made me realize that I needed to take it seriously and get this done because it was a lot of money and it was all paid for.”

Liz explained how a financial aid officer helped her straighten out her difficulties:

It was real helpful, the funding; I was on higher ed [scholarship from the Tribe], so that was good. I worked on weekends for gas money, so that helped. . . . Financial aid helped me because I went to Northern before that and I messed up, so my funding was kind of messed up with that. . . . I had to jump through a lot of hoops . . . I had to get admitted, I had to go and sit in front of a committee and ask to be admitted and tell them what I was going to do different this time. She is the one who helped me through that whole process.

Peer Mentoring and Tutoring. Five (17%) of the graduates said peer mentoring and tutoring were helpful in their completing their degrees and shared stories of how they started as a benefactor of the program and then progressed into being a mentor to other students. Even though the frequency of responses was less than that for the themes of teachers and financial aid, the depth of the conversation and the intensity with which they spoke, the excitement and enthusiasm heard in their voices, far outweighed the emotion

shown in discussions around the themes of teachers and financial aid. Following are some descriptions of their experiences in this area.

Beej explained, “I got into the Native American studies peer mentoring. I had a mentor and then I also became a mentor. I participated in a lot of their study programs that they provided—assistance, stuff like that. . . . It kind of shows you how to, where to go and where to look when you need help.”

Shelley said,

My study habits weren't as developed as they should have been. . . . I had to learn different skills, different ways to take tests; it was just a lot of little study skills I didn't know when I got there and I had to learn over time. I went to all of those study groups, study sessions, and they would set up tutors and study skills classes, or you would just visit with them and they would give you little tips on how to study. . . . My grades got better all the way through.

Graduates who shared about peer mentoring and tutoring felt very strongly that their participation in these programs was very helpful and that all students should take advantage of these opportunities, even before they come to a point when they actually need help. In fact, several shared that they had signed up their first day on campus and noted that it was one of the best things they did during their college experience.

Student Services Personnel. Three (60%) student services personnel discussed the importance of students getting to know instructors. In addition, two (40%) described their role in fostering student–instructor relationships, and one described herself as an advocate for students when necessary. She relayed several instances when students would have dropped out rather than contact an instructor on their own, yet after receiving help and working through the issue with the instructor, the student persisted in school. One

common thread in the discussion about the student–instructor relationship, from both the graduates’ and student services personnel’s perspective, was the importance of students learning where to go for needed help and then how to ask for it. Additional information on this topic will be included later in the section discussing suggestions to improve the success rate for new students.

Three (60%) of the student services personnel noted the importance of students planning ahead and being proactive about taking advantage of financial aid opportunities. By doing this, Native American students could increase their likelihood of success, and Terri, a student services personnel, noted that they could do this by “taking advantage of opportunities like financial aid sessions to fill out FAFSA, etc., [and by] knowing about deadlines and meeting them.”

Jane, another student services personnel, added,

One of the first things I think about is if they plan ahead. . . . Sometimes we see students that come in at the last minute and say “I want to go to school,” and they haven’t really thought about why or how or when. . . . Sometimes it’s good for them to plan what they want to do with their life, in the planning stage, and I’m talking in the financial aid arena because we see a lot of students come in at the last minute and they don’t have any financial aid forms filled out, no paperwork filled out, no direction on how they are going to pay for their fees, buy their books, live for next month or two or three. . . . So I think planning is a big thing...getting the paperwork ready.

All five (100%) of the student services personnel mentioned mentoring and tutoring programs when they were asked, “What kinds of things do you think help make Native Americans successful in their college experience?” One common thread that surfaced over and over throughout the interviews with student services personnel was the idea that students need to be aware of the services available to them. Among these

services are peer mentoring and tutoring, which are for all students, not only those who are having difficulties. In agreement with the graduates, student services personnel shared that participation in these programs prepare the students for a time when they might need extra help. Furthermore, students utilizing these opportunities have a clearer understanding of how the university system works, what services are available, and how to tap into those services. The importance of these services is reflected in the following quotes from student services personnel.

Leah shared:

Of course the support services have to be there. I know when I was a student, we didn't have them—they may have existed, I just didn't reach out for them, as far as support services go. Now, a primary focus of our student services is retention.... I think those that take advantage of them, as far as things like tutoring, counseling, or even just having someone to facilitate issues that they have with financial aid or the registrar's office or faculty.

Although not specifically addressing peer mentoring, Mary insists that having a mentor is invaluable:

There are very strong cultural differences sometimes that are subtle enough that students can't express those differences in how they make them feel other than being homesick or feeling lost or feeling odd, and when they get into those situations, it's good for them to have a mentor to sit them down and say, "You know what, you're a really good writer" or "I've listened to you explain things and you have a way of communicating that's so strong, it's so powerful, and this is going to take you a long way." So, I think, finding mentors, whether they're staff people, whether they're faculty, whether they are just older students—that's among the most important things that can happen to students.

Theme 5: Academic Preparation

Graduates. Fifth in frequency of response, 10 (33%) of the graduates reported that their academic preparation, either from high school or at Stone Child College, helped them to deal with the rigorousness of a bachelor's degree program.

Stone Child College. Seven (23%) of the graduates believed that their experience at Stone Child College, a 2-year tribal college on the Rocky Boy Reservation, prepared them for a successful transition to a 4-year institution. Sally said, "Stone Child helped a lot. My advisor knew the program I was getting into, so she told us what we would be doing. She was really helpful." Jayci agreed, "I went to Stone Child first; it got me prepared for bigger schools.... You knew what to expect and you knew that it's your responsibility to get your work done." Both Bridget and Merck felt that their business instructor at Stone Child College prepared them to transfer and successfully complete a 4-year degree. Bridget admitted, "My business instructor was a large part of my success at Stone Child. I learned a lot from him." Merck echoed the feeling, saying, "He [SCC business instructor] was the one that helped me."

High School. An additional three (10%) of the graduates reported they were academically prepared for college through their high school curriculum.

Student Services Personnel. All (100%) of the student services personnel believed that being academically prepared was important for students to be successful in completing a degree, and they added that students should develop a plan in high school that included advanced courses designed for college preparation. Furthermore, they

discussed the difficulties caused by the lack of academic preparation and noted the necessity to properly place students in college classes, as seen in the following quote from Mary:

Depending on the school that people come from—sometimes any student coming from a small town or town where there is not a strong tax base so that the schools are really good—sometimes they will come with some deficiencies, in math particularly, and that’s common among, that isn’t just American Indian students, that’s all students. They will come with some math deficiencies or if they’re a kid who hasn’t liked to read and have done more TV watching and fooling around outside than reading, their verbal skills may be kind of weak. Those kinds of students need to have the proper placement. They shouldn’t be placed in classes that are above their ability. When you are placing them, you need to let them know that this, there is no label on this class. . . . What you’re doing is building skills. So it’s not a matter of “you’re too dumb,” but “you need to build the skill; this doesn’t have to do with your intellect.”

Outliers

One graduate stated that faith helped them be successful in completing a 4-year degree, another said God, and a third person said their time spent in the library waiting on a ride gave them plenty of study time, which in turn allowed them to be successful in their classes, enabling them to successfully complete a 4-year degree.

Factors That Hindered Completion of a College Degree

Within this section of Chapter 4, obstacles graduates faced in their completion of a college degree will be presented. Graduates were asked, “Did you face any hindrances (difficulties) in completing your degree?” Student services personnel were asked, “What kinds of hindrances do they [Native American students] face in completing their college degree?” Twenty-nine of the 30 graduates (97%) reported facing difficulties during their

college experience. Through data analysis of the types of difficulties reported, the following two themes emerged: personal issues and academic issues. Within each theme, the findings from the graduates will be presented first, followed by those from student services personnel. The findings are listed below in order from most responses to least.

Theme 1: Personal Issues

Graduates. This portion of Chapter 4 will be devoted to describing the personal issues identified. Through analysis, this theme was divided into the following five subthemes: finances, loneliness, stress of commuting, life responsibilities, and discouragement.

Finances. The most common challenge affecting 14 (47%) of the graduates was finances. Graduates described the problem in two different ways. One struggle was finding enough money to live and to finance their education. The second struggle involved the processes and paperwork required to qualify for financial aid to help finance their college education. Graduates had very explicit stories about car problems, learning to budget, and the embarrassment of asking teachers to sign off on an attendance and grade slip so they could receive a check from their funding source every month or so. The feelings of frustration and embarrassment caused by financial hardships are expressed in the following statements.

Bridget recalled, “Finances are always a problem when you are in college. A few times we had car problems. . . . We had to ride the bus.” Albert said, “It [college tuition] was expensive. . . . I had to get a loan. It wasn’t a whole lot, and it all went to covering

my tuition and fees. . . . I'm still paying on that loan." John Doe sighed while sharing, "The hindrances always seemed like they were financial, though, more than anything. . . getting used to being independent and taking care of people and it was always tough, but I think in the end, I always had just enough." Merck's recalled hindrances boiled down to "just traveling back and forth and money." Day admitted, "Just paying for the expenses are kind of hard. . . . I tried to work odd jobs on the side. . . . I didn't know about the Pell not being there for you all the time. I transferred to so many schools that by the time I decided to graduate, I didn't have any Pell, so I was trying hard to work for enough money." Even though Liz had good financial support, when asked about hindrances she adamantly declared they were:

Mostly financial. It was a little embarrassing because on higher ed [scholarship from the Tribe] they made us take around a grade sheet and get it signed. That was embarrassing. That was something I didn't like to have to do. We should have just been able to go off our final grades and if you didn't get it, you should just have not been able to get funded the next year. That was kind of degrading, you know, to have to do that for our higher ed.

P.J. affirmed Liz's statement with the following response:

Funding was a huge difficulty, a huge barrier, I mean just fighting with people, like I had a hard time the first couple of years I think I was on higher ed, which was really hard for getting your checks up here, I'm sorry to say. Turning in your progress reports and having all your teachers sign them because at the 4-year level, they don't want to mess around and sign a piece of paper every month and a half so you can get a check. . . . I think that was a barrier rather than a help for me. . . . I was going to class every day, I was earning my degree, so if the help is available, why not use it, but at the same time, it was very humiliating. I hated asking them to sign off on that. . . . It was humiliating because it's none of their business and then some of them are negative about it. "Oh, she's on a free ride" or whatever.

Loneliness. The second most common difficulty graduates recalled was the loneliness they experienced. Nine (30%) of the graduates shared stories about how difficult it was to move away and the difficulty of being gone from their home. The different forms and levels of its intensity can be felt in the following quotes. Shelley stated, “It was hard to move away. That was one of the hardest things. Being gone.” Patrick agreed, saying, “I wanted to be home with my friends and family because everyone still lived here [Rocky Boy]. It was a huge hindrance for me.” Beej sighed and said, “One of the things that was hard was moving away from my family, but I always thought to myself, well they’re only a couple of hours away. I can go see them.” Mary Jane simply stated, “The homesickness was a big thing.” John Doe added, “I think my first summer there I did get the blues. I wanted to come home. I spent the whole summer struggling.” Betty also recalled:

The big thing when I first got to college—and I think this has more to do with going away versus if you stay here or go to like even Northern—is basically being lonely. I was really independent my whole life, but when I went, it was a little bit of a shock, buying groceries for the first time by yourself, and just being alone, and I think that was hard for me. A lot harder than I anticipated it was going to be, you know; it really surprised me that I was lonely and that kind of thing and I had a hard time with just being really down, you know, which of course, can get in the way of getting things done. So that, at first, for the first semester, or even maybe the first year, I really had a hard time with that until I really made friends and stuff like that.

Geronimo reminisced:

I was really lonely. I was lonesome, and I always tell my wife that if it wasn’t for that little cell phone, I probably would have come home. Every time I would get lonely, it would be right there and I would be able to call her, or I would call somebody and kind of draw myself away from the loneliness and wanting to quit. It is a wonder I made it through at that time because it was about the toughest time that I had about that time of my

life. I'm used to being around Native people and it was different, being around people my age and all that and to be down there [at college] amongst all those people that are about the age of my children. That is about the only deal that gave me a bad time.

Stress of Commuting. Mentioning it at the same frequency rate as loneliness, nine (30%) of the graduates indicated that commuting was a continuous hardship during their completion of a degree. The frustration felt from the hassles of transportation were easily detected as discussions ranged from driving time and waiting on others to car maintenance and repairs. George said, "I guess the main difficulty was driving back and forth; it takes a toll on the cars and vehicles, and I didn't have anybody to carpool with." Albert shook his head and rubbed his arm as he said, "The driving, getting up early, staying up late—that last semester was a killer. It was three times to Great Falls a week. . . I was driving alone." P.J. said animatedly, "Vehicles were huge, like when my transmission went out, I had to borrow; luckily my parents have two vehicles, so they let me use their vehicle."

Day shrugged, saying,

Driving back and forth and just sometimes your vehicle is not always going to be there. If something goes wrong, you are going to have to look for alternate resources to help you get into Havre to make it to school. Just the traveling sometimes back and forth, you needed to have money for gas to get to school and back home.

Unlike the previous four graduates, Merck carpooled, but she noted that it had its own difficulties: "Just traveling back and forth, the money. A lot of our classes were like spaced out during the day and then we traveled like kind of like in a carpool. We would

be there all day, so we would have to get there at 8 o'clock in the morning and end up staying there until sometimes 9 o'clock at night."

Although this was not the most frequent response graduates gave in discussing their difficulties in their college experience, the vivid memories, energy, and frustration with which they recalled transportation problems was significant.

Life Responsibilities. With slightly less frequent mention, eight (27%) of the graduates shared openly about the difficulty of balancing all of their life responsibilities. The ratio between male and female responses was equal. Graduates remembered making choices between going to one of their children's basketball games or studying for their next exam. Others spoke about the heart-wrenching decisions to separate from their own children for a period of time while they got adjusted to college. Some spoke about the conflicts they felt when they needed to go to class and their employer needed them to stay and work.

When asked about the difficulties she faced, Gem described her balancing act in this way:

Just managing a full-time job, a home, and kids—that was the main thing I guess. Usually I had to wait until everybody went to bed to do my homework. . . .When you don't have a job and financial resources, then I see people giving up and quitting because they need to work to support their families. But I did both. It was really hard, sleepwise. I didn't have a life for three and a half years. When you go to town to get groceries, you know, at least once a week at least. There were times I didn't even go to town a month at a time. I didn't have the time. I would go to work, take care of that, then go home and take care of the household stuff, and then homework. On weekends, the same thing. I would just sit there on my computer and work. You feel you miss out on your kid's activities. My son was playing basketball. I would make a couple, but I missed out on a lot of things like that.

Patricia shared similar feelings, saying, “I would say that working full time and going [to school]—I went two summers and then I had to drive back and forth, going in on icy roads, working around my schedule, and when I student taught, that was probably one of the toughest.” Shelby remembered, “I think another difficulty was just balancing everything, balancing being a mother, balancing being a basketball player, balancing being a student and trying to make it all work out at once. I had a lot of help, like I said, from family, but at the same time, it was like overwhelming at times.”

Aiden recalled his feelings in the following response:

My child, her mother, and I separated and that was another stress on me I guess because I didn't have my daughter around me all the time. I always believed that I should be a parent that is right there with my child all the time. It played a big part in it. . . . I wanted to achieve something, to be good for my daughter, but then again I was away from her and it was causing stress, so I was being torn.

Discouragement. The fifth most frequent response from graduates was that discouragement was an impediment to their success in college. Seven (23%) of the graduates revealed feelings of discouragement, which sometimes arose from transitioning from the “big fish in a little pond to a little fish in a big pond,” as seen in Betty’s reflection:

Another thing that is weird is that you know, especially if you come from this community, the schools are small so I was always like the top of my class, I was always a really high achiever, so then I go there and I’m not the highest achiever, and I still obviously did well, it was a little bit daunting, it was a little bit discouraging to go there and have to actually work for an A instead of just having it be super easy.

Throughout her interview, bits and pieces of the feelings of discouragement that she felt during her college experience surfaced as Tricia shared from her heart:

I wasn't prepped for college. I didn't know how to write. I didn't know how to do anything, and then when you are from somewhere else and you go there and you have a hard time in classes. . . . There are so many students there that their parents really help them . . . they just pay for their bills with their credit cards and stuff like that. . . . My roommate didn't even stay with me for 2 or 3 weeks because she had not ever met an Indian before, so she, she was really cool, but she just didn't know what to expect. . . . We ended up getting along really well after she actually started staying. . . . I would sometimes feel a little bit angry that all these kids didn't have to, they don't have, the white kids, they don't have really extended families so they didn't have to go to ten funerals a year. . . . They had their own vehicles that their mom and dad bought them . . . they would go skiing every weekend; they looked at me differently. Nobody would talk to me that much cause I was Indian and they didn't necessarily, they weren't mean to me, they just didn't know how to approach me or talk to me I guess. . . . It was hard for me to actually stay and go to school while everybody was out there partying, and they would call my room and talk to me.

The statement "it was hard for me" surfaced over and over throughout the transcripts and especially in the seven (23%) who indicated a real difficulty with discouragement, yet it wasn't made in a complaining tone but rather in a self-reflective manner. Within this group, the graduates felt they grew through the experience, even though it was difficult.

Student Services Personnel. Two (40%) student services personnel stated that finances were a difficulty many Native Americans face during their college experience. Terri added, "Students run into unexpected expenses and often they don't talk it over with a financial aid advisor or go to anyone to seek help."

Jane shared her expertise in financial matters saying,

The government says you can't be a professional student; you can't go to school forever and get aid. . . . So a lot of times we get students that have gotten two or three associate degrees and then decide to come and get their 4-year degree and they have kind of exhausted their financial aid eligibility. . . . One of the other things I see, students sometimes come and

they need to be ready for like when plan A doesn't happen, have a plan B. Sometimes the students have emergencies.

Four (80%) of the student services personnel shared that many students struggle with loneliness and explained that if students do not get connected with other students, whether through a club, mentor, or roommate, there is a much higher chance of them quitting school. Three (60%) also commented that the college campus environment can be very different from what the student has previously experienced, and if they do not have anyone to talk it over with and were not prepared for this change, they may experience what they described as culture shock or lacking adaptability skills.

Mary surmised,

I think in their cultural transitioning, if they have a rough time for whatever reason, it's easier for them to give up and decide that trying to adapt to this peculiar way out here isn't worth it, and there are varying degrees of adaptation that people have to go through. . . . I think depending on where people are from, they are going to have more or less of a problem adapting.

Terri reflected, "They need to be able to successfully navigate in both worlds by putting their culture aside or, maybe better put, pick up the tools necessary to navigate successfully on campus."

Although student services personnel described culture shock and lack of adaptation skills as hindrances to persistence, graduates used different vocabulary to describe this difficulty. They expressed similar feelings in statements about a "lack of exposure to outside the reservation" and "not knowing where to go at first, but then finding their way as they became connected with different student groups and programs."

In addition, student services personnel reflected on the importance of being open-minded and accepting of others in order to be successful in a different environment.

Only one (20%) student services personnel participant made direct references to commuting as a major difficulty for students, as seen in Jane's comment that "a lot of them are driving from Rocky Boy and if their car breaks down, then they have to have plan A or B."

Although none of the student services personnel made statements about the difficulties of balancing life responsibilities, three (60%) showed an understanding of the difficulties students faced due to extended family commitments, as seen through the comment that needing additional time to go home for a funeral was not necessarily for "just one day or a couple of hours, but possibly a week." Again, three (60%) shared that students seemed to lack an understanding of the patterns of higher education and the know-how that would allow them successful maneuvering through the system, such as attention to deadlines, being punctual to class, and asking for help. Additional suggestions made by three (60%) of the student services personnel were directed toward students being responsible for themselves and the persistence towards their degree. Jane commented, "They have to take some initiative and some responsibility, but I'm willing to help any way I can, but I won't do it for them, and I expect them to take the ball and run with it."

Finally, student services personnel didn't report discouragement as a major obstacle for students per se, but three (60%) described an awareness of this difficulty in statements about "students feeling overwhelmed and not feeling comfortable asking for

help from their professors or other resources” and recognition that sometimes when “they come up against a tough situation in school, where they flunk a class or they just don’t have a good semester, it’s easier to quit and go home.” There was also an acknowledgment that “even just having someone to facilitate issues that they have with financial aid or registrar’s office or faculty” would be helpful. From these statements, the student services personnel indicated awareness that students often feel discouraged, even to the point of quitting school.

Theme 2: Academic Issues

Graduates. A significantly smaller number of graduates described academic difficulties, compared to those noting personal difficulties, as a hindrance to college success. Through examination of the responses regarding academic difficulties, the following two subthemes developed: academic unpreparedness for college work, lack of study skills, and lack of time management skills. This portion of Chapter 4 will be devoted to describing the few academic issues identified both by graduates and student services personnel.

Academic Unpreparedness for College. Seven (23%) of the graduates clearly felt, in hindsight, that they were not academically prepared for college-level work. Five of those seven (71%) specifically discussed their deficiencies in math, as seen in the following statements.

Mary Jane recalled, “When it came to the math and sciences, I do not think I was well enough prepared as I should have been.” George said, “I’ve always had a tough time

with math. . . . I took a lot of algebra and geometry and things like that and kind of squeaked by with Cs. I guess I never was a math whiz.” Jim echoed George’s statement when he shared his lack of preparation for college by saying, “I think I was in everything except math because I never was really good at math, so I kind of struggled through the math.”

After math deficiencies, two out of the seven (29%) felt they lacked writing skills. Tricia summed up her precollege academic training thus: “I didn’t feel like I was prepared for the college work. You know what I mean. I wasn’t prepped for college. I didn’t know how to write.” Shelby felt the same way: “I struggled a lot in my writing, public speaking, which was really horrible, and I think every subject really.”

Lack of Study Skills. Five (17%) of the graduates commented that their lack of study skills caused them difficulty in their college experience. Moses said, “I didn’t know how to study and found other things to do with my time.” Shelley admitted, “My study habits weren’t as developed as they should have been because when I got there, I didn’t really know how to study. I had to learn different skills, different ways to take tests; it was just a lot of little study skills I didn’t know.”

Betty shared a similar experience:

While I was here [Rocky Boy Reservation], because I was always ahead, I never had to study. I never had to do work for any of my grades. It was just really easy, so then, going there [college], and having to learn how to study, and how to discipline myself to actually do homework, was really hard at first. It was really hard the first semester or two.

Lack of Time-Management Skills. Four (13%) of the graduates reported that the lack of time-management skills was a difficulty in the beginning of their college career.

Mary Jane expressed the transition from living at home during high school to being on her own in the following way:

In high school, my mom was constantly pushing, get your homework done. Did you do this? But when you are there [at college], you are away from home, you are curious and want to explore. You kind of forget sometimes the main reason you are there. It's like "let's go out and have fun." You go out and start meeting people and there is a party. Mom and Dad aren't there to tell you that you can't go. You have to learn to balance what was most important on your list and what you didn't really have to do. So that was a big thing I ran into.

Student Services Personnel. Four (80%) of the student services personnel discussed the difficulty students face, Native American or not, if they are not academically prepared for college-level coursework. In addition, two (40%) emphatically stated that students need to be aware of academic patterns and requirements and they need to be advised correctly and placed in the proper courses so they are successful. In addition, student services personnel stated that it wasn't that students aren't "smart" enough to succeed, but often they are guilty of "not putting themselves forward academically." Mary noted that for some, it is not culturally acceptable for them to step up, but instead they have been taught "they are supposed to be quiet, attentive, and just listen and it will come to you." Mary shared that it is quite possible that a Native student might incorrectly be perceived as lacking academic preparation due to different cultural patterns.

None of the student services personnel identified that the lack of study skills was a difficulty for students, but instead they made reference to students needing to be prepared for the "rigorous pace of college classes" and to "know patterns of academic

requirements.” It was mentioned that “a lot of them are ashamed that they don’t know how to use a library.”

One (20%) student services personnel participant noted the lack of time-management skills in the following concern: “They [students] don’t meet deadlines and are late for class, and they turn in assignments late.”

Outliers

One graduate stated that technology was a hindrance during their college experience. Another graduate said that laziness was hindering and a third expressed that they were misled by faculty and that hindered them in their college experience.

Suggestions That May Improve The Success Rate For New Students

Within this section of Chapter 4, the suggestions offered by graduates to improve the success rate for new students will be discussed. Graduates were asked, “What suggestions would you give that might improve the success rate for new students?” Student services personnel were asked, “What suggestions would you give that might improve the success rate for new Native American students?” Through data analysis, the suggestions divided into the same two themes as identified in the question of obstacles to college success: personal and academic. As some graduates reflected on the first part of their interview in which they shared what they found helpful in their own degree completion, they suggested those items for new students. Then again, as some reflected on the challenges they had to overcome to be successful, they suggested the solutions they found to challenges. Others made suggestions that were not directly connected to

items they had reported earlier in the interview as helpful or challenging, yet they felt that the suggestion would help others, even if they never employed it. In keeping with the trend of personal outweighing academic, graduates suggested more than twice the number of personal suggestions than academic suggestions (108/45).

As before, for each theme, the findings from the graduates will be presented first, followed by findings from the student services personnel. The findings are listed below from most frequent responses to least.

Theme 1: Personal Factors

Graduates. This portion of Chapter 4 will be devoted to describing the personal issues identified that may improve the success rate of new Native students. Through analysis, this theme was divided into the following five subthemes: persistence, responsibility, preparation for transition from high school to college, time management, and willingness to leave comfort zone and develop social skills.

Persistence. Eighteen (60%) of the graduates were very clear that new students needed to be encouraged to not give up, as seen in the following statements.

Betty encouraged, “There are always going to be things you don’t like and that are really hard, but just stick it out, just go through it and you’ll get past the hard part a lot quicker than you think, and it’s worth it.”

Beej asserted, “Don’t give up, because at times, you know, like, students will get overwhelmed or just feel like quitting, but in all, even if you’re not make the grade, you

can still make it and it will be worth it. It's just better to finish, just keep on going and finish."

Peter concurred, adding, "Never give up. Reach out and try new experiences. Maybe seek help if you need help. A lot of Native Americans don't do that. They aren't willing to go ask for resources."

Jim reflected:

I think they need to be free to explore what life is beyond Rocky Boy. I think a lot of kids go away, but they come back right away, right after a semester or two, they're back on the reservation, close to home. They don't give it a chance; they don't want to change. . . . Be persistent.

Tricia directed, "Just be persistent, even if you fail, you have to get back on it and keep trying and trying because eventually you are going to finish if you keep trying."

As the above statements from graduates demonstrate, the suggestion of persistence is laced with a heavy dose of encouragement, which was a common thread throughout the graduates' interviews. In addition, three (10%) graduates shared further insight into persistence by reminding new students to "not forget where they came from" and to remember the importance of "keeping your culture."

Responsibility. Twelve (40%) of the graduates in the study felt that high school graduates need to be more independent than they were in high school as well as more responsible for themselves and college requirements. Moses shared, "I think a lot of students don't realize how independent it is from high school to college, the transition, how much you have to depend on yourself. It's like a whole new world, and rather than having homework every day, you have a lot of tests." Julie added:

They need to make them more independent instead of dependent. . . . They need more exposure to the outside than just the reservation. They need to know that there is life out there. . . . I think that our curriculum isn't tough enough for them to make it on the outside. . . . We don't prepare them for the outside; we coddle them for an easy life.

Preparation for the Transition From High School to College. Showing a decrease in frequency of responses, 10 (33%) of the graduates suggested that new students need to prepare for the transition from high school to college if they want to be successful in completing a college degree. Within this category, graduates included the need for being responsible, independent, and ready for new experiences. Specifically, four (13%) of the graduates were adamant that the high school students need more exposure to the outside, meaning more contact with people, places, and experiences off the reservation. Jim said, "The world is bigger than Rocky Boy Reservation and don't be afraid to leave it. It will always be there."

Time-Management Skills. Next in frequency of response, eight (27%) of the graduates insisted that new students need to know time-management skills if they want to be successful in college. Time-management skills ranged from prioritizing school items to practicing self-discipline. The first thing out of Bridget's mouth when asked for suggestions was "Know how to prioritize your time. That was another hindrance actually for me. I wasn't prioritizing my time very well, so I would spend more time in student groups and doing that, rather than school work. So it's get your school work done first, and then be part of student groups."

Geronimo, a nontraditional student by age but culturally traditional, summed it up saying, "It means sticking to your schedules, your study habits, getting everything done

on time. Don't wait until the last minute because that's not going to work at all. . . . So right off the bat, the only thing I could say is to get those habits down and stick to them.”

Joe agreed that students need to prepare for the transition from high school and that time-management skills are important, but he expressed his concern about whether new students even understand the importance of those skills, due to their previous training, in the following statement:

I don't know if the public schools and the college really prepare some students for university level at the state level. I think sometimes that the deadlines aren't structured, especially at Stone Child or some of the public schools, elementary schools, high schools, and secondary schools. The deadlines aren't really solid, so I think they get used to that, so they probably are going to have to concentrate a little bit more and be organized and prepare and work on getting things done ahead of time versus after the fact.

Willingness to Leave Comfort Zone and Develop Social Skills. At the same response rate, eight (27%) graduates recommended that new students needed to be willing to leave their comfort zone and develop their social skills by making new friends and being open-minded, which would then allow them to have a group of people who offer friendship and support during their college years and beyond.

Shelley advised:

New students should build their own support group. Just make friends and when you do get there, there is the Equal Opportunity Program or something, and they can set you up with a mentor and they will take you around and show you everything, and there is the American Indian Student Support Program. There are all the different clubs—I mean NAS is like, the NAS building is pretty cool. They have free printing, they have a computer lab, fax machine, and they were pretty helpful if you needed anything. They even had scholarships just through the department.

Liz encouraged new students to cross the barriers by sharing from her struggles:

The more you go—like, the first semester might be hard—but the more you go, the easier it gets. You’ll know people; they don’t have to be Indian, you would still know they were friendly; they would talk to you after they got to know you. I think that’s the biggest part for us, being out of our comfort zone—being out on the rez, being surrounded by a lot of Native Americans, that’s a comfort thing. I would recommend that they just do it. It will get easier, you might not have all Indian friends, but you’ll get to know people. I did; I got to know lots of different people. Once they get to know you, they’re not judging you. They get to know you. They might judge you when you first meet, but after a while when they get to know you, they loosen up.

Student Services Personnel. Two of the five (40%) of the student services personnel showed a deep understanding of the students’ need for encouragement to help them to persist in their college experience, as seen in the following from Mary:

I think that every student needs to feel appreciated at one time or another. People need to say out loud to students, no matter what flavor they are, they need to say, you need to be able to say, I like you, or you know, you are pretty darn smart, or that was a really funny thing you said in class. You need to be warm and human with them as much as you can.

Jane agreed, saying, “I think encouragement and being receptive to some of their culture and needs is a part too.”

All (100%) of the student services personnel stated that students needed to be responsible and able to manage “life, classes, and money.” Jane shared, “I just try to say that you need to be responsible for yourself and get to class. Sometimes we don’t lay enough responsibility on the student.” Mary expanded on the theme of responsibility:

They need to be prepared to focus and so they have to look at how many distractions they have in their life before they come here, or how many they bring with them. . . . If there are financial issues . . . or a situation back home . . . students need to take care of that before they come. . . . They need to have a plan in place.

Leah suggested students take a proactive approach:

First of all, [they need] to make the right connections on campus so they feel comfortable walking into the registrar's office and talking to the registrar or going and talking to the financial aid director. Just building those relationships is key to success for when something does come up.

All five (100%) of the student services personnel recommended that students develop skills that will help them transition successfully into a different environment.

They spoke about adjusting to different requirements than at home, knowing what to do when, and being academically, socially, and emotionally prepared. Terri suggested, "The most important thing would be to reach out. They need to contact the American Indian Support Center right away and sign up for a peer mentor. If they have issues arise, they need to reach out and ask for help." Jane confirmed the need and added, "I think student support services is a big factor in helping Native American students, which includes financial aid, tutoring, and just having a place to go to get the support they need."

It was reported earlier that eight (27%) of the graduates spoke about leaving their comfort zone and developing social skills such as making new friends and being open-minded. Three (60%) student services personnel either used the same phrase or described a similar sentiment in the following scenarios. Two (40%) student services personnel used the same phrase "stepping out of comfort zone" to describe students needing to be willing to try new things and be open to new experiences and different people. Leah, a student services personnel, described a situation in which a student may have benefited had she stepped—or been led—outside her comfort zone:

I had a girl who had a problem with—she was the only Native student in the class and she felt like an outsider. . . . She felt like she was, not singled out, but avoided because of how she looked. It made her suffer; her grades suffered because a lot of the work was group efforts and she felt like she was not included and often times wasn't asked to take advantage of study groups. I hear that story at least a couple of times a year. If I had heard about the situation . . . I could have talked to the instructor before she had withdrawn from class. Even though the student wasn't willing to go outside of her comfort zone, the instructor definitely could have facilitated that.

Karen, another student services personnel at a different college, also identified this feeling in her comments, "Students may not feel comfortable asking for help from their professors or other resources. Students who come from rural areas or reservations might initially feel overwhelmed when coming to such a different environment." Terri, a student services personnel who has 17 years of experience in the field, described this same feeling multiple times during her interview when she talked about the importance of students "being able to walk in both worlds—staying in contact with their culture and meeting deadlines in the academic world" and "going out of their comfort zone to find a mentor who can answer questions" and "taking part in social events like barbeques to make contacts and build a network of support—again going outside of their comfort zone." She noted that Native students "have a lot in common with kids from small towns with transition issues and adapting to a different environment." Mary explained the same idea differently, saying, "There are very strong cultural differences sometimes that are subtle enough that students can't express those differences in how they make them feel other than being homesick or feeling lost or feeling odd."

Finally, three (60%) of the student services personnel described the importance of family support for students as a suggestion for improving the graduation rate for Native

Americans. Jane described multiple situations where the parents would not provide the necessary paperwork for students or help out in a financial emergency.

Theme 2: Academic Factors

Graduates. This portion of Chapter 4 will be devoted to describing the academic issues identified that may improve the success rate of new Native students. Through analysis, this theme was divided into the following six subthemes: study skills, class attendance, willingness to ask for help, lack of discouragement, academic preparedness, and completion of school work. As mentioned above, only 45 (29%) of the total 153 suggestions categorized into this second theme: academic factors.

Study Skills. Greatest in frequency of responses, twelve (40%) of the graduates suggested that if new students had study skills, they would be more likely to be successful in completing a degree. Moses spelled it out by saying, “It’s like a whole new world and rather than having homework every day, you have a lot of tests. . . . Be able to study and focus on what you are there for. So maybe study skills would be the best answer for that I guess.”

Class Attendance. Eleven (37%) of the graduates plainly stated that students needed to “go to class” if they wanted to be successful. The first thing from Shelley’s lips when I finished asking the question was, “Go to class every day and take in everything.” Jayci added, “Go to class. If you go to class and pay attention, the work is so much easier.”

Willingness to Ask for Help. The third most frequently voiced advice from the graduates was to ask for help when needed. Nine (30%) of the graduates encouraged over and over that students should ask for help when they need it. One example was Shelley's statement, "Don't be afraid to talk to people; don't be afraid to reach out for help whether it's tutoring or just someone to talk to like a counselor or someone in the Native American department or cultural center." Beej agreed but added a bit more personal sentiment:

Be open-minded and ask for help if needed. I mean, not to be discouraged if it doesn't always happen your way because there have been many days where I woke up and just felt like I don't want to do this any more. . . . There are a lot of good people in this community, Native and non-Native, that are willing to help, so if you run into a few bad ones, it is not any reason to give up. Keep going.

Lack of Discouragement. Falling just slightly in frequency of responses, six (20%) of the graduates repeated their mantra of encouragement by emphasizing "don't be discouraged" as words of advice for future students. Betty relayed,

There are things that are going to be hard and challenging. There are going to be people you don't like, that you don't get along with, whether they are professors or a classmate or whatever. There are going to be ways—no matter what the situation you are going into—there are always going to be things you don't like and that are really hard, but just stick it out, just go through it and you'll get past the hard part a lot quicker than you think, and it's worth it. So really just be persistent and don't be discouraged.

Academic Preparedness. Equal in frequency of responses, six (20%) of the graduates felt if new students were academically prepared for college, they would have a much better chance of succeeding. Jim advised, "Prepare as much as you can in high school because when I came out, I wasn't prepared in like the math portion of the degree.

So I struggled through that.” Mary Jane added, “I’d say prepare...learn to write English wise and grammar and what not – it makes a big difference.”

Completion of School Work. Next in the frequency of responses, five (17%) of the graduates added that students should not only attend class, but they should also do their school work. But for many Native students, it is something they must learn, as Joe shared from his own observations:

I have observed it mostly, but sometimes community, family emergencies, priorities, things going on with your family—you can’t prioritize it. A lot of students come from Rocky Boy that way; it is always an emergency or some kind of traumatic event going on, I don’t know, but sometimes you might have to just pick and choose what your priorities are, and maybe the day-to-day emergencies, you are going to have to choose your future, or what is going on day to day, because it seems like . . . it’s always a problem.

Student Services Personnel. Two (40%) student services personnel agreed that attending class and meeting course work deadlines were two of the most important tasks for students to be successful. Jane shared a little scenario to demonstrate the point:

I try to impress upon them that it is really important to be here every day because that is how you learn. If you are not here, you can’t learn. I know sometimes things happen, but you have to have a back-up plan to be able to be here when you need to be here. If they can’t be here, they need to talk to the instructor. A lot of times students don’t even want to bother to tell the instructor why they are not there, or what happened, and then the instructor just thinks they didn’t show up for no good reason. . . . You need to be responsible for yourself and get to class.

All five (100%) of the student services personnel recommended students ask for help when needed, whether the need is personal or academic, yet both graduates and student services personnel revealed that knowing what you should do and actually being able to do that may be much different. Karen, from student services, suggested, “College

success would also come from empowering students so they are comfortable asking for help and using the support services available when needed.” Patrick, a graduate who now works in student services, identified from both perspectives as he advised, “Maybe seek help if you need help. A lot of Native Americans don’t do that. They aren’t willing to go ask for resources.”

The student services personnel agreed with the graduates’ suggestions about not getting discouraged, except they did not voice the intense need of encouragement that the graduates entwined within their suggestions of persistence; this is reflected in Terri’s pragmatic comment, “If they are persistent, then they succeed. Students need to know that when they get into a difficulty, they need to come and find me so we can discuss the issues and try to figure it out—they often just give up and disappear.” Continuing in that theme, all five (100%) of the student services personnel stated an understanding that many students do leave due to discouragement, as seen in Mary’s words of advice, “Trust in yourself and have confidence in yourself and don’t let outsiders dictate how you feel about yourself.” She continued to encourage Native American students to be their own best advocates in the following statement:

If you have someone who is insensitive and makes some assumption about you in a comment or anything that is offensive, you don’t have to just hump up and swallow it. It doesn’t mean you have to go running to the Dean of Students immediately, but sometimes you can say directly to people, you can correct them in a polite way and a lot of times what people sometimes say, it’s not out of malevolence, but out of ignorance. I encourage them that if they have a teacher who doesn’t get it that American Indian families are much more than mom and dad and the kids, but they are the aunties, the cousins, the grandparents, and the whole funerary period is more than just go to the funeral for two hours and come back. Then let’s say you tell a professor you have to miss class because you are going home to auntie’s funeral and he says “I can’t excuse that,”

then that person needs to be educated. . . . They have to know that there are people who've got their back. . . . It is important for these students to know that they can go beyond just the Native community for support.

All five (100%) student services personnel were encouraging to students and indicated that other staff and faculty were too, but only one (20%) expressed the importance of verbal validation and encouragement at the same level as the graduates did.

All five (100%) of the student services personnel agreed that being prepared for college-level work was beneficial, but they added that resources were available for those who weren't at college-level work and encouraged students to take advantage of those opportunities.

Lastly, one (20%) student services personnel said that attending a tribal college before attending a state college increased the Native American students' chance of succeeding.

Outliers

One graduate suggested that it would be good to have more resources at Rocky Boy for students who are commuting back and forth to Havre so that they could do some of their work without driving to Havre. Another suggested that people should not put students graduating into predetermined categories. The graduate was recalling how she was strongly encouraged to attend Stone Child College before transferring to a 4-year college. She refused and was successful in completing her degree at a 4-year college. She had a strong conviction that students should not be automatically channeled to Stone Child College to "make sure" they are successful when they transfer to a 4-year college off the reservation.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 presented the responses of 30 graduates from the Chippewa Cree tribe and 5 student services personnel, from two different state colleges, who answered the question: How do successful Native American college graduates from the Chippewa Cree Tribe feel they were helped or hindered during their college experience? In addition, participants gave suggestions that might improve the success rate for new Native American students. Nine themes and an additional 32 subthemes emerged from the question asked.

Five of the themes emerged from stories the participants shared about what or who helped them to be successful. Those factors that the graduates found most helpful were family, personal goal, friends, institutional support, and academic preparation.

The two major themes of personal issues and academic issues developed through data analysis of what the graduates reported as obstacles in their college experience. Within the theme of personal issues, the graduates expressed having the most difficulty with finances, loneliness, commuting, life responsibilities, and discouragement. The factors that hindered students on the academic side were academic unpreparedness for college work, lack of study skills, and lack of time-management skills.

As in the analysis of obstacles the graduates faced, the two main themes of personal and academic factors also emerged from the suggestions they gave to improve the graduation rate for new students. The factors within the personal theme included persistence, responsibility, be prepared for the transition from high school to college, time management, and willingness to leave their comfort zone and develop their social

skills. The academic factors were study skills, class attendance, willingness to ask for help, lack of discouragement, academic preparedness, and completion of school work.

Chapter 5 will present an overview of this grounded theory study and the answers to the research question and subquestions. A discussion of the findings, recommendations, and suggestions for further research will be presented as well. Finally, the data will be discussed in the context of an emerging theory that may assist those working with Chippewa Cree students to understand what the students find helpful, what obstacles they face, and, finally, what suggestions they would make. This theory may then be used to design learning environments, procedures, and policies that will increase the success rate of this population.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explore factors that help or hinder successful completion of a bachelor's degree by students from the Chippewa Cree Tribe. From this information, a theory may be developed about what factors are significant for success from the perspective of the Chippewa Cree student. This emerging theory may then be used to better understand the college experiences of Chippewa Cree students and to design learning environments, procedures, and policies that will increase the success rate of this population.

As mentioned earlier, there is a difference between the student who seeks a 4-year degree and one whose goal is met by completion of a 2-year degree. This study focused on those students seeking a 4-year degree and what they believed helped them to be successful as well as what hindered them.

OverviewStatement of the Problem

Educators working with Chippewa Cree students need to understand how the students' precollege experiences, college experiences, and cultural backgrounds influence the students' success in the college environment in order to design learning

environments, procedures, and policies that will increase the success rate of the population.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explore factors that help or hinder successful completion of a bachelor's degree by students from the Chippewa Cree Tribe. The data will be discussed in the context of an emerging theory that may assist those working with Chippewa Cree students to understand what the students find helpful, what obstacles they face, and, finally, what suggestions they would make. This theory may then be used to design learning environments, procedures, and policies that will increase the success rate of this population.

Method and Data Collection/Verification

This grounded theory study used one-on-one partially structured interviews to discover participants' perceptions as to what helped or hindered them during their college experience. Fellow educators volunteered names and contact information of prospective participants who they believed would be willing to share extensively about their college experiences. The researcher made contact through personal phone calls in which the purpose of the study was discussed, participation was requested, and if agreement was reached, a convenient interview time and place was arranged. Additional participant names were obtained from the graduates, including student service personnel they found helpful, employing snowball sampling. Only one potential participant contacted chose to not participate. Interviews with the graduates were conducted during spring semester 2008 in the following three places: the researcher's office in Kennewash Hall at Stone

Child College, the graduate's office, and the Hilton Garden Inn in Missoula. All student services personnel were interviewed in their campus offices during spring semester 2008. The criterion method was used for participant selection in this study (Creswell, 1998). Criteria required that graduates had successfully attained a 4-year degree during the previous 8 years and were members of the Chippewa Cree Tribe. Verification and trustworthiness were established through three different means throughout the collection of data, analysis of the data, and writing of the findings. The methods selected followed common practices for the qualitative paradigm—that is, member checking, peer auditing, and triangulation.

Three peer auditors were employed to verify the trustworthiness of the collection and analysis of the data. One, who is employed with the Chippewa Cree Tribe, has earned a doctorate degree and is familiar with qualitative research, reviewed and made suggestions that were used for developing the interview protocol. The second two peer auditors, both work with Native Americans as teachers and administrators and have research experience. Both were briefed on the study, method of data collection and storage, and any questions were answered. One reviewed the data and how the themes were developed, randomly tracing themes back to the transcripts for verification, as well as looking for possible missed themes. The other reviewed the themes for accuracy and cultural relevancy, as well as, confirming that the themes were legitimately drawn from the data gained from the manuscripts. Written accounts were kept for each of these meetings.

Data Analysis

Data analysis progressed from particular statements to general themes. First, statements under each question were analyzed and placed into predetermined categories of helpful factors, hindering factors, and suggestions to increase successful graduation of Native American students. Second, the data in each category were thoroughly compared in order to fully develop themes that were presented in Chapter 4. In addition, some unique perspectives stated by participants were included at the end of each theme. Finally, a theoretical model was developed from the study. This model is presented later in this chapter.

Results

The three research questions addressed in this study were

1. What factors do Native American students of the Chippewa Cree Tribe think helped their educational journey until successful completion?
2. What factors do Native American students of the Chippewa Cree Tribe think hindered their educational journey towards successful completion?
3. What recommendations towards successful completion of a degree would these Native American graduates of the Chippewa Cree Tribe give other Native American students, teachers of Native American students, and administrators working with Native American students?

The answers to these questions are presented according to the primary themes that emerged from the data for each of the questions.

Research Question 1

What factors do these Native American graduates think helped their educational journey until successful completion? The findings in this research show that family support, having a personal goal, support from friends/social contact, institutional support, and academic preparation are important factors in students' successfully completing a 4-year degree.

Graduates reported overwhelmingly that the emotional support they received from family motivated them to persist in their pursuit of a college degree. In addition, they said that family expectations, a desire to provide for family and the financial support they received from their family were also helpful. One graduate said, "I don't know where I would have been today without their support."

Participants also believed that having a personal goal and a desire to "have better for themselves and their family" provided them with the self-motivation and determination to be successful. One said in reflection, "a lot of people in my family doubted me, and I knew I could do it."

Graduates and student services personal agreed that friends and other social support systems such as study groups helped them continue in their degree program.

Another helpful factor was the institutional support of teachers, financial aid, peer mentoring, and tutoring. Graduates expressed their gratitude for the help given to them by teachers and those working in the financial aid departments, as well as peer mentoring programs and tutoring.

Finally, participants stated that academic preparation, either from high school or Stone Child College, helped them get ready for the rigorousness of a bachelor's degree program.

Research Question 2

What factors do these Native American graduates think hindered their educational journey towards successful completion? Participants believed that personal issues far outweighed academic issues. The personal issues that were obstacles during their college experience were finances, loneliness, commuting, life responsibilities, and discouragement. The academic issues that were obstacles were being unprepared for college work, lack of study skills, and lack of time-management skills.

Almost half of the participants stated that the greatest challenge during their college experience was finances. They described finances as a twofold problem. One struggle was finding enough money to live and to finance their education. The second struggle was maneuvering the processes and paperwork required to qualify for financial aid. Graduates relayed explicit stories about car problems and recalled the embarrassment of asking teachers to sign attendance slips so they could receive a check.

Loneliness was the second personal issue that caused participants to struggle. Participants described the difficulty of moving away and the intensity of their homesickness.

Some of the participants described that commuting was a continuous hardship from the time they started college until completion. Some discussed car maintenance and

others the pitfalls of carpooling. They had vivid memories of the frustrations that arose from this difficulty.

Participants stated it was difficult to balance all of their responsibilities associated with living a life. Both men and women struggled with family responsibilities, job responsibilities, and school responsibilities. Participants described the difficulty of deciding what was more important, going to class or finishing a project due at work and found balancing all of their responsibilities very challenging.

Participants also believed that their feelings of discouragement were hindering to their college experience. They described transitional issues that arose from going from a very small school in which they were at the top of the class, to a large school where they fit in the middle. Others described adjustment issues that arose due to living with new people in the dorms.

Academically, participants stated being academically unprepared for college work, as well as lacking study skills and time-management skills. Participants stated having difficulty with writing, math, and science. Five graduates admitted that their study habits caused them difficulty in college and four reported difficulty with managing their time and setting priorities.

Research Question 3

What recommendations towards successful completion of a degree would these Native American graduates give other Native American students, teachers of Native American students, and administrators working with Native American students?

A greater number of suggestions were personal in nature than academic. On the personal side, participants recommended persistence, responsibility, prepare for the transition from high school, time management and being willing to leave their comfort zone and develop social skills. Over half of the graduates believe that new students need to not give up and that encouragement was a key factor in persistence. Three graduates reminded future students to “keep their culture” and to “remember where they came from” as a way of staying focused on the end result of completing a 4-year degree.

Participants suggested that new students prepare for the transition from high school to college by being more independent and responsible for self. Along with responsibility, they suggested employing time management that would enable them to meet deadlines. In addition, they encouraged new students “be open-minded” and “make new friends”, increasing their support system during their college years. Three student service personnel suggested that family support such as providing necessary paperwork and helping out financially, even if only in emergencies, probably increase the graduation rate.

On the academic side, participants recommended that new students develop study skills, attend class, ask for help, not get discouraged, prepare academically for college and complete all class work in a timely manner. Participants encouraged new students to “focus on what you are there for” and to “go to class and pay attention.” Nine graduates and all of the student services personnel advised new students to “reach out” and ask for help when they need it.

Over and over graduates emphasized the need for encouragement in statements such as “just stick it out” and “don’t give up.”

Graduates noted that new students may not realize the importance of completing their school work in a timely manner and encouraged new students to not only attend class, but to “pick and choose your priorities” enabling them to meet class deadlines.

Finally, one student services personnel suggested that attending a tribal college might improve the success rate for new Native American students.

Comparison of Results to Literature

The results in this study support many of the findings in the literature review, with some concerns being greater than identified in the literature. The literature reviewed for this study in an effort to understand why some students persist in college and why some do not included the following four areas: (1) factors related to persistence/retention before entering college, (2) issues related to student persistence/institutional retention during college, including models, (3) factors specifically related to persistence of Native Americans, and (4) strategies for increasing student persistence/retention. The section concerning models will be compared last to provide a smooth transition into the explanation of the emerging theoretical model that resulted from this study.

Factors Related to Persistence and Retention Before Entering College

Byrd (2006) and Carey (2005), and others, found that being academically prepared to enter college was one predictor of success. This study found that being prepared academically for college increased the likelihood of success for the participants

of this study. In addition, data from the MUS Data Warehouse (2005) showed that 25% - 30% of Montana students are not prepared in all areas. It was found that 23% of graduates in this study were unprepared for college work.

Both the Commission on the Future of Higher Education (U.S. Department of Education, 2006) and the Lumina Foundation (2007) reported that students face formidable roadblocks of financial need, inadequate academic preparation, lack of information, and discouragement. The results in this study are consistent with these findings, and also included loneliness, commuting issues, and difficulty balancing life responsibilities.

Several studies (Anderson, 1985; Bean & Eaton, 2000; Saenz, Hurtado, Bareera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007; Tinto, 1993; U.S. Department of Education, 1998) found that student goals and motivation played a major role in students planning for and taking appropriate steps to enroll in college. This study found that students, who set a goal to attend college during their secondary educational experience, or before, were motivated to complete the steps necessary to enroll in college.

Factors Related to Student Persistence/ Institutional Retention During College

This study revealed the importance of academic integration and preparedness. These results are consistent with the writings of Adelman (1999) and Lau (2003). The academic intensity of the student's high school curriculum or the lack of it impacted the students' ability to move forward in their curriculum. In addition, this study was consistent with Lau's findings that students who lack fundamental skills, especially in math and writing, found it difficult to cope with the average college workload.

Multiple studies (Cary, 2004; Lau, 2003; Swail et. al., 2003) found that financial aid positively affected a student's ability to pay for their education. This study found that finances was the major difficulty graduates faced and not only financial aid, but the personnel in the financial aid office, positively affected students' ability to persist.

The stronger the goal commitment, the more likely the student will graduate (Austin, 1984; Bean & Eaton, 2000; Lau, 2003; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003; Tinto, 1993). This study found that a strong personal goal set by the graduate provided the motivation and persistence needed to continue toward degree completion when difficulties arose.

This study revealed that the graduates received strong support from family and friends. This is consistent with the writings of Chao & Good (2004). Unlike Padilla (1994), this study did not conclude that a lack of family support and understanding was one of the major barriers keeping minority students from completing a degree.

The study found that balancing life responsibilities was a major challenge throughout the college experience. This is consistent with previous research that found many students who leave college before graduating are doing well academically but simply have too much going on in their lives (Bers & Nyden, 2001; Lau, 2003; Padilla, 1999; Polinsky, 2003).

Factors Specifically Related to Persistence of Native Americans

This study shared similarities with the writings of Jackson, Smith & Hill (2003) in which they defined three factor categories that explain why Native American college students may not succeed at college: (1) sociocultural factors such as isolation, various

family influences and negative interactions, (2) academic factors such as poor high school preparation, and (3) personal factors such as low levels of financial support and stressful family situations. Participants in this study also found difficulties within these three categories.

Consistent with Reyhner and Dodd's (1995) research on the subject of recruiting and retaining American Indian students, this study found that graduates faced obstacles such as finances and languages differences mostly noted in their writing abilities. Also consistent with Reyhner and Dodd's study, the graduates found it helpful when the faculty were willing to answer questions, provide personal examples, relaxing time requirements, as well as being culturally sensitive.

In this study, participants described the difficulties of loneliness, academic setbacks, financial difficulties, discouragement, and stress of balancing life responsibilities, as well as the determination and family support consistent with the portraits painted in Garrod and Larimore's (1997) writings in which 13 different Native American graduates describe the loneliness felt by leaving the reservation, the support of their mothers and grandmothers, the clash of cultures, as well as the strong desire to provide better for themselves and their families.

Swisher and Tippeconnic (1999) asserted that the interactions between teachers and students that take place every day is the determinant to whether students will persist or not. This study found that support of teachers had an impact on persistence.

Multiple studies state that Native American students have a better chance of succeeding at a mainstream institution if they attend a tribal college first (American

Indian Higher Education Consortium, 2000; Brown, 2003; Dell, 2000; Nichols & Monnette, 2003; Ortiz & Boyer, 2003; Ortiz & HeavyRunner, 2003). This study found that attending a tribal college helped some of the graduates' transition successfully to a 4-year program.

This study found that graduates relied on their inner strength, family values, and family support, which some labeled as cultural identity or "being traditional", and others did not, to help them maneuver successfully between reservation life and campus life. These findings are similar the findings of Huffman (2001) in which he concluded that Native American students who are able to draw strength from their cultural identity while adapting to college life are more likely to succeed than those students who either assimilate or never feel comfortable on campus.

Strategies for Increasing Student Persistence/Retention

Special programming efforts to increase minority student retention include bridge programs, structured campus residences, mentoring and other ethnic and cultural programs (Brown, 2005; Garrod & Larimore, 1997; Jackson & Smith, 2001; Lowe, 2005; Swail et al., 2003). This study found that special programming efforts like mentoring and Native American centers led to students persisting through degree completion.

The findings in this study agree with Rendon et al. (2000) that student validation is important and faculty and counselors should be trained to take the initiative to reach out to students. Additionally, many college students, especially minorities, feel isolated, lonely, and unprepared for the workload of college and retention policies like faculty/student mentoring programs, multicultural centers, summer transition programs

help create a feeling of comfort and support enabling this particular group to persist in their education (Landry, 2003; Lowe, 2005; Rendon & Hope, 1995). This study found that the support from positive relationships between students and faculty, peer-mentoring programs, and multicultural centers contributed to successful degree obtainment.

First and foremost, this study revealed the importance of family support for the successful completion of a degree. This is consistent with the research of HeavyRunner and DeCellas (2002) in which they developed The Family Education Model (FEM) consisting of nine principles used to increase the support for students through intense involvement by their families.

Issues Related to Student Persistence/ Institutional Retention During College - Models

Tinto's (1993) Attrition Model suggested that student's institutional experiences determine whether the student will remain in school. Tinto's (1998) later research encouraged faculty and administrators to promote student involvement and connected learning experiences among students and faculty alike. This study found that the support from friends and teachers, as well as peer mentoring and tutoring had a positive impact on persistence. Conflicting with Tinto's early research, Rendon et al. (2000) argued that students of color would not disassociate from their culture and family support network to become integrated into the academic community, but would instead "learn how to move back and forth between their native world and the new world of college." Furthermore, validation (active interest by someone, inside or outside the classroom, who encourages the student in their academic studies and ability to learn) not involvement empowers students of color to become powerful learners enabling them to persist until completion.

Although this study did support parts of Tinto's research, it has a greater support of Rendon's argument. This study found that the main support system was overwhelmingly family and their own personal desire to have better for themselves and their family, followed by the support of friends and teachers. Student validation was the "attention" given to them by their teachers. The encouragement they received from the validation was interpreted by the gratitude they expressed for it.

Anderson (1985) and Swail et al. (2003) both use geometric models to explain the dynamics between cognitive, social and institutional factors, as well as internal and external forces, both negative and positive to explain the battles that rage within students affecting their choice to persist. In essence, if the student is able to balance the forces, they are likely to persist. In agreement, the results of this study found that most of the graduates experienced difficulties putting them in disequilibria, but through personal and institutional support, they were able to return to equilibrium, enabling them to continue with their education.

Emerging Theoretical Model

As discussed above, multiple models depict how students progress through postsecondary education. Many areas overlap, yet each model expressed a slightly different viewpoint of student retention and departure. The results from this study fit well with parts of each of the models, yet differed in the amount of support from different areas, as well as the processes employed to successfully persist.

To better understand the dynamics of what factors and processes affect Native American students an emerging grounded theory model will be proposed. This model

integrates parts of each of the models discussed above, but also reflects Rendon's (2000) argument that students of color would not disassociate from their culture and family support network to become integrated into the academic community.

Different from most other models, this emerging model uses the power of the circle in Native American culture as stated by Black Elk, a holy man of the Oglala Lakota Sioux in John Neihardt's book Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux,

Everything the Power of the World does is done in a circle. The sky is round, and I have heard that the Earth [is] round like a ball, and so are the stars. The wind in its greatest power whirls. Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours. The sun comes forth and goes down again in a circle. The moon does the same, and both are round. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back again to where they were. The life of man is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves (p.194).

This theoretical model is depicted in Figure 2 and reflects the process described by Rendon et al. (2000) in reference to students of color not disassociating from their family support network, but would instead "learn how to move back and forth between their native world and new world of college."

My grounded theory model is based upon what graduates identified as supportive in their successful experience and what they suggested might be supportive to other Native Americans in their endeavor to complete a 4-year degree. Unlike other models, it does not include negative factors or obstacles experienced, but focuses on support systems and factors employed to overcome obstacles, as identified by Native American graduates.

The main element of the emerging theoretical model is how it is centered around the Native American student and the four components that make up their life: family, school, work, and culture/religion. Circling around the main components are the support systems identified in the study. They are family, having a personal goal, social contacts and friends, institutional support (which includes adequate financing, interactions with teachers, and peer mentoring and tutoring) and academic preparation. The third ring, which circles the second ring of support systems, includes the forces that Native American students suggested to propel new students through difficulties. They are having a persistent attitude, being responsible, employing study and time management skills, expanding social skills needed to adapt to new environments and people and being proactive in asking for help.

The arrows indicate the movement back and forth between a student's native world and their new world of college as described by Rendon et al. (2000). They also are representative of the whirling wind of power described in the above quote by Black Elk. Included in the power of wind, is the ability to blow out that which is toxic leaving a refreshed environment or slowly eroding away something that seems to have been there forever, making room for something new. The arrows also represent the movement needed by Native American students as they seek out what they need to be successful in their quest for higher education. Same as the circle of seasons, the change comes and goes, but comes back again. Native American students' change as needed, when needed, and then return to self, not completely changed, but having been refined by the power of the circle.

Finally, the circle framework symbolizes the strong resolve that has prevailed over the last centuries, as seen through the ability for Native students to persevere despite many obstacles. In addition, the circle symbolizes the endless strength and balance that a student finds within their circle of identity, which gives them the resilience needed to persist through difficulties.

This model is an emerging model and will need further refinement through additional research to modify and expand it for future use. Suggestions for possible research topics that will be beneficial in further testing and exploring this model are listed in the Suggestions for Future Research section.

Figure 2. Drummer’s Circle of Persistence



Recommendations

The results of this study may provide some direction for developing learning environments, procedures and policies designed to increase the graduation rate of Chippewa Cree students, as well as perhaps for other Native Americans. While these recommendations are based upon an evolving theory that needs further research,

individuals working with similar students may find them of value. Readers are reminded that the following recommendations are based upon data from graduates from one Indian tribe. The recommendations are listed below supported by an explanation.

1. Design recruiting and retention strategies and programs to meet the specific needs of the Native American student encompassing support systems that are helpful to them.

Use data from Native American students to determine the needs, implement strategies, and assess using research-based practices as to effectiveness of strategies.

This study showed that family was the greatest support system for Native Americans. Family included parents, grandparents, children, spouses or significant others, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, people who raised them, and close friends. Family should be included in the complete educational experience from recruiting through graduation and the more often, the better. Services such as childcare during the day and evenings, health care, housing, meals, and transportation should be available so that the student can concentrate and focus on their classes and not on worrying about how to take care of their family. In addition to basic needs, family should be included in social and cultural activities like powwows, family potlucks, fun night, etc. HeavyRunner and DeCelles (2002) advocate that persistence can best be attained in Native American students by interweaving family, community, and academic relationships. Faculty should work diligently to find ways to include families into the course work. For example, if an instructor is talking about child development, invite the students to bring their children (or a niece or nephew) into the classroom for a planned visit instead of observing a daycare or school classroom. Not only would this activity provide an opportunity for the

students to prepare age appropriate activities to occupy the children, it would give them an opportunity to practice their sensitivity skills and explore diverse cultures in a natural way. Additionally, the children of the students would be able to understand where their parent is when they are gone from them. This inclusiveness is not only good for the student and draws them into the curriculum, but it also increases the family support that has already been determined to be the most important support system for Native American students. In turn, faculty may become more sensitive to the needs, responsibilities and priorities of their students, which might encourage them to develop practices that lead to increase completion of courses, leading to increased graduation rates.

2. Collaborate with K-12 schools and the community, using multiple programs to develop a culture of academic success K-16, including programs that encourage early preparation for college.

Sixty-seven percent of the graduates and all of the student services personnel agreed that setting a personal goal to attend college increased their chances of being successful. In addition, only one-third (33%) of the graduates reported that they were academically prepared for college. From this data, it would seem that a collaborative effort should be put forth to develop programs that prepare students to be successful. These programs should be inclusive of career exploration at the elementary and middle school level, setting a goal to attend college or receive vocational training that will enable students to be self-supporting adults early in high school so they can take classes that will prepare them for college, as well as transitional issues dealing with the adjustment from high

school to college life. Students currently possess many characteristics to be successful in college such as persistence, responsibility and frugality, but students need encouragement and support.

The community, which consists of parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, all of who are part of the family support system identified in the study, should develop and participate in programs that increase the awareness of the positive affects of a college degree for an individual, as well as the whole community. These community programs would increase the effectiveness of programs integrated through the schools and decrease the negative fear and mistrust that often prevails as a result of misinformation.

3. Establish and/or advertise a Native American Center on campus.

This study showed that Native American students suffered from loneliness and isolation, not knowing where or how to seek out services, being under prepared for college level work and discouragement. In addition, it showed that friends, peer mentoring, tutoring, and study skills were positive support for students. By establishing a place where Native American students are all welcomed, information is available explaining what services are provided by whom and where, and students could gather together and talk, the Native American student would have a place to meet others in similar situations and to gain the information the need to be successful in their college experiences. Many campuses have centers such as this, but not all Native American students know about them, or take advantage of them. This study showed that Native American students often do not ask for help. It would be important to include a visit to the center as part of recruitment and retention strategies, but also a continual reminder

about the center should be woven in and out of the student's college experience, so that when a need arises, they will remember it is available. For example, faculty may be able to create a link by integrating into their curriculum a visit to the center, or maybe someone from the center could come to the classroom, to explain what the center offers and how it could be helpful to the student. Finally, Native American students reported having difficulty with more personal issues than academic issues. The Native American Center should include a culturally appropriate counseling program that not only helps with individual problems, but provides training in needed areas identified in this study such as: setting priorities, being responsible, time-management, and budgeting. It would also be beneficial if tutors could be available for individuals as well as study groups.

4. Develop a series of professional development seminars on diversity issues designed to give faculty, staff, and anyone interested, a safe environment to explore different cultures.

This study showed that faculty and student services personnel were not always in agreement on what helped Native American students and what hindered them. With this in mind, it might be beneficial to develop diversity exploration opportunities that give both sides a chance to develop a better understanding of each other, with the goal of increasing those areas that are helpful, and decreasing those that are hindering.

5. Encourage increased faculty and student interactions.

Both graduates and student services personnel targeted the importance of faculty interacting with students, both inside and outside of the classroom. One way might be to follow the advice of Rendon et al. (2000), which recommends institutions take an active role in fostering validation, which is described as showing students you know they can

learn. They suggested implementing a program to train faculty, counselors, coaches and administrators to design activities and policies that promote active learning and interpersonal growth among students, faculty and staff. A simpler way might be to just request, or if need be require it. It would depend on the institution and what the need is. It might be that faculty just need access to a little money to be able to buy lunch for students or provide a family pizza night, etc.

6. Create an advisory committee charged with the duty to increase Native American student retention.

This committee should have representation from all stakeholders such as the Native American Center, Native American students, dean's office, admissions office, student clubs, faculty, etc. It should generate ideas, as well as oversee strategies suggested by others. This committee should develop a strong working relationship with the recruitment and retention officers and any other departments involved. It should also assess on-going activities for effectiveness and make needed changes regularly, as well as assessing the overall institutional effectiveness in recruiting and retaining Native American students and its impact on increasing the graduation rate.

7. Recognize and give appreciation for success.

Recognition should be given for increased Native American enrollment, retention, and increased graduation rates. First and foremost, the graduates themselves should be recognized and they should be asked to mentor a new student. In addition, successful strategies that increased Native American student persistence should be recognized. Appreciation can be shown in many ways such as dinners, thank-you letters, etc. or

maybe a more cultural way, in which suggestions would be received from Native American students, such as having a feed with traditional food, or sponsoring a powwow, or having a give-away, etc.

8. Develop a comprehensive college finance and budgeting workshop.

Almost half (47%) of the graduates struggled with finances during their college experience. The struggle with finances is two fold—being able to pay for college expenses such as tuition, fees, and books, etc. and being able to cover daily living expenses. Informational meetings that include the family should be offered starting at the high school level and continued through out the college experience. Topics like budgeting, planning for emergencies, expected family contribution, and student loans, etc. could all be discussed. Topics should be determined by student need.

9. Develop and maintain an up-to-date data base within the Chippewa Cree Tribe to collect data on students who are currently attending college and those who drop out, concerning what factors helped them and what areas they struggled in. Data can then be used to identify problems and weak areas that can be addressed in an effort to continue to increase student academic success at all levels.

When this study began, and to my knowledge there still isn't, a central place where data was kept concerning the academic levels attained by members of the Tribe. Nor was there an account of all the members who had or were attending college. In addition, there was no committee or review board or policies or procedures that protected such data. In order to respect and protect the culture of the Tribe and its members, as well as having access to accurate data to make decisions, it is necessary for there to be a

central location for the approval of research projects, the review of results, and the dissemination of information. It is important to create a research and development entity, either within Stone Child College or the tribal government. This entity would need to research the role and scope of research and development departments and develop policies and procedures acceptable to common practices.

Suggestions for Further Research

Suggestions for further research to increase the graduation rate of Native Americans include:

1. This study included only graduates who were members of the Chippewa Cree Tribe. Further research should be conducted with graduates from different tribes to see if similar results arise.
2. Investigate retention strategies and their effectiveness that are currently employed at institutions that have a Native American student population.
3. Conduct research to learn more about the role and scope of Native American Centers and their effectiveness.
4. Further investigate the supportive role Native American faculty and administrators have on the retention of Native American students.
5. Investigate the development and effectiveness of learning communities and the impact they might have in increasing Native American graduation rates.
6. Use quantitative research strategies to support or negate the results of this qualitative study.

7. Conduct continuous research, using a qualitative survey to determine what barriers Native American students are facing on a particular campus and develop ways to overcome them.
8. Determine through research if certain living arrangements, like communal living quarters for Native Americans or arranging dorm rooms side by side or a complete floor, would increase the graduation rate of Native American students.
9. Conduct further research correlating SAT/ACT scores with students self-reporting of academic preparedness for college.
10. Investigate the role of advising on Native American student persistence.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explore factors that help or hinder successful completion of a bachelor's degree by students from the Chippewa Cree Tribe in order to begin to develop a theory about what factors are significant for success from the perspective of the Chippewa Cree student. This emerging theory can then be used to better understand what the students find helpful, what obstacles they face, and what suggestions they make to help other Native American students be more successful. A theoretical model was developed based upon the results of this study. Educators, whether in the classroom or as administrators, who work with Chippewa Cree or similar students, may increase their knowledge about their students' experiences so they be more effective in teaching and advising them at both the high school and college level, this increasing their chances of success.

The purpose of this chapter was to summarize the study's procedure and results, discuss conclusions, and present an emerging theoretical model that was developed upon the results of this study. Suggestions for further research were also included.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

MSU-BOZEMAN REVIEW BOARD PERMISSION



INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
For the Protection of Human Subjects
FWA 00000165

960 Technology Blvd. Room 127
c/o Veterinary Molecular Biology
Montana State University
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Telephone: 406-994-6783
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MEMORANDUM

TO: Kadene Drummer
FROM: Mark Quinn, Ph.D. Chair *Mark Quinn Ph.D.*
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
DATE: March 3, 2008
SUBJECT: *Factors that Helped or Hindered Graduates from the Chippewa Cree Tribe in their Educational Experience [KD030308-EX]*

The above research, described in your submission of February 28, 2008, is exempt from the requirement of review by the Institutional Review Board in accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 46, section 101. The specific paragraph which applies to your research is:

- (b)(1) Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.
- (b)(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.
- (b)(3) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior that is not exempt under paragraph (b)(2) of this section, if: (i) the human subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office; or (ii) federal statute(s) without exception that the confidentiality of the personally identifiable information will be maintained throughout the research and thereafter.
- (b)(4) Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available, or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.
- (b)(5) Research and demonstration projects, which are conducted by or subject to the approval of department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine: (i) public benefit or service programs; (ii) procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs; (iii) possible changes in or alternatives to those programs or procedures; or (iv) possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under those programs.
- (b)(6) Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies, (i) if wholesome foods without additives are consumed, or (ii) if a food is consumed that contains a food ingredient at or below the level and for a use found to be safe, or agricultural chemical or environmental contaminant at or below the level found to be safe, by the FDA, or approved by the EPA, or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the USDA.

Although review by the Institutional Review Board is not required for the above research, the Committee will be glad to review it. If you wish a review and committee approval, please submit 3 copies of the usual application form and it will be processed by expedited review.

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM – GRADUATES

Consent Form for Graduate

Researcher: Kadene Drummer
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Marilyn Lockhart
Department of Education
MSU-Bozeman

Thank you for your interest in this research study. You are free to decide not to participate, or to terminate the interview at any time. You are also free to not answer any question.

The purpose of this study is to explore factors that help or hinder successful completion of a bachelor's degree by students from the Chippewa Cree Tribe.

The interview should take about an hour. An audio recording will be made of the interview, and any tapes, data files, or transcripts will be kept securely in the possession of the researcher in a locked file cabinet. Soon after the interview, I will be sending or e-mailing you a transcript of the tape for you to check for accuracy. Please respond to the accuracy of the transcripts as soon as possible and be very careful to note anything that wasn't interpreted or transcribed by me correctly. If something about your response seems unclear to me after the interview, I will contact you for clarification. Please let me know if you do not agree to a short follow-up interview if needed.

Every effort to maintain confidentiality will be made. Since the Chippewa Cree Tribe is fairly small, pseudonyms will be used when sharing comments. If any quote would be used, your permission will be sought in writing or through e-mail as a way of protecting the meaning and essence of the quote. If you have concerns or want further steps to protect your identity, please let me know.

Please do not hesitate to ask any questions or share any concerns about the interview process. I would like to share data, results, and tentative conclusions with you before reporting them to verify them for accuracy. If you do not want to be part of this process, please let me know.

There are no known risks or discomfort associated with this study. The only anticipated benefit to the participants is in knowing that their information may help others succeed in completing a bachelor's degree.

Please sign your consent with the full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the study.

Signature of Participant Agreeing to Participate

Date

Signature of Participant Agreeing to be Recorded

Date

Signature of Participant Agreeing to Verify
Transcript, Results and Conclusions
for Accuracy

Date

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM – STUDENT SERVICES PERSONNEL

Consent Form for Student Service Personnel

Researcher: Kadene Drummer
 Faculty Advisor: Dr. Marilyn Lockhart
 Department of Education
 MSU-Bozeman

Thank you for your interest in this research study. You are free to decide not to participate, or to terminate the interview at any time. You are also free to not answer any question.

The purpose of this study is to explore factors that help or hinder successful completion of a bachelor's degree by students from the Chippewa Cree Tribe.

The interview should take about a half hour. An audio recording will be made of the interview, and any tapes, data files, or transcripts will be kept securely in the possession of the researcher in a locked file cabinet. Soon after the interview, I will be sending or e-mailing you a transcript of the tape for you to check for accuracy. Please respond to the accuracy of the transcripts as soon as possible and be very careful to note anything that wasn't interpreted or transcribed by me correctly. If something about your response seems unclear to me after the interview, I will contact you for clarification. Please let me know if you do not agree to a short follow-up interview if needed.

Every effort to maintain confidentiality will be made. Please do not hesitate to ask any questions or share any concerns about the interview process. I would like to share data, results, and tentative conclusions with you before reporting them to verify them for accuracy. If you do not want to be part of this process, please let me know.

There are no known risks or discomfort associated with this study. The only anticipated benefit to the participants in knowing that their information may help additional students succeed in completing a bachelor's degree. For questions concerning your rights as a human subject, please contact Mark Quinn, IRB Chair, 994-4707, mquinn@montana.edu.

Please sign your consent with the full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the study.

 Signature of Participant Agreeing to Participate

 Date

 Signature of Participant Agreeing to be Recorded

 Date

 Signature of Participant Agreeing to Verify
 Transcript, Results and Conclusions
 for Accuracy

 Date

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – STUDENT SHEET

Interview Protocol – Student Sheet

Project: Factors That Helped Or Hindered Graduates From The Chippewa Cree Tribe In Their Educational Experience

Time of Interview:

Date of Interview:

Place of Interview:

Interviewer: Kadene Drummer

Interviewee:

The purpose of this grounded theory study is to explore factors that helped or hindered successful completion of a bachelor's degree for students from the Chippewa Cree Tribe.

Questions:

1. Where did you earn your four-year degree? When?
2. What is the name of your degree?
3. Approximate GPA?
4. Currently employed?
5. What or who helped you be successful in completing your college degree? (goals)
6. Did you face any hindrances (difficulties) in completing your college degree? (academically prepared, emotionally ready, friends at the college, get involved in activities at the college, family supportive, contact with your teachers outside of class, difficulties - who did you contact?)
7. Would you consider yourself cultural and if so, in what way? How might that have influenced your college success? On an acculturation scale of 1-10 with ten being assimilated (total conversion to a new society) and 1 being enculturated (learned the ways of their own society), where would you rate yourself?
8. What suggestions would you give that might improve the success rate for new students?

9. Considering what we already discussed, was there anything or anyone else that helped or hindered you during your college experience? (loneliness, racism, responsibilities)

10. Can you recommend any student service personnel that might be able to share on the topics we've discussed?

After transcribing the interview, your data will be identified through a pseudonym. What pseudonym would you like to be identified with?

Interviewee's e-mail address:

Interviewee's gender: male female

Interviewee's age:

Interviewee's marital status: single married divorced
cohabitating

Tribal affiliation:

Do you speak a Native language? yes no

Did you have children at home during your college experience? yes no

What is the highest level of educational attainment of your parents?

Mom - Dad -

Did interviewee transfer between institutions during their college experience? (from where to where and why)

In what format would you like to review your transcript and preview comments?
e-mail (preferred):

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – STUDENT SERVICES PERSONNEL SHEET

Interview Protocol – Student Services Personnel Sheet

Project: Factors That Helped Or Hindered Graduates From The Chippewa Cree Tribe In Their Educational Experience

Time of Interview:

Date of Interview:

Place of Interview:

Interviewer: Kadene Drummer

Interviewee:

The purpose of this grounded theory study is to explore factors that helped or hindered successful completion of a bachelor's degree for students from the Chippewa Cree Tribe.

Questions:

11. What is your position and what are your job duties in reference to working with students?
12. How long have you been in this position?
13. What kinds of things help Native American students be successful in completing their college degree? (goals)
14. What kinds of hindrances (difficulties) do they face in completing their college degree?
(academically prepared, emotionally ready, friends at the college, get involved in activities at the college, family supportive, contact with your teachers outside of class, difficulties - who did you contact?)
15. What suggestions would you give that might improve the success rate for new Native American students?

After transcribing the interview, your data will be identified through a pseudonym. What pseudonym would you like to be identified with?

Interviewee's e-mail address:

Interviewee's gender: male female