

Exploring Achievement: Factors Affecting Native American College Student
Success

By:

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About the Author

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The idea for this study stemmed from Ms. Crosby's tie to the Native American community. Scholarship funding from the Comanche Nation made both her undergraduate and graduate studies possible and she desired to give something back. It is her hope that this research will help tribal and institutional offices understand the factors that will close the graduation gap between Native Americans and other college student groups.

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to explore factors that affect Native American student success in post-secondary education. The literature suggests that five factors affect Native American college students' ability to graduate: 1) previous academic performance; 2) financial aid; 3) familial support; 4) feeling connected; and 5) campus involvement. **Methods:** Semi-structured phone interviews with Native American college graduates were conducted to ascertain the factors they believe affected their college success. Students were asked to list the factors they believe affected their success and then asked questions based on the working-hypotheses developed through the literature. **Findings:** This research found that each of the factors predicted by the literature were supported by information collected from the interviews, although at varying levels. Familial support and financial aid were found to be the most important factors in student success while high school GPA and involvement in a first-year group were found to have the least impact.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Introduction

In the fall of 2008 approximately 19.1 million people in the United States were enrolled in a degree-granting institution. Native Americans account for approximately 1% of the total university student population (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). While this statistic is proportionate to the general population of the United States, a significant disparity appears when graduation rates are examined. On average, 57.5% of students who entered a four-year institution of higher education in the United States in the year 2000 graduated within six years. Only 40.2% of Native American students who entered four-year institutions in that same year graduated within six years; a 17.3% difference from the general population (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

The benefits of obtaining a bachelor's degree are not just limited to the private sector; the economic and social benefits can also be seen in the public sector. Not only do college graduates have greater lifetime earnings and professional mobility than individuals without a degree, college graduates also have a greater life expectancy and their offspring experience a better quality of life than non-college graduates (IHEP 1998). In addition to these private benefits, society at large benefits from having an increased number of college graduates through increased tax revenues, greater productivity, and appreciation of diversity (IHEP 1998). Table 1.1 lists numerous other economic and social benefits resulting from a college degree.

Table 1.1: Public and Private Benefits Resulting from Higher Education

	Public	Private
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased Tax Revenues • Greater Productivity • Increased Consumption • Increased Workforce Flexibility • Decreased Reliance on Government Financial Support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher Salaries and Benefits • Employment • Higher Savings Levels • Improved Working Conditions • Personal/Professional Mobility
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced Crime Rates • Increased Charitable Giving/Community Service • Increased Quality of Civic Life • Social Cohesion/Appreciation of Diversity • Improved Ability to Adapt and Use Technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved Health/Life Expectancy • Improved Quality of Life for Offspring • Better Consumer Decision Making • Increased Personal Status • More Hobbies and Leisure Activities

Source: Institute for Higher Education Policy 1998.

As Lin, LaCounte, and Eder point out, “American Indians have achieved the lowest educational levels among all racial minorities” (1988, 8). Based on this observation, and taking benefits resulting from obtaining a college degree into account, the fact that problems such as unemployment, poverty, alcoholism, and diabetes have plagued the Native American population comes as no surprise. Combating the problems facing this population has not been and will not be an easy road; nor does it affect just Native Americans. American citizens that do not identify as Indian are affected by Native unemployment and poor health because they both increase the burden on all taxpayers, not just Natives. According to Harrington and Hunt, more Native Americans with college degrees would close the socioeconomic gap and “serve as a principle driver for the enhancement of American Indian communities” (2010, 1).

While there may not be one single answer to resolving the problems facing Native Americans, finding ways to increase the number of college graduates within the population would be a step in the right direction. Specifically, understanding factors that affect Native

American college student persistence to graduation will inform university and tribal student support programs as well as Native American students themselves. Better support programs and better informed and prepared students are imperative to reducing the Native American college graduation gap and improving the welfare of the Native American population as a whole.

Although closing the graduation gap will require taking steps forward, it is necessary to look back on the steps that have been taken to bring Native American higher education to its current state. Understanding where this population has been will aid in helping it progress toward equaling the achievements attained by other racial and ethnic groups in the United States.

Native Americans in Higher Education

The history of higher education among Native Americans provides a useful backdrop within which to evaluate the current state of Native Americans in higher education. According to Carney “the history of Native American higher education is seen as comprising three eras: The colonial period, featuring several efforts at Indian missions in the colonial colleges; the federal period, when Native American higher education was largely ignored except for sporadic (and frequently interrupted) tribal and private efforts; and the self-determination period, highlighted by the recent founding of tribally controlled colleges” (1999, xi). This chapter will consider the history of Native Americans in higher education based on Carney’s interpretation of the periods as well as the state of Native Americans in higher education today.

Colonial Period (1492-1778)

While colonists certainly attached importance to college education for Native Americans, it was primarily to be a European education (Carney 1999, 19). Since the European conquerors saw themselves as the superior population, education on European terms mainly meant attempts

to replace Native culture and religion with European culture and religion. Because of this, conversion to Christianity was the primary focus of these early education efforts (Carney 1999, 19).

During the colonial period, the Spanish supported the opening of several institutions to serve as real colleges for the Native population (Carney 1999, 19). For example, Santa Cruz Tlaltelolco University was opened in 1536 to serve Aztec students. Unfortunately for the Natives, Spanish fears of the Indians becoming their equals led Europeans to withdraw their support of education that might level the playing field and the focus shifted from a more broadly-based education to simple religious instruction (Carney 1999, 20). This trend continued throughout the colonial period in the United States and well into the post-revolutionary period (Carney 1999, 20).

In the early seventeenth century, as English settlements grew, Native education became a focus of British colonists (Carney 1999, 21). Henrico College would have been the first college founded for Indians, and the first college in the United States, and was still in its planning phase when a chieftain led a raid against the Jamestown colonists, killing 37 and effectively putting a stop to support of Indian higher education (Carney 1999, 21). During the next century three of the United States' oldest universities—Harvard, William & Mary, and Dartmouth—were founded, with specific mention of the education of Native Americans in their charters (Carney 1999, 1). Still, with a combined total of 240 academic years before the Revolutionary War, these three institutions, according to official records, enrolled only forty-seven Indian students and graduated only four (Carney 1999, 2). In fact, “virtually every instance of professed devotion to Indian higher education by the colleges during the colonial period was actually an exercise in fund raising or in access to funds requiring an Indian mission” (Carney 1999, 3).

Federal Period (1778-1934)

The status of Native Americans in higher education was to get much worse before it would get better. In fact, “during the entire federal period the government maintained no higher education institutions for Native Americans” (Carney 1999, 50) even though the government had a “trust responsibility”, arising out of promises made in more than 100 treaties, to provide educational services and facilities to Native Americans in exchange for land (Deyhle & Swisher 1997, 114). With the end of the Revolutionary War, Native American education seems to have been insignificant in the minds of policymakers when compared to building a new government and achieving Manifest Destiny.

As the new country moved into the nineteenth century, academies, not colleges or universities, proved to be the only noteworthy additions to higher education institutions serving Native Americans (Carney 1999, 58). Academies were essentially missionary or for-profit schools that did not carry the title of “university” or “college.” Of these academies, “the more significant ones did elect to offer a classical higher education curriculum and were responsible for educating many subsequently influential Native American leaders” (Carney 1999, 58). While academies were a step in the right direction, they did not result in greater Native American access to higher education. Most educational opportunities available to Native Americans focused not on academic pursuits, but rather on low level agricultural, mechanical, and domestic training (Carney 1999, 49).

Despite this nominal attention to Native schooling, there were still federal policymakers who “went so far as to question the advisability of even such a minimal level of...education” for Native Americans (Carney 1999, 51). In 1844, Secretary of War William Wilkins argued against sending even the few enrolled Native students to college as he worried that “a few too highly

educated may succumb to selfish acquisition and oppression of the uneducated” (Carney 1999, 51). Commissioner of Indian Affairs, William Medill, followed a different line of reasoning in 1847 to arrive at Wilkins’ same conclusion. He argued that higher education of Native Americans had produced “excessively limited results” and therefore funds should be shifted to lower-level education programs (Carney 1999, 51).

Although this prejudice against Native American universities and the idea of increasing Native American college attendance existed, some Native students still managed to enroll in colleges and universities. While the majority of advanced academic institutions catered to White students, there were two, Bacone College, established in 1880 in Muskogee, Oklahoma, and Pembroke State University, established in 1887 in Pembroke, North Carolina, which retained cultural ties and special programs for Native Americans (Carney 1999, 82). Neither of these institutions received federal support. In brief, during this period, the federal government mostly ignored its “assumed responsibility for the education of Native Americans” (Carney 1999, 94).

Self-Determination Period (1934-Present)

The beginning of the twentieth century saw many Native Americans in their worst state since 1492 and the arrival of Columbus and European diseases (Carney 1999, 95). The lack of higher education geared toward Native Americans relegated members of this population to the lowest rungs of society (Carney 1999, 49), primarily because education programs provided by the federal government “ [were] geared to deny the Indian culture and accomplish little else” leaving them little or under-educated (Carney 1999, 95). Until now, the “Indian problem” could be dealt with by removing the Native population to areas away from White society. However, with the realization of Manifest Destiny, Indians could no longer be relocated and ignored,

forcing the federal government to explore ways to integrate this population into society. One way in which the government did this during the 20th century was by working toward fulfilling their “trust responsibility” regarding Native education.

The first step forward came in 1921 when the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) assumed some responsibility for Native American higher education (Carney 1999, 95) through authorized grants for Native college students. Publication of the Meriam Report by the Institute for Government Research in February 1928 brought the plight of the Indian even more attention. The report, officially titled “The Problem of the Indian Administration”, did not discuss post-secondary education at length, but did state that “higher education should be encouraged, not just allowed” (Carney 1999, 101). This shows a monumental shift away from the general belief that Native higher education was unnecessary and even undesirable. In response to the Meriam report and growing pressures, Congress passed the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, guaranteeing federal provision of educational services through the BIA as well as authorizing \$250,000 in college loan funding for Native American students. The impact this legislation had on Native higher education can be seen in two surveys conducted by the BIA in 1932 and 1935. The population of Native Americans enrolled in college in the United States in 1932 numbered 385; by 1935 there were 515 Native Americans enrolled in college. While the addition of 130 students may not seem significant, this constituted a 34% increase in just three years (Wright & Tierney 1991, 17).

Further progress could be seen through the 1940s. Native American attendance at universities and colleges across the nation increased substantially (Carney 1999, 96) as World War II veterans took advantage of the GI Bill education benefits and the BIA established a scholarship fund. Some tribes also took it upon themselves to support college students through

the establishment of scholarship funds (Carney 1999, 103). Add it all up and by the late 1950s approximately 2,000 Native Americans were attending college (Wright & Tierney 1991, 17). But this growth did not come without challenges. Although more Native Americans were attending college than ever before, by 1961 only six more college graduates existed in the U.S. than the 52 the BIA survey had discovered in 1932. Couple the BIA's resistance to becoming involved in higher education beyond funding (it still placed its focus predominantly on adult vocational programs) with Congress cutting 1957 funding for tuition grants to less than 1/3 of 1934 levels (Carney 1999, 105) and it would seem like a backslide was inevitable.

But that backslide did not come; instead, higher education for Native Americans saw improvements through the 1960s and beyond. The shift to a focus on self-determination, "the actual taking of control of aspects of Indian life previously in the hands of the federal government" (Carney 1999, 106), can be credited for those improvements. Championed by BIA Commissioner Robert Bennett, named as the first Indian to head the bureau in a century in 1966, self-determination brought the issue of Native higher education out of the background and firmly into the foreground (Carney 1999, 106). In fact, the founding of the Navajo Community College in 1968 is considered by many to be the true beginning of Native American self-determination in higher education as it represents the "first college controlled and directed by Indians" (Carney 1999, 106) and led the way for the 35 additional Tribal Colleges and Universities in existence today (Figure 1.1). The funding provided by the Higher Education and Tribally Controlled Community College Acts of 1978 and the founding of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium and the American Indian College Fund in 1973 and 1989, respectively, were also key factors in the ability of these institutions and their students to thrive. Finally, Indians could claim control of their own education and thus their own destiny.

Figure 1.1: Tribal Colleges and Universities



Native American Higher Education Attainment and Success

The ultimate measure of higher education success is graduation. Unfortunately, college graduation rates for Native Americans still lag far behind other groups even with the establishment of Native-friendly colleges and programs. In 2007, only 8.6% of Native Americans age 25 or above held a four-year college degree compared with 20.7% of Whites. When compared with other minority group attainment in that same year, Native Americans still come in last. In the next lowest attaining population, Hispanics age 25 or over, 9.4% held a

college degree (U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2007).

These figures are especially concerning when statistics show that high school graduation rates for Native Americans are comparable to other groups. In fact, the Native American population leapfrogs the Hispanic population in this category with 80.3% of Native students graduating from high school versus 60.3% of Hispanic students. (U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2007.) This suggests that Native Americans can and do succeed at the high school level, but they meet barriers when attempting to attain a degree at the collegiate level. The path to college graduation is influenced by many different factors on both the personal and the interpersonal level. One way to gain insight into how to increase the number of Native American college students that graduate is to ask Native Americans who already hold higher education degrees. Those who do reach graduation are a unique subgroup of the Native population and much can be learned from their experiences, especially when they are asked to respond to what education experts think accounts for their success.

Though “in the modern era self-determination means the Indian community is now empowered to determine its own educational objectives and direction,” (Carney 1999, 142) this does not mean that administrators and educators can return to the practice of neglecting Native American college students. Native students, like students of other backgrounds, require support and encouragement to succeed in their journey to obtain a college degree. Creating an expectation of academic excellence within their communities can help address “a long-standing deficiency of educational services [that] has caused some consistent and difficult problems within the Native American college student population,” (Carney 1999, 146) but support

programs will also be necessary. Because of this, it is important that administrators and educators understand the factors that affect Native American college student success so that appropriate programs can be developed.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this research is to explore factors that affect Native American student success in post-secondary education. Educators and administrators need to understand what predicts academic success, especially for those students that are part of an “extreme minority” where different factors might account for that success. As one example of an “extreme minority,” Native American college students, and the factors affecting their academic success, merit further study. This research strives to discover the factors that affect academic achievement for Native American college students so that plans and programs can be developed to help them succeed at the post-secondary level¹ and beyond.

¹ For additional Texas State University Applied Research Projects on the topic of higher education see Amaya (2010; Luedtke (1999); McCauley (2007); and Cordero (2008).

Chapter 2 Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to review the scholarly literature that focuses on Native American college students' academic success. This chapter first provides key definitions and then reviews five factors academic experts believe influence Native American college student achievement. These factors include: (1) previous academic performance; (2) financial aid; (3) familial support; (4) feeling connected; and (5) campus involvement. A conceptual framework consisting of five working hypotheses is developed from the literature to explore Native American college students' academic success.

Definitions Pertinent to the Research

The terms "Native American" and "academic achievement" merit special attention in this chapter because their precise meanings are subject to considerable debate. Much like the term "Caucasian" can refer to any number of different groups of people, "Native American" can refer to people of many different tribes with many different blood degrees and "academic achievement" can mean anything from a high GPA to the level of education attained. Given this, defining these terms is important in directing the focus of the research.

Native American

Most ethnic groups have a self-identity, which, according to Frisch, can be based on the common territory, traditions, values, and interests the members of the group share (1970, 208). This tendency to self-identify can be seen in the Native American population, whose members base their identity on factors such as location, family history, and tribal allegiance. However,

ethnic identity is more complicated for Native Americans than for many other ethnic groups because the issue of who is or is not Native American rests not just with the population itself but also with the federal government. This joint responsibility has resulted in over 30 definitions based on “blood quantum, federal tribal recognition, residence, descent, self-identification, and miscellaneous other factors” (McClain & Stewart 2010, 7).

One specific definition provided by the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs defines a Native American as “someone who has blood degree from and is recognized as such by a federally recognized tribe or village (as an enrolled tribal member) and/or the United States.” This same population is often also referred to as American Indians or just Indians. Carney (1999, 9) points out that “use of such a common term or terms nevertheless acknowledges a wide range of differences among tribes and individual people;” meaning that this population is not homogenous but a varied and vibrant group.

For the purposes of this research, the definition of the Native population provided by the BIA will serve as the standard for classification as a Native American. While this may limit the study, exploratory research is meant to be preliminary and further expansion of the definition may take place in subsequent inquiries.

Academic Achievement

Academic achievement can mean a number of things based on the situation in which it is being discussed. Often, grade point average (GPA) is the focus when academic achievement is researched. While GPA may be the most important measure of success for other groups, graduation is the ultimate measure of academic success for Native American college students. The purpose of monitoring GPA is to determine the eligibility of a student to graduate. Recall

that only 8.6% of Native Americans are college graduates. A Native individual that graduated with a 2.3 GPA is still a college graduate and a major success compared to the unfortunately low levels of higher education attainment for the vast majority of Native Americans. Ultimately, the goal of this research is to determine factors that assist in aiding Native American college graduation; because of this, graduation from an institution of higher education will be used as the measure of academic achievement.

Factors Affecting Academic Achievement

A student's ability to succeed academically hinges not just on their intellectual faculties but on any number of outside factors. While some factors may affect all students equally, other factors may play a larger role in a student's success based on their membership of a minority group. This section reviews the literature surrounding five possible factors that affect Native American college student success.

Previous Academic Performance

Previous academic achievement is a logical predictor of future academic achievement. Logically, if a student has the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in and graduate from high school, that student will adapt their skills to succeed in and graduate from college. This logical relationship is borne out by the literature. In a study of nine Bowling Green State University first-year student cohorts, the correlation between high school GPA and first year college GPA is positive and statistically significant (Gaskins 2009, 142). As there is a minimum GPA required to graduate from college, it would follow that since high school GPA affects college GPA, it also affects the ability of a student to graduate.

Most studies do not examine if the relationship between high school and college GPA holds for minority students. It is possible that this relationship is different for minority students because their racial background leads to different experiences than those White students live through (Bryson, et.al. 2002, 77). These different experiences can lead to a variance in factors affecting success. Kirby, White, and Aruguete found that high school GPA and high school rank predicted non-White college GPA (2007: 463). This relationship holds for African American and Native American students (Bryson, et.al, 2002, 76; Gaskins 2009, 159).

The impact of high school GPA on college GPA is considerable. High school GPA accounts for between seven percent and 60 percent of the variation of college GPA (Bryson, et.al. 2002; Kirby, et.al. 2007). If this impact holds true for Native American college students, then it suggests a focus on high school programs to prepare students for success in college. Native students must be made aware of the impact their academic achievement in high school has on college achievement so that high school is treated not just as a stepping stone to the next level, but also as a training ground for future success.

Although this factor may not be relevant for the entire student population, it appears to be a significant factor in predicting GPA for minorities in general and Native Americans in particular. As stated before, a college student's ability to graduate hinges on their GPA. If high school achievement² can predict college GPA then it can also predict the odds of college graduation.

² For additional Texas State University Applied Research Projects on the topic of high school achievement, see Michie (1993).

Financial Aid

With nearly 66% of undergraduate students receiving financial aid in the 2007-2008 school year (U.S. Department of Education, 2009), finances rank among the most important factors affecting student achievement. Wells' (1989) study found that "financial difficulty ranks among the top four factors hindering college level achievement for Native Americans." Almeida agrees, asserting that of all the challenges Native American college students must confront, the most serious is obtaining adequate financial aid (1999, 2).

Various studies have linked financial need and financial aid to a student's academic achievement. Gaskins' (2009) study evaluated various factors and their affect on grade point average. When he considered financial aid as an independent variable it was found that "all student financial aid variables were...significantly correlated with student GPAs after the first year" (143). It was also found that, for Native Americans specifically, those with an EFC (expected family contribution) below the mean and a gross need above the mean had significantly lower GPAs after their first year (162, 163). Another study conducted in 2009 on the impact of financial aid at three flagship institutions had similar findings for first-year GPA as well as for subsequent years (Stater 2009, 803).

As expected, academics are not the only ones that believe that finances affect the ability of a student to achieve. When Reyhner and Dodd asked Native American students about the factors they felt could positively affect Native American graduation success, the necessity of scholarships was mentioned (1995, 6). Based on his study, Stater asserts that "need-based aid and merit-based aid both have positive and significant effects on student GPAs throughout college," thus supporting predictions that financial aid promotes higher achievement (2009, 810). The relationship between financial aid and GPA is important to consider because, as noted

before, graduation is dependent on GPA. An increase in aid to Native American college students may mean less stress associated with paying for tuition, books, and living expenses, with a higher GPA and eventual graduation as the by-products.

Familial Support

Many believe that the road to a college degree does not begin the day a student first steps foot on a college campus, or even the first day of high school. Rather, a student's journey to collegiate success begins the day they are signed up for pre-school or kindergarten. Herdon and Hirt support this viewpoint in asserting that "the foundation for success in college is laid in childhood and nurtured through different stages of the college career" (2004, 511). If this is the case, a college student's academic success is greatly affected by their family, the individuals with whom they spend a great deal of time in the years preceding and extending through their college career.

The importance of family support in achieving academic success among minority populations has been the focus of various studies. One study focusing on factors affecting Black college student success found that the social environment provided by a student's parents influenced the student's view of education, and ultimately their success in college (Herndon & Hirt 2004, 491). A similar study involving Latino college students found that familial support was important in a student's development of academic self-efficacy (Torres & Solberg 2001, 61). As is the case in these two minority cultures, the approval and support of family is often very important to Native American children when pursuing their goals, especially in the academic field.

Although research concerning Native American college student success is not bountiful, a number of studies concerning this topic have found that familial support is an important factor in student achievement. When Reyhner and Dodd asked successful Native students to explain the greatest influence on their success, students most often credited their family (1999, 5). A similar study conducted by Rindone found that 45% of students reported encouragement from parents and other family members when asked to list a single factor that contributed to their high achievement (1998, 6). In fact, some Native college students have asserted that “the encouragement [of their family] was almost an imperative to be academically successful” (Jackson, Smith & Hill 2003, 553).

If the impact of familial support on academic success for Native American college students holds true, future programs aimed at helping students succeed will have to expand their focus on the student to encompass the family group. Harrington and Hunt argue that families should be encouraging Native students to plan and prepare for college as early as elementary and secondary school. They also believe that, based on the importance of family to success, higher education institutions should create social networks that are aimed at supporting Native American students as well as families (2010, 4). Programs like these could teach families the importance of their support and encouragement in helping their student succeed, thus increasing support and ultimately graduation rates.

Feeling Connected

Benjamin, Chambers, and Reiterman point out that while adjusting to college is arduous for members of most ethnic minority groups, this is especially true in the case of Native Americans (1993, 1). Though all new students on university campuses can feel isolated given the

new environment, tougher workload, and distance from their family, Native American students have the added burden of being in an environment that is, more often than not, designed with a predominantly White student population in mind. When faced with this drastic change in environment and mindset, “almost all Native American students tend to feel isolated” (Carney 1999, 147). According to Lin, LaCounte, and Eder, these feelings of isolation, along with perceived campus hostility toward their kind, contribute significantly to the performance of low achieving Native American college students (1988, 8).

It has also been suggested that it is perhaps a feeling of being torn between their Native culture and the dominant culture in the higher education community that contributes to the markedly lower performance numbers for Native American students. Ties to family and land are characteristic of Native Americans; deciding to pursue a post-secondary degree often means leaving these things behind and becoming immersed in the White culture that is predominantly represented on college campuses (Lundberg 2007, 406). Feeling like there is no place to be both a Native American and college student at once would serve as both a stressor and a distraction from the student’s goal—a college degree.

These studies all indicate that feelings of isolation lead to negative outcomes in terms of student achievement. If this impact holds true, Native Americans that feel isolated while attending college will be less likely to earn a degree. Therefore, it is important to find ways to make Native American students feel more at home on their campuses because “the more highly a student is integrated, both academically and socially, the more likely the student will persist at the institution” (Gaskins 2009, 2) and thus go on to graduate.

Campus Involvement

As was found in the previous section, Native American students often have feelings of isolation on college campuses throughout the United States. Joining a student organization to make friends and become involved in campus life is one possible way of counteracting these feelings as “establishing a connection to the university community is critical to the...experience of American Indian students” (Harrington & Hunt 2010, 4). These groups serve a social purpose as well as a means of building a support group. Research results suggest the importance of having some organized form of support from peers and faculty (Hoover & Jacobs 1992, 7). Not only is this support good for mental and social well-being, it has also been found that “engagement in university social groups is a consistent predictor of college success for Native American students” (Lundberg 2007, 407). Students can tell the difference when they are involved as well. Participants in Jackson, Smith, and Hill’s 2003 study credited their involvement in a student group as being a critical factor in their success (553).

Social groups are not the only form of support that can give students confidence to help them succeed; it has also been found that “peer mentors play an important role in helping American Indian students overcome potential barriers to their academic success” (Shotton, Oosahwe & Cintron 2007, 90). First-year programs and mentor groups can serve to integrate students into their new environment on both the social and academic level by providing interaction between other students and access to faculty and upper-classmen. In fact, Harrington and Hunt argue that such groups are a critical factor in retaining, and thus graduating, Native American college students (2010, 4). Structured groups like these allow students to gain information about their institution and academic programs, allowing them to feel connected. As

mentioned before, this feeling of connection can have positive effects on Native American college student success.

Finally, research has shown that interaction with faculty members outside of the classroom positively affects Native American college student success (Harrington & Hunt, 2010; Jackson, et.al, 2003; Lundberg, 2007). Native American students who have a supportive and encouraging relationship with their professors are more likely to be successful because they feel they have a place to go to ask questions, giving them a personal connection to their institution (Jackson, et.al 2003, 554). This feeling of connection is essential to a student reaching graduation because those students that do not have this feeling will not persist. If these observations hold true, it is important to foster student-faculty relationships that will give Native American college students the institutional support and encouragement needed to earn their degree.

Conceptual Framework

A review of the literature identified five factors that may influence Native American college students' academic success. The literature supports 1) previous academic performance; 2) financial aid; 3) familial support; 4) feelings of isolation; and 5) campus involvement as factors influencing the likelihood of Native American college students achieving academic success. The purpose of this research is to determine if these five factors do affect Native American college students' ability to graduate.

This research is exploratory and uses five working hypotheses developed from the literature. According to Shields and Tajali, working hypotheses are useful in exploratory research as they “signal that conceptualization is in its preliminary stages” (2006, 14). They are also useful when data collection is more qualitatively focused rather than quantitatively focused

(Shields 1998, 202). Table 2.1 summarizes the working hypotheses and links them to the literature.

Table 2.1: Conceptual Framework Linked to the Literature

Working Hypothesis	Supporting Literature
WH1: Previous academic performance is important to Native American college student success.	Bryson, Smith, & Vineyard (2002); Gaskins (2009); Kirby, White, & Aruguete (2007)
WH1a: High school GPA positively affects Native American college student success.	
WH2: Financial aid is important to Native American college student success.	Almeida (1999); Gaskins (2009); Reyhner & Dodd (1995); Stater (2009); Wells (1989)
WH3: Familial support is important to Native American college student success.	Harrington & Hunt (2010); Herndon & Hirt (2004); Jackson, Smith, & Hill (2003); Reyhner & Dodd (1995); Rindone (1988); Torres & Solberg (2001); Wells (1989); Willeto (1999)
WH3a: Parental support positively affects Native American college student success.	
WH3b: Extended family support positively affects Native American college student success.	
WH4: Feeling connected is important to Native American college student success.	Benjamin, Chambers, and Reiterman (1993); Carney (1999); Gaskins (2009); Lin, LaCounte, & Eder (1988); Lundberg (2007)
WH4a: Feelings of isolation negatively affect Native American college student success.	
WH5: Campus involvement is important to Native American college student success.	
WH5a: Involvement in a student organization positively affects Native American college student success.	Hoover & Jacobs (1992); Harrington & Hunt (2010); Jackson, Smith, & Hill (2003); Lundberg (2007)
WH5b: Interaction with faculty members outside of the classroom positively affects Native American college student success.	Harrington & Hunt (2010); Jackson, Smith, & Hill (2003); Lundberg (2007)
WH5c: Participation in first year or mentor programs positively affects Native American student success.	Harrington & Hunt (2010); Shotton, Oosahwe, & Cintron (2007)

Chapter Summary

The literature suggests that there are five factors that affect Native American college student success: 1) previous academic achievement; 2) financial aid; 3) familial support; 4) feeling connected; and 5) campus involvement. Five working hypotheses and various sub-

hypotheses have been constructed using these factors to predict Native American college student achievement. Chapter 3 will present the methodology used in this research and operationalize the working hypotheses.

Chapter 3 Methodology

This chapter discusses the methods used to explore factors that affect Native American college student success. The working hypotheses developed through the literature are operationalized to construct questions for Native American college graduates regarding the factors they believe affected their success. These questions were presented to participants during open-ended structured interviews.

Research Technique

Given the exploratory nature of this research, interviews were deemed an appropriate tool for gathering information as interviews are useful when studying a population that is too large to be observed directly (Babbie 2010, 254). Although the Native Americans do not constitute the largest college student population, it is still too numerous for direct observation. These interviews serve as a means to directly question Native Americans that were successful in earning their college degree.

Open-ended semi-structured phone interviews were utilized to obtain information from Native American college graduates on what factors they believe affected their success. Participants were informed of the research purpose, asked to list the factors they believed affected their college success, and then asked questions based on the working hypotheses developed through the literature. This blend of survey and qualitative interview methods allowed specific questions to be asked while making room for other possible areas of inquiry raised by the respondent (Babbie 2010, 320).

Table 3.1 summarizes the conceptual framework and links the working hypotheses and sub-hypotheses to specific questions used in the interviews. The sub-hypotheses and interview questions are used as a means to measure support for the working hypotheses. The questions also serve as a stimulant for further conversation about factors Native American graduates found were important to their success.

Table 3.1: Operationalization of the Working Hypotheses

	Working Hypothesis	Method	Question
WH1	Previous academic performance is important to Native American college student success.		
WH1a	High school GPA positively affects Native American college student success.	Interview	Research has shown that high school GPA is good predictor of college success. Do you believe that your academic performance in high school affected your success in college? How so? Why was it important to your success?
WH2	Financial aid is important to Native American college student success.	Interview	Did you receive any financial aid to attend college? What types of aid did you receive? Do you believe receiving financial aid affected your success in college? How so? Why was it important to your success?
WH3	Familial support is important to Native American college student success.		

WH3a	Parental support positively affects Native American college student success.	Interview	Do you believe the support you received from your parents affected your success in college?
WH3b	Extended family support positively affects Native American college student success.	Interview	Your siblings? Your extended family? How so? Why was this important to your success?
WH4	Feeling connected is important to Native American college student success.		
WH4a	Feelings of isolation negatively affect Native American college student success.	Interview	Which university or college did you attend? Can you tell me about your experience there? What would you say the campus climate was toward Native Americans? Do you believe there were opportunities for you to connect with people that had similar interests as yourself? Were there any Native American support groups at your institution? Did you ever feel isolated? How did you deal with those feelings? Do you feel this affected your success in college? How so? Why was this important to your success?
WH5	Campus involvement is important to Native American college student success.		

WH5a	Involvement in a student organization positively affects Native American college student success.	Interview	<p>Did you participate in any student organizations while in college?</p> <p>Do you believe your involvement in those organizations affected your success in college?</p> <p>How so?</p> <p>Why was this important to your success?</p>
WH5b	Interaction with faculty members outside of the classroom positively affects Native American college student success.	Interview	<p>Did you ever interact with faculty members outside of the classroom?</p> <p>Do you believe those relationships affected your success in college?</p> <p>How so?</p> <p>Why was this important to your success?</p>
WH5c	Participation in first year or mentor programs positively affects Native American student success.	Interview	<p>Did you participate in a first year or mentor group while in college?</p> <p>Do you believe your involvement affected your success in college?</p> <p>How so?</p> <p>Why was this important to your success?</p>

Sample

The interview subjects for the purpose of this research are Native American college graduates. While numerous requests for participation were submitted to tribal education offices, institutional organizations, and Native American Facebook groups, only six individuals were willing to be interviewed. Basic information about the six participants is given in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Characteristics of Interview Participants

Participant	Gender	Tribal Affiliation	College/University Attended
Respondent 1	Female	Comanche	The University of Texas at Austin
Respondent 2	Male	Comanche	Cameron University
Respondent 3	Male	Comanche	Oklahoma State University
Respondent 4	Male	Tohono O’odham	Arizona State University
Respondent 5	Male	Choctaw	The University of Texas at Austin
Respondent 6	Male	Seminole	Kansas University

All interviews, excepting the first, were conducted via phone. The first interview was conducted on March 27, 2011. Three interviews occurred on March 29, 2011 with the last two taking place March 31, 2011. The average interview lasted 15 to 30 minutes with the longest lasting approximately 45 minutes.

Arguably the most significant weakness of this study is the sample size. While six participants were useful in providing information about what they believe affected their college success, the small sample size makes findings difficult to generalize beyond this study to the Native American college student population as a whole. Future research on this topic would need a much larger participatory base to make findings applicable to the entire population.

Human Subjects Protection

Since this research required interviews to be conducted with human subjects, a request for review was sent to the Texas State University Institutional Review Board. The project was

granted an exemption and approved by the IRB on January 20, 2011. The exemption application number for this study is 2011Q9144.

Babbie states that some of the primary areas for ethical concern in social research are voluntary participation, harm to the participants, anonymity and confidentiality, and deception (2010, 64-68). In an effort to address these issues each participant was informed of the research purpose of this study as well as reassured that participation was strictly voluntary. It was also made clear that absolutely all information obtained will remain anonymous and confidential. Contact information for the researcher's advisor was provided for those participants who had questions or concerns.

Chapter 4 Results

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings from the interviews with Native American college graduates. The beliefs of the participants regarding the factors that affected their academic success are evaluated according to the conceptual framework that was developed in Chapter 2. This chapter summarizes the information gathered in the interviews and uses that information to measure support for the five working hypotheses and their sub-hypotheses. Table 4.1 presents the assessment of support found in the interviews for each working hypothesis and their sub-hypotheses.

The Role of Previous Academic Performance

According to the literature, previous academic performance is a key factor in predicting college student success. It is assumed that those students who are high achievers in high school will also be high achievers in college. This assumption was found to be true in studies concerning minority college students in general and Native American college students in specific (Bryson, et.al. 2002; Kirby, et.al. 2007; Gaskins, 2009).

Given the support in the literature for previous performance and high school GPA , it was hypothesized in WH1 and WH1a that students would attest to their importance to their achievement when interviews were conducted. However, when asked to list which factors were important to their success, none of the participants listed previous academic performance or high school GPA. However, when asked directly if they believe that their previous performance or high school GPA affected their success, all but one respondent asserted that their previous

performance was indeed a factor. More specifically, four of six respondents believed that the classes they took, rather than the GPA they earned, was important.

Respondent 5 in particular believed the opportunity to take college courses while in high school was “especially helpful” in preparing him to succeed. This belief supports McCauley’s 2007 finding that taking an advanced placement (AP) or dual enrollment class in high school is a significant factor in predicting college student success. If a student is enrolled in classes that ask them to think at a higher level while in high school, they will be better prepared to think at that level when they reach college.

Based on these findings, WH1 is supported while WH1a is rejected as five of six respondents believe that previous academic performance is important, but none of the respondents felt that high school GPA was important to their college success. This evidence shows that these successful Native Americans strove to challenge themselves while in high school by taking more rigorous classes to develop the skills necessary to be successful in college. Their lack of support regarding high school GPA shows that GPA may not be the best measurement for college readiness or the best factor in predicting Native American college student success. As evidenced by these results, providing Native American high school students with the opportunity to take advanced classes would not only enhance their secondary education but also give them tools to succeed in college.

The Role of Financial Aid

According to the literature, financial aid is a key factor in predicting college student success. In some cases, specifically those of Native American students, it is even seen to be the most important factor in obtaining a degree (Almeida, 1999).

Given the support in the literature for financial aid, it was hypothesized in WH2 that students would attest to its importance to their achievement when interviews were conducted. When asked to list factors which they believe were important to their success, two participants out of six listed financial aid. However, when asked directly if they believed that the receipt of financial aid affected their success, all but one respondent replied in the affirmative. According to Respondent 6, funding was actually the biggest factor in helping him obtain his college degree. Respondent 1 believed that she would have had to leave her institution if she had not had access to financial aid funds.

One interesting outcome of the interviews was the assertion by four respondents that not all sources of financial aid are created equal. While they believed that the receipt of financial aid allowed them to focus on their studies, and thus succeed in graduating, they believe that certain types of aid—scholarships and grants—are more important than loans. These four respondents believe that the receipt of loans is accompanied with “increased pressure to do well”, which can distract students from their studies, an effect contrary to the loans’ purpose to help students focus on those studies.

Based on these findings, WH2 is supported as five of six respondents attested to the importance of financial aid to their college success. As evidenced by these results, it is important to make more financial aid in the form of scholarships and grants available to Native American college students. Interestingly enough, there are numerous opportunities for scholarships and grants for Native Americans; the American Indian College Fund and individual tribes are just two examples of entities that provide financial assistance for Native college students. The challenge will come in making the population more widely aware of the availability of those funds. However, if awareness can be raised, the results of this study support the assertion that

Native American students who receive financial aid are more likely to be successful in obtaining their college degree.

The Role of Familial Support

According to the literature, family support is a key factor in predicting college student success. Not only is family support believed to be important during the childhood years, students also assert that it is the most important factor to their success while they are in college (Harrington & Hunt, 2010; Herndon & Hirt, 2004; Jackson, et.al., 2003; Reyhner & Dodd, 1995; Rindone, 1988; Torres & Solberg, 2001; Wells, 1989; Willetto, 1999).

Given the support in the literature for familial support, specifically the support of parents and extended family, it was hypothesized in WH3, WH3a, and WH3b that students would attest to its importance to their achievement when interviews were conducted. When asked to list factors which they believe were important to their success, three participants out of six listed familial support. When asked directly if they believed that familial support affected their success, all but one respondent replied in the affirmative. Of those participants that felt that the support of their family was important, all felt that both their parents and extended family deserved credit. Respondent 5 felt that he would not have been successful without the support and encouragement of his mother. Respondents 4 and 6 felt that it was their drive to make their families proud, to not let them down, that allowed them to succeed. Many respondents, including Respondent 1 voiced the belief of their families that graduating from college was “not an option”, it was something that was expected.

The single participant that did not feel like familial support affected his success, Respondent 2, asserted that it was not important because he did not receive support from his

family. He did, however, believe that had he received familial support his success would have been “more assured”. As this participant was the oldest of those interviewed, his responses may indicate that a generational difference in family importance is present.

Based on these findings, WH3, WH3a, and WH3b are all supported with six of six participants attesting to the importance of family support in general and parental and extended family support in specific to their collegiate success. Given the importance of family to the younger Native Americans in this study, programs that make more Native American parents and extended family aware of their role are essential. Parents in specific and family in general play a more involved role in higher education today than in the past. Many high school seniors are taken on college trips by and attend college fairs with their parents. An increase in activities like these as well as conversations initiated by Native American parents to show their support for and expectation of college graduation with their children would likely lead to an increase in graduation rates. As evidenced by the results of this research, students that feel like their families are supportive will be academically successful at the collegiate level.

The Role of Feeling Connected

According to the literature, feeling connected is a key factor in predicting college student success. Specifically, studies have shown that feeling isolated while on a college campus can negatively affect the ability of a Native American student to graduate (Benjamin, et.al., 1993; Carney, 1999; Gaskins, 2009; Lin, et.al., 1988; Lundberg, 2007).

Given the support in the literature for feeling connected, it was hypothesized in WH4 and WH4a that students would attest to its importance to their achievement when interviews were conducted. When asked to list factors which they believe were important to their success, none

of the six participants listed feeling connected. However, when asked directly if they believed that feeling connected affected their success, every respondent replied in the affirmative. When asked if they ever felt isolated while at college, four of the six participants replied that they had; all four of those respondents felt that their feelings of isolation would have negatively affected their success if the feelings had continued. Both participants that maintained they never felt isolated, Respondents 1 and 3, credited having “a good support group” and “a wide circle of friends” with making them feel connected from the start. Respondent 3 found that having a group to share the ups and downs of the college experience was very important to his success. The four participants that experienced feelings of isolation also credited their support group and friends with stopping those feelings.

Of the six participants, only two felt that they attended institutions that had a positive campus climate toward Native Americans. The remaining four participants felt that the climate toward Native Americans at their institutions were “ignorant”, “indifferent”, “ambiguous”, “non-existent.” Respondent 5 expressed frustration at the “mythical” characteristics he felt fellow students applied to Native Americans. Respondent 1, who attended the same university as Respondent 5, recalled feeling isolated even amongst other minority students, “a minority even among minorities”. Though discouraged by the lack of understanding by other students of their culture and heritage, overall, participants felt that they were able to get past these feelings of cultural isolation to achieve success.

Based on these findings, both WH4 and WH4a are supported as four of six participants believe that feeling connected was important to their success while feeling isolated had a negative effect. Discovering ways to make Native American students feel connected, not isolated, will be necessary to keeping them on college campuses and reaching the goal of

graduation. Institutions will need to invest in programs aimed at supporting Native Americans and educating non-Natives about Native culture. In this way Native American students will feel less isolated, paving the way for increased college success for this particular population. As a side benefit, diversity and cultural understanding throughout the entire college or university population can be improved. This decrease in feelings of isolation and increased cultural awareness would likely support increased academic performance and graduation rates among Native American students in higher education

The Role of Campus Involvement

According to the literature, campus involvement is a key factor in predicting college student success. Specifically, involvement in student organizations, interactions with faculty outside the classroom, and involvement in a first-year or mentor group find support in affecting the probability of a student reaching graduation (Hoover & Jacobs, 1992; Harrington & Hunt, 2010; Jackson, et.al., 2003; Lundberg, 2007; Shotton, et.al., 2007). Native American students were found to be especially affected by their campus involvement.

Given the support in the literature for campus involvement in varying forms, it was hypothesized in WH5, WH5a, WH5b, and WH5c that students would attest to its importance to their achievement when interviews were conducted. When asked to list factors which they believe were important to their success, none of the six participants listed campus involvement in any form. However, when asked directly if they believed that their campus involvement affected their success, 5 of the participants responded in the affirmative. When involvement was broken down into three categories—involvement in a student organization, student-faculty interaction outside of class, and involvement in a first-year or mentor group—five participants believed that

involvement in a student organization was important to success and four participants gave support to student-faculty interaction outside of class. Only two participants, Respondents 4 and 5, believed that their involvement in a first-year or mentor group affected their college achievement.

Overall, participants stated that their involvement with campus groups or faculty gave them the opportunity to be part of a unit, to interact with others that had similar interests. Respondent 2 felt that his involvement in a student organization provided a “grounding effect,” while Respondent 1 felt that her conversations about goals after graduation with other members of her organization kept her focused on achieving graduation so she could pursue those goals. Relationships with various faculty members gave Respondent 4 affirmation that he had chosen the right path—higher education—and influenced Respondent 4’s decision to stay at her university and as well as her path after graduation.

Based on these findings, WH5, WH5a, and WH5b are supported as five of six participants believe that campus involvement in general was important to their success, with five respondents supporting the importance of student organizations and four respondents supporting the importance of student-faculty interactions in specific. WH5c received limited support with only two of six participants giving support to its importance to their success. Given these results, it is important to impart to Native American students the impact that being involved on campus can have on their success. Students should be encouraged to join an organization on campus, be it social or academic. This involvement will provide students with a support group to fall back on, something that appears to be necessary for a student to graduate. Students should also be encouraged to build relationships with their professors as these relationships appear to provide

students with a wealth of information and advice that is not found in textbooks, influencing them to make goals beyond graduation.

It is also important to make administrators and faculty members aware of the importance of these factors on student success. Administrators that interact with students should encourage participation in student organizations as well as seeking out their professors outside of class. Faculty members need to be aware that their encouragement and support outside of the classroom can be as highly beneficial to the academic welfare of Native students as their teachings within the classroom.

Table 4.1: Level of Support for the Working-Hypotheses

Working-Hypothesis	Number of Supporting Responses	Level of Support
WH1: Previous academic performance is important to Native American college student success.	4 of 6	Strong Support
WH1a: High school GPA positively affects Native American college student success.	0 of 6	No Support
WH2: Financial aid is important to Native American college student success.	5 of 6	Strong Support
WH3: Familial support is important to Native American college student success.	6 of 6	Strong Support
WH3a: Parental support positively affects Native American college student success.	6 of 6	Strong Support
WH3b: Extended family support positively affects Native American college student success.	6 of 6	Strong Support
WH4: Feeling connected is important to Native American college student success.	6 of 6	Strong Support
WH4a: Feelings of isolation negatively affect Native American college student success.	4 of 6	Strong Support
WH5: Campus involvement is important to Native American college student success.	5 of 6	Strong Support
WH5a: Involvement in a Student organization positively affects Native American college student success.	5 of 6	Strong Support

WH5b: Interaction with faculty members outside of the classroom positively affects Native American college student success.	4 of 6	Strong Support
WH5c: Participation in first year or mentor programs positively affects Native American student success.	2 of 6	Limited Support

Chapter 5 Conclusions

The final chapter of this Applied Research Project summarizes the information and results presented and discusses policy implications and recommendations for future research. The purpose of this research was to explore factors that affect Native American student success in post-secondary education. A study of this topic was important because the disparity between Native American college graduation rates and those of other racial/ethnic groups is profound. Overall, the Native American population has the lowest attainment level in the United States with only 8.6% of the population aged 25 or older holding a college degree.

Given the low achievement levels, it is no wonder that Native Americans are some of the poorest, most marginalized members of our society. Horace Mann, an education reformer and member of the U.S. House of Representatives in the 19th century, once said that “education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men, the balance-wheel of the social machinery.” If this is true, then one of the most important ways to help the Native American population approach parity with the rest of the American population is to increase the number of Native American college graduates. This research sought to discover the factors that affected the ability of successful Native American college graduates to earn their degree in the hopes that this information could be applied to help the Native population in general.

Summary of the Research Findings

The factors of success considered in this research can be split into two categories: 1) those factors that the student encounters even before they reach an institution of higher education

and 2) those factors that the student encounters once they reach their institution. Factors in category one include previous academic performance, financial aid, and familial support. Factors in category two include feeling connected and campus involvement.

Interviews with six successful Native American college graduates revealed that those factors that are encountered even before reaching the university setting have a great impact on success. When addressing previous academic performance (WH1), five of six participants believed that this factor was important to their reaching college graduation, but four of six rejected the importance of high school GPA (WH1a) stating that it was the courses they took that were important, not GPA. When addressing financial aid (WH2), five of six participants maintained it was an important factor in their ability to earn a college degree. Of those five participants, four believed that scholarships and grants were more important than loans when specific types of aid were considered. Finally, when addressing familial support (WH3), five of six participants asserted that this factor was greatly important to their success with the sixth participant claiming that familial support would have been a positive had he received any. Support of this factor did not change when “family” was broken down into parents (WH3a) and extended family (WH3b).

A great level of support from participants was also found when factors encountered once on campus were considered. When addressing feeling connected (WH4), six of six participants responded that this was an important factor to their success. The four of six participants that admitted to feeling isolated at some point during their college career believed that those feelings would have negatively affected their success had the feelings continued (WH4a). The last factor addressed, campus involvement (WH5), was found to have had an impact on success by five of six participants. Of those five, all believed that involvement in a student organization (WH5a)

was important to their achievement; four believed that student-faculty interaction outside of class (WH5b) was important; and two believed that involvement in a first-year or mentor group (WH5c) was important.

Overall, each main working-hypothesis received strong support from the interview participants as factors that were important to their collegiate success. Of the sub-working-hypotheses, only high school GPA and involvement in a first-year or mentor group received less than strong support. Given the strong support for each of the factors considered in this research, policy implications can be derived from the findings to improve the state of Native American college graduation rates.

Policy Implications

While the primary purpose of conducting this research was to gain knowledge about those factors that affect the collegiate success of Native American students, the secondary, and arguably more important, purpose was to use that knowledge to formulate programs and policies at the tribal, secondary, and post-secondary levels to help others achieve success as well. The six participants in this study are not just Native Americans, they are high achieving Native Americans and much can be learned from their experiences in higher education.

Based on the findings of the interviews conducted with these successful individuals, there are multiple policy recommendations. First, those secondary institutions that serve a Native American population should not only offer but also encourage students to enroll in advanced classes. As found in Chapter 1, Native Americans do not seem to have a problem earning high school degrees but experience barriers to reaching college graduation. Participants in this study asserted that, rather than GPA, it was the advanced courses that they took in high school that

helped them develop the skills necessary to achieve in college. The availability of these courses combined with increased encouragement from teachers and administrators may be helpful in improving the quality of education that Native students receive at the secondary level, lessening the shock experienced when the transition to collegiate courses is made.

Second, the amount and visibility of college scholarships and grants offered to Native Americans should be increased. While college students from every racial/ethnic group struggle with funding their education, Native American students come from the poorest group in the country, increasing the burden felt by tuition and living costs. More than one participant in this study claimed that financial aid was the most important factor to their success, and four believed that scholarships and grants were more important than loans. While there currently are many opportunities for scholarships and grants, it seems that many Native students are not aware of them. Increasing the visibility of those available scholarships could lead to lower drop-out rates by Native college students because they could not afford tuition but did not want to take out loans.

Third, families of Native American children must be made aware of the impact their support can have on the probability of a college student persisting to graduation. Every participant in this study attested to the importance of family in helping them earn a college degree. In most cases, it was not financial support that made this support important but moral support and encouragement. More than half of the respondents also gave credit to the environment of expectation created by their families that was associated with college. If a Native American child grows up with the knowledge that a college degree is expected, they seem to be more likely, according to the results of this study, to achieve collegiate success. Family members should also be supportive while a student is in college. Tribal and institutional departments could

develop programs that are specifically aimed at educating parents and family members of the importance of their role in their student's success.

Finally, Native American college students must be made aware of the importance of campus involvement to their success. Involvement in a campus organization as well as interactions with faculty outside of the classroom can go a long way in helping students feel connected to their school. These feelings of connection, as we found in Chapter 4, are very important in keeping a student's achievement from being negatively affected by feelings of isolation. Encouraging Native students to seek out groups in which they feel comfortable, and thus build a support group to turn to when the frustrations and fears of collegiate life surface, could be one of the biggest factors in keeping them on campus. This knowledge can be imparted from both administrators and professors before and after students arrive on campus. Most importantly, students must be made to understand that, ultimately, they are the only ones that can choose to not feel isolated. They must be encouraged to actively seek out other students or professors with whom they have common interests.

Recommendations for Future Research

As stated in Chapter 3, this study had a very low participation rate. While the results can be used to gain some insight as to what factors are important to Native American college student success and what can be done to increase graduation rates based on those factors, they are preliminary and should be followed-up with a larger scale study. A larger, more varied sample would make it possible to apply findings to the population in general. It might also be advisable to conduct a quantitative study so that variance in factors can be analyzed.

Most importantly, research of any kind concerning this topic is encouraged. Native American students are a rarely-studied group and deserve and require our attention if the state of their education and communities is to improve. Improving the levels of education of current generations of Native Americans is the only way to ensure that future generations have a fighting chance of emerging from poverty, poor health and marginalization. This responsibility falls not only on Native administrators and educators but on the general population as well.

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