American Indian/Alaska Native College Student Retention Strategies

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Specific retention strategies are recommended to increase retention and graduation among these students.

ABSTRACT: *This article presents findings from a qualitative study examining the similarities and differences between American Indian/Alaska Native student perceptions and the perceptions of state representatives, university presidents, and faculty about persistence factors and barriers to degree completion specific to American Indian/Alaska Native students at three land-grant universities across Washington, Idaho, and Montana. A comparative analysis of themes emerging from interview data reveals conflicting perceptions among participant cohorts. Retention-to-graduation strategies are offered for institutions of higher education desiring to better serve these students and their respective tribal communities. The strategies offered, including specialized forms of culturally-sensitive career and academic counseling, peer mentoring, and Supplemental Instruction, can also help professionals delivering developmental education programming better serve this student population.*

For years, the issue of recruiting American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) students to U.S. mainstream colleges and universities has been a long-standing challenge. Policy-makers, administrators, and faculty alike have developed strategies and implemented programs in attempts to attract bright and capable AI/AN students only to be met with minimal results. Once on campus, retaining those students becomes an even bigger issue with many AI/AN students, particularly from Indian reservations, experiencing feelings of academic inadequacy, isolation, alienation, and marginalization (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Osborne, 1985; Pavel & Padilla, 1993; Tinto, 1993). For many, such factors become too much to overcome and result in AI/AN students leaving college before earning a degree. It is, therefore, critical to understand, from the AI/AN student perspective, what strengthens their resolve to complete a college education and what institutions of higher education can do to assist in this effort.

This study examines some of the factors regarding why AI/AN college students leave college before earning a degree. Specifically, this study explores the similarities and differences between AI/AN student perceptions and the perceptions of state representatives, university presidents, and faculty about persistence factors and barriers to degree completion for AI/AN college students. Based on the findings, specific retention strategies are recommended to increase retention to graduation among these students.

Participants were interviewed at Washington State University (WSU) in Pullman, WA; the University of Idaho (UI) in Moscow, ID; and Montana State University (MSU) in Bozeman, MT (Guillory, 2002). The retention strategies recommended not only apply to the study institutions but could also be used by other universities desiring to better serve their AI/AN student populations and their respective native communities as well. Lastly, the strategies offered in the "Implications for Practice" section can also help professionals delivering developmental education programming to better serve AI/AN college students through specialized forms of career and academic counseling, peer mentoring, and Supplemental Instruction.

Factors Affecting AI/AN College Retention

It is well documented that college success is a constant struggle for AI/AN. For example, AI/AN students have the lowest college enrollment (i.e., less than one percent) and graduation rates of any student cohort at mainstream U.S. colleges and universities. AI/AN earn 0.6% of all associate's, bachelor's, and advanced degrees conferred in the U.S. (Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Several studies report that, despite significant progress being made in college enrollment and graduation rates over the last 30 years, particularly within the tribal college system, retention of AI/AN remains a significant problem with rates of persistence-to-graduation within 6 years at approximately 36% compared to the general population at 56% (Shotton, Oosahwe, & Cintron, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Other studies report even lower retention rates among AI/AN college students (Benjamin, Chambers, & Reiterman, 1993; Larimore & McClellan, 2005; Pavel & Padilla, 1993; Tierney, 1992).

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The factors determining whether or not AI/AN students decide to attend and persist through college are as diverse as they are complex. Various studies on AI/AN college students have generated substantial research suggesting that factors such as precollege academic preparation, family support, involved and supportive faculty, social support systems in the form of AI/AN student associations, multicultural offices, peer mentoring programs, academic counseling, institutional commitment, and maintenance of an active presence in home communities and cultural ceremonies are crucial elements to college persistence (Barnhardt, 1994; Brown, 1995; Davis, 1992; Gloria & Robinson-Kurpius, 2001 ; Huffman, Sill, & Brokenleg, 1986; Jackson et al., 2003; Lin, 1990; Reyhner & Dodd, 1995). Other institutional roles in promoting attendance and persistence include offering sufficient fiscal resources for child and family care and providing retention programs designed specifically for AI/AN students (Almeida, 1999; Day, Blue, & Raymond, 1998; Tate & Schwartz, 1993). Further research shows that factors assisting the successful transition from high school to college also include degree of family involvement; giving back to tribal community; dealing with instances of campus hostility; creating an environment for cultural expression; and taking into account the unique academic, social, cultural, and psychological needs of these students (Belgarde, 1992; Brown & Robinson Kurpius, 1997; Carney, 1999; Cross, 1993; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008 ; James, 1992; Jenkins, 1999). Strengthening of cultural identity also appears to be a strong contributor to college persistence (Huffman, 2001). "How much difficulty American Indian students will face in college depends in large measure on how they see and use their ethnic identity" (Huffman, 2008, p. 3). All of these factors play significant roles in the decision for AI/AN students to attend, persist, or leave college. Therefore, it is vital for institutions of higher education, and professionals in the developmental education field in particular, to recognize the motivational sources for AI/AN students if they are to help their progress.

Methodology

In order to capture the essence of the AI/AN experience in higher education, leading researchers in the field suggest a qualitative methodical approach (Pavel, 1992; Tierney, 1991). Although quantitative research methods continue to maintain a stronghold among research scholars, the qualitative approach to research has made substantive strides in the field of educational research (LeCompte, Millroy, & Preissle, 1992; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Rudestam & Newton, 2007). In fact, when it comes to the AI/AN experience in higher education, the use of qualitative research methods is of growing importance. "As a result of the heavy emphasis on studies using quantitative designs, American Indian education scholars generally lack a good understanding of the personal encounters, dilemmas, strategies, and triumphs of the Native students from their point of view" (Huffman, 2008 , p. 4). In response to the need for more qualitative studies examining the AI/AN student experience in higher education, more studies using qualitative approaches have begun to emerge, particularly

Table 1

Institutional and Participant Profiles

Profile Categories	Washington State University	University of Idaho	Montana State University
Institutional Type and Description	• Carnegie Doctoral /Research Extensive University • State Land-Grant Institution • 150 Undergraduate Degrees/70 Graduate Degrees • 10 Colleges	• Carnegie Doctoral /Research Extensive University • State Land-Grant Institution • 154 Undergraduate and Graduate Degrees • Law School	• Carnegie Doctoral /Research Extensive University • State Land-Grant Institution • 102 Undergraduate and GraduateDegrees
Enrollment Profile: Students and Faculty	• Approximately 19,000 and students on main campus • Approximately 930 faculty	• Approximately 12,400 students on main campus • Aproximately 850 faculty	• Approximately 12,200 students on main campus • Approximately 830 faculty
American Indian Enrollment & Graduation Rates	• 252 or 1.4% self-report as being American Indian • (1997 to 2003) 42% graduation rate (16 graduates out of 38 freshmen cohort)	• 113 or 1.3% self-report as being American Indian • (1997 to 2003) 23% graduation rate (3 graduates out of 13 freshmen cohort) freshmen cohort)	• 234 or 2.0& self-report as being American Indian • (1997 to 2003) 26.2% graduation rate (11 graduates out of 42
Institutional Services & Programs for American Indians	• Native American Student Center • Plateau Center for American Indians of of the Pacific Northwest • Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Regional Tribes	• General Minority Student Center (No American Indian Student Center) • Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Regional Tribes • Special Diversity Assistant to President	• 26 American Indian Programs including: AIRO, ABC, MPA • Largest American Indian Student Centers in Northwest • Offers Master's Degree in American Indian Studies
Participant Profiles	• 1 State Board of Higher Education Member • 1 University President • 3 Faculty: Office of Provost (Tribal Liaison), Native American Student Services, Speech & Hearing Services • 9 American Indian Students	• 1 Public Affairs Officer for the State of Idaho Board of Education • 3 Faculty: Business & Economics, American Indian Studies, Office of Northwest Nations • 10 American Indian Students	• 1 State Board of Higher Education Member • 1 University President • 3 Faculty: American Indian Research Opportunities, Native American Student Services • 11 American Indian

within mainstream research journals (Dodd, Garcia, Meccage, & Nelson, 1995; Larimore & McClellan, 2005 ; Garrod & Larimore, 1997; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Shotton, Oosahwe, & Cintron, 2007).

To adequately examine the three institutions under study, I employed a multiple case-study approach which starts with a within-case analysis and concludes with a cross-case examination. The within-case analysis involves developing a snapshot of the institution by learning about its unique characteristics and contextual variables (Merriam, 1998). The cross-case examination then allows the researcher "to build a general explanation that fits each of the individuals' cases, even the though the cases will vary in the details" (Yin, 1994, p. 144). The multiple case-study approach permits researchers to discover the similarities and differences of the institutions under study as well as the processes and outcomes common across cases (Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Richardson & Skinner, 1991; Yin, 1994).

Study Institutions

Each of the three universities chosen for the study–Washington State University, the University of Idaho, and Montana State University–are each state's land-grant university. Each is also located in close proximity to large populations of AI/AN representing several different tribes and serves rural areas. Because AI/AN have a tendency to attend college on or near their home communities (Benjamin et al., 1993), choosing these particular institutions was logical. In addition, all three universities have similar numbers of total AI/AN student enrollment and percentages of AI/AN students to overall student enrollment.

Study Participants

AI/AN students. Students were invited to participate in the study by a primary contact, a Native American staff member already in frequent contact with the students. They were selected based on availability and experience, resulting in the participation of mostly juniors, seniors, and a few graduate students. A total of 22 AI/AN tribes were represented, as listed by the students: Arapaho, Blackfeet, Chippewa/Cree, Colville, Coeur d' Alene, Cree, Crow, Fort Peck Assiniboin, Hidatsa/Chippewa, Hopi, Lakota, Lummi, Makah, Navajo, Nez Perce, Northern Cheyenne, Salish-Kootenai, Sioux, Walla Walla, and Yup'ik. All participants grew up in either Indian "border towns" (towns near Indian reservation boundaries) or reservation communities. K-12 experiences for students from "border towns" differed from those who attended school on the Indian reservations: border town students were outnumbered by their White student counterparts. Students' ages ranged from 18 to 43 years; the average within the group was approximately 26 years old. Nine of the thirty students interviewed reported being first-generation college students with neither parent ever attending college. Nineteen of the thirty students reported having at least one parent who attended college earning college credit but never completing a postsecondary degree (i.e., 7 of the 30 students) or having at least one parent who had earned either an Associate Arts, Bachelor's, or Master's Degree (i.e., 12 of the 30 students). Family educational history was not reported by 2 of the 30 students. Students' majors reflected various disciplines, such as biology, business management, forestry, American Indian studies, and education.

State Board of Higher Education representatives, university presidents, and faculty. State Board of Higher Education representatives were selected from each state based on their knowl-

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edge of and influence in promoting and shaping state policy regarding student diversity.

As the "voice" of the institution–having power to help shape institutional culture–university presidents' perspectives were important to include. The faculty, both teaching (i.e., college professors) and nonteaching (i.e., student counselors and academic advisors), were selected because of their influence and ability to directly impact student experience, positively and negatively, through teaching, counseling, and advising (Hornett, 1989; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Essentially, faculty represented "street-level bureaucrats" who accommodate the demands placed upon them by administrators while balancing the reality of the classroom or counseling experience (Weatherly & Lipsky, 1994). Additionally, AI/AN students rarely have had day-to-day contact with senior-level administrators or state representatives, so the faculty are the face of the institution for these students.

Procedure

Focus group interviews were conducted with the AI/AN students and took place at each respective university's multicultural or American Indian student center. Sessions lasted between 90 and 100 minutes. An audio recorder and hand-written notes were used to record the student responses and observations during the focus group interviews. In addition, personal background information was obtained through a brief questionnaire distributed at the end of the focus group sessions. The adequately sized focus groups (Morgan, 1998) consisted of 9 students at Washington State University, 10 students at the University of Idaho, and 11 students at Montana State University, for a total of 30 students.

Data were obtained from state representatives via either phone interviews or written responses. Written responses were provided by a public affairs officer of the Idaho State Board of Education and a member of the Higher Education Coordinating Board of the state of Washington. A 45-minute phone interview was conducted with a Board of Regent for the state of Montana.

Individual face-to-face interviews with the university presidents and three faculty members at each institution were conducted for up to 1 hour, depending on availability. Individual interviews with faculty allowed respondents to teach the researchers about the issue (Elliot, 1992). Again, an audio recorder and hand-written notes were used to record their responses and observations. All interviews were held at the offices of the presidents and faculty members. All interview questions are provided in the Appendix. Permission to interview all study participants was granted by the Institutional Review Board of Washington State University.

Once data were collected and transcribed, I began coding the data by identifying keywords and/or concepts frequently mentioned by the study participants. By thorough analysis of the transcriptions and coding of the data, specific themes began to emerge from the responses of the AI/AN students and the institutional/state representatives. Once the themes were established, a comparative analysis was conducted to determine the similarities and differences between the two groups. Comparative analysis of the two groups is discussed in the "Findings and Discussion" section.

Findings and Discussion: A Comparative Analysis

Financial factors (Institution) versus Family and Giving Back to Tribal Community (Students)

AI/AN students and institution representatives in this study held somewhat contrary views about what drives AI/AN to finish college, at least in terms of relative importance. Institution representatives placed a high premium on finan-

cial factors. Using the financial circumstances of AI/AN in his state as his rationale, one president commented:

There are very few of the Indian kids who come in with the essential sufficient financial backing to really afford to go and stay at the university. To the extent that we can get scholarship dollars, fellowship dollars, in the hands of young Native American kids, the greater the opportunity to be successful.

From the institutional perspective, financial support drives or motivates AI/AN to persist through college completion. On the other hand, although a few AI/AN students in the study stated that sufficient financial support did help, they did not perceive adequate funding to be a principal persistence factor. Instead, it was viewed as a barrier because there never seemed to be enough money for childcare (for the single mothers in the study), tuition, or rent. One student mentioned: "If you've lost your scholarship and you don't have the drive or the willingness to work yourself and pay for it yourself, you're not gonna go back to school." Students did agree with institution representatives that the lack of money was pervasive, but they simply did not see it as the most daunting barrier to overcome.

In contrast, AI/NA students suggested that family and giving back to tribal community provides the determination and desire to finish. One student commented: "I'm the first in my family to go to college and so it will mean a lot to my family and me if I can graduate and become a teacher." Another student stated:

I have a lot of family that still live on the reservation, and most of my cousins don't have high school degrees . . maybe I can serve as a role model or make them proud of what I have been doing and of my achievements, serve as a driving force.

For many students, a need to live up to family expectations and a fear of letting their families down by not graduating from college was a major factor in persistence. One student stated: "Mine [motivation] is my family back home….We have a close-knit family, extended family…And they're, like, pushing us real bad…my greatest fear is to let them down right now." The connection for these Indian students to their families, whether nuclear or extended, was so strong that they were willing to overcome many difficult situations, such as an unwelcoming environment, lack of academic preparation, and inadequate financial support with some taking extra jobs to make ends meet. To persist in earning a college education brought hope of making life better for their families. It is a reflection of an indigenous philosophy of putting community before individualism. Additionally, a college education meant more than just a means to obtaining a career and financial independence; for these students, it was an instrument to combat deleterious conditions back home. "I wanna [sic] go back to my reservation and help my Indian people," said one Indian student. Another student wanted "just to help out the people…help out other students that are coming up, you know, to teach them and help them out…strengthen their minds." Again, this emphasis on family and giving back to tribal community reflects the communal culture from which these students come.

Academic Programs (Institution) versus Campus Social Support (Students)

Another motivational source from the institutional perspective was the belief that strong academic programs in the university system are a driving force. According to administrators and

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faculty, if universities offer academic programs with strong appeal for AI/AN they will be more inclined to finish college. One university president stated: "I think some individual attention, some tailoring of programs and advising [and meeting] special cultural needs, strengthens a Native American student's commitment to persist on through to graduation." Ironically, such a focus on specific programming for the individual student was never mentioned by the AI/NA students in the study.

Distinctively, students suggested that social support on campus was critical to their persistence. For example, the Native American or Multicultural Student Centers on each campus provided the "community" the students deemed essential in reducing their sense of isolation and alienation. Social support from the institution countered the negative effects of leaving home and the feelings of isolation that many of the Native American students experienced during their stay at the university. "What has helped me as a transfer student is having this Native American Student Center. It makes you feel like you're at home when you're around more native people," said one Indian student. The Indian reservations these students come from are often isolated with very few non-Indians, so to have enclaves or gathering places where students can socialize and feel a part of a university (although not a part of mainstream campus life) was vital to the growth and resiliency of these students. This particular retention factor was not mentioned or addressed by the institutional representatives.

Lack of Academic Preparation at K-12 Level (Institution & Students)

Interestingly, AI/AN students and institution representatives did agree that lack of academic preparation at the K-12 level caused, in some instances, severe barriers. Out of frustration, one Indian student exclaimed: "I think our education is getting a lot better on the reservation, but I really don't feel like I was prepared." Similarly, a state representative claimed: "Frankly, some of the [Indian] reservation K-12 schools are not as good a quality as we enjoy at other places." One faculty member suggested that the problems AI/AN students face result from

poor preparation in math and writing [at the K-12 level]; and this could come for a variety of reasons. Maybe the students and their high schools weren't preparing them for college. Maybe they've been out of school for a while and so their skills are kinda [sic] rusty. Maybe academics and education wasn't emphasized enough in their family or in their community so that they really [are not] valued highly.

Both groups emphasized that public school systems on Indian reservation land are substandard and that ill-prepared students sometimes avoid more rigorous college-level courses, particularly in English, math, and the sciences. The implication is that better schools and improved teaching at the K-12 level would increase the likelihood of AI/AN students completing college since they would not have to play "catch up." Unfortunately, it is not until they actually get to college that they realize they have some catching up to do.

Implications for Practice: Retention Strategies for AI/AN Students

The following strategies, drawn from the research, can assist colleges and universities to successfully meet the needs of AI/AN students. They are primarily centered on maintaining family and tribal community connections; addressing single-parent issues; and providing academic remediation through developmental education methods focusing on culturally-sensitive career counseling, peer-mentoring, and academic counseling. The proposed strategies are based upon the research findings of this study (i.e., from participant responses) along with examples of successful university programs

for AI/AN students designed solely for the purpose of attracting and retaining AI/AN students in higher education. (The program examples used to formulate the following strategies were derived from both the institutions under study and institutions outside the study.) Additional strategies are drawn from the Family Education Model (FEM), an Indigenous-focused college student retention model (HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002). The following retention strategies are intended to assist both traditional- and non-traditional-aged AI/AN students to successfully complete their college degrees.

Strategy 1: Maintain Connections to Family and Tribal Community

The first strategic recommendation is for institutions to create programs that allow AI/AN students to maintain a strong connection between the colleges they attend and the tribal communities they desire to benefit with their educations. This would also allow students to stay connected to their families, a major source of kinship leading to increased persistence for AI/AN students.

Several students in the study mentioned that their primary motivation to persist through college was a desire to give their families a better life through their education as well as make a positive impact on the tribal communities they wish to serve. The family component to this strategy was inspired by the student interviews and supported by the Family Education Model (HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002). Research undergirding this model was conducted at five institutions in Montana: Fort Peck Community College, Stone Child College, Salish Kootenai Community College, Blackfeet Community College, and the University of Montana (Department of Social Work). It is an indigenous-based model promoting student persistence in higher education that explicitly concentrates on AI/AN students. The FEM is based on principles of education and social work. But, because it is a model that promotes action, it also offers strategies on how to deal with AI/AN student attrition. The essence of the FEM is to create a family-like environment for AI/AN students by making family and tribal members an integral component of the educational process of these students. Making the educational process a two-way road that encourages AI/AN students to stay connected to family back home while allowing family to partake in their educational journey increases the likelihood of AI/AN students completing their college education.

From a community connection standpoint, university programs which directly connect AI/AN students to their native communities could prove successful for both recruitment and retention purposes. What is equally important here, from a developmental education position, is providing culturally-sensitive career counseling to AI/AN students that guides them into professional programs, and eventually careers, in high demand on Indian reservation communities. One such program, developed at Montana State University, is called Caring for Our Own: a Reservation/University Partnership (CO-OP). The CO-OP program emphasizes the partnership of university nursing educators with tribal leaders, reservation-based educators, and native health professionals, many of whom are graduates of MSU currently in clinical practice and health care administration on the Indian reservations. CO-OP identifies AI/AN students expressing a desire to provide the very best health care available to their own people. The many benefits of the program include expert, culturally-sensitive career counseling, academic assistance, and assistance with social and financial aid services

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available from MSU. Another beneficial program sponsored by MSU is called Rockin the Rez. This program includes faculty and staff from various programs on campus who tour public schools and/or tribal community colleges at each Indian reservation in the state of Montana. This is a concentrated effort to get representatives from MSU to discuss the many available opportunities on campus for AI/AN students with them on their tribal ground.

These programs are excellent examples of maintaining strong community connections to bolster trust and collaboration between the university and tribal communities. But critical here is the culturally-sensitive career counseling that AI/AN students must receive at the university level that will eventually lead them into professional careers germane to the growth and health of their native communities. This is also where AI/AN professionals (e.g., native professors, Indian education coordinators, tribal elders, etc.) can educate career counseling faculty and staff on university campuses regarding what is most needed in native communities. Such discourse can better inform career counseling practices for AI/AN students on college campuses.

Strategy 2: Address Single-Parent Students and Students with Family Issues

A second strategy is for universities to offer family-care services, special packages, or unique financial assistance for single parents and students with families. Several students in the study represent single parents (in some cases with four children) who have been going to school while trying to support their families, making life as a parent/student very difficult. Students have expressed extreme frustration at the lack of sufficient financial aid they received to support their families, causing many of them to contemplate leaving school altogether. AI/AN students typically fall into the upper demographic sets in terms of age, and many of these students are parents looking for retraining or deciding to attend college later in life. For example, within the tribal college system, education is viewed through a "whole community" approach to lifelong education, based on the principle that a student does not have to abandon culture or family to obtain an education. Furthermore, research shows that the average tribal college student is a 27-year-old single mother of three and is often a first-generation student, making leaving home untenable and familial support necessary for success (Williams, 2007). According to American Indian College Fund statistics, 91% of scholarship recipients are nontraditional students, that is, they have dependents, are older than 24 years of age, and work full time or have a combination of these characteristics. These students take longer to complete their education when faced with financial and familial demands (Williams). Universities should provide scholarships or financial aid programs, similar to the American Indian College Fund, that take into account the characteristics of the American Indian single/student parent given the fact they comprise such a large portion of all AI/AN attending college.

In addition to these recommendations, the research findings in this study support the use of the strategies offered within the aforementioned Family Education Model, in particular, the use of the Family Specialist. According the National Association for Developmental Education (2009), developmental education includes but is not limited to all forms of learning assistance, such as tutoring; mentoring; as well as providing personal, academic, and career counseling (NADE, 2009). The Family Specialist meets these criteria by helping student/parents identify financial resources, obtaining childcare information, providing family-life skills training, helping individuals deal with the tremendous pressure of being student/parents, and even assisting with family problems back

home through counseling. Serving as a liaison, the Family Specialist can be especially beneficial for AI/AN students who have the tendency not to use the general services available to them to their maximum benefit.

Strategy 3: Academic Assistance through Peer Mentoring

After initiating the recommended types of services for AI/AN students, institutions need to build confidence by providing academic assistance for these students, particularly in the areas of mathematics and English. Developmental education in these areas is critical since many of the students in the study have had limited exposure to advanced mathematics and poor English writing skills, which results in their playing "catch up" academically. Another finding related to academic underpreparedness revealed in research, is a heightened sense of anxiety that can adversely affect academic achievement (Cassady & Johnson, 2002). Additionally, the primary source of academic anxiety is the fear of failure, which can lead to a loss of self-esteem and ultimately interfere with school performance (Naveh-Benjamin, 1991; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Skaalvik, 1997). The study institutions– Washington State University, the University of Idaho, and Montana State University–all have peer mentoring programs for AI/AN students. Each program assigns AI/AN mentors to incoming AI/AN freshman and transfer students. Mentors are typically upper class-level students appointed to guide and advise incoming students. Through developmental education methods such as academic assistance using peer-mentoring, students can adjust to the academic rigors of college curriculum. An added benefit for incoming AI/AN college students who receive academic mentoring from upper class AI/AN students who have successfully completed undergraduate requirements in mathematics and English is that the incoming students are provided with role models. Such relationship dynamics can provide vicarious learning and have tremendous benefits on academic achievement; research shows people learn by seeing others reinforced or punished for engaging in certain behaviors (Bandura, 1986).

Other institutions across the U.S. have implemented similar peer-mentor programs to reduce attrition rates among AI/AN freshman, sophomore, and transfer students. One excellent program example is a student-initiated, peer-mentoring program at the University of Oklahoma (OU) called RAIN (Retaining American Indians Now). RAIN is geared toward freshman, sophomore, and transfer American Indian students. The program matches students with mentors who have similar academic majors, provides academic assistance, and ultimately develops academic resilience as well as social and personal growth. Peer mentors are asked to support their mentees by contacting them weekly, assisting in study hall, and providing regular reports on contact time. The administration of the program is coordinated by a student coordinator, governed by a student advisory board, and housed at OU's American Indian Student Services (Shotton, Oosahwe, & Cintron, 2007).

For the AI/AN students in the study, academic self-confidence was a huge factor in believing they could succeed at the college level. Providing a boost of self-confidence through strong academic support systems with cultural connections, such as hiring AI/AN student tutors or encouraging faculty to help students in these academic trouble areas, can go a long way in helping AI/AN students mitigate feelings of inadequacy as it relates to academic performance.

> *It is critical for colleges and universities to understand the cultural capital of their regional tribes.*

Conclusion

To quote an African proverb: "It takes a village to raise a child"; everyone from state officials, administrators, faculty, staff, parents, and community leaders can all play a part in the development and success of the AI/AN college student. However, mainstream colleges and universities seeking to recruit, retain, and ultimately graduate AI/AN students need to listen and understand the issues that can obstruct these students from achieving their educational goals. Tierney (1990) also suggests what is needed are more studies examining AI/AN students' unique relationship to higher education instead of depending solely on statistical surveys and charts designed for policymakers at the federal and state levels. These issues must be identified and heard from the AI/AN student perspective.

The findings and proposed strategies within this study were derived primarily from the AI/AN students' perspectives. Their relationship and experiences with the world of mainstream higher education provides great insight into what these students need to successfully complete a college education. But policy makers, administrators, professionals in the developmental education field, and faculty must be willing to dialogue with and listen to the issues that concern AI/AN people. Without such discourse,

helping these students achieve their academic goals will continue to be a struggle. Study findings are also substantiated by HeavyRunner and DeCelles (2002) who indicated that "institutions fail to recognize the disconnect between the institutional values and [Indian] student/family values; hence the real reasons for high attrition rates among disadvantaged students are never addressed" (p. 8).

The retention strategies offered in this article can help Washington, Idaho, and Montana and their universities better serve their American Indian/Alaska students and their communities. However, although the strategies offered are derived primarily from the participants and universities under examination, they could be effective at other U.S. mainstream institutions of higher education serving large AI/AN populations. In addition, mainstream colleges and universities across the U.S. should conduct similar studies to examine what factors are necessary for AI/AN students to be successful at their institutions. It is critical for colleges and universities to understand the cultural capital of their regional tribes and to use this knowledge to boost college retention. Without investigating what truly motivates AI/AN students to attend, persist, and graduate from college, mainstream institutions of higher education will continue to address AI/AN college student retention and graduation attrition from uninformed positions.

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NADE News: Self-Evaluation Guides and 2010 Conference

By Karen Patty-Graham, NADE President

NADE launched the *NADE Self-Evaluation Guides* (2nd ed.) *Best Practice in Academic Support Programs* during NADE 2009 in Greensboro, North Carolina as a collaborative effort between NADE and H & H Publishing, which also published the first edition. The second edition, edited by Susan Clark-Thayer and Lisa Putnam Cole, involved six authors and many reviewers working on the Guides. The four guides promote professional collaboration through self-assessment of programs for strengths and areas to be improved by faculty, staff, and administrators. Three guides coincide with program components certified through NADE: Developmental Coursework (Jennifer Ferguson and Jane Neuburger, co authors), Tutoring Services (Gladys Shaw), and Course-Based Learning Assistance (David Arendale). The fourth guide, Teaching and Learning (Karen Patty-Graham and Linda Thompson), may be used to enhance self-assessment of the three programs. Each guide contains statements of best practice for comparison with program characteristics.

Over the last several months, NADE's Certification Council has worked with representatives from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to assist Texas developmental educators who seek to improve their programs' effectiveness. Council members also attended the Technology Institute for Developmental Educators to develop technology tools that will increase access to assessment and certification information.

In 2009-2010, the Certification Council celebrates its 10th anniversary. Since its inception, the Council has become synonymous with the concept of increasing program effectiveness through systematic, continuous assessment and evaluation. All programs that have been certified in the last 10 years, as well as certification trailblazers, will be recognized during NADE 2010 in Columbus, Ohio.

The NADE Executive Board invites you to OHIO NADE 2010, March 10-13, 2010, in Columbus as we collaborate and network with colleagues from 31 chapters across the country and internationally to discover success in over 175 concurrent sessions, chapter meetings, and Special Professional Interest Network SPIN sessions. SPIN sessions will occur early in the conference to promote early connections with colleagues who share similar discipline-related interests. Keynote speakers include Richard Lavoie, Lily Calderon-Cavanaugh, and Byron McClenney. We hope you will join us for this shared professional collaboration! NADE conference registration and additional information about NADE are available on the website at www.nade.net.

NADE: Helping underprepared students prepare, prepared students advance, and advanced students excel!

National Association for Developmental Education (NADE) • 500 N Estrella Parkway Ste B2 PMB 412 • Goodyear, AZ 85338 • www.nade.net

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Appendix
Interview Questions

To Students:

Describe how you perceive the university addresses issues of diversity?

How does the university address issues relating to minority students, specifically Native Americans?

What would you consider to be three or four factors that have led you to persist through your university so far?

What have been the three or four barriers to overcome in trying the complete your education?

If you think about friends that have started college but not finished-what do you think kept them from doing so?

What would be your ideal institution?

To Administrators and Faculty:

Describe how the university addresses issues of diversity?

How does the university address issues relating to minority students, specifically Native Americans?

What three or four factors do you believe help Native American students persist through college?

What do you perceive as the three or four greatest barriers to completing college?

What are some of the problems administration sees in recruiting and retaining Native American students?

What is the relationship between Native Americans students and faculty?

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

To State Representatives:

What is the state's reputation as it relates to diversity initiatives in higher education?

What do you believe are the three or four factors that help Native American students persist through college?

What does the state board of education believe are the three or four most significant barriers?

What can the state do to ensure the university is supporting diversity, especially Native American students?

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