There are no quick and easy tips to motivating American Indian students into graduate education. The decision to make a commitment of time and money to graduate training, particularly at the doctoral level, and the ability to succeed in such a program, is affected by a number of factors: (1) parental and peer encouragement; (2) awareness of career options; (3) role models; (4) adequate academic preparation at the high school and undergraduate level; and (5) adequate financial and academic support services at the graduate level. No one factor can be identified as most important. Any attempt to motivate students by addressing one of these factors must be undertaken with the awareness that all are related. Teachers and counselors must overcome the lack of effective family and peer support systems for American Indian students at all levels of education. A basic fact is that American Indian adults often cannot motivate children because of their own low levels of education. Tribes can contribute to the process of motivation by providing scholarship support for college education, including graduate education. Most do so now. They should also see that their own community colleges or colleges in neighboring communities upgrade the educational opportunities of tribal members and make a commitment to encourage young people to become college teachers by promising jobs where possible. They might set up loan funds on the model of forgivable loans. For example, students who come back to the reservation to teach would be forgiven a certain part of the loan for each year of service. Most of all, tribes have to see that the development of human resources, their most important asset, is necessary to long-range development plans. They must realize that tribal members can benefit the tribe by being able to teach their college-level skills to future generations. (JHZ)
Motivating American Indians Into Graduate Studies

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MOTIVATING AMERICAN INDIANS INTO GRADUATE STUDIES

Graduate education is important because it provides a level of training that provides professional competence in areas such as law, medicine, and higher education. This digest will deal with the factors that affect American Indian students' decisions concerning higher education and graduate school, and ways of motivating American Indian students to seek those degrees.

Why is graduate education important for American Indian students?

Education beyond the bachelor's degree level gives students increased knowledge and expertise and a wider range of career options because of their specialized knowledge. Graduate education differs from undergraduate education because it demands greater independence. Graduates learn how to analyze questions, do research on them, and propose solutions. In professional areas such as law, education, medicine, and business administration, graduate education provides training in the ways of carrying out professional responsibilities in a very specific manner. In academic areas, such as economics, political science, or sociology, graduate education provides mastery of a body of knowledge that can be imparted to students. Research can benefit Indian tribes and communities by providing new solutions to problems that may be confronting them. Teachers can train new generations of scholars. Graduate education can develop human knowledge, which is probably the most important resource that Indian people have.

What is the main obstacle to motivating American Indian students into graduate education?

The main problem in getting Indians into graduate school is that there are so few of them who get into college. The drop-out rates for American Indian students are higher than for whites and similar to or higher than those for other minority groups at all levels of education from high school through college and graduate school. Only 55% of Indian students graduate from high school, as compared with 85% of white students. Only 17% enter college, as compared with 36% of white students. Those who graduate from college with a bachelor's degree are about as likely as white students to go on to graduate school, but only 2% complete a graduate or professional degree, as compared with 8% of white students (Astin, 1980). The problem is not so much in motivating those students who have succeeded in college as it is in motivating them to stay in school to get a bachelor's degree—a necessary prerequisite to a graduate degree. The problem goes back even further to the high drop out rates in high school. The real job of motivation must begin at the high school level. It is there that students begin to choose courses that will prepare them to succeed academically in college and in graduate school.

What factors motivate students to get graduate degrees?

Career opportunities are the main motivators for students to pursue graduate school. These must be kept in the minds of students at all levels of education. High school counselors must begin to tell students that they should prepare for well-paying jobs. They should point out that many Indian people have succeeded in becoming lawyers, social workers, and teachers. The majority of graduate degrees that Indians earn are in professional fields at the master's level. In 1979 (the latest year for which comprehensive figures are available), almost 300,000 masters degrees were awarded, nationally, of which 999, or 0.3%, were received by Indian students. The largest numbers were in education (451), business (135), public affairs (81), and health (58). These fields are generally perceived as important areas of professional expertise in Indian communities.

At the doctoral level, of the more than 26,000 doctoral degrees awarded by U.S. colleges and universities in 1981, 89 (0.3%) went to American Indians. Of those, 12 were in the Life Sciences, 14 in the Social Sciences (the majority in Psychology), and 42 (almost half) were in Education. These numbers can be used to impress students with the need for Indian representation in graduate school. These figures also illustrate the fact that there are Indians who have made it through graduate programs.

What factors must counselors overcome in motivating Indian students into graduate school?

Teachers and counselors must overcome the lack of effective family and peer support systems for Indian students at all levels of education. A basic factor is that Indian adults often cannot motivate Indian children because of their own low levels of education. According to the 1980 census, only 5.2% of Indian people in the 40-69 age range had completed 17 years of school, while 14.2% of the white population (almost 3 times as many) had completed that much. Thus, as a percentage of their respective populations, Indians who were in the age range to be responsible for college age children in 1980 were much less likely to have completed graduate education themselves. They were not able to tell their children what graduate education might demand or what opportunities it might present.

A second factor is the income level of families. The costs of college education continue to increase, and have done so at rates higher than the inflation rate of the American economy. The 1980 census data showed, however, that the median income of Indian families was $13,724, while that of white families was $20,835. This difference indicates how difficult it is for an average Indian family to afford the costs of college education—especially the costs of graduate education which continue for a longer time.

A third factor is the possible relationship between parental educational and income level and student scores on the Graduate Record Examination. The GRE is a widely used (although not universal) measure of student potential to complete a graduate program. There is a demonstrable, although not causal, relationship between parental educational and income level and student scores on the Graduate Record Examination. Some professional schools have specialized tests, such as the MCAT (Medical College Admission Test), the GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Test), and the LSAT (Law School Admission Test).

Since the tests are used by many universities as part of the decision-making process on graduate admissions, their importance is significant to the access of minority students to graduate education. Although research has shown that minority students consider that the tests are more crucial to graduate admission than do white students, graduate departments that use the tests do not make automatic decisions based on them. Counselors should be aware of this fact and convey it to students.

A fourth factor in the underrepresentation of American Indians in graduate school is the nature of the colleges that they attend. In the fall of 1978, the largest percentages of American Indian students enrolled in higher education were in 2-year colleges (53% of the total). Only 12% were enrolled in universities, i.e., institutions that had some graduate programs. Students who enter junior colleges are substantially less likely to get a baccalaureate degree than students who enter 4-year colleges (Austin p. 41). The community colleges which serve Indian reservations, however, probably provide the only real opportunity for reservation residents to enter college programs.

Although college transfer programs are offered at virtually all Indian-controlled community colleges, the majority of students are enrolled in vocational programs. Tribal councils must support the development of their own tribally controlled community colleges. These colleges must offer the kinds of liberal arts courses in writing skills, sciences, social sciences, and humanities that will prepare students to transfer to 4-year colleges. Tribal education specialists should seek the assistance of teachers at those colleges in structuring curricula to meet the requirements of transfer. An important issue in transferability of junior college courses is the compatibility of courses offered at the 4-year institution. Tribal community colleges must begin to develop agreements with state institutions to assure that students will be able to transfer their units. Instructors and counselors at the junior colleges need to be able to advise students to take those courses that will transfer.

Indian students who attend 4-year institutions are less likely than white students to go to universities which offer graduate programs (19.7% of white students; only 12.5% of Indian students). They are thus less likely to be faced with the problems of research and the heart of academic graduate education. They are less likely to be taught by professors who are actively engaged in research. They do not see graduate students at work. Students who express an interest in graduate education should be encouraged strongly to attend an institution that has both undergraduate and graduate programs.

Role models are another factor in motivating Indian students into certain kinds of graduate education. Indian students at the undergraduate level see few Indian graduate students and probably even fewer Indian teachers. According to a report by the Carnegie Foundation based on a survey of college teachers in 1982-83,
What can be done to motivate Indian students to seek graduate education?

It is often the case that students who have a desire to go to graduate school find it difficult to make the intellectual commitment that graduate school demands from all students. Teachers and counselors must judge from their own experience and from the experiences of others how to judge the potential of individual students. It also entails the realization that graduate education is not necessarily the only route to success and completion of degrees in college. Teachers can make a special effort to be aware of special programs and sources of funding available for Indian students. Three major scholarships programs about which Indian students should have knowledge are the American Indian Scholarship Services, Inc., in Albuquerque, New Mexico; the Indian Fellowship Program in the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare; and the Ford Foundation Fellowship for Minorities.

What role should teachers play in motivating students?

The federal government has helped to provide motivation for Indian American students through its support of fellowships in certain areas. The fellowship program supported by the Office of Education in the U.S. Department of Education is a good example. Private foundations such as the Ford Foundation have also supported Indian students who wish to pursue graduate education. Foundation support for college education, including graduate education, must be adequate to support the most capable students. Tribes and communities can upgrade the educational opportunities of tribal members and make a commitment to encourage young people to become college teachers by promising them possible positions in teaching that they may be able to fill. For example, students who come back to the reservation to teach would be forgiven a certain part of the loan for each year of service. Most of all, tribes have an obligation to themselves and their students to be aware of the importance of education in the future generations. The American Indian Center at UCLA conducted a survey of Indian tribal officials. The tribes and communities of federated nations were asked to indicate the major priorities they wish to attract Indian students to graduate school. Questions were asked about the factors that might be used to motivate Indian students to seek graduate education.

How can Indian tribes and communities begin to motivate their young people to seek graduate education?

Tribes and communities need to determine their own requirements for trained personnel and the appropriate institutional arrangements dealing with Indian people. The American Indian Center at UCLA conducted a survey of Indian tribal officials. The first step is to convince students that a graduate degree is an important means of obtaining employment. The majority of Indian students who go to graduate school have chosen professional areas such as public health, social welfare, education, business administration, economics, or law. These areas are the most significant areas of Indian communities. In addition, the majority of Indian students who want to go to graduate school have done so with the awareness that all are related. Any attempt to motivate students by addressing one of these factors must be undertaken with the awareness that all are related.