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Factors that Contribute to Success in College for Native American Students

Scott A. Winrow

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FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO SUCCESS IN COLLEGE FOR NATIVE AMERICAN STUDENTS

By

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Master of Science, Northwest Missouri State University, 1996

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
University of North Dakota
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Grand Forks, North Dakota
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This dissertation, submitted by Scott A. Winrow in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

(Chairperson)

This dissertation meets the standards for appearance, conforms to the style and format requirements of the Graduate School of the University of North Dakota, and is hereby approved.

Dean of the Graduate School

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ABSTRACT

Native American college student retention is a major issue for colleges and universities today. Most studies completed up to this point have approached the issue of Native American retention by surveying or interviewing those students who have left school. This study uses a qualitative interview technique to examine the experiences of Native American students who have been successful. Eight senior-level undergraduate students at a north central university were interviewed using a semi-structured qualitative interview protocol.

Interviews were transcribed and analyzed for recurring themes. Five mega themes emerged from the data analysis. 1) The meaning of success. Participants were more likely to define success in terms of meeting personal goals than in monetary terms. 2) Taking active steps to be successful. Participants recognized support services on campus and were active in seeking out this support. Support was sought from Native-based programs and individuals as well as from supportive non-Native individuals. Participants also were active in seeking out financial support from their tribes. Additionally, participants were active in standing for themselves on campus. Several individuals indicated that they had to learn how to speak up in order to get the support they needed—something they had not been taught how to do, growing up on a reservation. 3) Family support, role models, and mentors. Participants all reported having a great deal of support from their families and other significant people in their
lives. Participants also had identifiable role models and mentors both at home and on campus. Additionally supportive non-Native individuals were influential for these individuals. 4) Learning experiences. All participants reported having stopped and started college from one to four times prior to their current attempt at college. Individuals used what they learned through their previous experiences in college to be successful in their current attempt. Participants also indicated that they learned a great deal about themselves while attending college. An important part of this was learning how to maintain their identity as Native Americans while reaching out and including themselves in the dominant culture. 5) Connectedness with other Native Americans. It was important for these participants to maintain connection with other Native Americans both at home and on campus. Recommendations for retention and future research are included.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Minority student retention is a major issue facing colleges and universities today, and studies suggest that Native Americans as a whole have an especially low graduation rate (Tate & Schwartz, 1993; Tierney, 1995; & Wells, 1989). Information on this subject is somewhat limited, but rough estimates suggest that less than sixty percent of ninth grade Native American students go on to finish high school. Only about forty percent of the students who do graduate go on to college, and even more alarming, roughly eighty-five percent of these students do not complete a four-year degree (Tierney, 1995). Tierney stated, “If one hundred students enter the ninth grade, sixty of them will graduate from high school and about twenty will enter a postsecondary institution. Of those twenty students, about three will receive a four-year degree” (p. 4).

Wells (1989) surveyed thirty-three two and four-year colleges and universities with high percentages of Native American students, and found that over half of the students who leave before graduation do so within their first year. Overall, the graduation rate was a troublesomely low 27.3%.

In this review, I will summarize some of the findings of previous research that has focused on Native American students who have dropped out of college. I will discuss
reasons why this research, while very important, may not be providing a complete picture of the Native American college student experience.

Review of the Literature

Most studies completed up to this point have approached the issue of Native American retention by surveying or interviewing those students who have left school. Wells (1989) grouped his findings under four main categories: a) inadequate preparation for college, b) problems in adjusting to the college environment, c) personal and family problems, and d) financial difficulties.

Inadequate Preparation for College

Issues raised at the joint sessions of The Indian Nations At Risk Task Force and the National Advisory Counsel on Indian Education in October, 1990 suggest that Native American students typically do not get adequate preparation for college. This seems to be especially true for schools administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) where subjects taught are often limited to the bare bones basics of reading and writing, with little emphasis on problem solving and cognitive development. Part of the problem may stem from the fact that the government-funding amount per student is typically much lower in BIA schools than in public schools off the reservations (NIEA, 1990). Additionally, lack of information about college and poor advising at the high school level may be contributing to the problem of inadequate preparation. This in turn may lead to problems in adjustment for Native American students when they get to college (Moore, 1994). Tonemah (1991) points out that lower teacher expectations and lack of opportunities in BIA schools may also be contributing to the problem of inadequate
preparation. Students are not likely to excel in an environment where little is expected of them.

Problems in Adjusting to College

Adjusting to college is often much more difficult for Native American students, especially those who come from a reservation environment. These students need to adjust to an academic environment that is likely to be much more difficult and rigorous than high school—an issue that is likely to be magnified by problems associated with inadequate preparation for college. Additionally, most Native American students must make an adjustment to living in a whole new cultural environment that may be largely foreign to them. It is not unusual for Native American students away from home for the first time to experience extreme homesickness (NIEA, 1990; Tierney, 1995; and Wells, 1989). A student interviewed by Minner (1995) pointed out, additionally, that Native American students are committed to attending and participating in tribal ceremonies and religious activities. This situation can lead to students missing time from school and having difficulties keeping up with their schoolwork. This is especially true when their home reservation is located a great distance from school.

Negative pressure from peers at home is also another factor that contributes to problems in adjustment to college. Tonemah (1991) pointed out that Native American students experience a lot of pressure from their peers "to be like everyone else". Native students tried to be like their peers; they soon found out that they: a) were not like everyone else, b) American society would not allow them to be like everyone else, and c) their tribal societies did not want them to be like everyone
else. This resulted in the Native student having to make an either-or-choice; either reject who they were/are as a Native student and conform/succeed; or, reject the societal pressure and “go back to the blanket” (be Native) and eventually drop out (p. 3).

A Native American student who does not receive reinforcement and support from their peer groups back home is more likely to have difficulty adjusting to college. It makes sense that if a Native student does not have a support system in place, it is more probable that he or she will have a harder time handling the stresses that go along with being a college student in a foreign environment.

Personal and Family Problems

Family is the number one priority for most Native Americans (Minner, 1995). Studies have shown that many Native American students do not always get a lot of family support for going to college (Minner, 1995; Tierney, 1995; and Wells, 1989). Native American parents often send their children off to college with mixed feelings. They recognize that college can add to their children’s lives, but at the same time they realize that in many cases their children will need to relocate off the reservation to get a job in their chosen field. Even skilled jobs on the reservation may not always be secure, as workers are often replaced when different people are elected to tribal office (Morin & Seibel, 1998). This is probably analogous to the changes that take place in Washington every time a new president or party is put in the White House.

Family responsibility is also a concern for Native American students. Native American children may feel guilty or choose not to leave home if their elders require
assistance. Often, Native American children are needed at home to help take care of older family members or when help is needed with chores at home, such as taking care of younger children, farm fields, livestock, etc. (Minner, 1995).

Wells (1989) found several other personal and family factors involved in Native American college students' decisions to leave school including: homesickness, substance abuse, desire to remain on the reservation, maintenance of cultural identity, inadequate transportation for students who commute, and difficulty in adjusting to bureaucratic procedures at college.

Financial Difficulties

A major issue for many Native American college students is financial funding. The federal government has made small increases in financial aid for college students in recent years, but this has not kept pace with the growing price of attending college. Additionally, the financial contributions that families are expected to make to their children's education is beyond the means for many Native American families (Minner, 1995; & Wells, 1989). Other problems experienced include difficulty in filling out complicated financial forms, and unawareness of financial aid sources. Searching out and applying for financial aid resources is a complex and frustrating process that may be intimidating for many Native American families.

Tierney's Suggestions For Addressing Failure

William G. Tierney has spent much time researching and addressing the problems that Native American college students encounter on the path towards getting their college degrees. He suggests that one problem facing minority student retention in general is that
many institutions attempt to find a “one size fits all” approach to dealing with retention. Tierney believes that programs that institutions put into place to deal with minority student retention many not be fully addressing the needs of Native American students (Tierney, 1995).

Tierney points out that many institutions adopt a philosophy of minority student retention that is related to Vincent Tinto’s theory of “academic and social integration”. Tinto (1975, 1987, & 1993) proposed that minority students need to fully integrate themselves into the academic and social life of the college institution in order to succeed in college. This includes getting involved in “out-of class” activities such as social clubs and organizations. In addition to getting involved in out-of-class social activities, Tinto believes that minority students need to give up their old lives and adopt a new one based on the majorities culture.

Although he recognizes that parts of Tinto’s model have merit, Tierney (1995) questions whether fully integrating into the dominant culture will really help Native Americans be successful. He also asserts that this approach will ultimately keep Native American students from succeeding in college.

One concern I have with Tinto’s model is that it is monocultural. I do not want an either-or-dualism where Native American students succeed in college, but have to integrate, assimilate, and lose their heritage, or maintain their cultural pride, but fail to graduate from college. Indeed, for Indian students such a model unreflexively applied, can do more harm than good; if people lose their identity, then many of them will not succeed (p. 4).
Other researchers also question whether being fully integrated into the social fabric of the institution will lead to minority student success. Murguia, Padilla, & Pavel (1991) conducted research to find out how minority students, including Native American students, tend to integrate themselves into the university. These researchers found that minority students were more likely to socially integrate into the university by becoming involved in smaller "enclaves" such as ethnic clubs, groups, and organizations. They state that, "Such ethnic enclaves can provide a means for students to scale down the campus and integrate socially. Thus, ethnic enclaves can provide the student with an ethnically compatible environment that may be important for some ethnic students" (p. 436). These researchers also found that for Native American students, cultural identity was an extremely important factor for their self-identity. One participant in the study stated that "To accept myself as a Native American enables me to explain myself in this world and in life by forming a self-identity" (p. 439).

Mayo, Murguia, & Padilla (1995) studied social integration and its affect on academic performance. Part of this study involved looking at the types of groups with which minority students tend to get involved. These researchers found that Native American college students were much more likely to be involved in a minority organization than either Mexican Americans or African American students. In the Mayo et al (1995) sample, 77.2% of Native American students were involved in their minority-specific organization(s) compared to 43.6% for Mexican Americans, and 52.8% of African American students. This adds support to Tierney’s belief that self-identity is very important for Native American students.
Tierney (1995) suggests that institutions need to adopt an approach where “failure is not an option”. He believes that many people view the high drop out rate among Native American students as reflecting the failure of these students. He argues that it is much more appropriate to view this as a failure of the United States educational system. He states, “Failure is a peculiarly American construct. We ought to realize that other cultures and societies exist where educational processes function without the intense idea of stratification, sorting, and failure that exists in the United States” (p. 4).

Developing strategies that include Native American students and their families, in addition to the institutions themselves, is crucial for addressing retention. Tierney (1995) presents a plan for increasing Native American student retention that involves a three level analysis. He suggests that it is important to look at the approach of institutions, and the point of view of students and families in order to develop strategies that will work to help Native American students succeed in college.

**Institutional Actions**

Tierney (1995) identified ten “culturally specific” ways for institutions to help Native American students get involved in their college or university. These include: 1) develop the mission; 2) faculty orientation and development; 3) high expectations for students; 4) cooperation, not competition; 5) synthesis; 6) active learning; 7) assessment; 8) diversity; 9) out of class learning; and 10) role models.

It is crucial that institutions stress the importance of cultural diversity. Institutions need to reach out and demonstrate specifically that Native American students are valued. Too often, “academic excellence” is stressed in a universities mission
statement and the importance of cultural diversity may get lost in the process. This part of a universities mission must also be translated into the “courses and lessons” of students so that “Native Americans can move from the margins of the university to the center” (Tierney, 1995 p. 5).

Most faculty members get ample training in their field of expertise. However many don’t receive adequate training in general teaching strategies, much less how to teach students of diverse groups. Having formal training programs on Native American culture and society for new faculty members can help instructors learn about the backgrounds of the Native American students they teach. Formal on-going training can also be beneficial to all faculty members.

It is also important that Native American students receive feedback from faculty members that they have high expectations for them. Research has demonstrated that students do better when faculty members stress that they have high expectations for them. It is important, however that students know what “high expectations” mean. If students do not have clear ideas about what is expected of them, they will feel lost and have more difficulties.

Native American students also function more effectively when cooperation is stressed over competition. The norm in many “Anglo classrooms” is that competition is valued more highly, however, this is a foreign concept to most Native American tribal people. Native American culture emphasizes working together and incorporating this into the classroom can help Native students be more involved in the learning process.
Native American students can benefit from having learning experiences that stress integration (synthesis) of material, rather than having knowledge and experience isolated. It is most helpful if faculty can develop cultural specific ways for Native American students to integrate the knowledge they have from the outside world and allow them to bring it into the classroom.

Active learning is also important for Native American students. Students learn more when they can actively take part in the daily learning process. Learning that includes class discussion, for instance, can be more helpful to Native American students, than passively sitting back and taking notes from chalk boards or overheads.

Native American students also benefit from on-going assessment of their performance in class. Tierney points out that receiving a grade based on a paper or exam that is graded after the class is over is the equivalent to getting an “autopsy report”. Native American students function much better when receiving on-going feedback about their performance in a class. Additionally, having time to work through and correct mistakes allows students to learn more than just getting a paper or exam back after a class has finished. Hornett (1989) also points out that Native American students are more likely to have a “present time” orientation. Native culture stresses are more focused on things that are in the present and do not use the same “goal-setting” system that the majority culture utilizes. She suggests that faculty can help by using the following options:

1) Return exams promptly, which will link performance with outcome; 2) work with students to set up goals which are easily and quickly accomplished and
gradually lengthen the time between production and return; and, 3) provide clear reminders of expectations for upcoming exams or activities (p. 16).

Tierney also points out that it is important for students to be able to interact with members of other racial and ethnic groups. This is helpful for students of the majority culture as well as for minority students. Interacting in an environment where everyone's racial and cultural identity is valued will allow Native American students to be a part of the "core" of the university, "rather than [being] relegated to the margins of learning as an 'at risk' group" (p. 6).

Out of class learning is also beneficial for Native American students. It is important for institutions to promote and support Native American student organizations, events, and activities as a way for Native students to be actively involved in the university. It is also important for faculty and other majority culture members to demonstrate an active interest in Native American culture. This promotes the student becoming a teacher (of their culture) and the faculty or administrator being a learner.

Finally, it is important for institutions to provide role models for Native American students to look up to. Institutions who value diversity need a strong affirmative action plan that ensures that Native Americans are hired as faculty, staff, and administrators. Acknowledging the national debate on affirmative action, Tierney asserts:

At a time when affirmative action is under attack, there are few more critical symbols that an institution's leadership can utilize that portrays a commitment to diversity than a defensible affirmative action plan. A retreat from affirmative action is a retreat from equity (p. 6).
Students

Tierney (1995) notes that Native American students, like all students, are not passive objects in the learning experience; rather, they are active participants who have roles and obligations as well. He offers five researched-based suggestions that can help Native American students be successful. These include: 1) work in groups; 2) speak with faculty; 3) stay on task; 4) avoid running an educational marathon; and 5) demand excellence for themselves.

Research has shown that students learn more when they work together in groups, rather than by themselves (Tierney, 1995). Native American students can help themselves be more effective in college by getting involved in study groups very soon after arriving at college. Native Americans can also benefit when they interact with faculty on a regular basis. Tierney suggests that students do not have to talk to every professor, but it is helpful to form a relationship with at least one professor each term. This may be difficult for a Native American student who has left the reservation for the first time. Having faculty members encourage their Native American students to seek out assistance can help facilitate this process.

Native American students can improve their academic performance by learning what is expected of them in a class, and developing a plan to accomplish this. Not only developing a plan of action, but also actively staying on task is important for the success of students. Students need to learn to pace themselves over the course of their college years. Many Native American students come to college and try to accomplish too much too fast at the beginning. It is necessary for students to be motivated to work, but
spending too much energy at the beginning can lead to burnout. Tierney states, "A college degree is more like running a marathon; students need to pace themselves for a four year effort and train towards the ultimate goal of graduation" (p. 6).

Finally, Tierney also suggests that Native American students need to demand excellence for themselves. Students who have high standards for themselves have a greater likelihood of going on to graduate. He cautions, however that while high standards are important, it is also necessary for students to set achievable standards for themselves. Setting standards that are too high can lead to the student feeling frustrated and unhappy with themselves.

Families

Tierney (1995) also offers five suggestions for Native American families to utilize in order to help their children be successful in college. These include: 1) talk about college with your child; 2) provide on-going support; 3) encourage faculty and administrators to learn about Native American culture; 4) create high expectations for your child; and 5) work with your local high school to encourage them to adequately prepare Native American students for college.

Native American parents can help motivate their children by discussing college with them during childhood and adolescence. Tierney suggests that this process should start no later than the ninth grade and should be on-going. It can be especially helpful for parents to take their children to a college to talk with others about what college is like. Additionally, talking with other Native American college students about their experiences can provide valuable information about adapting to the college environment.
Additionally, Tierney recognizes that some Native American parents might have little or no experience with college themselves. He suggests that if this is the case, it is important for the parents themselves to learn more about college. Parents who take an active interest in college and discuss it with their children, can provide positive reinforcement for going to a college or university.

Parents need to provide on-going support to their children once they are in college as well. Tierney suggests that parents, aunts, uncles, and other relatives can all help students by taking an active interest in their relative’s experiences at school. Talking with the student about their classes and learning experiences shows the student that they have support from family back home. It is also important for the college student to feel that he/she can talk with family members about problems or concerns that they may be experiencing while away at college.

Parents can also help by taking an active role in talking with faculty and administrators about Native American culture. Discussing this at parent and student orientation, for example, can help encourage faculty and administrators to learn about tribal cultures. Families can also be helpful to their relatives attending college, by encouraging high expectations for their sons, daughters, nieces, and nephews in school. Tierney says, “A student needs to be continually reminded that everyone around him/her expects excellence, and to that end, the entire community will do whatever is possible to ensure that the student will excel” (p. 7). It is important, however, to make sure that the student does not feel pushed to excel to a level that is unreasonable for them to accomplish.
It is also beneficial for families to work with their local high school to encourage adequate preparation for college. High school preparation is an important factor in the success of Native American college students, and families can be influential in ensuring that high schools work towards this end. Tierney points out that, "Good schools create the conditions for college retention and graduation" (p. 7). High schools can work to ensure that Native American students are intellectually, culturally, and academically prepared for pursuing a college education.

Comparing Those Who Drop Out To Those Who Graduate

As noted previously, most research that has been conducted with Native American students regarding retention has looked at students who have dropped out of college. There is very little published research that looks at Native Americans who have persisted and graduated with a four-year degree. It seems likely that at least some institutions have looked at this issue however, if this is true, it has unfortunately not translated into much published material.

One study conducted by Leigh Jeanotte (1982) looked at students who dropped out of college and compared them with students who graduated from the University of North Dakota. Jeanotte’s study looked at 71 dropouts and 45 graduates. All 116 participants in this study were from reservations in North Dakota. This study looked at the biographical, pre-college, and college factors of participants. Significant differences were found between dropouts and graduates on all three factors. The following is a review of some of the important findings of this study.
Biographical Factors

Jeanotte (1982) found that the sex of the student did not influence whether they either dropped out or graduated. Students who entered college at an older age were more likely to persist to graduation. However, it was not reported whether graduates had made prior attempts at college. Jeanotte also found that students who dropped out were more likely to be single. He suggested that this might be attributed to married students receiving more support from spouses and family. Alternatively, married students also have family responsibilities which may lead to feeling more pressure to succeed. Additionally, graduates tended to have more dependents than did dropouts. This can be attributed to students who graduated being older and therefore more likely to be married.

The student’s family structure was not a factor for either dropouts or graduates. Being raised by either both parents, one parent, or relatives had no bearing for either group. Parental income also had no bearing on whether students graduated or dropped out. Jeanotte points out that, “This appears to contradict the notion that parental income has had an influence on academic success in college” (p. 18). Parent’s educational levels had no bearing on whether students tended to graduate or dropout. It was also noted that only 20% of the sample had parents who received any college training.

Pre-College Factors

The type of high school attended as well as high school location had no effect on whether students dropped out or graduated from college. Jeanotte also found that the size of student’s high school graduating class had no effect for either group. He stated, “student’s adjustment to college life was independent of the size of the high school
graduating class” (p. 19). It was also found that pre-college graduation status had no effects on whether the student graduated from college. Apparently both students who graduated from a traditional high school and students who went through the General Educational Development (GED) program did equally well in college.

High school GPA was a predictor of college academic success. Jeanotte found that students who graduated from college had higher high school GPAs than those who ended up dropping out. He also found that students who graduated had higher American College Testing (ACT) scores. Student’s perceptions of high school preparation were not significantly different between students who graduated and those who dropped out. He says, “It appeared that students may or may not allow their high school backgrounds to unduly influence their success or lack of it in their college programs” (p. 20). Interestingly, Jeanotte found that student’s use of high school guidance services had no effect on either students who graduated or dropped out. “This may indicate that the high school guidance personnel were unable to anticipate factors which affect a student dropping out of or graduating from college” (p. 20).

**College Factors**

As would be expected, Jeanotte found that students who graduated had higher college GPAs than those who dropped out. He also suggests that students who drop out often do not withdraw from classes properly, and therefore end up with failing grades on their transcripts. Students who graduated reported having clearer career goals and were also more likely to report finding greater relevance in their coursework. Jeanotte also found that the development of study habits prior to a student’s entering college did not
appear to be a factor for either dropouts or graduates. He says, “This seems to indicate that the study habits developed prior to college were not applicable to the type of study required for college coursework” (p. 21).

Dropouts also were more likely to report having difficulty managing financial aid. This might be because the graduates were older and likely to have more experience at managing their finances. Graduates were more likely to indicate that they were happy with receiving their financial aid in one lump sum at the beginning of the semester, whereas students who dropped out reported wishing they could receive their aid in weekly increments.

Interestingly, Jeanotte found that there were no difference between dropouts and graduates when it came to making the transition from home and high school to university life. He stated, “Apparently, university life was not a difficult adjustment for either of the groups. This seems to refute the notion that the transition from home to college has an effect on persistence” (p. 23). Jeanotte also found no differences regarding having received encouragement for college continuation. Whether or not a student received encouragement from others had no effect on the participants in this study.

Students who graduated also reported more involvement in cultural activities and groups than those who dropped out. Graduates were also more likely to report viewing their Native American heritage as an advantage. Jeanotte believes that this is “reflective of a good self-concept”. He also believes that this “refutes the notion that poor academic performance is culturally related” (p. 24). Students who graduated were also more likely to report that their instructors had more positive feelings toward them as Native
Americans. Jeanotte says, “Apparently, a good self-concept about being an American Indian person was reflected in the way graduates perceived others’ feelings toward them” (p. 25).

Dropouts were also more likely to report that their involvement in social activities caused them to have difficulties in college. They could not seem to balance social activities and their studies as effectively as graduates. Graduates were able to more effectively balance their time, and were also more like to report a “feeling of belongingness” to their total college experience. Students who graduated were also more likely to rate their assistance from instructors higher and were more likely to seek out assistance from instructors.

Graduates also reported using campus-related supportive services more often than did dropouts. Jeanotte attributes this to graduates having been in school longer. Both groups reported using Indian programs more than any other campus service. Graduates and dropouts both reported being equally satisfied with Indian programs as well. Dropouts, however, were less satisfied than graduates with other campus supportive services.

Summary of Literature Review

The literature reviewed indicates that Native American college student retention is a major issue for colleges and universities today. If retention rates are to be improved, colleges and universities that serve Native American students must develop action plans to address this issue. Several researchers have examined this issue by studying students who have dropped out of college. This has provided valuable information about why
many Native American students leave college. Researchers have tended to group reasons for leaving college under four categories: inadequate preparation for college, problems adjusting to the college environment, personal and family issues, and financial difficulties.

The research also clearly demonstrates that improving retention will require a multi-faceted approach. Colleges and universities can develop plans to help Native American students deal with the adjustment to college, but assistance must come from other sources as well. BIA high schools can help by developing programs that will ensure students are better prepared to tackle a college-level education. Family is an equally important part of the picture as well. Emotional support from families has been shown to be crucial to the success of Native American students, and is something that many students who end up dropping out report failing to receive. Many parents know little about college, not having had the opportunity to attend, and could benefit from having opportunities to learn about college themselves.

As noted in the literature review, most of the research conducted thus far to address the issue of Native American student retention has focused on those students who have dropped out of college. The problem with focusing on this aspect of the problem is that little research has been conducted to look at those students who persist to graduation. Jeanotte’s study found that students who graduated were typically older and more emotionally mature. I found no published information that tells us whether students who drop out of college ever return to complete a degree. Additionally, there is little information that informs us about the characteristics of Native American students who do
persist to graduation. Students who graduate are likely to have personal characteristics and experiences that differ from those who drop out. Examining these personal characteristics and experiences will provide valuable information that can be used to develop strategies and programs to help improve the retention rates for Native American college students.
CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

Statement of the Problem

Most previous research in the area of Native American student retention has been conducted using surveys or exit interviews with Native American students who have left college for one reason or another. This research has provided a valuable picture of the experiences of these particular Native American students. However, it may not adequately reflect the experiences of those students who have stayed in school. It is very likely that Native American students who have persevered and stayed in school have experienced some, if not many, of the same issues that have caused their fellow students to leave. However, their experiences may also include different intervening factors, which lead to a different experience for them. It may also be that students who stay in school and persevere possess personal characteristics that help them cope with the complexities of college life.

Conducting research with students who have been successful in school can provide necessary information that will be valuable to both colleges and universities to help improve graduation rates. Additionally, this research can provide new information that will be valuable in helping career counselors provide better services to Native American students. If career counselors have information about what assists Native American students in being successful, then they can use this information in helping their
Native American clients. This information could be especially useful in working with Native American clients that present with problems or issues that place them at risk.

The current study had the added benefit of looking at the topic of Native American success in college from a positive perspective. Most of the research conducted thus far has focused on the deficiency model—factors that have led Native American students to leave college. Looking at success from a non-deficiency perspective, from those students who have persevered, will add a valuable piece of information to the research area.

In order to understand college success among Native American students, I interviewed senior-level students, preparing to graduate with a Bachelor’s degree, about their experiences in college. In particular, I was interested in exploring the ways that successful students’ experiences differed from students who did not complete a college degree. I expected that Native American students who were successful in college would receive support from family members. I also expected that successful students are more likely to utilize Native and non-Native support services on campus. Additionally, successful students are likely to possess personal characteristics which allow them to better adapt and deal with the struggles required in getting a college degree.

Definition of Success

For the purposes of this study, I have defined success as having reached senior status with plans to graduate at the end of the current or following semester. While it is true that a student may leave school at any point in their academic career, I would argue that a student who has reached this status has demonstrated a certain level of success in
college. The data, which show that the majority of Native American students drop out within their first two years, I believe, lends support to this argument. Students who have completed at least three full years are likely to have experienced some if not many of the same issues that lead many other Native American students to leave school. I believe that it is valuable to explore the experiences of these students in order to assist more Native Americans in having a successful college experience.

It is also important to recognize that success is often defined from a European-American cultural perspective. In order to address the biases that are inherent in this perspective, this research will also ask Native American students how they define success. Juntunen et al. (in press) found that success for Native Americans was a collective experience. Success was viewed in terms of contributing to the well-being of one’s family and community. Native Americans in the Juntunen et al. study did not stress money and material gain, values considered important in Euro American culture. Success in the area of retention studies tends to look simply at the numbers of students who have completed school. While this may be an adequate classification of success for this purpose, it may not fully take into account how Native American students view their experiences. I believe that it is important to assess how Native American students define success in order to put their personal experiences in culturally appropriate perspective.

Research Approach

Approaching the question of retention by focusing on the experiences of successful students is a relatively new endeavor. This study explored this question from a qualitative perspective. I believe that much can be learned if we listen openly and
objectively to the stories of successful Native American students. A qualitative approach to this subject can also benefit future research and application by providing information that will be useful in developing a survey instrument to use with Native American students. In keeping with a qualitative research design, my research question was broad so that I could gather as much relevant information as possible from Native American students’ perspectives.

Research Questions

1. How do Native American students define success in general? How do they define academic success? Additionally, does their definition of success differ from their family’s definition?

2. In what ways do Native American students feel they have been successful in college?

3. Do Native American students feel there is support for them at UND? If so what kinds of support have they received? If not, why?

4. Who else outside of people in the college environment have been supportive of Native American students? Do they feel they get adequate support from their families? In what ways have these students received support from their families while going to college?

5. What kind of relationships have Native American students had with administrative offices, campus housing, career counselors, departments, advisors, and professors?

6. Do Native American students feel that they have had mentors or role models at college? If so, have these people been Native Americans or members of the majority culture? Do they have role models back home that have been influential?
7. How have Native American students funded their education? Do they receive tribal support? Are parents able to help fund their college costs?

8. In what ways has tribal higher education helped Native American students? Are there ways that tribal higher education could be more supportive?

9. What barriers or hurdles have Native American students experienced on the path towards getting their education?

The full list of interview questions were developed through a focus group consisting of myself, two Native American graduate students from the Department of Counseling, and another non-Native American graduate student from the same department who has conducted Native American research.

Participants

A potential list of students were identified from the registrar’s database of senior status Native American students enrolled at the University of North Dakota. The interviews were conducted during the spring and summer sessions of 1999. During the spring semester a randomly selected group of 50 students were mailed letters inviting them to participate in the study. During the summer semester, an additional 25 letters were mailed to students. Five students were interviewed during the fall semester, and the remaining three were interviewed in the summer. Two students were not included because they did not meet the research criteria. One of these was going to school part time and did not plan to graduate for an additional two and half years. The other already had a Bachelor’s degree and was taking classes part time while working for the university.
Participants were self-selected for this study based on their interest in participating after receiving the letter. Interested participants contacted the researcher via telephone or email to set up an interview. Participants were given a brief description of the research. They were reminded that the interview would be audio-taped, and an interview time was scheduled. Four of the participants were interviewed in the researchers office on campus, and the remaining four interviews were conducted elsewhere due to work and/or childcare issues. Participants were given a ten-dollar gift for participating in the study.

The Native American participants in this study represented two tribes. Six of the participants were enrolled Chippewa members and two were members of the Mandan/Hidatsa/Arikara affiliated tribes. A total of seven females and one male participated in this study. All participants reported that they planned to graduate at the end of the current semester or at the conclusion of the following semester. The ages of the participants ranged from 22 to 45 years old. The mean age was 33 (SD = 7.84). Seven participants were raising children while attending college, six as single parents and sole providers. Two of the participants reported being currently married. Additionally, the eighth participant reported being currently pregnant with her first child.

All eight participants reported having stopped and started college more than one time. One participant had attended only the University of North Dakota, but had stopped and restarted school three times. The remaining seven participants attended from one to four other colleges or universities besides UND. Additionally, all eight participants
report having either immediate or future plans to continue their education beyond the bachelor degree.

Procedures

Participants were greeted and were briefly informed about the purpose of the study. Each person was given two copies of the informed consent, which they read and signed. One copy was kept by the researcher and the other was given to the participant for their future reference. The researcher asked the participants if they had any questions prior to starting the audio-taped interview and any questions or comments were addressed. The researcher also instructed the participants to feel free to stop the interviewer at any point and add anything they felt was being missed or not fully articulated. The interviews lasted from forty-five minutes to an hour and fifteen minutes. Before concluding the interviews, participants were asked if there was anything they would like to add or anything they felt was being missed. After this, the interview was ended and participants were given their ten-dollar gift. Participants were also asked if they minded being contacted again if any additional information was needed, and everyone consented to this. However, participants were not contacted further because the transcripts were not fully analyzed until after they had graduated and left the university.

Analysis

Data analysis began during the data collection period. To modify and expand upon the questions that were being asked, each of the first four interview audio-tapes were played back prior to conducting the next interview. This helped the researcher identify areas that could benefit from further questioning. In particular, this led to further
questioning about participants’ previous experiences in college. Each tape was fully transcribed by the researcher after conducting all the interviews. The transcripts were then coded using procedures outlined by Merriam (1998) in ‘Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education’. Merriam describes the approach to data analysis in qualitative research as being:

the process of making sense out of the data. And making sense out of data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read—it is the process of making meaning. Data analysis is a complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation (p. 178).

The data was analyzed using the constant comparative method, developed by Glasser and Strauss in 1967 as a part of their grounded theory approach to data analysis. Because the basic strategy of this method is “compatible with the inductive, concept-building orientation of all qualitative research”, this method has been used by many qualitative researchers over the years (Merriam, 1998). Merriam (1998) describes this process as:

The researcher begins with a particular incident from an interview, field notes, or document and compares it with another incident in the same set of data or in another set. These comparisons lead to tentative categories [or themes] that are then compared to each other and to other instances. Comparisons are constantly
made within and between levels of conceptualization until a theory can be formulated (p. 159).

The first step in data analysis is to code the transcripts into initial categories. This process involves taking the transcripts and making notes on each of the transcripts about ideas and passages that seem striking as you read through each transcript. Each subsequent transcript is analyzed in a similar manner and then the transcripts are compared with each other to generate general themes.

In order to help ensure that I was identifying all the general themes, two other independent coders were enlisted. The researcher enlisted two doctoral level interns in Counseling Psychology to help code four of the transcripts. Each coder was asked to read the transcripts, make notes, and identify what he or she felt were general themes. After doing this, the three coders met to discuss and compare their list of themes and examples of each theme. A total of twelve general themes were identified. After discussing each coder’s lists of themes and examples, it was mutually determined that all three coders agreed on ten of the twelve general themes. Two additional themes were identified by at least two of the coders, myself (the primary researcher) and one other coder. After discussing these two general themes, all three coders agreed that they were both relevant to include.

After this initial coding check, I read each transcript several times and coded all eight transcripts using the twelve agreed upon general themes. Coding all eight transcripts led me to re-evaluate one code, that of “suggestions”. After careful consideration, I decided to break this theme down further. The items in this category
covered a broad area, and I ended up placing the coded items into the various other eleven categories where they seemed to fit better.

The eleven general themes or categories were then looked at by me to develop larger mega themes. These larger categories or mega themes are organized to "reflect the purpose of the research." These final mega themes become the answers to the research question(s) (Merriam, 1998). The eleven general themes were organized and became sub-themes of five larger mega themes.

Researcher Premises and Biases

I chose to study success factors in college for Native American students for several reasons. I have had a long-standing interest in Native American culture. As an undergraduate student at Iowa State University, I minored in American Indian studies, and participated in several Native American conferences and forums. Additionally, during my graduate training at the University of North Dakota, I spent much time working on a research team that looked at career issues and what career means to Native American students. Because of this, it seemed natural for me to continue to look at this topic by focusing on another area of needed research.

I have also had substantial training and work experiences in career counseling as well as general counseling training. Part of doing this study was also so that I can learn and find more effective ways to work with future Native American clients. I have always strived to improve my knowledge of cross-cultural counseling methods, and I feel it is important to take an active role in learning about other cultures. Saying you want to learn
about other cultures is one thing, but taking active steps to learn about others is, I believe, the important thing.

I have visited several Native American reservations, and have attended several Pow Wows. I have also participated in a few ceremonies that I have been invited to attend. I have always tried to be respectful and not involve myself in sacred events that would be viewed as not appropriate for a non Native American. I have also questioned whether, as a non Native American, it was appropriate for me to seek out and work with Native American clients. I think that the best response for me is to work and learn to be the best that I can be in terms of cultural understanding and respect.

Throughout the process of conducting this study, I have been concerned about the problems of a Euro-American researcher studying Native American students. I recognize that my cultural background heavily influences my experiences and perceptions related to getting a college degree. Therefore, I consulted with staff members from the Native American Center on campus, as well as Native American students from the Counseling Department. These people helped me shape and develop parts of my project which are reflected in my final methodology. I believe to the extent that it is possible, I attended to biases that I have as a Euro-American researcher attempting to understand Native Americans’ experiences in college.

The responses I had from the participants of this study were nothing but positive. Almost everyone expressed thankfulness that someone was doing research in this area. It did not seem to matter to them that I was not a Native American. What seemed more important to them was that someone cared enough to help do research with Native
American peoples. Several participants actually expressed a wish that more people would do this kind of research to help improve the college experiences of Native American students. They expressed great sadness that so many Native Americans quit school before being able to finish their degrees.
CHAPTER III
RESULTS

The Development of Themes

This chapter presents the results of information gathered from the interviews. It is organized around the mega themes that arose from the analysis of the interview transcripts. For the most part the themes reflect the considerable interest of all of the participants although the emphasis may vary between them.

The "themes" were developed when the information gathered in the interviews were analyzed. From that analysis categories of themes were developed which, upon further analysis, tended to form themselves into larger units of information called "mega themes."

The mega themes that arise from the interviews are: (1) the meaning of success; (2) taking active steps to be successful; (3) family support, role models, and mentors; (4) learning experiences; and (5) connectedness with other Native Americans.

The Meaning of Success

Defining success for these Native American students was an important part of this study. Success has often been defined in terms of the dominant European-American culture and as these interviews demonstrated, Native Americans often have a different view of what success means to them. The main theme that came across was that success was more likely to be discussed in terms of meeting personal goals rather than in
monetary terms. Participants expressed a strong desire to make a better life for their children, but this was more likely to be expressed through the ways in which they lived their lives and how they treated other individuals. By going to college and being successful, one participant indicated she could show her daughter that going to college was possible as well as achievable. Most participants also indicated that they felt their views of success were very similar, if not the same, as their families’ view of success. Participants who reported that their family members might view success differently indicated this was due to their family having grown up under very poor financial circumstances.

Personal Meaning of Success

As the participants discussed their concepts of what success meant to them, it became clear that finishing school just for monetary factors was not a primary goal for them. Success had much more to do with meeting their respective goals and feeling that they had accomplished what they set out to do. Some of the participants indicated that they wanted to be able to provide a better life for their children, however the main theme that seemed to come across was being able to accomplish their personal goals.

The following is how several participants described this concept:

P1: just accomplishing what I came here to do and making a good living for me and my girls.

P4: once you set a goal and meet that goal. I would say as long as you keep trying...whether your grade is a C or and A...as long as you have finished it.

P6: Success for me is doing your best at what you set out to do and accomplishing something, even if it’s not exactly what you set out to do...as long as you’re doing your best and trying... you can’t fail. If I was meant to get an A in a class, then by trying my best I will get an A...but if I was only meant to know enough to
get a C or a D, then that's what I was meant to know...as long as I try my best...cause you can't know everything...and you can't be good at everything, and if you're not good at music (for instance) well you can do something else.

P8: If we try to put it in general terms... to be happy and take care of my responsibilities. My idea of academic success is completing...however long that takes—just getting through it. It doesn’t have to do with the grades and it doesn’t even go with the time element...getting done within a certain time... that’s not the goal either...If I'm lucky I can get something done ahead of time, but it’s not a big deal as long as I get it done and get what I wanted out of it. I don’t have a 4.0...what I have learned I have hung on to though.

P2: Success for me generally would be completing what you’ve set out your goals to be. Success is also doing what you enjoy—not what you have to do to survive.

Participant P2 also discussed described success as an ongoing process. This person felt that success was not a means to an end, but rather something that continues throughout life.

P2: Success is always a process also. After you graduate you have to continue to learn.

Two participants talked about being successful so that they could improve their lives and make a better life for their children. This seemed especially important because these participants were raising children as single parents. One participant indicated that she was working on a college degree to show her daughter that she too could go to college.

P4: to obtain...get a good job for her...because I graduated with a PT certificate...and right now I guess it’s...because I am divorced...you know to try for her... and to show her that she can graduate from college too.

P7: I would feel successful if I’m doing what I want to do...living how I want to live...and not having the struggles I have had...It hasn’t been easy being a single parent and trying to raise kids on my own...so I feel that success will be when they’re raised and I know they’re doing okay...and I’m doing okay, and I’m in a job I enjoy.
Participant P7 went on to talk about going beyond what she considers success to be, and viewing it as a reward.

P7: I think success would be for me to get my Bachelor’s degree...and I feel that anything over that is going to be a reward.

Interviewer (I): So if you go for your masters, it would be a reward?

P7: Yeah right... not a frivolity, but something that I hadn’t originally set out to do, but the closer I get, the more I am starting to look at...

One participant defined success in terms of how they lived their life.

P3: Having other people respect you. Being honest and straight-forward...and if the people can relate well with you...and also in doing that, you have to have good morals and treat people well.

This participant went on to talk about how relating to others was more important than getting good grades.

P3: I think I would like to have a good GPA...and a 3.0 or better...I would like to get a 4.0...I’m not quite there yet...so that we can get a basic understanding of the class... that’s more important than the grades because some people go to school and get good grades, but they still can’t relate to people...they don’t make that connection.

Family Meaning of Success

The majority of participants felt that their families shared the same or similar views of success.

P4: They would say the same as me...setting a goal and meeting it.

P3: Pretty similar to me...There’s not many of us that go to school...a lot of them went to college but never finished...they don’t have a college degree, but they have good jobs...so we’re doing better.

P6: just try your best and as long as you’re happy...that’s all you need to worry about...and if something makes you unhappy then that’s what you need to change...not having a lot of money...or a fancy car or big house...If you’re
happy being in an apartment and riding a bike...then that’s your success...and having a good family...and that’s success.

P7: when my family talks about success...like my parents, they always say...you know my kids all graduated from college...so I think education is a very important thing...and that’s really been driven into us our whole lives by our parents...especially my dad...cause neither one of my parents graduated from high school, and they went back and they were in their 50s and got their G.E.D.s...my dad always taught me that if you have a good education, you can do anything...it doesn’t matter who you are...if you’re Native American or whatever.

Participant P5 reported that her parents are very proud of her, but feels frustrated because she believes she has not been successful yet. This participant is working towards becoming a medical doctor in order to help her people and she is strongly focused on reaching this goal. She recognizes that completing the degree is necessary before she can start helping her people. Because of this, she struggles with her belief that she has not accomplished anything yet, and her parent’s belief that she already has had a great deal of success.

P5: they’re proud of me...and they feel that I have already succeeded...since I’m a first generation college student...but I get frustrated when they try to brag about me...to them this is success...to me it’s not...to them even getting into college and being successful at all defines success...I get frustrated when they do that to me...it doesn’t put pressure on me...it’s like...I don’t feel I have accomplished anything yet...because...when I graduated with my two-year college degree, my family was all ecstatic, but I was saying this isn’t my goal...this is nothing...this doesn’t mean anything to me...and when I graduate at the end of summer that’s not going to mean anything either...because I haven’t reached my goal yet...[this participant is going directly on for an advanced degree.

Two participants reported that they felt their families would have different views of success. They attributed this to their families having been poor and struggling to survive.
P2: My family would define success as a college degree and a job that pays more than they made.

P1: I know my older sister just wanted to make money because they lived pitifully...a long time ago they were poor. She was already out on her own when I was born so she would probably define it differently.

Overall, participants viewed success in terms of meeting personal goals. Providing a good life for their children was important, but making a lot of money was not stressed. Academically, most participants felt that as long as they were putting forth their best effort, they were successful. The majority of interviewees felt that their families shared similar views of success, and those that differed attributed this to a history of financial struggles in the family.

Taking Active Steps to Be Successful

A common thread for students interviewed for this study was their active participation in their own success. This came across in several ways and was organized around the following general themes: 1) Recognizing Support and Being Active in Seeking it Out on Campus; 2) Seeking Support From Tribe; and 3) Standing Up for Self on Campus.

Participants in this study indicated that they felt there was a great deal of support for Native American students at the University of North Dakota. In addition to recognizing support, they were very active in seeking it out across campus. It was natural for these participants to seek support from Native American-related programs and services, but they also went to non-Native peoples they perceived as responsive to the needs of Native American students. Of special importance for these interviewees, was that all of them indicated either immediate or future plans to continue their education.
beyond their undergraduate degrees. Six participants reported plans for continuing their education directly after finishing their undergraduate degrees, and the other two participants indicated that they planned to continue on in graduate school at some point in the future.

Participants were also active in seeking out financial support from their various tribes. Most participants indicated that they received some form of financial help from their tribes, however, the process of doing this was frustrating for many. Three participants indicated that the amount of financial assistance they received was based on whom they knew. Some participants were frustrated because it seemed to take a lot longer to receive financial support from their tribes and monies tend to come in much later in the semester than university-based financial aid. One participant also expressed frustration because she was unable to receive financial support from her tribe because of growing up off her reservation. Additionally, two participants reported receiving their primary financial assistance from Indian Health Service (IHS) scholarships, and reported being much more satisfied with this program.

Another general theme that emerged was participants being active in standing up for themselves on campus. Several participants indicated that they had experienced prejudice and discrimination at one point or another on their path towards getting a college degree. What stood out about participants who experienced prejudice and discrimination was their active steps to make things better for themselves and others. Participants were not always successful in making changes, but they worked hard to develop personal strategies to try and make things better. Part of this involved finding
ways to fit in or deal with the majority European-American culture while still maintaining their cultural identity as Native Americans.

Recognizing Support and Being Active in Seeking it Out on Campus

Most of the participants (seven) felt that there was considerable support for Native American Students at the University of North Dakota. Native American Programs and Indians Into Medicine (InMed) in particular were cited as strong sources of support for several interviewees. There was a strong sense that the Directors of these programs as well as other support staff utilize a very personal approach with students. Here are some examples of their responses:

P1: The Native American Programs have helped me out a lot...the director...he helped me out a lot. I can’t even begin to tell you how much he helped me when my mother passed away...he was there...he’s helped me financially when I needed money.

Interviewer (I): So he helped you get financial Aid?

P1: Yeah, but he has helped me even more personally than that...

P3: Native American Programs have really helped. I really like that...they help me a lot. Phone calls...I call home to my tribal office and put in a request for money...and they really help me over there...they fax information for me, they photocopy my papers, help me out with projects, make calls for me...

P6: The staff at Native American program are very instrumental...if students would go there, they make an effort to know everyone’s name...ask them how they are doing...they feed you...once or twice a month someone will bake something, and it’s always nice to have something from your home. It’s kind of a mothering type of place...there are good feelings there...you can watch TV...you can hang out. And there’s a lot of support if you have a problem...The Native American Cultural Center has been beyond belief help for me.

In addition to Native American Programs and Indians into Medicine, participants identified several other sources of support around the university. Peer groups, student
groups (Native and non-Native), Career Services, The Trio Programs, Native American peers in housing, and various academic departments on campus were all mentioned as other sources of support by various participants.

Participant P6 indicated that interacting with various peer and student groups have been influential in showing her that Native American students can make it through college. She indicated that many Native American students struggle and sacrifice to get through college, and peer support is very important to help get through the struggles.

P6: There is a lot of support for Native American students...either through peer support or the fact that there are several groups [like] the older than average student that you can look to. You can see what they can do and if they’re here with families and they left their jobs and they’re still here. Because they came back to school...and they wanted to do something different...if they can give up their lives, their jobs, their steady income and come back to school, then you can stay here and do this...and those that are my age and say college isn’t all work...let’s go have some fun...let’s remember that we’re young...and that we can still be here...

All participants indicated that they lived in campus housing at one time or another, however, only two indicated that they still were in campus housing. Participant two (P2) indicated that peer support from other Native Americans in the same building or complex was very helpful.

P2: Where I live, they call it a “mini reservation.” My whole neighborhood is Native American from different areas...and we tend to support each other.

All participants indicated that they have received support from their various academic departments. It was typical of these interviewees to seek out someone from their academic department(s) to help guide their career work. Receiving help for course planning was part of this, but it was also typical for these participants to receive help and guidance above and beyond this to help plan for work placement or for future graduate
study. The following are some examples of what interviewees had to say about their departments and advisors:

P2: My advisor for my junior and senior year...once you get into the_____ program, you get a new advisor and she was very good. In fact, she has helped me with my coursework to continue on for my masters and my Ph.D.—she's already started that with me. She's helped me map out what I need to do personally for my own goals rather than a program...she works individually with me. There is another professor that sticks out in my mind. There is one who just happens to be doing her research on what I'm choosing to do mine on...the same area...she works closely with me. She calls on me to share a number of conferences we go to...share the information back and forth with each other.

P3: One of my teachers is really good—I like her. She really understands me...none of my questions are wrong.

P5: My departments are very good. The Indian Studies department is very good...just a wonderful staff...very helpful...very understanding. The_____ Department...my advisor is a Native American...and I love him to death. So when I have something I need to get advice on or something that needs to be done over there, I will go see him...and he'll sit there and we'll talk. I just love him...he's a wonderful person.

Participant six (P6) reported that she chose a different advisor because she felt the person was more receptive to Native American students. She indicated that it is very important to her to seek guidance from someone who is openly supportive of her as a Native American student. It did not matter that her chosen advisor was not Native American himself; rather it was more important that he showed interest in her as a Native American student.

P6: I go see Dr._____ due to the fact that he's more receptive to Native American students. He realizes the dynamics of our situation at college...especially if you're more...if you kind of follow your ways...then he understands certain things...and maybe he's just so approachable because he is so eager to learn about us...that we are more willing to go to him.
One participant, however, felt that there was not a great deal of support at UND. The University of North Dakota is currently dealing with a struggle whether to change the mascot from The Fighting Sioux to something that does not reflect a Native American tribe and this issue has caused hard feelings for many Native American students on campus. Participant P8 indicated that this perception has colored her view of support for Native American students at the university. When asked if she felt there was support for Native American students at UND she responded:

P8: No not that much. It's kind of different...so far all I have heard is them bragging about their numbers...that they're the highest population...and I don't think that's necessarily because they are supporting their Native American students all that well. I think it's their location. I think it's some of the things that they offer that draws them. I don't think it's necessarily that they run a better program...that they're better at supporting Native American students. I think if they did they would definitely not have The Fighting Sioux thing that they have got. If they really supported Native American students, they wouldn't have that.

Participants also offered advice and reflections on seeking out support.

Participant three (P3) reflected that not seeking out support when she first started college caused difficulties for her. She indicated that she was not prepared for college the first time, and recognized that when she started school again, it was important to seek out support and assistance.

P3: When I first came here, I wasn't aware of all the support. When I first came, I wasn't ready for school. The high school I went to didn't prepare me for college...so I came to school and the first semester I got good grades...the second semester my grades started falling so I left. I came back and then...and I knew they [the support] were there, but I didn't utilize them...then eventually I cut...and got tutors. It was a struggle to find the right support services...the irony is just getting through school...and working with the right people. I see how the networking and getting to know others really benefits you.
Other participants recognize that support is available, but feel that many Native American students fail to seek out that support.

P5: There is support, but you need to go out there and you need to use it. I mean it’s not going to come knocking at your door.

Later in the interview this participant alluded to the same point when stressing the need to seek out financial support.

P5: When you don’t have financial support...it’s important...you have to get out there and do research...research where monies are available...because no one is going to tell you about it.

Participant two (P2) also alluded to the same thing when discussing his active role in searching out financial support for college.

P2: I find a scholarship and I do whatever is required to get that scholarship as far as writing applications, getting letters, running off paper. I think I have funded much of my education by working hard to get my GPA above a 3.8 and getting scholarships. There are a number of scholarships available to either Native American students or minorities or just teachers in general—people in general—half of my education has been funded through searching out scholarships.

This participant also expressed his frustration that many Native American fail to seek out support. The participant believes that many Native American students view support as a form of welfare, and works to overcome that perception.

P2: There is a ton of support for Native American students here. Unfortunately not all Native American students choose to use it. Some don’t use it because some believe—feel that they want to compete on an even playing field with their non-Native counterparts. And some feel that programs designed as support systems for minority students...not just Native American students, but other minorities [as well] are similar to a welfare type program. They feel that it’s a crutch rather than a support. It’s very unfortunate. That’s what I get in talking to a lot of students. I’m a very outgoing person so I tend to reach out for support—saying I don’t understand...help me. And most students are willing to help each other.
An interesting finding from interviewing these participants is that all of them indicated that they had never made use of a career counselor. Two participants indicated that they have visited the Career Center to get help with their resumes, and two other participants reported seeking out help with tutoring at one time or another, however, no one indicated seeking out assistance to help choose a career.

Seeking Support From Tribe

Another theme that emerged from this study was being active in seeking out financial support from their respective tribes. The two tribes in which participants were enrolled offer financial support through the tribe to help pay for the cost of college. Monies are allocated through tribal counsel and are administered through a higher education office at each tribe. Each reservation sets up their own funding criteria and guidelines. All participants reported seeking support from their various tribes. All but one participant reported getting some form of financial support from their tribe, but many of them indicated that it was necessary for them to stand up and fight to get the support they needed. Participants reported that this was very frustrating for them, but most of them didn't give up until they got as much support as they felt they could. There was a strong perception among three participants that the amount of financial aid one received was related to who you knew in your tribal office, and also who was in political power at the time they went for support.

P3: I'm not one of the ones that was lucky enough to work the tribal system. I guess it's the same everywhere. I'm not as closely related as some of the other students received larger grants. Now last semester I did get a $500 grant. I do get some money, but I don't get as much as others.

Interviewer (I): So you feel in some ways it's connected to who you know?
P3: Oh yeah...I used to try and go get a job and I wouldn’t get a job even though I had the courses and education. They hired someone because they had a family or some reason...and then when I did have a family. I still didn’t get a job because I wasn’t related to the right people.

The participant went on to say:

P3: They give money to relatives...one guy last year got $10,000...he was the son of the tribal chair. The important thing is to keep calling and be persistent...eventually they will do something because they have to. Actually this is the sixth semester that they have paid money to me. The only thing is that you have to fight the system.

Another participant reported having similar experiences:

P1: The tribe is starting some of the payments...100% now, but before they...I could never get in the program (childcare support) because of my thought...favoritism...only certain ones. I had to do a lot of bitching. I had to do a lot of hollering around and talking to the tribal counsel.

Interviewer (I): So you had to go in there and fight for yourself?

P1: Yeah. I felt that there were some personal feelings towards me...which I found out that there was because the students that were on the program were all getting $400 a month...and the director told them to only give me $85 a month. I found that out from two of the case managers...that that’s what was going on. I threatened to report her (the director) that I was going to tell what the case managers told me in terms of her decision about my funding.

Another participant had similar experiences and was very frustrated and upset at how the tribe handles financial support. This participant talked about their specific experiences as well as discussing the frustrations that others from the same tribe have experienced.

P8: My tribal higher education sucks...they are totally inept. It was a mess! You never got your money...you never got it. There are people that I know that have been picked up by security in classrooms across the state who come from ______...literally picked up and escorted off campus because their bills were not paid....and the reason why was because they [the tribe] did not issue their checks. These students were waiting months...and some of them were getting their check in April for January...how on earth are you going to buy books in April? I don’t
understand how they never got shut down...so I just said no way am I ever going to trust higher education again.

Interviewer (I): Sounds like things are pretty messed up.

P8: Yeah it is...and the thing is that it's not like that for every reservation...there are other reservations that are very good. One time when I was trying to get my financial aid, I saw them take this students...The woman that heads the whole department looked at this persons name on the envelope and said well he's been going to school forever...he's never going to finish...she threw the unopened envelope in the trash can...she never even opened it. In front of me she threw it in the garbage...it shocked me...and a lot of times, you can't do anything about it. I could probably go to the tribal chair and they would get her for doing it, but I would be labeled a trouble-maker and she would keep her job. I have gone to the tribal committee and they gave me money in the beginning, but they made me sign a piece of paper that swore I would not leave the reservation...more or less...and kind of belittled me that if I took this money, that I would not get this education and leave the reservation to live like a white person...and I remember thinking that's the last time. I don't ever want to go to these people again and have them treat me like that. If they like you, you will get it...or if you're their favorite, you'll get anything you want and if you're not you won't...or you'll be made to do things differently. When I think about it too...sometimes I get pissed and my anger gets the best of me.

One participant indicated that there was overall support from their tribe, but expressed frustration with the amount of the support.

P5: It helped when I needed it, but I think that what they give you...they could offer you more assistance. I think the assistance that they give you is just ridiculously minute...a lot of these kids coming in are poor and don't have family support...and the scholarship that they offer is just minimal...it covers your tuition if you're lucky.

One of these participants felt that the tribe overall had helped a great deal, but also expressed frustration that the money seems to come later than it should. This participant believed that it was due to the tribal system not being computerized. There was recognition, however that computerization might cut into the amount of money available for financial support.
P2: They [the tribe] don’t do anything on computer. I don’t know why we have some of the largest tribal higher education at our tribe and nothing is on computer...you just call and they dig in their little file bag and try to find you. They send out reminders in the mail...post cards...you’re missing this or missing that, but I think it would be so much faster if it were on computer. The monies tend to come later in the semester than other financial aid...I think it’s because it’s not computerized. On the other hand, if they were to computerize things, would the money that they need to by all the computers cut into a couple of students funding? Are they saving the money for that? So it’s good and bad both.

One participant reported receiving financial assistance when first attending college, but having not received any form of support directly from the tribe. This participant attributed this to not growing up on her reservation. This person also felt that not growing up on the reservation has made it more difficult to know how to get the necessary financial resources.

P7: When I first attended college I received a grant and Indian scholarship, but not since I have been back. I think that’s the area that is kind of lacking for someone like me who doesn’t grow up on the reservation, but is an enrolled member. Because if you grow up on the reservation, your chances of having financial help in school are a lot greater. Because I am not associated with the reservation, there wouldn’t be anyone there that knows about me...and you kind of almost have to have some inside help or at least be known around to get financial help...so I think that’s been a real difficulty...because I know there are programs available for me...it’s just knowing how to get at those resources...and how to become eligible.

Interviewer (I): You said you have to have those connections and know people...I have heard that from others...

P7: Which is unfortunate because my understanding is that the way grants and things are supposed to work is that everyone is supposed to be eligible...not just because you live on or off your reservation...and I think they have missed that mark with many Native American people.

This participant went on to express feeling let down by the lack of support. The interviewee reported working on the reservation at one point and felt something should
be given back—especially since she intends to give back to the community by working on a reservation.

P7: You know I have worked on the reservation...and I feel like I have given some back. There are a lot of places that I can think that I would like to work that would be on the reservation...maybe not right here, but in the southwest...so you know...it's not that I wouldn't want to pay back part of what they would give me by working in a position...because I know there are those kinds of things available...so I think they should look at that when they are recruiting Native American students...not just will they come back to their own reservations, but maybe they will go other places and help too.

Two participants report having received some support from their tribes when first starting college, but report that the bulk of their current support comes from an alternative funding source. These two participants receive Indian Health Service (IHS) scholarships which are funded by the federal government rather than independently through their respective tribes. In exchange for agreeing to work on a reservation after graduating, IHS scholarships pay all expenses related to going to college so these participants no longer need to go to their tribes for support. These participants report being very grateful for the support they receive and do not feel that they have had any problems getting the support they have needed. One of the participants reported feeling that the program requirements and guidelines have been a positive source of support.

P6: It's good because you have to provide them with proof of enrollment obviously...and you have to have at least a 2.0 GPA and you have to reapply each year...and you have to provide them with transcripts at the end of each semester. When you get higher up...if you fail, they will put you on probation and they will give you a semester to prove yourself...and admit that you had a bad semester...it happens to everyone...or most everyone and then they give you a chance...and then you can wait a year...and then they will reinstate you and give it to you again if you can prove that you can still do well. They like to pick out people and shake you up a bit...especially if you're a good student and you didn't do so hot...they wonder why...
This person also felt that IHS scholarship administrators were responsive to what was going on in the student's life when problems occur.

P6: Every semester you have to send in the list of courses that you are enrolled in and then say expected problems which might arise...in academics...or expected social or family type of activities which might affect your performance in school. They have an idea so if you don’t do so well...or if you’re involved in activities...they will take that into account...knowing that you were really busy and involved so you only pulled a 3.2 or 3.0...they take this into account for you.

Standing Up For Self On Campus

Another theme that arose from the interviews was that the participants were active in standing up for themselves. For some, it was because of perceived prejudice and discrimination. There was a perception by some participants that they had to work harder or fight harder because of white societies’ lack of understanding and respect for Native American culture. One participant described her belief that she had to work harder to get where she wanted to be in life. This was a view that was shared by the rest of her family as well.

P7: My dad always taught me that if you have a good education, you can do anything...it doesn’t matter who you are...if you’re Native American or whatever, you can...I guess we always felt like we had to do more to get status and have what we needed out of life, than the typical person because we were Native American.

Interviewer (I): So you had to try harder...

P7: Try harder yeah. Don’t let anybody think you’re not as good as anybody else...a lot of pep talks and you know when we would be teased or harassed, we would come back, and he would reinforce that. You have got to stand up for yourself. You have got to get out there and fight for whatever you want. Don’t let anybody tell you that you can’t do it...so it was a lot of that...kind of pushing through our lives.
One participant (P5) described growing up believing that being Native American was wrong. Both of this participant’s parents were full-blooded Native American but felt that they needed to protect their daughter from discrimination by down playing or ignoring her Native American heritage. Her parents were both sent to boarding schools and had terrible experiences that led them to work hard to try and protect their daughter from discrimination.

P5: Well being Native American was wrong. You know for instance a couple of years ago I went to get a new social security card because mine was lost and they said oh you’re race is white...and I said no I am not!...so my parents...it’s been a learning experience for me because when I learned something about my ancestors, I would go home and tell them...and they would say yeah we knew that. But they wanted to like shelter me and wanting me to be white so that I wouldn’t have to suffer the way they did. They went to boarding schools and such you know...it was really horrible.

She later went on to say:

P5: I had to write a paper about myself [for school]...and I think that really helped because I started saying this is who I am...cause I didn’t have an identity before that. Then I started identifying with myself and who I was, and why you know my parents never taught me...because I was always treated as an Indian, but my parents were denying that I was...so I had to deal with the prejudice and things like that and I didn’t know why...and then when I started learning these things and had to actually do a paper about my ancestors...then I started saying this is why my parents didn’t teach me...my dad spoke fluent _______...it’s a declared language now, but he spoke fluently until he was 10 years old and then he was forced to go to school and they cut his hair...and they taught him English. You know he knew the language fluently, but he didn’t want to teach us, so it was quite interesting.

Two participants discussed having to stand up for themselves and fight perceived discrimination and prejudice from the housing office. One participant felt that this was directly related to prejudice on the part of neighbors towards Native Americans.

P5: I noticed that I got accused of having parties, when I was just having extended family over. To me that’s not a party...it’s family and they can come over anytime...and it’s always been like that growing up...we have always had a house
full...it’s just the way I grew up you know...and I noticed that I had to explain myself to these people. We had a couple of neighbors who were really prejudice...they were more prone to believe negative things about Native Americans.

This participant later went on to describe a conversation she had with the manager that she had to deal with when problems were reported. This conversation took place after the manager was no longer in that position.

P5: I ran into her one night...and she wasn’t the manager anymore so she said she could tell me ‘You were right...every time they complained, I had to call...it’s my job... I just hated to call you because I knew it had to do with race...it was just prejudice.’

Both participants, however, felt that housing was not very receptive to Native American culture and traditions. They felt that the housing office and the university lacked understanding and acceptance about the ways that Native American culture is different than the dominant white culture.

P5: White people are focused on the immediate family...Native Americans are not. I mean you are close to your uncles, aunts, nieces, nephews...so when you have family over...it’s not my brother coming over for tea...it’s not like that...that’s a different culture, and I think UND is really bad for recognizing that difference and accepting it. You know it’s not acceptable...it’s just not.

P8: There’s this thing in the lease where you can’t have immediate family live with you...and for me that was one of the hardest things. I couldn’t understand why they would do that. For me, there is only me and my sister...and the way it’s set up in my family and probably more of the culture as well...is that we are the ones that are going to take care of our mothers...and in some cases if there are not enough daughters then the sons will. And it’s expected that you will take in your parents!...one or both...it’s no big deal...it’s how we have lived our whole lives.

She went on to say:

P8: There are some girls I know that have young kids...and it’s natural to bring their grandmothers with...if there grandmothers are not busy or whatever...or if
these women think their daughters need them to take care of their kids, they will come right along and not bat an eyelash. So here’s the housing authority telling them that they can’t do that...almost like it’s mooching off the school...and it’s like...that should have nothing to do with it. If there’s enough room for people in that house or in that apartment that they can live fairly, comfortably, and if the rent is being paid...there is no reason that they can’t have their mothers there.

Other participants discussed having to learn to stand up for themselves and speak out when they needed to. These participants indicated that coming off of reservation schools had taught them not to speak up. For them they felt that they could not question authority or ask for the help they needed. One participant described speaking out as very foreign to them when first coming to college—something you just didn’t know how to do. Eventually he learned to speak up and considers himself to be very outspoken now.

P2: I learned to ask around, though. Who teaches that class? Tell me about this instructor...and I avoid instructors that have a lot of negative reputations because I’m very outspoken...so I avoid them. The norm is that...and I don’t know if that’s for all students, but the norm among Native American students is not to ask...just to sign up for classes and taking them and passing or not passing. I don’t know if that’s the norm among all students, but that’s the Norm among Native students. That’s something I try to do through peer advising...you need to find out about instructors. There are a small number of students who talk among each other, but there is generally a feeling that you can’t do that. So often the students come off a reservation school...where you’re just told what you’re going to do...no questioning authority...or if your at a tribal school where one person teaches 8 classes, you don’t ask...you don’t think to ask. It’s not something you know.

Another participant (P4) discussed similar experiences. For this person, growing up in a smaller community, learning to talk to professors to get the needed help was difficult and intimidating. This was something she learned to get over as time went by.

P4: I would say the first year I was here, I was really intimidated by them [professors]. And I didn’t attempt to talk to them because you know I was in the ______ program and we had our own little group of probably 30 students. We were always together, so I didn’t have to worry about all these different teachers...and so when I first came here it was very intimidating, and it took me a
while. Well I think this my 3rd year [at UND] is the most I have probably talked to them.

Interviewer (I): So the first year was kind of intimidating for you...

P4: Yeah because I didn’t know any of the classes. I never had a class as big as some of my chemistry classes. Yeah…the class was the size of my town. I have become more able to go talk to them without as much hesitation as I had.

Another participant (P6) discussed the need to talk to professors when having problems or not being able to understand class materials. She acknowledged that some professors may seem like they do not have time for students, but that it is still important to go to them when help is needed. She also suggests that if the professor is not receptive, then it is important to seek out others ways of getting help or dealing with the situation.

P6: If you fall behind, don’t be afraid to go to them [professors] and say I’m behind…and don’t be afraid to say I wish I could understand this. Can I work with you? A lot of times professors will try and make it seem like they don’t have the time…and sometimes they just don’t like students, and if that’s the case, then there’s other ways to go about it…like friends…or just realize that you can take it from a different instructor another semester. That’s really sad when you have to do that, but sometimes it’s easier on you to not fight it…and just do your best and go back and try again. That’s not something I would always encourage, but in some cases, it’s just less stress on you.

Overall, participants related several ways in which they were active participants in their current success in college. This active stance was demonstrated in several ways including: seeking out support and assistance from Native and non-Native programs and services across campus; seeking financial support from their respective tribes; fighting perceived prejudice against them as Native Americans; and learning how to speak up for themselves in order to get their needs met.
Family Support, Role Models, and Mentors

The mega theme Family Support, Role Models and Mentors was organized around the general themes: 1) Support from family and/or other influential people; and 2) Support from role models and mentors. Participants in this study had supportive individuals in their lives both at home and on campus. It was clear to these students that it was important to have support from their families, but it was also important to them to have other important or influential people in their lives that supported them and gave them guidance. Support in the form of role models and mentors was also key for these participants. Influential Native American role models and mentors both at home and on campus were important to participants, as well as supportive non-Native American faculty and staff members on campus.

Support From Family and/or Influential People

Support from family and/or other influential people was very important to these Native American participants. Participants expressed that this support came in several different forms. Emotional support, financial support, and encouragement were all important factors. Two participants had parents move with them to school to assist with childcare. Other participant’s parents remained at home, but still supported their children in any way they could. Six participants expressed receiving influential support from others back home, either currently or in the past. Whether past or present, these interviewees had important people in their lives that supported and encouraged them to make it through college.
Five participants directly attributed support from parents as a reason they are still in college today. Two participants reported their parents moved to Grand Forks to help them with childcare. Participant’s (P1) mother moved here to help take care of her grandchildren while her daughter went to school. Her mother died shortly after moving here, but support from others helped to encourage her to stay and finish college. Finishing her degree to make a better life for her children was also an influential factor.

P1: My mother came to school with me, but she passed away six months after getting here. I wanted to go home. I didn’t want to complete [school]. Everybody was telling me I should complete...so I did. My mom was an important reason for me to stay in school...her griping at me and telling me to do something with my life. My kids were also an important reason for staying in school.

Participant (P7) also reported that her parents moved to Grand Forks to help support her through school.

P7: My parents live in Grand Forks with me. In fact we live in the same house. They moved here about a year ago. When I decided I was serious about finishing this degree, they decided they were going to help out as much as they could...so they have. They moved in and they’re helping with the kids and they’re helping financially...so that I can concentrate on getting my degree. That’s been a big help.

This participant went on to talk about how having all four of her siblings graduate from college was support and pressure to finish school.

P7: All four of my siblings have graduated from UND. I’m the last of five to graduate. It’s been kind of a mission...and I think it’s really unique for Native Americans to have every sibling graduate from college and have pretty successful careers. So I think we are kind of unique in that sense. I know I sure feel the pressure to finish.

Another participant (P6) expressed similar sentiments about having other family members in college being encouragement for her. This participant indicated that her
younger sister has already graduated from college and her mother and younger sister are currently in college. She also expressed receiving support from her reservation as a whole, as well as expressing the need and importance for other Native Americans to go to college and get their degrees.

Interviewer (I): It sounds like there is a lot of support and encouragement in your family for getting a higher education degree.

P6: Yes...because pretty much if you want a job today...even back on the reservation...especially our reservation...because there are so many people with college educations that to get a good job you need to be educated. We're really educated...a lot of people with doctorates...and people really want you to go to college there...and with our college there...there really is no excuse not to go to college.

This participant also expressed having a lot of support from family back home as well as from friends and faculty on campus.

P6: I have a lot of support at home. I have a lot of support in general. I have a lot of friends and a lot of faculty...that are Native and non-Native who are definitely there.

Participant (P2) also expressed receiving emotional and financial support from his family.

P2: My family is very supportive of my needs. I'm the only person in my family attending college...and they have just been real helpful with what I need to do with my kids and supportive of me in general...everything from food and toothpaste to helping with bills.

Another participant (P8) reported receiving passive support from her family.

P8: When I told my family of origin what I wanted to do...they were just okay go ahead...is that what you want to do? No big help...well if that's what you want to do—go do it. I wasn't pushed. I wasn't hen pecked by either my mother or father...it was just kind of on my own.

Two participants reported other influential people back home on the reservation that have been a source of support and encouragement. One participant indicated she had
people from high school that influenced her decision to attend college as well as complete her degree. The other participant discussed an advisor from tribal college, and indicated that this person continues to be an active and supportive influence.

Participant (P5) reported that she had a very difficult childhood and the support she received from her high school principle, school counselor, and others played an important role in her struggling to succeed in college and working to finish her degree.

P5: When I was in high school, I was in this bad relationship and I tried to commit suicide a couple of times. I had the principle and school counselor come to my house and say you’re not dropping out of school—you have too much potential…and I’m thinking whatever…you know…so I think at that was the point, I got what they said. For them to come…I have seen so many kids drop out and nobody cares…and for them to reach out they must have seen something.

She went on to say:

P5: The things that have kept me in college are all these little things…that people thought I couldn’t do it…and then what kept me in college is when I failed…I didn’t want to lose it like that. I said I got to fix and set the record straight. I didn’t want to tell people that I failed. I would have had to tell these people the rest of my life that I failed.

Participant (P2) discussed an advisor from tribal college that was an influential source of support as well as a role model. This interviewee indicates this advisor is still an important source of support.

P2: The vice president [of the tribal college] has always been a huge part of my life. Educationally…she essentially did the same thing I’m doing. She’s a single parent working, traveling, and doing career work, all the outside influences other than just school that she’s dealt with. I can call her and say…you know hey…I got this illness with the kids or class or whatever…and she will talk me through it and calm me down. It’s no big deal [to her]. She’s just a wonderful person.
Role models and mentors was important to most of the participants. Seven of the eight participants reported having significant role models and mentors, either here, at home, or in both places. In addition to providing support to their relatives attending college, several participants cited family members as role models. Various participants also cited advisors, professors, Native American-related program directors and support staff, high school guidance counselors, and bosses as being influential people. Both Native American and non-native people were cited as being important as well. One participant also reported that other single parent mothers going back to school were important role models for her.

Five participants reported that family members both here and back home on the reservation were important role models for them. Here are some examples of what they had to say about their families:

P7: Especially my dad...because neither one of my parents graduated from high school, and they went back after they were in their 50's and got their GEDs. My dad always taught me that if you have a good education, you can do anything.

Interviewer (I): Sounds like your dad was a really strong influence.

P7: Yeah a strong influence...still going strong...still doing it.

Interviewer (I): That's one thing that I really like about Native American culture...that elders are respected so much more...

P7: Yeah...they really are...my dad...everyone caters to my dad because he is a really strong influential person in my family.

P3: When we were young we always had a structured home life. Although it did get kind of chaotic when I was a teenager, but my mom...she never hit us...she would always talk to us...she always explained to us.
Interviewer (I): It kind of sounds like what you were saying too is that your mom is a role model to you...

P3: Oh yeah! Like I said most of my relatives...my uncle was a judge...he was in the army...he came to UND and went back [to the reservation] and then he became a judge. But if you were to look at him on the street, you wouldn’t think he was a judge...he doesn’t dress like one...but he was a good man.

One participant, in addition to citing parents, indicated that he tends to look at certain aspects of every person—to see the positive side of people. When asked if there were any role models in his life, he responded:

P2: There are so many. I tend to look...and I think my family does too...we tend to look for what’s good in someone rather than what’s bad in someone. Find that thing you like...whether successful parent, successful alcoholic. If they’re successful in anything—what is it about their personality that causes them to be successful. That’s something that my parents have always taught me. What makes that person successful in what they do. And deal with that rather than why someone isn’t successful in other areas...because we are all going to be unsuccessful in something.

This participant also reported that one of his professors is a role model of his. He indicated that she is not a Native American, but is very interested in and supportive of Native American students. When asked if he had any role models on campus, he responded:

P2: Dr. _____ because she’s a very tolerant person—that’s something...most of my work is with tolerance education. I don’t know if it’s that she’s a role model so much for that particular aspect of my education...or even just as a person. I can’t make any definite delineation between the two...

Interviewer (I): Is she a Native American?

P2: She’s not, but she has worked on I think 14 different reservations—teaching and [she] understands the culture of every reservation she’s taught on. She immerses herself in the community. Which is something I would hope all teachers do, but it’s generally not the rule—it’s the exception.
He also indicated that she was a source of support as well as his mentor.

P2: Dr. _____ is the one that I share most of my research with. She is very good...she calls...she checks on me if I miss a class. I've got 4 or 5 emails or voice mails...what's going on?

Participant (P2) also reported that two of the support staff at Native American programs were role models as well as mentors and motivators for him.

P2: Here at Native American Programs [the location that this interview took place] _____ and _____ have both been role models. They work real close together—their offices are right next to each other and they work with all the same students depending on which one of them is in the office at the time. But they’re both very good at it. They’re real good at...not just mentoring, but motivating.

When asked if she had any mentors here, participant (P8) responded:

P8: I did, but this person left...not faculty wise...I don’t. I have mentors, but they are other students that are further along and they’re Native Americans.

When asked about role models she responded:

P8: There are a couple of teachers that are not in my department, but I have come to really like...and they’re people who truly like Native Americans.

Interviewer (I): Are they Native Americans themselves?

P8: No...they’re not...some of them are...I shouldn’t say not all. There are some that I have really connected with—even after classes are over. I will call them up and I will connect [with them]. There are others that are Native, and I appreciate that they are there.

Participant (P7) indicated that her advisor as well as another professor were mentors to her. She appreciates her advisor because she is an understanding person, and she appreciates her professor because she “works outside the box” and is assertive in standing up for what she believes in.

P7: My advisor would be one of them. She’s a very understanding person and she tries really hard to be helpful. I think she always tries to do right by her students.
And the other person I'm thinking about...she kind of likes to step out of the circle—works outside the box. She's not afraid to ask questions that need to be asked at times, and I think she's assertive. She's a great advocate for socialwork, children and for services. And I think that she's not afraid to stand up for what she believes in. I like that!

This participant also talked about her boss being a role model as well as a mentor. She looks up to her boss because she is a single parent and has gone through many of the same experiences that she has. She did not indicate, however, whether her boss was Native American or not.

P7: I have one [a role model]...actually my boss. I look at her and I think that she started here 19 years ago as a secretary, and went on for her Ph.D. And I think of her as being a mentor as well. I like her style...and that she raised kids on her own too. She's a single parent.

Participant (P8) indicated that a guidance counselor from high school has had a long lasting effect on her. This person was a Native American female and the participant indicated that this guidance counselor was an influential source of support as well as a role model for her.

P8: There was a guidance counselor back in my high school years. I had an idea that I wanted to go to college right from high school...I'd always wanted to. It wasn't like it was something that popped up later in life...it was always a plan to go...and I think I got that from that counselor. One thing that I thought was really cool was that she was a Native American female...and to have one as our guidance counselor...in a public school where there were pretty much half and half...Native Americans and white students. So for there to be the one and only guidance counselor, I thought was cool so she was a role model.

Participant (P6) reported seeing other single Native American mothers going to school and working to get their education as role models. Seeing other Native American women going through the same experiences (or similar) has been a source or support for her.
P6: When I see a Native woman with 3 or 4 kids in college with no husband, whether that’s through a twist of fate and they died...or they’re just not there...and they’re in school and taking care of their families...and they have jobs—those are my role models.

This participant also indicated that her mother and aunts are role models because they are doing the same thing that she is—going to school and taking care of their families.

P6: and my mom...and I have aunts that go to school and take care of their families...and they still do it...to know that there’s always a way if you want it bad enough...

It was clear that participants in this study had support from many significant people in their lives. Family members were a crucial part of this success, and most participants had the full support of their family. In some cases, family members even moved to the university area to help their relatives with childcare. Participants also had significant role models and mentors in their lives. Participants cited influential Native Americans both home and at school who strongly influenced them. Non-Native faculty and staff members who were supportive of Native American culture also functioned as significant role models and mentors.

Learning Experiences

The mega theme of Learning Experiences included the themes: 1) Learning from stopping and starting again, and 2) Personal learning experiences. All eight participants reported stopping and starting college more than once. One participant (P7) has attended only the University of North Dakota, but stopped and started three different times. All other participants attended either a smaller community college or tribal college (or both in some cases), before coming to UND to finish their education. For some participants, this was partly due to family problems and responsibilities. However, what seemed to
come across for many of the participants was that they felt they were not mature enough or academically prepared to pursue a college education the first time. Many of the participants indicated that as time went on they grew and matured and became more prepared to tackle working for a college degree.

Personal learning experiences was also a theme for participants. Several participants talked about learning that college was much more than just going to classes and getting good grades. Many indicated they learned a lot about themselves while attending college. Learning how to succeed in college was part of this. Some participants discussed how they have learned to balance their schedules and learned to work with faculty so they could get the help they needed. Other participants also discussed ways in which they have learned to step outside of their cultures to learn more about the majority culture. This did not mean giving up their identity as a Native American, but rather expanding themselves in ways that allowed them to learn about other people and cultures. Two participants discussed learning how to deal with the struggles related to being a Native American coming off of a reservation and learning how to find their place and a balance in the majority culture.

Learning From Stopping And Starting Again

All of the participants in this study reported that they stopped and started college more than one time. One participant has attended only UND, but it was more common for the participants to go to one or more community college and/or tribal college before coming to UND to finish their Bachelor’s degree. Seven participants indicated that they attended from one to four other schools prior to coming to UND. Many of these Native
American students reported having difficulties with childcare and getting other support services the first time they attended school. However, most participants indicated that they either didn’t feel ready to tackle school the first time or felt they lacked the emotional maturity to know how to be successful in college. What came across for most participants was that over time they felt they matured and gained more self-knowledge that has helped them to work to complete their college degrees.

Two participants discussed having difficulties finding or getting the appropriate support services for them and their children when they attended college earlier. This was a major struggle for them and contributed to their difficulties staying in school. Both of these students also attributed lack of maturity as an additional reason for them not being able to finish school during previous attempts. This aspect will be discussed later in this section.

P3: I’m a single mom. Basically I have to support my son. When I returned to school again in the early 80’s, it was really hard. I have been on social services. I had to work at least 30 hours a week and then I had to find a baby sitter and go to school full time.

P7: I came back in 1978 and stayed for I think three semesters and then left again. I had a small child at that time and it was very difficult...finding appropriate daycare, affordable housing, and everything I needed. There just wasn’t a lot of support systems for me at that time. And my family didn’t live here so it was really kind of tough, so I dropped out again.

One participant reported that she had to take time off because of two deaths in the family.

P1: I took a year off [here] because I lost my mother and brother, and had the baby and fell behind. I stayed here and took time off.

Two participants indicated that marriage problems caused them difficulty in an earlier attempt at college.
P2: As odd as it sounds, marriage was a barrier for me...not because of the finances and running a home, but more the personal relationship that we had for each other. There were just some things that didn’t work out.

P4: When I first came here, I was going through my divorce, and so my first year here was pretty bad because of the divorce and he was trying to keep my daughter and stuff. Plus I was living here and he was in another city, and that’s where the court was being held. So that was a big thing—the divorce.

A different participant described her experiences with a former abusive relationship that led to her stopping school on two different occasions.

P5: Well I had an abusive boyfriend that I picked up from high school. He used to run around on me...beat me up and you know things like that. Basically, I was doing well. I didn’t have a car so I was driving my bike to work and to school...and that sort of thing. I was holding three part time jobs. Everything was going really great until he walked out on me. It was Thanksgiving now that I think about it. I called my dad and said you know I have no money. I can’t make it on my own...he walked out on me. It was past the time to drop so I had to walk away from school...so I failed everything I had worked on...and my studies up to that point. He [dad] came up and we sold everything in my apartment... and that’s when we went to _____...to try and start over.

Interviewer (I): You mentioned that when you went to _____ that wasn’t quite working out either...

P5: Well it was going good and I was doing well in school and he [boyfriend] called and wanted to work things out. So I had went with this guy for 3 1/2 years so I basically packed everything up and left before finals, and came back to him.

After this she went on to say “everything I went through, I used as a learning experience”. Toward the end of the interview she went on to say:

P5: Well basically when I failed twice, I turned to drinking. I just thought I’m not going back to school. I met my husband now, and he’s the one that encouraged me to go back and go to that summer program.

When reflecting back on what they had learned about their experiences, three participants reported feeling that they lacked the emotional maturity to make it through school when they first started college. Taking time to mature and become more self-
aware was important for these students. The following are some examples of what they had to say about this:

P6: I attended UND in the fall of 95, but I found it a tad bit too much of an adjustment to be that far from home. I did well—I had good grades. It was just emotionally I needed to be closer to home. Then I got my own apartment and kind of grew up a bit before coming back to UND. I got a little more emotionally stable.

P3: When I came up here [UND], the independence was too much for me to handle, and I just went crazy for a while there. My grades really dropped.

P7: I wasn’t really doing anything. I was here, but I wasn’t. I wasn’t really participating in school and I was more interested in partying and I just wasn’t mature enough to be here. I just kind of wasted that whole year. When I came back, I was admitted on probation, so I kind of had to prove myself...when I did come back the second time.

One participant discussed his lack of academic preparedness as a reason for having difficulty with school the first time, as well as a lack of life experiences. He also discussed the lack of role models back on the reservation to encourage kids to go to school.

P2: Coming from a reservation high school...that I knew at the time was not challenging, but what student wouldn’t want that? And then coming right to school with no study skills, no note-taking skills, no life experience...and I had more than most of my peer group, but having nothing to compare it to.

He went on to say:

P2: The unemployment rate is like 50% on my reservation alone. I don’t know what it is on most, but I just couldn’t get a student job—it just doesn’t happen. So I had no experiences in dealing with finances. I had no experiences running a home—my parents did everything. I was very active in high school. I was active in student government and other things, but again it was on such a small scale. I had a graduating class of 16 so whom do you govern? You talk amongst yourselves and you just agree to do what everyone agrees to do...so the lack of life experiences was a huge hurdle for me. And I find that for most Native Americans...and it’s getting better now, but having no role models...no people you look up to and encourage you to go to school on the reservation.
This participant also noted that, "I have been in and out of school, which is normal for Native American people".

**Personal Learning Experiences**

Participants in this study also indicated that they learned a great deal about themselves while attending college. This learning took several forms. For some, it was learning how to balance their schedules; learning when it was best to take certain classes and learning how to balance the types of classes that they took during a given semester. Knowing for instance, that it helped to take only one or two classes at a time that require heavy amounts of reading, and balancing their schedules with easy and more difficult classes through out school so they wouldn’t get stuck with all the hard classes at the very end of their last year.

Participants also expressed learning how to balance their lives so they could still maintain their identities as Native Americans as well as reaching out and including themselves in the dominant culture. For many participants, this was not something they had to consider before leaving the reservation to come to college. One participant also noted that he expected to experience prejudice and discrimination when leaving the reservation to attend school so he had to work to overcome that. It was not that discrimination did not exist, but rather that he learned to view people as individuals and recognize not everyone was against him.

Participants also expressed learning a lot about themselves as individuals through their college experiences. Some noted that they learned that college was much more than just attending classes and getting their grades. They expressed that their experiences
taught them a lot about being able to reach out and interact with other members of society.

One participant (P6) discussed learning what it takes to have a successful semester. She learned to balance her schedule so that she wouldn’t be stuck with all difficult classes in one semester. She also recognized that for her it was important to be able to balance different types of classes like social humanities with science classes so that her mind could switch gears.

P6: I’m pretty much aware of what I can handle and what I can’t. What will be a successful semester and what won’t after being in college so long. Knowing that you can’t pair hard core lab sciences with upper level Indian Studies classes due to the fact that you have to read a lot...and study a lot in your upper level biology classes, and you have to write a lot in your upper level Indian Studies classes. That you can’t—you need to have time to let your mind switch gears from one of more social humanity oriented type of writing scenario to one of more hard core facts and memorization—which is much different.

She also went on to say that she learned:

P6: You’re allowed to have your own thought processes and to connect ideas [in Indian Studies] and the other one [biology] they just want you to spit back what they tell you.

As was previously discussed, the participants in this study were very active in reaching out to get the support they needed. For most of the participants, this wasn’t something they automatically did, but rather was something they learned as they went through school. Participant (P7) summed this up well by saying:

P7: The mistake I made when I was younger was [that] I didn’t get involved a lot with the Native American programs...for whatever reason at the time. I don’t even know why I didn’t. I guess I didn’t know there was a need or didn’t know what to do.
This participant went on to talk about how it is difficult for Native American students to be assertive and get the help they need.

P7: And not be afraid to ask questions. That's a problem for Native American students...being assertive and feeling confident to go after the things you need to. But I think that's what's important. Keep asking until you get an answer.

Participant (P2) expressed that education is more than just going to school. For him it meant getting involved with other groups and people in and out of school.

P2: Education is so much more important than going to school. I'm a very active student—not just academically. I'm active socially with a variety of clubs and organizations. School is much more than reading and writing and partying with your friends. It's part of being involved in a society in school. It teaches you how to deal with a variety of people...because you are going to deal with 10s of thousands of people outside of university life. And if you stay within your shell you haven’t grown—you haven’t got the life experience you need to go our and do what you need to do with your career.

He went on to talk about reaching out to people of other cultures. He noted that he seeks out experiences other than what he already knows. He also indicated that it was important to maintain contact with home as well.

P2: I'm not involved with the Indian Student Association because I can do that at home—I live that. I'm involved in the national honor society the Mortar Board because that brings together people from several different cultures...several different backgrounds—all with the same goal...to be involved in our communities. I think that any student that wants to be successful: needs to expand their peer group outside of their family, outside of their ethnic group, outside of their income level group—whatever their safety zone would be. Step outside of that and just take risks. Get involved in the local community and you will be more supportive of the school as a whole. And stay involved with back home—which is very difficult to do.

He indicated that finding a balance was important as well. He also reported that he makes sure that his children step outside of their comfort zones so that they can challenge themselves as well.
P2: You need to find a balance...and that's individual. The balance isn't just created—you have to find your happy or your comfortable place, but don't stay there. That's my advice to anybody. My kids are always stepping outside of their comfort zones. I don’t allow them to just be happy and comfortable. They have to challenge themselves.

Participant (P6) also expressed the importance of reaching out to others. For her, it was important to seek out other environments and opportunities.

P6: I have met a lot of people and I have come to know that part of college isn’t necessarily making the grade—it's making those connections...it's being around people. And having your whole self grow, and that's what keeps me in college. It's okay if I don’t hit it off with this person and it’s really hard to get along in this class. It’s okay because that’s going to be over in two months, and it will change and you will adjust. I guess the ability to deal with the fact that things are not always the same. And you have to be flexible and adapt to new ways of learning and different people. I like to get to meet new people and new environments. To know that there is a community here—that I’m not the only one. And we're all students and we all suffer—Indian and non-Indian.

This participant also expressed the necessity of learning to be political in college. For her this meant being able to work with professors and learn helpful ways of approaching professors to get the help she needed.

P6: You kind of have to learn to be political to succeed in college. You have to learn to say okay I have this problem; you don’t have to work with me, but it would really help me out. And really make them feel like they’re doing you a big favor, instead of expecting them...any professor...expecting them to let you do this. Then they’re usually very receptive...and if you do it in private and don’t bring it up in class when they’re gathering up their things and leaving, or when other students are bombarding them with questions. Take the time to seek them out or call them...or let them know some other way.

Participant (P3) talked about having bad experiences, but learning not to let it affect her personally. For her it was more important to see the bigger picture and remember that she is here to get her education.

P3: I mean I like going to school. I could go to school forever. I mean a lot of people will say ‘I’ve had bad experiences’. A couple of times I have had a few
negative experiences, but I just blew it off. I’m not here for that—I’m here to get an education.

Two participants discussed dealing with the social struggles they associated with being Native Americans. One participant (P2) discussed having difficulties getting the appropriate paperwork to get financial funding from his tribe. He related how this and coming off of a reservation made him feel like he had a ‘chip on his shoulder.’ He expressed feeling that as a minority coming off of a reservation, he was being attacked when he was struggling to get things settled between the university and the reservation. He also talked about working hard to find a balance between the cultural differences that he experienced.

P2: I wasn’t a shy person when I first started, but I was less outgoing than I am now so I didn’t go looking for the help. I got a nasty letter [from the university] saying this isn’t here. I would dig and look and go there and shake and worry. Just coming off a reservation, I felt like...and I think this happens to most minorities—even students coming from the inner cities. You feel like you have a chip on your shoulder. I am the minority and you are out to get me. And you feel this way whey you have a piece of paper and you go into someone’s office. You feel like they’re attacking...they’re just there to help...

He went on to say:

P2: And there are definite cultural differences. Just growing up within the confines of a reservation...and me not knowing how to deal with situations. Things that are very passive on a reservation are not passive at all for mainstream society. Things that are very important on a reservation are totally meaningless here...so trying to find a good blend of the two...

Interviewer (I): And not lose yourself in the process?

P2: Yeah right. Well, I guess I don’t agree that anyone ever loses themselves—they either include themselves or change themselves. I don’t feel like I have ever lost myself.
Another participant (P6) also talked about the social struggles that she has gone through. She indicated that she has learned not to judge other people without getting the chance to know them. One thing she still struggles with, however, is the University of North Dakota's hesitance to change the mascot the "Fighting Sioux" to something that is perceived to be less discriminatory.

P6: That's one of the major things I have learned through college. Dealing with the social struggle and no matter how you want to put it—that's everyone's struggle...and being at a university or college helps you...not helps you, but exposes you to that, and makes you realize that it's not always an individual's fault. That people are really the sum of their environments, and you can't judge people without really knowing them. And maybe that's something that not everyone learns, but I have learned. And dealing with things like the mascot issue. It's a thing that needs to be addressed because when someone is paying you millions of dollars to keep that name, what are a few tears...a few cries from some little Indians that don't even know how to survive in this world. To be sarcastic—what are they to a couple of million dollars.

Overall, the participants in this study indicated that they learned a great deal about themselves through their experiences with college. All participants reported having made one or attempts at college prior to their current enrollment. Lack of childcare and other supportive services were cited by some participants as reasons for having difficulty the first time they attempted college. However, lack of emotional maturity was cited by nearly all participants as a primary reason for leaving school the first time. The participants in this study indicated that growing emotionally over time has helped them become more successful in college. It was clear that these students were motivated to succeed and learned ways to be more academically successful.
Connectedness With Other Native Americans

The mega theme of Connectedness With Other Native Americans includes the themes of: 1) Connectedness with home, and 2) Connectedness at school. Several participants discussed having difficulties with getting back to their home reservations to see friends and family. Most participants report keeping phone contact with friends and family members, however, many participants report having difficulties with getting back home to visit. It was common for participants to indicate that this problem was due to the demands of school, the distance between home and school, or in many cases both of these reasons. One participant talked about how not growing up on her reservation made it hard to feel connected when she does get the chance to visit. She also indicated that it makes it difficult for her to feel that she fits in with either Native or white society.

Most participants report that they feel very connected with other Native Americans at school. As previously discussed, participants were active in seeking out the support they needed and were likely to seek this support from Native American Programs and/or Indians into Medicine. However, many students indicated that they are not very involved with student groups outside of these on campus. Some participants do try to get involved with other student groups, but many reported not being able to do so. Balancing being single parents and going to school meant limiting the amount of contact with traditional student groups and clubs. Despite not being able to get involved in many outside student groups and clubs, the majority of participants feel connected with other Native Americans at school. Being a role model was also a way that many students felt connected with other Native American students. Only a couple of students directly spoke
about being role models for other students, but this was something that seemed to come across with almost all participants when they talked about their educational experiences.

**Connectedness With Home**

Many participants expressed difficulty getting back home to visit friends and family. Most participants cited the pressures of schoolwork as well as the distance between home and school as reasons for not getting home as often as they would like.

Participant (P4) discussed having difficulties going home because of the distance between home and school. She indicates trying to get home when she can, but because of the distance, it limits her to going back to every couple of months.

P4: I grew up in _____ which is like a suburb [of her reservation], but it’s 300 miles a way. I do try to get back...probably once every two months maybe.

Participant (P6) reports having regular contact with family via the phone. She also reports that she tries to go back once or twice a month, but that she finds that it’s often necessary to stay at school in order to concentrate on school work.

P6: I talk to my family. If I don’t call them, they call me every 2-3 days.

She goes on to say:

P6: It [going back] depends on what I am involved in at school...usually once a month or twice a month, otherwise I notice that it’s hard to stay at school. It’s also hard to do my required studying if I don’t stay here. You can say you’re going to study at home, but that never happens...ever...that’s with anybody.

Participant (P8) reports going home at least once or twice a month, but indicates that the distance is also difficult for her. She reports feeling very connected with home and feels homesick when she cannot go back to visit. She indicates that it is culture shock for her to be here at school and not see many other Native Americans.
P8: If you’re really connected to your family and you can’t have some of them come and be with you, it’s really hard to do this. We get really homesick, and want to go home for pow wow. If you go home for pow wow, it’s really hard to get back here on Monday. If you don’t have the support or anybody here with you, and they miss you and want you there...distance is really the toughest thing. You almost get lost when you get here. You go into a culture shock because you don’t see too many other Indians. There’s not an entrenched family of them. There may be a few, but not of one tribe...so they’re a mixed and hodge podged together and so you might not feel connected to them. The distance that I think a Native American student has to go through to get their education is really hard on them. It’s one of the barriers.

Participant (P3) reported that going home was dependent on her school load.

P3: Last semester I went home once every other weekend...like every two or three weekends because I was taking easier classes. This semester it’s not that much—maybe once a month.

Two participants reported not going home often anymore because of family related issues. One participant indicated that she no longer goes home often because of the death of her mother and the other because of her mother’s sickness. Participant (P1) indicated that her mother and brother have passed away, and her sister currently lives in Grand Forks, North Dakota she indicated that now she only goes home “about twice a year—Memorial Day and when they have a pow wow”. Participant (P5) reported that she used to go home quite often because her mother helped to take care of her daughter. Now, however her mother is ill so her sister comes here to visit and she goes home in the summers to work on her externship.

P5: Well until my mother got sick I went home like every weekend or every other weekend because we share my daughter. But now that mom’s sick, my sister...she just comes up here, and I go back in the summers. I have an Indian Health Scholarship so I went back and worked on an extern there.

She goes on to say that “I eventually want to work there.”
Two participants discussed wanting to go to a reservation to work after they completed school. Both indicated that they might not necessarily go back to their own reservation but wanted to go another reservation so that they could help other Native Americans. Participant (P7) discussed this when talking about the difficulties she had getting financial support from her tribe. She said:

P7: There are a lot of places that I can think that I would like to work at that would be on the reservation...maybe not right here, but in the southwest.

Participant (P2) discussed wanting to go back to a reservation so that he could teach. He talked about how he felt it would be better for him to go to another reservation so that he could give something back to other Native Americans that were not a part of his reservation. He felt that he would have more to offer to Native Americans that were from other areas. For him, this would be a way to add diversity as well as teach different groups of Native Americans about his tribe and culture.

Interviewer (I): I can definitely tell that there's a lot of connection to back home. Do you plan on going back home to teach?

P2: I...I don't. It's always something I wanted to do, but just the last 6-7 months, I have been doing a lot of reading and thinking about whether returning to my reservation is good for me. I have a supportive family. I have home, but what does that do for my reservation when someone from within a society to bring... or to not bring in anything from outside the society. I want to return to reservations or work for the BIA in Washington. I have a lot of things I would like to do. But not to return to my own reservation would be a better step for me. I would like to give all my experiences of what I have done to a whole new culture and society. It adds more diversity. I have something to teach them. They have something to learn. I have nothing to teach my people back home other than to read, write, and arithmetic. I think most Native people going into education that go back to their reservation; do that within their society. I choose to take what I have learned growing up in my culture and bring it to another reservation...showing them the differences...showing them that there is more life outside the boundaries of your reservation. Because some students don't get beyond these boundaries.
One participant (P7) indicated that she does not feel like she fits in with her reservation. She grew up outside of her reservation, and this has led her to feel like she does not fit in with either white or Native American society. She also discusses the frustration that she feels with white society for believing that because she is a Native American, she automatically gets everything paid for.

P7: One thing I come back to...not feeling like I fit in. I don’t fit in to a totally white society. I don’t fit in to a Native American society because I didn’t grow up on a reservation. I think my life has been...it’s been difficult to try and stand my ground and say you don’t accept me. You don’t accept me so where do I fit in? I think that has really been a struggle and continues to be one. Because I wouldn’t be comfortable calling _____ and saying what can you help me do to finish my degree. I don’t even feel they would give it a thought or concern. I think that’s a real frustration for me...knowing my ancestors and their ancestors are the same...that they are coming from the same place. They choose to live there, and we chose to live here...however it came about. That’s a frustration.

She goes on to say:

P7: and Lack of knowledge. The society here believes well she’s Native American so she gets everything paid for. How many times have I heard that??? Oh Indians...they get checks every month. Where do these checks come from and where do you get them? I think that’s a myth for white society that because you’re a Native American, you’re taken care of by them. We pay our taxes so I’m supporting them. And that’s a problem too because I have been on my own and supported myself my whole life. So it’s kind of knowing how to fit in...

Interviewer (I): And finding a place for yourself...

P7: Right!

Connectedness at School

Connectedness at school was another theme that emerges in this study. As previously discussed, all participants indicated that they sought out support from Native American-related programs on campus. Sources of significant support for various participants included, Native American Programs, Indians into Medicine, as well as the
Native American Cultural Center. In general, the Native American students who participated in this study felt that there was significant support for them as Native American students, and they utilized them when needed. Student involvement in other groups across campus varied, however. Some students reported getting involved with other groups, while others were more focused on their families and academic work. Going to school and raising children as single parents limited the amount of involvement that many participants felt they could handle. Younger participants were more likely to report involvement with various student groups, while older students tended to limit their involvement in student organizations.

Participant (P6) indicated that she enjoys getting involved with other groups and organizations. She seeks out Native American groups and gets involved with them as a way to feel connected to the Native American community at UND.

P6: I like going to meet new people and new environments, and becoming more involved with organizations. Like being around and being a part of UNDIA or being a part of the ACES program...or being a part of any related program. At least being informed...at least in the Native American community on campus...but as well—being able to deal with non Native people as a part of that organization. Representing my people and the things of that nature...that’s what really keeps me here. To know that there is a community here—that I’m not the only one.

Participant (P4) reports feeling connected to the Indian side of things at UND more than other colleges she has attended.

P4: I would say that UND is the best out of the three colleges I have attended. I have been more connected to the Indian side of things here than anywhere else.
She later went on to discuss how it was difficult for her to meet others when she first came here. She also indicated that she does not get involved with much outside of class, and when she does, she limits it to spending time with her Native American friends.

P4: At first I hardly even knew anybody. Once I got into more of the Native American classes, I started to meet a lot more Native Americans and developed some friendships with them. That was mostly because of the smaller classes.

Interviewer (I): Do you interact with them outside of class?

P4: Actually, I don’t do much outside of class so If I do anything, it’s with my Native American friends.

Participant (P6) reports feeling supported and connected to other Native Americans through seeing different Native Americans from different tribes around the Grand Forks community. She indicates that she does not even have to talk with them; rather just knowing they are here makes her feel supported.

P6: There’s a lot of support in the community too. There’s a lot of people from my reservation who are not in college, but who work here...who are construction workers or moved with their families just to be here. You can go out at night and you can see a whole different ...from Bellecourt, or they’re from Fort Totten or from Fort Berthold...and you can see someone and they can look at you and you can look at them and it’s nice to know...

Interviewer (I): So you’ve got a connection there...

Yeah. Even though you don’t talk to them...or these people don’t like me, but these people will. I don’t have to like everyone and not everyone has to like me...and that’s okay.

Two older than average participants indicated they were not actively involved in student groups around campus. Participant (P3) reported that she used to be involved with student groups when she was younger, but no longer gets involved with student activities.
P3: I don’t get really involved with Bridges and stuff like that. You know, maybe years ago I could have, but right now my focus is to get my degree.

Interviewer (I): Your priorities change when you’re older and have kids too...

P3: Yeah. Way back then, I used to do UNDIA stuff and really get involved with the UND community...not now though.

Participant (P5) reports that she does not feel like she is that involved with social groups on campus. She indicates that she does not feel ‘socially successful” and views this as something she should have been more active in pursuing. She also recognizes that she has many things going on in her personal life, and this hinders her in being able to get involved socially on campus.

P5: Well I don’t think I have been socially successful. I’m not very active in school. I have this notion that I am here for my education and that’s it. And sometimes I want to get active in school, but I have so many other things in my personal life that it’s really hard...and so socially I could still do better. I have friends in school, but I don’t drag them into my social life or associate with them outside of school and that’s probably my one downfall.

Interviewer (I): When you talk about not getting active in school, are you talking about clubs and extracurricular activities?

P5: Yeah...those sorts of things. Someone offered me to be the secretary of INMED and I declined. So I don’t think I have really contributed...and when I think about it, I am referring to Native American programs. But then I have volunteered for pow wows. I have volunteered for pow wows and I will go in there and cook and clean...so in that way I do. But as far as taking a position...no...and I think that’s probably something I should have done.

Being a role model is a way that Native American students can be connected with other Native American students at school. While only one participant directly spoke about being a role model for other Native American students, this is something that I feel comes across from all the participants in this study. In interacting with many of these students prior to conducting the actual interviews, something that came across to me was
that most of these participants were taking part in this research to help other Native American students. This also comes across in the reflections and suggestions that participants made throughout their interviews. While being role models was not something that many participants explicitly discussed, I feel that in many ways they truly demonstrate that they are in deed role models.

Talking to participant (P6) about her experiences and struggles with getting her college degree led to a discussion about her being a role model. She reflected on how she felt when first coming to school and indicated that she wanted to be able to help ease other students' adjustment to school. She also indicated that she feels this helps her to be a better student as well.

Interviewer (I): So being not just a student, but a role model to incoming students is important to you...

P6: Yeah...and I think that helps me be a successful student because it kind of reminds you or what it's like, and keeps you grounded in reality. And makes you feel good because oh I went through this...because you can tell them, I cried all this time, and I wanted to leave and I got so mad. I just hated everything, but then as time went on and you kind of forget your anger and you forget your tears, and you forget your hate for whatever reason you were hating—the food, or the room you had, or even your roommate. You kind of forget that and you learn to not disassociate yourself but to draw a line between yourself, and your mind, and your ability to be in this world, and from someone else’s.

She went on to say:

P6: I don’t know if that comes from growing up or from dealing with people...different interpersonal relationships...or even professional or career oriented relationships...or academic—more formal relationships.

On the flip side of this, participant (P8) discussed how she recognizes that by going to college, she is now viewed as the role model. For her, this is something that she
sees as being important, but she reflects that it is scary and puts her under a lot of pressure.

P8: I would go back home and I'm the role model. It's kind of scary because then you feel this added pressure. So many people know what I am doing, and so many people know how far along I am. You kind of get positive and negative from that, but there's this added pressure. And all of a sudden I can't goof off...I can't. Everyone sees me differently. I'm expected to know things...things that are not a part of my education, I'm supposed to know. But it's like you're a role model...you have been out there and it kind of scares you. You want to do it, but at the same time, you don't want to. And I know we need it because there are not enough Native American students and I think there's a lot of opportunity. And if they would just know...if they would just come to the realization that they could do it. I think that's the hardest thing. I think they're going through the same thing I was going through way back. I don't think it has changed all that much for these students. I think they're going along with the idea that they are not going to accomplish this...that they don't have the brains...that they don't have the whatever. And all the obstacles seem a hell of a lot bigger—just like they did when I was younger.

She went on to say:

P8: I'm just hitting the stride in my culture. I feel like I am 21...just young enough to start making the difference, but I don't have the noodle. I don't have the wisdom. I don't deserve any of the respect. Some of it's really nice and at the same time, some of it's pretty pressure packed. But at the same time, I'm not really alone...there's a whole reservation behind me...never just me. I have never just done this for me...and I have never just done this for my family...it goes clean back to my reservation.

The participants made clear that connectedness with other Native Americans, both home and at school, was important. Participants indicated that they tried to maintain as much contact as possible with home, but distance and school demands made this difficult. Several participants indicated that after completing their degrees, they intended to go back to either their communities or another reservation to give back what they have learned to other Native Americans. Participants also indicated a high level of connectedness with other Native Americans at college. The demands of academics and
parenthood limited the amount of involvement that many participants were able to handle. Because of this, most participants tended to limit their involvement to Native American-related programs and organizations. Some participants expressed a desire to get involved with other non-Native American organizations, but with limited time available, it was more important to focus their involvement to groups and organizations where they could maintain connectedness with other Native American students.
CHAPTER IV
DISCUSSION

The current study focused on success factors for Native American college students. As mentioned in the literature review, much of the previous research has focused on Native American students who drop out of college. This previous research has provided a valuable picture of the experiences of many Native American college students and their reasons for leaving college before completing a degree. While valuable, this research has not provided a complete picture of the experiences of Native American college students. Little research has been conducted to look at Native Americans who have made it through school.

The current research has been an attempt to gain insight into the success of Native American college students. The goal was to listen to students and find out what has helped them be successful in college. In keeping with this goal, a qualitative research design was utilized. Interview questions were broad so that participants could feel open to share their thoughts, feelings, experiences, and in many cases their struggles to make it through college.

One thing that comes across clearly through the interviews and themes that emerged is that these participants share many personal characteristics that have helped them succeed in college. Strategies previously developed to help students make it through college give action plans for institutions, students, and families to follow.
However, they do not provide a picture of the personal characteristics and experiences of
the students themselves. These participants were all highly motivated to finish college.
They struggled to get through college, stopping and starting school again, but have
learned from their experiences and have worked hard to be successful in college.

Additionally, most participants have had to balance being a parent while working
towards their degrees. Six of the participants were single parents, one was married with
children, and the other was married and currently pregnant with her first child. It would
not be unexpected, however, that participants in this study would have children to raise
and support. In general, the participants were older (mean age = 33). Many older
students, Native American and non-Native have children and families to support while
attending college.

I will discuss the findings and implications of this study centered on the five
mega-themes that arose through the data analysis. These themes were: 1) the meaning of
success; 2) taking active steps to be successful; 3) family support, role models, and
mentors; 4) learning experiences; and 5) connectedness with other Native Americans.
Additionally, I will discuss ways that these students’ current successful attempt at college
differed from their previous attempts.

The Meaning of Success

Finding out the meaning of success for Native American students was an
important part of this study. In order to define what success is for Native American
students, it was necessary to ask them what success meant to them. Success has different
connotations for European-American society than it does for Native American society.
The first step in this process was to allow participants to define what success means to them.

While Euro-American culture defines success in terms of getting a high paying job and making lots of money, these participants were more likely to define success in terms of meeting their respective goals. Many participants expressed a strong desire to go back to either their reservation or another reservation to give back what they have learned to help other Native Americans. Completing personal goals and getting their degrees were important factors cited by many participants, whereas making a lot of money did not seem to be a factor. Like Native Americans in the Juntunen et al. (in press) study, participants in the current study wanted to provide a good life for their children and families, but this did not mean making the “big bucks” that is important to the dominant culture. It was more important to take what they have learned and give back to other Native Americans.

Success was also defined in terms of being happy and through the ways in which participants lived their lives. Native American culture stresses respect for others and it was important to these participants that they be able to convey this through the ways that they treat others and lived their lives.

Most participants also believed that their families would view success similarly. Participants indicated that working towards personal goals and being happy in life was stressed in their families. A few participants felt their families would define success in terms of having a good job and making money, however, because of a history of poverty in the family.
When talking about family and success, it was clear that participants felt they had a lot of support from their families for going to college and obtaining further education. Several participants indicated that their families stressed the value of education and helped push them to continue in school. While talking about being encouraged and pushed towards getting their degrees, no one indicated that they viewed this as a negative pressure. Rather, it was viewed as support and encouragement.

These findings have important implications for counseling psychology and career counselors. Counselors who work with college students need to recognize that many Native American students have different goals and values than traditional Euro-American students. Native American students view success differently and this will impact work values, career choices and overall career goals. Not every Native American student will go back to his or her communities to work following college, however, many express this as a goal. Career counselors can better assist their Native American clients if they recognize going back home to work is an option some students will choose, and assist their Native American clients accordingly.

Taking Active Steps to be Successful

Students who took part in this study felt there was a great deal of support for Native American students at the University of North Dakota. UND offers many services for Native American students including: Native American Programs, Indians into Medicine (INMED), the University of North Dakota Indian Association (UNDIA), and various cultural activities such as an annual Native American Pow Wow. In addition to recognizing that there was a great deal of support for them as Native American students,
these participants were active in seeking out Native American-based services. Participants also sought support from others including: professors, advisors, peer groups, and other Native Americans in housing.

Many researches have pointed out that Native American college students tend to seek out academic and emotional support from within their own cultural group (Mayo, Murguia, & Padilla, 1995; Murguia. Padilla, & Pavel, 1991; Meyers, 1997; and Rooney, 1985. Mayo, Murguia, & Padilla (1995) also found that Native American college students were more likely than either African American or Mexican American students to be involved with their minority specific cultural organizations.

This research finding was certainly true for these Native American students. When asked where they went to for support, participants were more likely to seek support from Native American groups and individuals. Students felt that someone who shared a similar cultural heritage would be more likely to understand and support them.

Nonetheless, many participants expressed that non-Native individuals also were a significant source of support for them. Many departments on campus have little or no Native American representation on the faculty, and when faced with this, students seek out support from faculty who are perceived to be respectful and interested in Native American culture. An advisor or professor’s race or ethnicity was not nearly as important as how the specific individual treated them as a Native American. Tierney (1995) stressed the importance of faculty taking an active interest in learning about their Native American students, and this was clearly reported as important for participants in this study.
It is crucial that departments with out Native American representation have non-Native faculty on staff who are open and interested in Native American students and their culture. If a Native American student perceives a lack of support from faculty and staff, he/she will be less likely to seek out needed support and assistance. Additionally, students may avoid a department all together if they perceive that department to be unfriendly towards Native students and culture.

A high level of motivation was characteristic of all participants in this study. Motivation is an especially important factor to consider because motivation is largely influenced by internal factors. However, universities can develop programs and strategies to support and encourage Native Americans students. Specific programs that demonstrate a strong commitment to Native American students can go a long way towards increasing motivation levels.

Additionally, being a parent was an important factor for students in this study. These participants were all parents or parents to be and viewed their success in college as being important for their children and families’ futures. Many students first coming to college are younger and single, and therefore less likely to have dependents to worry about. Older students with families have much more at stake when working towards a college degree. Having children that depend on you is a huge motivating factor to do well in college, and these participants expressed a strong desire to provide a good life for their children.

Another general theme that came across was being active in seeking out support from one’s respective tribe. Most participants indicated receiving at least some form of
help from their tribe, but for many it was a struggle to get this help. Several participants related that they felt whom you knew in the tribe influenced when and how much money was received. These participants reported having to fight and struggle to get financial assistance for tuition and childcare. Additionally, one participant was also frustrated because she had difficulty getting help from her tribe because she did not grow up on the reservation. She felt that having grown up off the reservation made her an outsider when it came to getting financial support. It is important to note that despite these problems, participants who received support were thankful that they were able to get what help they could. They were frustrated, however with the smaller amount of financial aid and the delays involved in the process of getting this aid.

Interestingly, two participants who received their primary financial support from Indian Health Service (IHS) scholarships were happy with their experiences with IHS. This may be because IHS scholarships are funded through the federal government rather than individual tribes. IHS has set guidelines for the qualification and amount of money received. Each individual reservation handles financial aid for college in a different manner, and as indicated by participants, the amount of assistance received varies from individual to individual in seemingly non-standardized ways. This method of determining eligibility is more likely to be viewed as unfair or preferential by recipients. This may also be why none of the participants reported having problems with financial aid through the university. University financial aid has standardized guidelines to determine the amount of aid received, and this is more likely to make students feel they are on a more level playing field.
It is important to recognize that the amount of funding available to college students will vary from reservation to reservation, however, tribes can benefit their students by setting up funding strategies that are perceived by students to be more fair and equal. A student applying for assistance from his or her tribe is less likely to have hard feelings if he or she feels that everyone has an equal opportunity for assistance. Several participants in this study who had difficulty with tribal funding for college perceived their tribes as less supportive of them as college students. The students in this study were motivated and in most cases fought for the funding they felt was deserved, however, it is likely that many other Native American students give up when faced with this challenge.

Another theme some participants discussed was feeling the need to stand up for themselves because of being Native American. While most participants felt the university was an overall supportive place, many described experiences where they felt discriminated against because of their status as Native Americans. It’s a very unfortunate fact that many minority individuals experience prejudice and discrimination in their everyday lives, and highlights the necessity for ongoing cultural sensitivity training. What stood out among students who experienced these problems, is that they were willing to stand up for themselves to try and make things better. Participants indicated that they were not always able to correct the problem(s), but they felt better about themselves for having stood up and tried to make a difference.

Standing up for themselves was not something that came naturally to all students. One participant in particular felt that tribal high schools do not encourage students to be
active and speak out. One reason given for this was an overall belief in not questioning authority—especially when the person in authority is older. Native American culture stresses respect for elders and therefore speaking out to an older instructor may be viewed as disrespectful. This is positively viewed when interacting with Native American society, but can be a struggle or adjustment for students to make when they move from the reservation and find themselves in a college environment. Standing up and speaking out for yourself is expected by the European-American based culture of the University system. This puts a burden on the students to learn to be able to maneuver between two different cultures, and highlights a need for faculty and staff to be educated about Native American culture. Faculty members who recognize that it may be difficult for their Native American students to speak out and ask for help, can develop ways to encourage students to seek them out for help. A faculty member who demonstrates an interest and concern for their students sends a message that it is okay to ask questions and seek assistance.

Family Support, Role Models, and Mentors

Several researchers have indicated that Native Americans who have difficulty finishing college often do not receive a great deal of support from their families (Minner, 1995; Tierney, 1995; and Wells, 1989). Participants in this study provide some evidence that the converse is also true. They are successfully completing college and they did receive support and encouragement from families and other members of their communities. These participants had support from family and friends in many different forms including emotional support, financial support, and childcare assistance. The
families did not always have a lot of money to help their children with school, but they helped their relatives in ways that were perceived to be as beneficial as monetary help.

There was a strong sense that families of participants were knowledgeable and put a high value on a college education and did whatever possible to help their child be successful. Six of the eight participants in this study reported having siblings or immediate relatives either enrolled in or graduated from college. Clearly the families of these students saw the value of college and provided a supportive environment that was highly valued by their children. Parents who are less knowledgeable could benefit from learning about college in order to encourage their children to attend college as well as ensure their success.

Role models and mentors have been cited by numerous researchers as being important for the success of Native American students in college (Lunneborg & Lunneborg, 1985; Meyers, 1997; Tierney, 1995; Tonemah, 1991; and Wells, 1989). All participants indicated having significant role models and mentors at home. Parents and other family members were important role models for participants, in addition to being strong sources of support. Families are highly respected in Native American culture and it was clear that these students looked up to their parents and other relatives and appreciated what they learned from them.

Role models and mentors also came from outside the family. Many participants cited staff and administrators from various Native American-related programs on campus as role models and mentors. It was important to these participants to have influential Native Americans in various positions across campus. Non-Native faculty and advisors
were also cited as being role models and mentors by some participants. What stood out about these non-Native role models and mentors was that while they were not Native American themselves, they clearly demonstrated openness, acceptance, and understanding towards their Native American students and advisees.

Learning Experiences

All of the participants in this study reported having stopped and started college again more than one time. Stopping and starting college was not an issue that I found much coverage of in the research, however, this was definitely true for these students. It is encouraging to know that some Native American students end up coming back to school after having had initial difficulties. However, there is little research data to know how many actually do come back for another attempt at college.

Lack of maturity and emotional readiness for college was also cited by many participants as reasons for past problems in school. The participants in this study indicated that they learned a lot about themselves over the years, and have used their experiences to help them be successful in their current attempt at college. By virtue of being older and having had more life experiences, these participants were more able to focus on the necessary things needed to work towards completing their degrees.

Several participants also discussed feeling that their tribal high school experiences did not prepare them with the tools to be successful in college the first time. Jeanotte (1982) found this to be a factor for both dropouts and graduates in his study. Graduates were able to learn what they needed to get past this problem, however dropouts were not successful at this. The participants in the current study also were able to overcome these
problems and were able to learn effective methods for being successful in college. By virtue of being older and having more experience with college, participants learned ways to get help from faculty. For instance, one participant discussed learning to interact with professors so that they would be more willing to help her. There was recognition that not every professor is good with students, and many of these participants indicated that they had learned strategies to get help from professors that they perceived as being difficult to approach or work with.

It was clear that these students learned a great deal about themselves while going through college. One of things that these participants learned was how to maneuver themselves so that they could learn to work within the Euro-American system of the university while still maintaining their cultural identity as Native Americans. Several participants indicated that when first coming to college they did not know how to reach out and ask for the help they needed. As mentioned previously, speaking out was not something that was taught or reinforced in these participants’ tribal high school experiences. As one participant indicated, speaking up and reaching out for help was just something that he did not know how to do, let alone that he should do it in the first place.

It was also striking that two participants talked about growing personally by seeking out experiences and interactions with other individuals and groups who were not Native Americans. One participant described this as stepping outside a person’s “comfort zone”. Both of these participants felt that they would not and could not grow as a person if they did not seek out experiences and people outside of their “world”. This was a learning experience and value they taught to their children as well.
Another theme that emerged from the analysis of participant responses was a strong sense of connectedness with other Native Americans on the part of these students. One way that connectedness was maintained was by going back home as often as was feasible. Participants tried to maintain as much contact with their home reservations as possible, but there were difficulties involved in doing this. Distance between home and school has been noted by researchers as causing Native American students trouble and was no exception for this group. Many of the reservations in North Dakota are a great distance from Grand Forks, with driving times of 1 1/2 to more than 5 hours for students to reach home. Going back home regularly was not something that many participants in this study could manage, and this led some to experience homesickness.

Participants also indicated that how often they went back home varied based on their academic schedules. They expressed a desire to go home when they could, but they recognized when they needed to stay here to work on school-related study. As hard as it may have been for these participants, they put school ahead of going home when it was felt to be necessary. This did not stop them from having contact with friends and family, however. Participants indicated that they would stay in touch with others back home via the phone when they could not get home in person.

One participant indicated that she had a difficult time feeling connected with her home reservation, however. She did not grow up on her reservation and her experiences have led her to feel that she has not been accepted nor does she feel she fits in with either
the Native world or the white world. She indicated that she still struggles to find her place and where she fits in the world.

Some participants also indicated their intent to maintain contact with other Native Americans by either going back home or to another reservation to give back to the Native American community at large. There was an important belief on the part of several participants that it was important to go back and give what they have learned to other Native Americans rather than finding jobs off of the reservation. Going back home after college is something that participants indicated was fairly common and does not appear to match well with Wells’ belief that many Native American students have to leave the reservation after college to find jobs (Wells, 1989).

Participants also maintained connectedness with other Native Americans at school. All participants reported having a strong relationship with one or more of the Native American support service programs on campus. It was important for participants to have this contact for more than one reason as well. Native American support programs were utilized for various forms of help navigating the college setting, and they were also a way for these students to connect with other Native Americans attending the University of North Dakota. This highlights the importance of having Native American-based support available on campuses. Without Native-based support, students are likely to have a more difficult time adjusting to college, and therefore leave college prematurely.

Contact with student groups varied, however. A few students reported getting involved with Native and non-Native student groups. Most students, however, limited their contact to the major Native American support service programs and concentrated on
academics and family. This may or may not be atypical for Native American students in general, but is not unexpected when you consider that these participants were all parents or parents to be. These participants got involved with as many groups and activities as they could, but were careful and cautious to not over extend themselves. Participants had a good grasp of how much they could handle and were effective at managing their schedules accordingly. What is also important is that when these participants did have time to interact with others, they chose to do so with Native American friends, or through a Native American organization or office.

Another important way that participants demonstrated connectedness with other Native American students was by being role models themselves. While only two participants directly talked about being role models for other students, all participants discussed ways in which they have helped other students through sharing their experiences and offering advice for managing the ups and downs of school. Having students with more school experience be peer mentors; whether officially or as friends, can help struggling students learn ways to improve their school experiences. Additionally, they can help a younger student feel less alone and isolated. Developing mentoring programs that encourage connections between advanced and beginning students can assist new students in making the transition to college life.

Differences Between Current and Previous Attempts at College

While not directly asked about the differences between their current and previous attempts at college, all participants shared reasons why they felt they had been successful in their current attempt at college. Personal learning experiences emerged as one factor
in students' current success, and have been discussed previously. However, participants cited reasons unrelated to personal learning as well.

Older students indicated that more support was currently available than when first attempting college. Of primary importance to these older participants was the availability of childcare services. Universities and the government were more likely to take a “hands off” approach to childcare concerns in the past. Childcare assistance has improved over the years, but this is something that continues to effect adult students with families today. Participants were also more aware of Native American-based support services in their current attempt at college. Some students indicated hearing that Native American programming existed when attending college previously, but had little knowledge with regard to what these programs offered. Other students, however, reported being unaware that Native American-based services were available. There was recognition on the part of participants that not knowing about and thus not seeking out support had made their previous attempts at school more difficult, and they were more determined to utilize the support that was available while currently going to school. This highlights the importance of informing students of available services. Students attending college for the first time are unlikely to know what support exists for them and providing this information is crucial.

Additional Considerations

In the course of these student interviews, participants were asked about their experiences with various administrative offices on campus including: the registrar’s office, the business office, financial aid office, and housing. With the exception of
housing, none of the participants felt there was anything significant about their experiences with any of these offices. All participants indicated that their experiences with these offices were either neutral or positive, and no one felt they have had any especially bad experiences.

Housing, however, was another story. Some participants felt they had either neutral or positive experiences with housing. One participant viewed housing as being a support because of the activities provided for the whole family. Three participants, however, had quite strong negative experiences with housing. One participant felt directly discriminated against by other tenants because of her race. She indicated that she was consistently being reporting to housing by another tenant because of issues that were related to her race. Housing did not support her side in these matters and this caused her to feel angry and helpless, and led to her and her family to find housing off campus. Two other participants also felt they experienced discrimination from housing. They were not allowed to have immediate family live with them in campus apartments to provide either childcare or to provide care for an older parent. There was a strong feeling on the part of these participants that housing was not responsive nor were they respectful of Native American culture with regard to the focus, importance, and respect that is placed on the family. University housing could benefit from cultural education which would assist them to be more responsive to Native American students’ needs.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary of the Study

This study was an attempt to find out what factors lead to success in college for Native American students. Eight Native Americans participated in an audio taped interview session with a Euro-American researcher. Each of the interviews conducted were transcribed and studied for themes. These interviews provided a rich collection of general themes which were grouped into the mega-themes of Meaning of success; Taking active steps to be successful; Family support, role models, and mentors; Learning experiences; and Connectedness with other Native Americans. In this chapter, I discuss recommendations for the retention of Native American students based on the results of this research.

Recommendations For Retention

The participants in this study have provided valuable insight into what has worked for them. Hopefully we can listen to them and use the information they have provided to help other Native American college students have a successful college experience. To that end, there are many implications from this research for improving Native American student retention. There are several things that universities, tribes, families, the state and federal governments could do to improve retention rates.
Recommendations For Universities

The participants in this study felt that there was a great deal of support for them as Native American students at the University of North Dakota. In addition, to finding the university to be a generally supportive place, they made use of the various Native American-related programs available. This demonstrates the need for these programs as well as how successful they can be. Native American students more so than other minority groups make use of culturally specific programs geared towards them and it is important that universities have these programs in place.

Having Native American role models and mentors on campus can help to create an environment that encourages success in college for Native students. This research adds considerable weight to Tierney's belief in needing strong affirmative action programs to ensure that minority students have appropriate role models in colleges and universities (Tierney, 1995). Current trends to dismantle affirmative action programs across the country, including legislation recently introduced in North Dakota, could have drastic effects for minority students. These research findings also suggest that the loss of affirmative action programs for Native Americans could have even larger negative effects. Native Americans are more likely to seek out support and guidance from other influential Native Americans on campus. If anti-affirmative action legislation continues to be enacted, and these programs are stopped or pared down as a result, Native American student retention rates are likely to be made worse rather than better.

It is important to recognize, however, that not every department or office on campus will be able to employ a Native American staff member. Therefore, it is
important that universities provide diversity training for faculty and staff to learn about
Native American culture and history. It is especially important that some history and
knowledge of the local tribes are included so that faculty and staff can better understand
the students they serve. This study clearly demonstrated that Native American students
are receptive to faculty and staff members who show knowledge and interest in them and
their culture.

Additionally, on-going training of faculty in teaching Native American students is
important. Teaching faculty to be open and encourage Native American students to come
to them for assistance is an important example of this. As participants in this study
indicated, learning to speak up and seek out help was initially a very foreign concept for
them. Faculty members that work preemptively to encourage first time students to seek
out help could help students get the needed help before they get behind or feel lost.

Colleges and universities could also help improve retention by developing
orientation programs that help first time Native American students adjust to college.
Many of the participants in this study reported feeling lost and out of place when first
leaving the reservation and coming to college. Coming to a large university and being
thrust into a foreign cultural environment can be a scary thing for a young first time
Native student. Providing programs that utilize peer mentors could go a long way to help
students adjust to college as well as learn strategies to help be successful. Many
participants in this study indicated that one of the biggest problems encountered initially
was not knowing about and thus not seeking out support. Education as well as
normalization of this process can encourage Native American students to be active in seeking assistance.

The participants in this study did not make use of career counselors and indicated little knowledge of career counseling. Including a career education and assessment course as part of a first semester orientation program could be beneficial. A Native American student who has grown up his or her whole life on the reservation may not have had much opportunity to learn about various careers and career possibilities. Including career education and assessment tools could help expose Native students to various opportunities as well as help them find out what they may like to explore as a major and career.

Additionally, this research suggests that universities need to look at policies that affect students, such as housing guidelines, and examine them within the cultural context of all students. It is very easy to establish rules and guidelines based on majority culture, but it is in a universities best interest to examine how these guidelines affect students from different cultural backgrounds. Not allowing immediate family members such as grandparents to live with their child to help with childcare, or not allowing Native American students to provide care to elderly parents can push Native American students off campus or in some cases may lead them to discontinue school all together.

Recommendations For Tribes

It seems clear from this and other research that many Native American students who come to college for the first time without the tools needed to be successful in college. Tribal high schools could benefit from having programs that focus on preparing
Native American students for college level work. Additionally, having programming as early as 9th grade to encourage students to consider higher education as well as showing them what college is like could prove beneficial. Doing things such as taking field trips to colleges or universities can help motivate students to consider higher education as an option for them. Part of what this entails is improving the financial situations that tribal high schools currently face. Tribal high schools typically have much smaller budgets and fewer staff members. As much as tribal schools would like to improve this situation, they cannot do it without better funding and more staff.

It came across clearly that Native American students who grew up on reservations felt they had support from many members of their respective tribe. Tribal college funding and scholarships was an area that caused many participants to struggle, however. Participants, while appreciative, felt they had to fight and struggle to get the support they received. These participants were all determined and worked to get the financial support they needed. Many other Native students faced with this situation may not be willing or able to do this though. It would help for various tribal higher education offices to become more formalized and develop standardized methods for determining financial aid eligibility. The amount of money available for financial aid will vary from tribe to tribe, but it seems important that standardized methods for determining eligibility requirements and funding amounts be developed. Native American students have enough to deal with in learning to adapt to college life, and the added struggle of fighting for financial aid may lead students to give up.
Recommendations For Families

The participants in this study demonstrated that it was crucial for them to receive support and encouragement from their families. Several participants indicated that family encouragement was a big factor in them coming back to school and working to complete their degrees. Previous research has shown that students who do not receive family support have a much more difficult time getting through college. Programming geared toward parents with children in junior high and high school can educate and encourage parents to be sources of support for their children. This programming can help parents encourage their children to attend college and it can help show them ways to be supportive once their children get to college. All participants in the current study had either immediate or extended family members who were either currently in school or whom have graduated. Programming could be especially beneficial if it is geared to or inclusive of those families who do not have relatives in college. Families that do not have any relatives in college are probably less likely to know much about college and what getting a college degree entails.

Recommendations For Governments

The federal government can benefit Native American students by providing additional funding so that tribal high schools can develop programs to encourage students to pursue a college education. Additionally, improved funding would allow tribal schools to hire additional faculty and develop strategies to assist students so they are better prepared to tackle college-level work. Limited budgets prevent tribal high schools from investing time and resources for college preparation.
Federal and state governments can also benefit students by ensuring that affirmative action programs are valued and remain intact. As noted previously, Native American college students value and utilize the services of Native American-based programs, faculty and staff. If anti-affirmative action legislation continues to be enacted, these programs and services will likely diminish and/or possibly disappear all together.

Limitations

This study was an exploration of the experiences of Native American college students who are within one semester of completing their undergraduate degrees. In particular, I was interested in looking at factors that contributed to these students’ success in college. There are several factors that directly affect the outcome of this study. Four characteristics of the Native American participants themselves are relevant. First, participants were self-selected for this study based on their personal interest in taking part in the research. Second, participants in this study were from two northern plains reservations. Each Native American tribe has its own unique culture and history, and so the experiences of these participants cannot be assumed to represent the experiences of Native Americans broadly. Third, participants were all parents or parents-to-be and had children to support. They were also in general older than the traditional college student. These participants are likely to share many similar characteristics of younger students without families, however, some of their experiences may differ based on age and family responsibilities. Finally, these participants are primarily from rural areas and either grew up on their respective reservations or lived in areas among other Native Americans.
Their experiences may differ from Native Americans who do not grow up on the reservation and/or who live in larger metropolitan areas.

Other limitations are related to my identity as a Euro-American researcher. I have tried to step outside my cultural beliefs and traditions in order to be open and receptive to Native American culture and ways. While I strive to be open and receptive as a non-Native person, I can never fully experience what it is like to be a Native American. This may have prevented me from attending to all of the cultural-specific issues related to success for these participants. Additionally, I would have liked to have had a Native American to help with the initial coding. However, due to the geographical location of my internship, where I did my coding and analysis, I was unable to locate a Native American to assist in this process.

Finally, this study made use of a qualitative research design. Qualitative research provides a valuable picture of the experiences of participants. However, due to manageability, a limited number of participants were studied, and this limits the generalizability.

Recommendations For Future Research

With so little research in the area of Native American student retention in general, there are many possibilities for future research. Given that the participants in this study were in general older and all had or were expecting children, it would be helpful to look at the experiences of younger and/or single students without dependents. I would expect younger students who are successful in college to share many of the similar personal characteristics as their older counterparts. Not having dependents, however, may
influence their experiences as well as whom and how they interact with in the university. Many of the older students did not get involved with the more traditional student organizations on campus, and it would be interesting to find out whether younger Native American students seek out these opportunities.

All of the participants in this study have made more than one attempt to complete their bachelor’s degree. Anecdotally, this appears to be a common experience among Native American students. However, it is not an issue addressed in the research literature. An important step in research is to better understand the experiences of students who have made more than one attempt before finishing school. Finding out how prevalent this is among Native American college students, as well as looking specifically at what factors contribute to these students taking another chance at college would be beneficial.

Additionally, looking at the experiences of Native American students from other tribes and regions could help improve the generalizability of these findings. Different tribes from different regions all have distinct cultural differences and it would be helpful to find out to what these differences mean for different Native American college students. Along with this, one participant discussed how not growing up on the reservation has led her to feel like she does not fully belong in either the “white” or “Native” world. It would be beneficial to examine the effects of not growing up on one’s reservation and explore what effects this has on their college experience.

It was also interesting that none of the participants in the current study had any contact with career counselors or career assessment while in college. It could be helpful
to look at the experiences of Native Americans when it comes to choosing a major in college. Exploring how they make career decisions can provide further insight into ways to help students with regard to retention. If lack of career direction is contributing to Native American students' dropping out, then remedies to address this could be developed.

CONCLUSIONS

There were many factors involved in the success of the Native American students in this study. The individuals who participated in this study were highly motivated individuals who learned from their previous experiences and found ways to be successful in college. All of them reported having difficulties like other students who have dropped out of college; however, these students did not give up. These participants came back and have worked hard to finish their degree programs. Participants were active in seeking out the support and assistance they needed to be successful. They also came from families who valued higher education and were very supportive of them as students. Participants had identifiable Native American role models and mentors both at home and at school. They also viewed supportive non-Native professors and advisors as role models as well. Additionally, these participants were effective at interacting with others in the Euro-American culture of the university, while maintaining their self-identity as Native Americans.

In order to increase retention rates for Native American college students, it is important to continue to explore the experiences of successful students to find ways to help more Native students succeed in college. Students who are succeeding in college
have a great deal of wisdom and insight that can be used to benefit others, and it is crucial to listen to what they have to say.
APPENDICES
Dear ____,

I would like to talk to you about your experiences as a Native American college student. I am completing a study that looks at the experiences Native American students have had while attending college. Specifically, I am gathering information about factors that have contributed to your success in college. I believe that your expertise as a senior-level student, having had four or more years of education will provide valuable information. The results of this study will be useful in helping colleges and universities, as well as career counselors, strengthen and/or develop programming to help future Native American college students be more successful in school.

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. The study consists of setting up a time at your convenience to take part in an audio-taped interview. I recognize that your time as a busy college student is valuable, and each participant will be given $10 as a gift for your time and effort.

I hope that you are willing to participate in this project. If you are, please call Scott Winrow at ____ (this is a local number) or via email at ___________. Please leave your name, phone number, and the best times to get a hold of you, and you will be contacted to set up an interview. I will be conducting the interviews during the month of July, and I am looking to interview at least 10 students for this project. I may call you to confirm that you have received this letter and to inquire whether you would like to take part in an interview.

The interview will take approximately 45 minutes to an hour to complete. Additional information about the study will be made available at the time of the interview. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you can decide to withdraw from the study at any time.

I am a doctoral student in the Counseling Psychology program here at UND. I am completing this study as part of the requirements for my doctoral dissertation. I have worked as a career counselor at UND and have worked on other research projects that have focused on the career experiences of Native Americans. If you have any questions about this study that you would like answered before deciding whether to participate, please call me at ___________. My advisor on this project is Cindy Juntunen, Ph.D. in the department of Counseling.

Thank you for considering my request to participate in this project. I look forward to hearing from you, and hearing about your experience.
CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a study about factors that contribute to academic success for Native American students. You were selected as a possible participant because you have been identified as a Native American student attending UND and because you have been classified as a senior (4th year or beyond). Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in this study.

The purpose of this study is to look at your experiences as a Native American college student and the factors that have contributed to your academic success. The information you provide will help colleges and career counselors be more responsive to the needs of Native American students.

PROCEDURES:
If you decide to participate, you will be asked to take part in an audio-taped interview that will allow you to talk about your experiences as a Native American college student. The interview will last approximately one hour and you will be given $20 as a gift for your time and effort.

RISKS AND BENEFITS OF BEING IN THE STUDY:
The benefits to participants in this study are indirect. You will be benefiting colleges, career counselors, and future Native American students by providing information that can be used to strengthen and develop future programming for Native American college students. The information obtained in this study will be used for the dissertation of the researcher, and for an article related to Native American student retention. There are no anticipated risks to participating in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY:
Your name will not be identified within the interview and signed consent forms will be held separately from the audio-tapes and the transcripts of the interview. In any report that might be published, no information will be included that makes it possible to identify an individual. The audio-tapes and transcripts will be kept in a secure room, and only the researcher and his advisor will have access to them. The tapes will be erased and consent forms will be shredded after the required 3 year retention period is up.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY:
Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your current or future relations with the University of North Dakota, or the researcher involved in any way. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.
CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS:
The researcher conducting this study is Scott Winrow and his advisor is Cindy Juntunen-Smith. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have any questions later, you may contact them at __________. You can also contact Scott Winrow via email at __________. You will be offered a copy of this form to keep.

STATEMENT OF ASSENT/CONSENT:
I have read and understand the above information and agree to participate in this study by taking part in the audio-taped interview.

Signature of Student __________________________________________

Date ______________________
Appendix C

MEGA-THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

1. The Meaning of Success.
   A. Personal Meaning of Success.
   B. Family Meaning of Success.

2. Being Active in Getting What is Needed To Be Successful.
   A. Recognizing Support and Being Active in Seeking it Out on Campus.
   B. Seeking Support From Tribe.
   C. Standing Up For Self on Campus.

   A. Support From Family and/or Other Influential People.
   B. Support From Role Models and Mentors.

4. Learning Experiences.
   A. Learning From Stopping and Starting Again.
   B. Personal Learning Experiences.

5. Connectedness With Other Native Americans.
   A. Connectedness With Home.
   C. Connectedness At School.
REFERENCES


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