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

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
Montana State University
© Copyright by Pat Alan Beu (1998)

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

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

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

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

by

Pat Alan Beu

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY--BOZEMAN
Bozeman, Montana

April 1998
APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Pat A. Beu

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

Dr. Gary J. Conti
Chairperson, Graduate Committee

Approved for the Major Department

Dr. Gloria Gregg
Head, Major Department

Approved for the College of Graduate Studies

Dr. Joseph Fedock
Graduate Dean
STATEMENT OF PERMISSION TO USE

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

Signature
Date
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When one embarks upon a project of this magnitude, success is rarely individual. A family's love, the tutelage and inspiration of faculty members, the support of friends, co-workers and employers, all deserve an expression of thanks. However, such expressions only tell part of the story.

I would also like to acknowledge the inspiration and influence of my God in this project. Without His divine guidance, without opportunities that were more than coincidental, without help when hope appeared futile, this project would not have been completed.

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention of Native American Students</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biculturalism and Native American</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Retention</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of Study</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Education and the Native American</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The College Classroom</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors Influencing College Attrition</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inhibitors to Retention</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention Factors for Minority Students</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention of Native American Students</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biculturalism and Native American College</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Success</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors Leading to Successful Experiences</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Native American and the University of</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Falls</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The History of the University of Great Falls</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Colleges and Universities</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The University of Great Falls Today</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Providencia Tolen and the Work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with Montana Native American Tribes</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE OF CONTENTS—Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Environment</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. FINDINGS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profile of UGF Native American Graduates</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals and Motivation</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources of Inspiration</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highlights and Accomplishments</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges and Difficulties</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Barriers</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of Indian Heritage</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keys to Success</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Drive</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support System</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overcoming Difficult Circumstances</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Orientation</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The UGF Experience</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American Role Models and Support Staff</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved Cultural Sensitivity</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. CONCLUSIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Study</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Profile</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Heritage and Background</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UGF Impact on Native American Pride</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Behaviors and Values</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Barriers</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS—Continued</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

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

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

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

Recommendations include: (a) improve collaboration between UGF and community and tribal colleges regarding educational and financial opportunities, (b) improve efforts to sustain, support, and maintain a multi-cultural program on the UGF campus, (c) improve campus support services for Native American students, (d) increase recognition of faculty members that impact Native American educational experiences, (e) increase efforts by UGF to hire qualified Native American faculty and support staff, (f) support efforts to foster self determination in Native American students, and (g) improve communication between Native American students and campus entities, especially the administration.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

Education in general and post-secondary education specifically have been identified by Native Americans as a key vehicle for individual and tribal self-sufficiency (Peregoy, 1981, p. 35). Yet, statistics indicate that only 9% of Native American adults have completed four years of college compared to 20% for the total U.S. population. Furthermore, 53% of Native American students enrolled in colleges or universities leave after the first year. Only 25% complete their college degree programs and Native Americans have the longest time lapse from baccalaureate degree to doctorate (14 years) compared to all races (American Indian Research Opportunities, 1993). It has also been noted that less than 50% of Native Americans adults living on the 10 largest reservations had a high school diploma in 1980 (Carter & Wilson, 1991, p. 1). American Indians and Alaska Natives are “extremely underrepresented” in higher education; little progress is being made in increasing their college enrollments; and between 1986 and
1988, American Indians experienced the smallest enrollment gain of all groups (p. 5).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Retention of Native American Students

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

Today, Indian nations are at risk because:

1. Schools have failed to educate large numbers of Indian students and adults.
2. The language and cultural base of the Native American is rapidly eroding.
3. The diminished lands and natural resources of the American Indian are constantly under siege.
4. Indian self-determination and governance rights are challenged by the changing policies of the administration, Congress, and the justice system. (Indian Nations At Risk Task Force Report, 1991, p. iv)
As the education of Native American students is considered, it must be remembered that educational practices, resources, and success have been highly questionable throughout the last 150 years. Perhaps the most glaring example of the predominant, white America societies' inability to adequately meet the challenge of providing quality education to Native Americans is the low attainment of educational success as defined by graduation with a bachelors degree. For instance, in addition to a drop-out rate for Native American high school students that exceeds 65%, the post-secondary drop-out rate is estimated somewhere between 75% and 93% (Hill, 1991). This indicates a number of things. First, Native American high-school-age students are entering the work force ill-prepared to compete with the majority of their peers for jobs that provide more than minimum wage pay. Second, there is but a small number of fields in which these students can qualify to work, thereby perpetuating the reliance on federal and state welfare assistance. Third, many of these students choose as adults to return to the educational environment because they see education as the only way to empower their lives and impact their economic well-being. Finally, because of being ill-prepared for the rigor of a college education, many of these students fail to complete their educational goals and
drop out of college; this can negatively impact their self-esteem and contribute to their cycle of poverty.

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

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

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

Studies on retention efforts and programs for Native American students have received an increasing amount of attention in recent years. Several factors have been identified which are important in promoting the retention of Native American students. Extended families are primary in providing support while Native American students are in college (Dodd, Garcia, Meccage, & Nelson, 1995). Also, having respectful, complimentary, and caring teachers is noted as the strongest influence on the student's educational experience. In addition, specific organizations and support services can assist in the retention of Native American students (Hoover & Jacobs, 1992). Guidance and counseling related to career selection and support groups within major fields of study are another influence to successful retention.
It is important for support programs to be in place to enhance social and academic integration of Native American students into academic life (Pavel & Padilla, 1993). The following support services have been found to be influential in retaining Native American students.

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

Biculturalism and Native American Student Retention

Several studies have begun to shed light on the impact that biculturalism has on the retention of Native American students. Biculturalism is the “ability to live simultaneously in two cultures” (Schiller, 1987, p. 2). “Biculturalism implies the maintenance of cultural identity as well as the movement to become an integral part of a
larger societal framework" (p. 9). Such maintenance of cultural identity includes an ability to speak native languages, the continued participation in native cultural events such as pow-wows and sweats and continued level of comfort in celebrating Native American events. A bicultural Native American college student can participate in these events while at the same time feeling comfortable in a college educational environment and having friends from both cultures.

In a 1978 study of students attending Haskell Indian Junior College in Lawrence, Kansas, a new cultural "hybrid" of Indian student was explored (Carroll, 1978). The traditional students were identified as those who maintained much of the culture identity that make them "Indian", and the nontraditional students were characterized as those who assimilated into the "white" culture because of their upbringing in a white, urban environment. However, the "marginal" student was the result of the traditional student who begins to "put off" some Indian characteristics and the nontraditional student who begins to act and behave more Indian in certain settings. "Such a person is defined as marginal because he or she lives on the margin of two societies, never quite able to break with past traditions and yet never quite accepted in the second society" (p. 11).
Other studies have emphasized a need for bicultural approaches to educating native students. The replacement of native culture and language with the English language and culture contributes to the failure of minority students, and yet educational programs that teach English language and culture in addition to the native language and culture create conditions for students to succeed in their schoolwork (Reyner, 1992).

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

Levels of biculturalism were examined in Schiller’s (1987) study of Native American students attending Northern Arizona University. She identified four levels of
acculturation: (a) bicultural, (b) Anglicized, (c) American-Indian oriented, and (d) marginal. Her results suggested that bicultural students demonstrated better psychosocial adjustment in academic factors, social factors, psychological factors, and culture factors.

Research has been conducted using the orthogonal cultural identification theory and the cultural identification of minority adolescents (Oetting & Beauvais, 1991). As opposed to theories that support the assimilation of minorities into a majority culture to ensure "success" (i.e., school achievement or financial security), the orthogonal cultural identification theory holds that identification with different cultures is orthogonal. Instead of cultures being placed on opposite ends of a continuum, cultural identification dimensions are independent of each other, and increasing identification with one culture does not require decreasing identification with another. (p. 655)

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

1) that cultural identification can be assessed reliably, 2) that it is essential to assess identification with any culture independently of identification with any other culture, 3) that any identification with any culture may serve as a source of personal and social strength, 4) that culture-specific attitudes and behaviors are
linked strongly to identification with that culture and weakly, if at all, to other cultures.  
(p. 678)

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

Statement of Problem

Various studies suggest that numerous factors impact the success of Native Americans in higher education. These include such things as institutional racism, academic preparation, knowledge of basic academic skills and especially language, and availability of support services. Many Native American students, however, have an adequate academic background, are well integrated with services at colleges and universities, but still drop out after struggling with the systems that are inherent to higher education in the majority culture. The system assumes that if students are adequately prepared academically from any
culture, they can or should succeed in college. American higher education is rigid in the expectations which it has for student performance. Dealing with conformity to core requirements, admissions standards, placement test cut-off scores, and grading on the curve all represent some of the subsystems with which an individual has to comprehend and negotiate in order to be successful in American higher education.

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

**Purpose**

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

Research Questions

The research questions that address the factors that influenced academic success for Native American college
students who attended the UGF of Great Falls include the following.

1. What is the profile of a successful Native American student?

2. How does a student's bilingual characteristics, tribal affiliation, or participation in cultural events relate to this profile?

3. How does being in a college setting contribute to or take away from a Native American student's pride in one's culture?

4. What are culturally ingrained behaviors and values that impact the successful Native American student?

5. What barriers did successful Native American students face in their educational pursuits, and how did they overcome these barriers?

Significance of Study

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Independent college: An institution of higher education supported by an organized church or other private benefactor which does not rely on public support.
Private college/university: An institution of higher education supported by independent benefactors without financial assistance from state or local government.

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

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

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

Assumptions

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

Another assumption was that since academic success to these graduates was so important they would be able to reflect on their various experiences as well as describe them. This also included the assumption that since they had reflected on their experience they would trust the
researcher enough to describe in detail feelings and impressions that impacted the quality of the experience.

Limitations

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

Because this study was limited to only those who graduated from UGF, it should be noted that each student attended the university accepting major differences between UGF and other institutions of higher education in the state of Montana. For example, students at UGF paid tuition of nearly two to three times that of other Montana state colleges and universities. These students may not reflect the same perceptions and views of those who attend the other institutions of higher education.
A limitation of this research is how the reader defines success. As noted in the definitions section, success is defined in this study as college completion with a bachelors degree. It should not be interpreted to imply that students who do not graduate with a bachelors degree are not successful. Many examples can be cited of individuals who are successful in life without ever graduating from a four year university. For the sake of the goals and purposes of four year universities such as UGF, however, success is defined as successfully completing the requirements to receive a bachelors degree.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

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

There are four basic areas that need to be reviewed to give an accurate portrayal of the experience of Native American students who attend the University of Great Falls (UGF). The first area relates to factors that effect the learning experiences of any Native American student. This
review, largely historical, paints a portrait of the challenges Native American students have experienced throughout the past 200 years as the United States has largely ignored the existence of native peoples and their educational needs.

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

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

A final area of examination is that of UGF itself. What are the current and historical foundations of UGF and how has it dealt with Native American students? This factor has a tremendous impact on potential student retention and
graduation. The integration of these four areas provides a basis whereby research can be conducted on the factors that impact the potential success of Native American students attending UGF.

Formal Education and the Native American Learning Experience

Efforts to provide education to the Native American have been influenced a great deal by historical precedent. This precedent required that a completely autonomous race of people become converted to an Old World, European belief and behavior system. This belief and behavior system, that was completely at odds with the system lived for centuries by Native Americans, was the primary initial motivation for providing formal education to the native peoples on the American continent. In order to convert Native Americans to Christianity, it was deemed necessary to teach at least some of them to read and write. An objective closely related to Christianization was to teach the Native Americans European modes of dress and behavior so they would look and act like "civilized" people (Oppelt, 1990, p. 1). However, efforts by the Jesuits, Franciscans, and Protestants to educate Native Americans had little influence on Native peoples and met with little success (Clark, 1992, p. 29). Private schools such as Harvard and Dartmouth, which were newly
established in the colonies, made feeble attempts to recruit Native American students and also met with little success in educating or converting the indigenous peoples of North America. The few Native Americans who participated in these schools found little support or encouragement when they returned to their tribes. "Acquisition of such knowledge seemed to be confusing to young tribal members who observed conflicts between the white man and their respective tribal communities" (Hill, 1992, p. 50). A quote attributed to Benjamin Franklin from a Native American chief gives a taste of the prevailing attitudes toward the American education provided:

We know that you highly esteem the kind of learning taught in those colleges and that the maintenance of our young men, while with you would be very expensive to you. We are convinced, therefore, that you mean to do us good by your proposal; and we thank you heartily. But you, who are wise, must know that different nations have different conceptions of things; and you will therefore not take it amiss, if our ideas of this kind of education happen not to be the same with yours. We have had some experience with it; several of our young people were formerly brought up at the colleges of the Northern Provinces; they were instructed in all your sciences; but when they came back to us, they were bad runners, ignorant of every means of living in the woods, unable to bear either cold or hunger, knew neither how to build a cabin, take a deer, or kill an enemy, spoke our language imperfectly, were therefore neither fit for hunters, warriors, nor counselors; they were totally good for nothing. We are, however, not the less obliged by your kind offer, tho' we decline accepting it; and to show our grateful sense of it, if the gentlemen of Virginia will send us a dozen of their sons, we
will take great care of their education, instruct them in all we know, and make men of them. (Block, cited in Thompson, 1994, p. 2)

As tribal people were being forced to give up their traditional lands and live on reservations, some federal commitment to Native American education was being financed and arranged. In 1887 Congress appropriated more than a million dollars a year to educate Native Americans, however, about half of this went to missionaries contracted to educate them (Utley, cited in Rowland, 1993, p. 44). Unfortunately, the goal again was to assimilate Native Americans into the majority culture rather than allow self-determination. Captain Richard H. Pratt, who founded the first Indian school at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, may have expressed the sentiment of American policy makers when he stated, "All the Indians there are in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him and save the man" (Prucha, cited in Rowland, 1993, p. 84). It was noted that the classroom would be the place where Indian people would shed their "savageness" and assume "civilized" ways (Fritz, cited in Hill, 1992, p. 51).

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Indian boarding school system was being organized by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. These boarding schools, most of which were off the reservation and far from Native families, contributed to a disintegration of Native American society
and family (Clark, 1992, p. 30). This disintegration was noted to permeate throughout Native American society:

In order to force compulsory education, Cheyenne children were taken from their homes and instructed in school. Moreover, BIA police were dispatched in order to insure that these children attended school. If families did not comply with sending their children to school, they were threatened with having their rations discontinued. As a result, families were disrupted and displaced by boarding schools, where their children learned little that related to their lives. Tribal elders were rendered useless by not having a role in the teaching and learning process of the young. The bond between young and old, which was an integral part of the Cheyenne "Journey of Life", was almost severed by virtue of the establishment of formal schooling on the reservation. (Rowland, 1993, p. 130)

In the years that passed since the Pratt Era, virtually every tribe would be effected by federal policies designed to change Indian people into the vision of what the non-Indian thought was good (Rowland, 1993, p. 84). This motive was pervasive in the educational policies directed at Indian people. Indian education meant that:

In the fifty years before the publication of the Meriam Report (1928), the federal government pursued a policy of total assimilation of the American Indian into the mainstream society. Recognizing the vast difficulties in achieving this goal, Congress and the Indian Bureau adopted a plan to remold the Indian's conception of life, or what came to be known as his "system of values". If this could be changed, assimilationists reasoned, the Indian would then become like the white man. The Indian system of values was expressed in the education of his children and his attitude toward the land. Consequently, the assimilationists chose to attack
these two concepts as the major targets of their campaign. (Szasz, 1974, p.8)

Significant to the future of Native American education was the 1928 published Meriam report. In this report, government support for Native American education, especially government run boarding schools, came under attack. Curriculum deficiencies, physical abuse, and poorly trained teachers were some areas noted (Boyer, 1989, p. 16). Also of significance during this period was the appointment in 1932 by President Roosevelt of John Collier as the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Under his leadership the relationship Native Americans had with the federal government was changed, self-determination was acknowledged, and reforms begun (Boyer, 1989, p. 18). In 1934, the Wheeler-Howard Act was passed, nicknamed the Indian Bill of Rights, which enabled Indian tribes to form constitutions, organize self-governments, incorporate as tribes, establish businesses, and even provide some financial assistance for Native Americans to attend institutions of higher education. By 1935, 515 Native American students attended colleges and universities under the provisions of this act (Tucker, cited in Hill, 1992, p. 52).

In spite of some efforts to digress and return to a policy of assimilation and termination of tribes after the Second World War, individual rights and educational
opportunities for Native American students continued to improve in the 1960's and 1970's. In the early 1960's the Indian Reorganization Act was rewritten and out of this effort the Higher Education Grant Program was created. By the mid-seventies over 16,000 Native American students were receiving funds provided by the program (Eschwage, cited in Hill, 1992, p. 53). In 1965, the Higher Education Act focused on much needed aid to students and developing institutions, setting the stage for greater participation in higher education by Native Americans (Boyer, 1989, p. 21). This change included an increase in the numbers of Native Americans receiving a college education and the beginning of tribal colleges where language and culture could be fostered and supported.

Local control of education and the generation of increased educational opportunities were addressed by the Indian Education Act of 1972. This act (a) provided locally-controlled, supplementary funds for schools with Native American students, (b) funded Native American students for undergraduate and graduate education in certain fields, and (c) provided local adult education programs (Szasz, 1977, p. 199). According to this act, Indian control of education was perceived as an important element for the future development and progress of Native American communities (Rowland, 1993, p. 2).
As described in this historical context, Native American educational success has had extremely austere beginnings. Currently, among Native American high school students, the drop-out rate is a staggering 36%, the greatest rate among all ethnic groups (Indian Nations At Risk Task Force Report, 1991, p. 7). Statistically, less than one-third of Native American ninth graders attend college. Worse yet, only nine out of every 100 Native American ninth graders will earn a baccalaureate degree compared with 20% of the total population (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). Other statistics indicate that no more than 55% of Indian students graduate from high school and that for those who finish, the level of academic preparation is low (Boyer, 1989, p. 59). Only 17% of those who graduate from high school go on to college as compared to 35% of white students (Boyer, 1989, p. 28). Though slowly improving, indices of educational progress remain well behind that of other ethnic groups (U.S. Department of Education, 1994).

Much of the problem is the blending of two very different and distinct cultures (Reyes, 1991, p. 25). The Native American student frequently comes from a home and community environment which for centuries has not placed a great deal of emphasis on competition, materialism, or academic attainment; all of these are important values of
Euro-American society. Instead, the Native American's world view is largely influenced by a casual, cooperative environment that does not always fit comfortably with mainstream society (p. 25). The Euro-American society that influences all of American education is market driven, competitive, and fast paced. The American system of higher education prepares all students to enter that environment. The principle purpose of higher education in America is to develop intellectual and vocational skills and to prepare the student for the world of work (Astin, 1979, p. 100).

Even Native Americans, from an urban background are influenced by parents and extended-family members whose value system represents a culture that has been focused on present needs rather than on vague future rewards.

The College Classroom

Nowhere does the clash of cultures become more forcibly visible than in the classroom of an American college or university. Although Native Americans have diverse cultures and languages, they stand apart from non-Indians in their belief systems and world views (Cornell, cited in Rowland, 1993, p. 8). In a higher education environment, the Native American student encounters an abstract, often theoretical, educational process that not only does not relate to the Native American world view but also frequently requires an
effort to see the relevancy of the subject matter from any cultural perspective. The classroom with its own language, rules, mores, and social system promotes its own distinct culture. However, the classroom is not a neutral arena in which all students operate on the same basis (Clark, 1992, p. 33). Academic success implies in part that the student feels comfortable within that environment, that the student has similar expectations and preparation for academic rigor, and that teachers do not differentiate between students on the basis of color, race, social class, or economic status.

Many factors contribute to the learning environment. Poor academic performance has been attributed to deficit theory (e.g., IQ or cultural), teacher expectation theory (tracking or groupings), and cultural differences (language use at home vs. at school or use of questions) (Clark, 1992, p. 34). Because of the special cultural differences between whites and Native Americans, effective teachers of Native American students need to develop:

1. an attitude of respect for cultural differences
2. procedures for getting to know the cultural resources of their students
3. the ability to translate this knowledge into effective instruction
4. skills in interactive decision making.
   (Clark, 1992, p. 37)

In a study of Native American adult students, the most commonly noted characteristic of good teachers is the
respect which they show for the students as human beings (Conti & Fellenz, 1988, p. 96). It was noted that regardless of the situation, good teachers always allow the students to maintain their dignity. The teachers are genuinely interested in the students and convey to them a sense that they are the important thing. "They ask your opinion" and find out about student’s needs and questions. Understanding teachers create an atmosphere in which students are not afraid to talk about their concerns, problems, and deficiencies.

The concept of time, whether it is when to arrive for class or when to turn in an assignment, is very important in the higher education environment. To many Native Americans, time is relative and certainly not something that should control one's life. Activity and interpersonal interaction, which is centered upon the present, is more important than due dates, schedules, and worries about "wasting time". The instructor, often emotionally distant and task oriented, is reluctant to bend and compromise in expectations. Classwork and lectures, which are frequently presented in a passive and uninvolved manner, occurs in a largely non-participatory setting with one-way communication. Evaluation is conducted on paper and pencil examinations, is dependent upon rote memorization, and is usually not related to real-life
experience (Reyes, p. 29; Holmes, Ebbers, & Robinson, pp. 5-6).

In contrast to this system, the Native American student has come from a culture that has relied on group harmony and cooperation for survival. Appropriate behavior did not pit the individual against the group although it did challenge one to self improvement. Agreement and cooperation have been central to the survival of the tribe. In this realm, humility and modesty was fostered. As a culture, individual accomplishment is a reflection of group success. Value is placed on individual dignity and personal autonomy; these are traits that are not always recognized in a competitive academic environment. Because of these cultural influences, the Native American students tend to exercise an economy in what is said, to not show-off and frequently to experience conflict in the classroom because they are quiet and do not speak out (Reyes, p. 25).

The Native American student, especially if from the reservation, has learned that wisdom comes from various sources and not always from a school teacher. Wisdom, encompassing a holistic perspective that includes the spiritual as well as physical and intellect, is not something just learned by reading a book. For example, among the Northern Cheyenne,
A primary means the elder used to instruct the younger ones was with ancient stories held in the tribe. In explaining the importance of these stories, a grandparent said, "These stories are given to you, and they are yours to carry all of your life. It is up to you to hand them to someone else." According to one elder, "The stories that I grew up hearing always taught for us to work hard, to do our share, and never be dependent. They were also used to explain how we should get along with the community and help others." (Rowland, 1993, p. 77)

Such education is experienced listening to a grandparent reflect on their past or by listening to adults speak around the kitchen table after dinner as much as in a classroom. This educational experience is much more pragmatic than abstract or theoretical. Also, in many Native American societies, education has a definite "spiritual" component. Janine Pease-Windy Boy (1990), President of Montana’s Little Big Horn College, refers to a source for her institution’s curriculum which is more closely related to real life as experienced by her tribe.

Knowledge can come from spending time in fasting and prayer, from the top of the mountain or the river bottoms, or from a small spirit....[We understood] knowledge was vested in all of us throughout the community....We inherited all these ways in which knowledge could be learned whether it is through observation, from listening, from mentoring, or through very, very meticulous study. We inherited a faith in our own scholarship and in the idea of education. (pp. 37-38)

Other factors that impact the educational environment have a tremendous influence on the learning of the traditional Native American student. These factors include
a Native American’s respect for nature, which may inhibit some involvement in science classes, and spirituality, which is frequently avoided in educational discussions (Reyes, p. 30).

The Native American student comes from a world where the family, especially the extended family, has played an important role. Priorities to one’s family may frequently take precedent over educational priorities. A death in the family, even if it is a distant family member, may take a student away from classwork for up to two weeks. In some Native American tribes, even non-blood relatives may have had a part in raising a child and are considered a part of the family (Reyes, p. 31). Family activities, celebrations, and events make up a Native American student's world. Studies have shown that minority students may have difficulty in school because the way they learn at home is different than the way the teacher expects them to learn (Clark, 1992, p. 34). Solutions to classroom cultural conflicts include designing instructional strategies based on learning methods familiar to students at home (p. 35).

As a student in a system that emphasizes the acquisition of wealth, individual success, and hard work, the Native American's value system is frequently at odds with the goals and expectations of the majority culture. Traditionally, a successful Native American has not been one
that has accumulated a great deal of wealth. In fact, in some Native American societies, accumulation of wealth implies distrust, suggesting a comparison with an oppressive white society. Many Native Americans hold a "what is mine, is yours" mentality. "Giveaways," where blankets, tobacco, or other gifts are presented, are still acceptable ways of honoring others. Likewise, there is not much emphasis in Native American culture on a "Puritan work ethic" which holds that members of society work hard for individual accumulation of wealth. The tribe has worked together, faced hardships and survival as a group. Motivation to earn money to accumulate wealth, to "save for a rainy day", or to work for the sake of working has not been valued in most Native American cultures (Reyes, pp. 26-27).

Whether the focus is on learning style, context, or situational, there is some indication that Native American students, like other adult learners, fair better when their needs are acknowledged. These include (a) the presentation of information that is related to student experiences outside of the classroom, (b) a high level of peer learning in which cooperation is emphasized, (c) and the presentation of information that is context-related, and (d) allowing students sufficient time to respond to questions in classrooms' (Woods, 1995, p. 29). Crow Chief Plenty Coup pointed out to Indian people in the late 1800's that
"education is your most powerful weapon. With education you are the white man's equal; without it you are his victim" (Clark, 1992, p. 15). Education, in general, and higher education specifically, has been identified by Indian people as a key vehicle to individual and tribal self-sufficiency (Peregoy, 1981, p. 35).

Factors Influencing College Attrition

More American college and university students leave prior to degree completion than stay. Of the nearly 2.4 million students who in 1993 would enter higher education for the first time, over 1.5 million would leave their first institution without receiving a degree. Of those, approximately 1.1 million would leave higher education altogether without ever completing either a two-year or a four-year degree program (Tinto, 1993, p. 1). There are various factors that influence the motivation of students to continue in school for class after class and semester after semester in spite of the cost of thousands of dollars and the sacrifice of years of time until they graduate or choose to leave college prematurely.

This is especially true for students who come from backgrounds that do not always reinforce the importance of higher education or the value of a college degree. Of this country's disadvantaged populations, members of almost all
racial minorities have lower college graduation rates than their white counterparts (Tinto, 1993, p. 31). Individuals from America's native groups—American Indians and Alaska Natives—have benefited least from post-secondary educational opportunity. The reasons include, but are not limited to, poor primary and secondary educational experience, inadequate educational resources, poverty, lack of parental support and role models, and widespread substance abuse (Wetsit, 1994, p. 36). Entry into any institution of higher education is a major accomplishment for Native Americans. However, regardless of the numbers of native students entering higher education the barriers that inhibit retaining those students through to graduation while in college becomes the next challenge.

Inhibitors to Retention

In higher education, much importance has been given in recent years to the retention of students. Yet, some confusion has occurred as to how to examine and categorize the wide range of types of college students that attend. Three categories of students have been noted: persisters, who were continuously enrolled from the fall of their freshman year through the fall of the sophomore year; stopouts, who completed their first quarter but failed to enroll for their second/or third quarters and were again
enrolled for the fall quarter of the next year; and withdrawals, who were enrolled for their first quarter but were not enrolled again through the next fall quarter (Pascarella, Duby, Miller, & Rasher, 1981, p. 329). It is important to note that stopouts were more similar to persisters than withdrawals. The main effect of stopping out is to slow progress toward any outcome, including dropping out and graduating (Stokes & Zusman, 1992, p. 288). Knowing whether students who leave universities later return is important to understanding the process of attrition from higher education. Over one half of the students in Stokes and Zusman's research who were still enrolled after five years had stopped out at some point (p. 289). This represents a reason it is difficult to track a student's retention and success. Of Stokes and Zusman's research of freshmen attending the University of Illinois at Chicago, 95% started as full-time freshmen. However, at some point in time, many attended part-time, most worked to support themselves, and about 20% interrupted their education for a time and then returned. The graduation rate for this cohort was only about 25% after 5 years (p. 288).

For those who leave college permanently, the causes of dropping out of college are both complex and difficult to isolate. Some noted factors influencing retention include the financial cost of attending college, poor academic
preparation and performance, and the lack of maturity and sound decision making (Levitz & Noel, 1987, p. 5).

The reality of some of these issues is not clear, however. Though some researchers have noted a small impact of financial aid upon persistence, the general conclusion is that financial aid is not a central element in student persistence. Though departing students very often cite financial problems as reasons for leaving, such statements are frequently ex post facto forms of rationalization which mask rather than reveal primary reasons for their withdrawal. Students who see their college experience as rewarding and/or as being directly tied to their adult futures will continue to bear great financial burdens and accept considerable short-term debt in order to complete a degree program. When college is seen as irrelevant and/or as unrewarding, even the slightest financial pressure will lead to withdrawal (Tinto, 1993, p. 81).

Academic problems are also cited as a cause in withdrawing from college. It is estimated that 10% to 15% of all institutional departures arise because of academic failure (p. 83). However, issues such as academic boredom, irrelevant classes, limited or unrealistic expectations of college, academic under-preparedness, transition and adjustment difficulties, the lack of certainty about a major or career, and a mismatch between the institution and the
student are hidden, more obtuse causes for students to not return (Noel & Levitz, 1988, p. 2). These may contribute indirectly to a lack of motivation which manifests itself in poor academic performance.

The significance of the connection between the student and the college, especially the learning environment, has been noted as the most direct impact on the retention of the student (Tinto, 1993, pp. 69-71). As students are more involved in the social and intellectual life of college, they more frequently make contact with faculty and other students about learning issues, especially outside of class, and are likely to learn. Student contact with faculty, especially outside of class, is an independent predictor of learning gain and growth. An important linkage exists between learning and persistence that arises out from the interplay of involvement and the quality of student effort (pp. 69-71).

Primary factors influencing departure from college prior to graduation occurs when there is an incongruence between the student’s pre-entry attributes such as family background, skills and abilities, and prior schooling; intentions; goals and commitments; and the campus environment (Tinto, 1993, p. 54). On the student level, the two attributes that stand out as primary roots for departure are described by the terms intention and commitment (Tinto,
1987, p. 39). Intention is defined as educational or occupational goals. Did the student intend to graduate? Did the student intend to collect a certain skill and then not feel the need to graduate? Did the student's goals change in college? A student is retained who has educational and occupational goals that are constantly maintained over the period of the educational experience. The second issue is equally important. What was the student's level of commitment? Commitment is the quality of student effort which manifests itself in two forms: commitment to goal and commitment to institution (p. 46). If the student's level of commitment changes while attending college due to maturity level, priorities, or life changes that student's inclination to stay through to graduation is impacted.

On the institutional level, the factors of adjustment, difficulty, incongruence, and isolation effect departure (Tinto, 1987, p. 39). Adjustment includes both social and intellectual adjustment (p. 47). Is there a 'fit' between the individual's social and intellectual needs and abilities and the school? Difficulty is defined by the level of academic demands (p. 51). Some colleges are "open admissions" while others require extensive academic prerequisites (e.g., admissions test scores, interviews, or a certain high school grade point average). Incongruence is
defined by the extent students are at odds with the institution (p. 53). This incongruence may be manifest in the intellectual compatibility between the student and school or the social compatibility between the student and the school.

Isolation is also noted as a cause of premature departure from a higher education setting. Defined as the absence of sufficient interactions whereby integration can be achieved, isolation manifests itself especially when there is no significant relationship(s) developed between the student and the school (Tinto, 1987, p. 53). In a study of voluntary withdrawal from a small liberal arts college, it was found that voluntary leavers were much less likely than persisters to identify someone on campus with whom they had a significant relationship and/or served as a significant definer of one's actions (p. 64). Research has demonstrated that the degree and quality of personal interaction with other members of the institution are critical elements in the process of student persistence (p. 64). The absence of sufficient contact with other members of the institution proves to be the single most important predictor of eventual departure even after taking account of the individual effects of background, personality, and performance (p. 64). Institutions with low rates of student retention are those in which students generally report low
rates of student-faculty contact (p. 66). It is significant to note that withdrawal from college is most frequent in the first semester of the freshman year, suggesting that the student has probably not bonded with the school, a significant friend, or a professor (p. 68). Congruence need not imply a perfect or even extensive match between the individual and institution as a whole, but it does argue that the person must find some compatible academic and/or social group with whom to establish membership (p. 58).

An extremely important voice in the research of the causes of student entry and departure from college is that of Alexander W. Astin. Much of Astin’s focus is on the environmental factors that positively affect student scholarship. Such factors include the student orientation of the faculty. Like Tinto, he also has underscored the importance of student-faculty interaction and its positive effects on scholarship and retention (Astin, 1993, p. 137). In predicting student retention and success, he notes that two of the most potent predictors are the student’s high school GPA and scores on the college admissions test (p. 187). Student retention in college is enhanced by living in a campus residence hall, attending a small institution, and the student orientation of the faculty (p. 196). Involvement variables showing positive associations with retention include receiving vocational or career counseling,
enrolling in an honor’s program, and student-faculty interaction (p. 196). These factors have a direct impact on student satisfaction and these directly impact retention (p. 278).

Negative input predictors of completion of a bachelors degree include having an outside job and being non-white (p. 194). Research indicates that the largest single negative effect on retention is working full-time as a student or working part-time off campus (p. 196). Commuting to school influences a negative impression of college and is negatively related to attainment of a bachelors degree (p. 390).

The issue of whether the campus was the student’s community was an important factor in retention (Tinto, 1993, p. 61). For many students, especially those living off campus or at home, membership in external communities may play a pivotal role in persistence. For persons whose initial goal and/or institutional commitments are weak, the impact of those communities may make the difference between persistence and departure. When the value orientations of external communities are such as to support the goals of college education, they may aid persistence. When they oppose them the reverse may apply. For that reason one would expect that persons from cultural backgrounds and or home communities with low rates of higher education
participation (e.g., persons from disadvantaged backgrounds) may face particularly severe handicaps in attempting to complete higher education degree programs. In trying to do so they may frequently be forced to at least partially reject membership in communities that have been a part of their upbringing. The conflict between the expectations of external communities and those of the college may be greater for disadvantaged students than for more well-to-do students generally (p. 61). Adult students are more likely to be married, live off campus, and/or be employed while attending college, and they are more likely to encounter greater problems in finding time to spend on campus. For those whose commitments to the goal of college completion is weak, the resulting sense of being apart from rather than a part of the youthful college community appears to be instrumental in their failure to complete their degree programs (p. 68).

Other research has examined the issue of external and internal retention on adult students (Naretto, 1995). Although the number of adult college students have continued to grow, their degree completion rate is low when compared to traditional age students (p. 90). In comparing the difference between persisters and those who left the college environment, adult persisters generally had a tendency to be enrolled full-time, and external influences were the usual cause of non-persistence (p. 90). Persisters were involved
with the social life of the campus and more committed to their educational goals. External environmental variables exert more influence than academic variables on degree completion (p. 91). The following apply to adult students:

1. The educational level of persister’s parents was somewhat higher than that of non-persisters.
2. A greater portion of the non-persisters were part-time students.
3. Non-persisters were employed for longer hours than persisters.
4. Persisters spend more time on campus, including involvement in various activities and utilization of student services.
5.Persisters expressed a sense of support and encouragement from the campus community. Non-persisters were either noncommittal or negative regarding the campus community.
6. For persisters, there was a greater support indicated by external communities (family, work, etc.).
7. Persisters indicated a larger portion of emotional support provided by the college than the non-persisters. (p. 96)

As it related to the success of adult students, membership in a supportive community is an important factor in explaining the persistence of adult students to degree completion (p. 96).

Administrators, faculty, and student-support personnel can make an impact on attrition through the observance of such behaviors as examining class and major selection or watching to see if a student is investing in the college environment (Noel & Levitz, 1987, p. 4). There are several keys to success that impact attrition and retention on the
college campus. They include things as assigning good teachers to freshman classes; having effective academic advising and career guidance; putting the strongest, most student-centered people, programs, and services in the freshman year; and emphasizing a “customer” focus by all who come in contact with students (p. 4).

Retention Factors for Minority Students

The issues influencing the success of minority students in higher education are also complex.

For many students, college still means a dramatic culture change. Those from rural areas meet a cosmopolitan culture... and many people, for whom college represents mobility out of the working class or the ranks of the poor, find the style and expectations of the academic culture quite alien. For students from poor and culturally deprived families, the college experience can bring both enrichment and severe conflict. For many students, the social mobility implied by college creates serious problems around issues of loyalty and integrity of their early lives. Socialization to middle-class values and styles of behavior, as well as the adoption of intellectual goals, distances them from their own culture of origin and creates conflicting loyalties. As they gain skills and become more middle-class, they feel their old ties slipping and fear that they are deserting people and a way of life that bred and nurtured them. . . . [The] integration is worth the effort. An earlier model of social mobility in this country assumed that people would abandon the past in the interest of success and acceptance into a higher status group. But a maturing sense of the legitimacy and value of cultural diversity—the growing insistence of ethnic and racial minorities on the independent value of unique histories, traditions, and heritages—has led to awareness of the terrible cost exacted by this earlier model. To say that no one wants access to
the advantages and perquisites traditionally reserved to a dominant group is not to say that one wishes to be identical to members of that group or to give up legitimate identification with one's own heritage.

Essentially, those students who fear abandoning their pasts are struggling with the same issue of loyalty. Denying or denigrating their past would mean abandoning their families and cultural roots. Individuals whose interpersonal development is strong and whose capacity for intimacy is large will choose, rather, to integrate their past with their present selves. To the extent that college can support such choices and help students with their integrative struggles...it will contribute to interpersonal development in those most capable of rich and generous interpersonal lives (Donovan, cited in Chickering, 1981, pp. 197-198).

Tinto's (1987) research indicates that rates of system departure from higher education were highest for Hispanics and Blacks and for persons of lower ability and social status background (p. 26). However, the likelihood of eventually earning a college degree is more strongly associated with measures of student ability than social status background (p. 27). The persistence of minority students often hinges upon there being a sufficiently large number of similar types of students on campus with whom to form a viable community. "Though the existence of minority student subcultures does not, in and of itself, ensure persistence, as race alone is not sufficient grounds for congruence, the absence of compatible student groups does appear to undermine the likelihood of persistence" (p. 58).
Whether specially admitted or not, minority students face particularly severe problems in gaining access to the mainstream of social and intellectual life in largely white institutions (p. 70). Beyond the existence of possible discrimination, minority students may find it especially difficult to find and become a member of a supportive community within a college. Sharing a common racial origin is no guarantee of the sharing of common interests and dispositions. Though differences in racial origins do not preclude commonality of interests and dispositions, it is the case that on all but the very largest campuses minority students have relatively fewer options as to the types of communities in which to establish membership than do white students. In such situations, they are more likely to experience a sense of isolation and/or of incongruence than are white students generally (p. 71). Academic difficulties, incongruence, and isolation seem to be more severe for minorities than for other students generally (p. 72). Of importance are those experiences which arise from daily interactions between students and faculty outside of the classroom. Other things being equal, when these interactions are more frequent and when they are seen by the student to be warmer and more rewarding, the more likely is persistence—indeed, the more likely is social and intellectual development generally (p. 84). Persistence of
disadvantaged students depends greatly on academic support and especially for minority students on the character of their social participation in the communities of the institution (p. 160). Disadvantaged students frequently require somewhat different forms of social support than do majority students. To assist with this need, minority mentor programs have proven quite successful (p. 161).

Student's perceptions of their own abilities may contribute more to their success than past academic performance (Kleeman, 1992). Minority and first generation college students are disproportionately victims of self-fulfilling prophecies that they cannot succeed (p. 140). Four categories exist of student self-beliefs and preparation levels. They are as follows:

1. **Well prepared with high opportunity orientation.** These students had an expectation of going to college. They had come from well-educated families and attended suburban or high performance inner city schools. They had more factual information about college.

2. **Marginally underprepared with high opportunity orientation.** First generation students that lacked the preparation of the first group but had grown up with strong family encouragement to pursue higher education.

3. **Marginally underprepared (or worse) with low opportunity orientation.** Not expected or encouraged to go to college. Family and peer advice was that college would make no difference in the opportunities they would experience in their lives. Odds against college graduation for this group.
4. **Well prepared with low opportunity orientation.** Well prepared students but lacking in conviction that college would make a significant difference in their lives. The study group was made up of primarily Native Americans who came from reservations with high unemployment rates and limited opportunities for professionally trained workers. A similar attitude shows up in affluent majority students who do not believe the quality of their lives depends to any great degree on their own exertions. (p. 141)

If students are to be successful and persist through to graduation, then higher educational institutions need to develop new ways of improving learning.

The preparation issue is arguably the most important challenge [those in higher education] currently confront. It cannot be neutralized by redefining outcomes, nor avoided by excluding high risk students. Changing the learning environment, especially student interactions with faculty members, by employing an achievement model that builds upon students' strengths rather than focus on their weaknesses is the only alternative promising long-term improvement. (Kleeman, 1992, p. 144)

When retention is named "the student dropout rate," it implies a problem with the student. Alternatively, when retention is named "institutional graduation rate," the focus is on the institution. True progress in retaining ethnically diverse students will only come when change occurs in the learning environment (p. 144).

In a study of ethnically diverse students at Arizona State University, five variables were identified which appeared to have a critical impact on college graduation
(i.e., achievement and success) (Kleeman, 1992). They were to:

1. Enhance students' belief in themselves by promoting the concepts of goal setting, college attendance, career planning, etc. to both parents and potential college students.
2. Provide financial information as it relates to both college attendance as well as a benefit of college attendance.
3. Establish academic support and skills enhancement by "bridge" programs, freshman orientations, early warning programs, academic advising, student study groups, academic assessment, and study skills seminars.
4. Promote student involvement in the life of the institution, especially student-faculty interaction.
5. Foster family and community outreach support while at the same time increasing faculty and staff understanding of cultures. (p. 148)

Social isolation is a common complaint of minority students at predominantly white universities (Armstrong & West, cited in Terrell & Wright, 1988). The predominantly white university is so enmeshed in white culture that it engenders feelings of isolation and alienation in Black students. Isolation, rejection, anxiety, and cultural values conflicts are cited as major reasons that Native American students do not persist. Mexican-American students reported higher levels of stress than white students (p. 27). In addition, every college has a distinct culture—nonverbal messages that students pick up from virtually every aspect of campus life. Administrator's attitudes toward students, the degree of collegiality among faculty,
the number and diversity of cultural events, the degree to which the college interacts with its surrounding community—are the type of factors that determine the tone of the environment (p. 28).

There are several major influences on attrition of minority students at predominantly white institutions. These include institutional racism, monocultural curricula, faculty expectations and attitudes, cultural conflicts, socialization, and family support (Armstrong & West, cited in Terrell & Wright, 1988). Institutional racism is defined as a pattern of collective behavior that results in negative outcomes for minorities. Admissions and progression criteria that involve culturally-biased achievement tests are examples of commonly institutionalized discriminatory practices (p. 28).

In American higher education, monocultural curricula is where the majority of courses are taught from a western European perspective. This contributes to a perceived discrimination by minorities. Expanding the core curriculum to include the contributions and perspectives of all racial and ethnic origins is necessary to benefit all students and not just minority students. This would also broaden the prejudicial views of some white students that are the result of lack of information regarding the importance of other
cultures' contributions and roles in history and society (Armstrong & West, cited in Terrell & Wright, 1988, p. 30).

Minority students are sensitive to the fact that they are not perceived by many at the institution as capable or that they are not expected to excel. This often produces a self-fulfilling prophecy. Many faculty perpetuate this expectation and attitude when they believe that a minority student is enrolled only because of a special admissions program that lowers admissions requirements for minorities (Armstrong & West, cited in Terrell & Wright, 1988, p. 30).

Minority students may have cultural conflicts with the values promoted by the predominately white institution. For example, the Native American culture requires dependence where as the college and university setting fosters independence. Native Americans value the needs of the group over individual needs and encourage sharing while the university environment is very competitive. Nonassertiveness in Native Americans and other minorities is in conflict with the assertiveness needed by students to function effectively in the college environment (Armstrong & West, cited in Terrell & Wright, 1988, p. 31). Native Americans have cultural and language differences from the white majority culture that may create conflict for them as they move back and forth between a predominantly white university environment and their home environment where
their ethnic culture is predominant (Armstrong & West, cited in Terrell & Wright, 1988, p. 32).

The socialization of minority group students is important because of its considerable contribution to retention (Armstrong & West, cited in Terrell & Wright, 1988, p. 31). Higher educational institutions must become knowledgeable about the cultural differences that impede minority students' social integration into a predominantly white institution if they are to have any hope of creating an environment conducive to learning for all cultural groups (p. 31). Native Americans see life as a "whole" rather than in "parts". The world is viewed in concrete connected "wholeness". However, higher education emphasizes abstract concepts and processes that require complex analysis of the individual parts (p. 33).

There is a tendency to view all Native Americans with the same social orientation and values. Although many Native Americans share some cultural aspects, there are major differences in tribes in areas such as language, dress, customs, and beliefs. Many Native Americans are lumped together as "Indians" or combined with other minorities when programs focusing on culture are presented on white college campuses. This generalization of the social background and integration of a particular group
based on race does an injustice to them as a people and ignores an important cause of retention in college.

Although family support is a significant factor for all students, it is of special significance to minorities. Many minority cultures place great value on families and the extended-family concept. Being away from family support thus places a great challenge and adjustment on them as they enter a predominantly white college or university. Most minority students are the first generation in their family to attend a college or a university and without a college education parents may not adequately prepare their children for, and advise them during, their college endeavor (p. 34).

Thus, several assumptions can be made related to student retention in higher education. They include the following:

- Students who feel a part of the institution are less likely to drop out.
- Families play an important role in determining a student’s persistence in college.
- Freshman students are more likely to withdraw than upperclassmen.
- It is important that retention strategies be implemented in the freshman year.
- Interactions between students and faculty are important factors for retention. (Armstrong & West, cited in Terrell & Wright, 1988, p. 39)

The goals of a retention program at predominantly white higher education institutions should include the following:
• Decrease the social isolation of minority students and make them more an integral part of the institution by increasing and enriching interactions between the minority students and administrators, faculty, staff, and other students.

• Enhance the self-concept of minority students by recognizing their cultural diversity and the contribution of cultural diversity to the institution, and by encouraging and providing for minority students' academic and social success.

• Involve and support minority student's parents so that they, in turn, will be prepared to properly advise and nurture minority students during the college years. (Armstrong & West, cited in Terrell & Wright, 1988, p. 49).

Retention of Native American Students

To understand the fundamental issues surrounding retaining Native American college students, one must grasp the tremendous challenges facing these students who enter college. The retention and attrition of Native American college students has roots in cultural, historical, financial, family, and educational background issues (Dodd, Garcia, Meccage, & Nelson, 1995; Hoover & Jacobs, 1992; Lin, LaCounte, & Eder, 1988; Pavel & Padilla, 1993; Tate & Schwartz, 1993; Wright, 1985). The following observations and studies shed further insight into the challenges Native Americans face as college students in a white college setting.
For Native Americans, education is significant beyond personal achievement and opportunity.

Education is key to self-determination in a broader sense. It sustains us as a people within the kaleidoscope of cross-cultural experiences and economic interactions. The ability to become more educationally self-directed is key to self-determination. It is also consistent with Indian tradition. (Hill, 1991, p. 47)

The historic inseparability of education, personal growth, and traditional Indian values is well documented. The acquisition of technical skills was largely a byproduct of life experiences (Hill, 1991, p. 47). These experiences catalyzed methods of inquiry which were neither formalistic, sequential, nor dependent upon the cohesive methods of external authority. "Assistance and guidance rather than domination and control were the way of our greatest teachers, our old people" (Hill, 1991, p. 47). This connection with Native Americans' greatest teachers, their "old people", is what is severely lacking when one considers the difference between the cultural background of Native Americans and the white culture. Native American "students currently associate education with the subjugation of their needs and interests to irrelevant academic agendas. Conformity to the practices of the dominant culture is sanctioned as a measure of one's worth" (p. 47). The traditional Native American learning process is cyclical and integrates a variety of methods with disciplines in ways
which honor relationships and correspondences. This is in contrast to formal education which is linear and dependent upon artificial and isolated tasks (p. 48).

As teachers ought not to "instruct", they ought not to "measure" according to narrow standards of proficiency. The Indian way is to value mistakes. A mistake is sacred in that, like victory, it is associated with an opportunity for wisdom. In the formal education system, education has been the mechanism that commonly denigrates and demotes our students. The effect is to stratify and alienate our students. (p. 49)

Finally, whether they are primary, secondary, or post-secondary, educational environments grapple with the same issues related to cultural diversity and retention.

Our imperative is to make it possible for our children, at the very beginning of their formal education experiences, to determine their direction. True advancement and productive interaction with European-Americans began only when Indians became participants in determining their future. Even if students get to college, many of them have lost the ability to control their needs and purposes as American Indian students. Any discussion about the import of post-secondary education, and post-secondary mechanisms which support well-being and retention, must begin with a discussion about developing opportunities for our youngest children to learn to constructively resist and challenge habitual and compliant forms of expression. (Hill, 1991, p. 51)

Some of the significant differences in the rate of enrollment, persistence, and graduation rates between rural and urban Native Americans indicate that residence rather than ethnicity may be the most significant factor in their educational achievement. Rural Native Americans are not as
likely to be successful in college (Oppelt, 1990, p. 121). Another possible factor related to success in college is the type of elementary and secondary schools attended. Native American students who attend federal schools are generally less well prepared than those who attended public schools (p. 121). Native Americans who are most likely to enter and succeed at all levels of higher education are those who are most similar to whites in economic level, educational background, values, place of residence, and other predictors of educational achievement (p. 125). There is conflicting data suggesting the value of attendance at a tribal or community college prior to entering a four-year school. Preliminary data from a few tribal colleges has indicated that transfers from two-year tribal colleges had a higher persistence at four-year colleges than those who initially matriculated at the four-year schools. However, Astin's studies of minorities in higher education showed that students who aspired to a four-year degree are more likely to attain their degree if they started at a four-year rather than a two-year college (p. 120).

A high level of cultural pressures among Native American students at doctoral granting institutions has been found to effect student success (Pepion, 1991, p. 64). Student worries about family matters are more common problems among Native Americans than among non-Indian
students (p. 65). Variables such as parental attitude regarding their children's college attendance, student competency in tribal language, and the language spoken by their father have been found to be major differences in successful and non-successful students (p. 65). A positive self-concept of one's Native American heritage and the use of and satisfaction with campus support services are factors which contribute to success (p. 65). When compared to those who did not complete their degree, successful Native American students were noted to be older, to possess a smaller degree of Indian blood, and to be monolingual English speakers (p. 65). Among students of the Yakima Indian Nation, measures of the degree of assimilation of students correlated with higher attrition rates (p. 65). Native American students who developed higher levels of integration into the university community were those whose fathers achieved higher levels of educational attainment, earned higher incomes, and were less attached to the Native American culture (p. 65).

When studying Native American students, a need exists to adhere to three sets of guidelines defining satisfactory academic progress: Federal financial aid regulations, institutional guidelines, and Bureau of Indian Affairs or tribal funding requirements. These distinguish Native American students from other economically disadvantaged
students and contributes to a high degree of stress (Pepion, 1991, p. 72). Finally, institutions interested in recruiting and retaining Indian students should aggressively attempt to increase the number of Indian faculty and staff as well as provide student support activities that foster cohesiveness among Indian students and reinforce pride in their cultural identity (p. 73).

When seeking to retain college students and especially those who are Native American, institutions of higher education must be aware of their goals and motives, implying that retention efforts and programs may be more self-serving than altruistic (Tinto, 1993, p. 5). Retention should not be the ultimate goal of institutional action, but rather it should be the education of students. Their social and intellectual growth should be the guiding principle of institutional action. Institutions must first determine the goals of their actions and the nature of their educational missions to understand the purposes for which students should be admitted and retained. Goal clarification enables educators to come to grips with the thorny question of which types of departure among which types of students are to be the object of institutional action and which are the natural outcome of institutional functioning (p. 5). The key to successful institutional action on behalf of student retention centers not only on the goal of education but also
on the institution's ability to provide settings for that education to occur. It requires a commitment born of the reciprocal obligation institutions and individuals accept when an individual is accepted and admitted to a higher education community. If there is a secret to successful retention, it lies in the willingness of institutions to involve themselves in the social and intellectual development of their students (p. 6). Herein also lies the key to the successful education of Native American students.

Biculturalism and Native American College Academic Success

It is through understanding the history of relationship between Native Americans and the American education system that one can be appreciate the challenges facing Native Americans when they arrive on the campus of a predominantly white college or university. Knowing Native American cultural attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors also influences the comprehension of the dynamics of this blending of cultures. This is especially true when that college or university not only admits a predominately white student body but also is in a setting that acknowledges and affirms the culture of the majority race. The arrival of one raised primarily in the Native American culture to an American college or university can be an experience of immediate
shock and adjustment. This culture shock can be intensified if the Native American has recently arrived from a reservation or small town close to the reservation to a large city with a college. There are many more places to go, things to do, people to visit, and activities to experience while at the same time beginning the process of disciplining oneself for the rigor of college study.

Culture shock has been defined as a disoriented, helpless feeling that occurs with direct exposure to an alien society (Wilson, 1983). The outstanding features of cultural shock include an inability to make sense out of the behaviors of others, an inability to predict what other people will say and do, and an inability to use customary categories of experience of habitual actions, for they elicit seemingly bizarre responses (p. 50).

The white, Euro-American college or university has operated in complete exclusion of the Native American culture since the time its organizers arrived on the continent. These schools were established with a "liberal" philosophy which holds that great thoughts and ideas have come from traditional western thinkers, philosophers, and leaders. In this setting the Native American comes face to face with a non-identity. The Native American's leaders are neither acknowledged nor quoted in class. Most instructors, as the masters of their classrooms, are not versed in the
ways of the elders. Often they can be impersonal and detached from not only their students but the practical applications of that which they are teaching. The standard method of delivery is by lectures and by assignment in a text book. Entire lecture halls can be filled with note-taking students who may not acknowledge each other or the professor. The grading system can be confusing and can be based on a competitive comparison of performance. Students are in competition with each other for the highest grades. These grades are to provide a basis for receiving a diploma, which is the key to competing for employment. The hopeful net result is a job that can provide financial security living in a city which is perhaps hundreds of miles from where the student was raised. It has been noted that the classroom is not culturally neutral (Clark, 1992, p.33). Factors such as the educational background of the student, the student’s academic strengths and weaknesses, personality traits, how recent the student has been in an academic setting, the make-up of the class, and the comfort and skill level of the teacher influence the quality of the learning experience.

Many problems have existed in bringing the two cultures together in an education setting. Early in this century, the polarity between Indian and white cultural values was so great that the teaching of white values to a child raised in
a traditional home often had a shocking effect, and such a
child found it difficult to retain a tribal view of the
world without periodic reinforcement. Thrown into a world
that directs one to be aggressive and competitive in order
to achieve the white man's version of success, which
generally meant a good job and the accumulation of material
possessions, Indian children faced the antithesis of their
own cultural goals (Szasz, 1977, p. 78).

Some researchers have observed that Indian students
like other ethnic minorities "have developed an insecurity
and ambivalence about the value of their own cultural
identity as a result of their interactions with the dominant
(society)" (Cummins, 1989, p. 112). Students of color who
attend four-year institutions are typically faced with the
choice of either assimilation, cultural pluralism, or
separation (Bressler, 1967). The cultural difficulties are
complex. Native Americans are members of tribes with
extensive political and kinship systems. Therefore, as
individuals they are accustomed to interaction within a
group of persons where there is an established relationship.
This context is altered when students enter "schools that
are either off-reservation, predominantly non-native, or
follow a western pedagogy. In short, most public schools or
universities in the United States rupture this cultural
context" (Woods, 1995, p. 29).
Factors Leading to Successful Experiences

The natural vacillation between the Native American and mainstream cultures has a tremendous impact on the abilities and well-being of the Native American student attending college at a predominantly white liberal arts school. Depending upon the extent that the student feels comfortable in the new environment, many dilemmas can arise, including examining how the student fits into this setting. A five-stage minority identity model has been developed to underscore how some minorities confront this dilemma (Terrell & Wright, 1988). In Stage 1, conformity, individuals prefer the cultural values of the dominant culture over their culture. Physical and cultural characteristics that identify them with their minority group are depreciated. Stage 2, depreciation, is a result of the individual’s encounter with information or experiences that are inconsistent with the views held in Stage 1, and this dissonance causes conflict and confusion regarding previously accepted values and beliefs. Resistance and immersion, Stage 3, produce total rejection of the dominant society and culture. Individuals in this stage accept completely the views of the minority group and are motivated to end oppression of their group. Introspection, Stage 4, occurs as the individual experiences discomfort with the
rigidly held views from the previous stage and begin to develop more individual views. This, in turn, leads to conflict between loyalty to one's group and personal autonomy. The final stage is synergetic articulation and awareness. A sense of self-fulfillment is experienced in this stage; conflicts from the previous stages are resolved; individuals are able to objectively examine cultural values from both the dominant and minority cultures and accept or reject those values based on their experiences (p. 36).

Biculturalism is defined as the "ability to live simultaneously in two cultures" (Schiller, 1987, p. 2). This implies the maintenance of cultural identity as well as the movement to become an integral part of a larger societal framework (p. 9). Such maintenance of cultural identity includes an ability to speak native languages, the participation in native cultural events such as pow-wows and sweats, and maintaining a level of comfort in celebrating Native American events. The bicultural model supports the intracultural transition that occurs when an individual crosses from one culture into another. LaFromboise, Coleman and Gerton (1993) examined cultural competence, models of second-culture acquisition, and models of bicultural competence in their research on the psychological impact of biculturalism. According to their research, in order to be culturally competent, an individual has to (a) possess a
strong personal identity, (b) have knowledge of and facility with the beliefs and values of the culture, (c) display sensitivity to the affective processes of the culture, (d) communicate clearly in the language of the given cultural group, (e) perform socially sanctioned behavior, (f) maintain active social relations within the cultural group, and (g) negotiate the institutional structures of that culture. It is noted that the length of the list reflects the difficulty involved in developing cultural competence, particularly if someone is not raised within a given culture. In this analysis, it was not assumed that cultural competence is dichotomous where one is either fully competent or not at all competent; rather as one achieves more levels of competence, the fewer problems an individual has functioning effectively within two cultures (p. 396).

Among the models of second-culture acquisition, several were examined including the Assimilation Model, the Acculturation Model, the Alternation Model, the Multicultural Model, and the Fusion Model. The Alternation Model postulates that an individual can choose the degree and manner to which he or she will affiliate with either the second culture or the culture of origin. This model implies that individuals learning to alternate their behavior to fit the cultures in which they are involved would be less stressed and less anxious than those undergoing the process'
of acculturation or assimilation (p. 400). The construct of bicultural competence is a result of living in two cultures and has its roots in the Alternation Model. Though the literature on biculturalism consistently assumed that an individual living within two cultures would suffer from various forms of psychological distress, the key to psychological well-being was postulated in the Alternation Model to be the ability to develop and maintain competence in the two cultures in which one lives (p. 402).

The Alternation Model of second-culture acquisition assumes that it is possible for an individual to know and understand two different cultures. It also supposes that an individual can alter their behavior to fit a particular social context. To develop bicultural competence, it is suggested that the following dimensions effectively manage the process of living in two cultures: (a) knowledge of cultural beliefs and values, (b) positive attitudes toward both majority and minority groups, (c) bicultural efficacy, (d) communication ability, (e) role repertoire, and (f) establishing some form of stable social network in both cultures (p. 403). Learning a new culture means learning a new way of making sense of experience (Jacobson, 1996). At the same time, making sense of experience is rooted in self-concept, and while self-concept is rooted in the contexts of
relationships in which it is being formed. Learning a new culture is at least in part learning a new self (p. 25).

In addition to having a strong and stable sense of personal identity, bicultural competence is also the ability to develop and maintain positive attitudes toward one's culture of origin and the second culture in which the person is attempting to acquire competence (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993, p. 408). This lends support to the hypothesis that ethnic minorities would outperform their monoculturally competent peers in vocational and academic endeavors because most education and career performance is not in the cultural setting of the minority student but in the setting of the majority, white culture (p. 409).

In examining the effect of biculturalism on various populations, the research of Getting and Beauvais (1990-1991) examines the impact of biculturalism on behavior. When a minority group with a separate and distinct culture exists in a larger environment that is strongly influenced by a majority culture, the situation could provide an abundant source of potential problems. There might be conflicting attitudes, beliefs, and values and differences in language, dress, behaviors, and traditions (p. 656). This conflict impacts all social institutions, especially education where students are still developing a self-image
and determining behaviors that influence the interaction between the individual and their environment.

Cultural identification is the product of an ongoing interaction with the environment. It is a basic trait, usually rooted in family experiences, but it changes throughout life with an individual's experiences. A high level of cultural identification involves cultural needs that must be met by the cultural environment and the ability of the individual to meet the demands of that cultural environment (p. 669). A high level of identification with a particular culture should be related to increased probability of engaging in behaviors specific to that culture or with behaviors that the individual believes are part of being in that culture (p. 669). In the research of Oetting and Beauvais (1990-1991), college and job success tend to be linked with Anglo identification while tribal activities and family relations are more likely to be correlated with Indian identification (p. 669). High cultural identification is related to positive psychosocial characteristics. Youth without a strong cultural identification show the lowest self-esteem and the weakest links to two of the major socialization systems, the family and the school. Strongly bicultural youth have the highest self-esteem and the strongest socialization links (p. 674). With both Indian and Mexican-American youth in the U.S.,
Oetting and Beauvais determined that bicultural youth were as strong in their cultural identification as those with high identification with a single culture (p. 679).

Bicultural abilities in students can strengthen a student’s chances of success in college. In a study of 92 Native American students at Northern Arizona University, bicultural students had significantly better grade point averages than other groups (Schiller, 1987, p. 83). They also (a) reported higher perceived academic ability, drive to achieve and academic self-confidence; (b) used the minority resource and learning resource centers significantly more than the other groups; (c) took more Native American courses; (d) perceived their heritage as an advantage; and (e) reported an easier transition from high school to college than other groups (p. 83).

Biculturalism has a positive influence in other psychosocial contexts as well. In a study of 151 adult Cuban-Americans, a positive relationship existed between biculturalism and overall psychological well-being, self-esteem, and degree of job-satisfaction (Gomez, 1990, p. 386).

Evidence shows that Indian people can retain traditional tribal culture and also be successful in higher education in a dominant non-Indian society (Oppelt, 1990, p. 125). It requires much more commitment and effort than is
necessary if one chooses one culture, but it has its rewards. Bicultural Indian people must spend the time and effort to learn two sets of values, languages, and behaviors and to learn how to reconcile the incongruities between them. Children who are raised in a bicultural setting learn and adjust to this more easily than adults who are raised in one culture and must learn the other after they mature (p. 125). However, there are also unfortunate individuals who are caught between the two cultures and not comfortable in either, demonstrating the pitfalls of bicultural existence (p. 126). Research suggests, however, that it is not mixed cultural identification but weak cultural identification that creates problems (Oetting & Beauvais, 1990-1991, p. 679).

Several things can be done to foster the development of biculturalism in college students. They include the following:

1. Educators should encourage Native Americans to seek out instructional and personal growth activities that more closely match their past experiences, such as cooperative learning environments and family centered counseling.

2. Encourage enrollment in Native American language courses maintain the cultural identity of students by encouraging the development and offering of courses and workshops about the Native American experience.

3. Maintain the cultural identity of students by encouraging the development and offering of courses and workshops about the Native American experience.
4. Encourage development of and participation in student and community activities that lend themselves to the promotion of ethnic heritage

5. Utilize the influence of the family as a means of encouraging use of student services, particularly in career planning, by providing the families information about these services

6. Promote the identification of faculty/service providers who have an interest and understanding of Native American culture to serve as mentors between student and the majority culture, be it the university or the community setting

7. Prepare and make available written material of university and community resources relevant and appropriate to the Native American. (Schiller, 1987, p. 98)

Successful Native American students negotiate a transition from one culture to another, especially if they are going from a rural community or reservation to a predominantly white school and community. The transition is not always easy and has a tremendous influence on whether the student is retained through to graduation. The student's ability to live simultaneously in two cultures, by maintaining a Native American identity while feeling comfortable in the surroundings of the white majority culture of higher education will help ensure academic success.

The Native American and
The University of Great Falls

The History of the University of Great Falls
UGF is a private, independent Catholic university sponsored by the order of the Sisters of Providence. Located in Great Falls, Montana, UGF is one of several educational and health care institutions established throughout the Pacific Northwest to fulfill the mission of the Sisters of Providence.

UGF was founded due to the convergence of three factors. First was the arrival in Montana of the Sisters of Providence order of the Roman Catholic Church. The Sisters of Providence order was founded in Montreal, Canada, in 1843 by Madame Emelie Gamelin and Bishop Ignace Bourget, the Bishop of Montreal. Madame Gamelin had lost her husband and three children to death over a period of five years. Much of her activity, both prior to the deaths of her loved ones and afterwards, was dedicated to the care of the poor and sick of Montreal. In the process of fulfilling the works of charity, she was joined by seven other women, and the seeds of a religious congregation were planted (Crowley, 1988).

Dedicated to caring for the poor and sick, the order of the Sisters of Providence grew. In April of 1852, Bishop Francis Blanchet of Oregon City and Bishop Augustine Blanchet of Nesqually (later Seattle) visited the Montreal Motherhouse to talk with the Sisters of Providence about the need of sisters in the west. After one group departed on an ill-fated voyage that ended in Chile, a second group headed
When Abraham Lincoln signed the bill creating the Montana Territory on May 22, 1864, eleven Sisters of Providence were preparing to leave their Motherhouse in Montreal. With Mother Joseph Pariseau (also known as Sister Joseph of the Sacred Heart) as leader, eight of them were to come to the established western missions of the sisters at Vancouver and Walla Walla, Washington Territory, and three were destined for a new mission in the Rocky Mountains of Montana to teach Indian children.

Caring for the sick and orphaned, these sisters built schools and hospitals in numerous locations throughout the Pacific Northwest. On October 27, 1864, four Sisters of Providence, the first white women to travel from the west to the east over no roads or trails, arrived at the St. Ignatius Mission, the first mission in Montana. At the St. Ignatius mission they found a "reduction," a mission organization where tribes of converted Indians would be drawn together in a permanent settlement. A school was established and farming, stock-raising, and other skills were taught. The various tribes were friendly and lived peacefully together. The sisters were welcomed and began immediately to teach Indian girls, which was so unusual that other tribes in the area sent their daughters to be taught. Throughout the late 1800's, the school and mission were
utilized by the local tribes, especially during times of severe weather or crop failure.

When the Sisters of Providence first came west, Mother Joseph was concerned about their ability to teach. Soon after their arrival, requests for Sisters of Providence to start schools poured in from towns and hamlets throughout the territory (Sjoblom, 1981).

A second factor that influenced the founding of UGF was the arrival of the Ursuline Sisters, another Roman Catholic religious community that arrived in Montana in the late 1800's. Formed in Italy but also based out of Montreal, the Ursuline Sisters arrived in 1884 to establish a school in Miles City, Montana. After the school was established, the sisters traveled further west and joined the Jesuit Priests at the Saint Peter's Indian School as teachers. This school was located near the current town of Cascade, Montana, only 25 miles from Great Falls. This school burned down in 1918, and rather than rebuild it, the sisters concentrated their educational efforts in Great Falls at the Mount Angela Academy. This academy, also known as the Ursuline Academy, provided the community with Catholic primary and secondary education (Cronin, 1973, p. 29).

As one compares the two orders of sisters, it is important to note that both organizations were motivated by a strong religious zeal and were products of a Catholic
educational environment. The Ursuline Sisters were dedicated to teaching and education, and this constituted its sole field of service. The Sisters of Providence had a constitution that allowed for greater flexibility. Teaching was but one of their services. For them, education was a subsidiary way to serve the poor and needy (p. 244).

A third factor in the organization of the future of UGF was the arrival to central Montana in 1930 of Bishop Edwin V. O’Hara. Bishop O’Hara had two main interests: the improvement of rural life and the promotion of education (p. 33). In early 1930, Bishop O’Hara approached the Ursuline Sisters to propose an institution of higher education in Great Falls, expanding on the current Ursuline Academy. In 1932, utilizing personnel from both orders of sisters, Providence and Ursuline, as well as local priests, the college opened. However, facilities were inadequate and during the second year classes were taught at the Columbus Hospital. Under the direction of the Sisters of Providence, math, science, and teacher training were initiated. In organizing the college, Bishop O’Hara specifically stated his purpose was to establish a school which “will exemplify the highest ideals of religion and culture, the important part of a truly liberal education” (p. 320).

The City of Great Falls, incorporated in 1884, had grown in the early 1900’s to become a major rail, electric,
and mining center of Montana. The Sisters of Providence had already established a hospital and orphanage by this time. By 1934, the new college classes had been attended by three distinct groups: Students from the two-year college program at the Ursuline Academy site, prospective teachers enrolled in the Great Falls Normal School, and nurses from the Columbus Hospital Nurses Training School (p. 62). Faculties were totally supported for years by tuition and personnel from various religious orders, including the Sisters of Providence. The college became co-educational in 1937, and the first four-year graduation was in 1939. In 1943, because all classes were instructed in Sisters of Providence facilities, the complete responsibility of the college was transferred to the Sisters of Providence (p. 129). In 1960 the college moved away from the hospital to a 40-acre area south of the city. In 1995, the College of Great Falls officially became UGF, offering associate, bachelors, and masters degree programs.

Private Colleges and Universities

Between the arrival of the first European settlers in the New England colonies and the end of the War for Independence, nine colleges were founded within the English-controlled portion of the North American continent. These colleges were established by various Christian denominations
to fulfill sectarian educational needs in respect to pastoral care and missionary service (Thompson, 1995, p. 33). In the United States, any school not operated or directly funded by a governmental agency is a private school. Private schools include religious day and boarding schools, nonsectarian day and boarding schools, military schools, postgraduate schools, and special education schools. Private schools are controlled administratively by a board of trustees which appoints chief executive officers, who have full authority over school management and responsibility for implementing the board’s educational policies (Unger, 1996, p. 763). In the State of Montana, there are three private colleges and universities, including UGF.

Many students prefer private schools over their public counterparts. The reasons vary. Some students choose private colleges because they agree philosophically with the teachings, precepts, and values of the sponsoring institution. Others choose private schools because there is a certain “prestige” associated with the name, tradition, or educational reputation. And still others choose private colleges and universities because they are unencumbered by the requirements and limitations of a state sponsored institution. Frequently, private colleges and universities are characterized by a smaller faculty to student ratio.
A common criticism of private schools over publicly funded schools is a substantially higher tuition because there is no direct government funding. Financial support for independent colleges is established through endowments and sustained by annual tuition and fee assessments. Funding is a serious on-going challenge for independent colleges, especially in tight economies or in areas with a small population base. These funding challenges are usually passed on to students in the form of higher tuition costs.

Today higher education institutions are challenged as never before by the diversity of their student populations and by the complexity of their student’s learning needs. People of all ages are enrolling in post-secondary education with great optimism, believing that higher learning will provide a better standard of living for them and their families (Thompson, 1994, p. 37). These changes in the dynamics of higher education are also true for UGF, which in the last 15 years has dropped its intercollegiate sports program and closed the dormitory to keep costs down. In that period of time the UGF student-body has become older with an average age of 32 and is more cost conscious as student responsibilities also include house payments, families, and day-care. However, due to the rural nature of the Great Falls location and the lack of other institutions of higher education in the area, many students are willing
to come to UGF in spite of a higher tuition rather than relocate to communities of distant state schools.

Rev. Paul Reinhart, in writing about the value of a private education, said that even though both public and private colleges have a place in a pluralistic and democratic society and that both endeavor to develop the potentialities of the individual and the society, church-related higher education has an additional obligation that rests on the philosophy held by its supporting religions body. He pointed out that:

One of the most important values of our private sector is that it safeguards against a monopolistic higher education system. Its diversity of financial support (individuals, organizations, corporations, and state and local government) provides pluralism of control. Independent [private schools] stand as a countervailing power to protect the public sector and preclude domination of higher education by any interest group or by government. Academic freedom is preserved as students and faculty alike are provided with an alternative to the state system. As a result, our campuses can sustain their tradition of being the testing ground for new ideas, the home for lost causes and a preserve for opposing views. There is room for independent initiative, the prerequisite for change and innovation. (Reinhart, cited in Cronin, 1973, p. 258)

Continuing on the value of a private education, Reinhart stated that the singular purpose of the independent Catholic college lies in its value orientation.

This learning experience that a private college can provide as a value-oriented institution, it seems to me, may well be the most fruitful
argument for the unique purpose and distinctive characteristic of such an institution, for its preservation of a balance for schools that must be tied in with government and a part of a massive public system. (p. 263)

The University of Great Falls Today

Reflective of values established by the sisters to be sensitive to the poor and needy, UGF has an open admissions policy to qualified students of every race and creed. Its academic programs are designed to “educate students through curricula featuring liberal arts courses combined with career and professional preparation” (UGF Mission Statement, 1995). The mission of UGF is “to provide students with the opportunity to obtain a liberal education for living and making a living” (UGF Catalogue, 1996, p. 1).

The present campus was opened in 1960 and works cooperatively with both private and public institutions to attain goals consistent with its educational purposes and values. UGF offers students a foundation for actively implementing Gospel values and teachings of Jesus Christ within the Catholic tradition; it serves students of all beliefs who wish to take advantage of its programs. UGF offers bachelors degrees in 30 majors, associate degrees in 13 majors and one certificate program. The UGF College of Graduate studies offers masters programs in human services, professional counseling, teaching, and criminal justice.
With over 120 full and part-time faculty members, UGF provides a favorable student to instructor ratio of 15:1. It is a small university of approximately 1,300 students which provides students of all backgrounds with an individual educational opportunity (UGF Catalogue, 1996, p. 4).

UGF is within 200 miles of three of Montana's eight Indian reservations. Great Falls is also home to over 2,000 Native American residents. Many of them belong to the "landless" Little Shell band of the Chippewa-Cree tribe. This group has made Great Falls their home in part due to historical efforts to urbanize Native Americans and also due to the fact that as a tribe they were not provided any land for a reservation.

UGF has a population of which 8% is Native American. As of the Spring Semester of 1996, UGF enrolled and served 105 Native American college students. Sixty of those students attended classes on campus, and 45 attended classes at satellite sites at four tribal colleges around the state. UGF hosts a Native American sponsored United Tribes Club and offers outreach programs to several Montana Indian Reservations. Ten bachelors degree programs and seven associate degree programs are offered over a distance learning system. Regular visits from noted Native American leaders and artists are provided on campus. In 1995, UGF
became the site for the Métis Studies Center; the Métis are a large group of landless Indians of mixed Indian and French descent.

According to the UGF catalogue, the curricula contains 13 different courses directly related to Native American studies, including anthropology (Ethnology of North American Indians), psychology (Chemical Dependency in Native American Populations), education (Native American Education and Practicum in Native American Education), English (Literature of Native Americans), history (Survey of Native American History), sociology (Culture and Traditions of Montana Native Americans and Native American Contemporary Culture), law (Native American Government and Law, Montana Human Rights Network, and Native American Courts), Native American Studies (Field Experience in Native American Studies), and religion (Native American Religions Traditions). Students can minor in Native American studies, and there are two Native American adjunct faculty members who instruct Native American-related classes.

Sister Providencia Tolan and the Work with Montana Native American Tribes

Perhaps the greatest representation of the efforts of the Sisters of Providence and UGF to reach out to Native Americans is the example of Sister Providencia Tolan. Sister Providencia, a professor of sociology for more than
20 years from 1948 to the late 1970's, became well known locally as well as nationally for her lobbying on behalf of America's Indians, especially the landless Indians of nearby Great Falls. In the early 1950's, the plight of the off reservation Chippewa-Cree groups near Great Falls triggered her drive to energize local residents to recognize the needs of these near-by Native Americans. Many of these residents "had resorted to an ostrich-like attitude when the local Indian problem proved too difficult to solve" (Bishop, 1993, 1E). The Indians settled near what became referred to as "Hill 57" in the 1920's after Great Falls city officials ordered their tents along the Missouri River burned because they were camped near a sewage discharge. Hill 57 was a windswept, barren-rock hill. Indians who lived there had come to look for work in Great Falls because their home areas could not support them or because they were the "landless" Indians of the Little Shell band of the Chippewa-Cree tribe who had no reservation to call home. Many of these Indians lived a semi-nomadic life, leaving each spring to find haying contracts or to pick hops in Washington State.

Sister Providencia planned ways to alleviate Hill 57's poverty, including soliciting donations and urging volunteer groups to repair and donate clothing. Yet she knew that even major community efforts were merely palliative.
Bureaucratic impediments exacerbated the economic void surrounding off-reservation groups. County officials denied them aid because they considered Indians the responsibility of the federal government. Meanwhile, the Bureau of Indian Affairs refused help because the Indians lived away from a reservation. Sister Providencia became especially active with the advent of two federal policies in the 1950's, termination of reservations and relocation of Indians to urban centers. She took opportunities to encourage grass-root Indian groups by meeting with tribal elders and speaking to tribal groups who were worried about retaliation from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. She also met with local, state, and national leaders to educate them regarding the plight of reservation and land-less Indians (Bishop, 1993, 6E).

Sister Providencia often acted as intermediary between local activists and community leaders in Great Falls and bureaucrats and politicians in Washington D.C. She became known both locally and nationally as a crusader against Indian poverty, including the directing of an airlift in 1950 to the snowbound Blackfeet Indian Reservation and the planning of forums in Great Falls dealing with Indian poverty and community indifference. Sister Providencia focused on the federal government because, as she wrote, "only at the federal level can the moral obligation to
In 1954, Sister Providencia initiated a study of reservation and city Indians and included other northern great plains settlements similar to Hill 57. She and her students collected and analyzed statistics on a variety of subjects, including education, housing, and voter participation. Findings confirmed their views on the value of reservations: Although Indian families who moved away experienced “a slight rise in economic opportunities, there was loss in group status and individual attainment” (Bishop, 1993, 6E).

In the mid-1950’s against a backdrop of perceived failures and criticisms, Sister Providencia devised new ideas to address Indian problems. In her “Five Planks to Nail Down 57 Problems,” she recommended that steps be taken to (a) Save the Family, (b) Guarantee Education (half of the children on Hill 57 were not attending school), (c) Work on Unemployment, (d) Save the Tribe, and (e) Equalize Special Services. She circulated her five planks and incorporated recommendations related to them into talks to local service clubs and on radio broadcasts (Bishop, 1993, 6E).

She became very involved in helping individual tribes find their own voice and express their needs. Chairing the Montana Inter-tribal Policy Board’s steering committee in
1960, she helped prepare Montana tribes for the American Indian Conference which was held in Chicago in June of 1961. This meeting was a harbinger of Red Power movements of subsequent years. Blackfeet leader Walter Wetzel appointed her tribal consultant and acknowledged her counsel. Rocky Boy tribal leader Edward Eagleman described her as a "fearless and eloquent sister, and probably one of the best informed persons in the United States on the Indian economic problems" (Bishop, 1993, 6E).

UGF has continuously executed outreach efforts to the Native Americans of North Central Montana for the past four decades. This is evidenced by educational efforts of Sister Providencia and the historical precedent of establishing a resident center at Fort Belknap Agency in 1958 with the Gros-Ventres and Assiniboine Indians. This tradition has continued in recent years as UGF currently has distant learning articulation agreements with four Montana tribal colleges. Even though Sister Providencia is no longer a fixture at UGF, her legacy lives on and both the community as well as the Native Americans of the region remember her influence and efforts.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Design

The study of characteristics that impact the success of Native American students lends itself well to a descriptive study using case study research. Descriptive research is undertaken when description and explanation rather than prediction based on cause and effect are sought, when it is not possible or feasible to manipulate the potential causes of behavior, and when variables are not easily identified or are too embedded in the phenomenon to be extracted for study (Merriam, 1988, p. 7). The case study design was used because this investigation was concerned with discovering new information, insights, and interpretations of education as it was perceived by successful Native American graduates. Because successful Native American graduates have fundamental cultural traits that bind them together as a distinct group, the perceptions espoused by them represent a view that is found nowhere else. Thus, graduates participating in this study represent a distinct social group whose views of the focus of this research represent
the boundaries of this investigation and therefore provide a lens to examine the world view of these graduates (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 98).

Case studies are a type of qualitative, naturalistic inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 57). Naturalistic inquiry assumes that multiple realities exist in nature. Phenomena do not converge into a single form or a single truth, but they diverge into many forms and multiple truths. Moreover, the layers cannot be described or understood in terms of separate independent and dependent variables; rather they are intricately interrelated to form a pattern of truth. It is these patterns that must be searched out for the sake of human understanding (p. 57).

In "descriptive" research the focus of case studies is to describe as accurately as possible an entity in its natural surroundings (Merriam, 1988, p. 7). These descriptions are considered "qualitative" because instead of reporting data, "case studies" use prose and literary techniques to describe, elicit images, and analyze situations by documenting events, quotes, samples, and artifacts (Wilson, 1979, p. 448). As opposed to "generalizing" research findings, qualitative studies investigate phenomena such as Native American academic success that is unique and atypical and that ultimately
unveil truths that were beyond understanding in the first case (Rowland, 1993, p. 49).

This descriptive study was drawn from interviews and personal histories of successful Native American graduates from the University of Great Falls (UGF), which is a four-year university with a predominantly white student body, faculty, and administration. Since this study sought to provide a better understanding of the phenomenon under study, the most appropriate design for this research was the educational case study using historical and descriptive data. Moreover, this study was guided by the belief that these graduates, representing such a significant minority of the UGF population, have a substantial contribution to make in terms of defining educational success.

UGF enrolls and serves approximately 105 Native American college graduates. Approximately 60 of those students attend on campus, and 45 are at satellite sites at 4 tribal colleges around the state of Montana. This private, liberal arts university with various baccalaureate and graduate programs has a population of which over 8% is Native American. Established by various entities of the Catholic Church, UGF has as part of its mission to help students "to obtain a liberal education for living and for making a living" (Mission Statement of the University of
Great Falls, 1992). Outreach efforts have historically included a specific mission to the Native Americans of central Montana. This is evidenced by educational efforts among the "landless" Little Shell Indians that make Great Falls their home and the establishment of a resident center at Ft. Belknap Agency in 1958 to serve the Gros-Ventres and Assiniboine Indians. This tradition has continued in recent years as UGF currently has distant learning articulation agreements with four Montana tribal colleges.

Research Environment

Descriptive studies take place within a specific context, and their purpose is to describe elements within this setting (McCroskey, 1997, p. 40). Such efforts require that "the researcher must be sensitive to the context and all the variables within it including the physical setting, the people, the overt and covert agendas, and the nonverbal behavior. One also needs to be sensitive to the information being gathered" (Merriam, 1988, p. 38). For research which involves the collection of qualitative data, "one of the cardinal principles of qualitative methods is the importance of background and context to the processes of understanding and interpreting data" (Patton, 1980, p. 9).
In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary data collection instrument of a research project (Guba, 1978; Merriam, 1988, pp. 19, 36; Patton, 1983, p. 22). An awareness of the relationship of the researcher to the context of the study is important. "Data are mediated through this human instrument. . . . The researcher as instrument is responsive to the context; he or she can adapt techniques to the circumstances; the total context can be considered" (Merriam, 1988, p. 19). Qualitative phases of research projects necessitate "that the researcher get close to the people and situations being studied in order to understand the minutiae of the program life. The researcher gets close to the program through physical proximity for a period of time, as well as through development of closeness in the social sense of intimacy and confidentiality" (Patton, 1983, p. 43). Therefore, since "the researcher using qualitative methods attempts to understand the setting under study through direct personal contact and experience with the program" (p. 41), it is important and necessary that there be a "specification of the role of the researcher in conducting the evaluation" (p. 43).

The design of this study took into consideration and was partly made possible by the fact that the researcher has lived in Montana for 13 years and has worked with Native
American students and participants of the Student Support Services Program at UGF. For nine years the researcher served as the UGF learning resource counselor providing academic, career, and personal counseling, coordinating tutorial services, and teaching orientation and study skills classes. For four years the researcher served as the program director. Student Support Services is one of the six programs funded by the Department of Education under the TRIO umbrella. At UGF the Student Support Services program was the primary vehicle to insure the retention and graduation of low-income, first generation, or disabled college students. 100% of the Native American students attending UGF qualified for Student Support Services.

As the learning resource counselor and later as the program director the researcher was given countless opportunities to observe the educational situation of Native American students attending UGF. Many students arrived on campus with little prior academic preparation. Some arrived without a support network or family connection within the community. Some struggled with substance abuse or were in abusive relationships. Others were attempting to escape poverty from the reservation. All were optimistic about academic success and realistic about the long challenge that lay ahead of them. As the staff person in charge of the
college placement exam, I became acquainted with most of these students when the placement exam was administered, worked with them regarding academic advising, taught them study skills, and provided entry counseling to ensure a comfortable transition had occurred between the student and the school.

It was disheartening to see the majority of these students drop out of school, most in their first year and many by the end of their first semester. Many chose to return to the reservation with huge debt. As the instructor of the college study skills class I observed one student start the class four times before successfully completing the requirements.

At the same time it was a thrilling experience to hear the familiar yells of congratulations and applause from family and friends when a student walked across the stage at graduation. Several graduates, having tasted the success of receiving their bachelors degree, would continue as masters degree candidates to make themselves more marketable at home.

This research was initiated to give voice to the few Native American students who endured the difficult process of succeeding within a foreign and often lonely system. Surrounded by white classmates, professors, and support
staff, Native American students were often separated from their family and homes. Though in contact with other Native American students, it was more likely that they came from different tribes and therefore from separate geographical regions. This was a source of bonding for some but a contribution to the isolation of others. Many Native American students would leave not because they didn’t have the academic ability but because they lacked the support necessary to stay in a foreign culture. In counseling sessions and in classroom discussions the challenge of balancing school priorities with children, a spouse, and a part-time job, while adjusting to a culture different from the reservation impacted success. The research that contributed to this dissertation was a natural result of these experiences.

Sample

The most appropriate sampling strategy for qualitative case study research is “nonprobabilistic” sampling, of which the most common form is purposive or purposeful sampling (Merriam, 1988, p. 48). For this study purposeful sampling was used to select the participants. With purposeful sampling, the participants are chosen based on the assumption that the researcher wants to discover,
102

understand, or gain insight; in other words, the sample is selected from a pool which the researcher can learn most (p.48). Purposeful sampling is used as a strategy when one wants to learn something and come to understand something about certain select cases without needing to generalize to all such cases (Patton, 1980, p. 100).

For this study 18 graduates were selected and interviewed. This group of graduates represented the wide range of characteristics of Native American students who attended and succeeded at UGF. There was consistency among this group to the responses of the questions, and this group was sufficiently diverse to represent various elements of the Native American students who attended UGF. This diversity included characteristics such as gender, bilingual vs. English-speaking, cultural background, tribal affiliation, age, and educational background.

Graduates' addresses are tracked at UGF through the alumni, registrar, and placement offices. Information from these sources was used to initiate contact with graduates who had graduated within the last 5 years in either baccalaureate or graduate programs. Individuals were chosen based upon their reservation and urban background, their tribal affiliation, and the age as either a traditional or non-traditional student. Interviews continued until
patterns emerged from the data categories (Guba, 1978, p. 60).

Graduation statistics for UGF showed that 59 Native American students graduated with either baccalaureate or masters degrees from 1992 through May of 1996. Based upon their demographic characteristics, 18 were purposely selected from this population. Appointments were made by telephone. Each graduate was invited to spend approximately one hour meeting with the researcher in one of three locations: On the UGF campus, in Browning at the Blackfeet Community College campus, and at Rocky Boy at the Stone Child College campus.

Interview questions were derived from two sources. Some questions were influenced by Schiller’s Native American Student Questionnaire (1987). Other questions were developed by the researcher. Some of these elicited demographic information (e.g., age, gender, tribal affiliation, and language of origin). Others were open-ended questions that asked about cultural involvement, sources of internal and external motivation, ways students dealt with academic and social barriers at the university, and themes that impacted retention to graduation. The intent was to uncover participant views of factors that
impacted their lives and assisted them in the accomplishing of their educational goals.

**Procedure**

As the name implies, naturalistic inquiry takes place in the natural setting in which the phenomena occurs (Rowland, 1993, p.53). In order to observe this natural setting, cultural norms were of utmost importance as this study was conducted. Data for this study was collected in a manner which honors Native American culture. This was accomplished by doing the following.

The researcher confirmed the importance and legitimacy of this study by discussing the goals and purpose of the study with a number of Native American students and graduates of both UGF as well as other schools of higher education in Montana. The intent of these discussions was to get a reaction to the nature and the wording of the questions and to insure that cultural norms and mores were respected. One of the readers discouraged the researcher from sending an introductory letter because she felt that a telephone call would be more open and appropriate with Native Americans. Another suggested that to have a Native American pave the way in introducing the study would
influence positively the responses and volunteered to help set up interviews.

Interviewees were identified by examining graduation records of students indicating Native American background on admissions forms from UGF from the years of 1992 to 1996. Interviewees were prepared by being told of the intent and purpose of the research and by being informed that it would potentially assist other Native Americans to be successful in a primarily "white" university. They were also told that the information would be shared with the administration of UGF to assist the school to be more culturally sensitive to Native Americans students. It was explained that all information would be keep confidential.

Interviews were set up by either offering to visit participants in their home, at the office of Student Support Services at the UGF, or in the libraries of Blackfeet Community College or Stone Child College. Participants were also offered the opportunity to make other arrangements if desired. Privacy and a quiet setting were taken into consideration. Prior to holding interviews, the investigator consulted with Native Americans to determine culturally important considerations regarding the data-gathering process and the use of probes in the interviews for the participants in this study.
Eighteen interviews were held. The interviews proceeded until patterns were perceived in the data (Guba, 1978, p. 60). In order to confirm the patterns which were identified, triangulation via perspectives from other interviewees and collaboration of pertinent texts, documents, and reports were employed to confirm and solidify categorical knowledge and to make this study structurally corroborative. Triangulation is the process of exposing a proposition to possible countervailing facts or assertions (Guba, 1978, p. 63).

The process of each of the interviews adhered to the following guidelines. First, interviews were semi-structured. Individuals needed to be provided the fullest opportunity to respond in their own terms and frame of reference (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 176). This is especially important because in some Native American cultures questioning is considered impolite and signifies distrust by the listener (Rowland, 1993, p. 51).

The use of open-ended questions allowed the participants to express feelings and thoughts related to the general nature of their educational experiences. Following these questions, probing questions were used to pursue more specific information directly reflective of the research questions. The mannerism of the interviews indicated that
the participants in this study felt at ease and not intimidated, and the format allowed them to define and describe topics in an unhurried, methodical manner.

Because the interviews were designed to be in-depth, each of the interviews started with a brief review of the graduate's education background and moved to more specific questions about personal experience. This was accomplished by using probing techniques as the basis for the interview questions (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, pp. 179-180). From this, more in-depth information was obtained that reflected more elaborate data. This technique has proven to be effective in gathering great amounts of data about respondents' experiences and feelings (p. 179).

After the interview questions were answered, the participant was asked if the researcher had correctly understood the response. As the process of gathering data continued, the content of each of the interviews was re-examined and compared to other interview data in order to begin the process of extending, bridging, and surfacing categorical information (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 96).

Key factors in looking at the aims of education are:
(a) The nature of the curriculum and educational method, (b) the role of the teacher and learner, and (c) the disposition one has in regard to the learning process (Darkenwald &
Merriam, 1981, p. 41). Therefore, in order to describe the educational experience as perceived by these successful graduates, this study was guided by the following questions:

1. What motivated you to want to go to college?

2. What do you consider to be among the greatest highlights or positive experiences of going to college?

3. As you reflect on your collegiate experiences, what were your greatest challenges and difficulties?

4. To what or to whom do you credit your greatest source of motivation to succeed in college?

5. What cultural events did you participate in as a college student that reflect your Native American heritage?

6. What Native American traditions, values, or beliefs do you currently honor?

7. How did being in a "white" college educational setting influence your Native American traditions, values, or beliefs?

8. What advantages has your Native American heritage been while attending college? In what way has your Native American heritage been a disadvantage?

9. Overall, how do you feel your college instructors felt about your Native American heritage?

10. Overall, how was UGF accommodating or supportive to you as a Native American?

11. How was UGF insensitive to you or your cultural roots?
12. As you reflect on your personal experiences at the UGF, what would you consider the greatest hurdle to academic success?

13. When times were difficult in school, what were factors that motivated you to continue and not quit?

14. To what degree did you need emotional support to stay in college and where was your source of support?

15. As you compare yourself to Native American peers who also succeeded in college, what things did you have in common with them?

16. As you compare yourself to Native American peers that may have experienced problems similar to yours but chose to drop out, what made the difference in why you stayed and why they dropped out?

17. If a Native American high school student asked your advice about coming to UGF, what would you tell this student based on your own experience?

Once the interviews were held and the field notes completed, the information was transcribed into a word processing file under particular field names. The files were analyzed by sorting the categories under key terms. Patterns were identified and were later used in the narrative analysis of the study. This research technique was chosen to describe or explain events or phenomena; there was no manipulation of the participants, and efforts were made to characterize the graduates as they lived in their
natural home setting (Merriam, 1988, p. 7).
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

Eighteen recent Native American graduates of the University of Great Falls (UGF) were interviewed to assess their personal educational experiences as Native American students at UGF as well as how their heritage influenced the learning experience. Information was also discovered that elicited perceptions of the institutional experience in the education of Native American students.

Native American students who graduate from UGF are representative of an important group of students who overcome tremendous sociological, historical, and educational barriers to receive their diplomas. On admissions applications they indicate their Native American heritage. Throughout their experience at UGF, they must negotiate the system of higher education in a school where over 90% of the students are white and all but two of the instructors are white. They were expected to perform comparably academically to students from a different educational background and culture that places a different
value on obtaining a degree. Many of these students in this study had left the reservation to attend school at UGF and were not sure of the educational benefits that they would receive upon completion of their degree. They represent a minority within a minority, the few of their race who successfully accomplished their goals of getting a bachelors degree.

The interview data suggest that these graduates were goal oriented, proud of their Indian heritage, and saw their education as not only a means to financial security but also as a way to help their people. These students felt in control of their own destiny, overcame institutional barriers, and were committed to their educational aspirations.

Profile of UGF Native American Graduates

Between 1992 and 1996, 59 students who on their admissions application indicated that they were Native American graduated from UGF. Of these 59 graduates, 18 (31%) consented to being interviewed. Of them, 15 of the 18 students were female, which also reflects the same percentage of the Native American graduating population. All but four of those interviewed were older than 30 years at the time of their interview and nearly half of those were
45 years or older. This suggests that they were mature students with family and other obligations. Twelve different tribes or tribal combinations were represented of which ten graduates were at least partially Blackfeet. Five graduates were at least partially Chippewa-Cree. Fourteen of the graduates were at least 50% Native American.

All but four of the graduates were products of a public school education. Of those graduates, half graduated from a high school on a reservation, and half graduated from a high school off a reservation. Of the graduates interviewed, all but three had high school grades reflective of A’s and B’s, or B’s and C’s. This suggests that the majority were good or above average students. Thirteen of the graduates had spent at least some of their educational experience at a tribal or junior college or some other institution of higher learning before entering and graduating from UGF. This indicates that they were prepared for the rigors of college work. Seven of the graduates had fathers who had graduated from high school and/or had attended at least some college. Eight had mothers with a high school diploma and/or some higher education.

Of the graduates, 11 indicated at least some ability to understand or speak their tribal language. Twelve noted their religious preference as either traditional Native
American or a blend of their traditional beliefs with a Catholic or Protestant belief. Eleven of the graduates lived on or close to a reservation and six lived in Great Falls. As children, 12 of the graduates lived on a reservation at least a portion of the time they spent growing up. These facts imply that many of those interviewed had the opportunity to develop bicultural values and by the end of the their college experience felt somewhat comfortable in either the white world or the Indian world.

Nine of the graduates chose UGF at least in part because they wanted to attend school close to their home and family. Only five of the graduates indicated that UGF was chosen because of their career goals, and two of those indicated that their career goal was influenced by the school’s proximity to family.

Goals and Motivation

For many of the graduates interviewed, the primary motivation and purpose for going to UGF was to improve their lives. Many of them had known and experienced poverty and therefore had a desire to become more affluent citizens. One female Blackfoot-Sioux indicated:

I wanted to get off the reservation. There were no jobs. I didn’t want to be poor. I was the first to graduate out of my mom’s family, which
included over 40 grandchildren.

A Chippewa-Ojibwa female said, "A few years ago I had my daughter. I didn’t want to have a minimum wage job." A Blackfoot female shared,

I have worked my entire life since I was 15 at minimum wage. When I went to work for the Blackfoot Head Start Program I liked the work. But without the degree, there was no future in it financially. There will be more job opportunities possible with a degree.

This woman expresses the frustration of many, that a ceiling exists which inhibits personal and financial opportunities. These ceilings were especially felt on the reservations where frequently white employees were hired from off the reservation because of so few qualified Native Americans.

A Chippewa-Cree male said, "I wanted a better lifestyle. I didn’t want to be poor." Still another Blackfoot-Flathead female said, "Our family was always poor and lived on welfare. I was the second child of 10. My grandmother said to get a good education." These graduates knew that a college education was a key to greater financial security.

Many indicated that traumatic life circumstances were the motivation to get their degree. For many, those traumatic experiences came because of relationship difficulties or abuse. "After a divorce I went back to
college to prove to my ex-husband that I could do it without him," admitted a Blackfoot-Chippewa-Cree. Another Blackfoot female said, “I was tired of living in poverty. I was going through a divorce and was angry. I needed to channel that [anger] rather than focus on my kids. I didn’t want to wait on tables the rest of my life.” A Sioux female said, “I wanted to better myself so I would not be dependent upon anyone again in my life. No one from home encouraged me.”

For others, substance abuse and alcoholism was a part of a lifestyle that influenced the motivation to go to college. A Blackfoot male shared,

I had been out of school 30 years. I had no immediate family. I was an alcoholic. I had been a street person and I wanted to turn my life around. I was encouraged by an aunt who was also a widow. I attend AA. I saw different people making it and I wanted to make it.

A primary motivation by many graduates to succeed in college was a need to set an example and be an inspiration for others. Many of these graduates were sensitive about their influence on not just their children but the example they set for their tribe. One Blackfoot-Sioux woman noted the importance of following the example of women in her family. "There were strong women in my family. My grandmother was especially influential. She was a secretary for the school district but had only one year of college. I
wanted to become a better person." A Blackfoot-Chippewa-Cree mother stated, "I wanted my daughters to see that there is a benefit to getting an education." An Assiniboine woman said, "A medicine man had taught me once about the importance of getting educated. My grandmother told me that everyone has a role in life. I asked myself what my role in life was and I decided that it was to help others." Still another Blackfoot woman suggested, "I was an aide at the school but wanted to be a teacher. I felt a need to be an Indian teacher for Indian kids." The desire to return to their tribes and families and inspire them to also go to college was a frequently cited motivation for being a successful student.

Sources of Inspiration

As several of the previous stories indicated, there were many sources of inspiration for these graduates to not only go to college but to succeed as well. For many of the graduates, the source of inspiration came from family members. These family members included both those from the immediate family as well as extended family. In fact, several graduates were as motivated by encouragement from a grandmother as they were from a spouse or parent. "My mother provided both emotional and financial support," said
a Chippewa-Cree man. Children also provided various types of support: "While attending college I stayed with my daughter who provided my emotional support. She was always there." The support by family members was universally noted to be both emotional and physical support, including money, housing, help with day-care, or food.

Personal circumstances were both a motivation and a source of inspiration. Even though most would not have chosen their circumstances, the impetus it provided helped make a difference in educational success. "My parents provided both motivation and emotional support," shared a Blackfoot-Chippewa-Cree woman. "I also received counseling while going through a divorce which provided support. Knowing that I was going to be a single parent kept me going." Another Blackfoot woman indicates, "My ex-husband motivated me. I wanted to show him I could become something. However, I also was motivated by a desire to have my family proud of me."

Whereas a number of graduates were motivated by vindictiveness toward their spouse, others were inspired by them. Their importance made the difference in the success of several graduates. One Blackfoot woman shared, "My husband made it easy for me to go to school. He did everything while I attended school." Another Blackfoot
woman stated, "I am indebted to my husband. I had to rely on the support of his income while in school, and he took care of the kids while I was away. He was very influential on my success." A Northern Cheyenne woman stated, "My husband was a great motivational support for me. Going to school with two children was hard work. Fellow students were also very supportive for me."

A tremendous source of inspiration for many stemmed from certain educators, advisors, and faculty members who taught them. These educators and support staff represented for many graduates a source of joy in their educational experience. A Blackfoot-Flathead woman stated,

My junior high track coach and teacher was very sensitive to my family situation. We were very poor. He would come to my home and line up babysitting opportunities for me so I would have money for track meets. That same drive made an impression on how I viewed education.

Still another cited the influence of an educator at the tribal college where she worked. "At Stone Child Community College, the previous president was my boss and mentor. She instilled a belief in me that I could do it. And I did."

Some gave credit to UGF professors and advisors. Professors made the educational process an enjoyable experience. Advisors helped the students focus their goals toward graduation and to their careers beyond. A Blackfoot
male gave credit to his primary advisors, "My advisors helped me figure out what to take and showed me how I could be successful." A Chippewa-Cree-Pawnee woman stated, "I had a sociology professor who I took a class from who was always available for us, who didn’t mind our questions. He took time to work out my academic planning sheet so I knew what classes to take. He encouraged me. He was compassionate."

Still another Blackfoot woman gave credit to her advisor: "My advisor was always very helpful to make sure that I was doing okay."

The importance of support staff to these graduates did also not go unnoticed. Three graduates gave credit to the Learning Resource Counselor at UGF who helps students with academic questions, referrals to a tutor, or counseling regarding personal problems that influence academic success. "The Learning Resource Counselor at the college was my greatest source of motivation to succeed in college," a Sioux woman stated. A Chippewa-Ojibwa graduate shared the importance of both the birth of a daughter as well as needed counseling provided by the Learning Resource Counselor: "Having my daughter and going through pregnancy was a source of inspiration for me. The [Learning Resource] counselor in Student Support Services was a continual source of support."
For some, the source of inspiration was at least in part from within themselves. Though not predominant, three graduates noted that their own individual resources and motivation made a difference in why they were successful. A woman noted, "I credit myself. My instructors were also helpful. As friends were taking the same classes, I kept telling them that if I could do it, they could do it." One man indicated, "My motivation was revenge on all of those who said I couldn't do it. It was a great feeling of accomplishment." These students, however, were in the minority. As a rule, most graduates were much less willing to accept singular responsibility for their academic success.

The importance of friends and classmates was also noted by 13 graduates. Many friends were practically family and they also provided emotional support, day-care assistance, and tutoring. A Blackfoot woman notes,

My advisor was great support. But I remember most the other Native American students who were in student housing with me. We could identify with each other. We were all struggling. We wanted to make better lives, and we shared a lot with each other. I don't know what I would have done without the other natives.

Another graduate claimed, "My classmates were my greatest source of emotional support." A Blackfoot male also stated, "Fellow classmates gave me emotional support."
Highlights and Accomplishments

There were many sources of satisfaction with these graduates. For some it was the accomplishment of getting a bachelors degree. The emotional feelings associated with receiving recognition at graduation were remembered vividly. When asked about her educational highlight, a Blackfeet-Chippewa-Cree woman enthusiastically exclaimed, "Receiving my diploma! I was the first to do it in my family. I had shown that I had done it!" A Chippewa-Cree-Pawnee woman spoke with great relief when she said:

When I walked across the stage at graduation. At one point in time of my life I thought I was mentally retarded. I had been in an abusive relationship. It was at that time that I found my spirituality, especially through my Cree language.

A Blackfoot woman acknowledged her educational highlight by saying, "Knowing that there was one month left and knowing I was about to finish. I stuck with a difficult finance class and found out that I was among only half of the students who finished the class."

Other graduates found satisfaction in putting their career interest into application or experiencing the joy that learning provides. These learning experiences included projects, practicums, research, field-trips, and classroom interaction with a stimulating instructor. A Northern
Cheyenne woman proclaims that joy came in "learning things like science that I have a deep interest in and being with instructors that are beautiful people." Another science major told of the enjoyment discovered on a field trip out of the country: "I really enjoyed my botany field trips. They were fun and I learned so much. It really exposed me to my field of interest." A Chippewa-Cree male exclaimed, "The instructors were the highlight. They were excellent. My computer science instructor was very interested in my success." A graduate who is now a college counselor and instructor noted, "Research. I loved doing the research and writing the papers." Still another graduate, a Sioux woman, reflected on a life-changing internship:

My greatest highlight was doing an internship at the Native American Center in Great Falls. I liked working with the people there and got to work acutely with the chemically dependent who would visit the center. I enjoyed my role as the organizer of community functions and especially enjoyed meeting with [Congressional] Representative Pat Williams from Montana.

Again, it was also noted the importance of friendships in the quality of the educational experience. Friends shared common experiences, the difficulties as well as the joys. A Blackfoot-Sioux graduate shared, "My being a student teacher was a highlight; applying book work to school. I enjoyed making a bond with friends; the
camaraderie and social interaction; the off-reservation influence." A Chippewa-Sioux noted the dual joy in "graduation and excellent teachers, especially stimulating instructors in her major."

Challenges and Difficulties

Almost every student, regardless of academic and personal background, experiences some problems and difficulties as they come to college. These difficulties come for most by virtue of the change that is required when students leave their home and adolescence behind to succeed in an academic environment or when an adult adds academic performance to a life of balancing priorities.

In addition to these difficulties, Native American students have an added challenge when they walk onto the campus of a college or university that is attended and taught by mostly whites. These challenges have roots in historical, cultural, and academic experiences.

For many students, the cultural change was a challenge that impacted their lives in various ways. For some students, the cultural change manifested itself in the way things are communicated on a college campus. Some students struggled to see professors as different just because they had an advanced degree. Others felt inhibited by the
implied expectation that one’s grade in class was influenced by classroom participation. A Blackfoot male tells, “Getting to know people was a real challenge for me. I was kind of shy. The culture was different. After awhile I blended in.” An Assiniboine woman shared:

I came from a home where we spoke my native language at least part of the time since I lived with my grandmother. Understanding teachers and the need for remedial English was difficult. I knew that I would have to work, but this was harder than I had imagined.

Fear of others was noted by a Blackfoot-Flathead woman:

The culture shock when I first left the reservation was very difficult. I wouldn’t drive for six months out of fear. I didn’t socialize because of my fear of different people, [such as] blacks or German speaking Hutterites.

The difficulties of being a non-traditional student made success a challenge for many of these graduates. Non-traditional students are older than many college students and therefore are frequently insecure in their academic abilities. Many have pressing outside responsibilities that take precedence over their college studies, such as children, a spouse, or work. Many are intimidated about being back in the educational environment after years of separation. A Blackfoot-Sioux woman with children noted, “It was difficult to apply myself to the educational level expected of college as a non-traditional student. I just
didn’t quit.” Another Blackfoot woman with children exclaimed:

I was so focused being away in college that it was scary to go into the public schools. I had not been at home for my children’s weekly activities. My husband would never tell me when things went wrong.

A Chippewa-Sioux woman also reflected on the burdens of a multifaceted life: “Being a non-traditional student was difficult for me. To work, attend school, care for a child, and maintain a home was very hard.”

Certain nuances adjusting to college were difficulties to be expected by some. These adjustment difficulties include getting used to the system of higher education. This system, which includes the importance of planning one’s program to reach a timely graduation, is not immediately understood. One Northern Cheyenne woman noted:

I took a high number of credits to finish early. Progressively I took more and more in spite of other responsibilities. This took all the fun out of going to school, and there are some classes [that I took] I can’t even remember. It took me more like six years to go through college. I didn’t utilize my academic advisor; all class selection I did by myself. I wish I had gone to a two-year school first.

Another graduate notes, “Certain classes, such as writing classes, upper level chemistry and calculus-based physics were tough. Just enduring to the end was tough.” Still another graduate shared her frustrations with learning that
she had a learning disability:

I failed the National Teachers Exam the first time I took it. My professors asked if I had dyslexia and sure enough I had a learning disability. After testing and assessment, professors were very helpful. But I had pride. I didn’t want people to know of my disability. But the staff and instructors at UGF were very helpful.

Classroom difficulties are experienced by most students at one time or another in the educational experience. They are painfully personal if students believe that they are being treated differently because of their race. Not all of these graduates looked at their educational difficulties as natural occurrences. One Blackfoot woman told, “My management science instructor was very difficult. I ended up taking the class independent study after my classroom experience. The instructor almost didn’t pass me when she couldn’t find a paper I had turned in.” Another woman shared, “I took an English class that I enjoyed, but after graduation I found out I had failed the class. The instructor wasn’t helpful at all. I had to take another class independent study and lost a job teaching. The instructor had an ‘attitude’ about helping me.” One Sioux woman expressed her frustration toward some of her instructors:

My greatest challenge was getting professors to understand me! I think some professors were so hooked on believing that I was going to cheat
because I was Native American that they didn’t give me a chance to prove them wrong. However, I think that by the time I ended my education, I had changed some of their minds.

College Barriers

The previous two stories constitute what would be defined as an institutional barrier to success. Barriers exist within institutions of higher education that prohibit certain students from succeeding. Some barriers are established intentionally, such as admissions limits to a competitive academic program and are designed to provide an appropriate student to faculty ratio. Other barriers, however, are less visible and develop out of an intent to keep a school or program with a certain type of student. This type of student has been designated as the type that best represents the school or program. Such barriers can be admissions standards, classes that prohibit continuance in a certain program, or attitudes displayed by personnel of the college or university that discourage success. Sometimes barriers exist because of sexist, racial, or intellectual attitudes. Frequently, many of those within the institution are not aware of these attitudes and the resulting barriers.

Twelve of the graduates interviewed perceived existing barriers at the UGF. One Blackfoot woman noted:
My writing skills were very poor. I felt that [this] was due to cultural difference in the way things were taught. There were two paths--Native and white. Growing up in an urban environment, I wasn’t aware of the prejudice, but coming to UGF made me aware of it. I didn’t notice it so much in the teachers but in educational materials and books.

Another Chippewa-Cree-Pawnee woman sensed the impact of classes that served as barriers to Native American students:

The first class I took was a psychology and law class. It was very difficult, in fact 11 students started the class but only 3 finished it. The school brought it up to the reservation as the first course in our program. That course sifted those who could handle college and those who couldn’t. It was scary; it shouldn’t have been the first class brought up. But I learned that the issue was the self-esteem of my own people, they did not believe they could do it.

Of the 12 students who experienced barriers, 11 suggested that the origin of those barriers were from specific academic departments or individual professors. A Blackfoot woman noted,

Overall, I was treated pretty much the same as all students. I did have an English professor, however, who gave me a D as a final grade for a literature class in spite of the fact that I fulfilled assignments and participated. I had a good grades in other English classes. I felt that he was prejudice against me because I was Native American.

Another graduate shares an impression derived from an English instructor,

I think one of the English teachers had it in for me but I couldn’t prove it. There was just a
feeling I had from her, and I was the only Native American in the class. I was an older student and she made a comment in class once that older students hadn’t learned it right when they went to school as children.

Still another graduate noted,

I had a writing professor at UGF that seemed more than tough. He was hateful. I haven’t had [writing] problems in my life. But this professor intimidated me and I never knew him as a person. I know it was racially motivated.

It is important to note that some graduates saw the cultural conflict as a natural consequence of bringing people together from different backgrounds. A Blackfoot woman expressed,

I didn’t feel that the college was insensitive to my heritage. When I came here I figured that I had to learn things the “white” way. I could input my culture when possible, but the Indian way of learning is different; for example the way we learn language like English. Our learning style is different. But no one was insensitive to me or verbally said anything that was prejudice to me. I did see some prejudice among a few, but I just believed that some of the faculty were ignorant and just not conscious of it. For example I had a professor who I knew did love Indians, but he was suspicious toward them.

Another Blackfoot-Chippewa-Cree woman shared,

One English instructor required that I retake a test but he wouldn’t change the grade for an entire semester. He was really rude, but I don’t feel that it was necessarily because I was Native American. I think he was this way to others.

Whether such behaviors were due to racism or not, they
certainly suggest an insensitivity on behalf of the school or school personnel. This was reflected by most of the students. One Blackfoot woman noted, “I didn’t find the university insensitive to my heritage. I did have a literature class where the instructor didn’t spend much time on Native American stories. I took the opportunity to help the students in the class grasp the meanings of the spirit stories.” A Blackfoot-Chippewa-Cree woman indicated,

There were a number of times I felt that people who worked at the college treated me as a dumb person, talking down to me, using simple language, speaking slowly.

A Chippewa-Sioux woman noted,

When some at the university would talk of Native Americans, they would lump us all together in one pot. Most whites didn’t know the difference between Indians from the reservation and those of us from urban backgrounds. Many reservation Indians had poorer academic backgrounds while those of us who went to schools in Great Falls had the same educational background as most whites.

Finally, a Blackfoot-Sioux woman summed up the incongruence between the school’s possible desires and their behavior by observing, “I found it interesting that there was only one Native American culture class, and it was taught by a white man.”

As a group, the graduates did not feel that the school itself was prejudicial or insensitive to them because they were Native American. Also, 16 students expressed the
feeling that most instructors were conscientious of their Native American heritage. However, it is obvious that many students were made painfully aware of academic or personal inadequacies that were perceived as barriers to success.

The Role of Indian Heritage

Attendance in college is an experience where a student can acknowledge, confront, and even question their perceptions of life. This occurs in part because college is a place that provides students a challenge to change, to examine constructs developed from formative experiences, and to learn in a setting that provides a microcosm of life situations. These educational experiences occur regardless of age and background.

Though it may be argued that the intent of college is not to challenge a person's culture or heritage, this still can occur as students confront these previously held perceptions and compare them to new ideas and perspectives. Certainly, the interaction of students with classmates from differing backgrounds, professors instructing concepts that challenge strongly held opinions, and the institution itself providing a "salad bowl" of conflicting perspectives give students examples of ways to see the world differently.
This was true of the graduates interviewed. Yet, 12 of the graduates expressed that they had grown in personal appreciation of their culture and heritage rather than feel that it was detriment due to being a minority in a college of largely white faces. One student with less than 50% Native American heritage noted, "I learned more about my heritage by taking Native American studies classes. They helped me learn more about myself than I would have learned otherwise." A 100% Blackfoot male shared a similar experience: "In spite of being a full-blood, in college I became more aware of my heritage. I attended a sweat for the first time. I became involved in the united tribes club and helped with fund raisers." Another woman, a Chippewa-Sioux, shared her experience: "I enjoyed learning about my heritage in Native American classes. As an urban Indian, I didn’t know much about my heritage." An Assiniboine woman expressed her experience,

When I first came to college, I was chosen as the princess of the pow-wow that year. I participated in my first give-away in which I gave some jewelry. At UGF I was a club member and participated in the fund-raisers. I was also asked to speak to children at schools in the community as a role model.

Another woman, a Blackfoot-Chippewa-Cree, indicated, "I took a Native American language class and a Native American religion class. I participated in my first sweat. I
learned a lot about the pipe ceremony. I fit in more at UGF and have a greater respect for my Native American beliefs."

Many students found the classroom and their living settings natural places to share their background and encountered opportunities to incorporate their Native American culture and heritage into their classwork and personal activities. An elementary education graduate noted her experience: "In college I was very open about my Native American heritage. People were curious, and I told them. I also would do Native American units in my education classes. I attended and participated in pow-wows." Another student found opportunities to strengthen the knowledge other Native American students had about their heritage: "While in college I counseled native women with their identity. I helped them acknowledge their heritage."

Class assignments provided a mechanism for Native American students to reflect upon their heritage and to draw upon it: "College strengthened and brought out my identity as a Native American. I was able to write frequently about my heritage in my papers." Another student shared this sentiment: "My Native American heritage was reflected in my class assignments and homework. My papers in particular would say a lot about my grandmother and her influence."
The native heritage of many graduates became a valuable resource for the students in extracurricular activities at UGF. "I helped establish the cultural diversity committee at the college," explained a Sioux woman. "When I worked at the Native American Center, we had a Sioux medicine man come to the college to speak about the Red Road and the Indian way of life." It is clear that these students took advantage of many opportunities while attending college to come to better know themselves.

Sixteen of the graduates acknowledged that their Native American heritage was a benefit to them while attending college. For some, the benefit was an improved view of life. One Assiniboine woman indicated that:

Through my spiritual heritage and the wholeness of Native American religious beliefs, I was enabled to get in tune with myself as a college student. At first I didn't feel like I belonged in college because I was so different. But as I came to know myself, I had to drop barriers and biases. I just needed to come to know myself and my heritage.

A Blackfoot woman noted, "My Native American heritage strengthened my self-confidence. It strengthened what I knew and believed about myself. My library research taught me as much about myself as helped me in classes." Still another woman explains,

I found that when I shared my belief system with class they would seriously listen and believe me. I found myself explaining in a class one day
[about] my involvement and participation in certain Native American religious ceremonies.... But the class understood where I was coming from.

For some students, their heritage paid off in tangible benefits. One Northern Cheyenne woman said, "I received some financial aid from my tribe. They were very encouraging to me." Another woman, a Chippewa-Ojibwa, shared her experience, "I received great support through my association with the American Indian Science and Engineering Society. Through them I received scholarships and was provided the opportunity to attend a national conference."

A Blackfoot-Chippewa-Cree indicates, "I did not receive any financial scholarships from my tribe, but my heritage did provide me with social services and support, such as WIC assistance, child care, and hospital services. I also received a job opportunity because of my Native American background."

Not all of the graduates found their heritage to be an advantage. Two graduates did not indicate any benefits that their heritage provided them. Six could remember the times that they felt that their heritage was a disadvantage. One Blackfoot woman recalled, "There were some groups of students on campus that went after recognition and scholarships that seemed to exclude me. Not that I wanted to be included in their group anyway, but I wasn’t invited
to be included." A Sioux woman felt at a disadvantage with professors: "I think some professors saw that I was Native American and did not trust me. Some thought I would cheat."

However, most of the graduates did not feel that their Indian heritage was a disadvantage to them. A Chippewa-Cree man explained it well by noting, "I don’t believe being Native American was a disadvantage to me. I’ve always believed that I was as good as the person sitting next to me. If they could pass the class, so could I."

Today, 15 of these graduates are still very actively participating in activities that celebrate their culture. "I currently participate in religious ceremonies, such as sweetgrass blessing and smudging; I attend pow-wows; I have a great respect for the elders of the tribe," exclaimed a Blackfoot-Sioux woman. A Blackfoot male indicated, "I attend pow-wows and Indian days on my reservation." Still another woman, a Chippewa-Ojibwa, told, "I live my Indian heritage through my personal integrity. I am proud to be Native American. I am especially proud of my grandmother’s background and inspirational teachings and motivation." "My husband and I attend our yearly pow-wows. I dance, and I encourage my children to dance. I also put on a yearly feed," indicated a Blackfoot woman.
Fifteen of the graduates noted that they experienced the typical life change that occurs in part because of a college experience. As one woman said, "I currently practice the teachings of my ancestors though I no longer feel that as an Assiniboine I am superior to other Indians." Another woman indicated, "I now attend sweats four times in the spring and four times in the fall. I'm beginning to feel more comfortable with my Native American beliefs; at first I felt as if I were betraying my Catholic heritage and upbringing." A Blackfoot-Chippewa-Cree woman noted, "I'm a born-again Christian, yet I blend my Christian beliefs with my Native American heritage."

Four of the graduates said that they acknowledged their heritage not so much in actions as much as in identity—that is, in how they define themselves. One Blackfoot woman indicated, "I practice my beliefs everyday. It is my way of talking, how I express my humor. It is my tradition; it is who I am." Another woman, a Blackfoot-Chippewa-Cree flatly stated, "I live it. Being Native American is who I am." Still another woman, a member of the Blackfoot tribe, shared, "All that I am and do is my Native American heritage. Even the way I dress. For example, as a native woman I wear a traditional dress when I teach or present in public."
Perhaps for some, coming to know their native identity was not so much a destination as it was a journey. One Blackfoot-Flathead woman admitted,

I am probably an 'intermediate' Native American. I participate in Native American practices if I have time, but if I am working or don’t have time I don’t worry about it. I suppose I would say that I was 'bicultural'. I communicate well to both Indians and whites.

A Chippewa-Sioux woman indicated, "I am more in touch now with the native appreciation of the earth. I am against littering and destroying the land. I am more aware now of how I was raised in a white society and how that affected me."

**Keys to Success**

In this study, success was defined as the completion of requirements that qualified a student for a bachelors degree. At least seven of the graduates not only satisfied this requirement but also had continued their education. Some were either working on a masters degree or had already received it. However, for the purpose of this study, a masters degree did not constitute more success than a bachelors degree.

When queried about what influences made an impact on the graduates' success, responses varied. These responses
can be largely categorized into the following areas: (a) an innate spiritual drive, (b) a reliable and steady system of support, (c) an ability to overcome difficult circumstances, and (d) a goal orientation.

**Spiritual Drive**

Eight of these successful graduates were driven by a spiritual orientation that provided faith in themselves and strength from their heritage. This spiritual orientation helped support their identity as a Native American in the midst of a “white” environment and gave them strength when times were difficult. When asked to compare her ability to succeed to those who did not, one Chippewa-Cree-Pawnee woman explained, "Not all have the same spiritual foundation I had. In my life, everything flowed from that. I used to have poor self-esteem. I had a victim mentality. But then I acknowledged the gift from my Creator. I knew that I was important in my Creator’s life." An Assiniboine woman also indicated, "We had Native American pride. We had courage. We had a sense of spirituality." A Sioux woman credited the influence of her tribal elders:

I asked the instructors for help, and I listened to what was said and how it was being said. I was told by my elders to listen to what I was told and keep an open mind for everything and not to judge. At school, we did not have an elder to talk to and get counsel. We had no spiritual leaders. We
could not practice our religious beliefs the way we had been taught. This was very difficult for some.

Support System

Sixteen of the graduates students attributed their success to a steady and reliable source of support for their ability to succeed. It was implied frequently that those without support or who tried to succeed academically without the help of someone did not endure through to graduation. A Blackfoot-Sioux woman explained, "For most successful students, support came from family members. Almost all of the students I went to school with relied heavily on their families to be successful. Most had their own responsibilities with children." The dilemma of caring for children was noted by most women. A Blackfoot-Chippewa-Cree woman noted,

We all had family support. Most of us were single women who relied upon other family members to care for our children. We also utilized support services at school. We showed everyone, "If we can do it with a child, so can you."

One graduate told of the challenges of trying to succeed in college without that family support:

Both emotions and priorities were issues as to why some drop out of college. What are priorities? When a student has the support of a family, they can do it. If the family doesn't understand, is jealous of someone because they have financial aid, or otherwise is not supportive, then it is
difficult to stay in school and graduate.

Another graduate attributed her success to caring parents:

The support of caring parents who watched my son kept me going. It was seeing a light at the end of the tunnel and knowing I couldn’t give up. That last semester I took 18 credits, did an internship, worked a job. I wasn’t going to let them down. I love challenges and always set goals.

When the support was not family, it was friends or school support. One graduate indicated the impact of friend support while studying:

The factor that helped me to not quit was teaming up with other students and forming study teams. I quickly came to know that I wasn’t the only one who felt dumb. In my opinion, this is where many Indians fail. They don’t know how to socialize in an academic setting. Besides, I had a great desire to succeed in my education.

Another graduate indicated the importance of a variety support systems. "I talked to other classmates and learned that they felt the same. I also talked to academic advisors who told me not to give up. Tutors were very helpful too," a Blackfoot graduate noted.

Overcoming Difficult Circumstances

Seventeen of the graduates indicated that their lives had not been easy. Though not an escape from difficulties per se, an education was an avenue that most saw as a way to
make life easier. Prior to attending college, these students had experienced problems associated with poverty, relationships, substance abuse, physical abuse, and even the law. Education was perceived as a way to finally control a life that had been uncontrollable. One student acknowledged her difficulties by confessing, "Most students have some kind of struggle. My struggles made me work harder. I had to struggle for all that I have, including my education."

Another graduate indicated the shared experience of a difficult life, "Many of the Native Americans that I graduated with had experienced childhood trauma. Many came from rough backgrounds." Another graduate focused on some of the difficulties indigenous to reservation life: "All of us had the problems of the reservation in common. We all had tough backgrounds of reservation poverty and were influenced by reservation negativity. But the Native American graduates I studied with were responsible for their lives and their families."

Twelve students focused on the trapped feelings Native American women have. One indicated, "Most of the women that I went to school with that dropped out were in bad relationships. They let their men run their lives. Not only did they not have any support from their men, but they were frequently isolated from family and friends and
therefore very lonely." Another stated,

I had will power. My dad always said, "You never give up." My support was my upbringing. On the reservation many marry young, and a lot of husbands are insecure of their wife's success. They want to keep a woman down. There is a definite cycle of abuse on reservations. But now, a "spirit of the circle" is showing females they can be role models.

Goal Orientation

Twelve graduates referenced the importance of goals in their lives and how having goals enabled them to focus on success. One Blackfoot woman indicated,

I had written down my goals to complete my education, and I referred to them regularly. Several times I had to travel to Great Falls for classes, and the roads were bad due to the weather. But I had to drive them anyway to complete my goals.

Another graduate said, "I had a goal and this drove me to come back to finish my education. I wanted off welfare and a doctorate degree by the time I was 50."

A Chippewa-Cree man likened his goals of success to his historical past:

Successful Indians had a positive self-esteem, and we were goal oriented. Our ancestors were goal oriented. When they went out hunting buffalo, they had a goal in mind. They knew they needed to get so much meat, so many hides to survive. That is why I was successful in college. I know what I need to do to survive; this is my life-style like buffalo hunting was to them.
Another graduate linked her goals to her spiritual resolve. She said, "We were committed. We were disciplined. We had a spiritual foundation that directed us to our goal."

The reality of the alternative was enough to keep some students focused on their goals. A Blackfoot-Chippewa-Cree woman with responsibility for her family noted, "Survival kept me from quitting. I had to maintain a B average to continue my employment." Another woman, a Chippewa-Sioux, told the dilemma of her alternative to success: "First of all, if I quit without finishing my degree, I knew I would have to payoff my student loans. My goal then was to graduate. I also didn't want my son to end up on public assistance." A Blackfoot woman indicated a similar dilemma: "At one point in time I almost left school to return to the reservation. When I saw what I was returning to compared to my life in school, I decided I liked my life better in school than I did at home."

The UGF Experience

When asked for recommendations and suggestions that would help UGF to provide Native American students with a more positive experience, responses varied. Many noted positive experiences at UGF, but most also had some caution.
When asked what advice she would give a Native American friend considering attending UGF, one Blackfoot woman indicated,

I found that the small classes and individual attention was very helpful and retains more students. I don't think large classes are good for our people. We are a social people and need to get to know those who we study with. I don't think UGF is as culturally sensitive as it could be. I think such activities as the pow-wow is not fully supported by the school.

A Sioux woman noted, "I would tell others that the school is very good and they would get a good education. I would warn them, however, to watch out for a double standard. We want you to come and pay tuition, but if you are an Indian, we might not trust you."

Many students reflected on the difficulty of individual instructors or programs and felt the necessity to warn other students of their experiences. A Northern Cheyenne woman said,

I wouldn't recommend that a friend come here to major in education. There is too much of an effort to weed you out of a program. I would ask if they had attended a community or tribal college first because I think that would help them to be successful here. Older students should seek out other educational opportunities before coming here. I would let them know how tough it is here. I had to learn everything over again. Also, if you take college 12 credits a semester, you'll be here forever. The worry that I might flunk a class caused me great anxiety."
One Blackfoot graduate warned,

Watch out! The instructors are difficult. Some Natives may think they can use their heritage to get more help, but it won't work here. In some classes, like English composition, you feel good with yourself because you made it through on your own. Some students may experience problems accumulating a huge debt to get their education here. I will be paying this school back for a long time.

An Assiniboine woman indicated, "UGF is no party school, so don't come unless you expect to work. The instructors are knowledgeable and want to see you reach your goals. They want to help you."

"UGF is a good school but it is tough," tells another Blackfoot graduate. "College is not like high school. You have to take responsibility for your learning. Go visit instructors and advisors. Communicate what you need to them. Write down your questions before hand and make sure you cover everything." Another graduate shares, "Be ready to struggle, to study, to stay focused. You can get a good education, but it won't be easy. Socially, I didn't get much from UGF, but I did academically. I had to be very disciplined taking distance learning classes." A Chippewa-Cree graduate also recommended to students considering UGF that "they'd better be serious about their education because UGF is not an easy school. Do not expect a free ride."
Financial issues were noted by 10 of the graduates. A Chippewa-Ojibwa recommended,

UGF is expensive and challenging. Keep looking for scholarships. Find a counselor to help you learn the ropes and take advantage of school resources. Talk with professors; they really want to help you succeed. Find or organize a peer support group and a study group.

A Chippewa-Sioux woman underscores the issue of cost: "Weigh your education options carefully because attending college at UGF is expensive. The location is great and the instructors are good, but the school is expensive."

The recommendation to attend school first at a tribal or other two-year college was noted by four graduates. A Blackfoot-Chippewa-Cree woman noted:

Have a lot of money. Don't waste a year at college. Go to a tribal college to find out if you're going to like it. If you are an older student, go get help because there are many willing to help you. It would be nice to come on campus for a while if possible to experience life off the reservation. I found myself intimidated being around a lot of people with a lot of education. New students should be made aware of Native American support systems right away.

Still another Blackfoot-Chippewa-Cree graduate observed, "Go to the tribal college first. If you go to UGF first, you find that it is middle-class, white America."

Specific recommendations that these Native American graduates gave to those who administer the direction of UGF
fall into the following categories: a) costs, b) Native American role models and support staff, and c) improved cultural sensitivity.

Costs

The average yearly cost for tuition, fees, room and board, and at UGF is over $8,000. These costs were overwhelming to the Native American students. Seven graduates recommended a different cost structure to help students choose to come to UGF. A graduate that attended school and also had to work to support a family suggested, “The school should provide more financial assistance to reduce the high tuition and fees. UGF should lower the costs so more Native Americans could attend. It is hard to go to school here and manage a home.”

A contributor to the problem was the continual yearly increase in tuition and fees UGF had instituted over the past several years. A graduate recommended, “The school should really look at how raising tuition keeps students from attending here. I would like to get my master’s degree [here] but the cost is too prohibitive.” Another graduate just stated, “The cost is very high; lower the cost.”

Native American Role Models and Support Staff
Though UGF has attempted efforts to hire Native American faculty and support staff over the years, the inconsistency and absence has been noticed by Native American students continually. Yet, this is one area that many Native Americans see as a "litmus test" to determine if the school is committed to them as a people. One graduate noted,

It would have been very helpful to have a Native American counselor available, especially in the financial aid department. This counselor can be a liaison between the school and the tribe. This individual would be supportive and care about Native American students. They would be a resource and a contact person. [They could assist in providing] more assistance in finding scholarships.

Another graduate also suggested: "I think the school should hire a minorities counselor to give the Native American students someone to go to for help and to be around who would be a role model." Another noted,

An advisor who has responsibility to help Native American students, who would be a support for them and help them succeed in college would be great. The school needs more Native American employees and teachers to serve as role models for native students.

Another graduate suggested,

Have a Native American counselor at the school. Bring in elders from the different tribes on occasion for students to be able to talk to. Help the faculty and staff engender a greater trust for Native American students. I felt that if the university wants to be better it would listen to
the students, and then they would know how to help
the students better.

**Improved Cultural Sensitivity**

The hiring of Native American faculty and support staff has a direct relationship with the perception that UGF needs to improve its cultural sensitivity. “I didn’t think that the professors were as sensitive to my heritage as a Native American as they could have been. Does the school provide professors with an inservice in Native American traditions?” one graduate inquired. Another graduate recommended,

I thought it would be helpful if there were more classes to address multi-culture issues. For example, all students should take a Native American studies course. I still think that there is a general lack of understanding of who we are as people. We are a shy people, but I feel that overall we are treated better now as a people than we have been in the past.

Another noted, “The school should continue to foster pow-wows, the Indian club, and attention to Native American heritage at school events such as graduation. It is great to see the flags from various Native American tribes hanging in the cafeteria.”

Cultural sensitivity as manifested in services was mentioned frequently as well. One graduate noted,

The school should do a better job promoting the efforts it provides to support Native American students. It would have been very helpful if services such as day-care during registration were
available and other support services for families with children. The school should hold an opening social for Native American students where the Native American Club is recognized and the place is pointed out for Native Americans to gather.

Another graduate, sensitive to the needs of many non-traditional Native American students, recommended,

It would help if the school would support an organization for Native American women. It would be great to have the elders come to the school to help all Native American to become "educated warriors". But I'm concerned especially that we [do more to] support Native American women and their children as they get their education.

In conjunction with a sensitivity toward their culture, three graduates noted the importance of supporting and improving the spiritual needs of Native Americans. One graduate noted, "I think it would have been better if the school had allowed more sensitivity on the spiritual heritage of its Native American students." In a similar note, another graduate added, "I thought UGF was really committed to Native American students, [but] it would have been nice to have a place set aside to practice Native American spirituality, perhaps a place to have a sweat lodge."

One graduate's comments summarized the feelings of many of her colleagues. She plainly stated that: "The college needs to hire more Native Americans. It needs to foster more cultural events like the pow-wow. Native Americans
need to be acknowledged and be given more incentive to come to UGF. And special fee waivers would help because the cost is so high."
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Study

This case study focused on Native American graduates of the University of Great Falls (UGF) and the pre-college and academic experiences that influenced their success. In this study factors that contributed to their success as students were described. In institutions of higher education throughout the United States, various factors inhibit the success of Native American college students. In spite of an increase in the number of students entering college and adequate academic preparation, retention and graduation rates are the lowest among all racial categories. This is also true at UGF where over 8% of the student body is Native American. No studies have conclusively determined the influences that impacted the educational experience of these students. Previous efforts to examine the characteristics of successful Native American graduates have typically been conducted through an ex post facto analysis of quantifiable data. The past research paradigms have seldom considered
the viewpoint of the successful Native American graduate (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 104).

The purpose of this study was to describe factors that contribute to the success of Native American students at UGF. This was done by invoking perceptions of the educational experience as reflected by these graduates. Factors examined included the influence of native culture, sources of motivation and inspiration, student goals, the highlights and accomplishments as well as difficulties and challenges experienced, the experience of barriers, and recommendations to the school for improving the academic environment for Native American students. This purpose was accomplished through the oral testimony of these adult graduates. The testimony was compiled with regards to students' individual needs, opinions, and educational and social experiences. In the spirit of this intent, the proper method for collecting critical information about each graduate was the semi-structured interview. This process was an effective means of examining the perceptions and experiences of each graduate (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 105). These perceptions and experiences revealed a comprehensive example of the interaction between the student and UGF, their peers, and their families.
This study examined five areas related to these graduate’s academic experience. The first area attempted to construct a composite profile of these successful students. These graduates were primarily female, nontraditional students who attended school while fulfilling family and work responsibilities. The majority of the graduates indicated that they were at least partially Blackfoot. The second highest tribal representation was from the Chippewa-Cree tribe. Both tribes are geographically located close to UGF. Most of the graduates attended public high school, had received good or better than average grades, and most had attended a two-year college prior to transferring to UGF. Most of the graduates could speak or understand at least some of their native language, most indicated a religious preference influenced by traditional native beliefs, and an overwhelming majority participated in cultural activities reflective of their heritage. The majority lived either on or near a reservation or in Great Falls and most had lived on a reservation at some point in their lives.

The second area investigated the influence individual cultural orientation and commitment had on the student’s academic experience. The graduates expressed an importance their Native American heritage and culture placed in their academic as well as personal lives. Testimony shared by
these graduates overwhelmingly reflected a commitment to their heritage. Most manifested "Indian Pride" and spoke enthusiastically about the influence their heritage had in their academic success. Several indicated they had grown up in appreciation of that heritage as college students and were thankful that UGF fostered a recognition of their heritage by providing Native American studies classes, bringing classes to the reservation, and by attempting to provide services for Native American students. Most participated in Native American culture events while being students and some indicated that while in college they participated in some events for the first time. Several students shared personal experiences where they were permitted class time to explain beliefs and behaviors and others felt satisfaction with opportunities to expound on beliefs through research papers and projects.

A third question assessed the influence that UGF had on the academic experience of these native students. The students acknowledged both a supportive academic environment as well as one that had instructors, classes, and programs that inhibited academic success. A supportive academic environment provided learning experiences that satisfied student hunger for knowledge. Many students spoke positively of educational experiences and settings that they
felt prepared them for the world of work. Many felt the
school and instructors were good and challenging.

In contrast, nearly all of the graduates could remember
vividly experiences that they felt inhibited their success.
Some students found at least one insensitive instructor that
proved to be a stumbling block to success. Other students
experienced bureaucratic run-around that could have ended
their academic experience. Many students longed for a
Native American in an authority position—a counselor, an
advisor, an instructor to be found on campus, or someone to
assist with financial questions. Nearly all of the
graduates noted the worry about long-term concerns regarding
the cost of attending UGF and how long they would be paying
the money back. Most graduates took these experiences in
stride, however, and did not allow them to permanently
influence academic progress.

A fourth area examined culturally ingrained behaviors
and values that contributed to the success of these Native
American graduates. Many of these students were oriented
toward goal setting and were determined to accomplish goals
because they had personal and community values to fulfill.
Some of these goals related to a desire for economic
improvement and others focused on the importance of
returning to the tribe and family to give back what they had
gained. These values were reflected in the willingness to accept substantial debt and support for each other through providing day-care assistance when needed. They were also reflected in the commitment to their spiritual heritage and participation in cultural events.

A final area of research was the reflections of these graduates on the barriers experienced as students of UGF. The findings of this study revealed that there existed perceived barriers that negatively impacted the experience of these graduates. Though neither frequent nor overwhelming, these barriers none the less reflected attitudes and behaviors of institutional personnel. These barriers communicated a lack of trust in the educational background of the student and the lack of belief that the students were as skilled in certain areas, such as writing, as were white students. Of special note was the finding that English classes in particular were singled out as a perceived barrier to success. This was not due to the subject being taught but the attitudes of certain instructors toward the students. Other barriers were also reflected in the occasional prejudicial attitudes experienced by the graduates from certain professors, students, or staff members of UGF.
Graduate Profile

Conclusions

1. Native Americans who are nontraditional age female students have a greater likelihood of graduating than other Native American students.

2. UGF appeals to the diverse Native American tribes of North Central Montana.

3. Native Americans who graduate from UGF are prepared academically when they come to UGF.

4. A main motivation of why Native American graduates chose UGF is the desire to live close to immediate and extended family, friends, and their home while attending college.

5. A main motivation of why Native American graduates chose UGF is because of a desire to improve their lives financially.

6. Successful Native American graduates of UGF are responsible caretakers of their families.

Many of these graduates have experienced various degrees of trauma in their lives, including poverty, relationship violence, divorce, and alcohol abuse. However, they are not only survivors, but also they are responsible adults who are motivated to provide for their families and loved ones by choosing employment that requires a bachelors degree.
A desire to be close to family, friends, and the reservation was important enough to these graduates that it was a primary motivation for choosing UGF. These graduates were motivated and inspired by their families and most gave at least partial credit to family members for their success. These families also represented a reliable support system that enabled the student to focus attention on homework, test performance, and academic success sufficiently to graduate.

These graduates were prepared for the academic rigor of UGF. They came from a background that reinforced academic success, and most had prepared themselves in part for university level work by successfully completing courses and programs at other schools. Several had also previously attended tribal colleges.

Recommendations

With its close-proximity to tribal reservations and urban Native Americans of Great Falls, UGF is in a prime situation to advance greater opportunities to Native American students. Since the primary motivation for these graduates to attend UGF was its proximity to home and the availability of academic programs that can provide work opportunities close to home, UGF could take advantage of
this opportunity. A joint research project with tribal colleges or the Native American Center could help identify projected career needs and employment sources on the reservations and neighborhoods where successful Native Americans live. Then, capitalizing on already established relationships with tribal and two-year colleges, UGF could support these programs by allowing many of the primary classes in these career areas to be taken on or near the reservations. By having students take these classes at tribal and two-year colleges which will have lower tuition rates, the overall costs for a four-year degree would be reduced and offset the reputation that UGF has among Native American students that its costs are prohibitive. This would also increase the positive relations between the tribal colleges and UGF.

Efforts could be extended to tribal colleges and local high schools to identify successful students and then openly recruit them. Graduates could also be employed as recruiters to speak to potential students. Scholarship moneys could be increased in these focused career areas on the reservation and with these students so that the message is conveyed by UGF that not only successful graduates are being sought but those who will return to their home and family to work. Working with tribal colleges and local
business leaders, the UGF office of Placement and Career Services could become more aggressive in locating internship opportunities that will enable the student to gain necessary experience. Since a primary finding was that these graduates were motivated in part by a desire to improve their lives financially, this collaboration would provide a conduit to financial opportunity.

Cultural and Heritage Background

Conclusions

1. Native American graduates who spoke or understood at least some of their native language had a greater likelihood of being a successful student.

2. At the center of successful Native American graduates' lives was their family. These families motivated and inspired them.

3. Successful Native American graduates practice native beliefs and participate in cultural events that reflect on their heritage.

4. Successful Native American graduates are proud of their native heritage.

5. Successful Native American students utilized themselves and provided for others a support system that helped provide academic success. Educational success was a combined effort involving family, friends, and classmates with similar struggles.

6. The UGF experience provided successful Native American students an important forum in a white setting to explain native beliefs, customs, and values. This forum promoted the
personal growth and cultural heritage of the Native American student.

With few exceptions these graduates represent at least in part a Native American heritage that blends various tribal and racial backgrounds. The majority of these graduates had at least some Blackfeet blood in their family heritage, but only two were 100% Blackfoot. Three graduates were 100% Native American. Ten separate tribes were represented in various degrees and combinations.

All of these graduates were committed to their native heritage and most endeavored to speak or understand some of their native language. A great majority practiced various manifestations of their cultural celebrations, including participation at sweats, pow-wows, give-aways, and sweetgrass blessings both as college students and as graduates.

At the core of the cultural backgrounds of many of these graduates was a strong family connection. To these Native Americans, this strength came from an understanding spouse, an assisting sister or parent, patient children, or just the bond that comes from being Native American. Several spoke of the necessity of reliance upon each other in the accomplishment of their academic goals. For many,
success was reflected much more in terms of a group effort than individual effort.

One characteristic that many of these graduates displayed was to openly welcome and even to look for opportunities to share their native pride with Indian and non-Indian people alike. To fellow Native Americans, this pride took the form of setting an example that if they could succeed in college, so could others. Many had a desire to blaze the trail for their children and to help them know of the benefits of going to college. There was also a pride in their specific tribe and the desire to have individual success reflect on tribal roots.

In a like manner, many of these graduates enjoyed the forum higher education in a white setting provided to explain native beliefs, customs, and values. Many expressed the belief that such efforts strengthened Native American-white relationships as well as enriched the educational experience. As a consequence, some graduates gained a greater knowledge of their heritage since they had to share it with others.

**Recommendations**

Most Native Americans come from a traditional background that recognizes, honors, and respects others
regardless of racial background. This reality underscores the need for UGF to sustain, support, and maintain a continual multi-cultural awareness program. This program could be attended by all UGF personnel, especially faculty members. One graduate expressed a dismay that a greater number of white students were not taking Native American studies classes. This disappointment is especially powerful because Native Americans are the largest minority in Montana. UGF could do more to encourage all students to take such classes and provide more inservice opportunities for faculty and staff.

UGF could do more to support and promote Native American cultural programs such as the pow-wow. Since a pow-wow is a significant celebration honored by most Native Americans and UGF is a central gathering place for Native Americans in the city, more support could be generated through co-sponsorships with various entities from the City of Great Falls.

Even though UGF provides a place for Native Americans to gather on campus, more could be done to support its use by Native American students. Currently this office is in an isolated and sparsely attended location on campus. In recent years the Native American office has been utilized by only a select few. Programming and activities for Native
Americans has been limited by funding and leadership problems. UGF could work closer with the Native American club leadership to promote activities and support efforts to draw attention to the club. Other office locations could be considered.

Desires to improve the communication and dialogue with campus authorities and personnel were frequently expressed by the graduates. UGF could promote more opportunities for Native American students to meet with UGF administrators and personnel on related topics, such as class offerings, academic climate, student concerns, and retention issues.

UGF Impact on Native American Pride

Conclusions

1. Native American graduates of UGF overwhelmingly perceived their educational experience to be positive.

2. Most of the graduates felt inspired by various UGF staff or faculty.

3. The accomplishment of receiving a bachelors degree was a significant highlight of the educational experience for some graduates.

4. Master instructors that are skillful at presenting their subject matter were motivating and intellectually stimulating to Native American students and made a difference in the quality of the educational experience.
5. Being completely immersed in the white culture presents a challenge that needed to be overcome for Native American students at UGF.

6. The affirmation of the cultural and tribal identity of its Native American students would help UGF retain more students to graduation.

7. Several students spoke of experiences with either fellow students or staff at UGF that suggested that at least at one point of their education they did not feel respected or honored.

For the most part, the graduates had significant praise for UGF and the experience they had as students. They felt that UGF was providing a service that was a benefit to Indian people. They were thankful that efforts were made to work with tribal colleges and to take college classes onto the reservation. On campus they felt that most learning experiences were void of prejudice or bigotry, in spite of the fact that the majority of the graduates were able to remember at least one experience of insensitivity. They enjoyed the learning environment and thrilled with the accomplishment of graduation. As tribal flags were displayed in the cafeteria and an eagle staff was carried with the American flag at graduation, they felt validated as Native Americans. They felt this demonstrated an effort to recognize Native American culture in university life.
At the same time, many of the graduates felt the effects of culture shock as they left the reservation and attended full-time on the UGF campus. Housing opportunities were not automatically available, and consequently, many had to live far from campus, had to make arrangements for commuting, and therefore could not participate in all of the campus activities. For some, the resultant shock was great, and they were not prepared adequately for the social transition. For others, the responsibilities affiliated with being non-traditional students caused even greater stress. Day-care opportunity was not always convenient. Several students left children and spouses on the reservation to attend college. Not all UGF staff were understanding of the need for the student to return home and miss school. Though some of these problems were universal to students regardless of race, for the Native American without close support it made success that much more elusive.

UGF played an important part in the support of the cultural heritage of its students. All of its students felt the need to be validated and affirmed. An environment where cultural insensitivity is allowed denigrates not only the student but the school itself. The result of this
affirmation and validation is, ultimately, more students retained through to graduation.

Recommendations

It is recommended that UGF continue to support efforts that eliminate the culture shock that native students experience when they come on campus. A special Native American orientation program, facilitated and led by Native adjunct faculty members and supported by members of the UGF United Tribes club, could be conducted for Native American students. This orientation would help bond new students with faculty and student mentors. It could provide a forum to answer questions that may not be asked if the student is in an orientation with white students. It could promote Native American pride from the beginning of the educational experience.

Since most of the successful Native American graduates were female and parents, support services could be evaluated. Day-care opportunities could be more aggressively promoted. UGF housing opportunities that focus on the needs of a family rather than on an individual could be a priority for the school. Since some of the women had experienced dysfunctional or abusive backgrounds, women support groups could be maintained. Student service
departments could be staffed by at least a Native American intern if funding for a position is not possible.

The important relationship between the student and the learning environment could be fostered and promoted by recognizing faculty members that are ascertained by Native Americans to be not only culturally sensitive but excellent teachers as well. Since the Native American graduates expressed value in experiential learning experiences, encouragement should be provided to faculty members to include learning strategies in their courses.

Finally, UGF could impact Native American pride most by committing to hire native faculty members and personnel. It is difficult to promote cultural sensitivity among the students representing Montana's largest minority when they are not visibly seen in power positions on campus.

Cultural Behaviors and Values

Conclusions

1. Many Native American graduates were motivated by a goal setting ethic to improve their lives.

2. Passing on the legacy of academic success was a value that motivated the success of many of the graduates.

3. Successful Native Americans were continually inspired and supported by others, especially
family members, who had a stake in their success.

4. A spiritual orientation influenced the success of many of the graduates.

5. The skills developed in overcoming major life obstacles prior to attending UGF helped the students with their academic success.

There is a perception among some in western society that Native Americans have no direction or goals. The findings from this study found this perception to be totally false. Indeed, identification and clarification of goals had a large impact on their educational motivation. Most of the graduates were goal focused, recognizing the relationship academic success had with their future financial stability. In addition, these graduates were successful in part because of a strong work ethic. They were motivated to accomplish their degree and were willing to work hard in their classes.

As previously noted, these graduates were inspired in part to be successful so that they could return to their tribes and give back to their people. Many were motivated by the desire to set an appropriate example for their children and families. This motivation and innate need to give back was expressed by most of the graduates.

The goal of succeeding in college was often made possible by a strong family support system. A large number
of family and friends supported, sustained, and sacrificed so that the graduate could succeed. It was invariably a team effort for most of the graduates and was reflective of a cultural value.

The importance of a spiritual orientation was also noted by many graduates. Inspiration came from medicine men or tribal elders. Strength was provided by participation in native celebrations. Individual spiritual philosophies reinforcing one’s significance to the world was an influence on success.

Many of these graduates had an inherent belief in success because they had succeeded before. Almost all of these graduates were survivors. Many had weathered turbulent childhood experiences, traumatic relationships, poverty, health and disability issues, substance abuse, and other impediments that would have dissuaded many from getting their degree. Yet, these graduates were successful.

Recommendations

Since the study reflected largely on the experience of successful Native Americans who were female, it would be beneficial to examine if the conclusions hold true across both genders. Several graduates noted different sources of stress between men and women and therefore different
approaches to their goals. Only by examining this can one determine if the goal orientation and motivation is the same for both men and women.

Another recommendation is that Native American students should seek ways of reinforcing self-determination in their own lives prior to and in conjunction with their college education. Native American students have a greater chance for success if they come to know themselves first, if they can reinforce the discovery of personal identity, and if they are effective in their communication of their goals and motivation to the significant entities in their lives. Native American college students need to acknowledge their heritage, family connections, native pride, and spiritual roots. The level of commitment to one's tribe and people needs to be resolved. Communication needs to occur so that familial and tribal jealousies do not hinder one's educational goals. The true essence of self-determination can only be realized through human empowerment and the willingness to take charge over individual affairs (St. Pierre, 1996, p. 119).

Individual students can accomplish these endeavors by making a cultural commitment to who they are. Efforts to learn one's native language, participate in cultural celebrations, and learn of one's heritage can give an
individual focus so that one’s identity is strong and has a place in their goals. Such actions can enhance a Native American student’s chance of successfully graduating from UGF.

**College Barriers**

**Conclusions**

1. English classes were perceived by several graduates as a means in place by UGF to inhibit their success.

2. There is a perception among Native American students that UGF does little to change prejudicial attitudes and behaviors of school personnel.

3. Incidences of cultural insensitivity by UGF personnel toward Native American students tarnished the educational experience at the school.

For several graduates who had lived most of their lives on the reservation, coming to UGF was more than a cultural shock. It was an experience where previously learned methods of writing and reading were not sufficient. In addition, a few experienced difficulty in being able to comprehend the words of the higher education environment. Understanding technical jargon related to classes and programs, to financial aid and registration, and to the system of higher education in general were all a part of the adjustment that students needed to make. For a few
students, this adjustment was so dramatic that it was similar to those who have English as a second language. This difficulty with communication was taken for granted by the institution and was a barrier experienced by many students.

Of greatest frustration expressed by the graduates was not the existence of prejudice or insensitivity at UGF but the perceived belief that certain classes or programs were obstructions in place to exclude them. Several noted that English composition was such a class. Others noted that it was not the class so much as it was certain professors. In the interviews, one professor’s name came up frequently. Still others felt barred from their success because an academic program had such a high standard. Elementary education was such a program that was mentioned more than once. Whether these impressions are real or imagined, it is important to note that the research was with graduates; what would those who left the institution early have said?

Though it was not a universal experience, several graduates did express the feeling that certain professors were prejudicial toward them. These experiences made an impact on their performance for the remainder of the semester. For some, it helped them resolve to be
successful. For others, the pain still existed even years after the experience.

Institutional insensitivity was an experience nearly all of the graduates encountered. Whether it was a professor who did not feel the sense of priority that the Native American did to return home to attend a funeral or frustrations encountered in the business office when there was a perceived belief that Native Americans were only at school to pick up a financial aid check, nearly all of the graduates were personally offended. These incidences, often small but very significant, were more than personal. They cut to the individual’s identity as a Native American. Nearly every graduate could remember an experience years after their occurrence.

Recommendations

UGF needs to examine how it promotes multiculturalism on campus and educates campus personnel regarding the experiences of Native Americans. It is unrealistic perhaps to believe incidences can be eradicated completely, but to say little or nothing sends an opposite message. In spite of the geographical proximity UGF is to Montana’s largest minority, most UGF employees have never had a Native American history class. Some UGF personnel have never
stopped at a reservation except to purchase fuel when passing through it. Many students and personnel continue to harbor prejudicial inaccuracies about Native Americans. However, UGF can be proactive in removing barriers by giving inservice meetings, classroom presentations, core requirements integrated with multiculturalism, and drawing attention to policies that impact attitudes that promote distrust between Native Americans and whites.

One of the ways UGF can improve its efforts of removing barriers is to foster improved communication between Native Americans and the leaders of the institution. Most of the graduates surveyed felt a sense of detachment from institutional policies and control. Few felt that they were a constituent who was important enough to be listened to.

An important recommendation is that UGF stay true to its spiritual values, roots, and mission. The mission statement declares,

The faculty and staff of the university join with students in a cooperative and enthusiastic search for truth, so that students may develop:
Commitment -- [by] find[ing] meaning in life which enables them to participate effectively in society while transcending its limitations, by living according to their own moral and religious convictions, as well as respecting the dignity and beliefs of other people (italics added) (UGF Catalogue, 1995, p. 2).
Some Native American students might question whether all school personnel are committed to join the students in a search for truth regarding respecting the dignity and beliefs of all people. Some of the graduates felt they were respected as long as they paid their tuition and then performed like the white majority. Though UGF has come a long way by providing Native American classes on campus and programs on reservations, it still has a distance to go in eliminating the attitudes from some personnel that contribute to barriers that inhibit Native American student success.

Thus, if UGF is going to fulfill its mission and adequately serve Native American students its leaders need to realize an institutional responsibility, that:

In the final analysis, it is [a] sense of obligation to students and the commitment it inspires which best capture the source of effective retention programs and help distinguish between those institutions which keep students and those from which students leave.... The essential character of such [institutions] lies not in formal structures and programs which they construct, but in the underlying values which inspire their construction.... Educational communities which care for and reach out to their members and which are committed to their members' welfare are also those which keep and nourish their members. There is no programmatic substitute for this sort of commitment, no easy way to measure its occurrence. It is not easily ascertained in any one action or set of actions, but is reflected in the policy choices made by institutional officials. The presence of a strong
commitment to students results in an identifiable ethos of caring which permeates the character of institutional life and sets it apart from institutions which place student welfare second to other goals. (Tinto, 1993, pg. 205-206)
REFERENCES


J. Conti (Eds.), Social environment and adult learning (pp. 37-40). Bozeman, MT: Montana State University.


Wilson, J. (1983). Wisconsin Indian opinions of factors which contribute to the completion of college degrees. Center for Education Research, Madison, Wisconsin.


Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. (NCES 95-167).

Graduate Demographic Form

1. Gender: Male ___ Female ___
2. Percent Native American ___
3. Tribal Affiliation: Blackfeet ___ Northern Cheyenne ___
   Gros Ventre ___ Assiniboine ___ Sioux ___ Crow ___
   Salish ___ Kootenai ___ Chippewa-Cree ___ Other (____________________)
4. Type of High School attended: Public (on reservation) ___
   Public (off reservation) ___ Tribally Controlled ___
   Private/Parochial ___ BIA (boarding) ___
   BIA (nonboarding) ___
5. Approximate High School Grades: Mostly A's and B's ___
   Mostly B's and C's ___ Mostly C's and D's ___ Mostly D's and lower ___
6. Junior or Tribal College Attended
   Yes (Where) _____________________ No ___
7. Does graduate speak or understand native language?
   Yes ___ No ___
8. Religious preference: None ___ Catholic ___ Protestant ___
   Traditional Native American ___ Native American/Catholic or Protestant Blend ___
   Other (Indicate__________________)
9. Place of Permanent Residence: Reservation
   (indicate___________) Great Falls ___ Other (indicate
town___________)
10. Place of Permanent Residence as a Child: Reservation
    (indicate___________) Great Falls ___ Other (indicate
town___________)
11. Father's highest level of education: No formal
    education ___ elementary school ___ some high school ___
    high school grad ___ some college ___ college graduate ___
12. Mother's highest level of education: No formal education___ elementary school___ some high school___
high school grad___ some college___ college graduate___

13. Primary reason for choosing UGF: career goals___ close to home or family___ financial aid offered___ Catholic or private education desired___ encouragement by parent, spouse or other family member___ Other (indicate____________________________)
Graduate Questionnaire

1. What were the goals and encouragement that prompted you to want to go to college?
2. What do you consider to be the greatest highlight(s) of your educational experience? Why?
3. As you reflect on your collegiate experience, what were your greatest challenges and difficulties? What caused them?
4. To what or to whom do you credit your greatest source of motivation to succeed in college?
5. How did you acknowledge your Native American heritage as a college student (i.e., participation in cultural events, etc.)? Did this change from the time that you entered college?
6. What Native American traditions, values, or beliefs do you currently honor?
7. How did being in a "white" university setting influence your Native American traditions, values, or beliefs?
8. How was your Native American heritage an advantage to your success as a college student?
9. How was your Native American heritage a disadvantage to your success as a college student?
10. Overall, how do you feel your college instructors felt about your Native American heritage?
11. Overall, how was the university accommodating of supportive to you as a Native American?
12. How was UGF insensitive to your Native American heritage or culture?
13. When times were difficult in school, what were factors that motivated you to continue and not quit? How did you deal with these factors?
14. To what degree did you need emotional support to stay in college and where was your source of support?

15. As you compare yourself to peers who also succeeded in college, what things did you have in common with them?

16. As you compare yourselves to Native American peers that may have experienced problems similar to yours but chose to drop out, what made the difference in why you stayed and why they dropped out?

17. What recommendations or suggestions would you give UGF that would help ensure the success of more Native American students?

18. If a Native American high school student asked your advice about coming to UGF, what would you tell this student based on your own experience? Can you give me some examples of how you addressed these experiences?

19. Do you have any further recommendations or suggestions that will help UGF be sensitive to the needs of Native American students?