

PERCEIVED FACTORS INFLUENCING THE RETENTION RATE OF NATIVE
AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY

by

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Liberty University

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

Liberty University

April 2012

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Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA
April 2012

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ABSTRACT

The number of Native Americans entering college is higher now than it has been over the past 40 years; however, the degree completion rate has been less than half that of White students. This research study was a bounded case study of Native American students enrolled in the teacher education program. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify the perceived factors influencing the retention rate of Native American college students. Some of the theoretical models that explain why students stay or leave an institution before earning a college degree look more toward explaining this phenomenon in a quantitative analysis, although some of the methods can be applied to a qualitative case study. Some traditional theories on student retention emphasize the importance of students' backgrounds and positive encounters with other ideas and people (Guillory, 2008). The data collection procedures included interviewing participants, taking field notes, and reviewing documents and federal initiatives. From the data analysis, major themes and topics emerged, which included (a) cultural identity, (b) the institution, (c) factors for success, and (d) barriers to success. The findings of this study signify the need for higher education to incorporate Native American cultural aspects into their programs. The needs of Native American students are complex and require administrators, faculty members, and students in higher education to get involved. The retention rate of Native American students will remain low unless more attention is given to the financial, academic counseling, mentoring, spiritual, and relational aspects of college life.

Descriptors: retention, degree completion, higher education, Native American college students, persistence

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the wonderful people in my life that have supported and loved me throughout this research process. I especially would like to thank my husband, whose editing skills are beyond reproach and whose gentle nature and wisdom have guided me throughout the years. You truly are the best part of me. I would also like to thank my family. They are my rock, my levity, my sanity, and most of all, the secret to my success. Finally, I would like to say a very special thank you to Dr. Ellen Lowrie Black, who always knew when to give me those words of encouragement, nuggets of wisdom, and invaluable guidance to see me through this research study.

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LIST OF TERMS

Throughout this study, several terms are used to describe indigenous people and the majority culture of the United States. The term *Native American* is used in specific reference to the original inhabitants of the continental United States and Alaska. Some of the Native American people prefer to be identified according to their respective nation (e.g., Navaho, Hopi, Cherokee, etc.). Others accept the label *Indian* while some prefer *Native* or *Native American*. Michael Yellow Bird's (1999) article in *American Indian Quarterly* gives a comprehensive view of the issue of racial and ethnic labels used for indigenous peoples in America. At times throughout the study, the term *Indian* was referenced in the literature and as a term traditionally used during the time period being discussed.

Other terms are used to describe the majority culture in the United States. The use of the term *Whites* refers to students who are ethnically identified as the majority population and classified by the color of their skin. The term *Anglo-American* refers to the first settlers to America from Great Britain. The term *Caucasion* also refers to the majority population of European settlers. The research study does not exclude other ethnic or minority groups represented in the United States, but for the purpose of this study, the populations identified refer to all Native American nations and tribes, along with all groups that make up the majority culture of the United States.

The term *tribal college* is used to define an institution of higher learning that receives its charter from a federally recognized tribe in the United States and Canada. These are public colleges that admit any qualified student regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or age. A majority of the tribal colleges are 2-year institutions granting

vocational or technical certificates and associate's degrees. They serve as junior colleges providing an opportunity for under-prepared students to develop the skills and competencies necessary for success in mainstream higher education. Some tribal colleges grant 4-year degrees, and at least two grant a master's degree.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Over the last 40 years, there has been an increase in the number of Native Americans attending college; however, the rate of degree completion has been less than half that of Whites. Many colleges and universities have struggled to accommodate Native American students and to create an environment suitable for their success in completing a college degree. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2009), National Center for Educational Statistics, the dropout rate among Native American students is nearly 60%. One of the many factors identified in the literature as causing failure for Native American students is the discontinuity between the home cultures and the school environment (Kanu, 2006). The underperformance and high dropout rate among Native American students has led to lower employment, poor socio-economic conditions, increased reliance on welfare, and a need to create adult education programs to give native students, whom traditional education has generally failed, a second chance (Binda, 2001).

The motivation for this study is due in part to the increase in Native American student enrollment in higher education and an overall increase in their population throughout the nation. Historically, Native American students arrive at college campuses where their family and tribal experiences differ greatly from that of their Anglo-American peers. According to Hale (2002), conflicts that may arise for Native American students when entering colleges and universities derive from European educational traditions. Over the last 400 years, the education of Native American students can be classified as a national tragedy. It is up to the educational leaders and administrators, to seriously address this issue and implement new and improved ways to accommodate

Native American students who, “without education are disempowered and disenfranchised” (U.S. Department of Education, 1991, p. 7).

Background

Finding a place at the table of higher education has eluded Native Americans over the past 25 years (Rolo, 2009). Native American students struggle to earn a 4-year degree due to the challenges of overcoming cultural barriers, particularly while attending non-tribal colleges. Colleges and universities are recognizing that creating a familiar environment is the first step toward increasing the retention rate among Native American students.

Currently, retention programs at non-tribal colleges and universities intend for the Native American student to integrate into the campus culture socially and academically. This includes forfeiting a portion of their cultural identity in order to succeed in higher education (Tinto, 1993). Along with this, the Native American student oftentimes feels isolated from fellow students and professors because they may not possess knowledge of specific subjects such as classic literature of Edgar Allen Poe or Mark Twain in an English class. Retention programs are based on the premise that these deficiencies can be remediated and that the problem rests with the student. What these programs fail to realize is that Native American students may hold extensive knowledge about the history of their tribe, medical and health issues on the reservation, or the student may even be a respected leader in his or her tribe, but this knowledge is not easily measurable or even valued in higher education (Tinto, 1993).

In developing an understanding of Native American college students, it is important to understand the history of Native American higher education. The importance lies in the ideology of what is considered official knowledge and whose

knowledge holds the most value. Before any new retention strategies can be adopted, it is necessary to examine the history of Native American students' experience in higher education.

The history consists of three eras: colonial, federal, and self-determination (McClellan, Tippeconnic Fox, & Lowe, 2005). The colonial era begins with the first contact between Europeans and Native Americans until the Revolutionary War. Although the colleges that were established during this time included in their statements of purpose educating Native Americans, only 47 Native Americans were enrolled over 80 years, and only 4 graduated (p. 9). Hale (2002) informs us that prior to any settlers arriving on this continent, tribes had their own formal and informal way of educating their children. She wrote, "Scholars, intellectuals, and elders ensured that the collective wisdom identifying each tribe was preserved and handed on to the next generation. Young men and women learned the tribal customs, stories, health practices, and rites and rituals" (Hale, 2002, p. xi).

The Native American educational model involved many tribal members, which differed from the more structured and formalized European approach. The Native American education model centered on oral tradition that the settlers perceived as being an unreliable and lesser form of education.

The federal era begins with the inception of a treaty relationship between the U.S. government and the Native American nations after the American Revolution. Initially, "ninety-seven treaties were signed addressing education for Native Americans, which provided for scholarship funds that were not used until Choctaw students attended White colleges" (McClellan et al., 2005, p. 9). As a result, "monies were given to prestigious universities...to be used specifically to cover tuition and living expenses for Native

American boys and they were to receive instruction in reading, writing, arithmetic, as well as catechism” (Kickingbird & Kickingbird, 1979, pp. 14-15). In actuality, very few Native American boys ever attended the colleges. The aim of education was to induct Native Americans into a European worldview. This ideology was supported by the belief that Native Americans would help their lot in life if they would take on European ways (Hale, 2002).

The self-determination era was driven by the passage of the Reorganization Act in 1934 and the progressive movement. The movement brought appreciation of Native American culture and insisted that the curriculum include the culture rather than aim to eradicate it. The Reorganization Act of 1934 granted Native American sovereignty and self-determination in education, which included the scholarship funds for Native American higher education (Carney, 1999). As a result, “in 1975, the Indian Self-Determination and Education Act instructed the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to contract services with the tribes rather than other non-native agencies” (p. 71). Through this act, Congress mandated that the quality of reservation life, as well as the customs and practices of the reservation, be improved by taking into account the tribal government.

Throughout the years, the Indian Self-Determination and Education Act needed revisions. Thus “Congress passes an amendment in 1988 acknowledging that Native American children had special and unique educational needs, which included programs to foster the linguistic and cultural aspirations of Indian tribes and communities” (p. 74). Although previous presidents have supported the principles of Native American self-determination, federal funding to tribes has been cut dramatically.

Garrett and Pichette (2000) reminds us that writers describe the deliberate attempts throughout U.S. history—by government agencies, schools, and churches—to

change the Native American institutions of family, clan, tribal structure, religious belief systems and practices, customs, and traditional way of life. Although it is important not to focus exclusively on negative factors, these practices are indicators of the challenges that face many tribes across the country. This study seeks to understand these factors and others that contribute to the retention rate of Native American students.

Problem Statement

There is very little information about the perceived factors influencing the retention rate of Native American college students enrolled in teacher education programs. However, there are several factors identified in the literature by which researchers try to explain this phenomenon. Guillory (2008) suggests that once Native American students arrive on campus, they "experience feelings of academic inadequacy, isolation, alienation, and marginalization" (Guillory, 2008, p. 12). Kanu (2006) found that a major factor in the low retention rate of "Native American students in both Canada and the United States is the discontinuity between the home culture of these students and the school environment" (Kanu, 2006, p. 118). Rolo (2009) stated, "According to a 2007 report by the Institute for Higher Education Policy, only 13 percent of Native Americans hold bachelor's degrees as compared to 28 percent nationally. Connection to culture explains a great deal" (Rolo, 2009, p. 27). Other researchers have made similar observations believing that additional factors include a lack of native cultural knowledge, socio-economic factors, lack of family support, and poor academic skills (Cajete, 2000; Cox & Ramirez, 1992; English-Currie, 1990; Haig-Brown, Hodgson-Smith, Regnier, & Archibald, 1997; Kanu, 2002; Shade & New, 1993). Whatever the reasons for the low retention rate of Native American students, the problem has persisted over the last 350 years.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this case study is threefold:

- To identify factors that influence the retention rate of Native American students enrolled in a 4-year teacher education program,
- To understand the students' perceptions of those factors, and
- To assess whether attending a Christian college enhances or detracts from those factors.

There are studies on the topic of retention of Native American college students that attempt to understand factors behind this phenomenon and the students' perception of these factors, but there is very little research that looks at how Christian education effects Native American students' academic success. This study looked at the campus environment, the perception of two Native American students, a tribal community leader, a college administrator, and a faculty member from the College of Education in order to understand the factors that result in the low retention rate of Native American students and whether a Christian environment ameliorates that low retention rate or not.

Significance of the Study

The primary importance of this study is that it identifies factors that may help Native American students broaden their career opportunities, enhance their academic skills, and increase their socio-economic status by taking a more holistic view of a Christian college environment to complete their college education. Change has to start with educators and administrators before it can begin to take place with students. By interviewing students and administrators, this research study benefitted from hearing the voices of Native Americans and from listening to the wisdom of the educators, which

provided a broader understanding of possible ways to enhance the educational equality for Native American students, which in turn, may increase their academic success.

Due to the low percentage of Native American teachers currently working in the field of education, it is difficult to identify factors that influence academic success for Native American students who want to become teachers. The majority of teachers in education are White females. The need for more Native American teachers continues to grow and until more Native Americans are trained and working in the field, educators will need to find ways of combining western ideas with cultural differences. According to Kanu (2006), when native and western ideas converge, learning becomes richer and more relevant. The author's basic assumption is that education should equip all children with the skills and knowledge they need to function successfully within society. This should be true for all children, no matter what the gender, race, religion, or creed.

Research Questions

There are three assumptions that outlined the basis of the following research questions. One assumption was that this case study would discover the perceived factors influencing the low retention rate of Native American students. A second assumption was that the teacher education program provides systematic support to students to increase the graduation rate of Native American students who want to become teachers. Finally, it was an assumption that this case study would bring more awareness to faculty, staff, deans, and chancellors of the crucial need for Native American teachers. The following questions guided this study:

1. What are the factors that influence the retention rate of Native American students enrolled in a 4-year teacher education program? Cultural socialization has an impact on how students learn, respond to course materials, instructional strategies,

and learning tasks. A theoretical framework formed by a longitudinal study directed by Tinta (1993) suggests that making connections with students within the first few weeks of arrival on campus helps Native American students assimilate into the college environment.

2. What are the students' perceptions of the factors that influence their ability to stay in college until degree completion? More colleges and universities are starting to implement student services to address the retention issues facing minority students. This will be one way to help students academically as well as socially by addressing the needs of the whole person, not just the academic needs.
3. What factors, while attending a Christian college, enhance or detract from the factors that affect degree completion? Swail, Redd, and Perna (2003) developed a model based on cognitive, social, and institutional factors affecting the retention rate of Native American students. He surmised that, "this model works to help describe the persistence process and the delicate balance between student resources (what the student brings to campus) and the institutional resources (what the institution provides for the student)" (Swail et al., 2003, p. 5).

Delimitations

Participants for this study were limited to those who are currently enrolled in the teacher education program, claim Native American status, and are over the age of 18. The decision to limit the participants to those who were currently enrolled in the teacher education program allowed the study to filter the factors that affect other degree programs and place an emphasis on producing Native American teachers. A qualitative study is useful for understanding the factors that influence the retention rate of Native American students, but it is only one component to a more meaningful understanding. A

quantitative study is an effective tool that points to factors that may predict who will or will not succeed in institutions of higher learning. Qualitative studies cannot be overlooked and give basis for quantitative inquiries (Yin, 2009).

Research Plan

A bounded, intrinsic, case study design was selected for the purposes of conducting this research study. This type of case study was chosen because "the purpose is not to come to understand some abstract construct, or generic phenomenon . . . Rather, the study is undertaken because of an intrinsic interest in, for example, this particular child, clinic, conference, or curriculum" (Stake, as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 48). Yin (2009) states the "rationale for a single case study is where the case represents a *unique* case" (Yin, 2009, p. 47). He clarifies the importance of the unit, or case, by stating, "If the unit of analysis is a small group, for instance, the persons to be included within the group must be distinguished from those who are outside it" (p. 32). Creswell (2007) also views single case study research as a methodology, as well as a product of the inquiry. He defines a case study as a "qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information and reports a case description and case-based themes" (Creswell, 2007, p. 73).

This research study was a bounded case study of Native American students enrolled in a teacher education program. The primary source of data collected included interviewing participants, which served as a way for the researcher to investigate personal experiences in an educational organization (Seidman, 1998). The participants interviewed included administrative personnel, a faculty member, a Native American community leader, a student who completed the program, and a student who was

currently enrolled in the program. Field notes were taken on campus for direct observation of student interaction. Other types of data collection included documents and the results of federal initiatives to incorporate on-going research studies conducted to identify factors influencing Native American student retention rates.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

There are several theories that suggest reasons why Native American college students have a lower retention and persistence rate than other minority students do. The review of the literature presents different theories for this phenomenon; yet, all have the same goal in mind, which is to raise the retention rate of Native American students. This case study seeks to answer three primary research questions: (a) What are the factors that influence the retention rate for Native American students enrolled in a 4-year teacher education program; (b) What are the students' perceptions of the factors that influence their ability to stay at college until degree completion; and (c) What factors, while attending a Christian college, enhance or detract from the factors that affect degree completion? The following is a look at what researchers and theorists have found on this topic.

Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework, or paradigm, of this study resides in critical theory (CT) perspectives, which "are concerned with empowering human beings to transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class, and gender" (Creswell, 2007, p. 27; see also Fay, 1987). Given this conceptual paradigm, the research focused on retention theories based on Banks' (1993) theory of multicultural education reform, Vygotsky's (1978) social development theory, and Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory. These theories attempt to explain how interactions within the academic institutions and social communities lead Native American students to withdraw from institutions of higher education prior to obtaining their degree.

Bank's theory of multicultural reform. Banks (1993) believed that a part of the education of any student is teaching them *how* to think rather than *what* to think. He explained that students should be taught to understand all types of knowledge and become active in debates about knowledge construction and conflicting interpretations. Students should be instructed in the creation of their own interpretations of the history of the past and history in the making. They must learn to identify their own positions, interests, philosophies of ideals, and assumptions. Essentially, they must become critical thinkers with the knowledge and skills, plus the commitment, needed to participate in democratic and social action. With this foundation, they can help the United States close the gap between its ideals and its realities. Another group, whom Banks (1993) called *multiculturalists*, believes that education should be reformed to give more attention to the experiences of people of color and of women. With support from at least two national organizations, this multicultural group gained support (Banks, 1993). This theory of multicultural curriculum reform advocates a need to reform the school curriculum to include activities and subject content to increase the cultural knowledge of the student population.

Vygotsky's social development theory. Social development theory, developed by Lev Vygotsky, argued that social interaction precedes development (Vygotsky, 1978). Constructivism was founded on Vygotsky's theory, which asserts three major themes:

1. Social interaction plays a fundamental role in the process of cognitive development.
2. The more knowledgeable other (MKO) refers to anyone who has a better understanding or a higher ability level than the learner, with respect to a particular task, process, or concept. The MKO is normally thought of as being a teacher,

coach, or older adult, but the MKO could also be peers, a younger person, or even computers.

3. The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is the distance between a student's ability to perform a task under adult guidance and/or with peer collaboration and the student's ability solving the problem independently. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning occurs in this zone.

Vygotsky focused on the connections between people and the sociocultural context in which they act and interact in shared experiences (Crawford, 1996). Wertsch and Sohmer (1995) interpret Vygotsky's theory by asserting the following:

Humans use tools that develop from a culture, such as speech and writing, to mediate their social environments. Initially children develop these tools to serve solely as social functions, ways to communicate needs. Vygotsky believed that the internalization of these tools led to higher thinking skills. (Wertsch & Sohmer, 1995, p. 332)

Bandura's social cognitive theory. This social cognitive theory (SCT) tries to answer the question of how people's experiences, environments, and behaviors affect how they learn. Bandura's theory describes learning in terms of the interrelationship between behavior, environmental factors, and personal factors (Bandura, 1986). It also provides the theoretical framework for interactive learning used to develop both constructivism and cooperative learning. Because it includes attention, memory, and motivation, this theory is related to Vygotsky's social development theory. According to SCT, the learner gains knowledge when their surroundings come together with personal characteristics and personal experiences. Bandura (1986) asserts that new experiences are evaluated with reference to the past; prior experiences help to guide and inform the

learner how the present should be investigated.

This theory emphasizes a dynamic interactive process to explain human functioning (Bandura, 1986; Burney, 2008). This theory “ascribes a central role to cognitive processes in which the individual can observe others and the environment, reflect on that in combination with his or her own thoughts and behaviors, and alter his or her own self-regulatory functions” (p. 130). Self-regulation is what allows a person to control his or her response or behavior when confronted with externally imposed stimuli. “Feedback is an externally imposed control that works with a person’s self-regulatory capability in order to adjust behavior” (Burney, 2008, p. 131).

Over the past 80 years, the attention brought to the federal government over the need to improve the academic success rate among Native American students has not diminished. Prior to the current No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) law, there was the Meriam Report of 1928 and the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 that continually emphasized the need to help the difficulties faced by the Native American population. From these mandated actions, researchers have developed theories to aid the retention rate among Native American college students. The following is a review of the literature that addressing theories about factors that aid and hinder the academic success of Native American college students.

Historical Overview

Historical context. Reyhner and Eder (2004) state the following:

In order for educators and policy makers to understand why the various programs in Indian schools exist and why certain curricula are more likely to lead to success, they must first know about past failures and successes of Indian education. (p. 12)

Table 1 displays Nies' (1996) chronological depiction of Native American education.

Table 1

Native American Education Timeline

Year	Actions and Legislation Affecting Native American Education
1771-1879	The federal government signs nearly 400 treaties with Indian nations and tribes, creating trust agreements and promising that the government will provide technical, agricultural, medical, and education services.
1870s	The government begins building its Indian boarding school system, often using deserted army bases. The most infamous one, the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, was based on the belief that it was necessary “to kill the Indian and save the man.”
1887	The General Allotment Act, or Dawes Act, allows the government to survey American Indian land and divvy up sections to individual tribe members, with the surplus going to non-Indians.
1928	The Institute for Government Research (now the Brookings Institution) releases the Meriam Report, a comprehensive look at the condition of American Indian life, and determines the federal government is providing inadequate services.
1934	The Indian Reorganization Act stops the allotment process and provides American Indians with more power to govern and determine their futures. The Johnson O’Malley Act, also passed in 1934, allowed the government to contract with states to provide education services.
1950	Impact Aid legislation compensates public school districts with nontaxable federal land within their school boundaries. American Indian parents were supposed to have a say in how these monies were used.
1950-1965	The Elementary and Secondary Education Act encourages more tribal and parental involvement and, overall, offers more aid for disadvantaged children.
1968	President Johnson calls for the establishment of American Indian school boards at federally managed and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools.
1972	The Indian Education Act establishes the Office of Indian Education, now under the Department of Education and provides funds for pre-K to college.
1975	The Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act authorizes the government to contract with tribes for the operation of BIA and Indian Health Service programs.
1978	Education amendments states “it shall be the policy of the BIA in carrying out the functions of the Bureau, to facilitate Indian control of Indian affairs in all matters relating to education.”
1990	The Native American Languages Act protects the “status of the cultures and languages of Native American,” and makes it federal policy to “promote the rights and freedom of Native Americans to use, practice, and develop their language.”
2002	The Office of the White House Initiative on Tribal Colleges and Universities

	(WHITCU) implements Executive Order (EO) 13270. This EO, signed by President George W. Bush, ensures Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCU) are fully recognized and have the same access to federal programs as other institutes of higher education.
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Before change can take place, researchers must understand the underlying cause of Native American resistance to schooling and the educational empowerment Native Americans are striving to achieve. The American School Board Journal (2007) created a timeline of the history of Native American Education. Table 1 is a depiction of that timeline and the relationship between the federal government and the Native Americans' educational needs.

When looking at the history of Native American education, it is not surprising that most Native American families believe that traditional public schools are not a very comfortable place to be. Up until the 1960s, under the federal government, Native American children were sent to boarding schools far away from their families. They were not allowed to speak their native language, wear their traditional clothing, or even use their own names. Psychologically, Native Americans are still influenced by centuries of being treated differently by the majority culture. Schools remain an uncomfortable place because public education has not succeeded in helping Native American children feel like they belong (McCarthy, 2004).

The Meriam Report. In 1928, the director of the Institute for Government Research, W.F. Willoughby, appointed Lewis Meriam to chair a study to investigate conditions of Indian tribes under the control of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). A committee consisting of experts in health, education, Indian policy, and economics spent 7 months visiting reservations and pouring over certificates of birth, death, and illnesses (Trafzer, 2000). The results of this study did not reveal any new facts about Native

American education, but it did compile a great deal of data in one document. From this document, reformers were given a foundation for improvement and a greater reason to rally for change (Hale, 2002).

This study brought to light the substandard performance of public officials who were serving the needs of the Native Americans. Boarding schools were criticized for their abhorrent facilities and the inadequate curriculum. Another concern that surfaced from the Meriam Report was the many health problems facing Native Americans.

Trafzer (2000) reminds us “many of their problems had their roots in poverty and the loss of land” (p. 347). Some of their health problems were the direct result of students being sent home from boarding school with diseases by which they infected their families and others. Another startling fact that emerged from the Meriam Report was that the BIA spent only \$0.50 per Indian per year on health care (p. 347). The mismanagement of funds by the BIA continues to plague Native Americans. For example, an 1887 law made the federal government responsible for collecting fees from anyone who used tribal land, with the money to be held in a trust fund. Mining companies, ranchers, and others paid billions of dollars to this fund. Currently over \$300 million is collected annually by the BIA. The money was supposed to be given to the descendants of the original Indian landowners, but every audit since 1928 has found billions of dollars missing from the trust fund. It is certainly one of the greatest financial scandals in the history of the United States (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2003).

Recommendations from the Meriam Report argue for the condemnation of assimilation as the primary goal of education. The report focused on the need for a broader curriculum, better school facilities, and teachers that were more qualified. The report also suggested more nutritious foods be served and the need to abolish child labor

(Trafzer, 2000). While attending boarding schools, many of the students would work for a family or White firm (Hale, 2002). The philosophy behind this was to give Native students experience in the ways of the dominant society, or White world, and earn money while they were learning valuable work skills. In actuality, “Native children were separated from their peers and their tribal way of life” (p. 16). One other outcome for some students who attended a boarding school was the difficulty they faced reentering life on the reservation. Many students struggled to fit back into the rhythms and customs of reservation life, although there were others who were able to make a successful transition. Hamley (1994) found that “success was dependent on one’s perspective. From the government’s perspective, returnees were not successful because they soon began wearing their traditional clothing, using their tribal languages, and returned to their traditional customs and spiritual beliefs” (Hamley, 1994, p. 6).

Tribal colleges and universities (TCU). The civil rights movement of the 1960s changed a generation of people and their attitudes towards different cultural groups and the need to support and celebrate these differences (Hale, 2002). The changing attitude gave many tribes and native communities an opportunity to form organizations to help improve educational opportunities. Tribal colleges were established to meet the needs of Native Americans who lived on reservations, which were far from urban areas where most mainstream colleges and universities are located (Cole & Denzine, 2002).

Researchers such as HeavyRunner and DeCelles (2002) describe the inception of tribal colleges as a product of the self-determination movement. From this movement, President Carter signed the Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act of 1978 into law. This allowed tribal colleges access to federal funding that was previously unavailable to them. Cole and Denzine (2002) remind us that tribal colleges were

established to provide Native Americans a culturally relevant education, along with more accessibility for meeting their family and tribal responsibilities.

Accessibility is a major factor for Native Americans. Boyer (1997) found that students were more likely to dropout or even attempt college due to physical distance of the colleges, poor academic preparation, and lack of confidence. Cultural ways of life are inherent in teaching at tribal colleges. The colleges succeed in allowing students to remain Indian and practice tribal customs. This philosophy not only helps the student, but the community as well (Pavel, 1992).

There is a unique relationship between the United States and Indian tribes, along with the United States and Alaskan Natives. President George W. Bush signed Executive Order 13270, which ensured the nation's commitment to educational excellence and opportunities extended to the tribal colleges and universities. In the Executive Order, the following statement reads:

Tribal colleges are both integral and essential to their communities. Often they are the only postsecondary institutions within some of our nation's poorest rural areas. They fulfill a vital role: in maintaining and preserving irreplaceable languages and cultural traditions; in offering a high-quality college education to younger students; and in providing job training and other career-building programs to adults and senior citizens. Tribal colleges provide crucial services in communities that continue to suffer high rates of unemployment and the resulting social and economic distress. (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, para.3)

One of the main purposes of the Executive Order was for the federal government to reaffirm its commitment to tribal colleges in providing educational excellence by

implementing the innovations and reforms of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Public Law 107-110).

Boyer (1997) describes tribal colleges as a mirror of the populations they are meant to serve. They are generally small, geographically isolated, underfunded, and in danger of losing their distinct form (Boyer, 1997). Martin (2005) agrees that tribal colleges do provide culturally relevant, holistic, and participatory educational experiences. There are currently 33 tribal colleges and universities within the United States, which share the following characteristics:

- A small student body, primarily made up of Native Americans;
- An open admissions policy (high school diploma or earned GED within the first semester of attendance)
- Established initially as a vocational school or community college offering 2-year degrees, four offer bachelor's degrees and two offer master's degrees (American Indian Higher Education Consortium & The Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1999)
- A flourishing growth rate between 10% and 100% annually (Boyer, 1997)

Although research points to tribal colleges as a culturally appropriate form of higher education for Native Americans, not all researchers concurred. Szasz (1974) criticized federal policy and the Bureau of Indian Affairs with perpetuating the disparity in Native American education. She argued that mainstream colleges and universities should also be responsible for providing culturally appropriate education for Native Americans. A later study concurred with Szasz's criticisms. Whitehorse (1992) stated that "an embedded notion was that Indian students could only satisfy cultural education needs in tribal colleges: that they had to divest themselves of cultural considerations to

attend mainstream colleges” (p. 36). Tribal colleges cannot compete with various services and degree programs offered at mainstream colleges and universities. Tribal colleges currently offer 2-year associate’s degrees in over 200 disciplines and over 200 vocational certificates, yet 60% of their educational courses are remedial (J. Moore, Arizona Department of Education, personal communication, April 18, 2011).

Retention theories. Some theorists have recommended that Native Americans reject schooling because it destroys their cultures and communities, while others insist it is the only way Native Americans can protect their lands and communities from the encroachment of the dominant society (Enos, 2002; Reyhner & Eder, 2004). Today an increasing number of Native Americans are entering colleges and universities in hopes of returning to their communities to teach in and administer to their own school and colleges. For those who succeed, they are discovering for themselves what works in Native American education and are expressing their ideas in both words and acts (Reyhner & Eder, 2004, p. 13). Consequently, there are factors that help some Native American students succeed in school, and others that influence them to leave without earning their degree. Tinto (1993) suggests that Native American students need to integrate into formal and informal academic, social, and peer-activities to reduce student departure. The following is a look at the literature and at what others perceive as the factors influencing the retention rate of Native American students.

Cultural knowledge. Kanu (2006) suggests one of the factors for the low academic success of Native American students is the mainstream schools’ lack of cultural knowledge. Many Native American students move away from home to attend urban schools, where more than 90% of the teachers are non-native (Grady, 1995). This lack of cultural knowledge within the school environment may be a factor in the

underperformance of Native American students. Research educators have lobbied for the inclusion of native cultural knowledge in school curricula (Binda, 2001; Cajete, 2000; Weeks, 2003) because they believe that native students are more motivated to learn when their cultural affiliation is valued in the classroom (Kanu, 2006). A study by Kleinfeld (1995) found that non-native teachers, as well as native teachers, were just as capable of helping Native American students with academic success. This study found that the success of teachers who were more effective with Native American students stemmed from their instructional style, not their ethnicity. This is a significant discovery in the field of instructional design as well as future teacher training on multiculturalism.

Other researchers agree that Native American students struggle with an institution's lack of cultural knowledge. Huffman (2001) found that Native American students are disappointed with their educational experience, which turns to an emotional rejection of the institution. A study conducted by White Shield (2004) indicated that Native American students believe mainstream colleges and universities do not offer an education that mirrors or value them as indigenous.

Meacham, McClellan, Pearse, and Greene (2003) looked at the effects of teaching and learning activities when there was an increase in diversity among the student population in the classroom. As the diversity in the U.S. population increases, so does the diversity of students in U.S. colleges and universities.

Racial and ethnic diversity in the United States increased more in the 1980s than in any other decade. In the 1990s, people of color, women, and immigrants constituted 85% of the entrants into the workforce. By 2020, one of every three Americans will be a person of color, and students of color will make up almost 50% of the student population. (p. 35)

The results of this study suggest that cultural knowledge increased when the diversity of the student population was greater. The dominant culture, as well as the minority culture, benefits academically when different faiths, ideologies, worldviews, and customs are shared in the teaching and learning environment.

Cultural identity. For the past 25 years, Native Americans have struggled to find a place at the table of higher education (Rolo, 2009). Many Native Americans struggle with the “challenge of overcoming cultural barriers while attending predominately White colleges” (p. 26). Through the lens of this struggle, colleges and universities realize that the first step toward retaining Native American students is creating a campus community. Many Native American students report difficulties in adjusting to “being part of an underrepresented and often misunderstood group on campus” (p. 26). Educators must understand how critical identity and community are for Native American students to succeed in higher education.

Guillory (2009) conducted a qualitative study on retention strategies for Native American college students. One of his findings includes a recommendation for institutions of higher education to create programs that allow Native American students to maintain a strong connection between the campus community and their tribal community. Cultural identity becomes a major force leading to an increase in college retention. One researcher states, “University programs which directly connect Native American students to their native communities prove successful for both recruitment and retention” (Guillory, 2009, p. 18). This can be supported by Kallen’s (1915) notion of cultural pluralism. He believed that ethnicity is genetically inherited and cannot be denounced or altered. From this perspective, it seems imperative for colleges and universities to respect this aspect of Native American students and find ways in which

they can celebrate and embrace their identity on campus. Wetsit (1999) believes that diversity survives throughout the native populations in such areas as time management, goal orientation, sharing versus materialism, being versus doing, humility versus arrogance, harmony with nature, the importance of tradition, and the reverence for elders.

Spirituality. Currently, there is little research concerning the influence of spirituality as a factor for Native Americans and their persistence in higher education. This may be attributed partially to the lack of any authoritative view or theory that can create a discourse on native spirituality (HeavyRunner & Marshall, 2003) “because ‘getting it right’ must come from a community of willing informants” (Irwin, 1996, p. 3). While the definition of spirituality differs from tribe to tribe, Garcia (2000) gives a general summation of spirituality below that pertains to most Native Americans:

Spirituality is giving credit and honor to the Great Spirit, the Creator, and Grandfather of all Indian people. Spirituality means living the life that the Great Spirit has blessed people with. It means being respectful of all things, especially the elders and the children. It means taking care of the Mother Earth and not abusing the gifts She has provided. It means acknowledging the Creator in every aspect of one’s life. Spirituality is sometimes demonstrated through prayer.

(Garcia, 2000, p. 47)

For those who hold a Christian worldview, one can acknowledge the themes that echo through this generalized meaning of Native American spirituality. The difference being that not all of the majority culture in the United States holds a Christian worldview, whereas spirituality for Native Americans represents the fabric that binds family, community, individuals, and people together while establishing a cultural identity of which they are a part (Fixico, 2000).

Garrod and Larimore (1997) also believe that spirituality and identity are difficult to separate in Native American culture. Their cultural identity and spirituality are “inextricably bound to family, community, tribe, and homeland” (p. 3). This interconnectedness found in Native American culture represents a unity of spirit (HeavyRunner & Marshall, 2003). The medicine wheel is a symbol of balance for native communities, which represents four areas of balance: physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual (Harris & McFarland, 2000; Whitekiller, 2004). It also applies to the way Native Americans approach life, not in a linear fashion, but instead holding fast to circular thinking characterized by the medicine wheel.

Spirituality is instilled in Native American students prior to entering higher education, which is not cultivated in mainstream colleges and universities unless attending a religious institution. Most mainstream institutions are more focused on “training professionals” (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001, p. 32) than fostering spirituality and emotional development. Research points to the importance of spirituality as a major factor in Native American retention rates. A qualitative study, conducted by Bowker (1993), on factors affecting the educational success of Native American women found that having a mentor, a strong sense of spirituality, and low family stress contributed to a higher success rate.

Spiritual traditions of Native Americans “involve a real need on the part of non-native people to recognize the intrinsic worth of native spiritual beliefs and practices . . . They are part of long held native traditions that have struggled to sustain their authenticity in the face of a dominant cultural denial” (Irwin, 1996, p. 309). An understanding of these traditions requires respect, patience, and a commitment to the complexities of Native American life and religion.

Family matters. For many, family is the cornerstone of life. This is even more so for most Native Americans. Most Native American students leave the reservation or their community to attend college. This separation from family may be a key factor on student retention. Guillory (2008) based his findings on a student retention model developed by HeavyRunner and DeCelles (2002) called the Family Education Model (FEM). A unique factor of this model is that it derives from the students' perceptions, not from administrators or public officials. Guillory noted that "this model suggests that replicating the extended family structure within the college culture enhances an American Indian student's sense of belonging and leads to higher retention rates" (p. 61).

Selden (2001) also used HeavyRunner and DeCelles (2002) FEM to identify cultural factors that increase student retention. This research examined why successful Native American students stay in college while others drop out, and found that successful students are able to build a closely-knit support network to help with the transition from high school to higher education. According to HeavyRunner and DeCelles, "We always look to our family first, and if that's not there, we look to our friends" (p. 2). Successful students have at least one person they can depend on. Selden found other barriers that need attention when working with native students, which include geographic isolation, as well as the challenges Native American students face when teaching their families about the demands of school. Some students admitted that some family members become resentful about taking care of children while their relative attends college (Selden, 2001). Selden noted another point made by HeavyRunner and DeCelles who admitted that the most important retention specialists are our grandmothers because they have all the power.

The extended family support system is one of the first systems sought by Native American students. Spiritual and tribal leaders are next, followed lastly by the university support services when assistance is needed. Lewis (1984) believes that Native Americans follow a very predictable pattern when they gain access to their support system. In general, Native American students are reluctant to use university support services. A study conducted by Ho (1987) found that as universities offer more and more services, and more Native Americans work in these service positions, the attitude of Native American students might turn around.

Self-esteem and locus of control. Research indicates that two of the most important motivational factors of academic success are self-esteem and locus of control (Sisney, Strickler, Tyler, Wilhoit, Duke & Nowicki, 2000). Self-esteem refers to an individual's perceived assurance of personal worth (Chow, Thompson, Wood, Beauchamp, & Lebrun, 2002). Low self-esteem is a problem among Native American students. There are research studies that suggest self-esteem and academic success rely upon a student's relationships with society and their perception of feeling valued. Having an understanding of their culture and past influences their success. Institutions must try to provide Native American students with opportunities to reaffirm their cultural identity.

Locus of control refers to a person's beliefs about control over life events. Sisney et al. found that locus of control has been associated with school success since the 1966 Coleman Report on Equality of Educational Opportunity was released (Gifford, Briceno-Perriott, & Mianzo, 2006). Hence, one way to facilitate student retention is to emphasize programs that help students develop the ability to learn autonomously. This may help students believe that academic success is not in the hands of the professors or luck, but in

their own capable hands. This study suggests that increasing a student's self-esteem and locus of control may increase retention and academic success.

In addition, another study conducted by Kerbo (1981) of college achievement among Native Americans attempts to empirically test for cultural factors that motivate Native American students in degree completion. Kerbo notes, "One of the most important cultural differences said to influence educational success among Native Americans is the existence of values rejecting individual competition" (p. 1276), suggesting that when Native American students identify themselves as more White, or have more White friends, they may come to feel more accepted in the college setting. Identifying with the dominant culture tends to ease the need to compete with White students, which raises self-esteem and overall school satisfaction. This study suggests when Native American students feel like they fit in, they may come to feel they equal White students in their ability to succeed academically. "It is not valuing education more, but the confidence in one's ability to achieve something valued by most Native American students that becomes the motivating factor" (p. 1279).

Summary

The literature on Native American educational success and retention heavily stresses several cultural factors. The importance of these cultural factors all stem from the perspective of the participants. Some of the barriers identified in the literature include poor academic skills, lack of sufficient financial support, and a need for more cultural knowledge from institutions of higher education. Studies suggest that increasing a student's self-esteem and locus of control may increase retention and academic success.

Although the current study sought to identify the perceived factors affecting the retention rate of Native American student from professors and school administrators, the

primary interest was the responses of the students. Based on the retention theories found in the literature, this study attempted to identify the perceived factors affecting the retention rate of Native American college students. This project presented data to identify the factors that would increase student retention rate of Native American students.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The following chapter is a description of a qualitative case study identifying the perceived factors influencing the retention rate of Native American college students. The case study included two Native American college students in a teacher education program. The case study design for this study was chosen because “case study knowledge resonates with our own experience because it is more vivid, concrete, and sensory than abstract” (Stake, as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 44). A qualitative case study was used because, as Merriam (2009) states, a qualitative method of research “focuses on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied, which offers the greatest promise of making a difference in people’s lives” (p. 1). Qualitative researchers are interested in “how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 14). This type of study also produces information only on the case being studied. This allows the researcher to focus solely on the process rather than the outcome.

Research Design

Merriam (2009) defines research methods as “a systematic process by which we know more about something than we did before engaging in the process” (p. 5). A qualitative researcher, on the other hand, is concerned with “understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 5). For this reason, a qualitative method was used for this research project. A case study allowed the researcher an opportunity to interact, observe, and peripherally assimilate using multiple data sources. It also allowed the

researcher the opportunity to uncover perceived factors gathered from Native American college students, faculty members, and educational administrators to develop ways of increasing the degree completion rate among Native American college students. One aspect of Native American culture is their averseness to talking about themselves and their achievements. Therefore, it was important to speak with faculty and staff to get an understanding of the students' academic skill levels and educational potential. Yin (2009) defines this bounded, descriptive, clinical method of investigation as a research tool that can "represent a significant contribution to knowledge and theory building" and in addition," such a study can even help to refocus future investigations in an entire field" (Yin, 2009, p. 47).

Guillory (2009) states that "in order to capture the essence of the Native American experience in higher education, leading researchers in the field suggest a qualitative methodical approach" (p. 63). Other researchers are also in agreement with this approach (Pavel, 1992; Tierney, 1991). The qualitative approach has made substantial contribution to educational research (Guillory, 2009; LeCompte, Millroy, & Preissle, 1992; Miles & Huberman, 1984). Due to the increased response for more study on the Native American student experience, more qualitative studies have emerged. For this reason, a qualitative case study was used to gain a good understanding of cultural identity, dilemmas, and triumphs of the Native American students from their point of view.

Seidman (1998) states the most important method a researcher has to investigate the experiences of another in an educational setting is through the interview process. In education, "interviewing is probably the most common form of data collection in qualitative studies" (Merriam, 2009, p. 86). Ness (2001) recommends the interview

process because it validates the traditional Native American outlook that fosters storytelling and listening. “Interviewing is necessary,” states Merriam (2009), “because researchers cannot always observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world” (p. 88). At times, interviewing is the only way to get data (Merriam, 2009). The interview questions were developed based on the following research questions.

1. What are the factors that influence the retention rate for Native American students enrolled in a 4-year teacher education program?
2. What are the students’ perceptions of the factors that influence their ability to stay at college until degree completion?
3. What factors, while attending a Christian college, enhance or detract from the factors that affect degree completion?

Procedures

The general procedures for this study draws from an in-depth case study method of data collection. The qualitative method of interviewing provided a useful tool to gaining an understanding of the participants' experience. Before the interview process began, approval from the Internal Review Board (IRB) was obtained (see Appendix A). The student participants who agreed to participate in this research study signed informed consent forms (see Appendix B). Other participants were contacted via electronic mail. If interested, they were asked to contact the researcher to set up an interview appointment.

The data collection process began with the first student interview conducted in the department of education’s adjunct professors’ office. The office is located on the second floor of the education building where privacy was a primary consideration for the students. Each of the student interviews took place at this location. The dean of students

was interviewed in his private office, located in the Student Union building. The faculty member interview took place at a local coffee shop, while the tribal community leader's interview was conducted via the telephone. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes, and a digital voice recorder was used to record the interviews. The telephone interview with the tribal community leader was also taped by placing the participant on speakerphone during the interview and recording his responses to the voice recorder. Copious notes were taken during the interview process, but careful consideration and mindfulness was given in making sure the participants knew they had the full attention of the researcher.

After the interview process concluded, a short discussion took place with each of the participants to ensure each one understood they would receive a copy of the interview transcript to review for accuracy and authenticity. The following information provides an in-depth description of the participants and the interview process.

Participants

Participants were chosen via purposeful sampling. This type of sampling is used when a researcher selects individuals who meet an informational need to complete the research. Those selected are rich in information and offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon that is the topic of interest (Patton, 2002). Five individuals participated in this research, which includes two Native American students, a Native American tribal community leader, the dean of students, and a faculty member who teaches and interacts with Native American students. The two students, faculty member, and the dean of students were all chosen from the same research site. The Native American tribal leader works off campus but interacts, counsels, and shares similar experiences with the Native American students. The low number of participants did not outweigh the contributions

they gave to the research based on the major characteristics of a case study. Merriam (2009), who concluded, supports this:

The single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of study, the case . . . a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries. The case then, could be a single person who is a case example of some phenomenon, a program, a group, an institution, a community, or a specific policy" (p. 40).

The following is a more complete description of the participants.

Native American students. The participants of this study include two Native American students. One of the students has successfully completed a degree in the Teacher Education program and the other student is currently enrolled, but has not yet completed the Teacher Education degree program. These students self-identify as Native Americans, each from a different tribe, and have close ties to the reservation and their native culture. Both students were raised and educated on a reservation, and it is where they plan to return after graduation. Although there is a distinction between tribes, these participants accepted the label Native American as their cultural identity.

Faculty. The faculty member included in this study is a full-time instructor who works at a mid-sized, private, Christian university. She self-identifies as White and holds a Christian world-view. She has experience teaching Native American students at the college level over the past 3 years and at the elementary and secondary levels for the past 30 years. The faculty member works in the Department of Education, and is an employee of this particular institution. This professor also works in a private Christian school district as the director of curriculum development. She mentors Native American students who are working towards a career in teaching elementary school children.

College administrator. The college administrator interviewed for this study to understand more of the perceived factors affecting Native American students was the dean of students. He self-identifies as White and also holds a Christian world-view. In addition, information gathered from the Dean of Students pertains to the spiritual needs, along with the academic needs, of Native American students who attend this particular institution. The dean of students is also an ordained pastor.

Native American tribal community leader. A Native American tribal community leader was contacted and interviewed for sharing the cultural expectations the Native American community has for students who are now entering colleges and universities. The tribal community leader works for the State Department of Education and works closely with Native American college students. He is also a Native American Lakota Sioux who graduated from college with a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in business administration. His experience with Native American students was invaluable to this study. Each participant was given a pseudonym to protect his or her identity. The following table provides specific information on the interview participants.

Table 2

Interview Participants

Pseudonym	Position
Mark	Dean of students
John	Tribal community leader
Debra	Faculty member
Luke, Student 1	Student, completed the academic program
Tara, Student 2	Student, in-progress of academic program

Study Site

A mid-sized, private, Christian university was the research site for this study. The college is located in Phoenix, Arizona. The college campus exists within an urban setting surrounded by residential homes, eateries, shops and parks. Local businesses rely heavily on patrons associated with the college. This university not only benefits the community, but it provides students and staff with a Christian environment grounded in biblical teachings. A more in-depth description of the study site is provided in the following chapter through the researcher's field notes from campus visits.

Researcher's Role and Personal Biography

The researcher is an adjunct professor at a private Christian college working in the education department at a small, private, Christian university. Teaching assignments include English courses from Introduction to Literature, American Literature I and II, Shakespeare, and an upper division course on the writings of C.S. Lewis. As an employee of this college, as with West Desert Christian University (WDCU), this researcher was required to sign a Statement of Faith in which she fully committed her teaching methods as well as relationships with peers and the student body to honoring God in all aspects of her life. In addition, she also has Native American ancestry as part of her heritage. Experiences with Native American family members involved a close relationship with a great-grandmother who self-identified as a member of the Cherokee tribe. The great-grandmother died when the researcher was ten years old. There was no other contact with Native American family member since the death of the great-grandmother. Personal bias pertains to the limited recollection of stories told by the family member. Information about the Native American culture was learned through a public education curriculum, teaching American literature classes, and self-discovery.

Her exiguous knowledge about this culture gives her the motivation and fortitude to pursue this topic in a diligent and rigorous manner.

Data Collection

Methods of data collection for this study encompassed fieldwork, interviewing, and document analysis. This data triangulation was used to ensure internal validity of the study. The researcher and support personnel used these methods. Proper consent was obtained from the college and the participants.

Observations. The researcher observed student interaction in the classroom, Chapel, and athletic events on campus, with proper consent from the university and the participants, which allowed the researcher a chance to view the way students group themselves in academic, as well as social settings. Interpretations were made by the observer whose bias and perceptions were included in the data but were separated out via the use of memos, asides, and reflections in the field notes.

Interviews. The interview format used in this study derived from a methodology that allows an appreciation of the participants' experience and the importance of their experience to emerge (Seidman, 1998). In qualitative research, the most common form of interview is the person-to-person encounter "in which one person elicits information from another" (Merriam, 2009, p. 88). In addition, Merriam states, "interviewing is the best technique to use when conducting intensive case studies of a few selected individuals" (p. 88). Interviewing also allows the researcher an opportunity to gain understanding of a phenomenon by adding a human element to the study.

The participants were contacted and asked if they were interested in participating in this study. Although the sample size was small, all five participants brought unique and diverse perspectives to this study. Each participant evidenced relevant experiences,

meaningful interpretations, warmth, and a deep interest in the research topic. Once the participants agreed to be interviewed, a date, time, and meeting place was arranged. The two Native American students signed and dated an informed consent form before the interviews took place (see Appendix B). The other three participants gave verbal consent to be interviewed but were not required to sign an informed consent form for this study.

A brief discussion took place to ensure that each student understood the purpose of the research and the interview process. The format of the interviews was open-ended. Merriam (2009) states, “less structured formats assume that individual respondents define the world in unique ways.... This format allows the researcher to respond...to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” (p. 90). The researcher asked a Native American peer the protocol on creating a level of comfort for the participants to respond openly to the questions. The setting and conversational style of interviewing also allowed the participants to share their experiences and give a voice to their educational experience. It was also very important for the researcher to recognize and acknowledge cultural protocol throughout the research process. The researcher accomplished this by not extending the right hand in a handshake gesture first when greeting the Native American participants. Per the tribal leader, the researcher only made direct eye contact briefly with the participants when asking questions. In addition, the door to the interview room was open when the researcher spoke to the male student.

Each interview was transcribed, read, and coded by the researcher, who solely prepared the transcripts of the interview sessions used in subsequent chapters of this study. All participants in this study were given a copy of their own interview transcription to review for accuracy. Each participant returned the transcripts with no corrections, except to omit “ums” for brevity. A research study conducted by Guillory

(2009) recommended retention strategies for Native American and Alaska Native college students based on responses to interview questions. Although the strategies suggested were derived from that particular study, Guillory (2009) believes "other mainstream universities and colleges should conduct similar studies to examine what factors are necessary for Native American students to be successful at their institutions" (Guillory, 2009, p. 20). The following is the list of interview questions—modified from Guillory (2009)—that were asked of students, an administrator, a faculty member, and a tribal community leader (see Appendix C).

Students were asked the following questions:

1. Describe your perception of how the university addresses issues of diversity.
2. How does the university address issues relating to minority students, specifically Native Americans?
3. What would you consider to be three or four factors that have led you to persist through your education so far?
4. What have been the barriers to overcome in trying to complete your education?
5. If you think about friends that have started college but not finished, what do you think kept them from doing so?
6. What is your ideal institution?

Administrator and faculty participants were asked the following questions:

1. Describe how the university addresses issues of diversity.
2. How does the university address issues relating to minority students, specifically Native Americans?
3. What three or four factors do you believe help Native American students persist through college?

4. What do you perceive as the three or four greatest barriers to completing college?
5. What are some of the problems administration sees in recruiting and retaining Native American students?
6. What is the relationship between Native American students and faculty?
7. Describe the ideal situation for Native American students to flourish at this particular university.

The tribal community leader was asked the following questions:

1. What is the tribe's perception on diversity issues in higher education?
2. What do you believe are the three to four factors that help Native American students persist through college?
3. What do tribal leaders believe are the three or four most significant barriers?
4. What can the tribe do to ensure the university is supporting diversity, especially for Native American students?
5. Describe the ideal situation for Native American students to flourish at this particular university.

Archival data. This research study reviewed West Desert Christian University (WDCU) statistical data to retrieve grade-point averages (GPA), retention and degree completion rates, and number of years/semesters attended or enrolled in higher education classes at WDCU. Educational administrators were asked to retrieve this data, which was searched for pertinent information. No special permission was needed to obtain this information because it is a matter of public record and no student names or other identifying labels were disclosed in this information.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is an on-going activity performed during and after the data-collection period has been completed. Merriam (2009) states that “simultaneous data collection and analysis occurs both in and out of the field: that is, you can be doing some analysis while you are in the process of collecting data” (p. 171). The goal of data analysis is to try to make sense out of the data collected (Merriam, 2009). This includes consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has read.

Coding. Developing a coding system involved searching the data for patterns, topics, and themes that emerged and using words and phrases to represent those patterns, topics, and themes. According to Creswell (2007), classifying is defined by reading the text, taking it apart, and looking for themes or categories of information to realign the information in a cohesive manner. Main themes are given codes, and once they are coded, a search for emerging data is done. Creswell (2007) also suggested the use of rich, thick descriptions validated accuracy of the data analysis. Themes that this research uncovered showed the need for a campus community, an increase in cultural knowledge by college educators, and a need for family support programs.

Open coding. The use of open coding was employed for interviewing and observing Native American students. Open coding compares data present in the literature review and investigates emerging themes and similarities (Merriam, 2009). The words and phrases used to represent the topics and themes were the categories used for the coding process. Through field notes and transcripts of interviews, the categories for coding revealed the themes that emerged from this data. The constructs from the literature review did not play an important part in the analysis process; instead, the

analysis process verified the constructs found in the literature review. Each transcript was reviewed and coded by hand, in which no computer-aided software was employed.

The process of coding was used to find answers to the research questions (Merriam, 2009). Analysis begins by identifying segments, or units, of the data that relate to the research questions. Each of "these units are also called categories or themes or findings" (p. 176). Constructing the categories started by reading the transcripts and making notes next to the data. "This process of making notations next to bits of data that strike you as potentially relevant for answering your research questions is also called *coding*" (p. 178). Codes were assigned throughout each of the transcripts and then reread to construct the categories or themes.

The number of themes that emerged depended on the data and the frequency of the response. Merriam (2009) believes that "the fewer the categories, the greater the level of abstraction, and the greater ease with which you can communicate your findings to others" (p. 187). The categories coded in each of the transcripts were combined and named due to their relevance to the research questions. This study examined the similarities found in the participant interviews, the observations, and the literature in order to better understand the perceived factors influencing the retention rate of Native American college students.

Trustworthiness. Strategies for ensuring the trustworthiness of this study included data triangulation, feedback, audit trail, and rich data. The most common strategy to ensure internal validity is data triangulation.

Merriam (2009) describes data triangulation, as "the most well known strategy to shore up internal validity of a study is what is known as triangulation" (p. 215). Data triangulation was used in this research to establish facts about the study by using different

sources of information. Multiple sources of data were used in this research to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon being studied and to increase the credibility and dependability of the data set. The sources used were interviews, the researcher's field notes, observations, and archival data pertaining to the retention rate of Native American college students.

Feedback, also referred to as member checks, was provided to participants and committee members throughout the data analysis stage of the research, which allowed for greater clarity during subsequent data collection from participants. The researcher intended to create a feeling of trust by providing feedback to those involved. This was accomplished by contacting participants during the data analysis process to ensure clarity of interview responses and interpretation of observed behaviors. It remained the expectation of this researcher to share the information gathered in order to further the search for factors influencing the retention rate of Native American college students.

An audit trail provided through field notes and daily journal entries to document what transpired during the research process was used as a valuable research tool. Descriptions of observations made on several campus visits and participant interviews were written down and dated for use in this study. Others who wish to study the same topic or same type of qualitative case study methods may use this element for repeating the research. A detailed description of daily activities, resources used, and data collected is presented in the following chapter.

Rich data defined as descriptive narratives are provided on the subject of the Native American students enrolled at West Desert Christian University participating in this study. Rich data gives the reader a detailed look at the sights, sounds, textures, culture, and uniqueness the participants possess.

Ethical Issues

Ethical considerations that potentially may arise during this study would include student privacy, data storage, and confidentiality. Each one of these issues was closely monitored to ensure that there were no breaches of ethical protocol at any time during this research study. Pseudonyms were used to ensure students' privacy. In addition, interviews were conducted in a private office on campus during the late afternoon of the summer session when student attendance was low. The interview transcripts, along with the data-recording device and voice recording, were stored in a locked file cabinet. The sole property of the file cabinet belongs to the researcher who maintains all the contents in the file cabinet. Careful ethical considerations for all parties were held to the highest standards.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

“Knowledge, combined with the wisdom of our peoples, is what creates true opportunity,” said Joe Shirley of the Navajo Nation (Native Village, 2011, P. 9). Aleeah Livengood, a Seneca Cherokee of the Oneida people, stated, “The acquisition of an education is the only way that we can improve our lives, the lives of our children and our people” (p. 3).

The need for education continues to escalate as each generation struggles to improve their standard of living. The above quotes are just a glimpse into the attitudes Native Americans hold toward higher education. Critical theory (CT) perspectives—including Bank’s multiculturalism, Kallen’s (1915) theory of cultural pluralism, Vygotsky’s (1978) socioeconomic theory, and Bandura’s (1986) social cognitive theory—weave their way through this research as a way of examining the behaviors, cultural distinctions, and values of Native American students. This chapter gives a description of the stories and experiences shared by the participants.

The purpose of this chapter is to report the data analysis and research findings. The primary focus of this study was to identify factors affecting the retention rate of Native American college students. The rationale for conducting this study included ways to broaden career opportunities, increase academic skills, and increase the socioeconomic status for more Native American college students. These extremely important issues emphasize the need for this study, to dig deeper into the perceived factors affecting the college retention rate of Native American students.

The research questions that guided this case study into the perceived factors affecting the retention rate of Native American college students in a teacher education

program are based on three assumptions. One assumption is that the case study would discover the perceived factors for the low retention rate of Native American students. A second assumption was that the teacher education program provides systematic support to students to increase the graduation rate of Native American students who want to become teachers. Finally, it was an assumption that this case study would bring more awareness to faculty, staff, deans, and chancellors of the crucial need for more Native American teachers. The research questions from these assumptions are as follows:

1. What are the factors that influence the retention rate for Native American students enrolled in a 4-year teacher education program?
2. What are the students' perceptions of the factors that influence their ability to stay at college until degree completion?
3. What factors, while attending a Christian college, enhance or detract from the factors that affect degree completion?

Description of the University

The institution of higher education selected for this study, West Desert Christian University (WDCU), a pseudonym, is located in an urban setting surrounded by residential homes, eateries, shops and parks. Numerous buildings and natural greenery, which make up the University's 90 acres, welcome all who enter the campus grounds. The initial view of the campus is a long regal walkway lined with tall, string-lighted palm trees that lead the visitor straight to the Student Union building where students can meet with university support staff, socialize with fellow students, and find a quiet area to study (Field Notes, 2009). The researcher visited WDCU several times throughout the fall and spring semesters of 2009-2010. During the month of July 2011, she conducted a case

study in which interview questions were asked and answered by the dean of students, a tribal community leader, a faculty member, and two Native American students.

The university website invites potential students to enroll at WDCU with the following description:

[West Desert Christian University] is a Christian university, and as such, we provide a quality education from the context of our Christian heritage for both traditional students as well as working professionals. To help our students find their purpose and achieve their full potential, we integrate our Christian faith into everything we do. With God's grace, WDCU has been cultivating a community of students, faculty, staff and alumni who care about each other in an environment that places ethics and Christian values at the forefront of our educational experience.

As a Christian University, it is our desire to help our students, both online and those living on campus, in their academic and spiritual journeys. Our hope is to intentionally provide opportunities for you to explore who Jesus is, grow in a relationship with Him, and ultimately become a co-laborer with Christ (WDCU, 2011, para. 2).

Native American History at WDCU included on the university's official website details additional information for current and future students and employees. The data states that:

Native American students have an established history with WDCU, including nearly 200 alumni and approximately 1,500 current students with a tribal affiliation. WDCU also has a partnership with the Native American Basketball Invitational. With the State where the University resides representing the highest

percentage of Native Americans across the nation, it is convenient to have the option to attend class at the urban campus, or online.

Higher education may possibly help a person propel their career goals by providing academic and critical thinking skills that potential employers are seeking from today's graduates. WDCU emphasizes these aims by appealing to the Native American student with the following information:

While 77% of American Indians ages 25 and older are high school graduates, only 14% currently hold a bachelor's degree or greater. As the number of jobs requiring bachelor's degrees continue to increase, so does the need to further one's education in order to maintain competitive in the job market. Each of the top ten fastest growing occupations requires a bachelor's degree, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. It is projected that these 10 fields will grow faster through 2018 than all other occupations. That makes it more important now than ever before to achieve a college-level degree. (WDCU, 2011, para. 4)

Currently there are 53,018 students enrolled in on-campus and on-line courses. WDCU is one of the fastest growing universities in the United States (WDCU, 2011). In the fall of 2010, WDCU hired 60 new full-time instructors for the very popular and fast growing on-line programs. The need for accessible education is great and this university is trying hard to meet those demands. The admissions policies are found on the University's website that includes the following statements:

[West Desert Christian University] welcomes applications from all qualified students, who are at least 16 years of age. Although the university seeks to integrate Christian faith and practice into all aspects of campus life, no statement of faith or religious affiliation is required of prospective students. Applications

for admission are considered primarily in light of the applicant's academic qualifications. Any qualified student willing to uphold the university's vision and mission and open to the possibility of spiritual as well as intellectual development is encouraged to apply. (WDCU, 2011, para. 1)

WDCU also offers approximately 100 bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degree programs in education, business, liberal arts, nursing, and health sciences. The university offers an ROTC program, as well as a military university program to meet the needs of military personnel, DOD personnel, and their families. The university has been named one of the nation's top military friendly schools by *GI Jobs* magazine (WDCU, 2011).

The university campus is currently undergoing major construction projects. The new buildings offer students many amenities such as an Olympic-sized heated pool, two new dorm buildings, and a new state-of-the-art student recreation center. In addition, a new 5,000-seat arena as well as dining facility with a bowling alley in the basement will be complete in the fall of 2011 (WDCU, 2011). The existing structures include two and three story brick buildings with desert landscape surrounding the front entrance from well-maintained sidewalks. There is a campus community pool that sits directly in front of the student union building where currently the cafeteria, game lounge, and several staff offices, including the dean of students, share space. The classrooms are clean, bright, and adequately equipped with audio visual aids, a computer, projector, white boards, and long desk tables (Field Notes, 2010).

The college chapel is located inside the gymnasium. The stage is set up in the middle of the basketball court with a podium, microphone, large screen, and a projector. The bleachers are accordion-style, meaning they retract up against the wall when not in use. During chapel service, they are pulled out and used for seating purposes. The

acoustics in the gymnasium enhances the music, the message, and the enthusiasm exhibited by the students, staff, and the chapel speakers and performers (Field Notes, 2010). Attending chapel at WDCU is optional, but WDCU does offer students an opportunity to earn 1/2 credit towards degree completion if they register for UNV 115, which requires students to attend 12 out of 15 chapel services and write a summary paper (dean of students interview, June 30, 2011).

Findings

The purpose of the chapter is to give an account of the findings from the data collection process. The data collected exposed factors influencing the retention rate of Native American college students enrolled in a four-year teacher education program. A number of factors that influence the retention rate surfaced from the participants' responses to the interview questions. These factors reflect the interest of the interview participant although the emphasis may vary between each of them.

The two students interviewed for this study each self-identify as Native American. Student 2 however, also clarified that her tribal affiliation is half Hopi and half Navajo. Her physical features of long black hair and brown eyes presented characteristics of Native American culture. She is in her early 20's, very soft spoken, very articulate, and eager to share her educational experience for this study. She wore traditional western-style clothing, which included a t-shirt and blue jeans. Before the interview process began, the researcher introduced herself and began a short conversation about the weather, favorite movies and television shows, and which flavor of ice cream is best in cold weather in order to get to know the participant better before asking the research questions. The participant appeared more relaxed and spoke candidly during the interview.

Student 1, on the other hand, is in his mid- 50's, a proud father of two children, stoic in appearance and facial expressions. He also wore western-style clothing, which included a collared shirt and blue jeans. Before interview questions were asked, a short conversation about hobbies, travel destinations, and weekend plans were discussed in order to establish a rapport with the participant. From the beginning of the interview process, the researcher noticed the slow cadence of the participant's speech that appeared to be characteristic of Native American storytellers. Listening to his voice, the researcher was mesmerized and engrossed in the manner in which the participant chooses his words to express his educational experiences. He had tremendous wisdom and insight into Native American students' behavior and shared his concerns as to why students decide to leave school before earning a degree. Student 1 was extremely helpful and forthcoming with his responses to the interview questions.

In reviewing the data from these interviews, several themes emerged, giving rise to the different experiences and perspectives on the retention of Native American college students. By reading the interview manuscripts and coding repeated phrases and words, specific themes started to emerge. According to the data, there are fundamental, as well as complex dynamics that exist between the student and the institution that contribute to the success or failure of the Native American student. The remainder of this chapter outlines the findings from the continuing data analysis process, which looked for related themes and topics shared by the participants. From that analysis, major themes and topics emerged out of the voices of the participants. The four main themes that arose from the interviews are cultural identity, the institution, factors for success, and barriers to success. These major themes included important topics such as the need for family

support, mentors, building relationships on campus, individual learning experiences, and connectedness with other Native Americans.

Cultural identity. Defining challenges that Native American college students face was an important part of this study. Challenges included issues with ethnic or cultural differences, religious differences, and financial barriers. Although there have been efforts to increase the low retention rate of Native Americans, the historical records show that difficulties persist in the educational experiences of this unique population. The effects the boarding schools had on native people crosses generations. It also affects the way Native Americans view higher education even today. The interview data collected from students and administrators shines a light on many of the challenges Native American students face in higher education. These challenges fall into two categories: either personal or institutional. One of the challenges that Native American students face when entering college campuses is the issue concerning diversity. Student 2's experience provides a look into the complexities Native American students face when leaving the reservation for the first time and entering the college setting:

Well, I think the college has a pretty good understanding of bringing different tribal groups together. The thing is that, I think it is just the students that need to get used to the idea because, while growing up on the reservation, you are only growing up in a tribe that you know. You don't really get to see other tribes but you keep hearing different stories, or arguments, or things like that, from your family members about one tribal group. So that's what you kind of grow up on, kind of another hatred toward another. Like me, I am half Hopi and half Navajo. Both those two tribes don't like each other, so, it was hard. But, both my mother, (not really much my dad's side, my dad is Hopi) but on the Navajo side they

really don't like that, so my mom got a lot of...kind of out casted because she married a Hopi, but it still kind of conflicts a little bit now with her family. Just growing up on the Hopi side, you get treated as a Navajo, then on the Navajo side you get treated as a Hopi. It's a little bit hard growing up in that, but that's kind of an example of how the different tribal groups are kind of against each other.

Student 1, on the other hand, is an older Native American student who understands the diversity issues on the reservation, but had a different attitude about diversity on campus:

I kind of walked in here...I knew pretty much what to expect, you know. Not that I heard about it before, it's just when you're amongst natives it's a little different being amongst Caucasians. So there is a diversity of different people here and each one is a little different, so I expected that. As each tribe is different, they have different customs, different religions, they even have different foods, you know, depending on where they live. Like my friend, Jacob, he is from the Hopi country and it's a different country. Where I come from, it's farm country, rich fertile land, you know. I expected that and I was kind of looking forward to that. I was wanting to meet others so we somewhat bonded pretty good.

The tribal community leader, who works with the state department of education, shared his personal experience in higher education:

I would say overall, particularly if they are coming from a tribal community, being able to have someone that looks like them and sounds like them and encouraging them really goes a long way in terms of helping them succeed. On a personal level, I really didn't have the confidence when I went back to school because I didn't do well when I was younger, so for me, I wasn't going to be able to get through it. So I went to a tutor for algebra in the tutoring services, where it

was available at the library. I went to the library and I went to the counter where I had an appointment scheduled. The tutor was sitting over there in the corner waiting for you, so I turned around and the tutor looked just like me. He was a native gentleman that had long hair and he was taking physics classes and higher level math classes, and all of a sudden I came out of that session feeling like I could do this. If I had turned around and it was a non-native tutor, I don't think that it would've made me feel any more confident or that I was capable of doing it.

When asked how the university addresses issues of diversity within minority groups, Student 1 felt equality was an issue:

Well, I wish it were more like the military where everyone is treated equal. I get a feeling sometimes that that's not how it works here. I don't know why, but I think what it is, is that each student is handled differently. I'm more mature, I can take a lot you know, whereas the young ones are easily offended or hurt, you know. I think in that respect, it's handled differently with each person: not by tribal affiliation or anything like that, just by the student personally. A lot of these kids, they never been away from home you know. They're young, and when they walk in here they get hit hard you know, especially as a freshman. When I came in here as a freshman—I'm more mature than all of them—I could hardly take it.

Student 1 emphasized that he choose to come to college and that he was not forced in any way. Making that choice on his own gave him the strength to be patient and give himself time to adjust to his new environment. He pointed out that it only took him a month or two and he was into a routine and really starting to enjoy college life.

Valuing cultural differences is a priority for the dean of students at WDCU, who believes that the university addresses issues of diversity from an educational viewpoint. He states the following:

On campus, we incorporate a session on diversity in the student leadership-training program. In addition, roommate mediation can have a diversity piece with it if that is the issue. We also have clubs and organizations for minority students. Presently we have NASA, Native American Student Association, which addresses issues relating to Native American students. There has been positive feedback regarding these activities from students, as well as staff members.

In her own words, the faculty member shares her perspective on how the university addresses issues of diversity:

Some of this is my awareness, and I will tell you as an instructor I've received no formal training in diversity awareness or diversity training. However, I do enjoy reading and I'm aware of social issues. So, in terms of my position within the university, diversity is addressed both in awareness of the sheltered English immersion program and the kids I teach. I teach teachers and they are required to be aware of the cultures that they are teaching. In addition, the sheltered English immersion program not only deals with teaching them to be aware of language, but also teaches an awareness of the fact that the students come from a variety of cultures. Moreover, the constructivist approach to education says that they come with a foundation for learning. Whether or not it's a foundation you expect them to have, they come with the foundation. In addition, that foundation is their experience in reading, or their experience in science, or even their experience in Christian culture. They are going to build on that, and I cannot presuppose that

their experience is my experience...awareness of that diversity means [awareness that] they have come from a Native American culture, that their exposure to concepts of what I am to teach [may differ]. And I teach methods classes. The methods they were trained by may be slightly or vastly different from the methodology that I am teaching. I try to use brain-based methods, something that is researched and then shown to have value through research and studies.

However, one of my biggest life lessons happens to be with the Navajo culture. I found out that I cannot ask your average Native American, particularly a Navajo, a question to their face, even if it's a student at a university level, because it's considered disrespectful. Therefore, when I'm teaching, I have to be aware of what their social needs are and the cultural needs are as I am addressing them.

Again, with the constructivist approach, it depends on their base of knowledge coming into the classroom and their understanding of learning and what teaching looks like. It's probably very different if they were educated on the reservation, or if they were educated in another country, or if they were educated in a Christian school or public school. I have to be aware of that background.

The tribal community leader was asked about the tribe's perspective on diversity issues in higher education, to which he responded with the following statement:

I believe it's important to define the difference between Native American students who are getting their education in their own tribal community specifically on reservation or adjacent to the reservation. There is a lot of public education adjacent to the reservation. There are a lot of public educational [facilities] adjacent to the reservation that have large Native American populations, and then those Native American students that are in the general urban population, what we

refer to as urban Indians. Actually, there are significant numbers of Native Americans that are in the urban areas. Within the tribal community, I believe that some of the researchers suggest that native students do better with teachers and administrators that come from the community, which I think is almost self-explanatory, but those teachers and those administrators have a better understanding in terms of where the students come from both socioeconomically and culturally. Whereas others, who have never been on a reservation before, it is a bit of a culture shock to come to the reservation, and their perception is about how students learn and what they understand and perhaps even their perception of how they approach their material might be different, and may be a lot more alien. It might take longer or be harder for them, the teacher, to gain not only their trust, but also [understand] how the student learns.

The spiritual importance placed on its members within any culture influences a person's sense of identity. For many Native Americans, cultural identity and spirituality are intricately bound. Although spirituality is often discussed in a specialized context for everyday discourse in mainstream U.S. culture, it permeates Native culture (Gilgun, 2002; Miller, 2003). There are considerable differences between the many tribes represented in the United States, but spirituality is considered an integral part of Native Americans' worldview (Fuller-Thomson & Minkler, 2005; Trujillo, 2000). According to Walker and Thompson (2009), Muscogee Creek Indians describe Native spirituality as "a pervasive quality of life that develops out of an authentic participation in values and real life practices meant to connect members of a community with the deepest foundations of personal affirmation and identity" (p. 310). Although the definition of spirituality differs

slightly from one tribe to another, most Native Americans agree to the following generalized meaning provided by Garcia (2000):

Spirituality is giving credit and honor to the Great Spirit, the Creator, Grandfather of all Indian people. Spirituality means living the life that the Great Spirit has blessed people with. It means being respectful of all things, especially of the elders and the children. It means taking care of the Mother Earth and not abusing the gifts She has provided. It means acknowledging the Creator in every aspect of one's life. Spirituality is sometimes demonstrated through prayer (p. 47).

To exemplify, Student 2 spoke about how the university gave her an opportunity to learn about different cultures and how other tribes respond to Christian teachings:

They [the university] give us a chance to just kind of get to know each other, how we grew up, and an opportunity to kind of explain our background. We also have apologetics class here that not only addresses how to talk about Christ to our own group, but also to understand how each people group will receive the message of the gospel. They actually allow us to do a presentation on our own people group and how the process of bringing the gospel to our own people and that's how we share it to the rest of the students. Also, to let them know the background of where we're coming from, this is how Christ is giving it to us. It lets the other students know, who are usually underclassmen, or understand that we are not all the same, and we don't all respond to the gospel the same way. So, it's pretty interesting. I have learned there are different tribes in areas where they are more warrior people, there are other tribes that kind of just wander, and then there are still others who take from tribes that are around them and make up into their own. There are tribes that have never fought, or anything like that, never wandered in

an area; they just found their setting and just stayed there. There are a lot of differences between cultures and tribal communities that I never knew about, but the Christian environment gave me a sense of connection to everyone.

Increasing cultural knowledge for Native students, as well as non-Native students, provides an important element to the educational experience for all who wish to teach in today's diverse classroom. The ability to understand cultural differences not only affects the different races, but it also affects inter-racial relationships as well.

The institution's retention potential. The institution of higher education plays a significant role in the retention of Native American students. With spirituality and religion at its cornerstone of Native American culture, Christian education may have a significant role in addressing issues relating to retention. The campus culture has an impact on the students' educational experience, and thus it must accept responsibility for the part it plays in helping or hindering students in their goal to reach degree completion. This section discusses how institutions of higher education influence the Native American students' experience. The interview participants shared their views on how higher education can improve its involvement in raising the retention rate of Native American students.

Administrators were asked how the university could help non-native teachers effectively teach native students in their classroom. The tribal community leader spoke on the university's responsibility with the following statement:

I would say responsibility falls under the category of professional development in terms of teachers who are already out teaching. The other is the teaching programs that teaching colleges provide in terms of their preparation prior to them going out, in providing them with that kind of cultural sensitivity in terms of

working in the tribal community. Obviously, you require a more tailored program at the university level because they can go through a standard teaching program and then again, they may not necessarily get that emphasis if they decide they're going to work in the tribal community.

The faculty member also emphasized the need for cultural training for faculty and staff:

I think that if the training were done well, it would be of great benefit. The problem with training is, it is very dependent on not only the content but also the person delivering the training. If the training you would be given increases your awareness of how content and methods affect students, then I think it would be a great thing. I think that if you use a PowerPoint presentation and simply run through it so you can say you did it, there would be little to no benefit. I think the unintentional benefit of this state becoming an English only state, thereby requiring sheltered English immersion classes, is not the intentional benefit to teach diversity training, but it was an unexpected benefit that has come out of it. This is for teacher candidates, not for all college students, however, it probably should be for everyone, and I agree it would be of benefit.

The question was asked whether diversity training should be included in the teacher education program, which was met with this response from the tribal community leader:

Yes, I think so and actually, there are a couple of efforts in terms of addressing this issue. The issue of teachers in tribal communities or a shortage of teachers in tribal communities goes beyond having available teaching corps that comes from the tribe. There are other issues in terms of housing and transportation. In some cases, tribes don't necessarily provide housing. For example, down in the southern region there is a tribe whose teachers have to commute 70 miles one

way. They have to leave fairly early to get to the school and then if they stay after for programs, then they don't get home until late. Back to the question on the shortage of teachers, there are two efforts. One is "Teach for America." Teach for America is kind of like the Peace Corps program where you can get your 4-year degree in whatever it is, not necessarily teaching, but go into a teaching corps and work in a tribal community. Teach for America could place you and then you are committed to teaching for a couple of years. And if you decide to stay in, they will provide you the professional development, or if you decide to move on into whatever your intended career, you can leave. So that is obviously a short-term solution but one that may help, and what we refer to as *parachuting teachers* in these small communities. The other effort is what's called *grow your own*. One of the state universities and Navajo have a project in terms of identifying Native American teacher aides in some of these very rural Navajo communities by recruiting them and encouraging them to get their teacher certificate. They have a combination of online and classroom instruction to move them toward getting their teaching certificate, and then they are able to teach within their own community. That is a larger process, so it's kind of a two-pronged approach in terms of trying to address the immediate issue.

When asked about the benefits for universities to collaborate with tribal colleges, the tribal community leader had this to say:

Yes, I think many universities do partner with tribal colleges because there are a lot of extension programs. We are now seeing a lot more online programs. I do know, again I am talking about my own tribe the Tohono o' Odham, that Pima Community College first went out and were doing extension classes in the

southern portion of the state. When the tribe decided they were going to start their own college, they [Pima Community College] helped them set it up and helped them get their accreditation. So they actually, Pima Community College, helped the Tohono O' Odham tribe set up their own tribal college.

This type of collaboration between a public 2-year community college and a tribal college benefitted the Native American community living in that geographical area. However, with more collaborative efforts by larger institutions of higher education, more Native American communities would be affected. Four-year colleges have more resources to help meet the educational needs of tribal communities to ensure educational equality is being addressed.

Individual factors for success. The literature has given a glimpse into the challenges Native American students face when entering higher education. In order for students to be successful in reaching degree completion, the institution itself plays a pivotal part. However, students who choose to enroll in higher education must first decide which college or university is best for them. They also differ in their personal ability to adapt and succeed in the chosen academic environment.

Support systems. Student 2 shared some of the factors that are currently helping her persistent in her university education thus far by revealing that the following:

The first year I was here, it was sort of like unexpected for me because I had applied here and I didn't really know much about it. I just applied here to apply because people told me to apply. So I did, but there are some things that are in my past that I went through that I blocked out of my mind. I'm moving on and I need to forget about all of what happened. But, God does things unexpectedly. I really do believe that Christ really brought me here to heal me from my past. I

didn't really understand how much it hurt me. I allowed myself to get hurt and so when I was here I actually took a counseling class. So, when I did, it was like the very last day of school the instructor told us we were going to have like some sort of real counseling session to allow us to understand what our students will be going through, if we're going to still pursue that career. So we did, but at the same time, it was like I have a feeling I am going to be one of those persons, and I was. Throughout that session, it allowed me to kind of express some troubles that I've had, but only to the extent that I only allowed it to be. But, eventually though, as the questioning progressed, it got to the point where a question was brought up and when I was asked to answer, I like literally opened my mouth but nothing came out. It was shocking. It just really lifted this burden that I had. I was just lifted and happy all the time. I think that if you want to come to a Christian college, you need to understand that you will be changing. You will be challenged, but it's really up to you if you want to challenge yourself. So, I think that one of the factors for success is actually just dealing with your past and make sure you have dealt with it in order for you to go further, also, to be able to learn more and be able to apply it to your life.

The dean of students identified three factors that help students in their quest for academic success. First, he felt that students should seek out help when struggling academically. Secondly, they should get involved in a supportive community. Often times they come from a tight knit community and transition can be difficult. Lastly, the students should have a plan for their life and understand their college education is a stepping-stone for that plan. The faculty member felt that finding early success was a contributing factor for student retention.

I do think that early success is very important. When I say early success, I mean providing adequate support at the beginning of their educational career to find that they can succeed. I do not have enough experience to know whether their peers from their tribal communities criticize them, but I know in other areas where education is not necessarily valued, that walking away from the culture you are part of to receive a formal education is a big step. Sometimes you are criticized for just trying to be better, or trying to emulate the White man's culture.

Therefore, I think early success is very important. I think helping them [students] find a community that they are a part of, like if they are musically inclined, then finding a musical community. If they are athletic, then finding an athletic community. If they are particularly academically inclined, to find study groups so that they have a community that they are part of and that they can excel within.

The need for a support system was a valuable factor identified for the students, as well as the administrative participants. As stated in the data, successful students have at least one person they can depend on.

Student 2 credits her success in staying in school thus far with having someone to help with accountability.

It really helps just to be able to find an accountability partner. Like someone who, maybe it is your best friend or some outside of school, but just having someone there that you are comfortable to tell everything to. Having them correct you, to help you think things through, or tell you that you are doing something wrong. You really need that especially when you are going to a Christian college.

The tribal community leader also reiterated the beneficial factors of a good support system by sharing his experience with the following:

I think it has to start with an early foundation, and I would say that is probably, whether tribal or...nontribal, is having a good support system. You know if a student doesn't have a role model, then obviously they don't have any expectations that they're going to be college-bound. In my case, I was fortunate because both of my parents had graduated from college. My father got his degree in the 1960s and my mother was much later, but you know there was already some expectation that was not out of my reach because I saw it and I was familiar with it. Whether they are tribal or nontribal, many kids out there come from families where they are first-generation higher education. They are blazing their own trail without mentors, good counselors, or good teachers that will encourage them that they are capable of doing it, and they could have the luxury with their confidence in their ability to believe that they can go on to higher education. They also need a support system once they are at a college or university. If they come from a tribal community and they are not at a tribal college, going to a big state school like Penn State or Arizona State, that is quite a foreign system for them. Therefore, unless there are some resources available to make them feel a little more comfortable, a little bit more able to navigate, then it is much easier for them to get discouraged and think that they are not going to be able to make it. If a student has a good support system at home and has a good support system at school, then they have a higher likelihood of success.

The faculty member also believes that a mentor would benefit Native American students by observing the following:

I believe a mentor, specifically a Native American mentor, would have a positive effect on students. It would be a powerful image if they had someone that walked

ahead of them. The Native American students that I teach here are part of the support community experience that they shared with their parents who were also educated. They walked that road ahead of them and they were very successful in college. I think there is that level of expectation that it is possible to do this really helps.

Support needed for Native American students does not just encompass friends and family. The need for teachers to build and nurture relationships with students was uncovered in the data as having a profound impact on Student 2. She stated the following:

You really need to find or get to know the teachers. They have a lot of the same experiences. You can ask anyone here a question and they can pray for you, or tell you things from an outsider's point of view. It really helps. There are only a couple of Native American teachers. Most are White. They are trying to expand to other reservations to see if more teachers would come in but most are non-natives. They have went in, the non-natives who have a heart for Native Americans, and they expose themselves to the tribal cultures and try to understand and apply it to their teaching and all that. So it's great. Overall, I think we do need more Native American teachers; it would help.

Native American teachers stand as role models for Native American students. Rodriquez (1997) believes that Native American professors are an integral part of higher education's efforts toward retention issues. Outside of family support, participants mention building relationships with instructors as an important aspect of their academic experience.

Barriers to success. There are numerous challenges that Native American students face when entering higher education. Guillory (2008) believes that “student

departure prior to degree completion occurs when there is incongruence between the student's pre-entry attributes, intentions, goals, and commitments and the campus environment" (p. 59). HeavyRunner and DeCelles (2002) suggest that there needs to be a duplication of an "extended family structure within the college culture" (Guillory, 2008, p. 61) to enhance the Native American students' experience. The research data revealed that the lack of support from the tribal community was one of the major barriers. Other barriers that emerged from the data include financial struggles, maturity levels, and the misconceptions about going to college.

Tribal community support. When the participants were asked what barriers they felt contributed to Native American students leaving college before earning a degree, the faculty member had this to say:

I truly believe the number one barrier is the lack of tribal community support; that is, if a student was raised on the reservation. It is very difficult to walk away from a community that you love. In my experience, if there is family support, they are more likely to stay with it. If they were within a Native American community that provides community support, I would almost guarantee success.

The student participants also emphasized the lack of tribal support on financial matters.

Student 2 shared some of her struggles by explaining the following:

One of the main barriers for me was finances. Coming from a native culture, we really do not have a lot of income that comes in. Even with the tuition fee low, it is still hard for us to get all that money scrounged up. That is kind of one of the barriers, but with a lot of prayer and faith and looking around for scholarships, it can be possible. Some but very few tribes will give money to students who go to a Christian college. Monies are given to students who go to a state college. It is a

lot harder to find scholarships, but there are churches around here that will help students. It is not as much, but it can help. A lot of students here are working part-time jobs to help pay the tuition, but there is always going to be a challenge. There is always someone there to help, and the school also gives scholarships to a number of students. They usually say if you are going to apply for scholarship, you are going to do some kind of volunteer work at the school, which is fine.

Financial support. The tribal community leader felt the socio-economic conditions played a crucial role in student retention. Sharing his understanding of the problem, he stated the following:

Part of what I think goes hand-in-hand—not with just those cultural requirements or expectations, but the socio-economic conditions—obviously, the majority of the tribal communities have very dire socio-economic and health conditions, whether it is alcoholism, substance abuse, and unemployment. All of those are all very high. It is one thing to look at it statistically, but it is another thing to live through it. So, you know, their parents may have problems with substance use or alcohol, or they may be raising their brothers and sisters, or they may have issues on their own. So, again with unemployment, numbers that range anywhere from 40 to 60 to 70% unemployment on some of these reservations. Those are very tough conditions to get out of or to devote to going on to higher education. There is that cultural component to take care of the family with such a high unemployment rate on the reservation.

The faculty member also conveyed that finances were a barrier by reiterating the sentiments of other participants when she said:

Once the students get to college and on the college campus, the things that I think inhibit their success would be perhaps the lack of funds. The application of their degree when they return to their culture, if they are going to return to their culture, is whether they are going to be able to use that degree to make a living that would be different from the living they might have made if they did not have a college degree. They really have to look at perhaps why they are doing it, and if they are satisfying a goal they have personally or if they are trying to make someone else happy or prove something to someone. With the onset of casinos having come to the reservation, the opportunity to earn a living on the reservation is greater, but often does not require a college education to earn that living. You could do those jobs without having additional education. Perhaps, if we could instill the mindset that they are thinking for future generations, that if we could help the Native American communities think about bettering the ability to pursue their culture through a written format, to teach within perhaps their native tongues. Not necessarily provide what we would consider success, but again the preservation of who they are, and the ability to use their God-given talents and abilities to develop their minds and that kind of thing, to be creative. Those kinds of things might be more motivating than bigger houses, better cars, and more money in the bank.

Misconceptions about college life. Another barrier that emerged from the data was the maturity level of the students and their misconception about attending a Christian college. Student 1 had this to say about fellow students. In addition, he also shared a childhood memory that affected him deeply:

I think some of them were not ready for college and they had a misconception of this Christian college. It is not a state university. This is a Christian college. They are a little lax here at times, but I keep reminding the kids, ‘you know we have responsibilities, so we have to live together and respect each other.’ I kind of remind them that I am from the old school. It is not like a state university where life is different. They conduct their lives differently, because here we have to follow the rules, follow the Book, and I don’t know what they are thinking. They come in here and they are not financially ready, and I have seen some things because of that. They are doing other things. They do not channel their money to the school; they owe money. So, those things I see students come here who are not ready. They got the wrong idea about the school and finances. The tribes will pay for you if you are going to a state university. They will pay for your education, but if they find out you are going to a Christian college they say no. My tribe is still very traditional. They do not want to get involved in what they call the White man’s religion. So, I’ve dealt with that too. Even when I went back home after being gone so many years they still come at me. They say, “hey, are you still going to church?” I say “yes,” but they remind you it is not for you, that is for the White man. You have your own religion here. You belong here, you know, and they won’t give up. They still want you back, you know. I have been involved in the Church since I was 9 years old. I asked my mom to take me away from the traditional ceremonies. I didn’t like those things. The religion worships different idols and I am not comfortable with that. So, if you look at the whole picture you look at the different nation tribes that have their religion, they worship different things in different ways.

Student 2 felt that the traditional Native American family did not understand or support students who wanted to attend a Christian college. She stated the following:

There is a lot of family that are very traditional and into their native culture and it's hard for students to learn sometimes because family or friends and people who are close to them do not like that they are coming to a Christian college. We had one student who is the only believer in her family. She went to a state university. At first, she had one more year of school before she graduated, but she just felt like she was called to a Christian college, so she came here. At first, she did not tell her family just because of the fear of what the family would do, but eventually she did tell them. You have to get over it and then be emotionally strong for the teasing that comes with it, or mocking, or things like that. It gets pretty hard for us as students. Sometimes there are responsibilities for the family to go home on weekends, which makes it difficult for the students. Fortunately for me, I did grow up in a Christian family. It was a little bit challenging because I am the youngest sibling and my parents didn't really want to let me go, but I am 20 now so they need to let me go ahead and support me.

The tribal community leader was asked if the returning student was more likely to succeed in college than the younger students who come straight out of high school. This was the response:

My observation is that native students do not drop out of college. They stop out of college. It is not uncommon for them to not make it. I may be an example of that, you know. I went to 1 year straight out of high school and then started working and then did not get back into school until I was in my mid-30s.

Historically, I would say a lot of our native students who have completed higher

education have been older and more mature, but it may have taken them 10 to 15 years to get their bachelors degree. There is a maturity factor there, particularly when they are coming from a very rural community and in some cases very disciplined communities. Some people, for example, are very strong ceremonial. It is comparable to coming from an Amish community. They are not exposed to a lot of things and it is really hard for them to handle the society. Again, if they come from a tribal community, they have as much responsibility at home. So, one of these barriers, in terms of students who come to this university, is that it is not uncommon that they are close to their culture and have to go home on the weekends for ceremonies. They do a lot of traveling back and forth between Navajo or Hopi to participate in some of their traditional ceremonies and then have to come back to school.

Cultural responsibilities on the reservation require everyone to participate in family activities and ceremonies. The demands of attending college on top of having to maintain the responsibilities at home, requires understanding and support from faculty members, administrators, and student services.

Recruiting and retaining Native American students is a priority with the faculty and staff at WDCU. The university has Native American recruiting officers who actively work at recruiting Native American students. When asked what are the problems when recruiting and retaining Native American students, the faculty member responded with the following statements:

Well, one of the things I have found is right here in our own city. There is a boarding school for Native American students, and some of the problems that they had were in recruiting students, even though it provided them a strong

education with a strong support at very little cost to the parents. I mean, it was only \$25 per month for these kids to get a private school education and boarding. The problems they had, and I would imagine the application is the same for this university, was that the tribal families wanted their kids to have the education but they did not want them to lose their culture. In my opinion, being educated outside of your culture implies you may adopt some of the other culture's ways, and certainly that is possible. I understand the need to preserve one's culture, but maybe it is not bad to lose things that are only superstitious, that really do not promote health, that do not promote right thinking. I can think of other cultures that I have studied where habits and traditions were not healthy habits and traditions. So, probably the biggest problem that I see is that for the Native American community to see this as a positive thing without losing their culture. I think that is the most difficult thing in recruitment. The same applies for retention. Everything is fine until they go back for tribal ceremony, then they are scared to leave again. So again, there are the consequences. This is family, so you cannot discourage them from going home. I think both recruitment and retention probably has a lot to do with that, and then we can always go back to financial factors and the lack of peers in the institution.

Education for betterment of the tribal community. The need for Native Americans to receive a college education echoes throughout the responses made by the participants. The need to educate the society still exists. Student 1 believes the following:

This place, meaning this university, they have the right idea. The people who started the school had a vision. There was a lack of leaders in the Indian

community and the natives are hungry for it. Believe it or not, they are.

However, I think we have to take it seriously. Moreover, when that day comes, you will see all types of leaders graduate and stick around and go through the four years because that is not happening now. They are dropping out because of one reason or another. So, they are not quite there yet, but when that day comes, they will understand why they are here and work together in love and put out these leaders that these teachers have trained. And that is, in my mind, would be the ideal college. The right school, the perfect school for Native Americans would be to learn to be good teachers. They need to consider higher education because they need it. Some of the benefits are that we need better leaders, whether in the church or the community. I know in my tribe we have our leaders who are on the council and the problem is they are uneducated. A lot of them are dropouts. They are not leaders but they sit on the council and make decisions.

Consequently, the need for better leadership requires better-educated community leaders. Participants reveal that the success they have achieved in their working career can be attributed to getting an education. Returning to the reservation to express to others the need to further their education was highly stressed during the interview process.

Ideal college setting. The last question gave the participants a chance to share what they thought was the ideal college or university setting. Choosing the right college or university can be a challenge for all students, regardless of age, gender, race, or religion. Each participant expressed a similar viewpoint but approached the questions with a unique perspective. Student 2 described the impact of her experience in higher education:

I really have only been exposed to one college, but I pretty much wish all Christian colleges were like this one. We have people in leadership who are able to understand that it is hard to be a Christian and how they can apply that to their own lives. Just finding out why they go back into doing the things they did in the past rather than finding that strength to keep continuing on. Here we are pretty much open about everything. We have family relationship course here, which teaches us how we can apply it to our relationships personally, and also in native culture. That is the really good thing about some of the courses in the teacher education program, we get to challenge ourselves in our thinking. Then we are challenged on how we can bring that back into our own native culture and how we can put it into our context. Also, it is more of a personal thing, how digging up what you really think and having to challenge others or encouraging others more. I had an American history course and when we were just about done with the 1800s, all of the Indian wars that happened. We found out that just talking about it really angered us and we had to stop and we had to pray. Even the teacher was asking for forgiveness and the native students just learned how to forgive the people from the past and even towards the future. The school challenges the whole person, not just academically. I think a lot of students realize now how challenging it is here and that it is not just about gaining knowledge, it is about real life situations. So I think that one of the things that challenges the students is that you cannot just learn about it. You learn to apply it, and that is what makes this an ideal college.

The literature does not imply those Native American students who attend a Christian university experience greater or lesser struggles than those who attend tribal

colleges or even state universities. Native students have a unique cultural and community bond that affects their decision to stay or leave higher education. The tribal community leader described his opinion of what would be considered an ideal university in which Native American students might flourish by saying:

I think that tribal colleges are the best model, with the idea that there is a purpose for their education. Again, these are conversations that came up while speaking about student performance. I do not think anybody that goes into higher education where their probability of success is going to be tied to their personal commitment, motivation, and purpose for going to school. If they knew why they were going to school and what they are going to do with it, it would probably increase their potential for success. The other part of it, from a tribal perspective, is getting back to the question, “for what purpose?” There is a fine line between the individual as a student, and the in the general population of him getting a degree, then getting a career, then having a family, then moving on in a very independent and personal way. When we talk about tribal communities, we talk about a collective as a whole. There is perhaps a greater tie in terms of culture, the language, the traditions. And if we look at it from maintaining a tribe, or another generation, or another eleven generations, then it is not just about learning mathematics, but learning more about their language and their culture and their purpose in terms of maintaining their community.

The faculty member took a more holistic approach in describing the ideal setting for Native Americans to flourish in higher education. As the data indicates, Native Americans hold strongly to their relationships with family and friends. Building a strong relationship with students allows them an opportunity to make their educational

experience a central part of their lives, not just a peripheral activity. In describing the ideal situation for Native American students, the faculty member had this to say:

Ideally, they have come with family support and they think coming to college is a good idea. Ideally, they think they have come with adequate resources and that they are not going heavily into debt. Once they get on campus, ideally, there are other Native American students that they can see. Whether or not they choose to become friends, there are visually other Native Americans on campus. There is an identity that they have created, which is that they matter and that their presence on campus makes a difference. Ideally, that there is some type of person to provide counseling and support and mentoring, perhaps assigned to them or perhaps chosen by them. This will allow them to vent, to let down, to ask the hard questions. Moreover, they would have seen someone go ahead of them and see that it pays to develop the mind God has given you. When I say pay, that is not talking about financially, but their satisfaction in growth of knowledge, their satisfaction in developing that and that they can give back.

Summary

The participants offered varied, yet similar insights into the factors that influence Native American students' retention rate in higher education. By listening, observing, and recording what the participants had to say, it is clear that Native Americans struggle to stay in school and earn a degree. There are factors that involve the students as well as the institutions, even though no clear solution emerged from the data as a way for them to either isolate or fix certain difficulties. However, there are intrinsic motivational factors that the student and the institution can cultivate to support the students' determination to complete their education.

The research questions that guided this study were addressed through the data gathered from the participants. Participants identified academic support as a factor influencing the retention rate. The need to build relationships with academic advisors, administrators, and faculty members was frequently addressed by all participants. The students' perceived factors included the need for financial support, tribal community support, family support, and more Native American mentors. The data did not support the assumption that attending a Christian university influenced the retention rate of Native American college students. However, the student participants did agree that the Christian environment did give them support while attending classes on campus.

Data from the present study revealed similar perspectives from the students and the administrators as each spoke to their spirituality and faith, which has affected them in education and within their tribal communities. The students expressed the challenges of being a Christian on the reservation along with the support and understanding they receive while attending a Christian university. Both administrators and participants agree that Native American students need family and peer support to give them a sense of balance to achieve their educational goals. The contrast between cultures also emerged as a barrier for students who remain connected to the reservation but leave to attend college.

There was a difference between the administrators' and the students' perspective on why Native American students leave college without earning a degree. The students spoke in humble fortitude about the need for Native Americans to realize that higher education is an important aspect to future opportunities. They pointed out the challenges students face from drug abuse, alcoholism, and immaturity. One student blamed these as reasons for why his peers drop out of college.

The purpose of this chapter was to report the factors influencing the retention rate of Native American college students. The voices of these participants revealed the many challenges Native Americans face when deciding whether to seek higher education. Chapter 5 will provide a brief summary and discussion on these findings.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This chapter emphasizes the key factors found throughout the present study that affect Native American students in higher education. The chapter consists of a brief summary of the study, a discussion of findings, limitations of the study, implications of the study, recommendations for future research, and finally a conclusion summary.

The findings of this present study support the data of the literature review on several key factors in helping Native American students attain degree completion. Hale (2002) states that “the challenge for the education system, particularly for those institutions educating Native Americans or their teachers, is the development of an understanding and appreciation of Native Americans and their culture” (p. 80). The results of this study indicate a need for personal and institutional partnership to address the immediate concerns of Native American students to ensure academic success in higher education.

Summary of Study

The purpose of this study was to identify perceived factors affecting the retention rate of Native American college students. Chapter 1 outlined the purpose of the study, identified the problem statement, and relayed the significance of the research. A brief historical overview of the colonial, federal, and self-determination era associated with Native American education was presented. Although strides have been made in some areas of tribal education, there has been very little change in the college retention rate of Native American students. Assumptions about the study were made in order to develop the research questions presented in Chapter 1 and again in Chapter 3. The research questions, which guided this study, were intended to identify the complex factors

affecting Native American students. They are reiterated below to establish the framework for the following discussion of the findings. They are as follows:

1. What are the factors that influence the retention rate for Native American students enrolled in a 4-year teacher education program?
2. What are the students' perceptions of the factors that influence their ability to stay in college until degree completion?
3. What factors, while attending a Christian college, enhance or detract from the factors that affect degree completion?

The research plan relied on a qualitative research method as an appropriate mode of inquiry into the stated problem.

Chapter 2 is a review of the body of literature dedicated to the retention rate of Native American students. A conceptual framework based on critical theory perspectives was addressed, spotlighting retention theories based on Banks' (1993) theory of multicultural education reform, Vygotsky's (1978) social development theory, and Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory. The professional literature detailed the historical context of Native American education to illustrate Native Americans' resistance to mainstream higher education and the cultural equality they are trying to achieve. The purpose of this study is to identify perceived factors affecting the retention rate of Native American college students enrolled in the teacher education program. The literature review unveiled prior studies that suggested retention of Native American students involves a complex web of personal and institutional matters. Due to the low number of Native American teachers employed in the education career field, the literature was unable to highlight much on this specific subject. This gap in literature exposed the need for more research on this topic.

Chapter 3 explained the methodology used for this study. A qualitative research designed was used. A case study was conducted at one specific Christian university. Interview data was collected from two students, an administrator, and a faculty member from that particular university. In addition, a tribal community leader was interviewed whose wisdom, insights, and experience with Native American students were invaluable to this study.

Chapter 4 conveyed the findings of this study through the voices of the participants. The researcher was aware of the appropriate customs and courtesies that must be followed when speaking to Native American people. A single site for this study was chosen because of its diverse student population, the services that it provides for Native American students, and the campus environment, which promotes a Christian worldview for faculty, staff, and students alike.

Major themes emerged from the data collection that shaped the findings of this study. The following discussion of the findings includes major topics identified in the data as cultural identity, support systems, and barriers to success. Each topic goes deeper into several sub-topics that echoed through each of the participants' responses. As stated in the previous chapter, the voices of this study gave this research a texture of honesty, frustration, perplexity, and hope for a better future.

Discussion of Findings

The history of Native American education has evolved from the Native American model of free and natural learning style centered on oral tradition, to a more formalized approach practiced by the European settlers. From the earliest European settlers, the cultural and religious practices of the Native Americans were contradictory to western ideals, and the settlers' desire to assimilate Native Americans ensued (Hale, 2002). The

effects of assimilation, as it pertains to education, crosses generations and still has an impact on the way Native Americans view mainstream education (Trafzer, 2000). The educational experience of Native Americans in higher education gained attention with the tribal college movement. The tribal colleges brought into focus the impact cultural identity has on the educational experience of Native American students.

The purpose of mainstream education for Native American students was to assimilate them into the main, predominately White culture. Horace Kallen, a social philosopher who introduced the term *cultural pluralism* attacked assimilation and the melting-pot theory. The term *cultural pluralism* connotes promotion of equality among different cultural groups. Kallen was concerned with adult education, emphasizing that every culture was equally valuable and that differences had to be respected. Rose (1997) commented on Kallen's cultural theory by stating that:

Kallen hoped that as adult education provided for change at the individual level, social change would inexorably follow. Rather than demarcating a unique role for adult education, he celebrated the possibilities for liberation residing in its diversity. Bemoaning adult education's failure to live up to its promise, he urged the field to emphasize its transformative potential. Although he saw adult education as a bridge between the individual and the community, he failed to resolve the tensions he so eloquently delineated between the two. Examining his work gives us a clearer understanding of the sources of these present tensions. (p. 138)

The three main themes of the findings are cultural identity, support systems, and a student retention model. Each of these are presented in detail in the following sections.

Cultural identity. The researcher identified factors concerning cultural identity that affect the personal and academic lives of Native American students. The personal issues identified by the participants involved resistance to new ideas and experiences, financial pressure, being undisciplined, and an unrealistic image of college life. As more and more Native Americans enter into institutions of higher education, the lack of adequate academic skills and coping mechanisms becomes more apparent. In addition, the responsibilities the Native American students have to their tribal community often outweigh their academic responsibilities.

Identity strengthens through culture (Meyer, 2003). The belief that the culture in which we are raised determines who we are, at an emotional and behavioral level, is defined by the term *cultural determinism*. This suggests that the environment influences who we are more than biological traits (Cumming, 2008). Historical research has shown that even after 400 years of efforts toward forced assimilation, Native Americans have developed a survival mechanism for their cultural identity by staunchly maintaining tribal community customs.

Part of the Native Americans' cultural identity is tied to their spirituality. Research conducted by HeavyRunner and Marshall (2003) found that for those Native American students who do persist in higher education, two key factors cultivate and support Native students: spirituality and tribal identity. Native Americans who hold a Christian worldview do not lose their native spirituality or tribal identity. The present study found that the student participants felt attending a Christian college helped them define their worldview and gave them the tools needed to cope with tribal peers who ridiculed them for their faith. The data did not support the idea that attending a Christian

university increased the retention rate for Native American students, but the participants felt the university provided adequate support to pursue their educational goals.

Academic factors that lead Native American students to leave higher education included having poor study habits, being underprepared academically, believing there was little value in assignments and courses, and lacking educational and career goals. The institutions, along with tribal leaders, must work together to improve the socio-economic conditions of the tribal community through education and allowing students to foster their cultural identity on campus as well as in mainstream society.

Support systems. Historically, Native American students have not been very successful in higher education. For this to change, certain factors must exist in order to increase the retention rates. These complex support factors echo throughout the literature under the topics of family support, mentors, and institutional support. Tinto (1993) believes that in order for students to persist in higher education, they need support from the institution, faculty and staff, and informal peer group interaction. The participants spoke specifically on the types of support they felt helped them continue toward fulfilling their career and academic goals.

Family support. Native Americans are relational people who need love and support that reflects family connection when entering higher education (Pavel, Banks, & Pavel, 2002). The faculty member's words brought a fundamental concept of success to light by showing how family support contributes to Native Americans' achievements in academia. Native students must contend with misconceptions from mainstream society about the native culture. They also must battle misconceptions from their own tribal community about how higher education changes them but still allows them to maintain

their cultural identity. Cultural understanding from family as well as the institution plays an important role in helping Native American students stay in school.

Mentors. It is through the rich interpretations of the study participants that we garner the opportunity to understand better the relationship between the student, the community, and the institution (Ortiz & HeavyRunner, 2003). Listening to Student 2 explain her need to have someone to depend on and help her be more accountable was a very raw and humbling experience. It was obvious she felt vulnerable speaking about her weaknesses, but the sense of trust she displayed during the interview was a precious gift. She mentioned how she needed someone, a best friend, a mentor, or someone outside of school to help her be accountable. She felt she needed support especially while she attended a Christian university.

Having a role model, either tribal or non-tribal, also helped the tribal community leader receive his education. He had parents who went to college and who expected him to do the same. Many native students are the first in their family to attend college or a university and struggle with the lack of family support. The tribal community leader eloquently stated, “They are blazing their own trail without mentors, good counselors, or good teachers that will encourage them.” Ideally, having a Native American mentor would benefit students immensely, but the low number of Native American students and faculty on campuses requires students and the institutions to build and nurture relationships within the available population.

Institutional support. The data reflected that Native Americans do want to receive a good education. Student 1 mentioned that Native Americans are “hungry for it” and “they need it as well.” The need for institutional support plays a key role in the success of Native American students (Guillory, 2009). The campus environment must

include a community where Native students can feel safe, create an extended family atmosphere, and build relationships with other students as well as with faculty and staff.

Many Native American students require more than just student services that institutions currently provide. Although these programs are helpful, research has shown that Native American students are relational people who need a specific environment to flourish (Tinto, 1993). The institution should consider incorporating more cultural knowledge into not only the curriculum, but also into the classroom, the campus activities, and into the community consciousness. HeavyRunner & DeCelles (2002) believe institutions of higher education "need to create a family-like environment for Native American college students by making family and tribal members an integral component of the educational process" (Guillory, 2009, p. 18). The teacher education program may need to be revised to handle the special needs of the Native American student. The importance of this change for future teachers cannot be overstated.

Teachers should be prepared to handle cultural issues as well as learning and personality issues in the classroom. A cultural experience may shed light on this issue. An example of a cultural experience that affected the learning environment was with one individual's first teaching assignment with the Peace Corps serving in northern Africa. She showed up early the first day of class to prepare the room and greet the students as they arrived and because she was nervous and a little anxious about teaching in a foreign country. When the time came for classes to start, no students showed up. This happened for two more days. The teacher was there early and no students came to class. Eventually, the principal sought her out and told her that the students would not come into the classroom if she were already in the room. She needed to arrive on time, but enter the classroom only after the students were seated. This was a sign of respect the

students were taught to show to the teacher. Because the teacher showed up early, the students were unable to show proper respect and so did not attend class. Being ignorant of these cultural norms put a burden on the students and hampered their educational experience. The institution is responsible for preparing teachers culturally and academically to work in the field, which ultimately provides them with the proper tools they need in order to help students with their educational goals.

Student retention model. The need to increase the retention rate of Native American college students is a complex endeavor that requires the community and the institutions to work together to improve this phenomenon. In order to bring about positive change in this area, the communities and institutions of higher education need a plan of action. Although higher education has put student service programs in place, the retention rate for Native Americans is still the lowest of all minority students. Tribal colleges are providing better education for native students, but they still suffer from high remedial education.

The U.S. Department of Education has an initiative called Access to Success that aims to “cut remedial education in half, produce better prepared K-12 teachers, and work for better assessments in K-12 so students know how prepared they are for college” (Abdul-Alim, 2011, para. 4). Although statistics are not available yet on the success of this initiative, there are indications from higher education that some success comes from structures that make advising and enrollment in academic support courses mandatory. Still, educational leaders admit that the goal of closing the attainment gap remains elusive.

A retention program promise may help reduce the attainment gap in higher education among Native American students. This program promise is a comprehensive

model that encompasses previously researched retention strategies and data collected during the present research study. The research from this study pointed to several key factors that do help in retaining Native American students, but from the institutions' standpoint, putting these factors into practice has proven complex. This ambitious model stands on four interlocking commitments in which each reinforces the others. This model deals with the multifaceted and complex needs of the Native American student. The four commitments include financial support, academic counseling, spiritual and cultural opportunities, and mentoring. Each of these components will be discussed in the following sections.

Financial support. Native Americans face a poverty rate of three times the national average in and around the reservations (Ambler, 2003). The participants of this study agree that the need for financial support was a key factor to staying or leaving college. One of the frustrations Native American students faced was the lack of funding because they chose to attend a Christian college. The tribal community would not provide support unless they attended a state or tribal college. However, students do have other options in obtaining financial support. Soon it may be easier for students to receive financial aid due to foundations and federal agencies that are reducing restrictions for funding tuition in hopes of increasing the number of Native American teachers. Participants expressed the need to change the misconception that Native Americans receive a free college education. This is not always true, and financial support continues to be a key factor in retention.

Academic counseling. Based on the U.S. Department of Education's (2009) initiative to increase the quality of education and decrease the attainment gap, signs of success point to academic counseling as a key component. A research study conducted

by the National Academic Advising Association on enhancing the college experience suggests that “good academic counseling may be the single most underestimated attribute of a successful college experience” (Light, 2003, para. 4). One of the major areas in which academic counseling may aid in student retention concerns choosing individual courses with the appropriate class size. Students are advised not to take large introductory classes all at once. Incorporating one small class into each semester or term may be more beneficial to their overall academic experience.

Spiritual and cultural opportunities. Gilgun (2002) believes spirituality permeates Native American culture compared to the more secular dominant society. Research suggests that higher education falls short on addressing Native Americans’ spirituality in the educational content. Because spirituality is so closely connected to Native Americans’ cultural identity, it is important for educational leaders to understand the traditional beliefs that are relevant to the student. Whether they kept their traditional beliefs, converted to Christianity, or developed a combination of both belief systems, spirituality was identified as an important factor in helping students cope with college life. By providing Native American students opportunities to gather, express their beliefs, and engage in cultural activities, the benefits would also enhance the entire educational community by showing cultural diversity is valued.

Mentoring. Nearly without exception, the most successful academic students have a least one strong relationship dealing with academic work with other people (Light, 2003). Native Americans are relational people, and whether they forge a relationship with a faculty member, an advisor, or other students outside the classroom, the value of a mentor goes beyond the social. Student 2 stressed the importance of finding someone to help her be accountable to her studies and to the college environment. Many of the

problems Native Americans face in higher education do not involve academics. These problems are very real and personal issues that continue to plague Native American students. The critical point is that students need strong relationships to reach their academic and career goals.

Limitations of the Study

The hermeneutics of this study's findings should include a holistic view of the overall retention problem still facing higher education today. Limitations for this study include (a) the possible reluctance of Native American students to answer questions that reflect their true feelings instead of giving answers to the questions they feel are expected of them, (b) are politically correct, and (c) the possibility of them giving answers that reflect their spiritual beliefs instead of their personal beliefs and experience. One reason for these limitations is that this study involved a primarily Caucasian researcher working with the Native American population. Past researchers violated research agreements with the Native Americans, which caused skewed study results. Due to this breach of trust, tribal leaders have since denied researchers access to reservations unless they were very well trusted or were Native American (Mihehuah, 2003).

A further limitation of this proposed case study is that it may only be generalizable to institutions that are similar to this particular institution used for this study demographically, geographically, and philosophically. However, other researchers will be able to use this research methodology as a guide to conducting research at other institutions.

Another limitation of this study was that it was conducted at only one Christian university. The low number of participants may be another consideration, but the variety of insights from each of the participants provided a diverse yet meaningful view of the

challenges Native American students face. The research site is a for-profit institution that maintains a strong Christian worldview with basic tenets grounded in biblical ideology.

A prevailing limitation of this study includes the need for more Native American researchers to conduct inquiries into this phenomenon and provide a more comprehensive dialog with mainstream educational institutions. Though this researcher has a limited knowledge of Native American cultural characteristics, it was still disconcerting to hear participants talk about racism, high percentages of substance abuse, dysfunctional families, feelings of being dejected or misunderstood, and a lack of support. Strong leadership that challenges mainstream institutions to seriously address the retention issues of Native Americans will potentially increase the number of students enrolling in the teacher education programs.

An additional limitation of this study pertains to the monolithic view held by the majority culture that all Native American tribes are regarded as one cultural group of people. Due to the unique differences between tribes, it may be appropriate for retention programs to address individual tribal customs.

Implications of the Study

The implications and recommendations are presented through the findings of this study. The need to train Native American teachers to meet the specific needs of this population cannot be overstated. A gap in the literature exposes the need for highly trained teachers to close the educational attainment gap Native American students face when entering institutions of higher education. The findings suggest that institutions and tribal communities must work together to bridge the gap between native cultures and mainstream education. Ortiz and HeavyRunner (2003) state, "It is through multiple and rich interpretation of their [Native American] stories that we can better understand the

relationship between the individual, the community, and the institutions of higher education” (p. 218). The educational experiences for Native American students have not been very successful over the last 400 years. Due to the assimilation policies and poor academic practices, tribes have not been receptive to formal education. However, economic and cultural survival is changing the attitudes about the need for higher education for Native Americans. The need for Native American teachers has emerged from this study as a critical factor in improving not only the culture, but maintaining the cultural identity of the tribal communities.

This study puts forward a call for institutions to look closely at how best to address the complex needs of the Native American students. By addressing their needs, the potential for increased retention rates increases, and more teachers that are qualified will emerge and fill the shortage in the classrooms. This study suggests a model of commitment that took into account the findings from the literature and the data gathered from this study. The implications for teacher education programs and increasing the retention rate on college campuses are that the present study shows that factors affecting the retention rate of Native American students are both academic and non-academic.

The misconception of free education provided to Native American students needs to be dispelled. Participants emphasized the financial burden placed on them because of the lack of support from their families and tribal communities. The need for grant money and more federally funded programs specifically intended for Native Americans plays a key role in retention.

The findings of this study confirm the findings from previous studies such as Guillory (2009), HeavyRunner & DeCelles (2002), and Martin (2005), which signify the need for higher education to incorporate Native American cultural aspects into their

programs. These aspects include native cultural identity, spirituality, and extended family support. Through mentoring and academic counseling, institutions can enhance the students' overall educational experience, which in turn may increase retention rates. The teacher education program can ensure the curriculum (a) includes culturally relevant material that allows Native American students to see a reflection of themselves in the course material to show the institution values and (b) recognizes the contributions they make to society.

Researchers and student services have already done much work in higher education to implement programs for Native American students, but more is still needed. The needs of the Native American students are complex and require administrators, faculty members, and students in higher education to get involved. Retention rates of Native American students will remain low unless more attention is given to the financial, academic counseling, mentoring, spiritual, and relational aspects of college life.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study identifying the perceived factors affecting the retention rate of Native American students enrolled in the teacher education program aligns with previous research in this area. The need for institutions of higher education to train highly qualified teachers to step into the tribal classrooms increases as the number of Native American students enrolling in higher education rises. The following are recommendations that have identified areas requiring further study.

First, there is a critical need for more research on the retention of Native American students in the teacher education programs. The federal initiative to educate and train more Native American teachers is still underway with no significant results yet seen. More effort is needed to investigate perceptions of Native American students as

pertains to key factors that cause them to leave school before earning a degree. The findings of this study suggest that the families and tribal community should set the precedent for empowering future generations.

Second, further research should be conducted to include a wider collaboration between tribal colleges and mainstream higher education. Tribal colleges are more successful in retaining students, but they are still plagued with a high demand for remedial courses. Tribal colleges also offer Native American students an opportunity to foster their cultural identity that mainstream institution may consider a valuable addition to their existing programs. Universities could potentially share resources with tribal colleges to allow more students access to teacher education programs.

Third, due to the small sample size of the present study, more research is needed to include more private and public university teacher education programs. In addition, more data needs to be collected from the voices of those Native American students wishing to become teachers. Additional data collected from tribal leaders would add wisdom and knowledge as to what the tribal community considers valuable elements needed to educate and retain Native American students. A longitudinal study may also provide additional data to support the findings of this study.

Fourth, due to the methodology of the research, this study represented Native American college students as a monolithic group, instead of representing individual tribes. Although the student participants did clearly state tribal differences, the research took an overview of Native American characteristics in identifying factors affecting the retention rate. Further research may include a tribe-specific study, where one particular tribe is studied specifically in order to determine if retention factors are explicit to tribal affiliation.

Fifth, further research may be needed that represents institutions by geographic region and religious affiliation. A cross-comparison study between regions may help identify factors influencing the retention rate of Native American students. This research study was conducted in the Southwest region of the United States, including research site and participants with family ties to the region. Data collected at other geographical locations may reveal factors not covered in the current research setting. Although the literature has not shown that attending a Christian university increased the retention rate of Native American students, there may be regional or geographical aspects that may provide a further understanding of the perceived factors influencing the retention rate.

Conclusion

This study of the perceived factors influencing the retention rate of Native American students corroborated many of the findings from previous studies presented in the literature review. The findings of this study suggest that institutions of higher education may raise the retention rate of Native American students through a holistic approach to meeting the needs of this under-represented population. The data did not substantiate that Native American students would persist at a higher or lower rate if they attended a Christian college or university. However, the data did reflect the critical importance spirituality plays in the cultural identity of Native American students. Previous studies, including Kanu (2006) and HeavyRunner & DeCelles (2003), also confirmed that allowing students to foster and maintain their cultural identity is a key factor affecting retention.

It is the hope of this researcher that the participants in this study felt they made invaluable contributions toward improving the opportunities for not only Native American students who wish to become teachers, but to every student who chooses this

noble profession. This study corroborates previous research, but also points at the need for further study on retention strategies for the teacher education programs. Further research would give Native Americans a louder voice, a broader scope of involvement in education, and a greater sense of empowerment.

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APPENDICIES

Appendix A: Internal Review Board Approval Letter

Subject: IRB Approval 1122.062911: Perceived Factors Influencing the Retention Rate of Native American College Students

Good Afternoon Tamara,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB.

Attached you'll find the forms for those cases.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well with your research project. We will be glad to send you a written memo from the Liberty IRB, as needed, upon request.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.

IRB Chair, Associate Professor

Center for Counseling & Family Studies

(434) 592-5054

[cid:image001.png@01CC366F.23E239C0]

40 Years of Training Champions for Christ: 1971-2011

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

You are invited to be in a research study on retention of Native American students in a teacher education program. You were selected as a possible participant because of your participation/role within a teacher education program. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Study Title: Perceived Factors Influencing the Retention Rate of Native American College Students

Researcher:

This study is being conducted by, Tamara L. Bergstrom, Ed.D. Candidate, Educational Leadership and Policy, Liberty University.

Inquiries:

The researcher will gladly answer any inquiries regarding the purpose and procedures of the present study. Please send all inquiries via email to Tamara at t1bergstrom@liberty.edu.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to identify factors that influence retention of Native American students in a teacher education bachelors degree program.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things: Participant in one, audio taped, interview, lasting no longer than 90 minutes.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

The study has minimal risk: perceived risk of this study may be that participants may not want to discuss some subject matter. Participants may benefit from increased understanding of their college experience. Self-awareness is a potential benefit as well. The potential publication of the findings of this study may prove beneficial to students, faculty, and higher education administrators as they seek ways to improve the retention rate of Native American students.

Compensation: Participants will not receive financial compensation for participation in this study.

Confidentiality:

The researcher will take precautions to protect participant identity by not linking information to participant identity. The records of this study will be kept private. In any

sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject, unless you are willing to disclose your identity. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. The audiotapes will be kept in a locked file cabinet that only the researcher has access to. The audiotapes will be destroyed within a year one year of the study by the researcher.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Grand Canyon University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is: Tamara L. Bergstrom. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact me by email at tbergstrom@liberty.edu. You may also feel free to contact my program advisor Dr. Ellen Black by email at elblack@liberty.edu.

Statement of Consent:

Liberty University and the university where you are currently studying, their agents, trustees, administrators, faculty, and staff are released from all claims, damages, or suits, not limited to those based upon or related to any adverse effect upon you which may arise during or develop in the future as a result of my participation in this research (Please understand that this release of liability is binding upon you, your heirs, executors, administrators, personal representatives, and anyone else who might make a claim through or under you).

*I have read and understand the description of the study and contents of this document. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this study. I understand that I must be **18 years or older to sign this informed consent and participate** in this study.*

Signature_____Date _____

Signature of Investigator _____Date_____

Appendix C: Interview Questions

To students:

1. Describe how you perceive the university addresses issues of diversity.
2. How does the university address issues relating to minority students, specifically Native Americans?
3. What would you consider three or four factors that have led you to persist through your university so far?
4. What have been the barriers to overcome in trying to complete your education?
5. If you think about friends that have started college but not finished, what do you think kept them from doing so.
6. What is your ideal institution?

To administrators and faculty:

1. Describe how the university addresses issues of diversity.
2. How does the university address issues relating to minority students, specifically Native Americans?
3. What three or four factors do you believe help Native American students persist through college?
4. What do you perceive as the three or four greatest barriers to completing college?
5. What are some of the problems administration sees in recruiting and retaining Native American students?
6. What is the relationship between Native American students and faculty?

7. Describe the ideal situation for Native American students to flourish at this particular university.

To tribal leader:

1. What is the tribes' perception on diversity issues in higher education?
2. What do you believe are the three to four factors that help Native American students persist through college?
3. What do tribal leaders/elders believe are the three or four most significant barriers?
4. What can the tribe do to ensure the university is supporting diversity, especially for Native American students?
5. Describe the ideal situation for Native American students to flourish at this particular university.