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TRIBAL COLLEGE TRANSFER STUDENT SUCCESS AT
FOUR-YEAR PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

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of the requirements for the

Ph.D. degree in Higher, Adult, and Lifelong
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**TRIBAL COLLEGE TRANSFER STUDENT SUCCESS AT FOUR-YEAR
PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS**

By

Matthew Van Alstine Makomenaw

A DISSERTATION

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
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ABSTRACT

TRIBAL COLLEGE TRANSFER STUDENT SUCCESS AT FOUR-YEAR PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

By

Matthew Van Alstine Makomenaw

Tribal colleges, which are often community colleges, have been successful in helping American Indian students achieve academic success. The current study was designed to understand what happens to American Indian tribal college students when they transfer to four-year Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). The research question that guides the current study is what are the experiences of American Indian tribal college graduates who transferred from tribal colleges and succeeded at four-year PWIs?

A qualitative study, specifically phenomenology, was chosen to draw out the experiences of eight American Indian tribal college students who transferred and succeeded at PWIs. Multiple interviews were conducted and analyzed with all eight participants, which resulted in six themes related to their successful experience at PWIs. The six themes were: personal goals and dreams; family matters; being a community member of an American Indian community; various levels of engagement with the campus; overcoming ignorance and stereotypes; and adjusting to differences in non-native and native academic worlds. The current study is significant and has implications for tribal colleges, PWIs, and anyone concerned about the success of American Indian college students.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, you are missed.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all of my participants who took the time out of their busy lives to share their stories. Your success and determination is an inspiration to everyone who cares about American Indian students. I wish you all success in your future careers.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This chapter provides information concerning the current study on American Indian tribal college students who transfer to four-year PWIs. The chapter includes an overview, problem statement, risk factors, purpose, research questions, rationale for the study and significance of the study. The chapter ends with definition of key words and a summary of the importance of the current study on American Indian tribal college transfer students.

Overview

American Indian students continue to struggle with success and persistence in colleges and universities. In particular, American Indian students attending predominantly White institutions (PWIs) encounter many barriers that inhibit their persistence and success, such as lack of institutional fit; quality faculty interaction; and access to American Indian faculty, students, and culture to name a few. Meanwhile, American Indian students have been able to find success at tribal colleges.

A trend in higher education is an increase in the number of tribal college graduates transferring to a PWI to attain a bachelor's degree (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2006). American Indian tribal college transfer students are faced with a variety of obstacles that accompany transferring to a four-year PWI, to include credit loss, transfer shock, and misinformation regarding academic requirements at a four-year institution. A difficult challenge to transfer success for tribal college transfer students is the vast institutional and student population differences between Tribal colleges and

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PWIs. The current study uses a phenomenological qualitative design to share the experiences of tribal college graduates who transfer and succeed at a PWI.

Problem Statement

According to the American Indian College Fund (2008), over half of tribal college students who graduate intend to complete a bachelor's degree. A survey of 242 tribal college graduates from 17 tribal colleges showed that 32% were attending college for a bachelor's degree and 3% for a professional degree (Cunningham & Redd, 2000). A survey of tribal college scholarship recipients revealed that 77% of students enrolled in a tribal college with the purpose of attaining a degree and 55% with the intent of transferring to a four-year institution (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2006), which in many cases will be a PWI, to attain a bachelor's degree.

Although American Indian students intend on transferring to a PWI, there are a number of challenges associated with the transfer process. Transferring from a community college to a four-year institution presents psychological, academic, social, and environmental challenges for transfer students (Laanan, 2001). Community college students who transfer to four-year institutions face many challenges, such as: transfer shock, defined as a decrease in GPA following transfer (Hills, 1965); an increased probability of being placed on academic probation in comparison to non-transfer students; and trouble adjusting to institutional characteristics, such as academic standards, faculty, and institutional size (Laanan, 2001). Transfer issues will be discussed in more detail in the literature review.

Many American Indian tribal college graduates intend to transfer to a four-year PWI, however, a problem is that many of these students encounter and struggle with a

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variety of obstacles from the moment they transfer to degree attainment. Given that many tribal college students intend to transfer to a four-year PWI and that the transfer process is filled with challenges, it is important to understand how American Indian tribal college transfer students succeed at four-year PWIs.

American Indian student profile

American Indian students in higher education are mainly comprised of American Indian women. In 2002, the enrollment for all American Indian students in higher education was 60% female and 40% male (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). At tribal colleges in 2005, 52% of the student population was American Indian women and 28% consisted of American Indian men (American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 2006). In addition to being women, a typical American Indian student will have a variety of academic risk factors.

Without considering transfer issues, 35% of American Indian students face four or more dropout risk factors (e.g., delayed enrollment, part-time attendance, financially independent, having dependents, single parent, working full-time, and being a GED recipient) as college students, which is significantly higher than all other undergraduate students (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Yet when describing tribal college students, roughly half are single parents, attend on a part-time basis, with an average age of 31.5 years (American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 1999). An American Indian tribal college student will often be a student who is in financial need.

In 2003, the unemployment rate for American Indians was three times that of the White population and a larger percentage of American Indian families lived in poverty in comparison to White families (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). The average family

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income for tribal college students is significantly less than the federally established threshold for poverty (American Indian College Fund, 2008). Financial aid is an important component of tribal college student success, with roughly 86% of tribal college students relying on federal grants (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2006). In 2000, 56% of American Indians in higher education received financial aid and American Indians in 4-year institutions were more likely to receive financial aid than White and Hispanic students (U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

Compounding the economic needs of American Indian students who transfer is the disparity in tuition of a tribal college and PWI. Tuition at tribal colleges averages about \$2,200 for full-time students (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2006), whereas the average cost of tuition for in-state four-year public institutions is \$6,185 (College Board, 2007). In spite of the lower tuition at tribal colleges, 95% of entering tribal college students still relied heavily on financial aid (American Indian College Fund, 2008).

Purpose

When American Indian students attain success at the tribal college and leave to continue their education at a PWI, an important part of the story is what happens to them at the PWI. American Indian students who attend tribal colleges prior to enrolling in a four-year institution are more likely to attain a degree than those who entered the four-year institution as first-year students (Boyer, 1997a). A benefit of attending a tribal college prior to attending a four-year institution is the ability for American Indian students to adjust to the academic environment before having to adjust to a new social environment, whereas American Indian first-year students at a four-year institution must cope with a new academic and social environment simultaneously (Rouse & Longie,

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2001). Tribal colleges are able to strengthen the academic skills and personal responsibility of American Indian students (Houser, 1991).

Even though there are benefits of attending a tribal college prior to transferring to a four-year PWI, there is still a concern that many tribal college transfer students have trouble adjusting to PWIs. A tribal college president asks, “Why don’t our students survive when they come to your universities?” (Taylor, 1999, p.4). While at a tribal college, American Indian students have access to retention resources, such as social services (e.g., child care) (Rousey & Longie, 2001) that they do not have at a four-year institution, and as a result, American Indian tribal college students who transfer to a four-year PWI struggle to find success and degree attainment.

The purpose of the current study is to understand the experience of American Indian tribal college graduates who transfer and succeed at a four-year PWI. In addition, a major component of the current study is to understand the experience of American Indian tribal college transfer students at PWIs from an Indigenous lens. I discuss an Indigenous conceptual framework and methodology in more detail in chapters two and three. Therefore, the current study is guided by the following question.

Research Question:

1. What are the experiences of American Indian tribal college graduates who transferred from tribal colleges and succeeded at four-year PWIs?

Rationale for the Study

Tribal colleges have been successful at enrolling and graduating American Indian students. Tribal Colleges in 1994 enrolled 12,384 students of which 9,861 were American Indian (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). In 2005, there were 16,986 students

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enrolled in the 32 tribal colleges, of which 80% were American Indian (American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 2006). The American Indian enrollment at Tribal colleges increased by 32% from 1997 to 2002 in comparison to a 16% increase at other higher education institutions (American Indian College Fund, 2008). Furthermore, of the 16,986 tribal college students in 2005, there were 2,372 graduates with roughly 80% being American Indian (American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 2006). In 1994, 8% of all American Indians were enrolled in tribal colleges (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Tribal colleges predominantly attract and graduate American Indian students, which provide those graduates with a higher education experience flavored with American Indian community and culture.

American Indian students who attend a tribal college have the advantage of attending an institution whose mission and purpose is embedded in American Indian culture and communities. American Indian students, while at tribal colleges, have the benefit of attending an institution where the student body is predominately American Indian, where there is a high percentage of American Indian faculty and staff and smaller classroom size than larger institutions. In addition, American Indian students have the comfort of attending an institution located within an American Indian reservation. In 1994, 50% of staff at tribal colleges were American Indian, and 30% of the faculty were American Indian (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). In 2005, 60% of the faculty, administration, and staff at tribal colleges were American Indian (American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 2006). However, when tribal college graduates transfer to a PWI to attain a bachelor's degree, they are faced with a student body that has a significantly smaller American Indian student body percentage, fewer American Indian

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faculty and staff, classrooms with a higher faculty to student ratio, and in most cases, they must leave the reservation in order to complete their degree. In 2001, American Indian faculty at all degree granting institutions were at .5% with only .3 % being professors and .4% being associate professors (U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

Tribal colleges have been successful at graduating American Indian students, but of the 36 Tribal colleges, only six offer bachelor's degrees and two offer master's degrees. Tribal colleges predominantly offer associate's degrees with over 400 majors and 180 certificate programs (American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 2006). American Indian students have experienced success at tribal colleges, but attainment of a bachelor's degree and its benefits require success at a four-year degree granting institution. The private benefits related to American Indians receiving a bachelor's degree, include, higher salaries, improved health and working conditions, and improved quality of life for offspring (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2007). American Indians receiving a bachelor's degree have a public benefit as well, such as, increased tax revenue, a decrease in reliance on governmental support, and increase in civic life (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2007). In addition, the social benefits of receiving a bachelor's degree impact native culture through language revitalization and cultural preservation (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2007). The achievement of an associate's degree, which is the highest degree offered for most tribal colleges, is valued and a celebratory accomplishment, but attainment of a bachelor's degree is a worthwhile accomplishment.

Although American Indian enrollment in higher education has increased, American Indian students have not typically fared well in terms of degree attainment at

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four-year PWIs. The college enrollment of American Indians has doubled from 1976 to 2002, but they still only accounted for roughly 1% of all college and university enrollments in 2002 (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). In comparison of that 1% of American Indian enrollment in 2002, the percentage of degrees conferred for American Indian/Alaskan Natives in 2002-2003 was 1.2% of associate's degree, .8% of bachelor's degree, .6% of master's degrees, and .6% of doctoral degrees of the total population of all degrees awarded (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). The total population of American Indians was estimated at around 4.5 million in 2005, with only 14% of those over the age of 25 earning a bachelor's degree and 76% earning a high school diploma (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). American Indian students are more likely to attain a high school diploma or an associate's degree than they are a bachelor's degree.

Out of 100 American Indian students who enter the ninth grade, only 20 will continue to a postsecondary institution, and only 3 will receive a four-year degree (Tierney, 1992). Percentage distribution of degree attainment among American Indian students has remained consistently low over the last 10 years (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). In 1995-6, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) found that 36% of American Indians graduate within a 6-year period from Division I institutions (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). For Division II schools, the NCAA found the three-year undergraduate persistence rate for American Indians to be at 33% in comparison to 49% for all undergraduates (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). American Indian students' persistence to degree attainment is at an alarming and problematic level.

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American Indian students are succeeding in Tribal colleges and struggling at PWIs partially because Tribal colleges provide American Indian students with an opportunity to advance the quality of their lives. However, attainment of a bachelor's degree expands the number of opportunities available for American Indian students. Access to a bachelor's degree for tribal college students often requires transferring to a four-year PWI, which is a challenge for American Indian community college transfer students. Even though American Indian students are proportionally represented in community colleges, those students who transfer are less successful at completing a bachelor's degree than Anglo community college transfer students (Pottinger, 1989). The importance of the current study is that it will uncover the habits and experiences that helped American Indian tribal college graduates successfully transfer and attain a degree from a four-year PWI when so many other American Indian students fail.

Significance of the Study

There is a growing amount of literature on tribal colleges and American Indian persistence factors at four-year institutions, but there is lack of knowledge about American Indian tribal college graduates who transfer to four-year PWIs. The current study is important as it provides relevant information (e.g., student experience and knowledge) to stakeholders, such as, university administrators and faculty at Tribal colleges and PWIs, future tribal college graduates who may consider transferring to a PWI, high school students thinking about their collegiate plans, and American Indian communities. The current study provides stakeholders with information regarding students' experiences at a PWI and knowledge that is beneficial to the success of American Indian students at PWIs.

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The current study explores strategies and resources used by tribal college graduates to succeed at a four-year PWI. Understanding what successful tribal college transfer students do to succeed at a PWI is helpful information to future tribal college transfer students. In addition, having knowledge of the major challenges and useful resources provides Tribal colleges and PWIs a starting point for reducing barriers and increasing support for tribal college transfer students.

Definitions for the Study

Success- There are a variety of individual and cultural definitions of success, but in the context of the current study's research design I am referring to the process of American Indian transfer students achieving degree attainment or evidence that degree attainment is imminent at a PWI.

Persistence- For the purposes of the current study persistence for tribal college transfer students is defined by completion of at least one-year at a PWI.

American Indian- The term American Indian/Alaskan Native (AI/AN) is used by the U.S. Census Bureau to identify the race/ethnicity of individuals who are Indigenous to North America and existed long before European contact. The terms Native American, American Indian, Indian, First Nations people of Canada, native, and Indigenous are also used in various contexts to describe AI/AN people. As the researcher, I recognize that tribal nations have their own names, in their own languages, such as, Odawa, Dine, Ojibwe, and Lakota. I recognize the rich, unique, and ancient culture, history, and traditions of tribal nations, but for the purposes of this study I will primarily use the term American Indian. I do this for no other reason than consistency within the study. I

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interchangeably use aforementioned terminology- such as native, Indigenous, and Indian, to describe a group of people who share a similar historical colonization experience.

*Who is considered American Indian-*When referring to the term American Indian, I bound it to tribal enrollment or direct descendants. The issue of self-identification for American Indian populations is a political and personal dilemma. American Indian tribal nations and the federal government have a distinctive nation-to-nation relationship that is recognized in the constitution (Wilkins & Lomawaima, 2001). The unique sovereignty status of American Indian tribal nations allows tribal nations to define who is and who is not a member of their communities. In addition, the federal and state governments have their own policies to determine who is and who is not an American Indian (Pevar, 2004). Policies regarding who is and who is not an American Indian may differ from government to government, but a common thread involves proof that an individual is a descendant of an enrolled member of a tribal nation. I recognize the political issue of defining who gets to claim being American Indian and that there are many American Indian students who for a variety of reasons do not qualify for tribal enrollment. However, to honor American Indian tribal sovereignty rights to determine their membership, I have made a choice to use tribal enrollment to define American Indian student for my study.

Tribal college student- The term tribal college student refers to American Indian students who received an associate's degree from a tribal college or have spent at least one-full year at a tribal college. I have chosen the criteria for the term tribal college student because it ensures that a student has the opportunity to fully experience the unique culture of a tribal college and all its resources.

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About the researcher- As the researcher in the current study, I am an American Indian who is committed to education of American Indian students and a firm believer in the tribal college movement. I discuss more of my researcher identity in Chapter 3.

Summary

The current study was designed to have a better understanding of the successful experience of American Indian tribal college transfer students at a PWI. The research on tribal college students, specifically transfer students to a PWI is limited. American Indian students typically fail at a PWI causing the need to understand what successful American Indian students do and experience at a PWI. The findings from the current study can be used to inform tribal college administrators, four-year PWI administrators, and American Indian students about the process and challenges of transferring from a tribal college to a PWI.

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CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

This chapter begins with an overview of American Indian education, tribal colleges and conceptual framework, followed by a review of relevant literature related to American Indian college student persistence, community college student transfer experience at four-year institutions, and race and racism in higher education. The chapter ends with a summary of what the literature review means for the current study on American Indian tribal college graduates at a PWI.

Background on Indian Education and Tribal Colleges

The history of American Indian students in western education has been filled with many failures, obstacles, and wrongful agendas. A predominant theme in United States educational policy towards American Indians has been one of assimilation. A goal of Harvard College in 1636 was to educate Indian youth with goodness and Christianity, but Harvard was confronted with a lack of enrollment, drop-outs due to the preference of American Indian students to return to their native communities (Boyer, 1997b). Richard H. Pratt in the late 1800s influenced Indian education by advocating the policy of removing Indian children from their homes to boarding schools with the mantra “kill the Indian and save the man” (Dejong, 1993). The boarding school era resulted in many native children being punished for speaking their native language and losing their connection to native culture (Child, 1998). As a result, the history of American Indians in western education has resulted in many native people believing that success in higher education equals leaving cultural traditions behind (Wright, 1991). The Meriam Report in 1925 and the Kennedy Report in 1969, while 44 years apart, both reported a crisis in

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Indian education, which included harsh disciplinary actions, overcrowded classrooms, and disinterested teachers (Dejong, 1993). The United States educational policy towards American Indian education lacked input and direction from American Indian tribal nations.

Indian education began to take a philosophical change in direction during the self-determination era, which coincided with the development of tribal colleges and universities. Tribal colleges developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which happened during national movements to help the socially and economically disadvantaged populations (Wright, 1989). The history of tribal colleges begins with a story about communities that were isolated, had high unemployment rates, and had no immediate access to higher education (American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 1999). The very first tribal controlled college in the U.S., a part of a federal legislation, was the Navajo Community College (now known as Dine College), which opened in 1968 (Wollock, 1997). Ten years after the first tribally controlled college opened, the U.S. government passed the 1978 Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act, which provided federal funding for tribal colleges (Dejong, 1993). In 1975 there were 13 tribal colleges, by 1989 there were 20 tribal colleges (Boyer, 2005), and currently there are 36 tribal colleges in the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 2008).

The focus of a tribal college is to reflect and honor the culture, values, language, and history of their tribal nation (See Benham & Stein 2003). Tribal colleges are institutions of higher education and their uniqueness lies in their mission to ground American Indian cultural values into the teaching, learning, and curriculum of the

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institution. Tribal colleges like tribal nations, have many similarities, but they are all unique, as tribal college missions are developed from within local community cultural values and needs. Initially tribal colleges were structured after western models of education, but the hope is that they will become more like the communities that they intend to serve (Boyer, 2005). Cheryl Crazy Bull, president of Sinte Gleska University, on the intent of tribal colleges, states “we intended to raise a bunch of radicals with the skills to recognize and address social injustice” (Ambler, 2005, p.9). At the onset of Tribal colleges, tribal college leaders found themselves bound to meeting accreditation, building trust, and developing respect from the general public and the higher education arena (Boyer, 2005). Tribal colleges opened with a culturally driven mission of educating American Indian populations that have been traditionally underserved.

For example, the mission of Diné College is to apply the four Sá'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón principles to advance student learning (Dine, 2007, www.dinecollege.edu):

1. Nitsáhákees (Thinking), Nahatá (Planning), Iná (Living) and Sihasin (Assurance).
2. In study of the Diné language, history and culture.
3. In preparation for further studies and employment in a multi-cultural and technological world.
4. In fostering social responsibility, community service and scholarly research that contribute to the social, economic and cultural well being of the Navajo Nation.

The above mission demonstrates how one tribal college grounds its mission statement into the local tribal nation's cultural values. The tribal college movement and

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mission is a result of a desire to redefine higher education institutions to help build Indigenous communities through Indigenous culture rather than western modes of education (American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 1999). Tribal college missions serve two purposes. First, like all institutions of higher education, they are responsible for educating and preparing students for employment. Second, they are also responsible for producing students who reflect the culture of the tribe they serve (Boyer, 2003). Tribally controlled colleges are institutions that not only have culturally centered missions, but they are governed by American Indians (Martin, 2005). In addition, in order to maintain recognition as a tribal college, institutions need to maintain a student enrollment that is at least 51% American Indian. The mission, students, and governance of tribal colleges are strongly influenced by local American Indian culture.

Tribal colleges were created to meet a need in the late 1960s and as they continue today they are still in a struggle to meet old and new challenges. The main challenge for tribal colleges is the incorporation of culture into the framework of western education models. Some students who attended tribal colleges or institutions with American Indian Studies Programs believed the support and level of cultural grounding did not meet their expectations (Weaver, 2000). Cultural grounding is an important factor for success among American Indian students. Therefore, it is imperative that tribal colleges succeed in infusing cultural knowledge into their education environment. American Indian students who have a strong foundation and connectedness to their culture are more likely to succeed in education (Ledlow, 1992; Rodriguez, 1997). An elder, survivor of the boarding school era and lifelong educator in Indian country, Esther Horne, encourages native people to become educated and combine old values with new knowledge for the

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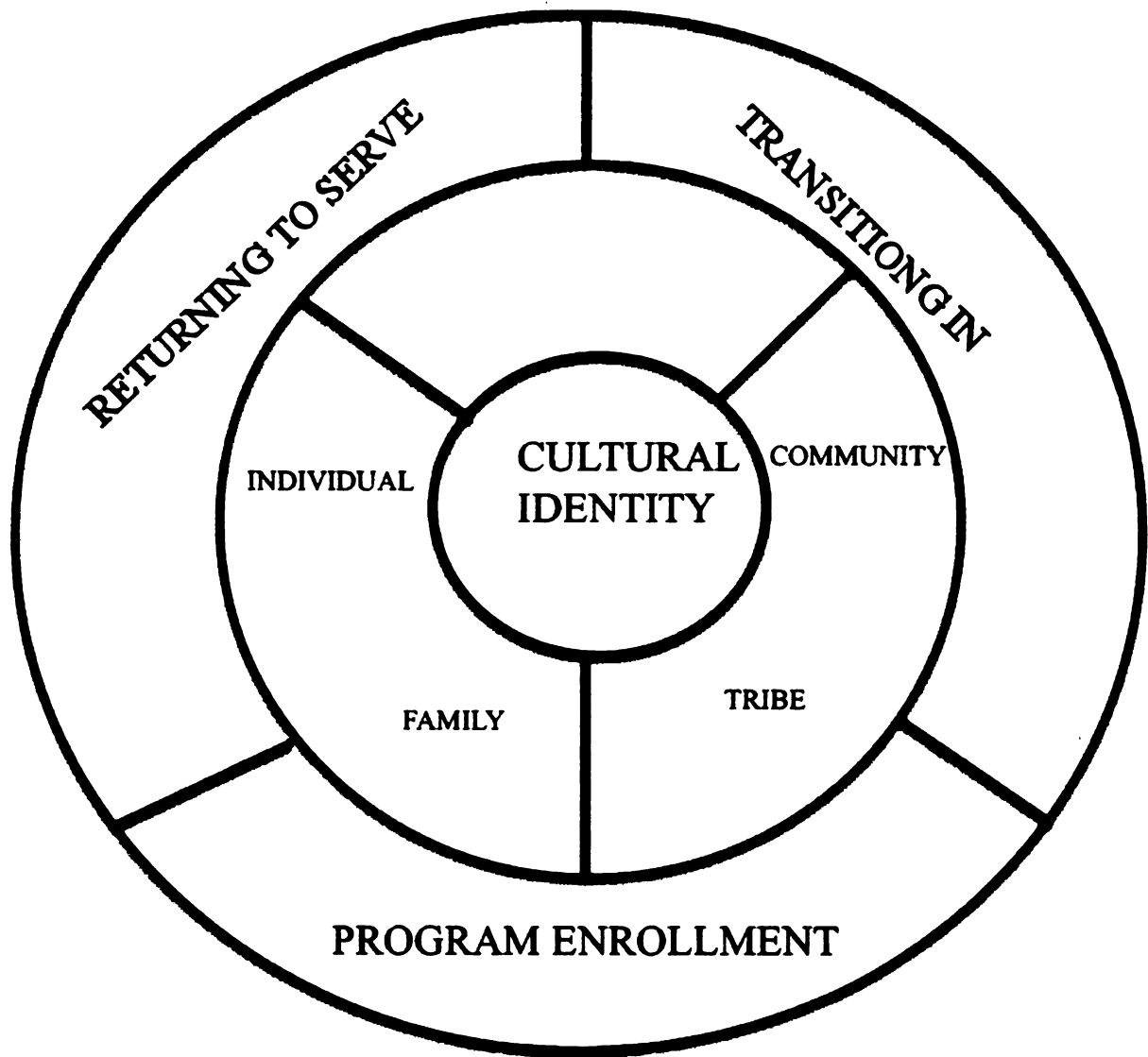
betterment of native communities (Multicultural Education, 2003). Incorporating culture means incorporating native languages as language loss is a detriment to native communities, history, and identity (McCarty & Zepeda, 2006). The success and comfort of native students depends on the presence of other native students but more importantly the cultural grounding and support of an institution. Tribal college graduates who transfer to a four-year PWI will encounter an institution that is not primarily focused on American Indian culture and students. As a result, it is important to understand how American Indian students who transfer from tribal colleges experience success at four-year PWIs.

Conceptual Framework

The Indigenous model that will serve as a conceptual framework and help guide the current study was developed by Pavel and Inglebret (2007), who studied American Indian/Alaskan Native student success in higher education. Pavel and Inglebret provide an evidence based model of American Indian/Alaskan Native student success, which was derived from observations, literature reviews, and research findings. Please see figure 1 for American Indian/Alaskan Native Student Success Model. A significant component of the model is that American Indian student success has many definitions and is dependent upon the individual. However, Pavel and Inglebret assert that there are commonalities and shared experiences of successful American Indian students.



Figure 1. American Indian/Alaskan Native Student Success Model (Pavel & Inglebret, 2007).



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American Indian/Alaskan Native Student Success

The center and key component of Pavel and Inglebret's (2007) American Indian student success model is cultural identity. When referring to cultural identity, Pavel and Inglebret acknowledge individual differences but stress the social component of a collective American Indian identity built around language, stories, and traditions. Pavel and Inglebret recognize that some American Indian students will have a stronger sense of identity than other American Indian students, but maintain that all American Indian students will find strength in developing and understanding their American Indian identity. American Indian cultural identity is an important journey for American Indian people; for some, a strong sense of cultural identity may happen prior to their higher education experience, and for others exposure to American Indian culture may not happen until their collegiate experience. Connecting to American Indian culture while in college can be done through attendance at cultural events (at home and on campus), interaction with American Indian student advisors, and holding leadership roles with an American Indian student group (Pavel & Inglebret). Regardless of when an American Indian student develops a sense of cultural identity, having an understanding of American Indian cultural identity is a critical aspect of identifying as an American Indian student.

The middle concentric circle of the American Indian student success model contains the place of individual, family, community, and tribal nations (Pavel & Inglebret, 2007). This aspect of the model refers to the interconnectedness of individual identity, family, community, and tribal nations in determining student success for American Indian students. Individual characteristics (e.g., determination, commitment,

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etc.) and the collective responsibility of the family and community in supporting American Indian students is a vital part of the success process for American Indian students (Pavel & Inglebret). A strong connection with family (to include aunts/uncles, grandparents, and cousins) and to American Indian communities is a critical support base for American Indian students. Family issues that do not directly relate to an American Indian student could have an impact on the success or lack of success for American Indian students in higher education. The tribal nation component of the model refers to sovereignty and self-determination of tribal nations and the importance of American Indian students connecting to its relevance and lived meaning (Pavel & Inglebret). Sovereignty and self-determination will be examined in more detail under the tribal critical race theory section.

The outer layer of the American Indian student success model begins with preparation for college, continues to the journey through college, and ends with serving American Indian communities (Pavel & Inglebret, 2007). Preparation for college begins with individual purpose for choosing to attend college (Pavel & Inglebret). Self-awareness by understanding life plans and selecting the appropriate college is crucial to the success of American Indian students (Pavel & Inglebret). The important aspect of the preparation for college phase involves American Indian students making informed choices about the college they attend and understanding the services they offer in order to find a right fit for their needs.

The American Indian student success model maintains that the journey through college for American Indian students should involve developing personal connections with faculty and staff (Pavel & Inglebret, 2007). Having a strong relationship with at least

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one faculty member is cited as a key aspect to American Indian student success (Pavel & Inglebret). In addition, the financial aid office is critical to the success of many American Indian students (Pavel & Inglebret), as American Indian students who develop relationships with faculty and staff will benefit from guidance on understanding financial aid policies and academic requirements. In the Pavel and Inglebret (2007) model, success in college for American Indian students is based on positive relationships with various departments of higher education institutions.

The final component of the American Indian student success model involves returning to serve native communities (Pavel & Inglebret, 2007). Returning to serve native communities means that American Indian students upon graduating use their education to better American Indian communities. Giving back and being of service to native communities has several layers. There are American Indian students who return to their reservations and take an active role in their community after receiving their degree, which is the hope of community members on reservations. There are American Indian students who upon receiving their degree, take leadership positions and are of service with a tribal nation that is not their own. Lastly, there are American Indian students who serve American Indian communities on a national level through American Indian organizations and associations. However, it should be noted that working for or within a native community/organization is not the only way American Indian students can be of service to native communities, but it is the most common way.

The ability to give back and be of service to native communities is a native value that American Indian students and graduates have indicated as an indicator of success for American Indian students (Pavel & Inglebret, 2007). Using an indigenous lens, like the

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Pavel & Inglebret (2007) model, that places value on American Indian culture will provide a culturally relevant analysis that is often missing educational research on American Indian students. The American Indian student success model guides the current study on American Indian tribal college graduates who transfer and succeed at PWIs.

American Indian College Student Persistence

College student persistence and degree attainment in higher education has continuously been an issue and object of research for scholars and administrators. The issue of American Indian student persistence and degree attainment in higher education, specifically in PWIs, has been particularly troubling and complex. American Indian student experience and persistence issues are similar to other students, but their cultural history, beliefs, and values create unique challenges. This section will provide an overview of the literature on American Indian student persistence. The purpose of the American Indian college student persistence section is to recognize the persistence literature that focuses specifically on American Indian persistence issues and American Indian students.

American Indian Student Persistence Themes

In reviewing the literature on American Indian persistence, there are commonalities and differences in persistence factors that help American Indian students succeed in higher education. In this section, I present 11 themes, nine from Jackson, Smith, and Hill (2003) and two themes found in the literature to guide my literature review on American Indian student persistence factors. The 11 themes of American Indian student persistence are family support, social support, faculty warmth, exposure to college and vocations, developing independence and assertiveness, reliance on spiritual

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resources, dealing with racism, nonlinear path, paradoxical cultural pressure, academic preparation, and financial resources, which are explored next.

Theme 1: Family support. A family member or community member at home who is supporting and stresses the importance of education helps American Indian student persistence in college (Bowker, 1992; Falk & Aitken, 1984; Jackson et al, 2003; Pavel & Padilla, 1993; Rindone, 1988). Family for American Indian students could be immediate family members or extended family members, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins or community members/friends. However, family obligations and responsibilities, especially with American Indian students with a strong cultural identity can interfere with the educational experience and persistence (Tate & Schwartz, 1993). The family education model, a retention model developed by tribal colleges in Montana to meet this challenge, takes aim at supporting tribal college students and the family of the student (HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002). Family support or the lack of family support is an important aspect that may impact the American Indian student experience and persistence in college.

Theme 2: Social support. Institutional support that demonstrates an understanding and valuing of diversity and American Indian culture is beneficial to the persistence and success of American Indian students (Benjamin, Chambers, & Reiterman, 1993; Weaver, 2000). Organized social groups, such as American Indian clubs and multicultural offices benefit American Indian students and are an example of institutional support for American Indian students (Jackson et al., 2003). American Indian students covet interaction with other American Indian students. American Indian student groups and cultural organizations can provide a meeting place for an American Indian student to

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network with other American Indian students, faculty, and staff (Reeves, 2006; Yurkovich, 2001). American Indian organizations can serve as a family unit for those who are missing the comforts of their family and cultural activities (Reeves, 2006). It is unclear if access to an American Indian community or American Indian center at a PWI provides enough access and exposure to American Indian students and culture for tribal college students who are used to a predominantly American Indian environment.

Theme 3: Faculty warmth. Positive experiences with faculty members enhance American Indian student persistence (Jackson et al., 2003). Meaningful relationships with faculty members who understand the needs of American Indian students and make themselves available in and out of the classroom help American Indian student persistence in college (Brown & Kurpius, 1997; Pavel & Padilla, 1993; Reeves, 2006; Tate & Schwartz, 1993; Weaver, 2000). Furthermore, although the racial/ethnic status of the faculty member does not matter in a positive student/faculty relationship, American Indian students do covet support from faculty members who are American Indian (Taylor, 1999; Tierney, 1996). The smaller class sizes at Tribal colleges create more opportunities for faculty-student interaction, but at a larger institution, American Indian students may have to seek out those opportunities for quality interaction.

Theme 4: Exposure to college and vocations. American Indian students who have had prior exposure to college through a summer bridge program in high school are able to use that knowledge as a resource for persistence (Jackson et al., 2003). In addition contact with a family member who attended college, helps persistence in college (Jackson et al.). A study on Navajo graduates revealed that a lack of knowledge concerning collegiate pressures and expectations presented an initial challenge to persistence

(Jackson & Smith, 2001). Since knowledge about college appears to be linked to success, exposure to four-year PWIs prior to transfer may be beneficial for American Indian tribal college graduates.

Theme 5: Developing independence and assertiveness. American Indian students who persisted in college were willing to ask for help, develop self-confidence, and become comfortable with social situations (Jackson et al., 2003). Another key individual characteristic is self-determination, even stubbornness, which can play a critical role in American Indian students succeeding in college (Taylor, 1999; Yurkovich, 2001). It is unknown if independence and assertiveness is a characteristic developed prior to attending college, while attending a tribal college or while attending a PWI.

Theme 6: Reliance on spiritual resources. American Indian students who understand and have a connection with traditional spirituality are more likely to persist in college (Jackson et al., 2003). American Indian families use spirituality as a central point to resolving issues and problems in their life (Stubben, 2001). Cultural grounding is an important factor for American Indian students who are more likely to succeed in education when they have a strong foundation and connectedness to their culture (Huffman, 1999; Ledlow, 1992; Rodriguez, 1997). Tribal colleges are culturally focused and grounded, but it is important to determine if native cultural values have filtered down to tribal college students and if that is an important persistence factor for success at a PWI.

Theme 7: Dealing with racism. Experiences with perceived racism was a challenge for American Indian student success (Jackson et al., 2003). American Indian students described experiences of racism as feelings of isolation from being singled out

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based on their race, being stereotyped by faculty and students, and inaccurate information about American Indians in the textbooks (Jackson et al., 2003). Ignorance of American Indian culture by their peers, perceived acts of racism, and feelings of alienation due to being physically and culturally different from the majority of students on campus is a significant barrier for American Indian students at PWIs (Brown & Kurpius, 1997; Pewewardy & Frey, 2004; Tate & Schwartz, 1993; Taylor, 1999; Weaver, 2000). Although American Indian students are less likely to experience acts of racism while on campus at a tribal college, it is unclear how American Indian tribal college transfer students would respond and handle acts of racism while on the campus of a PWI. More information regarding American Indian race, racism, and stereotypes will be discussed in the race, racism, and racial climate section.

Theme 8: Nonlinear path. American Indian students often take an academic route that includes attending more than one institution of higher education and/or a stopping out period of up to two years (Jackson et al., 2003). American Indian students who persist through multiple transfers are able to do so because they are unashamed of their collegiate route, not bound to the idea of graduating in a timely matter, and are comfortable with stopping out due to personal problems (Jackson et al.). There may be a variety of reasons why American Indian students attend multiple institutions or stop-out. For instance a study on American Indian nurses revealed that many had attended more than one college due to the need to be closer to home and taking care of family members (Yurkovich, 2001). Tribal college students who transfer to a PWI at a minimum will have attended two institutions, which suggest that they have certain characteristics that helped them persist through multiple institutions and reasons for attending multiple institutions.

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Theme 9: Paradoxical cultural pressure. Balancing paradoxical cultural pressure is a key to college persistence for American Indian students (Jackson et al., 2003). Paradoxical cultural pressure is conflicting messages from the students' home reservations about being successful in college and being a member of their tribal community (Jackson et al.). On an extreme level, paradoxical cultural pressure means fending off accusations of being called White, due to their academic aspirations, by other American Indians in the community. On a more practical level paradoxical cultural pressure implies that American Indian students must reconcile any conflicts between the value systems of their academic training and American Indian cultural protocol and expectations (Taylor, 1999). Dr. Dave Warner, an American Indian elder on his son returning to the reservation with a college degree, stated, "regardless of his degree, he will need to learn his place in our community....Remember this, it is not your degree that makes you a leader, it is your service" (Johnson, Benham, & Van Alstine, 2003, p.156). It is unclear how tribal college graduates who transfer to a PWI negotiate what it means to be a successful student and American Indian community member.

Theme 10: Academic preparation. Nationally, American Indian high school students had the lowest percentage of all racial/ethnic groups with college ready transcripts (Greene & Foster, 2003). A lack of academic preparation is a cause of difficulty for American Indian students in higher education (Falk & Aitken, 1984; Huffman, 2003). In contrast, American Indian students who were high achieving in high school were likely to experience persistence in college (Brown & Kurpius, 1997).

An important note is that students from reservation communities experienced more academic difficulties in college than non-reservation American Indian students

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(Huffman, 2003). As a result of American Indian students from reservation communities experiencing more academic difficulties, many of them are more likely to attend tribal colleges. A majority of tribal college students grew up on reservation communities. The academic preparation of tribal college transfer students is an important consideration when determining factors for persistence at PWIs.

Theme 11: Financial resources. Financial aid from tribal nations and American Indian tuition waivers serve as a positive resource for American Indian student persistence (Reeves, 2006). Family financial problems can result in American Indian students discontinuing their academic aspirations (Jackson & Smith, 2000). Inadequate financial aid for American Indian students can prevent them from continuing their education (Falk & Aitken, 1984). Tribal college students who transfer to a PWI are likely to perceive financial aid as an important factor in their success.

There are a variety of factors in the literature concerning the persistence of American Indian students. There are some factors that of persistence that apply to all students, but the historical, political, and cultural uniqueness of American Indian communities creates particular challenges and needs for American Indian students. Specifically, tribal college transfer students, present very unique circumstances and needs in order to persist and succeed at a four-year PWI.

Community College Transfer Experience at Four-Year Institutions

It is unclear what information tribal college students receive and do not receive about transferring to a four-year institution. However, community college students have been transferring to four-year institutions since their inception, which has made the transfer experience for community college students a subject of many researchers and a

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helpful body of literature on which to draw. This section will review the concept of transfer adjustment and persistence to degree attainment for community college transfer students. The purpose of the community college transfer section is to provide an overview of transfer issues faced by all students and focus on the literature related to American Indian students who transfer from Tribal colleges to PWIs.

Transfer transition and adjustment

The transition period for community college transfer students involves decisions and events that happen in the time period prior to arrival on campus. There are four important factors or decisions that influence a successful transition for community college transfer students. Community college transfer student adjustment to a four-year institution is one factor strongly influenced by preparation for the transfer process (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Flaga, 2006). That is, students who are able to access reliable and accurate information from community colleges and four-year institutions about the transfer process are more likely to experience a smoother transfer transition and adjustment (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Flaga, 2006). Unfortunately, many community college transfer students often do not receive adequate information regarding the transfer process (Townsend & Wilson, 2006).

Community college students would benefit from understanding the significant differences between attending a community college and four-year institution. Prior knowledge that would help community college transfer students create a successful transition includes knowledge about college classes and facilities. Community college students must adjust to classroom size, fewer homework assignments, and more lenient attendance policies at four-year institutions (Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Also,

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community college transfer students who graduated from a four-year institution rated the library, faculty advising, and financial aid services as the most useful support services (Glass & Bunn, 1998). Community college students would benefit from knowing what specific academic support services are available to help them succeed.

A second factor, community college transfer students who live and work on-campus have an easier time adjusting to the academic, social, and physical environment of a four-year institution than those students who commute (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Flaga, 2006). So when transfer students are active in academic clubs and campus activities, they are more likely to feel connected to the four-year institution (Flaga, 2006). Community college transfer students are likely to be commuter students upon transferring to a four-year institution (Harbin, 1997), and as such, are less likely to have access to on-campus support than on-campus students (Kodama, 2002). What role or significance living on-campus or commuting to campus has on tribal college transfer students is undetermined.

A third factor for a successful transfer for community college students is the financial aid office. Financial aid becomes more relevant at four-year institutions than at community colleges for transfer students (Harbin, 1997). A lack of financial aid for community college transfer students often results in the need for them to work, which means less time on campus (Dougherty, 1992). Since financial aid is an important component for American Indian students in higher education, it is important to know what type of access American Indian students have with the financial aid office.

The fourth factor for community college transfer students, loss of credit during the transfer process (Glass & Bunn, 1998), occurs when all of the credits accumulated by

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a student at a community college are not accepted by the four-year institution. Loss of credit is often due to a lack of knowledge by the transferring student about which courses are transferable (Dougherty, 1992). The importance and relevance of credit loss on tribal college transfer students is not fully understood due to a lack of research.

Community college students who transfer to a four-year institution can expect an initial transfer adjustment to their new institution. Community college transfer adjustment can be perceived from an academic and social perspective (Flaga, 2006). The academic perspective includes interaction with faculty in and out of the classroom, and the social perspective includes formal and informal interaction with fellow students that do not take place in the classroom (Flaga, 2006).

An important aspect regarding adjustment to the academic environment for community college transfer students is transfer shock. Transfer shock is a term used to describe an expected drop in grade point average for transfer students in the first semester upon transfer to a four-year institution (Hills, 1965). The concept of transfer shock has often been the primary subject of research on community college transfer students to four-year institutions. The research on transfer shock has varied from no significant difference in GPA between transfer students and students who enroll into four-year institutions as first-year students (Johnson, 2005) to a minimal difference in GPA (Diaz, 1992). However, studies have shown that transfer students can expect a drop in GPA the first semester upon transferring (Preston, 1993).

The social perspective on transfer adjustment involves the process of transfer students becoming socially comfortable outside of the classroom. Common social issues for community college transfer students, include not knowing other students, feelings of

isolation, not knowing how to access university resources, and commuting problems (Harbin, 1997). Contact with fellow students outside the classroom can be a positive experience for community college transfer students, which suggests that a valuable resource for community college transfer students is contact and advice from students who have experience and knowledge about the four-year institution (Flaga, 2006). Yet, community college transfer students have expressed more difficulty making friends at the four-year institution than at their community college (Townsend & Wilson, 2006).

Lastly, it is important to note that Students of Color have several distinctions in the transfer adjustment process. Students of Color have a low success rate at transferring to four-year institutions (Melguizo, 2007). When transferring into a new institution, Students of Color experience different expectations, learning outcomes, and academic behaviors than White students (Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003). For example, Students of Color expressed more of an interest in establishing lifelong goals and skills, which has been shown to predict success for Students of Color (Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003). Despite the expectations reported for Students of Color, it is unknown what distinctions apply to American Indians.

Persistence to degree attainment

A study on community college transfer behavior revealed that one out of four community college transfer students received a bachelor's degree (McCormick & Carroll, 1997). It is important for community college transfer students to transition and adjust to a four-year institution, but the end goal is often persistence to degree attainment. This section discusses the factors that influence the persistence toward degree attainment for community college transfer students.

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Approximately 70% of community college transfer students who complete at least a semester's worth of credits at a four-year institution graduate with a bachelor's degree (Wellman, 2002). Community college students who received an associate's degree prior to transferring were more likely to graduate at the four-year institution than those who transferred without an associate's degree (McCormick & Carroll, 1997). A debated issue revolves around who is more likely to persist to graduation, community college transfer students or students who enroll into a four-year institution out of high school. Studies comparing community college students who transfer to a four-year institution and students who enter directly from high school found no significant difference in persistence to graduation (Lee, Mackie-Lewis, & Marks, 1993; McCormick & Carroll, 1997; Melguizo & Dowd, 2009).

An important consideration in persistence to graduation is length of time to graduate. Students who transfer from community colleges are likely to graduate if given sufficient time to complete degree requirements (Glass & Bunn, 1998; Lorentz & Benedict, 1996). Persistence to graduation between Students of Color and White students is often debated. However, when allowing for more time to graduate, minority student graduation percentage is similar to that of White students (Glass & Bunn, 1998).

What is known about length of time to graduate is that when students are employed full-time they will take longer to graduate and perceive their jobs as barriers to degree completion (Glass & Bunn, 1998). In addition, efficiency in graduation time could be improved through better academic advising and clear articulation agreements between community colleges and four-year institutions (Poch & Wolverton, 2006). Despite the

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research on community college students, factors that lead to length of time to graduation for tribal college transfer students remains unclear.

Tribal college transfer students to a four-year PWI

Although there is a paucity of literature on tribal college transfer students at PWIs, two studies are similar in purpose to the current study. Brown (2003) sought to understand the perceptions of the tribal college experience from tribal college students who transferred to the University of North Dakota, a four-year PWI. The tribal college students believed their tribal college experience empowered them, helped them develop confidence, and adequately prepared them for attendance at a four-year PWI (Brown, 2003). However, the study did not specifically examine the persistence or success of American Indian students.

The issue of persistence for tribal college transfer students at a PWI was studied at a public institution in Montana. Dell's (2000) study on American Indian tribal college students who transferred to a Montana University measured the persistence factors of American Indian transfer students from their first semester to their second semester at a Montana University. The study consisted of seven American Indian transfer students from a tribal college in Montana. Academic integration was found to be an important variable in participants' experiences and students were more likely to academically integrate when they have acquired effective learning strategies and developed meaningful relationships with faculty in the Dell (2000) study. Dell (200) determined environmental pull, such as, financial difficulties and family responsibilities to be an important factor in persistence or departure. Although the study on Montana tribal college students examined

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the transfer persistence of tribal college students, it focused specifically on persistence to second semester and not necessarily persistence to degree attainment.

Racial Climate in Higher Education

Race and racism play a significant role in shaping the experiences of minority students in higher education. This section, on racial climate, provides an overview of the potential issues facing American Indian students in colleges and universities. Racism and racial climate at PWIs are important issues to consider as American Indian students are accustomed to a safe and nurturing environment at tribal colleges. An overview of critical race theory, the concepts of micro-aggression and stereotype threat, and racial climate in higher education for minority students is also provided. This section ends with a review of American Indian student experiences in higher education.

Critical Race Theory

The purpose of the critical race theory and tribal critical race theory section is to establish that American Indians are a political group in addition to a racial group. A common misconception is that American Indians are only a racial group, which leads many people to believe that some American Indian rights are special unjust preferences rather than rights negotiated through political treaties. The misunderstanding of American Indians as a historical and current political group has an impact on the racial climate at colleges and universities for American Indian students.

Critical race theory, which originated in the field of law, has made its way into the field of education. Race, according to critical race theory, is a social construction produced by humans, not nature or biology (Lopez, 1994). The development of critical race theory as a theoretical lens was to move the discussion of race and racism into the

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academy (Parker & Lynn, 2002). The central tenet of critical race theory is that racism is more than acts of aggression based on skin color, but it is an endemic part of American culture that goes deeper than human prejudice (Parker & Lynn, 2002). An assumption of critical race theory is that race and racism matter and exists in the fabric of society in the United States. Race and racism have real life and policy implications for historically subjugated groups in the United States, which include American Indians.

An extension of critical race theory is tribal critical race theory. The central tenet of critical race theory, racism is endemic to American culture, applies for American Indians, but what distinguishes tribal critical race theory is the recognition and emphasis on the political/legal status and colonization of American Indians (Brayboy, 2005). That is, tribal critical race theory argues that American Indians are different from other racial groups due to their status as a political group. There are nine tenets to tribal critical race theory, but for the purposes of the current study only four are discussed on the topic of race and American Indians. The four tenets are as follows:

1. Colonization is endemic to society.
2. Indigenous peoples have a desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty and self-Determination.
3. Governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation.
4. Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups.

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Colonization is the process of legitimizing and rationalizing decisions to justify the occupation of lands previously inhabited by Indigenous people (Brayboy, 2005). In addition to occupying and taking of land from Indigenous people, colonization as endemic to society is also played out in the socialization process, such as the belief that White knowledge is superior to Indigenous knowledge (Brayboy, 2005). The concept of colonization in education takes the form of European dominant curriculum as general education and minority based curriculum as an academic minor or specialization. Racism is a component of colonization, but the process of colonization is the justification used to take the land and culture away from Indigenous people.

Second, tribal sovereignty and self-determination are important concepts to consider when discussing how race and racism impact American Indian issues and students. Tribal sovereignty is the ability for Indigenous people in the United States of America to make decisions without permission from the United States government (Brayboy, 2005). Tribal sovereignty has been established through a series of Supreme Court Cases and is the reason why American Indians are a political group in addition to a racial group (Wilkins & Lomawaima, 2001). However, tribal sovereignty for American Indians is a limited sovereignty and subject to the will of the United States congress (Wilkins & Lomawaima, 2001).

Self-determination is “the right of all peoples to freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development” (Riding In, 2005, p.108). Self-determination is an important cultural concept for Indigenous communities in higher education, because it challenges the notion that Indigenous people are incapable of knowing and understanding Indigenous culture (Deloria, 2004). The

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future of tribal sovereignty and self-determination is dependent on education, because education is a powerful force that has the ability to be used to socialize and decolonize the minds of forthcoming generations (Tippeconnic, 1991).

Third, tribal critical race theory argues assimilation policies have had a negative impact on Indigenous peoples and culture (Brayboy, 2005). Tribal critical race theory maintains that while western education impacts the identity of Indigenous people, it should not be at the expense of Indigenous culture (Brayboy, 2005). Education for American Indians must not be one of assimilation, but one of regeneration of American Indian identity, culture, and history. The challenge for American Indian students in higher education is balancing the pressure to be cultural and an academic.

The fourth tenet of tribal critical race theory that relates to American Indian student success is the importance of tribal traditions and culture. Tribal critical race theory maintains that Indigenous culture, language, and traditions should be the foundations by which the educational experience of American Indian students is analyzed (Brayboy, 2005). Recognition of American Indian ways of knowing in education is the springboard for self-determination, sovereignty, and cultural survival of American Indian communities and people (Brayboy, 2005). American Indian culture and language is the foundation that defines American Indians as a race. Since racism and colonization are assumed to be endemic to American society, they have an impact on the everyday experience for American Indian students.

Micro-aggressions

Micro-aggressions are an example of experiences that can detract from the collegiate experiences for Students of Color. "Micro-aggressions are subtle insults

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(verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward People of Color, often automatically or unconsciously” (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000, p.60). Overt racism is typically not accepted by most people, but subtle racism, such as micro-aggressions, often creeps into the everyday experience in today’s society (Picca & Feagin, 2007). Micro-aggressions can leave People of Color in higher education feeling out of place in the academy due to race and the belief that others have lower expectations of them (Solorzano, 1998). Examples of micro-aggressions for Students of Color include feeling invisible or ignored in the classroom, being told that they are only at the university or college because of affirmative action, and feelings of being drained from everyday scrutiny (Solorzano et al., 2000).

Stereotype Threat

Stereotype threat is a phenomenon that impacts the ability of Students of Color to perform in higher education. Stereotype threat is a poor performance in education based on pressure from a stereotype that less is expected from them (Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Stereotype threat theory maintains that anxiety plays a role in testing situations for stigmatized groups (Osborne, 2001; Steele, 1997). Furthermore, stereotype threat impacts the working memory of stigmatized groups, which can result in poor performance on cognitive tests (Schmader & Johns, 2003). It is not known if stereotype threat plays a role in the experience of American Indian students at PWIs.

Racial Climate in Higher Education

A common theme for colleges and universities is to strive for diversity in their student body. However, college students from diverse backgrounds struggle with racial integration and social relations in higher education (Bok, 2006). In fact, Students of Color

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perceive campus climate differently than White students. For instance, Students of Color are more likely to report their institution as racist and hostile than White students (Rankin & Reason, 2005). Students of Color often report a lack of diversity on campus and an unwelcoming campus environment (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002). Furthermore, the lack of a diverse campus leads to feelings of tokenism for Students of Color, which is an increased understanding for Students of Color that they are different and underrepresented (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen, 1998).

As a result, many PWIs have taken measures to support Students of Color and provide a safe and welcoming campus environment. Colleges and universities can help Students of Color by ensuring that they have adequate academic support, multicultural skills, ability to participate in a global community, and participation in campus life (Hurtado, 2003). An essential element to a positive campus racial climate for Students of Color is an increase in the number of Students of Color and positive peer interaction (Park, 2006). For Students of Color, involvement on campus and positive peer interaction revolves around cultural centers (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002).

It is important for American Indian students to have positive interaction and connection with other American Indian students and non-American Indian students. Having a sense of belonging or being a part of the campus community is an important component to student persistence and positive racial climate (Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008). For Students of Color, those who have positive interaction with their White peers in college were more likely to have a sense of belonging at a PWI (Locks et al., 2008).

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Unfortunately, Students of Color sometimes lack cultural and racial support at colleges and universities. American Indian students report a lack of cultural support from their White classmates (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002) and hostile learning environments filled with racial prejudice, which are factors that lead to American Indian students leaving their first year in college (Pewewardy & Frey, 2004). Although the Students of Color experience and perception of racial climate in higher education speaks to the American Indian student experience, there are some specific issues that relate directly to American Indian students.

American Indian experience in Higher Education

Two common racial issues for American Indian students in higher education are ethnic fraud and misinformation regarding American Indian culture, history, and people due to stereotypes. Ethnic fraud occurs at colleges and universities when individuals self-identify as a specific race in a deception designed to achieve perceived benefits in hiring, scholarships, and research (Pewewardy, 2004). Unfortunately at most colleges and universities, the predominant method used to determine race and ethnicity of individuals is self-identification or checking of a box on a hiring or admissions form (Pember, 2007). The problem with self-identification is when individuals self-identify as American Indian in order to achieve perceived benefits many will discard their new identity when they no longer find this identity useful for personal gain (Pewewardy & Frey, 2004). A study at UCLA exposed that a majority of the students who self-reported as American Indian students on campus were unable to provide documentation or enrollment with a federally recognized tribal nation (Machamer, 1997).

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Ethnic fraud impacts the experience of American Indian students at colleges and universities in two significant ways. First, colleges and universities generally measure diversity through racial/ethnic self-identification numbers, but the use of self-identification leads to inaccurate admission numbers of American Indian students (Pewewardy & Frey, 2004) and inaccurate number of American Indian employees (Pewewardy, 2004). That is, a college and university may not be as diverse or have as many American Indian students, faculty, and staff on campus as they portray in university reports.

The second way American Indian ethnic fraud impacts students involves American Indian faculty. The danger in ethnic fraud goes beyond individuals falsifying their ethnic identity, but some of those individuals are fabricating and inaccurately portraying indigenous culture and ceremonies in classrooms (Pember, 2007). Complaints by students and faculty against professors abusing the self-identification policy and misrepresenting native culture have a minimal effect due to no law against “ethnic fraud” (Redsteer, 2003). The issue of ethnic fraud of American Indian identity is a complex and political issue that impacts diversity, accuracy in numbers, and cultural integrity for American Indian students in higher education.

The second issue for American Indian students in higher education involves American Indian stereotypes. There are numerous stereotypes concerning American Indians, but three stereotypes most likely to impact American Indian students are discussed here. One stereotype involves the notion that one American Indian can speak for all American Indians or that all American Indians are the same. American Indians like other minorities are subject to being drawn into a discussion involving their race or asked

to be the only American Indian on a committee so that the university can say an American Indian voice was represented (Brayboy, 2003; Deloria, 2004). American Indian students at PWIs are likely to be the only American Indian student in their classes, which means they are likely to be asked to speak on behalf of any American Indian issues.

A second stereotype that American Indian students are likely to encounter involves what an American Indian looks like. The belief is that American Indians should look like a full-blooded American Indian with long dark hair and brown skin; however, the reality is that American Indian students who are less than full-blood American Indian may not look American Indian (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002). The concept of blood quantum derived from the Dawes Rolls of 1887, where all Indians on the rolls were considered full-bloods (Garrouette, 2003). The blood quantum of present day Indians can be defined from a chart based on the degree of blood from their parents and ultimately to their ancestors on the Dawes rolls (Garrouette, 2003). The blood quantum process and minimum requirement for determining who is and is not American Indian is highly contested, but the point is that American Indian students may not necessarily have the physical features generally assigned to American Indians.

A third stereotype that American Indian students are likely to encounter involves the belief that modern American Indians are not “real Indians” and that American Indian culture ended in the 1800s (Miheuah, 2004). An example of how American Indians are viewed as historical people rather than present day people is how colleges and universities use American Indian mascots and nicknames that are of an American Indian from the 1800s with feathers and a headdress. The images American Indian mascots and nicknames present are derogatory and negative images to the American public and leave

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American Indians with a lower sense of self-esteem (Harjo, 2005). The American Indian College Fund (www.collegefund.org) has attempted to counter the perception that American Indians are historical people by creating a poster campaign showing pictures of modern American Indians in modern professions. American Indian students in PWIs may be faced with the notion that they are not real American Indians.

Summary

A majority of the student persistence models and literature, community college transfer literature, and racial issues in higher education literature do not include American Indian students or consider American Indian cultural values. Therefore, not all aspects of student persistence models and literature, community college transfer literature, and racial issues in higher education literature that do not include American Indian participants will apply to the experience of American Indian college students. However, the basic concepts of those models and literature may certainly be relevant to the experience of American Indian college students.

The current study seeks to understand significant factors that help tribal college American Indian students succeed at PWIs. There are some quantitative studies on American Indian student persistence and retention, but an issue with those studies involves ethnic fraud and authenticity of American Indian identity. The literature on American Indian persistence in higher education is mostly qualitative with small sample studies. Additionally, a majority of the qualitative research on American Indian persistence is based off Southwestern institutions, tribal nations, and tribal members. When considering literature on American Indian student persistence, it is important to understand the diversity in American Indian culture and institutions of higher education.

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There are over 500 American Indian tribal nations with American Indian students attending a variety of institutions of higher education in different regions of the United States. More specifically there is a lack of research on American Indian students in the Midwest.

The community college transfer literature suggests that there are several transfer issues that inhibit success for transfer students at the four-year institution. However, what the literature does not account for is the role of the transferring institution. There is a paucity of literature on tribal college students, but there is even less on tribal college transfer students to four-year PWIs.

In addition, the American Indian student experience in higher education and specifically in PWIs is not well understood. What is known is that American Indian students have trouble succeeding at PWIs and that they are confronted with a variety of racial stereotypes and misconceptions. A majority of research on American Indian students is based on factors leading to attrition and not necessarily on why students succeed. The current study will add new knowledge to the literature on American Indian student experience, persistence, and success of tribal college transfer students in the Midwest.

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CHAPTER 3

Methods and Methodology

The purpose of the methods and methodology section is to establish the rigor and care that I use to address the current study's research question. In this section, I discuss qualitative methods, Indigenous methodology, the research design, and end with a section on researcher identity.

Qualitative Method

Qualitative research is the process of placing the researcher in natural settings in an attempt to garner an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative research is also designed to search for and understand the meaning of human actions and expressions (Talbert, 2004). Furthermore, qualitative research allows for data to be derived from the words of the participants (Polkinghorne, 1994), which is why understanding the experiences of tribal college transfer students at four-year institutions is best understood using a qualitative study.

The research question for the current study is: What are the experiences of American Indian tribal college graduates who transferred from tribal colleges and succeeded at four-year PWIs? The research question was developed to collect data that will help administrators at tribal colleges and PWIs, as well as American Indian students and communities, understand the experience of tribal college graduates at a PWI. American Indian students have typically struggled and failed at PWIs, therefore the current study spotlights the story of eight American Indian students who were able to overcome barriers and succeed at PWIs. Qualitative methods allow for those American Indian students who have succeeded at a PWI to share their stories in their own voices.

Studies and reports on American Indian students in higher education tend to focus on the negatives and the problems faced by American Indian communities and students, but the current study honors the triumphs of successful American Indian students. Using qualitative methods allows for a better understanding of the essential meaning behind the experience of tribal college transfer students at four-year PWIs.

The current study uses phenomenological methods, which is a specific type of qualitative research. “A method offers a systematic way of accomplishing something orderly and disciplined, with care and rigor” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 104).

Phenomenological methods value and emphasize the experience, perception, and consciousness of the participant (Moustakas, 1994). When using an Indigenous methodology, adapting research methods to meet the need and expectations of Indigenous communities may be necessary in order to be culturally respectful (Kahakalau, 2004). The current study will use hermeneutic phenomenological methods in conjunction with an Indigenous methodology to describe the meaning ascribed to the success and experience of tribal college students at a four-year PWI.

There are three main types of phenomenology, hermeneutic (See van Manen, 1990), transcendental (See Moustakas, 1994), and experimental (See Giorgi, 1985). While all three types of phenomenology share similarities, hermeneutic phenomenology was selected to guide the data collection and analysis for the current study. Hermeneutic phenomenology, like other types of phenomenology, is attentive to the description of a lived experience, but it differs in the amount of value placed on the interpretive process of deriving meaning in a lived experience (van Manen, 1990). Hermeneutic phenomenology is descriptive in how things appear, but it is also interpretive, because it

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is based off the notion that all phenomena captured in a language is interpretive (van Manen, 1990). In addition, hermeneutic phenomenology allows for and encourages the involvement of the researcher and his or her experience with the phenomenon in the research process (Hultgren, 1995).

Phenomenology is concerned with the description of essence or lived experience in the world (van Manen, 1990). That is, “phenomenology focuses on the appearance of things, a return to things just as they are given, removed from everyday routines and biases, from what we are told is true in nature and in the natural world of everyday living” (Moustakas, 1994, p.58). Furthermore, phenomenology is also concerned with how “a person experiences and understands his or her world as real and meaningful” (van Manen, 1990, p.183). The use of phenomenological methods in the current study is to allow for American Indian tribal college participants to describe the meaning of their experience at a PWI in their own words and perceptions.

The purpose of phenomenology is to use the experiences of other people in order to have a better understanding of the deep meaning of a human experience (van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology is designed to explore how participants articulate their experience with a particular phenomenon (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). A phenomenon is described as a central concept that is experienced in the conscious of individuals (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). The phenomenon in the current study is the lived experience of American Indian tribal college graduates who transferred to and are experiencing success at a PWI.

American Indian students succeeding at PWIs is a rare phenomenon. Overall, American Indian students have historically not experienced success at colleges and

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universities. The number of American Indian students who attain a bachelor's degree is consistently regarded as troubling and below that of other racial/ethnic groups.

Furthermore, the number of American Indian students who are enrolled in bachelor degree granting institutions is consistently a low percentage.

In addition to a lack of success, what makes the experience of American Indian tribal college transfer students at PWIs a phenomenon is the differences in institutional cultures of PWIs and tribal colleges. An American Indian student at a tribal college enjoys the comfort of everyday occurrence with American Indian people and culture; however, American Indian tribal college students who transfer to a PWI experience an environment where contact with American Indian people and culture becomes an anomaly. American Indian tribal college students' experiences of persistence and success at a PWI, a place where so many American Indian students fail, is the phenomenon of the current study.

Indigenous Methodology

The current U.S. higher education system was not developed by Indigenous peoples nor was it developed for Indigenous people. Mihesuah and Wilson (2002) insist that scholars and educational systems take responsibility for accurately portraying native history, native voice, and ensuring that native communities benefit from any research about them. Indigenous education should be approached with an epistemology that derives from Indigenous ways of knowing. It is improbable to think that any Indigenous ways of knowing model or methodology could speak for every tribal nation in the U.S. or for Indigenous people throughout the world. However, there are models that speak more authentically to Indigenous people than others.

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In order to proceed, I believe it is important for me to discuss how I use and what I mean by Indigenous methodology. I use methodology as an integration of epistemology and ontology that enhance a particular way of constructing knowledge. Ontology deals with truth or reality and what can be known as “real” in the world (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). A person can take an ontological viewpoint that can range from there is an absolute truth to truth is relative. Epistemology deals with the nature of knowledge and the relationship between the knower and what can be known in the world (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). How knowledge is created and what counts as knowledge may vary depending on the epistemological viewpoint.

How ontology and epistemology are perceived and used in research depends on the chosen research paradigm. A research paradigm involves underlying assumptions about reality, knowledge, and the discovery of knowledge (Fien, 2002). There are a variety of research paradigms, such as positivism, post-positivism, interpretive-constructivism, critical, and post-structural (Lather, 1992). The current study takes a constructivist approach to ontology and epistemology.

A constructivist viewpoint maintains that reality is socially constructed and subjected to human interpretation (Fein, 2002). Further, constructivism maintains that knowledge is subjective and developed through interaction between the researcher and participants (Fein, 2002). Methodology deals with the development of knowledge and I intend to use an Indigenous methodology.

The term “Indigenous peoples” became prominent during the American Indian Movement of the 1960s; it is meant to describe the collective struggle for self-determination and shared colonial experience of the world’s colonized peoples (Smith,

1999). When using the term Indigenous, I use it to be synonymous with the definition for Indigenous peoples. Benham (2007) describes methodology as “the logic behind the research/inquiry approach” (p.519). When I refer to Indigenous methodology, I am referencing the inclusion of Indigenous history, culture and language, and self-determination that has an influence on how a researcher approaches knowledge and ways of knowing. The issue with creating complex definitions lies in that definitions are normative to the people providing input to the definition (Sears & Hughes, 1996).

Louis (2007), an Indigenous scholar, believes the aim of an Indigenous methodology is “accomplished in a more sympathetic, respectful, and ethically correct fashion from an Indigenous perspective” (p.133). What makes Indigenous methodology different from western methods of research is the purpose of healing and spirituality rather than focusing on objectivity and neutrality (Smith, 1999). I do not believe that there is one single concept of an Indigenous methodology, but many that are built upon the cultural foundations of a specific Indigenous community. However, I believe that there are common themes of Indigenous methodologies.

What are the various types of Indigenous methodologies? What is a culturally appropriate way to attain knowledge in Indigenous communities? Is an Indigenous methodology necessary and important? These are important questions for all researchers to consider when entering or working with native communities. This section discusses the important components of an Indigenous methodology and ends with a discussion of an Indigenous framework that I chose to guide the current study.

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A critical aspect of an Indigenous methodology is to acknowledge and understand the role history and colonization have played in shaping Indigenous communities. A first step in conducting an Indigenous methodology is to discard and remove oneself from stereotypical western concepts of Indigenous culture (Benham, 2007). Indigenous methodologies arose as a counter story to colonialism and an educational system that values western knowledge over Indigenous knowledge (Louis, 2007). The history of colonialism has left Indigenous people in a continuous state of cultural survival, which has left native languages at risk of extinction (Wilson, 2004). A significant tool of colonialism was the boarding schools and missionary influence that changed the way of life for Indigenous people (Meyer, 2003; Wilson, 2004). The history of colonialism on Indigenous peoples is a significant aspect of an Indigenous methodology.

Smith (1999) argues that imperialism and colonialism are relevant to Indigenous methodologies because they frame the experience of Indigenous people in modern times. Imperialism is the control of capital, and colonialism is the expansion of control, which meant subjugating Indigenous peoples (Smith, 1999). Allen (1986) maintains that Indigenous people value and believe in interconnectedness (no separation, such as mind and body), that all life (animal, plant, minerals) forms have privilege and place in the world, and that the commonality of Indigenous people is religion more than a shared sense of colonization. However, it is important to realize that colonization has had an enormous impact on Indigenous identity and values in the modern era (Allen, 1986). Indigenous methodology is important because writing and history legitimize how the world is viewed and acted upon (Smith, 1999).

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Purpose of Indigenous methodology

The purpose of an Indigenous methodology is bounded to specific researchers, but generally speaking the end goal is self-determination through an affirmation of cultural knowledge and being of service to native communities. Self-determination as the goal of an Indigenous methodology is more than a political aspiration, it represents a process of social justice, decolonization, and healing for Indigenous people (Smith, 1999). Wilson (2004) advocates for decolonization and a complete return to traditional ways that were once the backbone of healthy tribal nations. Additionally, Wilson considers decolonization as the process of trusting and believing in the ability of Indigenous people to make empowered change. For Meyer (2003), a native Hawaiian, Indigenous research must have a practical function or be of use to native communities other than merely theoretical. Themes of Indigenous research will vary, but examples include cultural survival, remembering traditions, reframing social problems, and language revitalization to name a few (Smith).

Louis (2007) maintains that Indigenous people are still in danger of being misrepresented, used, fragmented, and simplified by western researchers. Louis describes the purpose of Indigenous research as respecting and accepting the knowledge and decisions made by Indigenous people, meeting the needs of the community, and sharing the knowledge of research with Indigenous people. Benham (2007) asserts that Indigenous knowledge has been reduced to a commodity for the benefit and rejuvenation of western knowledge. The re-telling of Indigenous knowledge from a native perspective should be embedded in a cultural, historical, ecological, and political context (Benham, 2007). Furthermore, the purpose of Indigenous research is to raise critical questions that

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exemplify the tensions of power in knowledge and legitimize Indigenous knowledge (Benham, 2007).

Accountability

Indigenous research is primarily accountable to Indigenous communities, which emphasizes the importance of sharing the knowledge and information of a study with the Indigenous community (Kahakalau, 2004). Accountability in an Indigenous methodology means recognition of the wisdom and showing respect to the elders of a native community (Hermes, 1998). An Indigenous methodology must recognize and be accountable to the histories, traditions, languages, social conditions, and cultural ways that pervade native communities (Swisher, 1996). Failure to be accountable to Indigenous communities could lead to mistrust and result in researchers being denied access to information (BrayBoy & Deyhle, 2000).

Accountability in Indigenous communities means more than the present day Indigenous people, but also involves a spiritual and value laden component. An Indigenous methodology must be accountable to their ancestors who came before them and the future generations that have yet to come by preserving cultural knowledge (Benham, 2007). Indigenous scholars are accountable to “truth”, which is accurately portraying history through the process of engaging Indigenous communities in the development of knowledge (Benham, 2007). Indigenous culture often dictates being accountable to the creator/spiritual being (Benham, 2007) and the physical environment of a community (Meyer, 2003).

While it is important to rely heavily on Indigenous knowledge and meeting the needs of Indigenous communities, it is also important to inform researchers that

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Indigenous methodology does have rigor. Indigenous methodology will often take place in the academy and will be under the scrutiny of non-native researchers, which makes legitimizing Indigenous methodology a necessity (Wilson, 2004). The methods of an Indigenous methodology will often be developed by western researchers, but how they are used is what makes an Indigenous methodology.

Sample and Site Selection

A criterion sample was chosen to meet the purpose of the study, which is to understand the experience of American Indian tribal college students attending and persisting at a PWI. When conducting a phenomenological study a criterion sampling format is appropriate to represent people who share a common experience (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2007). The inclusion criteria for American Indian tribal college students include: A tribally enrolled member with a sovereign Indian nation (while there are many definitions of who is an American Indian, commitment to an indigenous methodology dictates respect for self-determination of individual tribal nations to determine who is American Indian), an American Indian student who attended at least two semesters at Mgizi Tribal College or Ademin Tribal College and transferred to a four-year PWI, recently graduated from a four-year institution or accumulated at least 24 credits at a four-year institution, and a G.P.A in good academic standing at a four-year institution.

The criteria allow for a selection of American Indian participants who have had time to absorb the institutional culture of a tribal college prior to enrolling into a vastly different PWI. In general, when a community college student transfers to a four-year institution with an associate's degree they transfer in with 60 credits. Therefore, in

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general, a transfer student who has accumulated 24 credits of graduation will be roughly within one year of graduating. In addition, American Indian tribal college transfer students who have accumulated at least 24 credits at a PWI will have completed one year at a PWI and are more likely to graduate from the PWI. In addition, the 2.0 or higher G.P.A. or in good academic standing for the participants serves as additional evidence of success and persistence at the PWI.

The participants for the current study were recommended by staff members from Ademin Tribal College and Mgizi Tribal College. The staff members used the prescribed criteria to guide their recommendations. In addition, I used snowball techniques to locate participants, which is using participants to refer other potential participants to the researcher (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 1990). A majority of the eight participants were located through the use of snowball technique.

In a phenomenological study the number of participants can range from 5 to 25 individuals (Creswell, 2007). There are no exact numbers for sample size in qualitative studies, but the goal is to amass enough quality information to meet the intended goal of the research study (Sandelowski, 1995). Another strategy for sample size in qualitative research involves saturation, which is when new themes and information cease to emerge with added interviews (Marshall, 1996). A smaller sample size was chosen to provide in-depth understanding of the experience of American Indian tribal college students at PWIs. A total of eight participants who transferred from Mgizi Tribal College or Ademin Tribal College to a four-year PWI were selected. I stopped data collection when repeated stories emerged and no new information was presented by the participants. In addition, I had no other volunteers or recommendations of potential participants from the selected

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The two tribal colleges where the selected participants were chosen from is located in the same state in the Midwest. Midwest tribal colleges were selected due to a lack of research and recognition of tribal colleges that are not located in the southwest or northern plains. The chosen tribal colleges will be referred to as Mgizi Tribal College and Ademin Tribal College. In addition, the reservations where the tribal colleges are located will be referred to as Mgizi reservation and Ademin reservation

Mgizi Tribal College is an accredited institution located on a rural Indian reservation. However, access to a larger town is roughly 20 miles away, but it is roughly an hour drive during the winter months. Mgizi Tribal College is a land grant college offering associate degrees in 14 programs. In addition Mgizi Tribal College offers technical training and American Indian cultural classes. Mgizi Tribal College enrolls over 500 students with roughly 60% being American Indian. Mgizi Tribal College participates in an articulation program that ensures general education requirements will transfer to other in-state four-year colleges. Mgizi Tribal College offers many vocation and transfer programs, but American Indian culture and language is the primary focus for the college. For instance, the most popular major at Mgizi Tribal College is devoted to an American Indian language immersion program. A majority of the students who graduate with a language degree do not transfer to a four-year institution. Mgizi Tribal College graduates roughly 30 students per year with 20 plus students receiving associates degrees.

Ademin Tribal College is an accredited institution located on an Indian reservation, which is situated next to a city with a university. Ademin Tribal College is a land grant college offering associate degrees in liberal arts, Native American studies, and

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Business. Ademin Tribal College also offers non-degree courses, such as, community education classes in Native American Culture, language, and arts. Ademin Tribal College enrolls over 100 students with a majority of them being American Indian women. Ademin Tribal College has articulation agreements with five institution of higher education. Ademin Tribal College is a relatively new tribal college, which is a reason why it has fewer students, programs, and articulation agreements.

Due to a limited number of tribal college transfer students who fit the criteria, the actual four-year PWI varied. Between the eight participants from the two tribal colleges they transferred to four PWIs, Big State University, Water University, Hub University, and Outpost University. Two participants went to Big State University, one to Water University, four to Hub University, and one to Outpost University. All of the university's are located in the same state as the two tribal colleges.

Big State University is a four-year public major research university with a student enrollment of 40,000. Big State University is located four hours away from Mgizi Tribal College and an hour away from Ademin Tribal College. Big State University does not actively recruit or work with Mgizi Tribal College or Ademin Tribal college. Big State University has a variety of resources available to American Indian students to include an American Indian institute, two student groups, faculty/staff group, American Indian studies program, and an indigenous law and policy center.

Water University is a four-year public university with a student enrollment of 2,800. Water University is located 20 minutes from Mgizi Tribal College and three hours from Ademin Tribal College. Water University actively works with and recruits from Mgizi Tribal College and is working on communications to work and recruit from

Ademin Tribal College. Water University has an American Indian cultural center and student group available to American Indian students.

Hub University is a four-year public university with a student enrollment of 27,000. Hub University is three hours away from Mgizi Tribal College and five minutes away from Ademin Tribal College. Hub University actively works to develop a relationship with the local American Indian reservation where Ademin Tribal College is located. Hub University actively recruits students and communicates with the administration at Ademin Tribal College. Hub University does have an American Indian center and student group available to American Indian students.

Outpost University is a four-year private not for profit university with a student enrollment of 13,000. Outpost University's main campus is five hours away from Mgizi Tribal College and two hours away from Ademin Tribal College. However, Outpost University does have satellite campuses 20 minutes from Ademin Tribal College and the closest satellite campus to Mgizi Tribal College is three hours away. Outpost University does not actively work with or recruit from Mgizi Tribal College or Ademin Tribal College. Outpost University, as a private institution, does not accept the Indian tuition waiver that is available to American Indian students at public universities.

Data Collection

After receiving approval of the university's Institutional Review Board, American Indian tribal college graduates who met the inclusion criteria were recruited. I began by approaching Mgizi Tribal College and asking for assistance and approval in locating participants. Historically and presently there are issues with researchers coming into reservations and taking advantage of American Indian communities, which is why I felt it

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was important to get approval from the American Indian community first. In addition, an Indigenous methodology dictates that research with American Indian communities should be done in harmony with and for the benefit of American Indian communities. Initially I had trouble getting in contact with Mgizi Tribal College and it was not until I attended their annual powwow did I find someone to help me.

After receiving the approval of the president of Mgizi Tribal College, who admired my persistence in getting approval, a staff member went to work on sending out my recruitment letter to potential participants. I was also able to get an American Indian department at Water University to send out my recruitment letter to students who transferred from Mgizi Tribal College. I was able to locate my first participant with the help of an American Indian staff member at Big State University.

After expanding my criteria, I contacted Ademin Tribal College and received their help and approval for my study. A staff member at Ademin Tribal College put me in touch with several potential participants. I was able to get a majority of my participants through snowball sampling (Browne, 2005), which is using participants to locate other potential participants. Potential participants were more likely to help out when a friend recommended they participate.

Understanding a lived experience can be attained through a variety of methods, such as, transcribed interviews, formal written responses, diaries, in conversations with friends, and poetry to name a few (van Manen, 1990). Data collection for the current study consisted of personal reflection and notes from the researcher after the interviews, one-hour interviews with the participants, and a second half-hour follow-up interview. Following the first and second interview I kept written notes, thoughts, and questions

about key moments and points of emphasis during the interview. I used my reflections from the interviews to frame questions for following interviews with other participants as well as talking points for the second interview.

Upon agreeing to participate, the interviews were scheduled. Interviews were conducted in a secure and private location selected by the participants. Participants were given a consent form, demographic questionnaire, and copy of questions prior to starting the first interview. I then collected the consent form and questionnaire and began the interview. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

A standardized open-ended 60 minute first interview and a 30 minute follow-up interview was conducted with the American Indian tribal college participants. A standardized open-ended interview is an interview with fixed questions, although the questions allow for the participant to respond freely (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Interviews in a phenomenological study should begin as a mere chat and progress into a conversation around the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). The interview process took the form of active interviewing, which encourages and allows for the interviewee to provide alternative answers outside the prescribed parameters of the interview questions (Holstein & Gubrium, 2002). In addition, throughout the interview I listened closely for the “public voice” in an attempt to evoke the “inner voice” of the participants. The “public voice” is used by participants who speak as if they are addressing a large audience and the “inner voice” is less guarded and a more authentic conversation (Seidman, 1991).

In the first interview the participants were asked to respond to the following four thematic questions:

1. Would you share with me your story about the decision to attend a tribal college and your decision to transfer to a four-year PWI?
2. Would you share with me your story concerning the transfer process, such as, the application process, transferring credits, and adjustment to a new institution?
3. Would you share with me your experience at a PWI?
4. Would you share with me the factors that you believe helped you succeed and persist at a four-year PWI?

The purpose of the first interview was to gather personal accounts of the experience of American Indian tribal college students at a four-year PWI. The four thematic questions had a list of prompts to stimulate the conversation when needed. However, the flow of the interview was dictated by the participants to allow for their thoughts on what was important and meaningful about their personal experience.

The second interviews took place anywhere from one and a half to four months after the first interview. At the beginning of the second interview, the participants were given the preliminary themes that I developed from the first round of interviews. The structure of the follow-up interview began with thoughts that arose between the first and second interviews, followed with conversations about each theme, and then concluded with a conversation about anything the participants felt was left out about their experience at a PWI.

Data Analysis

All participants were given pseudonyms, the pseudonyms were taken from the native language of the tribal nations of the participants. An Indigenous methodology encourages the use of native language in the research study. The analysis process

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consisted of listening to and reading through the data several times for general understanding of the phenomenon prior to any thematic analysis. I also transcribed all of the interviews myself, which allowed me additional time to listen closely to the participants as they discussed about their experiences at the PWIs.

The process of thematic analysis is interpreting insightful meaning of a lived experience (van Manen, 1990). Themes in a phenomenological study are “the experiential structures that make up that experience” (van Manen, p. 79). A theme is intransitive and has a meaning or point that captures the phenomenon that is being examined (van Manen). The six themes that were derived from the current study were used to vividly describe the experience of American Indian tribal college transfer students and how they have persisted at a PWI.

After transcribing the first interviews, I began analysis of the interviews by isolating and pulling out significant statements. I used a selective approach (van Manen, 1990), which is to separate significant statements that are essential to the experience of the phenomenon. In total I had 367 significant statements from all eight of the participants.

After selecting significant statements, I began to organize the significant statements into meaningful thematic clusters. I started organizing clusters after interviewing the fourth participant and continued with clustering after each successive interview. In total, I developed 23 clusters out of the 367 significant statements. I then translated the meaning behind each cluster into a single thematic phrase.

Upon giving the clusters a thematic sentence or phrase, I then began the process of grouping similar clusters into larger themes that related to the experience of attending

and succeeding at a PWI for the participants. The key in developing themes in hermeneutic phenomenological methods is to delineate themes that are essential to the lived experience. Essential themes are aspects or qualities of a phenomenon that make the phenomenon what it is (van Manen). After a long period of reflection and analysis, I took the 23 clusters and merged them into six themes that best described the experience of tribal college transfer students at a PWI.

Reflection and re-writing are important aspects in the process of arriving at the themes in hermeneutic phenomenology (van Manen, 1990). Reflection involves a process of analyzing the thematic components of a lived experience. Re-writing involves constant revisions of text in order to effectively illuminate the meaning behind the lived experience. Constant writing and reflection is a critical part of the process in hermeneutic phenomenology; therefore, the process of developing the themes underwent multiple drafts. The themes are parts of a whole that make up the experience of American Indian tribal college transfer students who persisted and succeeded at a four-year PWI.

Trustworthiness and Goodness

In qualitative research the use of quantitative terms, internal and external validity, are replaced by trustworthiness and goodness. Goodness refers to making meaning of events as humans engage with the world rather than verifying objective facts (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002). In phenomenology goodness is “shown in the lived quality of the language and the deeper meaning brought forward by the researcher in conversation with the text” (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002, p.453). A significant aspect of goodness is providing an audit trail that verifies how meaning making was developed and interpreted (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002). In the current study, the achievement of goodness is

pursued by following Arminio and Hultgren's (2002) guidelines, which make my biases transparent, reflection on how I represent the participants in text, and documentation to support interpreted meaning in the text in order to not distort the participants' story. My biases are reported in the following section on researcher identity. Also, I kept a journal with reflective notes on my interaction with the participants and thoughts throughout the process on how I am representing the meaning making of the participants.

Trustworthiness is evidence that a research study is credible and representative (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002). In order to provide documentation on the authenticity and trustworthiness of the interpreted meaning of the participants, I utilize member checks, triangulation, and peer debriefing.

Member check. The purpose of member checks is to verify the accuracy of my interpretations and be used as another source of data (Talbert, 2004). In the second interview I discussed the preliminary interpretations with the participants. During the second interview the participants had the opportunity to agree, disagree, or be indifferent about the preliminary themes. There were a few clarifications, but no major discrepancies between my interpretations and the participants' member check.

Triangulation. Triangulation is the process of validating one source of information with another source of information, so that no one item of information is used without triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation is used to acknowledge the contradictions and nuances of various contexts in the participants' narrative (Talbert, 2004). Triangulation in the current study was fulfilled by multiple interviews with the participants, reflections from the participants, and my personal notes following each

interview. The multiple sources of data were used as a means of verification of the interpretations made in the data.

Debriefing. The purpose of peer debriefing is to demonstrate that the findings and interpretations are reasonable and probable (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002). Peer debriefing involves another researcher reading through the findings and developing their own interpretations and themes. If the interpretations are reasonable, the peer interpretations will be similar to that of the researcher. Upon the development of themes and interpretations in the current study, secured a peer debriefer who received transcripts of the first interviews and developed some of his own themes from the data. My peer debriefer in the debriefing process then presented his themes to me, which were very similar themes to what I had developed. I then showed my peer debriefer the themes I developed and he believed my claims were reasonable and credible.

Researcher Identity

In a phenomenological study, bracketing is used to suspend pre-existing knowledge about the phenomenon in order to avoid predisposing interpretations prior to understanding the significance of the phenomenon (Van Manen, 1990). I partook in the bracketing process by making explicit my personal experience and beliefs concerning the phenomenon. The purpose of this section is to put forth my experiences and prejudgments on the purpose of the current study in order to consciously focus on the lived experience as told by the participants.

I am Odawa, from the Grand Traverse Bay Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians and Little Traverse Bay of Odawa Indians. My personal and professional commitment is to be of service to native communities. I grew up in a native family and attended many

cultural functions during my youth; however, I was not exposed to the anishnaabemowin language (Odawa dialect). My grandmother was a fluent speaker and attended a boarding school in northern Michigan, but her experiences there influenced her not to teach her children or grandchildren the anishnaabemowin language. My academic and professional career is influenced by my desire to learn, teach, and understand native culture and history. I believe that preserving native language, teaching history from a native perspective, understanding native values and teachings, and service to native communities is a vital component to my identity as an American Indian.

When conducting a phenomenological study it is important that the researcher identifies his or her experience with the phenomenon in order to open him or herself to the experience of the participants (Creswell, 2007). I did not attend a tribal college nor did I transfer from a community college. I enrolled at Michigan State University, a PWI, as a freshman and it took me 5 years to complete my bachelor's degree. I have taught at a tribal college, conducted research on tribal colleges, and I am currently on a Board of Regents for the Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College. I was also an administrator for a Native American programs office, where a portion of my job duties included recruiting American Indian students and tribal college students. As it relates to the current study, I have experience as an American Indian student at a PWI, I have worked with American Indian students at a tribal college, and I have known and worked with students who have left a tribal college and completed their bachelor's degree.

As an American Indian researcher, I believe that I have a responsibility to American Indian people and that my research should be useful to American Indian communities and respectful to American Indian language and culture. Renee Louis

(2007), a native Hawaiian, believes it is the responsibility of Indigenous people to shelter Indigenous knowledge from misrepresentation. Indigenous scholar Ku Kahakalau (2004) is driven to demonstrate that Indigenous people can conduct high quality native inquiry. Benham (2007) states, “native/Indigenous scholars, storytellers, cultural experts, and communities should be the first tellers and the owners of the telling” (p.518).

However, being American Indian does not guarantee that my research will be viewed as authentic to a native community. Indigenous scholar Bryan Brayboy (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000), reflecting on one of his previous research projects, questioned whether he was acting too much like a researcher and not like a “real Indian”. Hermes (1998) identifies as a “mixed-blood” and acknowledges the pressure and complexity of trying to be “authentic” enough. Wilson (2004) believes that there are biological Indigenous people who act and think from the perspective of the dominant society, Indigenous people who think and act with a colonized mind inhibit the growth and recovery of Indigenous knowledge. Western research models advocate avoiding “going native”, but in an Indigenous methodology being a part of and being of service to the community is a necessity (Hermes). As a researcher I am committed to quality work and being a quality American Indian researcher.

Summary

The research design was chosen to answer the research question that guides the current study. Qualitative methods, specifically phenomenology, was used to provide an in-depth perspective of the American Indian tribal college graduate experience and success at a four-year PWI. An Indigenous methodology was used as an overarching lens that guided the structure and nature of questions asked and knowledge gained from the

current study. The current study consisted of multiple interviews with eight American Indian tribal college transfer students at four-year PWIs.

CHAPTER 4

Profile of Participants

Chapter four begins with a description of the eight participants in the current study. The eight participants were Kaagego, Bezhik, Niizh, Nswi, Niiwin, Naanan, Ngodwaaswi, and Niizhwaaswi. Following the description of the participants is a summary of the profiles.

Kaagego

Kaagego is a 30 year old female and a single parent of four children, ages three, five, ten, and eleven. Kaagego has spent most of her life living on Mgizi reservation where she is a tribal member. Kaagego's journey into higher education began at a PWI five hours away from her home and family. Regarding the experience, Kaagego said, "well I originally attended (a PWI) for a semester and hated every moment of it. And actually I was put on academic probation at the end of the semester and I basically just went home with no credits on the books." Given that her first experience at a PWI was not enjoyable or successful Kaagego returned home and began taking classes at Mgizi Tribal College.

Upon returning home, Kaagego worked full-time, got married, and had three children while attending Mgizi Tribal College. Although completing her associate's degree in business administration at Mgizi Tribal College took her 14 years, she graduated with a 3.9 G.P.A. Kaagego was driven to complete her associate's degree because she knew how much it meant to her father who was a big advocate of tribal colleges.

After earning her associate's degree, Kaagego decided to attend Big State University, which is four hours away from her home. Her decision to attend a university so far away from her reservation was influenced by her need to get a break from tribal politics on the reservation. For most of her stay at Big State University Kaagego lived on campus, in apartments where many families, graduate students, and student athletes reside. While living in campus apartments Kaagego relied on daycare to watch her children while she attended class.

However, midway through her final semester at Big State University Kaagego could no longer afford her rent and had to finish the semester living on the couch of a family member. Kaagego has a couple of family members and friends from her reservation who live near her campus. Due to a lack of money and space, Kaagego had to send her children back home to live with her parents and friends for the last half of her final semester. Kaagego did not work while taking classes and relied on financial aid to help her pay the bills while attending Big State University.

Kaagego had over 100 credits from her tribal college, but she was only able to get 60 credits accepted by Big State University. Kaagego is majoring in English and has two cognates, one in business and one in American Indian studies. Kaagego has a 3.7 GPA and is very close to graduating. Upon graduating from Big State University Kaagego is seriously thinking about going for a law degree, as she has already been accepted into law school.

Bezhik

Bezhik is a single female of three children, ages seven, 14, and 19. She is 34 years old and has spent most of her life living on Mgizi reservation where she is a tribal

member. Bezhik's academic career stalled in high school when she had to dropout due to having a child at a young age. However, she did earn a GED a few years after her firstborn child and then proceeded to enroll into Mgizi Tribal College. Bezhik then stopped out of Mgizi Tribal College due to her second child and did not return until nine years later. A motivating factor to enroll again at the tribal college was frustration with her job. Bezhik said, "basically I was sitting at work one day and I was bored, oh I don't know maybe a little disgruntled and I didn't want to do this job anymore." Bezhik graduated from Mgizi Tribal College with a degree in general studies and a 3.2 GPA.

Bezhik decided to transfer to Water University for a degree in nursing. She continues to live on the reservation and travels close to 30 miles in order to attend Water University. Bezhik enjoys life on the reservation and did not want to move her family making Water University an obvious choice to continue her education. Bezhik is engaged and relies on her fiancé, oldest daughter, and other family members to help her out with her younger children while pursuing her collegiate degree. In addition to going to school full-time at Water University and taking care of her family, Bezhik works full-time at the local casino.

Bezhik was able to transfer 85 credits from her tribal college to Water University. She has been attending Water University over a year and has a 2.9 GPA. Bezhik still has a few more years left to graduate because the nursing program is a minimum of three years once enrolled.

Niizh

Niizh is a single male in his 30s with two teenagers. He has spent most of his life living in an inner city an hour away from the reservation where Ademin Tribal College is

located. Niizh is a tribal descendant of the reservation where Ademin Tribal College is located and is also a member of a different tribal nation an hour away from Ademin Tribal College. Niizh does not have primary care over his children; therefore, he is able to focus his time on his school work. Niizh is a full-time student who relies on several scholarships for his income.

Niizh was a good student in high school and attended college right out of high school. He stopped out after one year of attending college to work full-time so he could provide for his children. Niizh stopped out of school for 10 years prior to enrolling at the tribal college. Niizh was working a manual labor job and was enticed to move to the reservation and attend the tribal college by his mother. Niizh said, “she had asked me to help out with my sister and she would help me out with college.” In addition to his mother’s enticement, Niizh had come to the realization that he needed a degree in order to get a non-labor position.

Niizh was very active at Ademin Tribal College where he was president of the student council and yearbook committee. In addition, while at the tribal college, Niizh secured an internship with NASA, where he was able to obtain additional training and encouragement to major in the sciences. Niizh transferred to Hub University, where he decided to major in chemistry and is active in student research and the American Indian student group.

Nswi

Nswi is a 24 year old single woman with no children. While Nswi does not have any children to look after, she does have the responsibility of taking care of her mother who has a chronic illness. Nswi grew up in a rural town away from the reservation where

Ademin Tribal College is located. She is a tribal member of a different tribe than the one where Ademin Tribal College is located; however, she did not grow up on her own reservation.

Nswi unlike the other participants did not take any significant amount of time off while moving from high school to enrolling into a tribal college and transferring from a tribal college to a four-year PWI. She did take the fall semester off following her senior year in high school due to her family moving away from her hometown to the reservation where Ademin Tribal College is located. Nswi was a good student in high school, but by her own admission was not ready to attend a four-year university. She was inspired to enroll at Ademin Tribal College by one of her cousins who was also enrolling.

Nswi graduated from Ademin Tribal College with a 3.47 G.P.A. and an associate's degree in liberal arts. Upon receiving her associate's degree, Nswi continued to take courses for a business degree at the Ademin Tribal College. Nswi did not complete her associate's degree in business but instead decided it was time to transfer to a four-year institution.

Nswi was able to transfer in 91 credits into Hub University. She resides near campus while attending Hub University and works anywhere from 24-40 hours a week on Ademin reservation, which is five minutes away from Hub University. Nswi is a history major at Hub University with a 1.8 G.P.A. Her first semester was rough, resulting in her choosing to change her major from business to history. Nswi has since made a complete turnaround after changing to a history major. She continues to raise her G.P.A. and is no longer on academic probation. Nswi has shown great strength and persistence in continuing on with her education following a tough first semester.

Niiwin

Niiwin is a 39 year old male who is married with three children, ages two, four, and seven. Niiwin is a tribal member where Ademin Tribal College is located and has lived most of his life on his reservation. Niiwin was a high school dropout, but he did go back three years later to get his high school degree at an alternative high school on the reservation. Niiwin dropped out of high school to take care of his grandparents who were very ill at the time. There was a 13 year gap in between Niiwin graduating from high school and attending Ademin Tribal College.

While attending Ademin Tribal College, Niiwin was working full-time for the local casino. He was able to attend classes during the day using a work policy that allowed him nine hours of leave time for education. Niiwin graduated from the tribal college with an associate's degree in business and a 3.6 G.P.A.

Niiwin transferred to Hub University where he has been attending for over one year as an environmental studies and biology major with a 3.2 G.P.A. Niiwin was able to transfer in 100 credits from the tribal college. Niiwin continues to work full-time for his tribe on the reservation while taking classes part-time or full-time depending on the semester.

Naanan

Naanan is a 36 year old female who is married with three children, ages eight, eight, and 14. Naanan is a tribal member where Ademin Tribal College is located and has spent her entire life living on her reservation. Naanan, upon graduating from high school, enrolled into Hub University. Naanan was not comfortable attending Hub University. She said, "I didn't fit in the white institution, initially I went there and I did really well my

first semester, but I didn't have (any) direction or assistance on how to fit into the campus life." Naanan left Hub University and seven years later enrolled into Ademin Tribal College.

Naanan graduated from the tribal college with a 2.1 G.P.A. and an associate's degree in liberal arts. Naanan worked full-time while attending the tribal college and taking care of her children. Her work in the human resources department inspired her to want a bachelor's degree in business from a four-year institution. Naanan, instead of going back to Hub University, chose to go to a much smaller Outpost University.

Naanan has a 3.6 G.P.A. at Outpost University and has been enrolled there for over a year. Naanan is still working with Outpost University on how many credits they will accept from her tribal college. She is majoring in human resource management and is taking classes full-time while working full-time. Naanan is allowed to take nine hours of leave time per week from work to take classes. Naanan commutes roughly 20 miles from her home on the reservation to take classes at Outpost University.

Ngodwaaswi

Ngodwaaswi is a married female over the age of 35 with two children, ages 15 and 20. Ngodwaaswi is a tribal member where Ademin Tribal College is located and has lived on her reservation until the age of 18. She then moved to a major city for many years until moving back to the reservation seven years ago. Ngodwaaswi never graduated from high school and did not get her diploma until returning to the reservation.

Ngodwaaswi on how she ended up getting her high school diploma explained, "well I ended up applying for a job, but they said you don't have your high school diploma. Well

they ended up letting me go get it (a GED) and so I did.” Ngodwaaswi had been out of school for over 15 years prior to enrolling at Ademin Tribal College.

Ngodwaaswi majored in business administration at Ademin Tribal College and had a 3.6 G.P.A. She worked full-time for her tribal nation and took advantage of her work policy that allowed her to take nine hours of educational leave time to take classes at Hub University. Ngodwaaswi transferred to Hub University with the intention of attaining a degree in Business Administration. She currently works full-time and attends part-time and has a 2.6 G.P.A. at Hub University. Ngodwaaswi was able to transfer in 60 credits from the Ademin Tribal College.

Niizhwaaswi

Niizhwaaswi is a married 30 year old female with one child, age 12. Niizhwaaswi is a tribal member where Ademin Tribal College is located and has lived there her entire life. She started her career at an American Indian four-year university but left after a week due to being homesick and the death of a friend. Niizhwaaswi then attended a satellite campus of Mgizi Tribal College prior to attending Ademin Tribal College.

It took Niizhwaaswi roughly eight years to graduate from Ademin Tribal College due to sporadic enrollment. She graduated with a degree in Native American studies and had a 3.0 G.P.A.. Niizhwaaswi instead of transferring to Hub University, which was only a few miles away, chose to attend her dream college, Big State University.

The first year Niizhwaaswi commuted to Big State University, which is an hour away from her reservation. The second semester she moved closer to Big State University; however, because Niizhwaaswi was working full-time for her tribal nation she commuted back Ademin reservation to work her second year. Niizhwaaswi was able

to transfer 60 credits from her tribal college into Big State University. Niizhwaaswi graduated with a degree in English and had a 2.8 G.P.A. at Big State University. She currently works for her tribal nation and is planning on applying to law school.

Summary

The eight participants had a variety of different backgrounds and paths along their journey from a tribal college to a PWI. There were six females, two males, and the average was 35 for the participants. There was only one participant under the age of 30. Half of the participants were married and the other half single, and the average number of children was three. There was only one participant who did not have a child, but she did have the responsibility of taking care of her ill mother. Six of the participants spent most of their life on the reservation and two spent most of their youth living in an inner city.

The average number of years out of school for the participants was 10 years, and only one went to the tribal college the first year out of high school. Five of the participants went to the tribal college first and three of the participants had unsuccessful attempts at a PWI prior to enrolling into a tribal college. Seven of the participants lived on their reservation or near their reservation while attending the PWI, only one left and she went to a school four hours away from her reservation. Six of the participants worked full-time while taking classes and two were full-time students relying on scholarships and financial aid for their income.

CHAPTER 5

Presentation of Themes

Chapter five is a presentation of the six themes and sub-themes that emerged from multiple interviews with the eight participants concerning their experience at PWIs. The chapter ends with a summary of the themes.

Introduction of themes

Upon analyzing the interviews, six themes emerged, which were: Personal goals and dreams; Family matters; Being a community member of an American Indian Community; Various levels of engagement with the campus; Overcoming ignorance and stereotypes; and Adjusting to differences in non-native and native academic worlds. The first three themes relate to personal experiences that are not directly related to on-campus interaction, whereas the final three themes relate to the experiences and interaction while on-campus. In addition, all six themes have sub-themes, which are specific examples that relate to the main theme.

Personal goals and dreams

Niizh- When you know who you are, as a person and as a people you got a path, and you know it. There are all these people who don't do well because all they have is questions; you know who am I? And they don't do well in life because they don't have that drive. And I have it. Look; I am a native man and I have to do this for my kids and for my people too [American Indian people and tribal nations].

An American Indian cultural belief is that everything has a purpose and role in the world. The participants finding and developing their own personal goals and dreams

aided their success and persistence at their PWIs. For some students, they have had lifelong goals and dreams and for others their goals and dreams were developed later in life. The personal goals and dreams of the participants ranged from attaining a degree to working in a specific career field. A majority of the participants had specific ambitions that they believed could be achieved by attaining a bachelor's degree. The participants desire to attain a bachelor's degree and use the degree to begin or advance their careers played a significant role in their successful experience at a PWI.

Many of the American Indian tribal college transfer students in the current study were very clear about their purpose for going to college. Unlike some college students who attend college and are undecided about their major, let alone what type of job they want, the tribal college transfer participants were firm in what they wanted out of their collegiate experience. In addition to career path, the clear sense of purpose and motivation for going to college for the participants included family, spirituality, and financial stability.

The personal goals and dreams of the participants were sectioned into two sub-themes, career exploration and conformation and other personal motivations. The career exploration and confirmation sub-theme relates to the participants personal goals and dreams of having a specific career. The other personal motivations sub-theme involves an assortment of personal motivations that have inspired the participants to chase their dreams of attaining a four-year degree at a PWI.

Career exploration and confirmation. While at their PWIs, the American Indian tribal college transfer students were completely focused on chasing their career dreams

and goals. Six of the eight participants knew exactly what career they wanted prior to transferring to their PWIs.

Kaagego- “I always wanted to go to law school”

Bezhik- “I decided I wanted to come back to school for nursing”

Naanan- “I wanted to do something in human resources (management)”

Niizhwaaswi is in the process of applying to Law School. Knowing what careers they wanted helped the participants focus their choice of major and classes at the PWIs, which in turn meant they were taking classes that were of interest to them.

Two of the participants, Niiwin and Ngodwaaswi, were already working in their desired career field but wanted a bachelor’s degree to open up other job possibilities in their chosen career field. Niiwin was the most passionate and secure with his career choice. He enjoys and has experienced success while working in the recycling department for his tribal nation. He stated, “with the recycling department, I turned a non-existing department into an award winning department in the state.” Niiwin is majoring in environmental studies and biology and uses his classes to increase his knowledge in recycling so that he can continue to improve his department. While working in the recycling department, Niiwin realized that the environmental studies field was his life calling. Niiwin wants the credentials that come with a four-year degree to add credibility to his work experience. Niiwin’s long range career goal would be to pursue a career with the Environmental Protection Agency.

Ngodwaaswi is majoring in business administration and currently works in the travel department for her tribal nation. She enjoys her business classes and takes pride in trying to find the best deals to save her tribal nation money in travel expenses.

Ngodwaaswi uses her business classes to help guide her decisions at work. Ngodwaaswi, like Niiwin, also wants the credentials of a bachelor's degree in case the opportunity for advancement opens up in her chosen career field. Ngodwaaswi would be willing to consider another position related to business administration within her tribal nation if it were the right opportunity, but she currently has no desire to leave her position. Ngodwaaswi is committed to a career in business administration, specifically working in travel and tourism.

Although all of the students had a clear purpose for going to college, two students were not completely settled on a career choice. Niizh and Nswi were unsure of what careers they wanted to pursue, but they did know what majors fit their interests and personalities. Niizh's interest was developed while at Ademin Tribal College. He said, "I took a chemistry class taught by someone at [a four-year university] and that only sparked my interest in the sciences." In addition, Niizh had an internship with NASA during his time at the tribal college, which contributed to his interest in science, specifically chemistry. Niizh has an offer from NASA to be an internship recruiter for them after he graduates. However, Niizh thinks it is important not to settle on a career too soon. Niizh commented,

I came to the four-year [university] thinking I was going into chemistry because I really got into it from the tribal college. But I keep my options open and I talk with many people because you never know where one person may lead you into a whole different path. If I find something else here I may take a different path. Niizh, while not settling on a specific career is very passionate about chemistry and he would like to work for NASA upon graduating. Niizh intends on using his collegiate

experience to find the right career choice, although he is heavily leaning towards chemistry.

Of all the participants, Nswi was the most unsure of her personal career goals. Nswi went into the four-year institution as a business major but quickly realized it was not the major for her. Nswi commented,

I failed [all but one] of my business classes. I really liked history, but I wasn't sure what I could do with that but teach. And I am not a teacher. So I still don't know what I am going to do with it, but I would rather do something I like than stick with business.

Nswi had a rough first year as a business major, but upon changing her major to history, she had a successful second semester. Nswi was the only participant who seemed to be struggling with the process of figuring out herself and career path. While Niizh had a strong chemistry interest, Nswi was the only participant who did not initially have any overwhelming career interest or dreams. In addition she was also the only participant who struggled academically, that is, until she found an interest in her history classes.

In summary, having a defined personal career goal and dream was helpful to all of the participants while at the PWIs. Those who had a specific career choice had no trouble finding a major, classes that they enjoyed, and a path of how they would use their degrees. The two participants who were already working in their career field were able to integrate their coursework into their jobs. The two students who did not have a specific career, but a major interest, were at the very least able to take classes they enjoyed. The participants with a defined career goal and dream were very focused on what classes they took at their PWIs and how those classes would translate into a career.

Other personal motivations. The goals and dreams of pursuing a bachelor's degree at a four-year PWI for many of the American Indian tribal college transfer students were influenced by an assortment of personal motivations other than career goals. The motivations for American Indian tribal college transfer students' decision to earn a degree were diverse.

Four of the participants, Niizhwaswi, Kaagego, Bezhik, and Niiwin were motivated by lifelong dreams of attaining a bachelor's degree. Niizhwaswi commented,

Well my ultimate goal is to go to law school and I wanted to go to a big school. I mean I wanted a bachelor's degree no matter what and wanted to go to a big school because they had a law school. Grad school or law school was always in my sights.

Specifically since the age of 12, Niizhwaswi has always wanted to attend Big State University, a goal she was able to achieve. The three participants had lifelong dreams of attaining a bachelor's degree from an early age, which strengthened their commitment to attend a PWI and succeed at the PWI.

Two of the participants were motivated to earn a degree for one or both of their parents. Constant encouragement to attend college from a parent instilled the dream and goal of attaining a degree for Nswi and Naanan. Nswi was influenced by her mother to attend college. She explained, "well it started when I was younger, my mom has pretty much beat it in my head. 'You need to go to college you need to get your degree'." For Naanan, it was a final wish of her father. She said, "I always wanted to continue and get my education and it was important to my dad that before he died that I get an education." While it may appear that attaining a degree for a parent is not a personal goal or dream,

but for the two participants, brining happiness to their parents was personal and important to them. Sharing a dream with their parents helped Nswi and Naanan feel like they were not alone in their quest for a degree, which helped them succeed while at a PWI.

Three of the participants, Kaagego, Niizh, and Nswi mentioned that their motivation to go to college was influenced by money and the need to have a higher paying career. The need to move beyond lower income entry-level casino jobs for Nswi and labor jobs for Niizh was a motivating factor to attain a bachelor's degree. Niizh on wanting a better career stated, "my main reason for going back to school was better opportunities for work." Kaagego was influenced by her lifelong dream to be a lawyer, but she was also heavily influenced by her economic situation. Kaagego explained why she left her job on Mgizi reservation to enroll at Big State University. She said, "I have always wanted to go to law school and I always felt like I was letting myself down by not finishing (school). I had a really good job, but with the economy and three kids, I was really going under." Leaving a full-time job to be a full-time student was a short-term drop in income, but Kaagego like the other two participants understood the difference in long-term income between their old jobs and future ones. The participants desire for higher paying careers was not superficial but one of financial necessity to support themselves and their families.

Two students, Niizh and Niiwin were motivated by something more personal and internal. Niizh was motivated by a higher paying job, but he was also motivated by his spirituality. He commented,

The creator gives you a path to walk and my path is to go to school. He gave me these abilities to do whatever it is with school. This is what I am supposed to do,

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maybe be a role model or mentor to other nishes (American Indian people). You can't just choose to ignore what you are meant to do, because I did that for a long time you know drinking and partying. It was just a big waste of time. Once you know what your path is go for it and focus on it and give it a 100%.

Niizh had always done well in school and had a natural gift when it came to math, but it took him time to embrace his talents. Niizh has a sense of purpose in his life and he believes that his personal dream and goal of attaining a degree is a part of his life mission.

For Niiwin, a college degree needed to have meaning and connect to his personal sense of being. Niiwin advocates pursuing your dream and finding what is meaningful to you as the appropriate way to choose your life path. He commented,

Don't jump into something that you are not whole heartedly into, I think a lot, of people say; 'well that is the most popular degree well I need to do that.' Well that may not be what your heart is telling you to do. Take your time sit down and do something that you are going to love and have your heart and soul into making something better.

Niiwin's motivation for degree attainment directly relates to his life mission of creating an environmentally conscious world. Having a sense of purpose in life and knowing how education relates to that purpose helps Niiwin and Niizh persevere while at their PWIs.

Ngodwaaswi's main motivation behind her decision to pursue a degree was being a role model for her children, showing them that education was important. Ngodwaaswi talked about her desire to be a role model for her children. She explained, "I also have two boys and if they see that I went back to school it would encourage them to stay in

school.” Naanan and Niiwin also wanted to get their degrees in order to show their children that education is valued. Ngodwaaswi like Nswi and Naanan found personal motivation in attaining a degree for someone other than herself. While pursuing a degree at a PWI, several of the participants were determined to succeed so that their children would believe that a college degree is attainable and valued.

In summary, most of the participants were motivated by a variety of factors to achieve a college degree. For some, it was the need to satisfy their parents’ hopes and dreams and for others it was to satisfy their own lifelong hopes and dreams. Financial stability and walking their spirituality paths were also important factors in the participants desire for a college degree. Having a variety of motivations to pursue and attain a college degree helped the participants stay focused and committed while at their PWIs.

Family matters

Naanan- “I don’t know what it is but you have to have that family acceptance to feel good about moving forward with your life.”

An American Indian value revolves around the importance of family and making decisions for the betterment of the whole family and this was true for the American Indian tribal college transfer students. The participants attributed their decision to attend a PWI and their subsequent success at a PWI to family. Family for the participants could include their children, spouses, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, and lifelong family friends. All of the participants were very sincere and passionate when talking about the role their families play in their educational experience at PWIs.

For the participants, the family unit and its needs must be satisfied before any individual goals and dreams are satisfied. While the goals and dreams of the participants

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played a significant role in their desire to attain a four-year degree, family approval and meeting family needs is what allowed the participants to chase their individual goals and dreams. Family was the key to the participants experience at a PWI, without family support or a healthy family unit, success would not have been possible for the students.

The family matters theme was sectioned into three sub-themes, role model for family, family support and influence, and family first. The role model for family sub-theme relates to the American Indian tribal college transfer students wanting to attain their degree to demonstrate that education is a family value. The family support sub-theme relates to American Indian tribal college transfer students relying on and using family support as a vital resource in their degree pursuit. The family first sub-theme relates to the participants putting family needs before education, no matter the outcome.

Role model for family. All of the participants believed it was important to be a good role model for their family by showing their children and other family members that education is important and attainable. In addition, being a good role model meant more than going to school, it also meant living a healthy lifestyle. Through the pursuit of their degrees, overcoming obstacles during their life, and living a healthy lifestyle the participants were able to be good role models for their families.

The American Indian tribal college transfer students have tremendous stories of overcoming obstacles and redemption that provide substance to them being good role models. Bezhik for instance was a mother at the age of 15 and dropped out of high school, but it did not stop her from succeeding in college. Bezhik pressed on in education because she did not want her past to be used against her. She said,

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I was a very young mother and graduated from the tribal college when my daughter graduated high school. She had said something once about how I would have become a nurse if she had not been born. I was like that had nothing to do with it and I can still do it and you can do whatever you want. I went back to school to prove that.

Beshik uses her story to help her children believe that they too can succeed if they have the desire and put forth the effort. Many of the participants had stories of overcoming obstacles, such as, past failed efforts in education, single parents with a low income, and death of both parents to name a few along their pursuit of an education.

Many of the participants had several years between high school and their success in college. The several years between high school and college for many of the participants provided an opportunity for them to mature as individuals. Maturity was central to the participants wanting to be good role models for their families. Naanan talked about maturity and being a role model. She commented “I think it is important to be a role model, I did my thing when I was young, you know wild, but I knew I had to grow up. I really had to scale back.” It was important to Naanan that her children not see the younger version of herself. For Niizh, changing from someone who partied a lot to a healthier lifestyle helped himself and his family. He said, “It really has helped my relationship with my kids. By making that change and going to school it has really helped a lot of people in my family to make that change also.” In total, four participants cited staying away from partying as a factor in them becoming more mature and a positive role model. Maturity was a key component for many of the participants in being a good role model for their families.

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A practical example of the participants being a good role model for their families is the concept of family homework time. Ngodwaaswi on how she takes time for family and models good study habits to her children. She stated, “when I do my homework he does his homework”. Multitasking family time with doing homework was an important aspect of being a good role model. Niiwin commented,

And I am also showing that education is important because when I go home at night my kids are seeing me doing my homework. With my seven year old we do our homework together. I think I am setting up a good route that my kids see me going to school and that it is important. I think that is one of the reasons too why I went back.

For many of the participants, being a role model for their family by going back to school and succeeding was an important aspect of their success and experience at a PWI.

In summary, all of the participants believed that being a good role model for their families was absolutely necessary and a major reason why they are pursuing a bachelor’s degree. Many of the participants were at a stage in their lives where living a good and healthy life for their children was important to them. The participants wanted to live a healthy lifestyle free of addictions and full of positive choices in order to represent their family in a good way and to model positive behavior for their children. While at their PWIs the participants through living a good life and being good role models were also choosing life habits that were conducive to having a successful educational experience at their PWIs.

Family support and influence. The support and influence of family was critical to the success of American Indian tribal college transfer students at four-year PWIs.

Without family support and influence, the participants believe they would never have made it to a PWI nor would they be experiencing success there. From the decision to go to school to where they went to school to family helping out at home, American Indian tribal college transfer students relied on family support.

Many of the participants considered family support when deciding what college they would chose to attend. Most of the participants had family (e.g., parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends) who lived nearby, making the decision to move away from their reservations more difficult. For Naanan where to transfer was an easy choice. She said “I think the distance, I could have went to a four-year (PWI) an hour away, but I have a family and the current institution is only 15 minutes away. It was easier if an emergency happens.” Naanan had no intention of leaving the reservation, which made her choice of institution based primarily on distance. Six of the eight participants chose their four-year institution based on being able to stay on the reservation close to their supportive families.

Kaagego who was the only participant to remove herself from reservation life, noted that family still played a role in her decision as to what institution she would attend. Kaagego talked about her decision. She said,

I knew I wanted to stay in (state), I already had been to (another four-year institution in state) and hated it. So I did some research and found (Big State University) and my little brother lived there, so I would have some family support. So I just did it, [I] picked up with all the kids and moved and a year later here I am.

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Kaagego was concerned about picking up and leaving with her children, but she needed a break from tribal politics. Family support was important to Kaagego and having her brother nearby made it easier for her to go so far away from her reservation.

For many of the American Indian tribal college transfer students, family support came in the form of helping out with children at home. All but one of the participants had children, and they all said they could not succeed if it were not for family helping out at home. For many it was their significant other who played a major role in helping out at home. Niiwin gave full credit to his wife and her help. He said, “my wife had full reign of the kids while I was at school”. Many of the participants believed that their significant others deserved a lot of credit for their success at their PWIs. For Naanan, getting family support was a priority before she would even consider going back to college. She said,

I told my husband without your support I can't do it, I can't take three kids to class. I had to make sure he was committed. I had to make sure my family supported me first and that kind of gets you a long ways.

For the participants with children at home, having a support system to help take care of their children was a necessity.

Having family support at home for a few participants meant help and support from their children. Bezhik relied on her oldest daughter for help. She commented, “oh yeah, my family helps out a lot. My daughter would [help], she has her drivers license [and] she helps transport [my son] back and forth [to school] when she could”. Other participants needed their children to support their decision to attend college because of the time commitment required by college classes. Ngodwaaswi's children helped out by understanding and respecting her study time in the evenings and on the weekends. Many

of the participants were grateful for the understanding and support of their children while they attended a PWI.

Family support and influence for the participants also meant encouragement and pride from their family members. On what has been critical to her success at a PWI, Niizhwaaswi stated, “My aunt, my mom, they knew what I was doing and when I came home they were so proud of me and that meant a lot to me.” Many of the participants mentioned the positive feelings they experienced when receiving support and encouragement from family members. Whether it was a significant other, grandparent, or daughter, having family who would take on extra duties at home played an important role in the success of American Indian tribal college transfer students while at the four-year institution.

In addition to family support, family had influence over the participants’ decisions to go to college and success while there. Family influence for a few of the participants took the form of parental expectations. Kaagego who struggled early on in her higher education career, went to college and continued her pursuit after early failures, because as she stated, “my dad was going to kill me if I didn’t do something”. A mistake in Kaagego’s financial aid led to her accepting money from her father to finish while at Big State University, which added more pressure for her to succeed. She said, “my dad had to give me a huge amount of money. I couldn’t fail because I would be screwing him over and his investment in me.”

A few of the participants believed that they could not fail in college because of underlying pressure to meet parental expectations. When struggling her first semester at a PWI, Nswi’s mother kept her focus and committed to a college education by constantly

telling her, “you have to go, you can’t stop you have to [continue]”. A majority of the participants made the decision to attend a four-year institution and experience success there based on some friendly pressure to get a degree from their family.

Family influence played a role in the timing of when participants transferred to a four-year PWI. For example, Ngodwaaswi initially was content with graduating from Ademin Tribal College, but her family had other ideas. Ngodwaaswi commented,

my family they helped me. And then my sister she graduated from (a four-year institution) and my (family member said) ‘you should go to (a local four-year institution)’. Okay I am going to do it. And then he gave me the stuff, because I originally was going to take a break. They were like ‘oh no you don’t want to take a break.’ So they have been helpful.

Ngodwaaswi like a few other participants needed an extra push from family members to continue her education.

In summary, all of the participants were supported and influenced by family while attending a four-year PWI. The participants chose their colleges based on retaining help from their family in regards to taking care of their children. Without strong family support most of the participants would not have been able to achieve success at their PWIs. From the decision to attend college, to where they attended, to their success in college, family support and influence was a determining factor.

Family first. The importance of family cannot be understated, as family matters always take precedence over education if conflicts between the two arise. For the participants, family always comes first and plays a role in all of their life decisions. The participants were always cognizant of the consequences their decisions had on their

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family and this was true for their experience while at their PWIs. From the decision to go to college, to how they spent their time at college, the participants always put their families first.

The decision to attend college was not made without the approval of family first for many of the participants. All but one of the participants had children, and they all had to determine when was the best time for them to enroll into college. Bezhik waited until her family was ready. She said, “I was definitely ready, I had three kids, one of them was in daycare, one was in high school, and one was in elementary [school]. So they were all where they needed to be, and I didn’t have anything blocking me.” Waiting until the time was right to go back to school played an important role in the success of the American Indian tribal college transfer students.

When making the decision where to attend college, the participants’ first priority was to take care of their family responsibilities. Taking care of ill family members was the reason a few participants stayed close to home. Nswi commented on her decision to stay close to home, “with my mom being sick I would rather be here a little bit longer. She knows that I am eventually going to move on....I just need to stay close to home for a few more years.” Nswi and a few other participants had family members who lived on the reservation with health issues making the decision to stay close to home necessary.

For Niizh, the only participant whose children did not live with him, attending a college too far away from his children was not an option. Niizh realized the impact of living away from his children on a summer internship in another state. He commented,

In the end, I stayed at (local four-year) because it is close and I have two children that I couldn’t just leave. I had been doing an internship at NASA and had been

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gone for a whole summer and that really affected me and my children right there and to be gone most of the year, I couldn't do it being a parent.

Keeping family close was the first priority for Niizh and many of the participants when making decisions about college.

While at their four-year PWIs, the participants made adjustments to their schedules that took time away from family, but they were still committed and focused on putting family first. Niizh who relies and sticks to his planner at all costs makes exceptions for family. He explained, "when it comes to your family you have to go; we are going to reschedule this, because family comes first. Family is your backbone that is your main support system. I probably learned that the hard way". Rescheduling for family matters meant doing your homework at late hours, not doing your homework, and sometimes not going to class.

Juggling education and family responsibilities has been a challenge for many of the participants. Niiwin on managing family and education,

I think family was a big barrier, because I have to make sure things get done. My kids have to be picked up from school, making sure they have dinner cooked. It is your responsibility they depend on you and you have to meet their needs first.

Niiwin was quick to say that family as a barrier was not a negative assessment, just that taking care of his first priorities made it difficult to fully embrace his educational experience and requirements. Success in higher education for many of the participants meant figuring out how to fit their educational experience into their family life.

When confronted with family-education conflicts, the participants' will always chose family. Naanan talking about education and family conflicts. She said, "I know if it

comes down to it at home and I can't find someone to watch my kids, I won't go to school and it [does not even bother me]". Niiwin agreed that family comes before education, he cited family as reason why many don't continue on with their education. He said, "I (know) a lot of people from the tribal college don't (transfer to a PWI) because of family issues." All of the participants were consistent in that they would not even hesitate to choose family over their pursuit of a degree.

Two of the participants already had to make the decision to choose family over education in their past. For Niiwin it was in high school when he had to dropout to take care of his grandparents. He stated,

My circumstances were probably a little bit different than most when they dropout of high school. I didn't really plan on dropping out, I just lived with my grandparents most of my life so when they fell ill and they needed assistance and help, to me that was more important than my education at the time. Just because they were there for me when I needed assistance in life and now they were needing assistance as they approach the end of their life. I just felt helping them out and making sure they were comfortable was important to me. After they walked on, I decided well I will finish my high school diploma because a lot of jobs required a high school diploma.

Niiwin understood it was more important to take care of his elders first and his needs and wants second. Naanan faced a similar dilemma when her father passed away. She stated, "when my dad died I felt it was my responsibility to stay home and be with my mom." Nobody pressured Naanan to stay home and help out, she just believed it was the right

thing to do. Taking care of family is an important value for American Indian people even at the expense of personal goals.

For the participants, family always took precedence over education even if it meant dropping out of college. All of the participants had a strong commitment to their families and put their success and wellbeing ahead of their own. Success and persistence in college for the participants at their PWIs was helped by their ability to wait for the appropriate time to go to college and picking an institution that would allow them to meet their family needs.

Being a community member of an American Indian community

Niiwin- I think I get everything from my grandparents. My grandparents when I was brought up they were always helping other people. When people were struggling I would see my grandfather lending them some help with food or driving them to appointments. I have always had that instilled into me that it is not always about you, other people need help.

A traditional American Indian value is to think and act in a way that is best for the whole community rather than what is best for an individual. This was evident in many of the American Indian tribal college transfer students who had a deeply rooted connection to their American Indian communities and reservations. Many of the participants have lived on the reservation for a majority of their lives and have a well developed sense of what community means to American Indian people. Those who did not grow up on the reservation quickly learned what it means to be a part of an American Indian community. American Indian values dictate that it is important for people to do their part in helping American Indian people and communities succeed and thrive.

Being a community member of an American Indian community meant giving your talents to the benefit of the community, receiving support and help when you need it from the community, and helping others when they need help. Many of the participants when choosing to get a degree at a PWI had every intention of using their knowledge and diploma to help their communities. Furthermore, the strength and pull of being a member of an American Indian community meant that many of the participants did not leave the reservation to complete their bachelor's degree. While at their PWIs the participants sought ways to connect their education to the betterment of their communities. Success and persistence while at their PWIs was helped by the participants having a strong sense of community and interaction with their reservations.

Being a community member of an American Indian community is split into three sub-themes; giving back to community, community support, and community role models. The giving back to community sub-theme relates to the desire of the participants to work for an American Indian community upon graduation from their PWIs. The community support sub-theme relates to the encouragement and strength from American Indian communities that the participants received. The Community role model sub-theme relates to the aspirations the participants had in being a positive example for other American Indian community members.

Giving back to community. An American Indian value is to be of service to your community by sharing your wealth. The knowledge and education the participants receive while at their PWIs was expected to be shared with their communities. Kaagego talked about sharing in her community, "everyone shares, when I get my degree it is my duty to also share because there are a lot of people who won't go to college. All the

native students I know plan on giving back to their communities.” Giving back to their community ties back to the cultural value of sharing that was common for many traditional American Indian tribal communities.

The expectation of giving back to community is common amongst many of the community members on the Mgizi and Ademin reservations. Kaagego talked about the expectation that those who leave for college will give back to the community. She said, “then, yeah they (people in the community) automatically assume that you will come back and use your knowledge to help your people. Which I will, so that works, I guess not everybody does that.” Niizhwaaswi concurred with the notion that not all native people go back to their reservations after college, but she believed they should. She said, “don’t forget to give back. I’ve seen a lot of people go to school and stay away, but we need them on the rez.” The participants believe that giving back is an expectation and point of interest by many American Indian communities because of a lack of qualified American Indian employees on their reservations. Naanan spoke on the need for American Indians to get educated and work for their tribal nations. She stated,

I don’t see myself leaving but I know we need to educate ourselves. I always hear people say well we don’t want people coming in here and telling us what to do.

Well then you need to get out and do it yourself, I wish more people were like that, but it is not like that right now.

The participants believe that getting your education and using it to help the community is the culturally appropriate thing to do and an important role in self-determination of their tribal nations.

The relatively small American Indian communities that the participants come from help promote the sense of community and value of being of service. Many of the participants when describing their reservation/community use the word family. Bezhik talked about why she plans on staying on the reservation. She said, “family, around here it is a small community. Everybody is close. Safe.” The participants viewing community as family, and in many cases a large portion of the community is biological family, was a pivotal factor in many of the participants wanting to give back to their American Indian communities.

The value of giving back to your community is something that many of the participants’ learned from their parents. For Nswi, it was her mother. She said, “truthfully, my mom has always talked about giving back and [she told me] it is better to have different natives come back [to the reservation] and work.” Many of the participants had verbal reinforcement of the value of giving back to your communities.

A few of the participants recall their youth being spent with their parents volunteering at community activities on the reservation. For Naanan, her family has always preached being of service to the community and acted on their values. She stated, both my mom and dad provided service to the community, my dad was one of the first substance abuse counselors here. They both work for the tribe and are members of the tribe and it is just something that I grew up with. And us kids, we had to help when we were little when it was fundraising at the time. We knew we had to do for the tribe; we were raised that way. You know if you live here, you need to work here.

The participants who lived on the reservation most of their lives had a strong connection to the community value of giving back as they have had it reinforced verbally and through participation. Living on the reservation and having family who are and were active in the community left a few of the participants with a sense of responsibility to the community. Kaagego talked about her sense of responsibility. She commented,

Just living on the reservation and seeing what life has been like, knowing and hearing my grandparents (speak). Knowing how much my dad has accomplished in his lifetime and knowing, like you know when I was 13 there was not enough housing. I mean there were 20 people living in a three bedroom house. You had people living in vans, most people didn't even have a car. You know people used four wheelers to get around. I ran the economy food program for 11 years. I know how poor people are, I know, I had people who had to choose between supplies and food. It is necessary for me, I couldn't do anything but go back and do something to make a difference.

Living on the reservation and having an understanding of the history and community needs is what drives many of the participants' need to give back to their community.

Giving back to the community not only means a specific American Indian reservation, but there is a larger context for the word community, to include all American Indian tribal nations and people. Kaagego not only wants to help her tribal nation, but she wants to make a larger difference as well. She said,

I don't just want to help out my reservation. I want to work on legislation and do things nationwide. Its just another part of the communal process, if I have something, I share it, and if someone else has something they share it with me. So

I will get my education and share it with whatever I have with my people to better the situation.

The participants understand the broader picture of the world and that they can help out American Indian communities even if they work outside of their reservations.

Niiwin is content with his current job on his reservation, but opportunities to help out his tribe in other ways have arisen. He said,

I was working and doors started opening for me, where I can go into other environmental fields where people were doing things like working with EPA and things like that. I was like wow; I could work with EPA and do better things for the tribe and make sure that we are looking out for generations ahead and how will my kids benefit from what I am doing today.

A few of the participants would like to give back to their own community, but they also are tempted by national opportunities. For example, Nswi currently works for a tribal nation that is not hers, and her plans after college may not mean going back to her tribal community. She said,

And for me I think it is important to learn about your culture and to give back to your culture. I know I want to move on, but my plan is to always come back or maybe a warmer climate and help out west, there are reservations out there.

Giving back to an American Community is a strong value and is important to the participants, but it must also work within their own personal and family desires and needs.

In summary, most of the participants believed it is critical that they use their education to give back to their communities. Furthermore a majority of the participants

lived and worked on their reservations while attending their PWIs. Most of the participants planned on continuing to work for their tribal nation after graduation, but a few did want to give back to the native community through national native organizations. The idea of using your talents to help your community is a native value and was evident in the participants presence at a PWI.

Community support. The American Indian community on the reservation shows a lot of pride and interest in their students who are going off to a four-year college. American Indian tribal college transfer students feel a sense of responsibility to succeed at a four-year university because of the support and recognition they receive from community members. Half of the participants believed the community support and recognition they received fueled their drive to succeed in college.

The four participants who experienced community support spoke passionately about its influence and meaning. Kaagego described why she could not fail in her educational dream of a college degree. She stated,

failure is not an option. I really know that every time I go home everybody says how are you doing? How are classes? When will you be done? When are you going to be an attorney? I can't go home a failure, I refuse until I accomplish my goal. Absolutely every time I go home people stop me on the street. Really pushing me to do well, we have faith in you and you will be successful. And people at home are so proud of the kids that leave and go to college. I mean unreal amount of pride that they have. So that is the thing, I will not go back home and let them down.

Kaagego was motivated to persist and succeed because she did not want to disappoint those who want her to achieve her goals and dreams. Many of the participants mentioned that their American Indian community was aware of who was going off to college.

The small and close community on the reservation created a situation where community support could be found from a variety of people within the reservation.

Niizhwaaswi spoke about the support from a friend and her community. She said,

That was like my best friend (she) said I am proud of you, you know you hear that from family but I was like that is cool. I feel like everybody was backing me, at times it felt like the whole tribe was supporting me, that for me was the most important thing. I got on the leadership program and everybody knew what I was doing, the whole community. Everybody was always asking me how I was doing and saying that is so great. When I was down there (at PWI) and alone I knew I had that and that was more than important than being alone.

For Niizhwaaswi, the support and encouragement from people other than her family surprised and inspired her while at her PWI. The support of the community left a few of the participants with an additional drive to succeed because they did not want to let down their community.

Community support for all of the participants came in the form of money. The tribal nations of all of the participants have programs that give scholarship money to their tribal members who are pursuing degrees in higher education. For the participants, the tribal scholarships were a form of community support. Niizh talked about the scholarship money as a form of community support. He commented,

a lot of people in the community do look up to those going to college. Even me being on this reservation, my tribe really believes in me by giving me a scholarship. Their support really makes me want to give back to my rez and it would [mean a lot to me] to be able to help others.

For Niizh, the financial support from his tribal nation inspired him to want to pay them back by working for them upon graduation. A few of the participants believed that the scholarships their tribal nations provided them was a way for their tribal communities to show support for those trying to better themselves through education.

For Kaagego, community support through finances was evident through her close friends. Kaagego talked about how her friends have helped. She said, “I have a friend who gets double points at the casino on Wednesday and she is like if I win I will send you money. I have had friends who have given me food.” Community support on the reservation in the form of money has played a helpful and needed role in the success of many of the participants.

Community support for Naanan, played a major role in her understanding the importance of education. Naanan’s parents were not anti-education, but they were pro-work. Naanan talked about the importance of community support. She stated,

My parents were raised in a time period when they were struggling for jobs. To me their view is different, education wasn’t a priority, working was, so I didn’t grow up in an educated household. I don’t think they understood the importance of education so I think it was the whole community that influenced me.

Naanan believed that community support was a factor in her desire to receive an educational degree when she first left for college. It should be noted Naanan’s parents

changed their viewpoint and became her biggest supporters of her pursuit of a college degree.

Those participants who spent time living away from the reservation had the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of community values. Kaagego reflected on her thoughts after leaving the reservation to attend college. She said,

It is a whole different world. I never realized, I have not lived on the reservation my entire life, but you think you live like any other American you see on television but you don't. There is a very strong communal aspect when you live on the rez and a tribal college. That is not something that exists in typical White society.

Kaagego developed a strong appreciation for the value of community when she left the reservation for college. Ngodwaaswi had a similar experience after she left the reservation for many years to live in an inner-city. Ngodwaaswi talked about why she moved back to the reservation. She commented, "I moved when I was younger. I figured it was time to move back to the rez where there is a community and everybody knows each other." Living off the reservation has left the participants with a keen understanding of the strength that can be gained from a supportive American Indian community.

While community support has played a positive role in the participants desire to persist and succeed at their PWIs, it has also played a negative role in the ambitions of a few participants. Naanan's community inspired her initially, but a change in the population size of her reservation has left her with conflicting feelings about community support. Naanan believes that her community has become more populated and divided in a span of 15 years. She said,

I think with changes now in the community, with so many different people here, it is family and those that you know who provide the encouragement. I think the community is so divided now. How can you have the support of the community when everyone is so divided.

Naanan believes that there is a section of the old community that still supports her, but there is a section of the reservation that is new and can be unsupportive at times.

Two other participants mentioned incidents of negative feedback from their community concerning their educational aspirations. Kaagego talked about how some people in her community expected her to fail. She stated, “people just assume (some hesitation), and a lot of people just assume you are not going to make it. I’ve had a lot of people say oh you’ve moved home? [I say] no I’m just visiting, not back to stay.” A few community members believed Kaagego’s presence on the reservation meant that she had failed at her university. Bezhik concurred with Kaagego’s perceptions, as she sensed that people in her community were expecting failure as well. She said, “I just don’t want to fail. Nobody wants to fail, because there is always somebody who you might think is secretly behind your back hoping that you will. So I guess you always want to prove that I won’t.” The negative community feedback did not put a damper on the educational experience for the participants rather it only served as fuel in their desire to succeed. Overall, the participants spoke mostly of positive community support and how it has helped them along their journey at their PWIs.

Many of the participants found community support to be helpful in their success and persistence while at their PWIs. The encouragement and interest the community showed in the participants success was at times unexpected but helped them keep focused

and determined. In addition, community support came in the form of financial help, which was also needed and appreciated by the participants while at their PWIs. Culturally for American Indians, the whole community is responsible for guiding and supporting all of its community members.

Community role models. Many of the American Indian tribal college transfer students believe that it is important to set an example of success at a four-year institution for future and current members of their American Indian community. The participants believed that many of their fellow community members needed to expand their horizons and overcome their apprehension about attending college. Being a role model for their communities was a reason many of the participants cited as why they wanted to succeed in higher education.

Many of the participants are well aware that a majority of their classmates and friends on the reservation will not attend a four-year PWI and this bothered them. A problem is that many people from the reservation do not travel outside the reservation and the people they know who leave for college outside the reservation do not succeed. Kaagego spoke about the need for native people to leave the reservation. She commented,

I think for Native Americans it is really important, at least on my reservation. If they (people on her reservation) have left they have never gone very far, some not even south of the Big Bridge. I think it is important they know what they are capable of, to gain more confidence and to have some of those small successes under their belt so they know they can do this...that they can be successful in the classroom.

The participants understood that getting a degree required leaving the comforts of the reservation and attending a PWI, but they do not feel like the rest of their community is willing to do so. The participants wanted to lead by example and show their community that American Indians from their reservation can succeed at PWIs.

The participants not only believe it is important to lead by example, but they also think it is important to be a vocal advocate. Naanan thinks it is important to get her degree and encourage others to get theirs. She stated, “my degree is going to help my community. I tell people that is something you have to want and be willing to leave the community for and have direction and be prepared for the unseen.” The participants believe that it is important to encourage others that they can succeed, because there are too many people telling them they cannot. Niizh talked about the horror stories he heard about people who left his tribal college to go to a PWI. He said, “people coming back to the tribal college with horror stories about ‘it is so hard’. Going to the teachers (at the tribal college)....trying to get help (from tribal college faculty) with their four-year classes, they were just struggling so bad.” With the number of students going back to their tribal college and speaking of failures and difficulties, a few of the participants believed it was critical that they succeed and communicate to others that they are having a positive experience at their PWIs.

The participants believe it is important to be positive role models by showing other people on their reservations that success at a PWI is possible. Being a role model for their community was not the sole purpose for the participants’ decisions to attend and succeed at college, but many of them believed it was important. Niiwin commented on being a good role model. He said, “I am getting the degree and I can encourage other

tribal youth to get their degree. I guess you could say lead by example.” Niizhwaaswi best sums up the reason why it is important for successful native students to be role models. She said, “as Indian people we have to get educated and be ready to compete with the world.”

In summary, many of the participants believed it was important to be good role models for their communities, especially for the youth. The participants believed that leading by example and being vocal about their experiences in college is important for American Indian college students. Far too many American Indians from the reservations do not succeed in education, which is why the participants want to succeed and persist to degree attainment at their PWIs.

Various levels of engagement with the campus

Naanan- “I just want to go to class and do what I have to do and come back home.”

Most of the American Indian tribal college transfer students are solely focused on doing what it takes to earn their degree, which meant they had minimal interest in engaging with the campus other than what is required to pass their classes. The ideal scenario for many of the participants would be to go to class and passively learn and then go back home. Specifically the participants wanted minimal engagement and interaction with non-native faculty, students, and program departments on campus.

The participants were not averse to the non-native community at the PWI, they were just unsure how they would be viewed and treated. Most of the participants spent their entire lives living on the reservation, and those who did not have spent a significant amount of time living on the reservation where they predominately interacted with other

American Indians. Historically, American Indians living on the reservation have experienced more than their share of negative experience with non-native people and agencies. Niizh talked about the hesitation people on the reservation have towards non-natives. He stated, “those who have always lived on the rez all they have dealt with is social workers and the government, they got that whole mindset that everybody is going to treat them (with a lack of respect).” The history of American Indians on the reservation who were treated disrespectfully by non-natives have left a few American Indians with a cautionary attitude towards interaction with non-natives.

However, it should be noted that Niizh was the only outlier when it came to interacting with non-native faculty, staff, students, and departments. Niizh was very active as a research assistant, a member of student government, and in the honors program. He is most proud of his work as a research assistant. Niizh said, “I mean I am an undergraduate with limited experience in the lab and I am hands on in there working with stuff.” Niizh who does not work and has two children, who do not live with him, has the extra time to be active with his university. In addition, Niizh acknowledges that his personality is conducive to seeking out services and interacting with all types of people. While many of the participants see college as a credential, Niizh was the only participant who believes it is a place where you are supposed to expand your horizons and become a well-rounded citizen.

While the participants wanted minimal interaction with non-native aspects of their PWIs, they did covet interaction with American Indian faculty, staff, and program departments at the PWIs. While the participants would prefer to do what they must to succeed and then leave the PWIs, for several of the participants this did not apply to the

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American Indian community on campus. Kaagego when asked if the lack of desire to interact with non-native faculty, students, and programs at her PWI applied to native faculty, students, and programs, she resoundingly said, “no that is definitely different.” Interacting with other American Indians was special for the participants, Naanan stated her reason why interaction with American Indians is so important, “I think it is just that sharing of history and connection.” Interaction with and seeing other American Indians on campus provided a different perception and feeling for the participants while attending their PWIs.

Yet, there was one participant, Bezhik who did not have the need for interaction with native faculty, students, and programs. Bezhik attributed the lack of need for interaction with native faculty, staff, and students to not having enough time for anything outside of going to class. However, she was not sure if things would have been different if she did not live on the reservation while commuting to campus. Many of the participants mentioned that living on or near a reservation made the lack of a native presence at PWIs more bearable because they could always go home to a network of support.

The various levels of engagement with the campus were divided into three sub-themes; interaction with non-native and native faculty, interaction with non-native and native students, and interaction with non-native and native departments at their PWIs. The interaction with non-native and native faculty, student, and departments sub-themes focus on the differences of engagement for the participants with non-native and native aspects of campus.

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Interaction with non-native and native faculty. Almost all of the participants kept interaction with non-native faculty to a minimum. American Indian tribal college transfer students only engaged with non-native faculty when called upon in class or when it became necessary to ensure a passing grade in their classes. The participants' interaction with non-native faculty varied, but most of the participants did not cite interaction with non-native faculty as a primary factor in their success while at their PWIs.

A few of the participants interacted with non-native faculty when they were failing a class. Niizhwaaswi commented on when she seeks interaction with non-native faculty. She said,

If my classes were easy, or easy for me, I really didn't bother with too much, but if I had a hard time I would go to office hours. Somebody told me before the way to get good grades is to get to know [your instructor] so I would bug them and show up at offices hours. Other than that (I didn't).

Niizhwaaswi, like a few of the other participants, understands the purpose and benefits of office hours, but in general they do not take advantage of them unless they have a pressing reason. However, most of the participants were able to succeed in their classrooms without going to faculty office hours.

Another reason that would necessitate interaction with non-native faculty for a few of the participants was missed class time due to work or personal issues. Many of the participants worked full-time, so conflicts with work and school occurred on occasion. Niiwin talked about why and when he talks to faculty members. He commented,

as far as interaction with faculty, if I have questions or concerns or what not, I talk to them. Being a non-traditional student I let them know my situation and that I may have to miss some classes.

For Niiwin and few other participants, conversations and interaction with non-native faculty was often relegated to an emergency or need to know information. In general, the participants did not encounter many conflicts between work and school, as many of the participants had work-release time from their jobs.

Most of the participants just wanted to go to class, participate in class, and then go about the rest of their day. Kaagego talked about her mission for each class. She commented,

I try not to have any contact with my professors outside of class. I'm really vocal in class, but outside of class I don't want anything to do with them. They say come visit me, but I say no I really don't need to; I don't have anything to say to them outside of class. They are a necessary evil, I just go to class, some professors are good and some are not. I just try to get a 4.0.

The participants were not anti non-native faculty, they were just focused on what they wanted out of their collegiate experience and interaction and developing relationships with non-native faculty was not a necessary component to their success.

However, most of the participants embraced the idea of interacting with an American Indian faculty member on campus. Specifically, the participants had a desire to take a class at the PWI taught by an American Indian faculty member. Unfortunately, American Indian faculty at PWIs are rare and many of the participants were not able to experience a class taught by an American Indian professor. Most of the participants

coveted interaction and experiences with American Indian faculty at their PWIs because they believed it would or gave them a sense of belonging in the academy and provide comfort for them while on campus.

Of the eight participants, only two were able to take a class from an American Indian faculty member and that instructor was the Anishinaabe (native) language teacher. The other six participants thought taking a class with an American Indian faculty instructor would have been helpful to their collegiate experience. Niizh described why taking a class with an American Indian faculty member would be important to him. He commented, “[Here at the PWI] it’s different than at the tribal college where you have a couple [of American Indian faculty] teaching and all the students are native, you feel more like you belong if you have more native faculty.” The lack of American Indian faculty on campus left many of the participants feeling like the PWI is not for American Indian people because they rarely see any in the academy.

Taking a class with an American Indian faculty member had a different feel for the two participants than classes with non-native faculty. Kaagego attempted, on several occasions, to describe the feeling and experience of taking a class with a native instructor several times. She said,

You can tell when you walk into a classroom, when I walk into (the) classroom, when I walk into Ojibwe it feels different. The mood in there is different, we all get there early and the first 30 minutes we bitch and moan about all our other classes and about life. People have brought their children to class, I have brought mine to that class. It’s a totally different feel.

She also notes the instructor, “is really flexible and very native and our interactions are very native and I don’t know what that means specifically. It is just a different way of interacting.” Niizhwaaswi had the same language instructor as Kaagego and had a similar feeling. She commented, “I had a class with her at (Mgizi Tribal College) so I knew her and her kids. That was nice, it was really nice to get a break from it all. There were a couple of Indians in the class.” Kaagego and Niizhwaaswi both talked about a different feeling being in a class with a native instructor, they felt at home and like they belonged on campus. Having interaction and experiences with native faculty members on campus was a factor in the success of the two participants while at their PWIs.

In summary, most of the participants did not need to have a strong relationship with their non-native faculty in order to persist and succeed while at their PWIs. Interaction with non-native faculty was mainly restricted to class time and only on occasion did interaction take place outside of class. However, the opposite was true for interaction with American Indian faculty, with most of the participants wanting interaction with American Indian faculty while at their PWIs.

Interaction with non-native and native students. The participants did not mention any interaction with non-native students outside of the classroom or through required group work. Most of the participants were too busy to develop relationships with non-native students while on campus. In addition, the participants did not believe like they had a lot in common with the rest of the student body at their PWIs.

A majority of the participants lived on the reservation and were only on campus long enough to go to class. Ngodwaaswi commented on her interaction with non-native students. She said, “I really have no contact, I just go to class and go back to work.” Most

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of the participants were older in age, lived on the reservation while attending their PWIs, and therefore did not have a lot in common with most of the student body. Kaagego talked about the differences between herself and the general student population. She commented, “You know I’m 30 and have three kids you know I don’t have a lot in common with the student body.” Niizhwaaswi echoes the differences in age and maturity. She said, “I was 26 when I started, I wasn’t way older, but all the other students were 19 and 20. They were excited to drink for the first time. I never thought I was a part of the community.” The participants did not have a lot in common with most of the students at their PWI and they did not feel that interaction with non-native students on campus was necessary for their success while at their PWIs.

However, American Indian tribal college transfer students did have a need to see and interact with other American Indian students. Coming across other American Indian students provided a sense of camaraderie and comfort for the participants. The problem was that the PWIs were often big campuses and had very few American Indian students, which meant most of the participants rarely come across other native students while at the PWIs.

Most of the participants would go through their day at their PWIs without ever seeing another American Indian student. Naanan never came across other native students, but she would have liked to and was always on the lookout. She stated, “I think it would have made a difference in camaraderie you know same race and stuff.” Many of the participants cited camaraderie and comfort as the reason for their desire to see and interact with other American Indian students. Niizhwaaswi has been looking for the comfort of other native students since graduating from high school. She stated, “I really

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wanted to be around other native students and teachers, coming out of high school it was really rough.” Coming from a tribal college with many native students, most of the participants were looking for other native students while at their PWIs.

When the participants did come across other American Indian students in the classroom or walking around campus, it was a great feeling for them. Niiwin talked about the positive vibes he got from crossing paths with other native students on campus. He stated, “native students here are few and far between. Not everyone is getting the same degree or classes. When you see another native it brightens up your day.” Niizhwaaswi concurred with Niiwin about wanting to see other native students and being happy to come across others. She said, “I felt like that all the time, when there was an Indian, it was like ‘hey’ all excited.” Most of the participants talked about the good feelings when they did come across other native students while on campus. However, coming across other native students was a rarity, Naanan’s assessment of the possibilities, “I already know I am not going to see other Indians, unless it is like a lottery win.” While most of the participants have access to native people at home or on the reservation nearby, they still believed there was something unique and gratifying about seeing and interacting with other native students on campus.

The participants knew of other American Indian students on campus, but the problem was finding them. Niizh commented on not seeing other native students around campus. He said, “I know of other natives that are here but I never see them.” A strategy to find other native students for Kaagego was to take an American Indian class, she said, “my biggest help was I took ojibwe. I took ojibwe specifically to find some other Indians.

They got to be here somewhere; there has got to be at least one in the ojibwe class.” The participants were active in trying to find other native students on campus.

However, a problem the participants had in finding American Indian students was determining who is and who is not a native student. Niiwin talked about the trouble with finding native students. He said, “It’s hard to know how many natives are here because once the blood quantum gets lowered everyone looks like everybody else. So it is hard to determine if individuals have any Native American background”. Several of the participants mentioned the issue of knowing who is and who is not native based on physical appearance. Although finding other American Indian students at the PWI is a challenge for the participants, there was a comforting feeling when they were able to interact with other American Indians on campus.

In summary, interaction and developing relationships with non-native students on campus was not a priority or a factor in the experience at a PWI for most of the participants. The opposite was true for American Indian students, where most of the participants believed that interaction with other American Indian students on campus was helpful in having a positive and successful experience at their PWIs. However, an issue for the participants was finding other American Indian students at their PWIs.

Interaction with non-native and native departments at PWI. The American Indian tribal college transfer students used non-native academic services at the PWI only when it was required or necessary. For example, the participants went to orientation because it was required and they visited their academic advisors to figure out what classes they needed to graduate, but their experiences with these departments did not stand out as

overly useful or helpful. In addition, none of the participants mentioned using academic services such as, tutoring or the writing center while at their PWIs.

As stated previously, the participants were very focused on accomplishing their goals while on campus. Bezhik talked about her non-use of non-native departments. She commented,

I really haven't used any of the resources they have available. I know they have upward bound and things like that, but yeah my college life has been kind of boring. I go to class and I study in between classes and leave there and go home.

For the most part, the participants went to class, did their homework, and went back to work or home. Most of the participants were aware of the various services available to them but, they were either not interested in using them or did not believe there was a need to use them.

The participants when having to use the various academic and student services at the PWIs did not find them to be very useful. For example, all of the participants were required to participate in orientation, but when discussing orientation the participants had very few positive or interesting things to say about it. Niizh said, "I think orientation helped you sign up for classes. Basically after that it wasn't too helpful. You kind of get a brief overview of classes and until you start going to classes you don't remember anything." The most common response to the usefulness of orientation was it helped them pick out classes for their first semester, but in one case a participant found advice from orientation to be damaging. Nswi during her orientation heeded the advice she received about what classes to take. She said, "I originally signed up for five classes and they don't tell you in orientation that is a bad idea". Nswi struggled her first semester in

part from taking more classes than she should have. Orientation for all of the participants was an insignificant or hampering aspect of the experience at their PWIs.

The two institutional departments the participants did use, were academic advising and financial aid. The participants' meetings with their academic advisor were often uneventful and relegated to figuring out what classes they needed to graduate. Kaagego who was really focused on graduating talked about her academic advisor meetings. She said, "I only meet with my advisor once a semester to figure what classes to take in order to graduate as fast as possible." The participants did not find the advising office to be overly helpful or useful in their collegiate experience at a PWI.

The other department the participants mentioned was the financial aid office. In general when talking about the financial aid office the participants did so with bitterness. The most common complaint had to do with refunding the participants tribal scholarships. Ngodwaaswi talked about her interaction with the financial aid office. She said, "it took them two months to post my check, they said something about the computer posts it and they had to do it manually, but it took awhile. I had to call them a couple of times." Many of the participants mentioned frustration with financial aid and having to call them on multiple occasions because the staff were unhelpful. A couple of students believed that the financial aid office had issues with American Indians, but those issues will be discussed in the overcoming ignorance and stereotypes theme.

While the participants did not find non-native departments overly helpful or useful, the American Indian tribal college transfer students found American Indian departments to be very helpful and useful. One participant did not have an American Indian department at her school and two participants did not stay long enough to interact

with their native departments. However, the other five found their institutions native departments to be helpful in their experience at their PWIs.

Most of the participants received information about American Indian departments and their activities via E-mail. Ngodwaaswi was one of the people who did have time to interact with the American Indian department, but she did receive updates on their activities. She stated, “(the American Indian program office) would be important if I hung out here, but I don’t even know where the office is here. I do get emails from the native advocate about what is going on”. While the participants did not take part in all of the American Indian activities that were offered, they did appreciate knowing that things were going on and that when they could participate they would.

However, access to an American Indian department was an issue for Kaagego, who made several attempts to visit the American Indian program office, only to find the doors closed. Kaagego had to enroll into a native language class to get information on the American Indian department at her institution. Kaagego talked about the process of getting information about American Indian departments. She said,

(Native students) should be given something, some sort of brochure, a pamphlet, a packet something identifying where you can find other native students, services for native American students, native American organizations something. So you don’t have to run around campus looking for it, because the other groups are really out there. If I were a Black student coming here I would get that information. I would know where to go; I would know where to find people like me. As a Native American student I don’t think even (Big State University)

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recognizes what they have in their Native American department and how important that is to Native American students.

Once getting information on how to contact the American Indian department, Kaagego was then able to get very valuable information on Indian health services for her children. The American Indian departments provided useful and helpful information and activities for the participants while at their PWIs.

For four of the participants, they found their American Indian Department to be useful in helping them meet other American Indian students, getting involved with cultural activities on campus, and having a place on campus that feels like their own. Niizh described the importance of the American Indian department believing in him while at the PWI. He commented, "I mean they believe in me. Programs that are for Native Americans, well there is just one of them, the Native American department. The (Native American Advocate at 4-yr) is there to help you and she does." The American Indian Department was useful as a resource in navigating the university and getting connected to the American Indian community on campus.

Lastly, a helpful department at the PWI for a few of the participants was the admissions office, which included help from both native and non-native admission recruiters. Niizh talked about a specific non-native admissions officer that helped him and other American Indian students. He said,

we got to take a tour and meet certain individuals like (name of admission officer). And he was very helpful, this guy said, 'hey you come over and give them my name and we will get you a free application fee, we will get that waived. So when I went there I went myself and talked to him and got my fee waived.

The admissions officer that Niizh was referring to was very active and committed to working with and recruiting native students. Niizhwaaswi benefited from the help of an admissions officer who was American Indian. She said, “(about the application and admission process) it was pretty easy, a friend hooked me up with a person in admissions.” Applying and getting all the paperwork necessary to transfer was made easier for the participants by having access to an admissions officer who focuses and is dedicated to the recruitment of American Indian students.

In summary, while at their PWIs, most of the participants did not find non-native program departments to be overly useful or helpful to their persistence and success. The participants only made use of the non-native departments or programs when they had to in order to graduate as fast as possible. In contrast, many of the participants found their American Indian department to be helpful and useful in connecting them to other native students and cultural activities at their PWIs.

Overcoming ignorance and stereotypes

Niizh- “They ask do you live in teepees? I’m like yeah and I ride a buffalo to school.”

Kaagego- “So (ignorance and stereotypes) is really hard and sometimes I walk out of the class wanting to punch somebody in the head and sometimes I want to cry and sometimes I want to yell.”

American Indian tribal college transfer students were cognizant of the probability that they would encounter stereotypes, ignorance, and racism while at their PWIs and in fact most of the participants dealt with those issues on their PWI campuses. The participants believe that most people with stereotypes or racist ideas were misinformed

and not necessarily hateful. Therefore, the participants often referred to those people who hold misinformation about native people as ignorant rather than racist. The participants believed that it was their responsibility to educate and provide accurate information to those on campus who held the misinformation about American Indians.

A key to the success and persistence of the participants was how they handled and overcame racially sensitive incidents. The participants did get discouraged by the various stereotypes and ignorance, which often impacted their classroom and campus experience. However, for the most part, the participants were equipped and ready for stereotypes while attending their PWIs because they have been dealing with various stereotypes most of their lives.

The overcoming ignorance and stereotypes themes is sectioned into three sub-themes; perception of racism and stereotypes, educating misinformation, and impact of ignorance and stereotypes. The perception of racism and stereotypes sub-theme relates to how the participants view and label racial incidents. The educating misinformation sub-theme relates to the responsibility the participants believed they had in correcting the amount of hurtful and wrong ideas people had about American Indians. The last sub-theme on the impact of ignorance and stereotypes relates to the role racial incidents had in the participants' experiences while at their PWIs.

Perception of racism and stereotypes. Many of the participants in the current study encountered racially sensitive acts that could be interpreted as racism while at their PWIs. Yet, American Indian tribal college transfer students chose to perceive potential acts of stereotypes and racism as acts of ignorance rather than hate. The participants seemed to cope with the stress of ignorance and stereotypes in regards to American

Indians by believing in the hope that people are good and capable of changing their misguided viewpoints.

The participants attributed insensitive or inaccurate racial remarks and ideas to ignorance rather than racism because they believe most people do not come from a hateful place. Kaagego discussed why she thought certain incidents may be ignorance rather than racism. She stated,

I don't think it's racism, I think Indians are unique in that, because there is the mythology of the vanishing Indian and people don't think we actually exist. And they say things that could be considered racist but they are not coming from a place that is racist, it is coming from a place of ignorance. So, total misinformation. I have Black friends, East Indian friends, Latino friends and stuff. I think it is very common, we all know what is and what isn't acceptable to say to a Black person just from the civil rights movement and watching TV. But people don't have a clue what is and isn't appropriate for American Indians because the stereotypes are believed. You know, so they don't understand that is not authentic. No we don't all have teepees. I don't think that comes from a negative place it is just there is not a lot of us.

Niizhwaaswi expanded on the difference between ignorance and racism. She said, "racism would be like Indians are stupid, but ignorance would be like misinformation of facts." The participants were hesitant to describe racial incidents as hate or racism. A few of the participants believed that they have become accustomed to stereotypes, racism, and ignorance. Niizhwaaswi described why she is no longer shocked or upset by smaller acts of ignorance and racism. She said, "we're numb to it." Niiwin also talked about a sense

of being numb towards racism. He said, “very rarely do I get offended, (because) I have been around it most of my life.” A racial incident would have to be blatant and obviously hateful for the participants to consider it racist or hateful.

The participants believe that there is a lot of misinformation and stereotypes about American Indians that go unverified due to a lack of knowledge, access to, and visibility of modern day American Indians. A few of the participants who went to a PWI next to their reservations were amazed and disappointed to find out that their fellow classmates did not know there was a reservation five miles away. Niizh talked about the lack of knowledge people have about American Indians. He said, “ignorance in that they don’t even know there is a reservation here and a lot of people don’t, its not that they are stupid, it is that the only knowledge they have is stereotypes.” Niizh and the other participants believe that most students they have met have a limited knowledge of native culture and they do not know where to look for authentic and accurate information on American Indians.

Racial incidents have happened on most of the participants’ campuses, but the participants still believe that their universities are safe and diverse. Kaagego talked about the campus climate at her PWI. She said “[Big State University] is definitely trying to create an atmosphere of diversity and acceptance. It just makes me frustrated at times (dealing with ignorance). They are trying, they have classes. The population is extremely diverse so they have to be accepting of differences.” While the participants believed that their campuses were safe, they realize that ignorant and hateful people were probably on their campuses. Nswi talked about her campus and a racial incident from the previous semester. She stated,

I think that year before we had the whole lynching thing. One kid brought in a noose, but I think you will find that any place you go...different racist issues. For me personally I have not had any issues....(it made me feel) kind of sick, but then again it is a college and it is full of stupid kids and they are from big cities and bring stupid stuff here. And it is just something everyone needs to work together. To me it is welcoming between all the diversity events. I don't know I just never felt like 'oh don't come here'.

Niizh concurred with Nswi, he still thought his campus was welcoming even with incidents of negativity directed towards American Indians on campus. He said, "I believe that there are stupid people out there, but I have not met these stupid people. They (people around campus) talk about that they hear people writing (negative) letters and sticking it on campus about natives and everything....I feel welcomed there". The participants understand that there are people on campus who hold racist thoughts and viewpoints, but they are not willing to attribute the ideas of a few to the entire campus.

In summary, the general consensus of the participants was that most of the racial incidents they encountered were influenced by ignorance rather than hate. The participants understood that racism exists in the world and on their campus, but they believed that most of their campus was accepting of diversity. In addition the participants encountered mostly covert racial incidents that are less visible and hostile than overt racial incidents at their PWIs.

Educating misinformation. American Indian tribal college transfer students believe it is their obligation to inform and educate those faculty, staff, and students at four-year PWIs who hold inaccurate portrayals of American Indian people and culture.

The participants take the time and effort to educate others about American Indian issues because letting them leave with inaccurate information is not acceptable for them. Niiwin talked about what he tells his children. He stated, “you don’t get ashamed of who you are, that is behind us. You need to be proud of who you are and inform people.” Educating on the misinformation was a necessary step in redefining what people know and think about American Indians. All of the participants were willing to take the time to educate and give others accurate information on American Indian issues.

With so few American Indian students at PWIs, the participants often found themselves having to be American Indian educators. Naanan talked about taking time out of her busy schedule to educate others on American Indians. She commented, “once I get started on it, it is easier and I have to let it go. I think they need to be schooled on stuff like that; what are you going to do, let them keep those ideas without straightening them out”. The consequences of not educating inaccurate views of American Indian people and culture outweighed the energy used to constantly be the purveyor of American Indian knowledge. Niizh talked about the stress of being a spokesperson for American Indian issues. He said,

sometimes, like thinking about it in retrospect, I am like man I hate it. But when it comes right down to it and the situation is right there, it’s like a reaction, so I am not even thinking about should I do it. I have a big mouth, whatever. I just don’t want to be that person who lets ignorance keep going, I’m like you know what you are going to be a little bit smarter, because you are just dumb and I am going to give you some information.

The participants accepted their role as American Indian educators because they believed they were making a difference by taking time to educate others about American Indian people and culture.

A few of the participants were proactive in their efforts to educate others about American Indians. Naanan, when she could, used her school projects to inform others about American Indians. She commented, "I try and do school projects on it (American Indian issues) and let people know the history of the tribe and where I am from."

Kaagego took a step further and was able to get one of her instructors at the PWI to let an instructor from the tribal college come in and give a lecture to her class. Kaagego sought help from her reservation in educating students in one of her classes. She said,

One of my professors from the tribal college came down here and she lectured the class, my Native American literature class. Because I was the only Native American in the class, she came down because the students couldn't understand; this is where it hit me that it is a different way of life on the reservation. We were reading Native American literature and they kept referring to it as mythology or magic but not real. Yet they could read text by White people like Tolken or something and they could understand that or the Bible or something and understand how that was important, but they could not understand the Native American point of view.

All of the participants believed it was important to be assertive and proactive in ensuring their campuses received accurate information about American Indians. While at their PWIs, a strategy the participants used to respond to ignorance and stereotypes was to

educate as many people they could who held misinformation about American Indian people and culture.

In summary, all of the participants believed it was critical that they become American Indian educators while at their PWIs. With so few American Indian students on campus, the participants found themselves spending a lot of time educating the misinformed. At times, the participants were overwhelmed and burdened by being American Indian educators but fought through the stress because they believed the price of not doing so was too great.

Impact of ignorance and stereotypes. Racial stereotypes and ignorance played a role in some of the American Indian student's disengagement from the classroom and university. Overall the participants were able to overcome and handle stereotypes and ignorance while on campus but on a few occasions, racially charged moments became very stressful and overwhelming. About half of the participants experienced racial ignorance and stereotypes that directly impacted their educational experiences on campus in terms of going to class or attending events.

The role racially charged incidents have had on participants varied from the attitude they brought to class to them not going to class. Ignorance and stereotypes have impacted the frame of mind for several students. Naanan talked about her thoughts heading into class. She said "I get nervous when I go into a class. I know people have their preconceived ideas about natives and I can overlook it, but there is just a feeling inside of what people are going to think of me." A few of the participants went into classrooms at PWIs hoping they would not experience any form of ignorance or stereotypes related to American Indians.

Although the concern about encountering ignorance and stereotypes did not stop the participants from going to class, it did add stress and apprehension to their experience. Naanan talked about her feelings when she is on campus. She said, “I did feel like students stared at me and they didn’t know much about Native Americans. They told me they didn’t know much, they have that stigma associated with Native Americans, with per cap (a percentage of money from casino revenues that goes directly to tribal members) and casinos; they have preconceived ideas.” A few of the participants were always on guard and worried about having to be confronted by someone who had ignorant and stereotypical ideas about American Indian people and culture.

Some participants were hopeful that staring from other students was due to alternative possibilities rather than racism. Niiwin commented, “sometime people stare at you here, but that could be because you are older, or they think they know you, or maybe it is my tattoos.” The participants were worried about acts of racism and stereotypes while on campus at their PWIs, but they countered those worries by being hopeful that racial incidents were isolated incidents and that the reason behind racial tension is due to a lack of knowledge and misinformation.

However, racism, ignorance, and stereotypes did result in one student not wanting to go back to class and another student who did not go back to class. Kaagego and Ngodwaaswi experienced racial incidents at their PWIs that exemplified the impact racial ignorance and stereotypes can have on American Indian students in the classroom. Kaagego described a classroom experience that resulted in her no longer attending class. She stated,

I had a class last semester where the professor referred to traditional Native American regalia as a costume and called small pox filled blankets, he gave them some kind of name. He said that the small pox infected blankets had really rattled the Native Americans. It pissed me off, not only do I have to sit there and listen to it, it's a lecture class, with the knowledge that another 200 people are in the class not getting the right information. I have to deal with the fact that some people are not ready to deal with the fact that some people are not ready yet to speak the truth, because America is not ready for it. Rich White students especially don't always want to know the truth of the minority students no matter who the minority student is.

Kaagego's racial experience ended up with her no longer attending classes when she did not have to, but she was able to finish the class with a 4.0. Kaagego's experience left her very hesitant and wary of future classes that she had to take at her PWI.

For Ngodwaaswi, her racial incident did not end with her no longer attending class, but it did leave her feeling very uncomfortable. Ngodwaaswi, talking about what happened in her Business Ethics class. She said,

In one of my classes, my instructor was talking about something and it ended up being a big deal, and I didn't mean for it to be a big deal. She was talking, and she was using examples, and she said, we got this Indian chief and he wants to kill people for not following the rules basically something like that. And then people in the class started saying 'kill the chief, kill the chief'. Oh my gosh! I felt so uncomfortable and anyway it turned into a big fiasco.

Ngodwaaswi wrote a complaint letter to the university and the instructor apologized over the incident. However, the experience left Ngodwaaswi uncomfortable and nervous anytime Native Americans were mentioned in any of her classes while at the PWI. The two participants who experienced racial incidents in the classroom did have a hard time dealing with their experience and it played a role in their future classes at their institutions.

Several students experienced issues of ignorance and stereotypes with their financial aid departments. The issue the participants had with the financial aid office were often over an Indian Tuition Waiver program. The Indian Tuition Waiver is a program that American Indian students receive when attending a public institution as a result of an agreement between the State and American Indian nations in the State. For most of the participants, the issue was mainly over eligibility requirements, but for one student it became more personal. Niizh described the situation with a particular financial aid employee. He commented,

This is what she said, 'this Indian tuition waiver right here is a gift from us (Hub University) for you to use.' And I was like, I don't think so, you need to reword what you are saying. She was like, 'that is how we classify it', and I was like well you need to reword what you are saying. I said it is not a gift, you might, whatever you are thinking, you need to say this is what you are entitled too. When you say this is a gift like you are doing a favor to us, this is something that you have to do. This is something that is owed to us, whatever you are saying. I had to go through a whole process with (local educator) to write a letter, because I told

him about it. And wrote a letter to the dean of students and he is no better than her because nothing happened.

Niizh was eventually able to work with another financial aid staff member and revolved his situation. As it turned out, the financial aid person Niizh was having trouble with was giving him inaccurate information. Several of the participants mentioned that their financial aid office seemed to have issues with American Indian students receiving a tuition waiver.

Encountering racial ignorance and stereotypes had a negative impact on some of the participants while at their PWIs. Those students who had to deal with racial incidents in the classroom were left with apprehension and concerns of possibly having to face future incidents in the classroom at their PWIs. The participants were affected by ignorance and racial stereotypes while at their PWIs, but they were able to overcome thoughts of dropping out and continued to persist towards degree attainment.

Adjusting to differences in non-native and native academic worlds

Kaagego- So you really have to be brave. And you have to have confidence in yourself. There are days I walk into a classroom and felt like I don't want to be there that I don't fit in, but you just have to get over it and do it. It's not easy. I believe it is important for native students to believe that they can be just as successful as anybody else.

American Indian tribal college transfer students had to adjust to differences in institutional culture, time management, institutional intrusiveness, and institutional size between their tribal colleges and PWIs. The differences between native and non-native institutions became obvious to the participants the moment they stepped foot on a PWI

campus. The participants were confronted with larger classes, fewer American Indian students, and a less intrusive and caring institution to name a few while at their PWIs.

The participants believed overcoming the initial culture shock between the different institutions played a role in their success and experience at their PWIs. All of the participants mentioned that they had to make adjustments upon transferring from a tribal college to a PWI. Some of the differences in native and non-native academic worlds were easier to overcome than others, but all of the participants were challenged by institutional differences in one form or another while at their PWIs.

The themes of adjusting to native and non-native academic worlds is sectioned into four sub-themes; differences in institutional culture, differences in concept of time, differences in intrusiveness, and differences in campus size. The differences in institutional culture relates to student population, mission, and academic assessment. The differences in the concept of time sub-theme relates to the flexibility or lack thereof regarding deadlines and classroom attendance at the PWI. The differences in intrusiveness focuses on the varying levels of institutional help and guidance the participants received at the tribal colleges and PWIs in navigating their institutions. The final sub-theme of differences in campus size relates to the participants adjusting to a much larger PWI.

Differences in institutional culture. American Indian tribal college transfer students must adjust to the difference in institutional cultures between the tribal college and the four-year PWI. The most obvious difference to overcome for the participants was the difference in mission and student population, more specifically, the amount of American Indian culture in the classes and on campus at a tribal college compared to a

PWI. All of the participants noted the difference in institutional cultures and talked about the role it played in their experience at a PWI.

At the tribal college, the participants were very comfortable and found the institution's mission and student population to be a benefit in their academic success. Kaagego talked about the comfort she had while at her tribal college. She stated, "you don't have to be the outsider, you're not the invisible Indian on the fringes you know. You are with people who are like you and that is really important and its embedded right in the curriculum." Attending an institution where American Indians are the majority and native culture and history is honored and a priority proved to be a successful formula for all of the participants. Overall, the participants were very connected to their tribal colleges and found them to be a warm and supportive environment to learn.

While the participants found their tribal colleges to be more like a family atmosphere, they found their PWIs to be less personal. The participants were quick to point out how the lack of American Indian presence in the classroom and on campus left them feeling out of place and alone. Niiwin summed up the initial experience of attending a PWI after attending a tribal college. He said,

it was overwhelming. By overwhelming I mean going to a place you don't know.

By don't know, I mean like moving to a whole new city. You don't know anybody; everybody is a stranger, and with me I am older than all of the students here and you notice that right away. The classroom atmosphere is pretty close and you know everyone, but here you feel a little more like a loner. You are not really fitting in the age group and lifestyles and you are coming from a whole different social background. Tribal colleges on the reservation were a big family

atmosphere; you know most of these people your whole life. You might see most of them in one way or another, but here it is a culture shock. You are moving into a situation where you pretty much feel like you don't fit in at all, but once classes get going you realize that students are here to learn and they are not here to look at you and judge you. I believe that the experience is a little overwhelming at first, but if you can make it past that first semester most students will be good. That first semester was a lot, it was the most stressful and it hinged on if I wanted to continue.

Niiwin described going to the PWI as a culture shock and being in a new city, even though the PWI is five miles from his reservation. Despite most of the participants living so close to their PWIs, campus was not considered their community; it was not their reservation.

The participants stressed the difference of feeling like a family in the classrooms at the tribal college and feeling like a lone individual at the PWI. Ngodwaaswi talked about being a part of a family at the tribal college. She said, "It is smaller (at the tribal college) and you know (the students) it feels more like family and friends (at the tribal college)." Initial success at the PWIs for the participants was dependent on them being able to overcome the shock of attending a college with a completely different institutional culture than their tribal colleges.

Additional differences in institutional culture for the participants revolved around competition and assessment at the PWIs. At the tribal college you can get into any major you sign up for, but at four-year institutions some majors are competitive and require

additional acceptance. Bezhik chose a very competitive field and she discussed the process. She stated,

The classes are going well, some of them I had to retake because I wanted to get in the nursing program and your G.P.A. has to be up there high, because it is a real competitive field to get into because there is not a lot of instructors for that.

So if I got a B in something I am retaking it to try and get the A.

Bezhik was able to adjust to the competitive process at her PWI because of her sheer will and determination to be a nurse. Competitive programs at the PWIs tested the resolve and commitment of a few of the participants' pursuit of their academic dreams and goals.

A more common difference in institutional culture between the tribal college and PWI for the participants involved classroom assessment. Nswi discussed the change in classroom assessment between the tribal college and PWI. She stated,

My first semester, all it was, was a test and no extra work. I don't do well with tests, I do well with projects and essays. I mean my accounting class was three tests, there you go, there is your grade. And the same thing with my ethics class.

The change in teaching and how the class was brought up at the tribal college you had different things, but here it is strictly lecture. And that was one of the things you had to get used to and the one-on-one time is gone. Thankfully in history there are smaller classes. I've learned that smaller classes are better for me.

The participants believed it was a big adjustment between being graded purely on exams rather than homework and papers like they were accustomed to at their tribal colleges.

The participants found taking classes with smaller enrollments led to classroom assessments that were similar to their tribal colleges.

All of the participants had to overcome differences in institutional culture when transferring from a tribal college to a PWI. The difference between the two institutions may seem obvious, but the reality of the differences was challenging for the participants. Success and persistence at the PWIs for the participants was helped by their ability to work through and adjust to the institutional differences between the tribal college and PWI.

Differences in the concept of time. American Indian tribal college transfer students had to master their time management skills while at the PWI. A difference between the tribal college and the PWI had to do with “Indian time”. The contemporary concept of “Indian time” is that things will happen when they happen, and people will be there when they get there. The traditional concept of “Indian time” was dependent on the seasons and environment, for example certain ceremonies would not start until the first fall of snow. The issue of time becomes a problem when the tribal college will work with an “Indian time” attitude and the PWIs will not.

“Indian time” at the tribal college meant flexibility, but at the four-year institution time was not flexible. Bezhik talked about the difference in the concept of time. She stated, “the four-year is not as flexible; when I was at tribal college the instructors would come in and sometimes it was two minutes late or something, but at four-year it starts and ends on time.” The difference in flexibility was an adjustment for many of the participants. Niizh commented, “it was an adjustment because I got used to the Indian time.” A few of the participants had to learn about the need for adjustment the hard way, meaning they received no credit for late papers or legitimate excuses in their classes. Nswi talked about her learning experience. She said, “last semester my paper got deleted

from my flash drive and she would not give me one more day. At tribal college, I would have gotten one more day”. The participants quickly realized that in order for them to succeed at their PWIs they needed to adjust and let go of the concept of “Indian time”.

Many of the participants realized that having better time management was a more useful strategy than “Indian time”. Time management required the participants to plan where they are going to be, when they will get there, and when they can get homework done. All of the participants mentioned the importance of time management in their success at the PWI. Beshik talked about the importance of time management. She said,

scheduling, scheduling work, classes, kids, transportation, because I drive my kids to and from school. I have a son who is autistic. Him getting on a bus is not an option; so I always had to have someone to take him there or pick them up if need be. Still managing to get 40 hours of work in and attend classes full-time and be able to study. Just basically time management.

All but one of the participants had children, all but two have full-time jobs, and they all had multiple responsibilities outside of school that take time away from their academics in their time management planning. The participants had to find a way to schedule their time effectively in order to achieve success at their PWIs.

The key to time management for the participants was a scheduling book. Niizh who waived his scheduling book in the air with his right arm. He said,

Scheduling, you have to do that; I mean you have to do that. I just got a new scheduling book and it is my bible. I mean if you don’t have your bible you are going to hell, and hell is academic probation my friend. If I don’t have this

(scheduling book), I am not focused. I have so many things in my head it is hard to make time for each individual thing. Scheduling [is key].

Using scheduling books helped the participants create time to take care of their families, education, work, and even time for themselves. Bezhik spoke about taking time for herself. She said, “I had Saturday off where I didn’t go to work, didn’t go to school, and I refused to study. I didn’t even clean my house that day.” Time management and attention to deadlines was a skill that the participants had to master and a skill they believe was vital in their success, persistence, and experience at their PWIs.

In summary, the participants had to adjust or develop better time management skills upon entering their PWIs. A few of the participants initially received poor grades on papers because they believed their new institution would be similar to the tribal college in terms of forgiveness and flexibility with time and deadlines. For most of the participants, a successful experience at their PWIs meant adjusting to institutional differences and redefining how they thought of time and deadlines.

Difference in intrusiveness. American Indian tribal college transfer students had to adjust to a less personal and intrusive PWI. While at the tribal college, the participants became accustomed to an institution that would take time to check in with their students to ensure academic success. Most of the participants found that their PWI was too big, and therefore, instructors and administrators had less time to be concerned with individual students.

At the tribal college, administrators and faculty members knew all of their students because they believed that knowing students personally, symbolically demonstrated that the success of every student was important to them. Kaagego talked

about the attitude of her tribal college administration and faculty. She commented, “(at the tribal college they) are really invested and it is important to them. It’s different for them. For so long, natives have been left out of education; everybody there is really invested in turning out highly educated native people.” The participants appreciated the effort and sense of caring the tribal college showed in helping them succeed.

At the tribal college, it was not unheard of for administrators or faculty members to call students at home. Niizhwaaswi talked about the sense of responsibility and ethic of care tribal college faculty and administrators had towards their students. She said, “the instructors from the community cared. I remember I didn’t show up for a test, and I don’t know why I didn’t show up, but the teacher called me and said ‘hey you have a test get in here’.” The participants mentioned that administrators at the tribal colleges continued check in on them while they were at their PWIs. Compared to the tribal colleges who had a deep sense of responsibility to American Indian student success, the participants found their PWIs to be less helpful and caring about their academic success.

All of the participants believed that the tribal college administrators and faculty were very helpful in navigating the institutional environments at the tribal college. However, while at their PWIs, the participants believed the most administrators and faculty treated them as an anonymous number. Nswi described the feeling that most of the participants had about orientation. She commented,

They don’t really help you much there, they give you a list of what you should take and I had to rework that, but they don’t really help you, because there are so many students coming in at one time. My friend, they signed her up for three

science classes her first semester, which you shouldn't do your first semester. And they are like no, it's fine, it is how it is supposed to go.

For the participants, the experience with orientation was similar to their experience with other departments at their PWIs.

Another department at PWIs that the participants found to be less helpful than they should be was academic advising. The participants also found a lack of help from academic advising in the process of declaring a major. Nswi talked about her issues of when to declare a major at the PWI. She said, "I don't know I've had issues everywhere. Trying to declare a major, I didn't know that when you have a certain amount of credits that you had to declare a major." The participants believed that the various institutional departments at the PWI would only give out minimal information and had little interest in being overly helpful like their tribal colleges.

Navigating the institution required a lot of persistence and self-motivation for the participants. The participants learned very quickly that they had to do a lot of the work themselves and that the PWI is not going to be overly helpful like the tribal college. Kaagego talked about what it takes to navigate her PWI. She said, "students have to be really persevering; they have to go out and look for resources and help. Make great solutions to a problem....You have to be willing to get out and look for those things they won't come to you." Nswi concurred with the notion of being self-reliant, she stated, "I am starting to get used to it and know how it goes, what road to take, and to be more assertive....Keep going and be more assertive." While there is an institutional difference in the amount of intrusiveness and connectedness between the tribal college and PWI, the

participants found success because they were able to adjust and navigate the environment at their less intrusive PWIs.

The consequences of not having a supportive environment at PWIs could lead to American Indian students not being able to navigate a less intrusive university, which can lead to dropout from a university. Two of the participants, prior to attending a tribal college, failed in their first attempt at a PWi, and they blamed their lack of ability in navigating a less intrusive and caring institution. Naanan did not understand the withdrawal rules at her institution. She said,

I did well my first semester, but I got sick my second semester and just quit going and didn't withdraw and that kind of hurt me and my grade point went down. I was dismissed from there because of grades, and they were really rude to me after that.

Naanan decided not to go back to her first PWi due to the way they treated her when she went on academic probation. Kaagego left her first PWi in part due to homesickness, but also due to a feeling that nobody at the institution cared. She commented, "I felt really out of place and I didn't like it at all. The professors were like, they didn't care, it was sink or swim, figure it out for yourself. It was a really rough environment for me." The participants believed that an institutional ethic of care for their students would help students succeed and navigate the university.

In summary, most of the participants found their tribal colleges to be more intrusive, in a good way, than their PWIs. At the tribal college the faculty and administrators truly cared about the success of each individual student, but at the PWi students did not believe that was evident. Some of the participants struggled without

someone checking up on them and making sure they were doing their work, however, participants' success was tied to their ability to become more self-sufficient at their PWIs.

Differences in campus size. American Indian tribal college transfer students had to be prepared for the differences in campus size between their tribal colleges and PWIs. Tribal colleges tend to have a total student population around 100 to 200 students, where a larger PWI could have 100 to 200 students in one class. All but one of the participants went to an institution that was significantly larger than their tribal college. Attending larger PWIs meant the participants had to overcome and adjust to campus size in order to succeed at their PWIs.

The initial impression of being on campus for the participants was a feeling of being overwhelmed. Niizhwaaswi talked about the adjustment to a larger campus. She stated, "when I got down there and went to orientation, it was big, like 40,000 it was intimidating. The campus gets smaller after awhile." The size of a larger campus resulted in a few participants having trouble finding their buildings and friends. Niizh commented on the difference in campus size. He stated,

Basically it was hard, adjustment, because it was so big. I didn't have as much of a problem as some because as a science major most of my classes, all my classes are located right next to each other. Some people are all over, one in music, one in another, all these different classes. Adjustment, it was bigger, trying to go and meet other people it was bigger and I had trouble finding these places.

An initial adjustment for the participants was not getting lost and overwhelmed by the larger campus. Persevering through the initial shock of a much larger campus was critical to the success of the participants.

The participants also noticed the difference in the size of their classrooms, which went from roughly three to 10 students in a classroom at a tribal college to 150 in a lecture hall at a PWI. Niiwin talked about the difference in classroom size. He stated, “I walked into my first classroom at the four-year institution and it had like over 100 students in it and I am used to 12 or 13 [which] was a lot at the tribal college. It’s a big adjustment.” A few of the participants quickly recognized that finding a way to stay out of larger classes would be to their benefit. Kaagego talked about why she avoided larger classes. She said, “I didn’t get stuck in a bunch of lecture classes, I have a bunch of seminars, which is really similar to tribal college classes. That is really nice, because I don’t like to be in a classroom with 200 people.” The participants found the size of the PWI to be a challenge, but they were able to find methods to adjust and overcome the challenges of a larger institution.

In summary, differences in campus size was significant for almost all of the participants when transferring to their PWIs. Initially the larger PWIs made it harder to navigate and find friends for the participants. In addition, the size of the PWI meant large lecture halls with more students than the participants were used to at their tribal colleges. However, after the first semester, most of the participants were able to adjust to the difference in size at the PWI.

Summary of themes

The experiences of eight tribal college students who transferred and experienced persistence and success while at four-year PWIs resulted in six themes. Three of the themes that emerged from the eight participants experience while attending PWIs were personal and had little to do with campus interaction; those themes were: personal goals

and motivation, family matters, and being a community member of an American Indian community. The other three themes that emerged involved interaction on-campus with their PWIs; those themes were various levels of engagement with the campus, overcoming ignorance and stereotypes, and adjusting to differences in non-native and native academic worlds.

The three themes that did not directly relate to on-campus interaction were very personal and were a major factor in their overall experience and success while at their PWIs. Most of the participants had personal goals and dreams of attaining a specific college degree, which provided focus and direction, which in-turn helped the participants experience success while at their PWIs. Family matters was the essential component to the participants success while at their PWIs. Family support was critical to the participants' success and family issues had the potential to derail their educational dreams. The third theme of being a community member of an American Indian community was also important to many of the participants' experiences of success and persistence while at their PWIs. Community support and giving back to American Indian communities were important cultural values and goals held by most of the participants as they attended PWIs. Most of the participants had personal factors, which had very little to do with their institutions' campus, that played a central role in their overall experience and success at their PWIs.

The three themes that did relate directly to on-campus interaction for the participants also played a critical role in their experience of success and persistence. The various levels of engagement with campus theme were important to what aspects of the campus the participants found helpful or unhelpful while at their PWIs. The participants

were more inclined to engage with campus when it had to do with American Indian faculty, students, and program departments. Overcoming ignorance and stereotypes to achieve success was necessary for most of the participants at their PWIs. Many of the participants did not find their campuses to be hateful, but they did experience minor issues, which impacted their overall experience at their PWIs. The final theme of adjusting to differences in non-native and native academic worlds was an obstacle the participants had to overcome when transferring to a much different PWI. Differences in institutional culture, intrusiveness, and size between the tribal college and PWI were evident from the moment the participants began their transfer process. Most of the participants had challenges on campus at their PWIs, which influenced their overall success and experience.

CHAPTER 6

Discussion, Implications, Delimitations, and Recommendations

In chapter six I discuss the themes of the current study in relation to the research question and literature review. I then discuss the implications of the findings as it relates to practice for stakeholders in the education of American Indian students. The delimitations section follows and it describes the boundaries of the current study. The last section presents recommendations for future research as it relates to American Indian tribal college transfer students.

Discussion of themes

The purpose of the current study was to explore the educational journey of American Indian students who attended a tribal college and subsequently transferred to a four-year PWI. Tribal college transfer students were chosen as the focus of the current study due to a lack of research on tribal college students and the lack of success for these students in PWIs. There has been a steadily increasing number of tribal colleges opening throughout the United States since the very first tribal college, Navajo Tribal College, which opened in 1968. An increasing number of tribal colleges have led to an increasing number of tribal college students transferring to PWIs. Currently there is very little knowledge and information about these students and what makes them successful.

A qualitative research design was used to gather information from eight American Indian participants who attended tribal colleges and four-year PWIs in the Midwest. Data were collected through two interviews with each of the eight participants. In total participants attended two tribal colleges and four PWIs. The participants consisted of six

females and two males, all but one had at least one child, most worked full-time, all but one lived on the reservation while commuting to a nearby PWI.

The current study was guided by one research question: What are the experiences of American Indian tribal college graduates who transferred from tribal colleges and succeeded at four-year PWIs? The research question was designed to explore the support, challenges, and success American Indian participants experienced while attending a PWI. Interviews with the eight participants resulted in six themes: personal goals and dreams; family matters; being a community member of an American Indian community; various levels of engagement with the campus; overcoming ignorance and stereotypes; and adjusting to differences in non-native and native academic worlds. In the interviews, the participants revealed the experiences and inner drive that propelled them to persistence and success while at their PWIs and included their interaction and presence on-campus, issues and events in their personal lives, and experiences away from campus.

The current study used an Indigenous methodology to guide the research design. An Indigenous methodology incorporates Indigenous ways of knowing, history, language, and culture when researching Indigenous peoples. I chose Pavel and Inglebret's (2007) American Indian/Alaskan Native student success model as the conceptual framework to provide an Indigenous perspective or lens when discussing and analyzing the data and themes. The American Indian student success model maintains that cultural identity, individual, family, community, and tribal nations are interconnected and play a role in an American Indian students' preparation for college, journey through college, and serving native communities after college (Pavel & Inglebret, 2007).

Cultural Identity

The cultural identity component of the Pavel and Inglebret's (2007) American Indian/Alaskan Native student success model relates to a collective American Indian cultural identity, which includes native languages, cultural beliefs, and histories. A common misconception is to believe that in order to be a "real" American Indian, one must have a strong sense of cultural identity and exhibit characteristics associated with American Indians from the 1800s (Mihesuah, 2004). However, the Pavel and Inglebret model states that cultural identity will be different for each individual person due to language and culture loss as a result of past assimilation policies on American Indians. Regardless of the level or strength of cultural identity for individual students, the Pavel and Inglebret (2007) model maintains that success for American Indian students only means having a personal understanding of what it means to be an American Indian.

In addition, studies (see: Jackson et.al.; Huffman, 1999; Ledlow, 1992; Rodriguez, 1997) have shown that American Indian students who have a strong connection to American Indian spiritual and cultural grounding are more likely to persist and succeed while in college. All of the themes in the findings of the current study have a strong influence of cultural identity throughout them. The theme that most directly relates to cultural identity is being a community member of an American Indian community where the participants describe how they perceive themselves as American Indians living in an American Indian community. By being a member of an American Indian community the participants have developed a sense of what it means to be American Indian and to have an American Indian value system. Throughout all of the themes, the

participants mentioned and described how cultural identity (i.e., American Indian history, values, and culture) influence their career goals and experience on campus at PWIs.

Individual, Community, Tribe, Family

In the Pavel and Inglebret (2007) American Indian/Alaskan Native student success model, the individual, community, tribe, and family are all interconnected pieces of success for American Indian students. In the current study, the three themes that related to the individual, family, and tribal community components of the Pavel and Inglebret (2007) model were personal goals and dreams, family matters, and being a member of an American Indian community. The individual, family, and tribal community components of the Pavel and Inglebret (2007) model as with the three related themes from the current study refer to individual experience at home rather than interaction on-campus. The participants in the current study spoke passionately about their individual experiences at home; moreover, what happened in their personal lives away from campus often directly influenced or impacted their experience at their PWIs more than on campus interaction.

The theme of individual goals and dreams from the current study is similar to the individual component of the Pavel and Inglebret (2007) model. The success and persistence of the participants at PWIs was, in part, due to their clear sense of purpose of why they were at college and what they wanted out of their experience. Having direction, purpose, or life goals has been shown to be a significant component to the success of American Indian students in college (Pavel & Inglebret, 2007) and Students of Color in general (Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003). The transfer students used their aspirations for

a specific career and other personal motivations as a beacon of what they were trying to achieve while at their PWIs.

Although most of the participants in the current study were attending a four-year PWI with the purpose of attaining a degree in order to achieve their lifelong dream or a specific career, several of the participants cited their need for a higher paying career as motivation for their goals and dreams. In general, tribal college students have a family income that often falls below the federal poverty level (American Indian College Fund, 2008). While most of the participants in the current study had full-time jobs or received significant amounts of financial aid, many of the participants were single parents with multiple children or ill family members to support. The need for a higher paying career was a reality for several of the participants.

The theme of family matters is congruent to the family component of the Pavel and Inglebret (2007) model. While individual goals and dreams were important to the participants' experiences at a PWI, the heart and centerpiece of their experiences at PWIs was family matters. For instance, most of the students mentioned staying close to home to attend a PWI because it was best for their family, which is not uncommon for American Indian students to cite family as a reason for attending colleges near their homes (Yurkovich, 2001). In addition, the support of family was a critical aspect to the success of the participants while at their PWIs, as this has been shown to be a positive influence in other American Indian student success and persistence in higher education literature (Bowker, 1992; Falk & Aitken, 1984; Jackson et al, 2003; Pavel & Padilla, 1993; Rindone, 1988). The notion of family took priority over everything when it came to the participants' educational experiences.

The participants consistently noted that family always comes first in their lives and that their presence at a PWI was for their family. Family obligations and responsibilities have been shown to be a factor for American Indian students dropping out or stopping out of college (Dell, 2000; Jackson et.al., 2003; Tate & Schwartz, 1993). Success for the participants while at the PWIs was contingent on their ability to navigate the time demands of both family and education, because if they didn't, their education would take a back seat to family. Lastly, many of the participants expressed a desire to be role models for their family when discussing their reasons for pursuit of a degree at a PWI. The participants in the current study took pride and found motivation in being able to demonstrate to their children and other family members that success in college was an attainable and worthwhile goal.

The theme of being a community member of an American Indian community related to the community and tribe aspect of the Pavel and Inglebret (2007) model and although it was important to the participants' experiences while at their PWIs, family matters and personal goals and dreams appeared to be more important. However, the participants cited American Indian community support, which included financial support, as an important component in their success at PWIs. The participants in the current study were grateful, motivated, and inspired by the support of their home communities and generosity in providing financial support. The findings of community support in the current study, confirm studies (Pavel & Inglebret, 2007; Reeves, 2006) that maintain American Indian community support as a critical aspect of American Indian student success and persistence in college.

Another component of being a community member of an American Indian community was the fact that all but one of the participants chose and wanted to stay close to or live on their reservation communities while attending their PWIs. American Indian students preferring to return to their communities rather than stay on campus at college has been an issue dating back to Harvard's attempts in the 1600s (Boyer, 1997b). For many American Indian students there is a cultural pressure to be active and contributing members of their tribal community rather than leave their tribal communities to attend college (Jackson et.al., 2003; Taylor, 1999). However, the participants in the current study removed the cultural pressure of being active community members rather than leaving to attend college, by continuing to live on their reservations and attending a PWI nearby. The participants in the current study showed that American Indian students no longer have to leave their communities in order to receive an education.

Transitioning In

The transitioning in section of the Pavel and Inglebret (2007) American Indian/Alaskan Native student success model concerns the differences in culture between native values and colleges, particularly PWIs, choosing an appropriate college, developing good study habits prior to college, and becoming a self-determined leader while in college. The transitioning in period for the participants in the current study relates to the adjustments they had to make while transferring from a tribal college to a PWI. The adjusting to non-native and native academic worlds theme, which included adjusting to differences in institutional culture, concept of time, intrusiveness, and campus size, is similar to the transitioning in phase of the Pavel and Inglebret (2007) model. Although the Pavel and Inglebret (2007) model discusses aspects of transitioning

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in, the adjusting to non-native and native academic world theme provides specific and in-depth examples of how American Indian students transitioned in and became successful students. Lastly, the theme of ignorance and stereotypes from the current study, while not cited in the Pavel and Inglebret (2007) model, does relate and could be an aspect of the transitioning in phase of the American Indian/Alaskan Native student success model.

Differences in institutional culture meant that American Indian tribal college transfer students had to overcome the reality that they were no longer attending an institution where they were the majority, where the institution is designed around their culture, and where they felt like a family rather than individuals. The participants in the current study noticed right away the difference between the institutional culture of a native focused tribal college and their PWIs. The literature reveals that American Indian students from reservation communities experience more academic and social difficulties in college than those from non-reservation communities (Huffman, 2003). Partly because non-reservation American Indians are more accustomed to living and interacting in predominantly White environments than reservation American Indians. For the participants in the current study, all of whom came from reservation communities, there was an initial adjustment period to the institutional culture of their PWIs to include interacting in a predominantly White environment. Although the participants in the current study had the experience of adjusting to college life while at their tribal colleges, upon transferring to a PWi, a key to their success was adjusting to differences in institutional culture at the PWi, such as a competitive academic environment, differences in classroom assessment, and the lack of American Indian presences on campus at their PWIs.

A second adjustment aspect between non-native and native academic worlds involved the concept of time. While at the tribal college, the participants were given leniency and forgiveness pertaining to showing up to class on time, leaving class early, not showing up to class several weeks in a row, and handing in work late for full credit. The literature does not discuss issues or differences in the concept of time and meeting deadlines for American Indian tribal college students. In order to achieve success at their PWIs, the participants had to make adjustments to stricter academic policies, which were not as forgiving about meeting deadlines involving homework and taking exams at their tribal colleges.

A third adjustment for the participants involving non-native and native academic worlds centers around the concept of intrusiveness. While at their tribal colleges, the participants received a level of support and guidance (e.g., phone calls to remind students to make up missed exams and homework or that they need to attend class or else they may fail) from their tribal college faculty and staff that they did not receive while at their PWIs. As such, in order to succeed at the PWIs, the participants mentioned having to adjust and become more assertive in navigating their institutions. American Indian students who are able to develop a strong sense of determination and motivation are more likely to experience college success (Jackson et.al.; Pavel & Inglebret, 2007; Taylor, 1999; Yurkovich, 2001).

The fourth adjustment the participants had to make between a non-native and native academic world regarded the differences in campus size. The size of classrooms and number of students at four-year institutions have been shown to be an adjustment for other types of transfer (e.g., community college) students (Townsend & Wilson, 2006),

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but the difference is exacerbated for tribal college transfer students who often have classes of two to six students at their tribal college; for them a class of 25 is large let alone a lecture hall of 100 students. In addition, the participants had to adjust to a campus that was often over a mile end to end, where at the tribal college the campus consisted of two to four small buildings right next to each other. The participants were initially in shock of the differences in campus size, but they were able to quickly adjust to their new institutions.

The overcoming ignorance and stereotypes theme from the current study is not prominent in the Pavel and Inglebret (2007) American Indian/Alaskan Native student success model, but the experience of transition into campus for many American Indian students involves issues with race, ignorance, and stereotypes. The literature shows that American Indian students are more likely to succeed and persist when they believe their higher education institutions value and support diversity (Benjamin, Chambers, & Reiterman, 1993; Weaver, 2000). Even though all of the participants in the current study believed that their PWIs supported and valued diversity, overcoming ignorance and stereotypes was still a challenge they faced while attending their PWIs.

Upon stepping foot onto campus at their PWIs, the participants in the current study quickly realized that American Indian faculty, staff, and students were not a visible aspect of campus life. A lack of a diverse campus has been shown to result in Students of Color having increased feelings of being different and underrepresented (Hurtado et al., 1998). The low enrollment of American Indians at the PWIs combined with transferring from a tribal college where American Indians are their majority, increased the sense of being underrepresented and different for the participants in the current study.

Furthermore the literature reveals that an issue and barrier for American Indian students in college is dealing with ignorance, racism, and alienation due to being a member of a racial/ethnic group that is different from the majority of campus (Brown & Kurpius, 1997; Jackson et al. 2003; Pewewardy & Frey, 2004; Tate & Schwartz, 1993; Taylor, 1999; Weaver, 2000). Although the tribal college transfer participants in the current study did not discuss feeling alienated, they did experience acts of ignorance and stereotypes while on campus and in the classroom at their PWIs. As a result, several of the participants were worried about encountering future acts of ignorance and stereotypes while at their PWIs. Most of the participants in the current study recognized that they needed to overcome acts of ignorance and stereotypes on their path to success at their PWIs.

One method the participants used to overcome acts of ignorance and stereotypes was how they perceived racially sensitive situations or comments. Common experiences for Students of Color often consist of micro-aggressions, which are subtle insults or racially insensitive comments that exist in everyday interaction (Picca & Feagin, 2007; Solorzano, et al., 2000). The participants in the current study were confronted with micro-aggressions, but viewed them not as racism, rather as ignorance or stereotypes, which they believed were due to misinformation rather than hate and could be easily corrected.

A second method the participants used in overcoming ignorance and stereotypes was to become American Indian educators. A common issue faced by American Indians in colleges is that they are often placed in an uncomfortable position and asked to be the voice for all American Indians on American Indian issues (Brayboy, 2003; Deloria,

2004). However, the participants in the current study embraced the role of being American Indian educators who provide accurate information about their experiences as American Indians. The participants believed it was better that they give their opinions and information rather than let less informed people talk about American Indians, or worse yet, let individuals walk around with inaccurate information.

Program Enrollment

The program enrollment aspect of the Pavel and Inglebret (2007) model refers to the experience on campus for American Indian students and the need for them to develop positive relationships with faculty, staff, and administrative departments while attending their chosen colleges. The experience of being on campus and interacting with faculty, staff, and students in the Pavel and Inglebret (2007) model is similar to the theme of various levels of engagement in the current study. The participants in the current study were primarily interested in developing relationships with the American Indian community on campus, but they were less interested in developing relationships with the non-native community.

Although Pavel and Inglebret (2007) advocate for positive relationships with faculty, staff, and administrative departments, the students in the current study primarily were interested in developing their relationships only with American Indian faculty. The level of engagement at PWIs for the participants depended on whether the engagement with campus was native based. That is, the tribal college transfer participants coming from a native based and focused institution wanted the same experience at their PWIs. While on campus at the PWIs, the participants sought meaningful interaction with

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American Indian faculty, students, and program departments but did not covet the same type of interaction with their non-native counterparts.

Although studies have shown that positive and meaningful interaction with faculty to be a factor in American Indian student success and persistence at college (Brown & Kurpius, 1997; Jackson et al., 2003; Pavel & Padilla, 1993; Reeves, 2006; Tate & Schwartz, 1993; Weaver, 2000), for the tribal college transfer participants in the current study, developing positive and meaningful interactions with faculty was not a factor or a desire in their persistence and success at their PWIs. Furthermore, the literature suggests that while American Indian students prefer a positive relationship with American Indian faculty, the racial/ethnic status of faculty members is a non-factor in the need for positive faculty relationships (Taylor, 1999; Tierney, 1996), which was not consistent with results from the current study where the racial/ethnic status of faculty members did matter to the participants. The problem for the participants was that at their PWIs, American Indian faculty were in short supply, as such many of the participants did not have access to American Indian faculty. Overall, positive and meaningful relationships with faculty members at PWIs was not a significant factor in the success of the tribal college transfer participants.

The participants in the current study did desire contact and interaction with other American Indian students at their PWIs. The literature shows that American Indian students benefit from American Indian student groups and interaction with other American Indian students (Jackson et al., 2003; Reeves, 2006; Yurkovich, 2001), which was true for many of the participants, who expressed a sense of camaraderie when seeing or interacting with other American Indian students on campus. Although similar to

American Indian faculty, finding American Indian students to interact with was often difficult due to the large campus and so few American Indian students at PWIs. Furthermore, for Students of Color, campus and peer interaction often take place at cultural centers (Jones, et al., 2002). Interaction with other American Indian students for half of the participants, took place through involvement with an American Indian student group. Although the participants expressed interest in interaction with other American Indian students, most of them succeeded with minimal interaction with other American Indian students while on campus at their PWIs.

Interaction with non-native students for many of the participants in the current study was minimal and often bound to required classroom interaction. The literature states that community college transfer students often experience feelings of isolation at their four-year institution and would benefit from increased contact with fellow students at the four-year institution (Harbin, 1997; Flaga, 2006). Additionally, the literature shows that having a sense of being a part of campus and having positive interaction with White peers to be an important component to the success and persistence for Students of Color (Locks et al., 2008). But, for most of the tribal college transfer participants, interaction with non-native students was not desired or a necessary component to their success at PWIs. In addition most of the participants lived nearby on their reservations and were only interested in attending their classes and going back home to their community as soon as possible.

The literature shows that community college transfer students feel more connected to their four-year institutions when they are active in campus activities (Flaga, 2006). However, many of the participants in the current study did not have a need or

desire to be connected to their PWIs. For many of the participants, their community was their reservations not the PWIs. While the participants were not actively involved with campus activities outside those relating to American Indian issues and topics, there were several key departments, namely financial aid and academic advising, that impacted their experience at their PWIs.

For the participants in the current study, academic advising and financial aid were the two most cited academic services in regards to their experience at PWIs. Advising and the financial aid office have been shown to be the most useful services on campus for community college transfer students (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Flaga, 2006; Harbin, 1997). While student services were not overly supportive to the participants in the current study, academic advising and the financial aid office were the most used student services for the tribal college transfer students.

However, while academic advising and financial aid were often cited in the experience at a PWI for the participants, it was not always positive. The problem with academic advising for a few of the participants was that on occasion, they were given advice in regards to selecting classes. The problem with the financial aid office was almost exclusively tied to eligibility for the Indian tuition waiver and the timeliness of distributing the participants' tribal scholarships. Issues with financial aid and/or financial issues at home have been shown to be a reason why some American Indian students dropout of college (Dell, 2000; Falk & Aitken, 1984; Jackson & Smith, 2000). While none of the participants thought about dropping out due to issues with financial aid or academic advising, those issues did present challenges and added stress to their experience at their PWIs.

Returning to Serve

An aspect of the being a member of an American Indian community theme similar to the returning to serve aspect of the Pavel and Inglebret (2007) model was giving back to American Indian communities, which is a cultural value that many American Indian communities hold and a value that the participants found important in their journey towards degree attainment at their PWIs. A majority of the participants intended to work for their own tribal nations or another tribal nation upon graduating from their PWIs. It should also be noted that all but one of the tribal college transfer participants were already working for their tribal nation while attending college. As such, most of the participants were able to apply the knowledge from their coursework into their jobs, which in turn benefits their tribal nations. The desire and intention of all of the participants in the current study to work for American Indian communities and tribal nations aligns with the American Indian value of being of service to your community.

Summary of discussion

The participants' experiences of success and persistence while at their PWIs was helped by a strong family, well-defined dreams and goals, and sense of connection and responsibility to American Indian communities, knowing what they wanted out of their college experience, having the ability to overcome ignorance and stereotypes, and making adjustments to a much bigger and different PWI. Generally, the Pavel and Inglebret (2007) American Indian/Alaskan Native student success model served as a useful framework to interpret and make meaning of data in the current study. Yet, there

were some aspects of the tribal college transfer student experience at a PWI that either contradicted or did not fit in the Pavel and Inglebret model.

Five aspects of the Pavel and Inglebret (2007) model fit to some degree with the findings in the current study: individual, family, community, transitioning in, and program enrollment as it relates to developing relationships with other American Indian students. The personal goals and dreams, family matters, and being a member of an American Indian community themes aligned with the individual, family, and community component and adjusting to non-native and native academic worlds aligned with the transitioning in aspect of the Pavel and Inglebret (2007) model. Family matters played a larger and more important role in the experience of the participants in the current study than was suggested in the American Indian/Alaskan Native student success model. The program enrollment aspect of the Pavel and Inglebret (2007) model suggests that American Indian students covet interaction with other American Indian students while in college, which was also true for the participants in the current study.

The aspects of the Pavel and Inglebret (2007) model that did not fit with the findings in the current study were developing positive faculty relationships and the role ignorance and stereotypes had on American Indian students. Other literature consistent with the Pavel and Inglebret (2007) model stress the importance of developing positive faculty relationships as a strategy for success, but most of the participants in the current study were able to succeed without making meaningful relationships with faculty a priority. Having the ability to overcome ignorance and stereotypes while attending college, which the participants in the current study had, is not a characteristic or factor of the American Indian/Alaskan Native student success model.

Implications for practice

The six themes from the current study have several implications for key stakeholders in the education of American Indian students. The relevant stakeholders for the experience of successful tribal college transfer students at PWIs are tribal college administrators, faculty, and students; administrators, faculty, and students at PWIs; American Indian high school students; American Indian communities; and anyone concerned about the success of American Indian college students. The implications from the current study relate to the benefits of attending a tribal college prior to attending a PWI, the transfer process, navigating a PWI, and tips for success while at a PWI.

Implications for tribal college administrators and faculty

The participants in the current study believed that their experiences at their tribal colleges played a significant role in their success at PWIs. As such, the experiences of tribal college transfer students at PWIs have several implications for tribal college administrators and faculty members. The implications for tribal college administrators and faculty includes developing career aspirations, develop relationships with local PWIs, strengthen cultural identity, and responsible time management and consequences.

Developing career aspirations. A successful trait and theme for the participants while attending a PWI was having a strong sense of a goal or dream. It is important for tribal colleges to help their students in career exploration and confirmation prior to transferring to a PWI. Most tribal college students transfer 60 credits or more to a PWI, which means they most often need to declare a major upon arrival at a PWI. When tribal college students do not have a strong commitment to a career upon transferring, their time trying to find an appropriate major may often prolong their time to degree at a PWI.

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Develop relationships with local PWIs. A theme among tribal college transfer students while at a PWI is a tendency to not want to associate with or develop relationships with non-native faculty, staff, and students. Tribal college transfer students did benefit from having a contact person in admissions at a PWI. It is important for tribal colleges to develop relationships with admission recruiters at nearby PWIs and have recruitment nights at the tribal college. The participants in the current study believed having a contact person in admissions made the application and admission process smoother and easier. In addition, all but one participant went farther than 60 miles for college, which suggests that tribal colleges should focus their partnerships and relationships on local PWIs.

Strengthen cultural identity. A contributing factor in the success of the American Indian tribal college transfer students at PWIs was their ability to overcome stereotypes and ignorance by focusing on educating those who are misinformed. In order to accurately educate others about American Indian culture and issues, American Indian students need a strong sense of cultural identity. It is important for tribal colleges to continue to stress and strengthen cultural identity for their students as it helps them understand their culture and in-turn educate others about American Indian culture. Having a strong sense of cultural identity and knowledge is a useful resource for American Indian students prior to transferring, as they are less likely to acquire accurate cultural knowledge and more likely to encounter ignorance and stereotypes while at a PWI.

Responsible time management and consequences. An adjustment the tribal college transfer students had upon transferring to a PWI was the lack of intrusiveness at the PWIs

as compared to tribal colleges. Tribal colleges in wanting to be overly helpful and supportive of their students often coddle them too much to the point that the students struggle when they transfer to a PWI with less intrusive faculty and administrators. Tribal colleges provide nurturing environments that breed success for their students while at the tribal college, but they must do more to prepare their students to be more self-sufficient and determined in order for them to succeed outside of the tribal college. Tribal college should stress the importance of understanding deadline dates, managing time, and the consequences of not meeting deadline dates and managing time to their students.

Implications for PWIs

The participants in the current study described several factors that helped them succeed while at their PWIs. The experiences of tribal college transfer students who transferred to PWIs have several implications for those who attend and work at PWIs. The implications for PWIs includes American Indians in key departments, understanding underlying assumptions, and improved advising for tribal college transfer students.

American Indians in key departments. A theme for the tribal college transfer students was the yearning to interact with American Indian faculty and administrators on campus and to minimally use non-native academic and student services departments at PWIs. While the participants may have succeeded without significant interaction with non-native faculty and staff on campus, they would benefit from positive interaction with a variety of academic and student service departments, such as a writing center, financial aid, and advising to name a few. PWIs could help their American Indian students by having American Indian faculty and staff in other departments or areas other than those designed for diversity or American Indian studies. For example, many of the participants

had issues with financial aid over an Indian tuition waiver, an American Indian staff member in the financial aid office could help reduce some of the tension and misnomers about the waiver for American Indian students. American Indian students at PWIs could benefit from having American Indian staff on campus in key departments other than designed diversity programs.

Understanding underlying assumptions. An issue and challenge for the participants was overcoming stereotypes and ignorance while at their PWIs. Many of the participants encountered various degrees of stereotypes and ignorance while on campus, which resulted in students feeling uncomfortable while in class and in one case not going back to class. It is important for PWIs to educate their faculty, administrators, and students on their underlying assumptions or bias in regards to American Indian people. The main issue for many of the participants was that they encountered people who held tight to stereotypes about American Indian people. PWIs should provide required training for non-native faculty, administrators, and students to help them understand their own underlying assumptions concerning American Indian stereotypes and to provide them accurate information about American Indian people and culture. Faculty, administrators, and students at PWIs who are cognizant of American Indian stereotypes could help American Indian students by creating a more supportive and inclusive learning environment.

Improved advising for tribal college transfer students. A major adjustment for the tribal college transfer students was campus size, specifically classroom size. Tribal college students thrived at the tribal college in part due to small classroom size, as it was not uncommon for tribal college students to take classes with only handful of other

students. While at the PWIs, the participants often found themselves struggling to adjust to class sizes of 100 students. PWIs could help tribal college transfer students by advising them to take smaller classes that would emulate the classes at the tribal college. While taking larger classes may be unavoidable, initially it would help tribal college students adjust by advising them to take more familiar smaller sized classes.

Implications for American Indians thinking about college

The participants in the current study had a variety of unique stories along their successful journey in education. As such, the experiences of tribal college transfer students at PWIs have several implications for American Indians who are considering the possibility of attending a college or university. The implications for American Indians thinking about college includes tribal college to PWI route and follow your dreams.

Tribal college to PWI route. All of the participants believed that going to a tribal college prior to transferring was helpful in their success at a PWIs. While at a tribal college, the participants were able to learn how to be a student and find a career passion in a supportive one-on-one environment. In addition, the participants benefitted culturally from an institution that is predominantly American Indian and whose focus is culturally driven. American Indian high school students who are nervous about attending a larger college or adults who are making a return to academics after a long layover should consider attending a tribal college first. By attending a tribal college before a PWI, American Indian students would have the opportunity to learn in a nurturing environment and have the opportunity to strengthen their cultural identity.

Follow your dreams. Many of the American Indian tribal college transfer students were older in age and had been out of school for many years prior to enrolling into a

tribal college. Furthermore, many of the participants already had several children and were working full-time before they began their academic journey. American Indians who may not have taken the traditional high school straight to four-year institution route should not give up on their academic pursuit. In fact, a key factor in the success of the tribal college participants was that they were determined and made a choice not to be deterred by challenges and obstacles in their attempt to obtain a college degree.

Implications for tribal college students

The participants in the current study had successful experiences in transferring from a tribal college to a PWI. Therefore, the experience of tribal college students transferring to PWIs involves critical information to future tribal college students thinking about transferring. The implications for tribal college students thinking about transferring includes personal goals and dreams, family matters, being a community member of an American Indian community, various levels of engagement with the campus, overcoming ignorance and stereotypes, and adjusting to differences in non-native and native academic worlds.

Personal goals and dreams. A helpful factor in the success of the participants was that they had established personal goals and dreams prior to transferring to their PWIs. Having personal goals allowed the participants to stay focused and be efficient in their class schedules while at their PWIs. American Indian tribal college students who are thinking about transferring to a PWI should start thinking about their career choice and goals while at the tribal college and long before they begin the transfer process. In addition, by having a career choice chosen, it would help tribal college students identify the necessary prerequisites they need to take before they arrive at a PWI.

Family matters. The most important aspect of the participants' experiences at a PWI involved their families. All the decisions the participants made in relation to their collegiate experience were made with their family in mind and with family approval. A tribal college student thinking about transferring to a PWI should research the amount of time college consumes and be sure that their family understands the time commitment and gives their approval and support. Current tribal college students should use their family as a resource and inspiration to succeed at a PWI. If a tribal college student does not have his/her family's support and approval while attending a PWI it may become a major barrier and challenge to their success.

Being a community member of an American Indian Community. The American Indian community on the reservation played a significant role for many of the participants while at a PWI. All but one participant lived on the reservation while attending a PWI, and they all spoke of the importance and influence of American Indian cultural values that were learned from American Indian communities. When thinking about attending a PWI, current tribal college students need to evaluate the importance of their reservation community to them and whether or not they would consider leaving the reservation to attend a PWI. It should be noted, current tribal college student thinking about transferring should know that they do not have to leave the reservation in order to be successful at a PWI. Moreover, by staying on the reservation while attending a PWI, an American Indian student need not have to wait until graduation at a PWI to give back to their community as they could do so while attending a PWI. The participants in the current study found being a member of their reservation community while attending a PWI to be a resource and vital component to their academic success.

Various levels of engagement with the campus. Many of the participants in the current study wanted to interact with the American Indian community on campus. However, while at a PWI it will become necessary to interact with the non-native community at a PWI. Therefore, it is important for current tribal college students who are thinking about transferring to find a native or non-native contact person at the PWI and develop a relationship with him or her. While some of the responsibility of providing resources for students belongs to the PWIs, many of the participants in the current study mentioned the importance of being assertive in getting the help they needed. Having a contact person on campus will help future tribal college transfer students understand policy procedures and utilize important departments on campus, such as financial aid and academic advising. Tribal college transfer students, by having a resource person at their PWI, will be able to focus on their coursework rather than hassling with various department staff to understand institutional policies.

Overcoming ignorance and stereotypes. Many of the participants encountered ignorance and stereotypes while at their PWIs. The participants countered ignorance and stereotypes by becoming educators and purveyors of truth about American Indian people and culture to those who are misinformed. Current tribal college students should be aware that they will most likely encounter ignorance and stereotypes at a PWI, but rather than view it as a negative they should perceive it as an opportunity to dispel ignorance and misinformation regarding American Indians. By educating those who are misinformed, tribal college transfer students can do their part in reducing the number of people on campus who hold inaccurate and stereotypical information concerning American Indians. Mostly, it is important for tribal college students to find a healthy and productive way to

overcome ignorance and stereotypes so that it does not deter them from achieving academic success at a PWI.

Adjusting to differences in non-native and native academic worlds. All of the participants experienced an adjustment period when transferring from a tribal college to a PWI. The major transition adjustment had to do with the overall size of the PWI, which meant an inability to be attentive to the individual needs of all their students. Current tribal college students should be prepared for a larger campus by visiting their chosen PWI frequently, preferably before transferring. Current tribal college students should sit in on a large lecture class and seek out the opportunity to converse with current PWI students who transferred from a tribal college. Tribal college students who visit their PWI often before transferring would be less likely to be in shock of the differences in size.

Another key trait that many of the participants in the current study found useful while at their PWIs was to be more assertive. Whether it was pestering the financial aid office until they answered their questions or met their needs or finding a native support group, the participants all exhibited moments of assertiveness. At the tribal college, there is less of a need to be assertive due to the tribal college being very small, more intrusive, and student oriented. Current tribal college students will find that their PWIs will be less coddling than the tribal college and that they will be responsible for meeting deadlines and knowing how to work the college system. Current tribal college students who plan on transferring to a PWI must be prepared to be more assertive and self-sufficient at the their PWI.

Implications for American Indian communities

The participants in the current study all came from a tribal community and many of them continued to live on their reservations. The experiences of tribal college transfer students at PWIs include relevant information for American Indian communities. The implications for an American Indian community includes communicating workforce needs to American Indian students and be aware of what happens at PWIs.

Communicating workforce needs to American Indian students. A common theme for all of the participants was a desire to work for an American Indian community or organization upon graduating. In the current study many of the participants were already working for their tribal nations while attending their PWIs. It is important for American Indian communities who often want American Indian employees to recruit and find a place for American Indian graduates of a PWI. A common statement from the participants of the current study was that they wanted to work for native communities but if they could not find a job in their field they would go elsewhere. American Indian communities could help connect American Indian students with jobs on the reservation by offering internships and communicating their workforce needs to tribal college student prior to their transferring to a PWI. American Indian communities want American Indian employees and American Indian students want to work for American Indian communities; the next step is to make arrangements and programs that will ensure that both parties meet their goals.

Be aware of what happens at PWIs. Many of the participants commented on the help they received from various members of the community with issues or concerns they were having while at their PWIs. For instance, some participants needed emergency

financial assistance and others needed help dealing with Indian tuition waiver procedures. American Indian communities could help American Indian students succeed by being aware of the issues and concerns that they face at local PWIs. American Indian communities should work with PWIs to develop a taskforce committee at the PWI with representation from American Indian tribal nations. The task force could work with students on making the transition and experience at a PWI smoother for American Indian students, especially students from the reservation. American Indian communities taking a role in what happens at PWI would help relieve some of the burden placed upon American Indian students to be educators and messengers of truth concerning American Indian issues, knowledge, and culture. This may not be possible with all PWIs, but many tribal reservations have relationships with nearby PWIs. American Indian communities could request a special American Indian committee at their nearby PWI, which would include tribal council members from their reservation.

Delimitations

The current study focused on the experiences of eight American Indian tribal college transfer students who persisted and succeeded at PWIs. The institutions in the study consisted of four PWIs located in the same state in the Midwest. There are several delimitations to the current study, which were the Midwest location, unique state and tribal program, and tribal colleges near a variety of PWIs.

The study is limited specifically to the experience of American Indian tribal college students in the current study and generally to tribal college transfer students to a PWI in the Midwest. In particular, the tribal nations in the Midwest are primarily Anishinabek (Odawa, Ojibwe, and Pottawatami) and the students who attend tribal

colleges in the Midwest are for the most part Anishinabek as well. There are hundreds of American Indian tribal nations in the United States, while there are many similarities, there are also many differences that should not be dismissed. That is, the experience and native culture of American Indian students in the plains or southwest would not necessarily be the same as those from the Midwest.

Furthermore, the State in which the study takes place has a unique State/tribal agreement/treaty, which allows American Indian students in the State to be exempt from tuition at public universities and colleges. The experience of tribal college students at PWIs with a tuition waiver may be significantly different than those who attend a PWI without a tuition waiver, as tuition is often thousands of dollars more at PWIs than at tribal colleges. The current study involves the experiences of tribal college students at PWIs who receive an Indian tuition waiver.

The current study is limited to tribal colleges on reservations that are near a variety of PWIs. For many tribal colleges out west, the nearest PWI is often hundreds of miles away from the reservation, which would require American Indian tribal college students to leave their reservations. The participants in the current study often had the option of attending several PWIs only a few miles away from their reservations, which meant they did not have to leave their homes to pursue an education. Having to pick up and leave behind the support and comforts of the reservation, which the participants in the current study did not have to do, may alter the experience of tribal college students attending a PWI.

Recommendations for future research

The current study was focused on the experience of tribal college transfer students at PWIs in the Midwest. The data collected in the current study represents a small sample of tribal college transfer students and more research is needed to continue to understand the experiences of tribal college transfer students at PWIs. I offer the following four recommendations for future research involving American Indian tribal college transfer students to PWIs and American Indian students in general.

First, research studies are needed, that track the journey of tribal college transfer students at PWIs over a period of years to determine how many are succeeding and persisting. Currently there are no reliable numbers on those who succeed and fail after transferring from a tribal college to a PVI. Tribal colleges only track those who transfer to four-year institutions, but not whether they succeed or fail upon transferring. Furthermore, a national study that explores the major challenges and success strategies of tribal college transfer students who transferred to PWIs would be very useful to tribal colleges, PWIs, and policymakers.

Second, an examination of the experiences of other tribal colleges in states without an Indian tuition waiver is needed. The experience of attending a PVI in a state with an Indian tuition waiver may provide different experiences at PWIs for tribal college students than those who attend a PVI without an Indian tuition waiver. In the current study, none of the participants had to pay for their education as they all received an Indian tuition waiver and scholarships from their tribal nations. In addition to the Indian tuition waiver, more research is needed to determine if other tribal nations give their students scholarships for higher education. A useful research for policymakers would be

one that could determine the role and impact that an Indian tuition waiver and tribal scholarships have or do not have on the success of American Indian students in general and tribal college transfer students.

Third, more research is needed on the experiences of American Indian students in the Midwest and other regions as a majority of the current research focuses on American Indians of the Southwest and Great Plains. Exploring American Indian students in other regions allows for the opportunity to examine the differences of experiences of these students at colleges and universities. A distinction between a majority of Southwest and Great Plains reservations and reservations from other regions is the distance between reservation land and other major cities and institutions of higher education. In the current study, the students from tribal colleges in the Midwest had a variety of options for higher education near their reservations, whereas American Indians in the Southwest and Great Plains have to travel long distances to attend a university or college. Since American Indians exist in locations other than the Southwest and Great Plains, more research should be conducted on American Indian students in other locations.

Lastly, an examination on the differences and similarities of American Indian students from the reservation or those who have spent a significant amount of time on the reservation in comparison to those from urban and rural areas is needed. Research that explores the advantages and disadvantages of being from a reservation or spending a significant amount of time on a reservation at a PWI compared to those who have spent a majority of their life in a non-native environment would provide valuable data on the similarities and differences those students have in the support they need and challenges they have while attending PWIs. For example, some American Indian students may have

more cultural knowledge than others, some may not have known they were American Indian until later in their life, some may be Christian, some may be traditional. Research focused on the different experiences and challenges that American Indian students have will help educators understand that American Indian students are a diverse group of people.

Recommendations for theory

Pavel and Inglebret's (2007) American Indian/Alaskan Native student success model served as a useful framework for understanding the data in the current study. However, there were findings in the current study that did not fit or align with the Pavel and Inglebret (2007) model. I offer three recommendations for theory involving American Indian students in higher education and specifically the American Indian/Alaskan Native student success model. In addition I offer a recommendation for tribal critical race theory.

First, the Pavel and Inglebret (2007) model does not account for ignorance and stereotypes toward American Indians in their success model, but the participants in the current study cited overcoming ignorance and stereotypes as a factor in their success at PWIs. Encounters with ignorance and stereotypes were an issue and challenge for many of the participants in the current study and an issue that is cited in the literature involving the experiences of American Indian students in education. The Pavel and Inglebret (2007) model should also include a section on the personal attributes needed by American Indian students in order to overcome ignorance and stereotypes while attending college.

Second, the Pavel and Inglebret (2007) model and literature on American Indian student success stresses the importance of American Indian students developing positive

and meaningful relationships with faculty members at colleges and universities.

However, the participants in the current study succeeded without developing positive relationships with faculty. Although more research is needed to determine if other American Indian tribal college transfer students believe that developing positive faculty relationships is a non-factor in American Indian student success, it is worth considering and re-thinking the idea that developing positive faculty relationships is an important factor in American Indian student success.

Third, the Pavel and Inglebret (2007) model and literature on American Indian student success cite family as a contributing factor in American Indian student success. Although the factor of family in the current study was consistent with Pavel and Inglebret (2007), the role of family for my participants was much more central to their success than what is proposed in Pavel and Inglebret (2007). For the participants in the current study, everything about their success, determination, and goals for college were tied to and revolved around family. I recommend that the Pavel and Inglebret (2007) model place family at the center of their American Indian/Alaskan Native student success model to reflect the critical nature, support, and influence that family has on American Indian students.

Lastly, tribal critical race theory (Brayboy, 2005) is a theoretical lens that views American Indians as a political group dealing with issues of colonization and assimilation while striving for sovereignty, self-determination, and valuing tribal knowledge. The Indigenous methodology used in the current study parallels tribal critical race theory as a theoretical lens to understand the unique experience of American Indian students in higher education. While tribal critical race theory focuses heavily on colonization and

assimilation, the Indigenous methodology approach used in the current study emphasizes positive American Indian success stories. I recommend that social scientists using tribal critical race theory include a lens that highlights American Indians moving forward towards a bright future through self-determination rather than a group of people muddling through a stressful political past of colonization and assimilation.

Summary

The current study explored the experiences of successful American Indian tribal college students who transferred to four-year PWIs. The participants attended tribal colleges and PWIs from the same state located in the Midwest. The research design for the current study was a qualitative study using an Indigenous methodology. Multiple interviews with eight students was conducted over a period of four months and resulted in six themes, which were: personal goals and dreams; family matters; being a community member of an American Indian community; various levels of engagement with the campus; overcoming ignorance and stereotypes; and adjusting to differences in non-native and native academic worlds.

The themes from the current study have implications for tribal college faculty, administrators and current students, American Indian communities, and faculty and administrators at four-year PWIs. While the study provided a glimpse of the experience of tribal college transfer students at four-year PWIs, it was not all-inclusive and future studies should be developed. American Indian students continue to struggle in college and the current study provided a peek at the experience of successful American Indian students at PWIs.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ROUND 1

1. "Would you share with me your story about the decision to attend a tribal college and your decision to transfer to a four-year PWI?"

Prompts (Used only when needed)

1. What were the most appealing aspects of attending a tribal college?
 2. What were the positives and negatives of your tribal college experience?
 3. What factors or people influenced your decision to transfer to a four-year PWI?
 4. When did you decide that you were going to transfer to a four-year PWI?
 5. Did you have any concerns or hesitation about transferring to a four-year PWI?
 6. What did you know about transferring to a four-year PWI?
 7. What colleges and universities did you consider transferring to and why?
2. "Would you to share with me your story concerning the transfer process, such as, the application process, transferring credits, and adjustment to a new institution?"

Prompts

1. Did all of your credits transfer? If not, did losing credits impact your experience at a PWI?
 2. Did the PWI have an orientation program for transfer students? If so, was it helpful?
 3. What were three significant challenges or obstacles that you faced in the transfer process?
 4. What skills, knowledge from your tribal college experience helped prepare you for the four-year PWI?
 5. What were the most significant adjustments that you had to make your first semester?
 6. Were you academically prepared for the first semester challenges presented by the four-year PWI? Socially prepared?
 7. What was your G.P.A. the first semester? How many credits did you take?
3. "Would you share with me your experience at a PWI?"

Prompts

1. Did you commute or live on-campus at your four-year PWI? How has commuting or living on-campus impacted your experience at a PWI?
2. What type of interaction did you have with faculty, staff, and students at the four-year PWI? American Indian faculty, staff, and students?
3. Did you work while at the four-year PWI? How did that impact your experience?
4. How did you perceive the racial climate at your four-year PWI? How were American Indians perceived on campus and in the classroom? Did you feel that the campus was welcoming to Students of Color? How did this impact your experience?
5. What were the most significant highlights (positive and negative) of your experience at the four-year PWI? Did you enjoy your experience at the four-year PWI? Would you recommend the tribal college to four-year PWI route to others? How has your chosen route (TRIBAL COLLEGE-PWI) helped and challenged you?
6. What institutional departments and services did you find most useful? And least helpful? Did you feel like you were a part of the college campus? How so or why not?

7. Were you able to find access to American Indian culture and people at the four-year PWI? Was this important to your experience at the four-year PWI?
4. "Would you share with me the factors that you believe helped you succeed and persist at a four-year PWI?"

Prompts

1. What strategies helped you succeed at the four-year PWI?
 2. What helped in you succeed in the classroom? Outside the classroom?
 3. Did you have a support system or person (family, faculty, friends, etc) that helped you along your journey to success at the four-year PWI? How did they help?
 4. Were there times when you felt like dropping out or giving up on college? If yes, what helped you through these doubts?
 5. What were the most significant barriers to your success at the four-year PWI?
 6. Do you feel that your education aligns with American Indian cultural values? If yes, how so?
 7. What lessons did you learn that you would like to share with other American Indian students at PWIs? For future tribal college transfer students?
5. Concluding thoughts- "Would you like to share anything else that you feel is important to know about how you persisted and succeeded at a four-year PWI?"

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ROUND 2

Recap the highlights of the first interview

1. Is there anything new you would like to add or clarify?

2. Theme 1 Attending College with a Purpose

American Indian tribal college transfer students are driven by a life goal, which is to earn a degree for a specific career. Meaning American Indian students are only focused on completing their classes, having minimum contact with non-native faculty and staff, and using academic services only when necessary.

Is there anything you disagree with or concerns you with this theme? Do you feel this theme is relevant to your experience and success at the four-year PWI? Is there anything you would like to add or expand upon on this theme?

3. Theme 2 Family first and family support

American Indian tribal college transfer students are driven to succeed for their family and succeed because of family support. Meaning American Indian students want to use their degree to support their family, need their family to support their degree aspirations, and family needs come before education.

Is there anything you disagree with or concerns you with this theme? Do you feel this theme is relevant to your experience and success at the four-year PWI? Is there anything you would like to add or expand upon on this theme?

4. Theme 3 Being a part of an American Indian community on the Rez

American Indian tribal college transfer students have a deeply rooted connection to their American Indian communities and reservations. Meaning American Indian students intend on working for their tribal nation or another tribal community, are motivated by the support of their communities, and feel it is important to be a role model for the community.

Is there anything you disagree with or concerns you with this theme? Do you feel this theme is relevant to your experience and success at the four-year PWI? Is there anything you would like to add or expand upon on this theme?

5. Theme 4 Handling American Indian stereotypes and racism

American Indian tribal college transfer students must be cognizant of the probability that they will encounter stereotypes and racism while at a four-year PWI. Meaning American Indian students believe that most people with stereotype or racist ideas are just misinformed and that it is the responsibility of American Indian students to educate them. Also, American Indian students can be discouraged and impacted by stereotypes and racism in the classroom and campus.

Is there anything you disagree with or concerns you with this theme? Do you feel this theme is relevant to your experience and success at the four-year PWI? Is there anything you would like to add or expand upon on this theme?

6. Theme 5 The lone Indian in need of a native community while at PWI

American Indian tribal college transfer students have the need to see and interact with other American Indian people and students. Meaning American Indian students will often be the only American Indian in the classroom and walking around campus creating

a sense on loneliness. Having other American Indian students around creates a sense of camaraderie.

Is there anything you disagree with or concerns you with this theme? Do you feel this theme is relevant to your experience and success at the four-year PWI? Is there anything you would like to add or expand upon on this theme?

7. Theme 6 Adjusting to differences in native and non-native academic worlds

American Indian tribal college transfer students must adjust to the difference in culture between the tribal college and the four-year PWI. Meaning American Indian students must adjust to time management, a less intrusive four-year institution, and differences in size and number of students.

Is there anything you disagree with or concerns you with this theme? Do you feel this theme is relevant to your experience and success at the four-year PWI? Is there anything you would like to add or expand upon on this theme?

8. Possible MITW and other financial support from their tribal nations.

American Indian tribal college transfer students would not have transferred without the ITW and/or scholarships from their tribal nations or other institution.

Is there anything you disagree with or concerns you with this theme? Do you feel this theme is relevant to your experience and success at the four-year PWI? Is there anything you would like to add or expand upon on this theme?

APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Name _____

Age _____

Tribal Affiliation _____

Married or Single _____

Number of Children and ages _____

Major at Tribal College _____

G.P.A. at Tribal College _____

Major at PWI _____

G.P.A. at PWI _____

G.P.A. in High School _____

Number of Credits Transferred to PWI? _____

Number of credits needed to graduate? _____

Do you receive financial aid? If yes what type? _____

Do you work while attending school? How many hours? _____

How far do you live from campus? _____

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent Form

Project Title:

Tribal College Transfer student success at four-year predominantly White institutions.

Project Summary:

The current study on tribal college transfer students is a research project. Through the use of multiple interviews and a questionnaire, this study will seek to understand the meaning of the tribal college transfer student experience at a predominantly White institution. You are invited to share your story as a transfer student at a four-year predominantly White institution, which will help provide data to create an understanding of the experience and success of tribal college transfer students at four-year predominantly White institutions.

Estimate of Subject's Time:

Interviews will take approximately 60 to 90 minutes for the first interview and 30 to 60 minutes for a second follow-up interview. Questionnaire will take 5-10 minutes.

Voluntary Participation:

Please note that you must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate at any time, may refuse to answer certain questions and may discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Your interview will be audio-taped and will be turned off at any time you feel uncomfortable. Please check one of the following options:

☐ I agree to be audio-taped ☐ I do not agree to be audio-taped

Confidentiality and Anonymity:

Your privacy in this study will be protected to the maximum extent allowed by law. All data will be treated in a confidential manner and no student will be identified by name in the study (pseudonyms will be used). Data for the current study will be stored in a locked cabinet by the researcher for a period of 3 years. Michigan State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) will have access to the data.

Risks and Benefits:

There are no known risks associated with this study. While you may not benefit directly from this study, your participation will contribute to the understanding of tribal college transfer student experience at four-year predominantly White institutions.

Payment:

You will receive a \$25.00 gift certificate to a restaurant or book store of your choice as compensation for your participation in this study. Payment will be given following the 2nd follow-up interview.

Contact Person(s) and Questions Regarding this Study:

If you have any concerns or questions about this research study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or if you believe you have been harmed because of the research, please contact the researcher, Matthew Makomenaw by regular mail: 411 Erickson Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824, by email: vanalst1@msu.edu, by phone: (989) 400-6758. Faculty Advisor - Dr. Matthew Wawrzynski, by regular mail: 426 Erickson Hall East Lansing MI 48824-1034, by email: mwawrzyn@msu.edu or, by phone (517)-355-6617.

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 202 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

Your signature below indicates your voluntary participation in this study.

Participant Signature

Date

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