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# THE PERCEPTIONS OF SELECTED TRIBAL COLLEGE TRANSFER STUDENTS ATTENDING THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA

by

Donna L. Brown
Bachelor of Science, University of North Dakota 1991
Master of Arts, University of North Dakota 1995

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 Education

Grand Forks, North Dakota
August
2002

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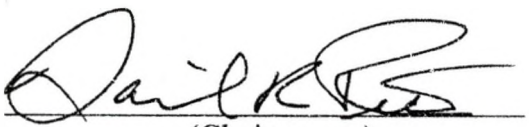
This dissertation, submitted by Donna Lisa Brown in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.



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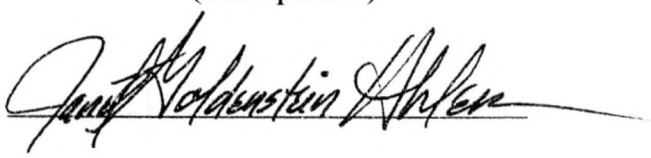

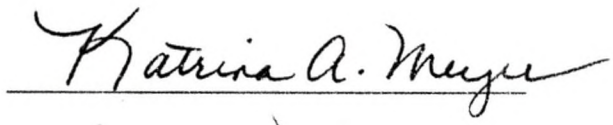

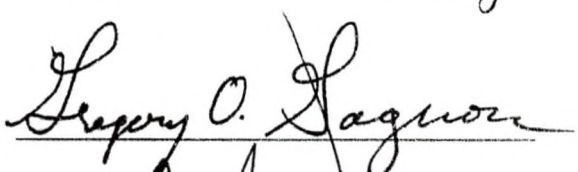

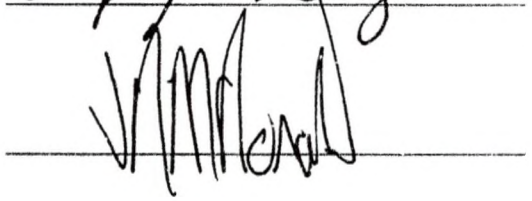

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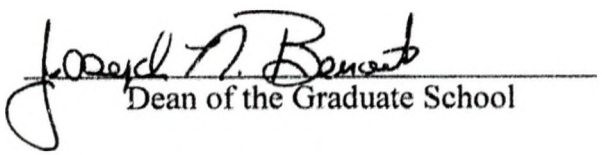

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Signature Donna Brown

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the perceptions transfer students from Tribal Colleges have upon entering The University of North Dakota regarding their own readiness for a four-year institution. This study sought to find out what could be done at the tribal colleges, at UND, and what the institutions could do collaboratively to improve the success of tribal college transfer students. Eleven students participated in the study. They were first semester transfers coming directly from tribal colleges who had transferred in at least 45 semester credits and with grade point averages of 3.0 or higher. The participant's experiences were recorded using the qualitative research method of in-depth interviewing. In addition, demographic data was collected on the students.

The themes that emerged from the study were:

*Theme One:* The participants expressed concerns regarding their transfer to UND.

*Theme Two:* The participants identified personal motivation as a factor leading them toward the completion of their degrees.

*Theme Three:* The participants identified family as playing an important part in their educational experiences and decisions.

*Theme Four:* The participants described various financial concerns.

*Theme Five:* The participants reported that the faculty at tribal colleges have different teaching styles than the faculty at UND, thus, the students have had to adjust their own learning styles and study methods.

*Theme Six:* The participants thought the faculties at their respective tribal colleges were too lenient.

*Theme Seven:* The participants recommended that others attend tribal colleges before attending four-year institutions.

*Theme Eight:* The participants expressed the importance of the Indian Center and the Native American Programs staff and support services at UND.

*Another Notable Topic:* The participants talked about racism at UND and the Grand Forks community.

Some of the recommendations derived from this study included:

1. That tribal colleges identify and better support the transfer function.
2. That tribal college faculty provide more rigorous instruction.
3. That tribal colleges and UND better collaborate on articulation programming.
4. That UND bolsters support services for American Indian students.
5. That UND provide a more adequate center for American Indian students to congregate.

# CHAPTER I

# INTRODUCTION

## Indian Education and Tribal Colleges

Throughout history in the United States, Indian people have faced many overwhelming barriers to the attainment of higher education. Poor preparation for college, excessive high school dropout rates, unaddressed cultural differences, and limited financial resources were just some of the hurdles that kept Indians from college (Boyer, 1997; Stein, 1988; Tierney & Wright, 1991).

> Indian students were often discouraged from attending college by their own teachers who, inspired by misguided kindness or overt racism, did not want to see Indian students enter the more rigorous life of higher education where, in their view, failure was likely. (Boyer, 1997, p. 20)

Even among the most academically prepared Indian people, the experience of leaving the reservation is generally accompanied by institutional shock of such enormity that few can persevere (Raymond, 1986).

Tribal colleges have been in existence for a relatively short period of time. These institutions were created over the last three decades to respond to the higher education needs of American Indians, especially those living in geographically isolated areas such as reservations. Tribal colleges were established in response to the conditions experienced by students at off-reservation institutions, such as inadequate funds and

loneliness for the family. From the beginning, tribal colleges addressed the problems of financial aid limitations, cultural isolation, and family considerations. Ideally, tribal colleges combine the preservation of tribal history, culture, and traditions with academic preparation, vocational training, and basic adult education (Belgarde, 1994; Boyer, 1997; Cunningham, 2000; Raymond, 1986; Wright & Tierney, 1991).

A major function of tribal colleges is to provide autonomy in higher education for American Indians, however, they are dependent upon external sources for funds, personnel, and part of their legitimacy. Therefore, they must meet two sets of expectations (Belgarde, 1994). Tribal college administrators must manage unique problems experienced by their Indian clientele by adjusting institutional routines to the cultural norms of Indian society. At the same time, they must present the familiar appearance of a postsecondary educational institution to outside resource providers and accreditation agencies. "Despite the adoption of formal structures, however, day-to-day practices at tribal colleges continue to reflect the social patterns of Indian rather than mainstream society" (p. 1).

All tribal colleges are formally sanctioned by one or more tribal governments and maintain a board of directors that is exclusively or predominantly American Indian (Belgarde, 1994; Boyer, 1997; Stein, 1988). The tribal colleges are formally sanctioned as the institutions of higher learning for their communities. However, their governance is not to be confused with the governance structure of the tribe itself. Most colleges

recognize that administrative autonomy is necessary for both accreditation and to avoid inappropriate interference by tribal politics (Boyer, 1997).

There are currently 32 tribal colleges and they are growing each year. Existing colleges are expanding and new colleges are being established (American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 2001). There are presently five tribal colleges in the state of North Dakota. Tribal colleges have done a great deal for Indian people and their communities by providing the post secondary education many might not have received. Many students seeking a four-year college degree choose to initially attend community colleges, including tribal colleges, rather than go directly to a four-year institution. Increasingly, American Indian students seeking a four-year college degree prefer to initially attend a Tribal College rather than go directly to a four-year institution (Boyer, 1997).

## Problem

While the total population in North Dakota is declining, down 1.2 percent from 642,200 in 2000 to 634,448 in 2001 (U. S. Census Bureau, 2002), the population of Indian people is rapidly growing in North Dakota. In 2000 the U.S. Census Bureau reported the North Dakota Indian population to be 31,087 – 4.9 percent of the State's population. The population of Indian people in North Dakota is increasing at a rate of about 2.1 percent per year. It is reported that the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians are increasing at a rate of about 10 percent per year (North Dakota Indian Affairs Commission, 1999). In 2000, 34 students transferred to UND from North Dakota tribal

colleges and in 2001, 27 students transferred to UND from North Dakota tribal colleges (University of North Dakota, 2002). With the increase in the American Indian population in North Dakota and the growth of tribal colleges, one can expect to see a larger number of tribal college students transferring to the University of North Dakota in the future.

There has been some research on American Indian students at UND (Gagnon, 1998; Harles, 1995; Jeanotte, 1981; Thompson, 1998). However, there have been no studies dedicated to the tribal college transfer student population at UND. There is a need for research on Tribal College transfer students at UND. "Central to the community college's collegiate mission is its role in facilitating the transfer of students from one level of higher education to another, yet no function has been more misunderstood or recently neglected by community college administrators and faculty" (Bernstein, 1986, p. 33).

A special study on Native American retention was conducted by the UND Student Affairs Research and Evaluation Department (1987) comparing American Indian students to all other races combined. Although the study is somewhat dated, some important findings can be noted. Of the full time freshmen who entered UND in fall 1986, 77 percent of all students were retained through the freshman year, while only 45 percent of American Indians were retained through the freshman year. One of the more intriguing portions of the study was a section on self-perceptions. A similar concept, self-predictions, has been proven to have some accuracy, such as asking students to estimate their chances of completing a degree or dropping out (Astin, 1997). This study revealed

that American Indians have lower self-perceptions of ability than other students at UND. Sixty-three percent of non-Indian students believed they possess above average academic ability, while only 44 percent of American Indian students believed they possess above average academic ability. Forty-four percent of non-Indian students predicted they would need tutoring, while 70 percent of Indian students predicted they would need tutoring.

Thompson (1998) conducted an independent study on retention and graduation rates of UND undergraduate Native American and other students. The study compared the retention and graduation of Native American students to that of all other students at UND who graduated over the same 10 year period as well as the traditional six year period used in most retention and graduation studies. Thompson found that, of the freshmen that entered UND in 1986, 12.8% of the Native American students had graduated six years later, while 45.2% of all other students had graduated. After ten years, 21.3% of the Native American students had graduated, while 49.9% of other students had graduated. The study revealed distinct differences in retention and graduation rates between UND Native American students and UND "All Other Students." Although using the ten year time frame greatly improves the graduation rate for Native Americans, the graduation rate is still nowhere near the level of graduation an institution such as UND would hope for or expect of its students (Thompson, 1998).

In addition to having to adjust to a college that is larger and more structured than their home institutions, many American Indian transfer students have to overcome cultural differences and juggle family and work responsibilities. Institutions with

climates that are not receptive to cultural diversity or supportive of diversity issues create feelings of isolation in many American Indian students (Day, 1999).

Cantrell, et. al. (2000), reported that several studies have been done regarding transfer shock, the phenomenon of transfer students experiencing a drop in grade point average the first semester at a four-year institution (Cantrell, Dell & Fishbaugh, 2000). These studies have been quantitative in nature, focusing on the correlation between grade point averages and whether or not a student drops out of college before the second semester. Jeanotte (1981) studied the factors that contribute to why American Indian students remain in school or drop out. This study was also quantitative in design.

Most of the models that have been developed on retention and the supporting studies are applicable to the traditional college student, i.e., first-year freshman, 18 years of age, middle-class, and non-minority. Probably the most widely used theoretical model for student retention is Vincent Tinto's Model of Institutional Departure, which is described in the first edition of *Leaving College* published in 1987 (Tierney, 1992; Dell, 2000). As a basis for his model, Tinto suggested that individual departure from institutions of higher education happens due to the following factors: intention, commitment, adjustment, difficulty, congruence, and isolation. According to Tinto, the fit between the student and the institution is crucial to persistence and the individual's ability to socially and academically integrate are the key to the fit. His model of student institutional departure sees the process of persistence as being marked over time by

different stages in the passage of students from past forms of association to new forms of membership in the social and intellectual communities of the college (Tinto, 1987).

Tierney took issue with Tinto's model (1992). He charged that there are several problems with his view, which can ultimately hold harmful consequences for racial and ethnic minorities. His interpretation of Tinto's model suggested that American Indian students leave their individual cultures and rituals at the door of the institution and undergo a rite of passage into the dominant, most often predominantly white, society of the institution. He further charged that institutions that accept Tinto's model reject differences based on categories such as class, race, and gender. They strive for a homogeneous society rather than a multi-cultural society that embraces and celebrates differences. He concluded by suggesting, "rather than think about student participation from a social integrationist perspective, an alternative model is to conceive of universities as multi-cultural entities where difference is highlighted and celebrated" (Tierney, 1992, p. 604).

Dell (2000) did a study similar to this one entitled, "The First Semester Experiences of American Indian Transfer Students." Dell did not use Tinto's model because his theory on institutional departure lacked consideration of "environmental pull." "Environmental pull factors are, by definition, things over which the institution has little control but that contribute to students' decisions to remain in or drop out of school" (Bean, 1990, p. 164). Examples of environmental pull factors for Bean include inadequate finances, significant others being in another location, and family

responsibilities. "Since a close family system is central to American Indian culture, as are heightened financial difficulties, the use of Bean's model may be more useful to explain American Indian persistence" (Dell, 2000, p. 24).

In the second edition of *Leaving College* (1993), Tinto added family obligations and finances to his list of factors that may lead to departure. "Though the competing external pressures of families and peers for disadvantaged students are no different in kind than those for other students, they may well be more intense" (Tinto, 1993, p. 63). He also took into account the problems Tierney and Bean had with his original model. Tinto makes recommendations regarding minorities and older than average students and has considerably revised and expanded his model. The roots of individual departure have been revised to include virtually all the important research that has been done since 1987, which has "led to substantially revised sections on the experiences of older students and of students of color in higher education" (Tinto, 1993, p. X).

Different types of students stay at or leave institutions for different reasons, and there is no substitute for conducting a local study into the causes of attrition. "An analysis of the causes of attrition for each type of student is sensible in identifying problems that lead to attrition that can be remedied through proactive programming," (Bean & Hossler, 1990, p. 288). "Specific recommendations about minority retention must take into account the characteristics of the minority group in question, the characteristics of the college or university, and ultimately the characteristics of each

individual student" (Bean, 1990, p. 168). Thus, it is important to devote a study to tribal college transfers to address their specific needs and concerns.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the perceptions transfer udents from Tribal Colleges had upon entering UND regarding their own readiness for a four-year institution. This study sought to find what could be done at UND to improve the success of tribal college transfer students, what the tribal colleges could do to improve the success of tribal college transfer students, and what UND and the tribal colleges could do collaboratively to improve the success of tribal college students.

## Method of the Study

This study used a qualitative research design. According to Vincent Tinto (1998), qualitative research on retention needs to be done. This approach was not a comparison of groups (i.e., Indian vs. non-Indian), but explored the experiences of this particular group of tribal college transfers to UND in detail.

Participants were interviewed on two occasions. The first interview was conducted early in the fall semester of 2001 with the second interview being conducted early in the spring semester of 2002. The purpose of this interview schedule was to determine whether there was a change in what each student perceived as their level of readiness as compared to the reality of what they experienced during the fall semester. The interviews began with a few guiding questions designed to keep the interview on the topic, yet allow the participants to freely express individual perceptions and concerns.

The first interview occurred early in the fall semester, which was the first semester of each participant's attendance at UND. Tinto (1998) maintains that the first ten weeks of initial enrollment are the most critical period for students entering a college or university. It is during this period that students are making necessary adjustments to their new environment. Statements and questions used to guide the interviews included:

1. Tell me about your educational background, going only as far back as you wish to go.
2. Tell me about your experience at the tribal college you attended.
3. In what areas do you feel you were well prepared to attend UND?
4. In what areas do you feel you were less well prepared?

The second interview took place early in the second semester. Statements and questions used to guide the interview included:

1. When I first interviewed you, back in September, I asked how well you were prepared to attend college at UND. How do you feel about your preparation now that you've had a full semester at UND?
2. What did the tribal college do that you found helpful in preparing you for study at UND?
3. What do you now wish the tribal college had done to better prepare you?
4. What did UND do for you that you found helpful in the transfer process to UND?
5. What do you now wish UND had done to better prepare you?

6. Was coming to UND what you expected it would be? Why or why not?

## Benefits of the Study

The successful retention of students offers at least three benefits: the students will be able to reap the rewards that a college degree affords, the university will be able to achieve its purpose of providing a successful educational experience for the students, and society will be able to utilize the skills of the graduates and become more productive. "Clearly it is to everyone's benefit to come to terms with why students leave college", (Tierney, 1992).

This study should be important to others as it examines, from the student perspective, what was helpful at both the tribal college level and the university level. The findings could possibly benefit the tribal colleges, UND, and future tribal college transfer students. It is anticipated that significant themes will emerge from the data that will identify what works, what doesn't, and most importantly, how tribal colleges and UND might work together to improve the tribal college transfer students' success, at least from the student perspective.

Prior research has brought about changes in programming for students, particularly in the area of student affairs. However, "We have not seen comparable changes in the academic side of the house or in the organization of higher education" (Tinto, 1998, p. 168). This study should have implications for staff, administrators, and faculty at both the tribal college level and UND. It is anticipated that recommendations

from this study can be useful at other institutions of higher education that have an interest in improving the success of tribal college transfer students.

## Assumptions

1. The participants will provide accurate, honest, and forthright responses.
2. Recommendations for change described in this study are directed at higher education institutions rather than individuals.
3. Institutions of higher education can make improvements based on research.

## Limitations

1. This study is limited specifically to tribal college transfer students at UND.
2. This study is limited to the students who transferred to UND in the fall of 2001.
3. This study is limited to students who transferred to UND with grade point averages 3.0 or higher and at least 45 semester credits.
4. This study is limited to students from North Dakota tribal colleges.

## Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms and definitions are provided:

American Indian. A person who is a member of a United States government federally recognized Indian tribe and/or who possesses at least one fourth (1/4) degree Indian blood. The terms "American Indian" and "Indian" will be used interchangeably throughout this dissertation. The term "Native American" will be used within quoteations from other researchers.

Coding. The analytic process through which data are fractured, conceptualized, and integrated to form theory.

First-generation College Student. A student who attends a college and whose parents have not obtained a college degree. Parents' possession of as least an associate degree is considered achieving a college degree and removes a student from this category (Willett, 1989).

Indian Reservation. A designated land area where American Indians reside as determined by treaty or executive action of the United States government.

Native Four-Year College Student. Students who begin their studies at four-year institutions (Carlan & Byxbe, 2000).

Qualitative Research. Any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Stopout. A person who temporarily withdraws from the educational system and returns to complete their degree at a later time (Tinto, 1993).

Tribal College. An institution for post-secondary education that has been formally sanctioned by one or more American Indian tribes.

Transfer Shock. The phenomenon of an appreciable drop in grades the first semester after transfer (Laanan, 2001).

Transfer Student. A student who has transferred from one college to another.

## Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter I of this study provides the reader with an introduction to Indian Education and Tribal Colleges and transfer and retention at four-year colleges. This is followed by a description of the problem and purpose of the study.

Chapter II is a description of the methodology used in this study. The reader will find a discussion of the fundamentals of qualitative research and a rationale for choosing qualitative research for this study. The method for selecting the participants, setting up the interviews, the interview questions, and inductive data analysis will also be described.

Chapter III provides a profile of each of the participants. This information allows the reader to better understand the participants and the personal experiences they bring to the situation.

Chapter IV contains the findings of the study. Significant themes that were uncovered during the study are described along with supporting evidence in the form of quotations from the interviews.

Chapter V is a discussion of the literature related to each theme.

The final chapter, Chapter VI, is a presentation of a summary of the study. The themes of the study are listed along with a brief discussion of each. A conclusion, implications, and recommendations are presented. The chapter ends with a commentary by the researcher.

The Appendices include copies of the letter of support from Native American Programs, the letter that was sent to the participants inviting them to participate, the

consent form, the interview questions, the data sheets, and a letter of support and cooperation from Native American Programs.

# CHAPTER II

# METHODOLOGY

This chapter contains an introduction to qualitative research and explains in detail the process used to carry out this particular study. The means used to gain access to the participants and then to ultimately gain their consent is also discussed. Finally, the strategies for data analysis and reporting the findings are explained.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the perceptions transfer students from Tribal Colleges had upon entering UND regarding their own readiness for a four-year institution. Tinto (1998) urged researchers to include qualitative methods in studies on retention and persistence. He explained that research on persistence must enable us not only to document the impact of institutional practice on student behavior, but also to understand how and why that impact arises. He said that in the final analysis, it is that *understanding* that can best serve our interests as educational researchers, theorists, and policy-makers.

## Nature of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research had its beginnings in the early 1900's and began to gain significant popularity in the 1960's. One way to define qualitative research is to compare it to quantitative research. The key difference is that quantitative researchers work with a few variables and many cases, and qualitative researchers rely on a few cases and many

variables (Creswell, 1998). Qualitative and quantitative methods are not simply different ways of doing the same thing. Instead, they are different approaches that have different strengths and are often best used to address different questions and purposes. The strength of qualitative research is a result of its inductive approach that focuses on specific situations or people and its emphasis on words rather than numbers. Maxwell (1998) describes five particular research purposes for which qualitative studies are especially suited:

1. Understanding the *meaning*, for participants in the study, of the events, situations, and actions they are involved with and of the accounts that they give of their lives and experiences.

2. Understanding the particular *context* within which the participants act, and the influence that this context has on their actions.

3. Understanding *unanticipated* phenomena and influences, and generating new grounded theories about the latter.

4. Understanding the *process* by which events and actions take place.

5. Developing *causal explanations*. "Quantitative researchers tend to be interested in whether and to what extent variance in x causes variance in y. Qualitative researchers, on the other hand, tend to ask how x plays a role in causing y and what the process is that connects x and y" (Maxwell, 1998, p. 20 ).

This study was achieved through a qualitative research design. This approach is not a comparison of groups (i.e., Indian vs. non-Indian), but allowed the researcher to

explore the experiences of this particular group of tribal college transfer students in detail.

## Inductive Research

In qualitative studies, a researcher does not begin a project with a preconceived theory in mind. Rather, the researcher begins with an area of study and allows themes to emerge from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The areas of study involved in this research project were transfer students and retention. In qualitative studies, data analysis is conducted in an on-going process which enables the researcher to explore themes as they emerge and to pursue unexpected leads. Analysis of the data is interplay between the researcher and the data, where the researcher is required to have some degree of creativity. Creativity can manifest itself in the ability of the researcher to suitably name categories, ask stimulating questions, make comparisons, and extract a realistic scheme from masses of unorganized raw data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Some unexpected themes came out in this study that the researcher could not find, verbatim, in the literature. At times it was difficult to name themes for fear of losing the meaning intended by the participants, but the researcher is satisfied that their meanings have been preserved and presented in their truest sense.

## Interviewing

Data for qualitative research may consist of any combination of observation, interviewing, documents, films or videotapes. A researcher can approach the experience of people in many ways such as examining personal and institutional documents, through observation, through exploring history, through questionnaires and surveys, and through

a review of existing literature. However, if the researcher's goal is to understand the meaning of the experience, then interviewing provides a necessary avenue of inquiry. Thus, the primary method used in this study was in-depth interviewing. "At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (Seidman, 1998, p. 3). The strength of in-depth interviewing is that we can come to understand the details of people's experience from their point of view, rather than drawing conclusions based on preconceived notions.

The purpose of the first interview was twofold: to establish rapport with the students and to gain an understanding of what the students' perceptions were of their own readiness to attend a four-year institution. Intentionally, these interviews were conducted early in the fall semester. Tinto (1998) maintains that the first ten weeks of initial enrollment are the most critical period for students entering a college or university. It is during this period that students are making necessary adjustments, and acclimating to their new environment. Statements and questions used to guide the interviews included the following:

1. Tell me about your educational background, going only as far back as you wish to go.
2. Tell me about your experience at the tribal college you attended.
3. In what areas do you feel you were well prepared to attend UND?
4. In what areas do you feel you were less well prepared to attend UND?

The purpose of the second interview was to learn what each student experienced as reality of their readiness in early Spring term, 2002 as compared to the perceptions

they had early in the first semester, Fall 2001. The interviews were conducted in January and early February.

1. When I first interviewed you, back in September, I asked how well you were prepared to attend college at UND. How do you feel about your preparation now that you've had a full semester at UND?
2. What did the tribal college do that you found helpful in preparing you for study at UND?
3. What do you now wish the tribal college had done to better prepare you?
4. What did UND do for you that you found helpful in the transfer process to UND?
5. What do you now wish UND had done to better prepare you?
6. Was coming to UND what you expected it would be? Why or why not?

In addition to the interview information, demographic data were collected including tribe, tribal college transferring from, age, sex, marital status, number of dependent children, employment status, cumulative GPA, GPA after the first semester of attendance at UND, GPA after second semester of attendance at UND, number of credits transferring in from tribal colleges and number of credits earned during the first two terms at UND. Most of the information was reported by the participants, except for GPA's and number of credits, which were confirmed by official UND documents.

## Participant Selection

In the planning stages of this study, the researcher identified 27 tribal college graduates entering UND in the fall of 2001 as the potential subjects. A preliminary

review of incoming students revealed that without contacting each person and asking them, it would be impossible to determine which students had actually received degrees from their tribal colleges. The next parameters selected were tribal college transfers with 60 or more semester credits and a GPA of 3.0 or higher. The rationale for the parameter of a 3.0 GPA or higher was that it demonstrated they did well academically and it could be expected that those students would continue to do well at UND. The rationale for the parameter of 60 credits or more indicated to the researcher that they had significant experience at a tribal college, as opposed to maybe taking a course or two. Within these parameters, the *n* was less than five. By changing the semester credits to 45 or more, the indication was that the participants still had a significant experience at a tribal college and using these criteria, 15 potential subjects were identified. Final parameters were; students transferring to UND from a tribal college, a GPA of 3.0 or higher, 45 or more semester credits transferring in to UND, and fall 2001 being their first semester of attendance at UND.

A list of incoming American Indian students was obtained from the Office of Native American Programs (NAP). The UND Office of Admissions supplies this list to NAP prior to each term. With the assistance of an employee of Native American Programs, academic records were checked to see who fit the above criteria. Students having had their most recent experience with higher education at a tribal college were the desired subjects, so if the last school attended was any institution other than a tribal college, that name was eliminated.

## Contacting the Potential Participants

The first contact with the potential participants was by letter, mailed shortly after classes began in August 2001. The letter contained an introduction to the researcher, provided a brief explanation of the study, and listed the benefits that might result from the study. The process used to select the participants was explained and the student was informed that the researcher would be phoning to ask if he or she were interested in participating. The phone calls were made one week later. If the student agreed to participate, the first interview was set up during that conversation. The day before the appointment, another phone call was made to remind the student about the appointment. Eleven students participated in the first round of interviews.

For the second round of interviews, students were contacted by phone in early January to set up appointments. A contingency plan was in place in the event any of the participants dropped out or did not attend UND in the spring semester. If this had occurred, the researcher would have traveled to their new location to conduct the interview. Fortunately, this did not happen and all 11 participants were in attendance and agreed to and participated in the second interview.

The researcher assisted the participants in selecting pseudonyms to protect their identities. The interviews were audio taped and transcribed by the researcher. The tapes were kept in a secure location. In the analyzing phase, the tapes were used when necessary to check for accuracy, tone of voice, laughs, sighs, pauses, and interruptions.

## Analysis of the Data

Immediately after the first interview, transcription and analysis of the data began. This kept the data fresh in the researcher's mind and lessened the possibility of audio tapes and transcripts piling up, which might have made the task of final analysis difficult and discouraging. More importantly, Maxwell (1996) advises researchers to give frequent attention to their studies to progressively focus on interviews and watch for thematic developments. The interviews lasted approximately one hour each. The entire first round of interviews was transcribed before the second interviews took place. The researcher reminded the participants of what they said in the first interview in the event the topic needed further explanation or verification.

An inductive analysis method was used to code the data. "The process of noting what is interesting, labeling it, and putting it into appropriate files is called 'classifying' or, in some sources, 'coding' data" (Seidman, 1998, p. 107). The key feature of qualitative coding is that it is developed in interaction with, and is tailored to the understanding of, the particular data being analyzed (Maxwell, 1996). The researcher did not strive for a certain number of themes, nor limit the number of themes during the coding process. The goal of coding was not to produce a prescribed count of things, but to break down the data and rearrange it into categories that aided in the development of themes. After the data was analyzed by inductive coding, eight themes became apparent from the data and the issue of racism was mentioned. Each transcript was read through several times, with the researcher highlighting phrases, or codes that appeared significant. The codes were then grouped by similarities and the categories were named. After

analyzing the codes and categories, a theme was written to capture the significance. See Figure 1 for an example of inductive data analysis.

## Reporting the Findings

The participants in this study are profiled in Chapter III. Profiles were written based on the information collected on the data sheets and information gathered from the interviews. In Chapter IV, the themes that were uncovered are identified and supported by quotes from the interviews. The researcher made every attempt to convey the meaning of the themes as ascribed by the participants. Chapter III follows with the participants' profiles.

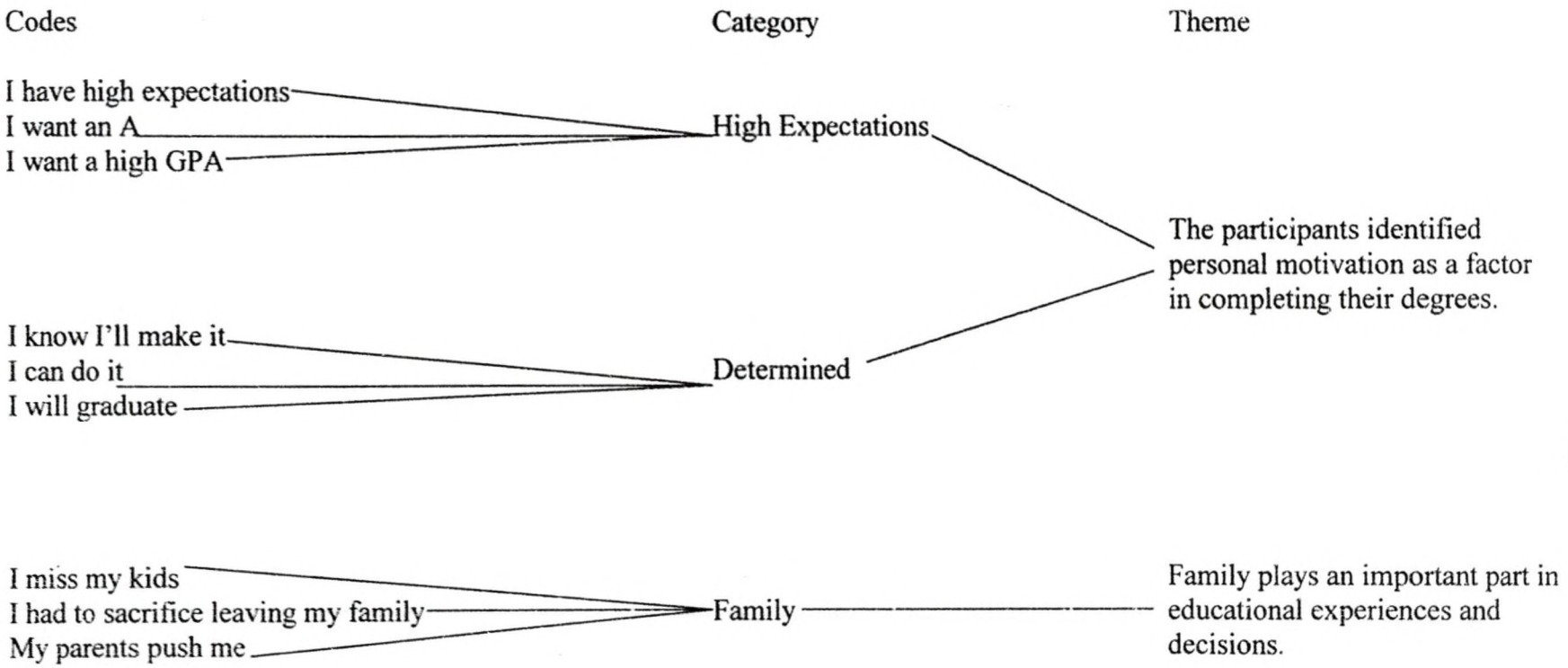


Figure 1. An Example of Inductive Data Analysis.

# CHAPTER III

# CONTEXT AND PORTRAITS OF THE STUDY PARTICIPANTS

## Introduction

Chapter III provides a narrative description of the participants and their individual backgrounds. Information collected on data sheets before each interview and backgrounds drawn from the interviews have provided the portraits for each of the participants. The participants come from a variety of backgrounds, but most are enrolled members of North Dakota tribes, unless otherwise indicated.

There are five tribally-controlled colleges in the state of North Dakota; Cankdeska Cikana Community College in Fort Totten, Sitting Bull College in Fort Yates, Fort Berthold Community College in Newtown, Turtle Mountain Community College in Belcourt and United Tribes Technical College in Bismarck. AIHEC reported in 2002, that there are more American Indians enrolled in tribal colleges in the state of North Dakota, more than are enrolled in the mainstream institutions in the state.

All of the participants in this study attended a tribal college in the state of North Dakota, however, not necessarily the college governed by their respective tribes. The tribal colleges represented in this study were Turtle Mountain Community College, Standing Rock College, and Fort Berthold Community College.

The University of North Dakota is located in Grand Forks. In the year 2001, the total enrollment at UND was 11,764 and the enrollment of American Indians, including

graduate and professional schools was 367, about 3.1 percent (University of North Dakota, 2002). UND has 26 Indian-related programs to serve these students and an American Indian center which serves as an academic and social gathering area (L. D. Jeanotte, personal communication, June 25, 2002).

The interviews took place in the office of Native American Programs at UND. The interviews were private, with the exception of one where a participant's 6-year-old child was present.

To begin the interviews, the participants were asked to give a history of their educational experiences, going only as far back as each of them wished to go. Some began with elementary school, but most began their stories at the high school level. One told me about his experiences in elementary boarding schools.

## Adeline

Adeline is twenty-two and a single mother of one. She has a two-year-old daughter. Her daughter is currently living with her maternal grandmother on their home reservation while Adeline attends college. She is the first of her siblings to attend college, but she is not a first-generation college student.

Adeline grew up in a western state. She attended school there through tenth grade. Her family moved "back home" the summer before her junior year. She began attending a reservation high school at that time. She says she was well ahead of her class because the reservation school didn't offer any of the advanced placement courses she had been taking at her previous school. She ended up taking some courses via NovaNET (a comprehensive online courseware system that delivers standards-based curriculum)

and commented, "I ended up teaching myself and I don't think I grasped all the concepts."

Her senior year on the reservation was more challenging as she had some instructors who assessed the students academically and as a result, challenged them to their full potential. Adeline graduated as valedictorian of her senior graduating class. Immediately after high school she attended a tribal college for a year. In her second year, she took time off while she had a baby and returned to the tribal college during the third year. She did very well and transferred to UND, mostly because UND is close to home.

At UND, Adeline was receiving several forms of financial aid. Along with a Pell grant and other basic federal aid, she was receiving a Higher Education scholarship from her tribe, and she was the recipient of a full private scholarship. According to federal financial aid guidelines and the University of North Dakota financial aid office, she was fully funded for the academic year 2001-2002. She did not have a job and did not intend to look for one. As she was fully funded, she intended to devote as much time as possible to her studies.

Adeline transferred to UND from her tribal college with sixty-two cumulative credits and a 3.74 GPA. She is majoring in Biology. Her long-term goal is to attend veterinarian school. During her first semester at UND, Adeline completed twelve credits with a GPA of 2.25.

While at UND, she is living in family housing. She travels home often to be with her daughter and her mother frequently comes to Grand Forks so they can all be together. She misses her daughter greatly, but she says she knows that at this time her daughter is

better off with her grandmother, for several reasons. If her daughter were here in Grand Forks with her, she would have to find a daycare and leave her with "strangers." If she leaves her with her mother, her mother provides child care and she has several cousins with whom she interacts. Adeline says she uses her time alone to study. Although she feels the current situation is best for both of them, she is hoping she can work something out for next year where her daughter can be with her full-time.

### Donna

Donna is twenty-five years old, married, and the mother of two children who are five and two years old. She is not a first-generation college student, but she is the first of her siblings to attend college. At the time of our first interview, she was commuting to UND each day, a round trip of approximately two hundred miles. She said that although the commute was long, she had time to think on the way to Grand Forks, and time to wind down on the way home. Another benefit of commuting, she said, is that she used time in-between classes to study and work on assignments.

In December, she applied for and received an apartment at UND family housing. Now her husband and two children live in Grand Forks with her. She says that now it's almost as though she has it "too easy." She says she worked harder during the fall semester because with her schedule and the commute, she knew she had to. Now, she finds herself procrastinating and not applying herself as strictly as she did in the fall. With the family so close by, she finds that instead of spending in-between class time at the library, she runs home to see if her family needs anything. She said, "I know I should be going to the library, but once I go home I feel I should stay home and help cook and

help around the house. After I do all that, I'm tired. I feel bad if I'm not there, or if I'm not helping."

She is receiving several forms of financial aid. Along with federal aid such as the Pell grant and SEOG, she receives a generous scholarship from a private foundation. Although Donna is considered to be fully funded, in the fall she earned extra money with a part-time job at the tribal college she previously attended. She had been tutoring tribal college students ten to twelve hours per week. However, this spring semester she is living in Grand Forks and no longer works.

Donna transferred to UND from her tribal college with sixty-eight cumulative credits and a 3.81 cumulative GPA. She earned twelve credits in the fall at UND with a GPA of 3.50. She is majoring in Business and her long-term goal is to become a lawyer.

### Ian

Ian is twenty years old, single, and living in an off-campus apartment. He is a first-generation college student and the first of his siblings to attend college. Although neither of his parents attended college, they have always encouraged, even pushed, him to attend. He says he always knew he would take his education further than high school and chose to attend a tribal college for his first two years rather than go to a four-year institution. He believed attending a four-year institution would be a "little bit harder" than tribal college, and in doing so he would have to live in another city, away from his parents.

Ian performed well in high school, graduating with a 3.45 GPA. He transferred to UND from his tribal college with sixty-eight credits and a 3.15 GPA. He receives an Indian Health Service scholarship and is also considered to be fully-funded.

When we first met in October, Ian was majoring in physical therapy. He said a combination of things made him switch his major to nursing later in the fall. He spent some time reading the UND catalog, and going over the course requirements for the physical therapy program. He said he thought the curriculum for the nursing program was a better fit for him and that if he were a nurse, it would be the same as Physical Therapy in that he would still be helping people. He also said "males are needed in the nursing field." Another factor that had an impact on his change of major was encouragement by his girlfriend, who is a nursing major. What's more, she has a relative who works in the nursing department. She introduced her relative to Ian, and he said, the relative was very helpful and kind to him. All these factors led him to change his major to nursing during the course of this study.

Ian goes home frequently to visit his family. He completed thirteen credits in the fall semester with a GPA of 2.69. In his opinion, he could have done better. He says perhaps he has "too much freedom" here, where back home when he was attending tribal college and living with his parents, they pushed him to do his homework, much like they did when he was in high school. He vows to apply himself to his studies in the spring and to exercise better study skills.

## Jonathan

Jonathan is twenty-one and a single student. He is living in an off-campus apartment with two roommates. Jonathan grew up on the reservation and says high school was a "great" experience for him although he feels some of the teachers didn't push him as hard as he thought they should have pushed at times. He was an honor student until his senior year, when other distractions lowered his grades a bit. He did not specify what these distractions were.

Immediately following high school he attended the tribal college in his home town. He says he tried to be involved in extra-curricular activities as much as possible and was elected a member of the student council his sophomore year. His major is computer science and although the tribal college did not have a computer science major he has always taken courses in that area, knowing he would someday transfer somewhere to complete his degree.

Jonathan transferred to UND with eighty-two cumulative credits and a GPA of 3.15. However, the road to UND was not exactly smooth for Jonathan. His original plans were to attend UND, so he completed all the admissions, transfer, and financial aid paperwork to that end. However, shortly before he was to move to Grand Forks, his significant other at the time impressed upon him that living apart would not be good for their relationship. Consequently, he transferred his records to Minot State University within days of the start of school. Unfortunately, the relationship didn't last very long as they broke up less than two weeks later. Although this was a very difficult time for him,

he persevered and completed the year at MSU. He says the faculty and staff at MSU were very kind, understanding, and helpful to him during this difficult time.

The following summer, he said he "hung out" in Grand Forks with some friends who were attending UND. At the time, he was unsure of his plans for the fall. He and his friends frequented the Native American Programs Indian Center at UND. Again, just days before the commencement of fall semester he was encouraged to attend school and applied, this time to UND. The difficulty in this situation is that his financial aid was delayed, but overall his experience here at UND has been positive. He feels he made the right choice by coming.

Jonathan's financial aid package was not complete, so he was earning extra money bartending approximately twenty hours a week. His first semester at UND, he completed eight credits with a GPA of 2.67. He had to drop a few of the "extremely hard" classes he was in and received an F in a one-credit course. Because of registering late, he said he had to "take what I can get and it just didn't work out for me."

Joy

Joy is twenty-two years old, married, and lives in family housing at UND while attending college. She and her husband rent the apartment, which they share with her mother who is attending graduate school. Joy is not a first-generation college student, nor is she the first of her siblings to attend college.

She attended a high school on the reservation and did very well. She carried a 4.0 GPA right up until the week before graduation, when she received some lower grades in math and composition and ended up graduating with a 3.9 GPA. After graduation, she

attended tribal college for a year, then took a year and a half off to work, then returned to the tribal college in the spring of 1998. She attended the tribal college for a year and although she says she didn't have to work hard for good grades, she describes her time spent there as "pretty good." She said, "I did what was required and I got good grades, I never had to actually try for it." She did not graduate, but instead transferred to UND.

Joy experienced something none of the other participants did. She attended a summer program at UND through the Indians Into Medicine program. The program is designed to facilitate tribal college transfer students as they prepare to attend UND. The students who attend this particular program have all expressed an interest in pursuing a health career. Joy's major is biology and she intends to go to medical school. She is interested in specializing in either pediatrics or family medicine. She says the program was very helpful. The only thing she would change about it was that it was only six weeks long and she thought it could have been longer. Topics covered included anatomy, biology, physiology, and study skills. She transferred to UND with 75 credits and a GPA of 3.18.

Joy completed fifteen credits in her first semester at UND, with a GPA of 2.40. She feels she did well, but thinks there is room for improvement. She said, "I think I did pretty good. Overall I did fairly well, for just getting here so I'm kind of pleased, but not quite what I expected you know." She says she is still adjusting to being here, but now that she's more settled in she hopes to do better in the spring.

## Linus

Linus is a thirty-eight year old man, married, with four children and one grandchild. He is not the first of his siblings to attend college. Several of his siblings hold graduate and professional degrees of some sort. His mother attended college as well. While at UND, he is living in family housing, but his family resides at their permanent home on the reservation. In the fall, he was going home most weekends, or occasionally his family came to Grand Forks. At the time of our second interview in January, his oldest child and grandchild were living with him and he found himself going home less often. He said he is over the initial shock of living apart from his family, but he hopes to find a better solution someday since he plans to be in school for at least another five years. He is especially bothered by not being around his three-year-old at such an impressionable age.

Linus began telling me about his educational history with his experiences at boarding schools. Around the eighth grade he entered a boarding school in the south. He was well ahead of the other students, so he was tested and moved up one grade. He said, "It wasn't a very good experience." Due to being moved up a grade, he was interacting with older kids. "I just fell into the wrong group I guess. We stayed in dormitories, that's just the way life was." He returned to his home reservation his freshman year of high school, where he lived with relatives. He says, "Due to a lack of supervision, I didn't get very good grades."

His post-secondary educational career began right out of high school when he attended a vocational school. He completed a nine-month welding program, but wasn't

immediately able to find a job in that field. Some time later, he did secure a job as a welder so he says the time he spent at vocational school wasn't a total waste. He had been working in a similar job for approximately ten years when, he says, "One day I just, I looked up and I was looking around and thought, there's got to be something better, more important, for me to do." He asked for a lay-off that fall to attend school and "that was it, I never had second thoughts about it actually."

Linus's major is criminal justice and his long-term goal is to become a lawyer. He transferred to UND with sixty credits and a 3.86 GPA. This past fall, Linus completed twelve credits with a GPA of 3.50, which placed him on the president's honor roll.

His financial aid package indicates that he is not considered fully funded, but he says it is adequate. He does not have a job and does not intend to apply for one.

Michelle

Michelle is the exception to the study in that she is not an enrolled member of a North Dakota tribe. She is enrolled in an eastern Montana tribe, but has relatives and has lived on a North Dakota reservation most of her life. She is twenty-four years old, single, and has no children. She is living in a UND residence hall while attending UND.

Michelle did not attend a tribal college immediately after high school. Rather, she moved to a large Midwestern city where she had relatives to attend college. She said she liked the college she attended a lot, but she was extremely homesick. She completed an entire academic year there and did well, but decided to attend a tribal college the following year. She said, "I was really homesick 'cause I'm really close to my family."

She attended her tribal college for two years before transferring to UND. Michelle transferred to UND with eighty-six credits and a GPA of 3.35.

She has several friends and some family members in the Grand Forks community. In fact, she spends the majority of her free time at her friends' apartment. She says she plans to spend more time in her residence hall room during the spring semester so she can concentrate when she studies. She completed the fall semester with thirteen credits and a 3.31 GPA.

Michelle is not considered fully-funded, but chooses not to work so she can devote most of her time to her studies. She is majoring in Biology and hopes for a career in the medical field someday.

Molly

Molly is twenty-six years old, married, and the mother of three children. When we met in October she was pregnant with her third child, who was due in December. By the time we met in January, she had the baby and all was well with the family. Her husband is attending UND also. They are renting an apartment off-campus while they attend school. She said this is the first time in her lif, she has lived off the reservation. She is a first-generation college student and the first of her siblings to attend college.

Molly says she was never really interested in school. She was diagnosed with a learning disability at the elementary level, and later, around sixth grade, she says they "stopped watching." In order to avoid being "labeled," she went through school doing what she had to do to get by. She said, "School was just not really important to me at the time, and when I graduated, I don't know how I did that [graduate] but I did!"

Despite her lack of interest in school, she always knew she needed a college education and thus began taking courses at the tribal college the summer after she graduated. For the next few years, she gradually pursued her education, taking courses while working full-time and taking time off to have children and begin her family.

Molly transferred to UND with 148 credits. Her GPA was 3.11. The reason for the high number of credits is that she had previously been enrolled in a four-year program at her tribal college. When she received a scholarship to attend UND, the family decided to transfer. She is considered fully-funded and her husband receives some financial aid as well. Neither she nor her husband were employed at the time. Molly is also concerned about leaving her children with "strangers" so she and her husband have adjusted their schedules so they do not need daycare.

Molly completed nine credits in the fall semester with a GPA of 3.75. She is majoring in education. She is still struggling with her learning disability, but does not seek support services to address it.

### Star

Star is twenty-six years old and the single parent of two children. She and her children live on-campus in family housing while she attends school. She has siblings who have attended college and her mother holds a graduate degree. However, she says, she hasn't received a lot of support from her family while pursuing post-secondary education. She's basically been on her own since she was sixteen.

Star says her family "moved around a lot" while she was growing up because of her mother's employment. Her high school years were spent in a larger North Dakota

city. At fifteen she had her first child and began attending an alternative high school. She says, "Even though I was a teenage mother I just sort of blossomed there and did really well and gained confidence in my education." At seventeen she graduated from high school and moved to another state to attend college.

When she arrived at that college, she didn't have a place to live. She said, "I didn't understand what was going on in school - in college. I didn't really have any guidance and I didn't know how to use my resources to find out." She did things on her own and as a result ended up living in temporary shelters for awhile. "I didn't understand deadlines or how to use a computer - I didn't understand anything!" At the time, working to earn enough money to house and feed herself and her child was her priority. With the pressures of being a young, single parent, and having no money, she ended up dropping out of school at mid-term that first semester. She moved with her son back to her home reservation where she returned to school at the tribal college the following fall.

Star's experience at the tribal college was, as she put it, "really good." She said, "At tribal college - it was home." She attended on and off, taking time for family and work. "It took me extra long because I wasn't sure of my major and I kind of took extra classes I didn't need." Eventually, she graduated one spring and began planning her transfer to UND.

She transferred to UND with ninety-six credits and a GPA of 3.11. She is receiving a scholarship that places her in the fully-funded category, but with her being single with two children, she still struggles financially. She completed twelve credits in the fall semester with a GPA of 3.0. She is majoring in education.

## Tammy

Tammy is thirty-eight years old, married, and the mother of four children. She began describing her educational history with her experiences at the tribal college. She enrolled at the tribal college ten years after high school graduation. She said, "That was a big change but I enjoyed it. It was really a good experience for me. I got a lot of self-esteem out of it. It was right at home and I enjoyed going." After graduating, she found a job on the reservation where she worked for several years before reading about a new program being offered at UND. It was her sister who thought she would be a good fit for the program, then requested the application and urged Tammy to fill it out. Tammy procrastinated, but eventually completed the application and was accepted. She transferred to UND with eighty-three credits and a GPA of 3.41.

While at UND, she is living in family housing. Attending UND was a difficult decision for her. She faced leaving her family behind as her husband is employed in her hometown. She had been able to keep some of her children with her most of the time, but her husband kept them at home when she needed time to study. She was going home every weekend to be with her family. Occasionally, her family came to Grand Forks for the weekend. While at UND, she does not have a vehicle so walks wherever she needs to go. However, she does not consider this to be a hardship. She is not a first-generation college student, nor is she the first of her siblings to attend college.

She completed the fall semester with twelve credits and a GPA of 3.33. She is majoring in education. After graduation, she plans to return to the reservation to live and work.

## Two Moons

Two Moons is forty-eight years old, married, and has two grown children. He and his wife live in UND family housing while he is attending school. He transferred to UND with sixty-two credits and a 3.11 GPA. He is majoring in a science and hopes to return to the reservation to work at an Indian Health Service clinic.

Two Moons grew up in a neighboring state in a "definitely white community," he said. His parents were divorced, they were poor, and he said he had a tough time while growing up. He dropped out of high school midway through his sophomore year for a variety of reasons, and eventually got a general education diploma while in the military. He worked blue-collar jobs all his life until about five years ago when he was injured on the job. His injuries were so severe he was not able to return to work so he began taking classes at the tribal college about two years ago. It had been over thirty years since he was last in school. "It was pretty hard, I was pretty apprehensive at first I suppose, but it went way better than I thought it was gonna." He made the Dean's list the first semester and continued to do well through graduation.

Finances were a factor in whether or not he transferred to UND. About mid-summer he was notified he had received a scholarship and began planning his transfer to UND. He said, "It all depended on if I had enough money to come, if I could afford it. Then I got that scholarship so here we are." He received a Pell grant, his scholarship, and a few other financial aid resources. However, he is not considered fully-funded as his financial aid budget shows an unmet need.

Two Moons is not particularly fond of the Grand Forks community. To him, this is a "big city" and he feels somewhat isolated. He and his wife were going home often to see friends and take care of unfinished business. However, he hoped to rent his home out soon and will try to "stick around" Grand Forks for most weekends.

Since his accident he has had to deal with chronic pain. He suffered nerve damage which affected his sleeping pattern and his ability to concentrate. He was able to overcome these complications while at the tribal college, but they had become worse since arriving at UND. He completed the fall semester with nine credits and a GPA of 1.25. He failed one three-credit course. This was extremely disappointing, but he was consulting with doctors to manage his pain and hoped to do better in the spring.

## Summary

The participants have several things in common. They are all enrolled members of a federally recognized tribe and they are all strongly connected to their tribal communities. Each of them transferred to UND with 45 or more semester credits and a GPA of 3.0 or higher. Most of the participants' previous college experiences had been at tribal colleges. If the participant had earned credits from any institution other than a tribal college, the tribal college was the last institution attended before UND. It was also interesting to note that most were not first-generation college students.

Evident in their profiles though, is the diversity of the eleven participants. Some began their education at a tribal college with intentions of transferring to a four-year institution. Others were drawn to UND by a specific degree program. Some made their decision when they were reasonably certain they could survive financially. Their family

situations were diverse as well. Some were single, some were single parents, some were married, and others were married with children.

As diverse as they were, they did have similar concerns, interests, and experiences relevant to this study. The information collected on data sheets before each interview and the backgrounds of each of the participants is summarized in Table 1. Chapter IV follows with the themes that were identified from their interviews as well as supporting evidence in the form of quotations from the interviews.

Table 1. Student Profiles at-a-glance

| | Age | Married | Children/# | Employed | 1st Gen | 1st of Siblings | Major |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Adeline | 22 | N | Y/1 | N | N | Y | Biology |
| Donna | 25 | Y | Y/2 | Y | N | Y | Pre-Business |
| Ian | 20 | N | N | N | Y | Y | Nursing+ |
| Jonathan | 21 | N | N | Y | N | Y | Computer Science |
| Joy | 22 | Y | N | N | N | N | Biology |
| Linus | 38 | Y | Y/3 | N | N | N | Criminal Justice |
| Michelle | 24 | N | N | N | N | N | Biology |
| Molly | 26 | Y | Y/2* | N | Y | Y | Education |
| Star | 26 | N | Y/2 | N | N | N | Education |
| Tammy | 38 | Y | Y/4 | N | Y | N | Education |
| Two Moons | 48 | Y | Y/2 | N | Y | Y | Science |

* Third child was born between semesters.
+ Changed major from physical therapy in the fall to nursing in the spring.

# CHAPTER IV

# THEMES AND SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the perceptions transfer students from tribal colleges have upon entering UND regarding their own readiness for a four-year institution. This study sought to find out what could be done at the University of North Dakota to improve the success of tribal college transfer students, what the tribal colleges could do to improve the success of tribal college transfer students, and what UND and the tribal colleges could do collaboratively to improve the success of tribal college students.

## Introduction

This chapter identifies and provides supporting evidence for eight themes that emerged from the data collected through two in-depth interviews with each participant. In addition, the issue of racism will be discussed. Supporting evidence is provided by participants' quotes. The following themes and the issue of racism were identified:

Theme One: The participants expressed concerns regarding their transfer to UND.

Theme Two: The participants identified personal motivation as a factor leading them toward the completion of their degrees.

Theme Three: The participants identified family as playing an important part in their educational experiences and decisions.

Theme Four: The participants described various financial concerns.

Theme Five: The participants reported that the faculty at tribal colleges have different teaching styles than the faculty at UND, thus, the students have had to adjust their own learning styles and study methods.

Theme Six: The participants thought the faculties at their respective tribal colleges were too lenient.

Theme Seven: The participants recommended that others attend tribal colleges before attending four-year institutions.

Theme Eight: The participants expressed the importance of the Indian Center and the Native American Programs staff and support services at UND.

Issue: The participants talked about racism at UND and the Grand Forks community.

## Theme One and Supporting Evidence

*Theme One: The participants expressed concerns regarding their transfer to UND*

Most participants expressed some form of complaint about or suggestion to facilitate a smoother transfer from a tribal college to UND. These have been categorized into three subsections:

1. Inadequate advising at either the tribal college or at UND.
2. Limited number of courses offered at the tribal colleges.
3. The need for "two-plus-two" programs.

*Inadequate Advising at Either the Tribal College or UND*

Some of the participants thought the tribal college could have provided more advice and guidance regarding course selection at the tribal college. Some felt as though

they wasted time taking classes they didn't need and could have benefited from taking others. Regarding the advising he received at the tribal college, Ian stated:

> They messed up my schedule. I think they should be guiding a little bit more, they should check on you, make sure that you are doing everything right, make sure that you're getting everything you need to learn before you even go to the university.

Linus thought the tribal college should help students define why they are attending college. He thought some students were taking classes simply because they had nothing better to do. Regarding his experience with the advising he received at the tribal college, Linus had this to say:

> I think it would have been helpful if they had a counselor system like in high school. Somebody to help you look at a certain area, um, to help you with what "going to college" means. I should have been taking some classes that might have been more pertinent to what I was there for. I think they could have had better advisement as far as which classes to take and not to take.

Molly was advised by a faculty member at UND to take a course she considered to be quite difficult and later found out a course she had previously taken at the tribal college fulfilled this requirement:

> Anyway, I had taken it and they [fellow students] were like, "Why are you in that class?" and I said this is what they told me to take. So, I did a little research of my own and found out that I don't even need it. So now I'm in this class and I can't drop it because it's past the last day to drop.

She also expressed confusion as to who was assigned as her advisor when she arrived at UND. She said, "I don't really know if she's my advisor - if I should see her all the time or what. I don't really know where to go."

*Limited Course Offerings at the Tribal Colleges*

Some participants expressed disappointment at the variety of courses offered at the tribal colleges. Although they were disappointed that they couldn't have prepared better by taking advanced or specialized courses, they all seemed to understand that it would be difficult for the tribal colleges to justify hiring faculty to teach these courses to a limited number of students. Adeline had this to say:

> As far as math and the sciences, they don't really have a lot of options. They don't have a biology major. They just have a general science major that you can transfer with. Now that I've declared a major, she said, I was behind a semester so I think I'm gonna pick up summer courses and play catch up a bit. For my major, those things weren't offered at the tribal college, so I was lacking some of the things that I needed.

Jonathan said:

> They don't offer as quite as much as I would have liked, in the computer field. They just didn't have a whole lot to offer. They had the basic stuff that would help an average person with general knowledge about computers. I just sat in class and did my own thing because I pretty much knew what was going on already.

Linus acknowledged that the tribal college had pre-law suggestions for students, but not a real pre-law curriculum. He said, "Of the things I've taken down there, there was an emphasis on pre-law, but all that means [at the tribal college] is that I took an extra history or micro-economics or something."

*The Need for "Two-plus-two" Programs*

Some participants expressed frustration upon arriving at UND classified as juniors, but facing four more years of undergraduate education. They were careful to check the articulation agreements and made sure the courses they were taking would transfer to UND. Most said they were confident they had taken all their general education courses, thus the first two years of college were complete. However, the participants soon found out there were courses in their field they should have been simultaneously taking along with their general education courses, from the time they were freshmen. As Adeline had stated, "She said I was behind a semester, so I think I'm gonna pick up summer courses and play catch up a bit."

Ian said:

> So I was kind of confused on like, my classes that I took down there and by the time I got up here I was supposed to be in the physical therapy program already. I had to stop and take preparatory classes.

Jonathan probably had the strongest argument regarding the need for smooth transfer. He said:

> One thing it allowed me to do was get my generals out of the way so I could concentrate strictly on my major and minor, but what I didn't realize at the time

> was that they balance your generals along with your major as you go along. So I mean, I come here and I'm taking courses I should have taken as a freshman. I'm taking a prerequisite at the same time as taking a 200-level course.

He even went as far as to say, "The easiest thing that I could have done was just to come to school here first." However, Jonathan is one of the strongest supporters of the tribal college experience. "I don't regret going to tribal college. I got a lot of credit there and I got a lot of things done."

## Theme Two and Supporting Evidence

### *Theme Two: The participants identified personal motivation as a factor leading them toward the completion of their degrees*

Most of the participants expressed components of personal motivation as factors for pursuing their degrees. The first sub-theme is determination. The participants expressed determination to obtain their desired degrees no matter what barriers they face. The second sub-theme is high expectations and responsibility. The participants were disappointed with grades that were less than exceptional. All but one of the participants experienced transfer shock, a temporary decline in GPA the first semester after transfer. However, no matter what grades they received from UND in the fall, most said they could have done better. They also accept full responsibility for their performance in school, rather than blame their instructors or other outside interferences.

#### *Being Determined*

No sub-theme was supported more vehemently than this one. When talking about their expectations to succeed, none of the participants had to think about their answers.

None of the participants included non-completion of their degrees as an option. Everything they stated was stated matter-of-factly, as though there was no room for doubt or argument. Adeline said, "I know I'll make it through UND. I know I'll be graduating." In the fall semester, when Donna was commuting to UND she said, "I'll get a good education and I'll get a lot out of it 'cause I know I have to work hard and I'm not gonna quit. I'm gonna keep going no matter what – even if I have to drive for three years!" When Ian was experiencing some difficulties with his coursework he said, "I won't fail. I'm a person that's like, goal oriented. If I get past this certain point I can make it through the whole way."

While plotting her program of study for the next two years, Joy acknowledged that it was going to be difficult taking two science courses per semester. However, she said, "I don't know if I'm actually gonna make the two-year goal but, I'm definitely going to graduate."

Linus expects to persevere through law school. "I'm gonna make it through this. I am confident. I've never been a quitter." Michelle simply said, "I think I'm gonna be good [at school] because I want to be good." Two Moons commented that although the transition has been a little tough, he will finish here "the same way I did at the tribal college – above average. I pride myself on being above average." Star is determined to succeed for herself and to enable herself to provide for her children:

> I think I'm gonna make it straight through without problems just because I want it so bad. I want to provide for my kids and it doesn't matter what the community is. It doesn't matter what people call me in classes. It doesn't matter what people

> say and do. It's me and I am finishing my education for no other people than for me. That's how I feel right now. I'm twenty-six years old and I need to get on with it.

Tammy experienced some difficulties with an instructor at UND who told her the work she had been turning in wasn't of very good quality. She said, "I kind of got upset but I didn't let her discourage me. I really worked hard on my final paper and the paper before that and ended up getting an A on both of them." She continued:

> I think I'll do pretty good because I have my mind set that I'm going to and I've always done the best that I could in everything that I did. I work to my highest ability and I know I can do it here.

*Accepting Responsibility*

Not only are the participants determined to succeed in school, they take responsibility for their own actions. Adeline said, "I have such high expectations of myself." Most expressed disappointment when they received less than perfect grades. They placed the blame on factors that they are in control of. Furthermore, it is evident they analyzed their performance, asking 'why' and 'what can I do better next time?' They also consider measures to ease their disappointment when they don't live up to their expectations. Adeline went on:

> I also know if I don't do so well in something I can't beat myself up over it. There's just some things you're good at and some things you're not. You just have to accept your faults and pick up in other places.

The first two weeks at UND were tough for Donna. She found the classes to be fast-paced and she wasn't used to that. "The first two weeks I wanted to cry. I was ready to give up. I thought, Okay, this is reality. I need to do my work and I need to study. I just have to work harder for an A." She admits 'slacking' the first few weeks of the spring semester, "I'm going to class and everything, but I know I could work harder and I know I should be reading more." Even though supposedly her life should be easier now, no longer commuting and living in UND family housing, she feels she has become lazy. Ian talked about transitioning from home to being on his own:

> What hits you is that you have too much freedom I think. You're away from home and you feel like you're free I guess and I think laziness sets in if your mind's not set. You have to push yourself so you do well up here. You can't slough off I guess.

To combat the change in his environment, he knows the answer lies within him. He said, "I need to study more, study a lot more actually."

During the first semester, Joy wasn't getting as high grades on her assignments as she wanted. She said, "I'm not performing as well as I'd like to right now." On the subject of math specifically, she said, "I'm good enough at it, but you know, there's room for improvement." After seeing her fall semester grades she commented, "I think I did fairly well for just getting here so I'm kind of pleased, but it's not quite what I expected you know."

Jonathan talked about having been "out of practice" with studying and has taken steps to improve. "I'm getting better now, I've taken a study skills course that has helped

me out." He said he frequently procrastinated as well. "The procrastination thing has come down a bit. I don't do that so much."

The grades on his first set of exams in the fall were somewhat disappointing to Linus. "I was a little disappointed. I thought to myself, was it because I didn't study hard enough? Maybe I have to work a little bit harder at it." Reflecting on whether UND is what he expected it to be or not, he said:

> I guess at first there was a question in my mind if I could handle it [UND]. I'm making it to all my classes, but anyone can do that. I don't want to say I'm smart, because I think it has to do more with if the person's willing to do the work. At first I was a little concerned with if I could comprehend and understand everything. But now that's changed. I know it's just a matter of working at it.

In the fall semester, he completed twelve credits with a 3.50 GPA. He said of his performance, "I did pretty good, but I could have, believe it or not, I know I could have done better."

Michelle blames her shortcomings on spending too much time at her friend's apartment. "I think I need to start staying in my dorm because it's less distracting and I can study more." By spring semester she said she was spending more time in her own residence hall room. Of her performance in the fall, she said, "I think I did okay. I wish I would have done better in chemistry. That's the only thing I'm not happy about. I don't think I worked hard enough on it." When asked if there was anything anybody could have done to help her get better grades she said, "It was me. I mean, there were tutors

available [but I didn't use them]. I just didn't study enough. Sometimes I just won't study you know, that's the problem. So this semester that's what I'm trying to do."

Although Molly refers to her learning disability as a factor in her performance in school, she says she is responsible for making up for it by studying more. "I have to apply myself, study more. Since I have that learning disability, I have to find ways that work for me."

Star is finding her workload easier here than it was at the tribal college. "I haven't confronted anything that has been too difficult for me in school. I just have to discipline myself more." She received a disappointing grade in one class. "I don't know what happened there with me, but I feel this semester I'm trying a lot harder and spending more time studying."

Spring semester, Tammy was experiencing difficulty in algebra, but she was seeking help early in the semester. "I'm taking algebra right now and really having a tough time. But, I'm working with a tutor." She says she wished she would have taken algebra at the tribal college as it might have been easier. "It's my own fault I didn't take algebra there."

Two Moons' chronic pain is having an effect on his academic performance. "It's all me, I've been in chronic pain and my sleeping pattern sucks. I try to study, but I don't think I'm maintaining the way I used to." He is seeking help to control his pain, but so far has been unsuccessful. Although he knows the pain is part of the problem, he also stated that he needs to manage his time better. "It's time management. I just think that it's a matter of applying yourself." He has sought help for the symptoms related to his

pain such as the inability to concentrate and he says that it is helping. Of his performance fall semester he had this to say:

> I did poor. I'm so mad at myself I can't stand it. I like to excel at whatever I endeavor and this way, I'm not happy. Getting an F is not with me, I don't like getting B's! So far I'm doing a little better – now if I can just keep it up.

## Theme Three and Supporting Evidence

### *Theme Three: The participants identified family as playing an important part in their educational experiences and decisions*

Most of the participants talked about their families and how they affect their educational experiences and decisions. Several have had to leave their families behind while they pursued their education at UND. Adeline had to leave her young child with her mother most weeks while she attended college. As difficult as the situation was, she knew that at the time it was best for both of them. Adeline used her time alone wisely by studying. She traveled home often to see her daughter and sometimes her mother brought her to Grand Forks. Family definitely was a factor in Adeline's decision on where to attend college:

> I chose UND because of the location. It's closer to home than if I were to go somewhere else because my mom keeps my daughter off and on, so when we switch back and forth it's just a shorter drive than me going out of state somewhere. When you're six hours away from home you don't get to see your family as much so it turns into more of a personal loss.

At her interview in January, she hoped that her mother would be able to live with her, which would enable her to keep her child with her at all times. "By next year, she should be in Head Start and my mom is thinking about coming here to finish her LPN licensing. Hopefully she does that so we can work our schedules around [for child care]."

Donna's college plans were affected by her family right from the start. She didn't receive help from her parents financially or with forms and had to learn everything on her own. As a result, she was short on finances her freshman year of college and had to drop out. A while later, she found herself working at a daycare and decided to return to school because, she said, "I didn't want to do daycare the rest of my life." By this time she was married and they moved out of state so she could attend college. The first semester went well. She made the Dean's list. However, she got pregnant during the spring semester and had to drop out again, this time because of severe morning sickness. Here again, she stopped out of the education system due to family matters. Her next step was to move to her home reservation where she attended tribal college. "I went to tribal college because they had a child care facility. It was just easy." She attended there for one year and transferred to UND. She began the year commuting, but said she didn't think of it as difficult:

> I enjoy the drive. It gives me time to think. Let's say I'm going nuts, getting kids ready and all this and if I got somewhere in five minutes my head would still be spinning. I like the drive, it gets me through it. However, I have to get up at five and don't get home until eight, then I have to take care of the kids and I'm tired. It's hard but I don't let it get at me.

By spring, Donna had found an apartment in Grand Forks and moved her family there. When interviewed in the fall, she said she didn't get much support from her family. In the spring, she said, "My husband has gotten a lot better."

Ian does not have a family of his own, but his parents still have a lot of influence in his life. He said they put a lot of pressure on him to do well in school:

> I have to go back [home] often, my parents call every night and they expect me to do good and they're pressuring me to do good and I don't like having that feeling of people pushing me. I want to do it for myself. They [my parents] are making me feel bad [for not doing well].

Family played an important part in Joy's life as well. Joy had a sister living in Grand Forks when she came to college. "She was pretty good about telling me what to do and all that." While attending school herself, she also had concern for another sister attending a tribal college back home. "My family said she wasn't doing very well in school. She was too busy being with her friends. Now she's doing better though. She's doing her work and stuff." One more family aspect for Joy is that her mother is attending graduate school and shares an apartment with Joy and her husband.

Linus got a lot of support from his wife and family. He comes from a well-educated family. His mother and most of his brothers and sisters have bachelor's, graduate, or professional degrees. His wife is very helpful and supportive of his decision to attend school. The worst thing about being in Grand Forks is that he has to be apart from his family, as they are living at home where his wife works:

> When I first started I was thinking, yep, five years, I'm gonna do it. But now, I'm thinking, five years traveling back and forth, my family's over there and I'm over here? I have a real connection with my youngest child and I keep thinking, I'm seeing this [child] once a week. How much of his life am I willing to miss?

In the spring, his oldest daughter was living with him and, he says, the initial shock of separation from his family was over:

> It's getting better because I realize that I'm going home every weekend or their coming up here and during the week I'm busy anyway. Plus, my daughter lives here with me. I have a little company that way. I think the initial shock is what got me at first. I can see next year as not being a problem at all.

When Michelle was a freshman, she attended an out-of-state school. "It was okay because I had some family there. I had a cousin there so that made it a lot easier. I liked it a lot, but I was really homesick." Her performance in school was good. Her grades were good, but she decided to move home to attend tribal college the following year. "I came home. I don't know, I was really homesick because I'm really close to my family." After graduating from tribal college, she transferred to UND. She had several friends and relatives here and she was able to go home some weekends.

Tammy had to leave her children and husband behind to attend college as well. She said her children were worried about her when she first moved to Grand Forks. Her children have stayed with her part time; the youngest child who is under one year old and a six-year-old. "I kind of have a hard time leaving him [the six-year-old]. Also, it's hard having the baby here because he wants attention the minute I walk in and I end up paying

more attention to him than anything else." Her youngest child was staying at home with her husband at the time of her interview in January. "It was hard to come back knowing he's back [home]. I'm so used to being busy with him it's like I don't have the ambition to do anything now." Tammy's husband was driving to Grand Forks every Friday after he got off work and they would drive back home that evening. She said she was going home most weekends, unless her family came here.

## Theme Four and Supporting Evidence

*Theme Four: The participants described various financial concerns*

Many of the students profiled in this study were considered fully-funded by UND and federal guidelines. They transferred in with GPA's above 3.0 and thus, most were recipients of numerous and generous scholarships. However, each of them expressed concerns of some sort about their financial situations. These concerns are sorted into two categories. The first category is "student aid and scholarships" and the second category is "the need for good grades as an incentive for scholarship dollars."

### *Student Aid and Scholarships*

Several of the participants expressed their gratitude to the tribal college staff and UND staff for assistance they received identifying scholarships and filling out applications. While at her tribal college, Adeline received help from a staff member in filling out a generous scholarship application. As it turned out, she received the scholarship and was very thankful for the assistance she received. "I was one of the [scholarship recipients] and so my final year at [tribal college] was well taken care of." The scholarship transferred with her to UND, but she said, the cost of living is much

higher here. "I can suggest for students coming here, to make sure you have other funding because it does cost a lot to come to the university. The cost of living is way higher." She also talked about the importance of knowing what your resources are and taking the initiative to seek them out. She talked about UND campus resources and Grand Forks community resources:

> When you come into a larger city, I would say go out and try and find all your resources because a lot of the things I know, I know other students that I talked to didn't even know they exist. They would ask me, "Where did you get that from?" And I would say, you have to do the work. You have to go looking. You can't just expect it to come to you all the time.

In the spring, she talked about her rent being high, but that she had sought a community resource to ease the problem:

> I don't think the financial aid office realizes that the cost of living in an apartment is higher than living in a dorm. I was really running low on funds last semester. I think I'll do all right this semester though, because I went over to the Grand Forks Housing Authority and I am on the waiting list. [When I get accepted] that will cut a lot of my cost down.

Donna also had a good experience with scholarship assistance at the tribal college. Like Adeline, she also stressed that it is the student's responsibility to pursue the resources:

> The financial aid lady introduced me to Fastweb [a free Internet-based scholarship search engine]. She introduced me to all the scholarships that are out there for

> Native Americans. She helped me fill out the applications and write the essays. It was her helping me with financial aid that really, really helped me. I knew that I could look other places and that it wasn't going to just come to me. I had to go look for it.

She also mentioned a staff member at Native American Programs who helped her get a scholarship to attend UND. She said, "He was really helpful. He helped me get that scholarship." Joy said the UND staff who hosted the summer program she attended did a good job of helping her apply for financial aid. "They helped me out a lot with financial aid so I had a really good adjustment I think."

When Jonathan originally applied for UND and was accepted, he was granted a tuition waiver and several other scholarships. "I originally planned to come to UND. I had a free ride, basically. I pretty much had everything paid." In the transfer to Minot, he lost most of those resources. Upon his return to UND in the fall of 2001, he experienced financial hardship again. He admits that he himself was primarily responsible for the hardship, because he was late in applying for student aid; nonetheless, lack of financial aid was still a hardship.

Linus talked about how difficult it was for him to complete the paperwork involved in applying for scholarships. He said, "I relied on my wife to take care of most of that stuff. I didn't have the patience for it. I'm better at it now though." At the tribal college he previously attended, the financial aid office took care of much of the paperwork for his scholarships. At UND, he wasn't aware he had to do these things for himself. As a result, some of his spring financial aid was late. He said, "Applying for

scholarships takes a lot of energy out of me. I would like it if I had someone to sit down with me once a week or so and help me fill out scholarship applications."

Michelle said her tribal college also helped her seek and apply for scholarships. "They were really helpful with that [applying for financial aid]. They made us aware of scholarships."

Molly struggled financially when she was a student at the tribal college. She said that with a family, it was tough going to school without adequate aid. The tribal college she attended offered tuition waivers for family members of employees, which she wasn't eligible for. She wished the college would offer tuition waivers to everyone, based on performance in school. Another frustrating situation that had an impact financially resulted when she attempted to return books to the bookstore at UND. She wasn't aware of the policies in place for returns, and thus was not able to return them.

Star experienced financial difficulty at the tribal college as well. The program she was in was awaiting accreditation so the students could not receive the Pell grant and other federal dollars they were expecting. Being a single mother, this was especially difficult. At UND, she is finding paying rent to be her biggest financial obstacle. She suggested, "The tribe should buy an apartment building for their students to live in during the transfer phase. That's the only thing that is really overwhelming right now. We [students] need something that is more affordable." She also regrets that she doesn't have a computer of her own. She wished there was a program of some sort to help students buy computers. She was grateful for the assistance she was receiving from

Native American Programs in providing the scholarship providers the documents they regularly requested of her.

After making mistakes on her application for federal student aid, Tammy's financial aid package was deemed inadequate. She sought help at Native American Programs where staff members assisted her with applications and a budget. Two Moons' ability to attend UND was riding on whether or not he received enough financial aid. "It all depended on if I could afford it. I got that scholarship so here we are."

*The Need for Good Grades as an Incentive for Scholarship Dollars*

Many of the students were concerned with keeping their grades up to scholarship standards. Donna said, "I have to keep my GPA above 3.5 [to keep my scholarship]. So I sent my grades in and I'm waiting for my check." Ian said, "If I fail a class I don't know what I'd do. I'd be so disappointed and also, I'd lose all my scholarships." In the fall, Jonathan found himself searching for courses to fill the twelve-credit requirement dictated by his funding source:

> Right now I'm kind of hurting. I'm thinking about trying to drop a class right now but I need two credits to pick up so I can stay a full-time student and keep my scholarships. I'm very worried at this point.

As it turned out, he was unable to find classes late in the fall semester to fulfill the twelve-credit minimum course load. In the spring, he was carrying sixteen credits to make up for the shortage. In the spring, Two Moons also had to carry extra credits because he dropped below twelve credits in the fall. "I had to take fifteen credits because I only completed nine in the fall."

## Theme Five and Supporting Evidence

*Theme Five: The participants reported that the faculty at tribal colleges have different teaching styles than the faculty at UND, thus, the students have had to adjust their own learning styles and study methods*

Here again, a theme is divided into subsections. The first subsection is "Indian Learning Style." Some of the participants repeatedly talked about how Indian people have a different learning style than the majority population. They went on to say how the instructors at the tribal high schools and colleges are aware of this and teach accordingly. The difficulty with this, they say, is when they transfer to the university they have to adjust to a different teaching style. The second subsection is simply, "Different Teaching Style," not necessarily having to do with cultural characteristics. Several of the participants talked about how the faculty members at tribal colleges have different teaching styles than the faculty at UND. Under both subsections, the participants added that rather than wishing the faculty would change, they accept the changes and are adjusting, or attempting to adjust their own learning styles and study methods.

### *"Indian" Learning Style*

Ian began speaking about how culturally, Indian people have different learning styles than the majority population:

> They're [tribal colleges] still teaching with hands on kind of stuff. It was mostly like high school I guess. Coming here was a little different. They say Indians learn by visual and hands on stuff, so it's kind of hard when you come here. You have to learn everything visual, learn from taking notes, no demonstrations.

When we met in January he talked about how he was seeking assistance to adjust to this unfamiliar learning style. "I thought I could do it myself, but now I'm seeking help [tutoring]."

Molly also talked about an "Indian" style of learning. "She [a tribal college instructor] tried to reach our, learning style you know, more relating to what we can understand. A lot of Native Americans learn differently. They're more hands-on, more 'story.' Anyways, that's how I am."

*Different Teaching Style*

The second category of theme five is, a different teaching style. In the fall, Joy said it was "different" at UND. "It's different here. I have to do a lot more concentration and memorization. I have to develop new ways to study." Jonathan talked about how test-taking differs, in general, at UND from tribal college. He said, "I've never been a great test taker. It's different than what I know 'hands on'." Although he didn't attribute it to his culture like Ian did, he said, "I can visually do things with my hands and I understand a lot better than I can from reading a book. Reading from a book, it just doesn't register. A hands-on person is what I am."

Linus's concerns had to do more with personal relations with faculty and students that are possible at smaller, tribal colleges than at a larger institution such as UND. He said:

> There's one thing I lost [by transferring to UND]. It's the personal relationship with the teachers. You could just sit and talk to them with ten people in the class. You could have real discussions about community issues. If you're in a

> government class you could talk about tribal government. It's not constantly just lecture, lecture, lecture. You probably heard this before, but here [at UND] you're just a statistic, more of like a number here. When it came time to take a test, the instructor reviewed in class with us. Here, you have to be more professional, get your own study groups together. That's hard.

Molly also missed the personal attention she received at the tribal college. "It was good, I liked it. I liked it a lot because it was smaller and I knew everybody."

Although Star didn't state that the different teaching style she was experiencing at UND was different from the style at tribal college, she did say that a particular faculty member had a different teaching style she was trying to adjust to.

> I'm not used to that type of teaching. It's usually, 'what do you know,' not 'let's trick you and stump you and reword things to confuse you.' I'm not saying it's all his fault; it's just that I couldn't adapt myself to his mode of teaching.

## Theme Six and Supporting Evidence

### *Theme Six: The participants thought the faculties at their respective tribal colleges were too lenient*

Most of the participants in this study spoke highly of their tribal college experiences, often citing how they probably wouldn't be at UND if it weren't for the tribal college. More often than not, they recommend that other people, such as family and friends, should attend tribal colleges before attempting four-year institutions. However, most of the participants thought the faculties at their respective tribal colleges were too lenient. More specifically, by lenient, the students meant two things: 1) they

weren't strictly held to deadlines, and 2) they were not expected to cover all the content the course required. They appreciated the leniency while attending the tribal colleges, but it made them less well-prepared to attend UND.

*Deadlines*

On deadlines, Donna had this to say:

> [We] wouldn't have our work done and students would complain and the instructor would say, okay, let's do it next week. I started getting into that. I didn't like it because I knew I couldn't do that here. I think that the tribal colleges need to teach the students to do their homework and to hand it in. They need to get used to doing it because when they get here it's just totally different. They don't really expect much out of you and they're too lenient, but not all of them. There were some really good instructors [at tribal college].

Donna gave an example where one day her class reviewed for a test and only one person showed up on the day of the test. The students were allowed to take the test at a later date and she thought maybe they should have been penalized for missing it on the set date. "That's what I didn't like about tribal college, they keep giving you chances and going on and on and on and right before grades are submitted you have people with all this homework trying to take tests." Michelle said, "It's [tribal college] more lenient on some things, you know, like if you miss a deadline. When I came here, I had to get used to [meeting deadlines] again." Ian had this to say:

> They're more lax over there [at tribal colleges] because they give you a certain amount of time, but sometimes they'll give you little waivers and you can just slough off and ask them to give you a little bit more time to do it.

Two Moons said, "Tribal college could probably prepare you better for the university. Maybe they're a little too lenient in some ways." Like the others, he was concerned about deadlines:

> I think the professors back there need to do better justice to the students that truly intend to go on [to another institution]. You know, you have to do this and you better have it done on time. I mean, it's good if you're not planning on going anywhere. They'll work with you, which is good, but when you're supposed to do something you should do it. It's great that they give you one-on-one time, but they let you do what you want as long as you get your work in by the end of the semester.

*Content*

Joy found that she wasn't as well prepared for upper-level courses as she would have been had the tribal college covered more material. She said:

> They take longer to go through the material and I think that in some ways it was good that you understood what they were teaching you, but in other ways it was bad because you didn't learn everything that was required for the course.

Again, in the spring, she said, "Well I think they're [tribal colleges] just a little bit too lenient."

Jonathan said, "Some classes were really challenging, but then depending on who the instructors were, some of them seemed a little laid back." When asked what she meant when she said she thought UND was "harder" than tribal college, Michelle said:

> It [tribal college] was just a lot easier. I mean, it's the same material but they didn't expect you to know as much. Here [UND] you have to know all the details and everything and at home they didn't really think that.

Molly compared the tribal college to UND, "The [tribal] college is different than other colleges, you know, you're babied and pampered a lot. They're really lenient." However, she did mention one instructor that she did not consider lenient. "I never worked so hard for an A or a B in my life! I was grateful. She taught me a lot."

## Theme Seven and Supporting Evidence

### *Theme Seven: The participants recommended that others attend tribal colleges before attending four-year institutions*

Overall, the participants said their experiences at their respective tribal colleges were excellent. With the exception of some of the faculty being "too lenient," they feel the tribal colleges prepared them well for attending UND. They highly recommend that friends and family attend a tribal college before transferring to a four-year institution. Adeline appreciated the convenience of the location of her tribal college. She said, "At [tribal college] you were right down the street. It's so convenient for you to just go to college right there."

Donna said, "I always recommend taking everything [possible] down there [at tribal college]." She says she appreciated the supportive atmosphere of the tribal college:

> It was really supportive. If they couldn't help you they tried to find a way to help you. They're really helpful and really supportive. Even when you're no longer their responsibility they care about what you're doing and how you're doing it.

Joy advised her sister to attend the tribal college before UND. "I told her to go one year and then leave, but she stayed for two years. I told her, well, try and take as many science courses as you can there." About attending the tribal college, Linus said:

> It's probably the best move I made as far as going back to school is concerned. At the time, I didn't have the confidence to come right to a four-year school. Definitely, without a doubt, [tribal college] gave me that confidence. Besides, it was right at home and I had my family there. Also, I knew the teachers. It's a really nice school and the timing was right I guess. It pointed me in the right direction.

Star highly recommends the tribal college she attended:

> At [tribal college] they helped me feel strong enough that I could come here and make it. Especially the women there, they're cultural and they make you feel like you're empowered and strong and that you're, you're a star, not just a number. I would suggest that any one of my brothers and sisters and anyone of my family start there before they go to a university because it's such a good start.

Being an older than average student, Tammy said, "For advice that I would give to younger students, I think they should go to tribal college first before they come here because it's pretty scary here. And then transfer right away instead of waiting." She waited ten years after tribal college to attend UND. "It's surprising how much I forgot."

Two Moons is also an older than average student. He waited thirty years between getting his GED and attending tribal college. When asked if he thought it was a good idea for him to attend tribal college before UND he said, "Definitely, without a doubt. I don't even know if I could make it if I wouldn't have been there first."

## Theme Eight and Supporting Evidence

*Theme Eight: The participants expressed the importance of the Indian Center and the Native American Programs staff and support services at UND*

The support the participants received from the Native American Programs staff and the importance of the Indian Center on campus came up numerous times. The fact that the researcher is a staff member of Native American Programs may have been a factor in their praises. The fact that the interviews were held at the Native American Programs offices may also have influenced the participants. Nevertheless, this theme came up enough times to identify it as significant.

Donna said of a staff member, "He was really helpful and he helped me get that scholarship. He helped me do everything so I know that this place can be really supportive." She went on to say about the NAP staff in general, "They'll direct you. So I'm really glad with Native American Programs this year." Ian said, "Whenever I went in there and asked for help it seemed like everybody wanted to help. They made me feel right." Jonathan received encouragement and assistance from NAP staff as he was making the decision to attend UND:

> The people are great here. They're willing to help. I never had a problem meeting with someone [NAP staff member] because if one person is out, there's

> usually someone else I can talk to. Support wise, it was very easy for me to make the decision to come here.

He also talked about spending time at the Indian Center:

> I'm always there so I hear about everything that's going on. If there's a new scholarship out [NAP staff member] will say something about it. It's really nice over there, where people actually care, I should say. NAP is the one thing that I highly love about this place. It helps me out with everything that I need and it's a good place to hang out. I get to meet people from back home and other reservations. It's really nice.

Molly talked about calling NAP for assistance even before arriving on campus. "I didn't know any of that. I called here maybe twice a week. I think they were getting tired of me calling." Upon arrival she said, "The Native American Center – that's really helpful." Michelle frequented the Indian Center, but did state specifically what type of assistance she received, "I just starting going to NAP and just hanging out. They were really helpful." Star appreciated the convenience of NAP staff assistance, "Just being able to go there and have somebody who's helping you. It helps that they [NAP staff] take on some of the responsibility for you." Tammy said:

> I hadn't received a lot of help with my financial aid, but this program [NAP] has really helped me. Just even for somebody to talk to I call once in awhile because I don't really know that many people here yet. I go to the Native American Center a lot if I have questions or anything.

The Issue of Racism and Supporting Evidence

*Issue: The participants talked about racism at UND and the Grand Forks community*

This issue wasn't brought up in the interviews enough times to identify it as a theme, however, given the importance of the issue in today's society it must be mentioned. Two participants experienced racism since arriving in Grand Forks and one discussed the Fighting Sioux nickname and logo controversy. For the most part, Star was enjoying her stay in Grand Forks. She said overall, the people she interacted with at UND were nice, but she felt the community was racist:

> Outside of school, I feel the community is racist. It's almost everywhere I go I feel like I'm being stared at, like I'm gonna steal something. I feel like I get a lot of bad attitudes and a lot of bad treatment. I find that this community could be categorized as a racist community. I'm just here to get my education so I'm not letting it bother me too much on a personal level.

At her interview in the January she talked about an incident that had occurred late in the fall:

> My neighbors were screaming racial slurs at my brother and me. I had a girl on the phone telling me "You dirty poor Indian. Why don't you go back to the reservation and get the hell out of here?" The staff at [UND] housing was very supportive and very nice and it ended up that the neighbors moved. It was just things like that that just shock me; they're so 'in my face.' I never, never confronted that until I came here.

Two Moons also felt the community was racist. He said, "There's prejudice around here. You know there is." He experienced racism at UND as well:

> He [his instructor] told me I looked like a Taliban. I didn't know what to do about that. I like to think that now that I'm older it just doesn't hurt as much. I just don't go off the handle like I used to. I thought about it and confronted him the next day. He stepped back and apologized. I'm still not sure what to think about that. I mean, is he a bigot or what?

It is important to identify the Fighting Sioux nickname and logo issue because at the time of the interviews, the controversy had been particularly intense for about two years. Interestingly, only one person mentioned the issue. Adeline commented:

> With the whole logo thing, I just try to stay neutral with it. I have a friend who's really anti-logo and I was like, what's your problem? It's just a logo. You didn't come here to debate over a logo. You came here to go to school. And besides, you knew when you came to school here that the logo was here. You made the choice to be here so why complain about it now. [I] got into a few heated debates about it.

## Summary

Most of the participants thought that their transfer from tribal college to UND could have been smoother. Some thought the advice on transfer they received at either the tribal college or from UND was not accurate and/or appropriate. Others wished the tribal colleges could have offered more courses to better prepare them for UND, but understood the limitations the tribal colleges had with faculty, space, and resources.

Several of them transferred to UND with the notion they had completed their first two years at the tribal college and had only two years to go at UND. Those who were science majors found that UND recommended coursework for these programs beginning their freshman year, thus, they faced three or four additional years at UND. Factors of personal motivation were very important toward the completion of their degrees. The participants were found to be vehemently determined, and accepting of responsibility for their performance in school, whether they perceived it as good or bad. Most of the participants talked about their families and how they affect their educational experiences and decisions. Some struggled with leaving family members behind to pursue their educational goals, while others brought their families with them, which caused a different type of stress. Some talked about the pressure their parents placed on them to succeed in school, and others felt pressure to succeed so they could provide for their own children.

Although most of the participants were considered fully-funded by federal and UND guidelines and were grateful for the financial aid they were receiving, most experienced financial hardships to some degree. The high cost of living in Grand Forks, compared to the cost of living on the reservations where they came from, was the most difficult financial adjustment mentioned. Some were concerned about getting good grades while at UND in order to keep the merit-based scholarships they were receiving.

The participants identified differences in teaching styles between tribal college faculties and UND faculties. Some thought the difference was cultural; others simply saw it as different. Although the participants appreciated the leniency of the tribal college faculties, they thought it made them less well-prepared for the university.

Leniency was described in two ways: 1) they weren't strictly held to deadlines, and 2) they were not expected to cover all the content the courses required. Despite the different teaching styles and the leniency of the faculty, they all recommended that others attend tribal colleges before attempting enrolling at four-year institutions.

Upon arrival at UND, the participants were appreciative of the assistance they received from the Native American Programs staff. They also commented on how important it was to have a place, specifically the American Indian Center, to socialize among other native people where they felt welcome and comfortable.

Finally, although only three participants talked about racism, the issue is important and the incidents mentioned were significant enough to be reported. Two participants experienced overt racism, but seemed to accept it as a part of life in Grand Forks. As the controversy was at a high point at the time of the interviews, it was surprising to the researcher that only one person mentioned the Fighting Sioux nickname and logo issue. Further, the interviewee took a neutral position on the issue. The following chapter, Chapter V, will provide a discussion of the literature in reference to the themes.

# CHAPTER V

## DISCUSSION OF THE LITERATURE IN REFERENCE TO THE THEMES

This chapter provides a discussion of selected literature that relates to each of the eight themes and the issue of racism that emerged from the data collected through the in-depth interviews and data sheets.

### Theme One and Discussion of the Literature

*Theme One: The participants expressed concerns regarding their transfer to UND*

Most tribal colleges have strong relationships with state colleges and universities to facilitate transfers (AIHEC, 1999). However, as the data have shown in this study, students feel they could benefit from improvements in the transfer process. Today's tribal colleges are considered comprehensive community colleges with many functions. The primary goal is to be responsive to the broadly defined educational needs of its community. Community colleges that value all functions equally and that are committed to responding rapidly to changing community interests and needs are likely to face problems with the transfer function (Knoell, 1982).

Community colleges are the crucial point of access to higher education for millions of low-income and minority students. For a variety of reasons, 49 percent of all undergraduates in the U. S. begin their journey through higher education in community colleges (AIHEC, 1999). In a study of tribal college graduates, it was found that 32 percent were attending college for a bachelor's degree and three percent were attending

college for a graduate or professional degree (AIHEC, 2000). Given these demographics, community colleges, including tribal colleges, must understand the importance of their mission as collegiate institutions and not view themselves as simply educational sites offering whatever local communities or businesses wish to support.

> Central to the community college's collegiate mission is its role in facilitating the transfer of students from one level of higher education to another, yet no function has been more misunderstood or recently neglected by community college administrators and faculty. (Bernstein, 1986, p. 33)

More and more, tribal college students continue on to four-year institutions after earning their degrees at tribal colleges and, having had a successful college experience, do well academically. One study of students from Salish Kootenai College in Montana found that American Indian students who had attended the college and then transferred to the University of Montana earned higher grade point averages and had higher graduation rates than Indian students who had gone to the university directly from high school (AIHEC, 1999). "It is encouraging that many of the Tribal College graduates are continuing to seek higher education, because educational attainment rates among American Indians in general are low" (AIHEC, 2000, p. 10).

The perception of some of the respondents in this study was that the advising they received from either the tribal college or the university regarding transfer could have been better. Some were frustrated by the lack of courses offered at the tribal college level. Some said that even though "all their credits transferred" to UND, several faced additional coursework. For certain majors, they were missing courses they should have

taken as freshmen. Due to the schedule of prerequisites, they now had to take beginning courses and fill their schedules with electives in order to carry twelve credits to ensure eligibility for financial aid.

Better and more programmatic articulation agreements between higher education systems can have a positive effect on transfer however, these educational agreements may not have much effect on factors that govern teaching and learning. When the time comes to evaluate credits, students may find that much of their previous work will not be accepted for credit toward their major. "In other words, the articulation agreements may not be worth the paper on which they were written" (Bernstein, 1986, p. 38). Bernstein painted a bleak picture of articulation agreements, but institutions such as UND have since developed some very helpful articulation agreements with the North Dakota tribal colleges (UND, 2001).

In addressing transfer problems, the first step to consider is identifying who the future transfer students are and to have a program designed especially for them. "The transfer program and the students enrolled in it must be identified as a function and a clientele distinct from the other community college functions and clienteles" (Knoell, 1982, p. 12). Kissler (1982) said efforts to broaden access, which includes admitting students with basic skills deficiencies and the expansion of vocational programs, has not left the community colleges enough resources to concentrate on the transfer function. Palmer (1986) also insists that the identification, assessment, and tracking of potential transfer students is essential to smooth the flow of students from community colleges to baccalaureate-granting institutions. He says that efforts to improve transfer depend

largely on communication between college personnel and students. College personnel need to identify potential transfer students, gather information on their strengths and weaknesses, and provide information to the students on support services and the transferability of courses. Students also need to keep track of their progress and keep their advisors informed of changes in their goals and plans.

Advising plays an important role in student retention. Most students need advising, but institutions are sufficiently different so that no foolproof advising system exists. Transfer advisers must be knowledgeable about all the potential institutions their students may transfer to. Advising is likely to reduce attrition when the advisers are concerned with and informed about the student and are familiar with the options and regulations of the institution. "Students who, through their advisers, get a positive attitude toward themselves, their institution, and how their schooling fits in with their lives and careers are more likely to remain enrolled" (Bean, 1990, p. 159).

Offering courses that transfer and advising transfer students are necessary but not sufficient elements of a transfer program. Identifying and counseling students with the potential to succeed in baccalaureate degree programs are also important. This is especially true for students who may have low educational and career aspirations. The goal is not to force students into transferring, but to inform and advise them about educational and career opportunities at the baccalaureate level (Knoell, 1982).

Understandably, tribal colleges can only offer a limited variety of coursework. The students in this study who experienced the most frustration with limited coursework were interested in the sciences. Many colleges are eager to add or expand programs in

the sciences, but often find they are inadequately prepared to offer quality programs. "All these programs offer more opportunities for students, but also tend to reveal all too clearly weaknesses in the infrastructure: small and poorly stocked libraries, inadequate classroom and laboratory space, and more, (Boyer, 1997, p. 84). In these cases, it may benefit some students to be attend a four-year institution sooner than their third year of college

In an overview of national community college curriculum data, it was found that although distance education courses have increased, the traditional liberal arts curriculum on campuses is relatively stable. Fifty-four percent of the course sections in the community college curriculum were in liberal arts and overall, 74 percent of liberal arts courses were transferable to in-state four-year public institutions (Striplin, 2000).

Collaborative programs, sometimes called two-plus-two programs, have had some success, but aren't always the answer. In the Carnegie Foundation Special Report on Native American Colleges, Bay Mills Community College President Martha McCleod discussed a two-plus-two degree program in education offered in conjunction with Northern Michigan State University. "These agreements and gestures of goodwill directly benefit students, who now know they can make a seamless transition to a variety of institutions in Michigan and neighboring states, confident that they will not have to justify the quality of their tribal college instruction" (Boyer, 1997, p. 86). Again, it is difficult to offer a wide variety of these programs because of the lack of facilities and faculty.

In his recommendations for action, Boyer urged tribal colleges to enrich their curricula and build stronger collaboration with non-Indian institutions. The use of distance learning technology, allowing colleges to send and receive instruction is vital. In Montana, three tribal colleges are sharing courses with a non-Indian four-year institution. The tribal colleges offer language and culture courses in exchange for math and science instruction from the non-Indian partner. Similarly, the University of Great Falls is offering a bachelor's degree to four Montana tribal colleges via inter active video. "Distance learning technology may offer a cost-effective path to stronger and more complete programs of study" (Boyer, 1997, p. 90).

Many community colleges participate in partnership programs with four-year institutions to help promote transfer at their institutions. Some of the main aspects of these programs include a core curriculum that provides unified courses with thematic linkages, rigorous courses that use interdisciplinary approaches and innovative teaching approaches, the development of faculty-student relationships, and extracurricular experiences into the program. Before these programs can be developed, community colleges and four-year institutions must understand the student and his/her academic issues and the institutional factors associated with transfer. With this kind of understanding, support programs can be developed that will facilitate successful transfer and persistence to the baccalaureate degree and beyond (Kim, 2001).

In a guide written for tribal college transfer students, Robbins (1998) encouraged the transfer students to take an active part in the transfer process and not rely entirely on student support personnel. "Transfer can be a difficult and stressful experience.

Planning your transfer will help you ease the transition process and begin to develop systematic ways of planning for other parts of your life" (p. 16).

## Theme Two and Discussion of the Literature

### *Theme Two: The participants identified personal motivation as a factor toward the completion of their degrees*

Learning can't happen unless a student is ready and willing to pursue the learning experience. A variety of studies have emphasized the importance of personal motivation as a factor for successful learning (Flood & Moll, 1990). Several of the participants expressed views that could clearly be categorized as dealing with personal motivation. First, they have a strong sense of determination to complete their degree programs. Second, they are motivated by high expectations of themselves. Some were older than average students who had clearly defined goals. Some were at UND because their parents expected them to attend college.

> Professors have found that older, more mature students returning to school for continuing education frequently have more motivation to learn than the average college-age student. Older, more mature students know why they want to attend college. The average college-age student often has less motivation and attends college because of parental expectations or because it is "the thing to do." (Flood & Moll, 1990, p. 23)

Not only do these students expect to finish their baccalaureate degrees, but they expect to achieve high GPAs in the process. When the students saw their grades from the fall semester, they were disappointed by transfer shock, but that did not sway their

determination to succeed in college. Each pointed out their own shortcomings and had a plan of action to do better in the spring; particularly to study more and harder. The importance placed on personal motivation suggests that despite institutional, family, and tribal efforts to increase retention, it is still necessary for each student to persevere through their own personal difficult times.

*Student Attitudes*

Students' attitudes about themselves and their attitudes toward the institution play a significant role in retention. When a student arrives at an institution with positive attitudes and has positive experiences, the positive attitudes are likely to be maintained or to increase. When a student arrives at an institution with negative attitudes and has negative experiences, he or she is likely to leave.

> A general sense of satisfaction with life at the school, feelings of self-development, a sense that the education they are receiving has a practical value for securing employment, and a sense of self-confidence as a student are a core block of attitudes positively affecting retention. Stress, on the other hand, reduces the likelihood of students remaining enrolled. (Bean, 1990, p. 165)

Students who are committed to getting a college education and graduating from a particular institution are more likely to persist in college than those who lack such commitment. Bean (1990) found that students' intentions were the strongest predictors of their decisions to remain in or withdraw from school. All of the participants in this study had a strong sense of determination to succeed in college, with success being defined as completing their desired degree. "Regardless of whether a student is situated

in a family setting or in a school setting, success demands goal-orientation, determination, and persistence from the student, and it is not to be negotiable" (Lin, 1990, p. 6).

To succeed as a student, an individual needs skills and attitudes that are appropriate for academic work. When a student develops proper academic attitudes, such as integrity, delayed gratification, and valuing scholarship, the student is likely to perform well academically, which is evident in a high or at least an improving GPA. Students who perform well are more likely to remain enrolled in an institution (Bean, 1990).

*First-Generation College Students and Personal Motivation*

Four of the participants were first-generation college students. The college environment presents academic and personal challenges for all students, but these challenges are even more problematic for first-generation college students. In addition, first-generation college students are prone to doubts about their academic and motivational abilities. They often think they are not college material. "For first-generation students, the movement into another culture is markedly uncertain and often filled with critical self-evaluations" (Striplin, 1999, p. 2). Overcoming these academic and personal challenges is critical for the successful transfer to a four-year institution. Striplin also found that first-generation college students are over-represented at community colleges. Because of this, these institutions have a responsibility to respond to their needs, which include assessing potential transfer students and keeping them on the route towards the baccalaureate.

*Effect of Transfer Shock on Student Attitudes*

The term transfer shock has been used to characterize the temporary dip in transfer students' academic performance in the first or second semester after transferring. In a study conducted on transfer students in the years 1928 through 1964, it was found that: 1) transfer students should expect to suffer a considerable drop in grades in the first semester after transfer, 2) transfer students' grades will improve the longer they are in school, and 3) native students (students who began their college career at a four-year institution) as a group are shown to perform better than the transfer students (Hills, 1965). However, for tribal college transfer students, one study has shown just the opposite. A study of students from Salish Kootenai College in Montana found that American Indian students who had attended the college and then transferred to the University of Montana earned higher grade point averages and had higher graduation rates than Indian students who had gone to the university directly from high school (AIHEC, 1999).

Transfer shock is well-documented and thoroughly studied (Carlan, 2001; Carlan & Byxbe, 2000; Menacker, 1975; Townsend, 2001). It appears to be universal, affecting students to varying degrees regardless of major, academic ability, age, or geographic location. One reason why it is important to understand transfer shock and to educate students of this phenomenon is because a student who is unprepared for transfer shock may be more likely to become discouraged and to abandon his or her efforts at achieving a four-year degree (Cantrell, Dell & Fishbaugh, 1996)

Most of the participants were upset by the degree of transfer shock they experienced their first semester at UND (See Table 2). While apparently not statistically

significant in all cases, even a small drop in GPA was significant to the students. They were disappointed in themselves for the drop in GPA they experienced and blamed themselves for not studying enough. Challenges confronting American Indian students' potential for completing postsecondary education includes, among other things, good study strategies (Hoover & Jacobs, 1992). In *What Matters in College*, Astin (1993) found that one variable with the largest correlation with a positive effect on a students drive to achieve included hours spent per week studying or doing homework.

In the conclusion to his study, Hills (1965) suggested that the transfer student who plans to earn a baccalaureate degree should be warned of the probability of suffering transfer shock. This may prepare him or her for the shock and lessen the disappointment experienced. It would be encouraging for the students to hear though, that 67 percent of the students recover from transfer shock, usually within the first year of transfer (Kim, 2001). However, after the spring semester, or the second term at UND, only three of the 11 participants in this study were showing signs of recovery from transfer shock in terms of GPA (See Table 2).

Several aspects of, personal motivation are important factors on academic performance. Some students are motivated by the need to please others, such as parents. Others are motivated by the need to provide for others, such as their families. Being aware of what their career goals are and knowing the path of least resistance to that end is motivating for some. On the other hand, some students are driven only by the need to study for good grades (Flood & Moll, 1990). Being aware of what motivates a person is

the first step. Faculty and staff at educational institutions can assist students to identify and articulate their goals.

Table 2. Amount of Transfer Shock and Recovery from Transfer Shock in Terms of the Degree of Change in Grade Point Averages

| | Tribal College GPA | Fall UND GPA | Amount of Transfer Shock | Spring UND GPA | Transfer Shock Recovery |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Adeline | 3.74 | 2.25 | -1.49 | 2.08* | -.17 |
| Donna | 3.81 | 3.50 | -.31 | 3.00 | -.50 |
| Ian | 3.15 | 2.69 | -.46 | 2.55 | -.14 |
| Jonathan | 3.15 | 2.67 | -.48 | 2.23 | -.44 |
| Joy | 3.18 | 2.40 | -.78 | 2.43 | +.03 |
| Linus | 3.86 | 3.50 | -.36 | 3.31 | +.19 |
| Michelle | 3.35 | 3.31 | -.04 | 2.67 | -.64 |
| Molly | 3.11 | 3.27 | +.16 | 3.73 | +.46 |
| Star | 3.11 | 3.00 | -.11 | 1.75 | -1.25 |
| Tammy | 3.41 | 3.33 | -.08 | 2.45 | -.88 |
| Two Moons | 3.11 | 1.25 | -1.86 | 4.00* | +2.75 |

* These students completed fewer than 12 credits spring semester.
Adeline completed 9 credits.
Two Moons completed 2 credits.

## Theme Three and Discussion of the Literature

### *Theme Three: Family plays an important part in the participants' educational experiences and decisions*

In the same way that external peer groups may hinder social integration in the college, so may family pressures influence college persistence. For many American Indians and non-Indians, participation in family obligations hinders persistence. It does so because of the ways in which external obligations limit one's ability to meet the demands of college. "Though the competing external pressures of families and peers for disadvantaged students are no different in kind than those for other students, they may well be more intense" (Tinto, 1993, p. 63). Married students may not have the same support network provided to traditional age students, but they need a support network of an understanding spouse or partner, in much the same way. For married students, Bean (1990) suggested institutions provide an orientation for spouses similar to the orientation currently provided for parents at most colleges.

For many of the participants in this study, obtaining a bachelor's degree was a way to upward mobility. Leaving family behind to attend college was a great sacrifice, but some saw it as necessary, or at least better for the family in the long run to do so. "To become a competitive applicant in today's job market, these students and their families realize the indispensability of a bachelor's or even a master's degree" (Striplin, 1999, p. 1). Studies have shown that community college students who successfully overcome the challenges of transferring to a four-year institution and who ultimately complete their bachelors degree, appear to achieve overall parity with native (students who begin their

studies at four-year institutions) four-year college students in areas such as job prestige, stability of employment, job satisfaction, and earnings (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998). The conventional wisdom that higher education leads to a better life, especially for minority students, is generally accepted among most Americans. A simple reading of history seems to justify that concept and to support reliance on education as the path to upward mobility (Wilson, 1986). It is no wonder that many American Indians, with such a high rate of poverty, will make great familial sacrifices to obtain a college degree.

Parental support has a major influence on how students interact with their college environments, especially traditional-age students. Students are more likely to remain enrolled in college if their parents understand all of the aspects of college and support the student's decision to attend college (Bean, 1990). "Institutionally initiated communication with parents is thus considered a useful measure to promote retention" (Bean, 1990, p. 198).

Significant changes in family obligations may lead to a students' departure, but not necessarily to permanent departure. The student may return to college when their situation changes. In this situation, the student is referred to as a "stopout," a person who temporarily withdraws from the educational system and returns to complete their degree at a later time (Tinto, 1993). Institutional resources should not be used trying to affect things that the college cannot control. Uncontrollable factors such as a family crisis or a serious health problem might result in a students' leaving school. "It is of little use for a school to try to anticipate and counteract such events" (Bean, 1990, p. 164).

## Theme Four and Discussion of the Literature

*Theme Four: The participants experienced various financial concerns*

There are some myths that much of the general public believes about American Indians that needs to be clarified. One is that all American Indians can get free money for college and the other is that all American Indians are rich with casino money. In reality, American Indians have the highest poverty rate of any other ethnic group in the United States (Belvin, 1999).

> Only five of the tribal colleges receive any income from gaming. The notion that all tribes either operate casinos themselves or receive a portion of the revenue from other tribes' casinos is a misconception (Belvin, 1999, p. 21).

It is true there are scholarships intended specifically for American Indians, but most of the scholarship agencies have limited resources. To even stand a chance of getting one of these scholarships, the applicants must sift through mountains of paperwork and red tape. For many American Indians, the hassles of getting funding are often enough to prevent college attendance (Belvin, 1999). That said, students who lack or perceive that they lack finances are likely to withdraw from school (Bean, 1990).

Tinto (1993) insists that "though there is little doubt that personal finances can and do impact upon persistence, there is still some question about how and why they do so" (p. 65). He believes that much of the impact of finances occurs at or before the point of entry into higher education. Finances influence decisions on whether and where to attend college in the first place, as some of the participants in this study asserted. Many said that their final decision on whether or not to attend UND depended on if they

received a certain scholarship. Tinto acknowledged that many recent studies have proven that financial aid given to needy students does have an impact their persistence. However, he maintains that personal and family finances do not play a major role in persistence *following entry* into higher education. He downplays the impact of finances on educational departure when he states:

> Though departing students very often cite financial problems as reasons for their leaving, such statements are frequently ex post facto forms of rationalization which mask primary reasons for their withdrawal. Students who see their college experiences as rewarding and/or as being directly tied to their adult futures will continue to bear great financial burdens and accept considerable short-term debt in order to complete a degree program. When college is seen as irrelevant and/or as unrewarding, however, even the slightest financial pressure will lead to withdrawal. (Tinto, 1993, p. 68)s

Bean (1990) asserts that "high amounts of financial assistance are not guarantees of high rates of retention" (p. 158). Referring to previous studies, he says that the effects of financial aid are mixed. A modest scholarship may symbolize to the student increased acceptance by the institution, which may have an effect on retention. However, students who receive adequate amounts of financial assistance (considered fully-funded by their institution), probably come from educationally disadvantaged families and may have attended lower-quality high schools than students who receive no aid. He added, "Do not automatically believe that money is the chief reason for students to leave school. It rarely is" (p. 164).

Despite Bean and Tinto's position on the role of finances on college completion, it has been extensively reported in the literature that for American Indians, financial difficulties have a huge impact on their ability to complete college (Belgarde, 1994; Belvin, 1999; Boyer, 1997; Stein, 1988).

## Theme Five and Discussion of the Literature

*Theme Five: The participants report that the faculties at tribal colleges have different teaching styles than the faculties at UND, thus, they have had to adjust their own learning styles and study methods.*

An abundance of studies have revealed that the faculties at tribal colleges have different teaching styles than the faculties at four-year institutions (AIHEC, 2001; Belgarde, 1994; Belvin, 1999; Boyer, 1997). Further, some of the participants in this study feel they have had to overcome cultural differences, such as non-competitiveness and avoiding eye-contact, related to their learning styles in order to succeed at UND. It was evident that these participants did not think of themselves as any less capable, but they felt they would have to work harder for good grades than the traditional university student.

Backes (1993) found that the dominant personal learning style for American Indians was indeed, different than the dominant personal learning style for non-American Indian subjects in his study on learning styles.

> The importance of these findings lies in the fact that a dominant learning style of the total population of American Indian students was shown, and that learning style (abstract random) coincides with a deductive, holistic instructional

methodology. On the other hand, the dominant learning style of non-American Indian students (concrete sequential) coincides with inductive, linear methodology that dominates traditional classrooms (Backes, 1993).

The teaching method one uses to transmit learning can have a significant effect on whether students learn or fail. The teaching style of many classrooms does not match the learning style of American Indians. Consequently, this mis-match is a determining factor in the learning success or failure of American Indians (Swisher & Deyhle, 1989).

"Students felt the flexible, accommodating, and supportive style of faculty [at tribal colleges] plus the use of alternative styles of teaching (other than lecture) made the learning environment unique and positive" (Ness, 2002, p. 38). In her study, the participants compared tribal college staff to staff at other colleges they had attended. "The tribal college staff were much more student-oriented and customer friendly" (p. 38). She also reported that many of the participants in her study could easily identify how they learned best. Often their learning style benefited from more individual attention and support, which they received at tribal colleges.

An example given by Pavel and Colby (1992) of culturally conscious instruction focused on instructors who changed the climate of a biology classroom to accommodate the high visual-perception skills exhibited by American Indian students, which was identified by several participants in this study. "Discussion sessions were saturated with photographic slides and visuals that contained relevant graphics, as well as images of organisms and natural settings" (p. 2). Some of the students in this study also mentioned their preference for small group discussions over lectures and a preference for hands-on

activities. The instructors in the biology class also changed the format of the class to emphasize discussion rather than lecture and to increase the wait time during question and answer sessions (Pavel & Colby, 1992).

In tribal colleges, faculties adapt the educational process to meet the needs of the students. Instructors teach to Indian learning styles by including of tribal perspectives in the curriculum, as one of the participants in this study identified. They also provide an environment of support and respect. In the eyes of American Indian people, what mainstream institutions are missing is a sense of kinship, community, and a non-competetive learning environment. "Students who grew up in a culture that taught learning through observation could easily feel overwhelmed in a classroom stimulated by competition and participation" (Belvin, 1999, p. 22).

For the most part, tribal community colleges and four-year institutions represent different academic cultures. For example, tribal college faculties have a tendency to base their standards of how a student performs in comparison with the performance of others taking the same class (Belvin, 1999). In contrast, faculties at universities often grade students by measuring them against a standard that may not change with variations in preparation or aptitude of those enrolled in the course (Bernstein, 1986). This is especially true in lower-level courses where the enrollment is high.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) summarized a large body of literature indicating that informal contact by students with faculty members enhances academic integration and hence reduces attrition. Informal contact between students and faculty members has a positive effect on students' attitudes. When students believe faculty members are

concerned about their cognitive and social development, the result is students who have positive attitudes toward the school. These informal contacts increase retention.

Astin (1997) reported that by far, the strongest environmental effect on student satisfaction with faculty involves the environmental measure, "Student Orientation of the Faculty." A description of the content in this item is as follows:

> Faculty are interested in students' academic problems, faculty are interested in students' personal problems, faculty are committed to the institution, faculty are sensitive to issues of minorities, faculty are easy to see outside of office hours, and there are frequent opportunities for student-faculty interaction (Astin, 1997, p. 281).

Tinto (1998) suggested that colleges promote shared, connected activities to enhance student learning. This style of teaching would mesh with the traditional Indian value of cooperation. He recommended that institutions reorganize their curriculum into learning communities which enable students to share learning across the curriculum. Another suggestion was to promote shared, collaborative learning experiences so that students learn together rather than alone.

More (1989) cautions that an over emphasis on differences in learning styles may lead to a new form of inaccurate labeling and stereotyping of American Indian students. Further, he said that misplaced emphasis could result in focusing on the weaknesses of Indian students rather than on their strengths. He concluded that the most effective application of learning style theory lies in greater understanding of and ability to adapt to individual differences, and in identifying and building on the strengths of Indian students.

## Theme Six and Discussion of the Literature

### *Theme Six: The participants thought the faculties at their respective tribal colleges were too lenient*

It would have been easy to include this insight into the aforementioned theme because it could fall under teaching styles. However, the researcher found that it repeatedly came up in the interviews and that because it was so specific, it should not be watered down to fit the teaching styles theme.

More specifically, by lenient, the participants meant that they weren't strictly held to deadlines and that the content covered was sometimes less than what was identified in the course requirements. In a study of Turtle Mountain Community College graduates, Monette (1995) reported that the graduates indicated that the degree of competitiveness and strictness of grading were significantly greater at four-year institutions than at Turtle Mountain Community College. They appreciated the leniency while attending the tribal colleges, but it made them less well-prepared for the stricter deadline policies and more rigorous content requirements of UND faculty.

> The quality of the transfer program depends to a large degree on the quality of competition among students for grades in transfer courses. In the absence of such competition, community college transfer students may find it difficult to compete successfully with 'native' students in upper-division courses after transfer. (Knoell, 1982, p. 12).

*Late Assignments*

There is nothing in the literature that identifies leniency at tribal colleges as a theme, however some scarce literature was found on handing in late assignments. Flood and Moll (1990) suggested assignments turned in late should be penalized by a significant reduction in grade. This policy should be outlined in detail in the syllabus. Often, knowing the circumstances will motivate the students to complete assignments on time. "In explaining this policy to students, the professor can also describe his own time constraints and other commitments which would make evaluating late assignments difficult and detrimental to the students' best interests" (p. 154).

Giczowski (1992), said the reverse. "Professors should be prepared to accept late assignments within specified limits, without penalizing students' grades" (p. 3). He suggested the students come up with options for completing assignments within limits that are fair for all students. The behaviors and expectations that faculty convey to students carry the greatest potential for negative impact. If faculty expectations are low and if faculty do not encourage students to achieve higher levels of mastery, then it follows that the students they teach will not be very well-prepared for four-year institutions (Bernstein, 1986).

*Course Content*

Faculty in upper-division fields sometimes express concern about the rigor of community college courses and may even refuse to accept them toward their degree programs. Increasingly, however, syllabi are coordinated between the two levels of colleges to reduce variation in course content and level. Between institutions where

many students transfer from community college to four-year institutions, administrators, counselors, and faculty members must help students choose an academic plan that builds on previous work. "Administrators may have to insist that agreements about the transferability of courses be worked out, despite faculty concerns about comparable content" (Stark & Lattuca, 1996, p. 323).

In one study, it was found that community college faculties were a letter grade more lenient in grading English themes than four-year faculty. For this and other reasons, community college grades are often regarded as inflated estimates of student achievement. In fact, some four-year college faculties perceive a community college C to be equal to an F at their institutions (Carlan & Byxbe, 2000).

Fisher (2002) says that the heavy weight placed on student evaluations on community college faculty encourages instructors to dumb down courses and inflate grades in hopes of getting better evaluations. "Student evaluations are here to stay at most community colleges in the country, where they are routinely used for tenure review, pay hikes, promotions and awards" (p. 7).

## Theme Seven and Discussion of the Literature

### *Theme Seven: The participants recommend that others attend tribal colleges before attending four-year institutions*

In the same way that it would have been possible to include this theme into the teaching styles theme, the researcher thought this theme was important enough to justify a separate theme.

For many students, attending a tribal college allows them to stay close to home and family while deciding whether or not they want to go to a four-year institution. Tribal colleges are smaller than most four-year institutions so individual one-on-one attention from tribal college faculty a benefit. Some students find that they need remedial courses or tutoring and are more comfortable receiving these services at a tribal college than a four-year institution (Robbins, 1998).

The curriculum at tribal colleges emphasizes not only academic requirements, but cultural contributions and philosophies of the tribal communities as well. Students learn who they are and that what they believe has value. Rather than being a disorienting experience for students, attending a tribal college represents a reinforcement of values inherent in the tribal community. "With this preparation and sense of self-worth, many tribal college graduates have gone on for further study or found meaningful work in geographic areas where low educational attainment levels and high unemployment rates are the norm" (Pavel & Colby, 1992, p. 2).

Tribal colleges offer general education courses that add richness to the career-oriented programs, which is especially valuable for students who plan to continue their education at non-Indian four-year institutions. "Tribal college administrators note that their students often prefer to complete more challenging courses in math, science, and English at a tribal college where more support and encouragement are offered" (Boyer, 1997, p. 32).

Community colleges are usually tied to local industry, business, and government, and offer higher education within the financial and commuting reach of the communities'

citizens. The concept of ' community" from an Indian perspective is far more encompassing than the typical notions of community held by most Americans. "The community is the basis for individual self-awareness among American Indians, and identity is based on participation in and knowledge of traditional life of the community as embodied by the tribe" (Wicks & Price, 1981, p. 4). Perhaps this strong sense of community is another reason why students prefer to attend tribal colleges before transferring to four-year institutions. Tribal colleges are accountable to the federal government and accreditation agencies, but more importantly, they are accountable to their students and their communities (Hill, 1994).

Another compelling argument for attending a tribal college first is that at tribal colleges, students say, "It's OK to be Indian." A strong sense of identity and self-respect is critical to any student's success in learning (Belvin, 1999).

## Theme Eight and Discussion of the Literature

### *Theme Eight: Participants expressed the importance of the Indian Center and the Native American Programs staff and support services at UND*

The literature is full of remarks about how a one-stop cultural/help center is essential to minority students' successful retention and completion of their degrees (Day, 1999; Dell, 2000; Falk & Aitken, 1984; Jeanotte, 1981; Neuerburg, 2000). The type of center referred to often houses staff that provide student services such as, recruiting, admissions, registration, financial aid, tutoring, study-skills workshops, counselors, and advisors. Pavel and Padilla (1993) recommended that support programs should be in place at institutions to enhance academic and social integration while American Indians

are in college. Also, the importance of an American Indian center to American Indian students cannot be underestimated. The very presence of a cultural center where students can socialize, study, and meet is just as important as offering support services. These centers are even more effective when staffed by American Indian personnel.

Falk and Aitken (1984) concluded that Indians who serve on the faculty, staff and administration provide important support and role modeling for Indian students. They suggested that recruitment and retention of Indian administrators and personnel is crucial. "While more Indian faculty and staff are present on college campuses, high turnover rates among these people and lack of Indian administrators are still problems (p. 3).

Another important function of these programs is orientation. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) noted that some common objectives of orientation programs include to acquaint students with administrative regulations and expected behaviors, introduce them to student services, and help them develop academic skills necessary to succeed in college. There are numerous institution-specific variations in orientation programs, but "the common theme underlying them all is the facilitation of the student's successful integration into a new and unfamiliar academic and social setting" (p. 403).

Responsive colleges and universities frequently provide additional academic and personal services to minority students beyond what is offered to the traditional student. "Special support programs that are designed to promote the educational mobility of minority and other disadvantaged students have also been part of the movement to improve transfer" (Palmer, 1989, p. 3).

To address some of the problems Indian students face on predominantly white campuses, such as isolation, low self concept and confused identity, American Indian centers have been established on many college campuses. "Considering the academic deficiencies, social isolation, and cultural conflict faced by Indian students, counseling services – provided most advantageously by Indian counselors – contribute positively to the retention and success of Indian students (Wright, 1985, p. 3).

In an interview study on educational success among American Indian doctoral recipients, Neuerburg (2000) found, "A strong faculty member/mentor and Native American support system (often called a community) was available and very important to the participants as they progressed to the completion of their terminal degree" (p. 48). Some of the participants in her study stressed the importance of such a support system. They reported being part of a community, which was typically made up of other Indian students. Finally, they also stressed the need for a gathering place often called a "home-away-from-home" (p. 104).

In a study on undergraduates involved in student support services, the students asserted that they had significantly benefited from their involvement in the program. Some of the comments included, "It seems like there is an answer here for everything," "It's like these people are part of your family and you don't want to let anyone down because they've helped you so much so far that you just want to keep pushing," and "It kinda gave me a feeling of self-worth and like I wasn't just a number. It was like being a part of their family" (Wallace, Abel, & Ropers-Huilman, 2000, p. 95).

Morphew, Twombly and Wolf-Wendel (2001) insisted that the receiving four-year institutions are responsible for providing appropriate personnel services to dull the transfer and culture shock frequently experienced by first-semester transfer students. The four-year colleges must have financial aid and appropriate on-campus support for transfer students.

Campuses are responding to the needs of minorities, but at a slow rate. A campus' history of student support is evident when one looks at the location and condition of fraternities and sororities compared to the location and condition of ethnic centers. The former are usually located in the heart of campus in large, elaborate facilities with beautiful landscaping. The former are usually located on the edge of campus in small, remodeled, older homes. Research findings support the important role of ethnic centers and support services for minorities on predominantly white campuses (Astin, 1993; Day, 1999; Dell, 2000). Campuses must ensure that these services and organizations have enough staff, funding, and resources to serve students successfully (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson & Allen, 1998). "It is not uncommon for an American Indian student to disappear and never return the first month of school because one of these services did not meet the student's needs" (Ness, 2002, p. 39).

Tinto acknowledges that minority programs are extremely valuable and necessary, but research has proven that faculty also play an important part in minority student retention. A misconception, he says, "is that retention is primarily the responsibility of student-affairs staffs, whose work puts them in direct contact with students outside the

classroom. That is regrettable, because faculty members' involvement is critical to the success of retention programs" (Tinto, 1989, p. 1).

The researcher acknowledges that the study participants may have been influenced toward this theme by the fact that she is an employee of Native American Programs (on leave at the time of the interviews) and the fact that the interviews were conducted at the American Indian Center. In any event, the literature strongly suggests that ethnic minority student centers and support staff are very important to the retention of minority students.

## The Issue of Racism and Discussion of the Literature

*Issue: The participants discussed racism at UND and in the Grand Forks community*

Although the issue of racism did not come up in the interviews enough times to consider it a theme, the importance of the issue in today's society necessitates its mention. Few issues in higher education have received more recent attention than the issue of race on campus. However, interestingly, there is probably no other area in higher education that so obviously lacks institutional policy than the racial climate. According to Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, and Allen (1998), it is time for higher education policy-makers and institutional leaders across the country to use some of the research evidence that demonstrates the benefits of diversity by enhancing educational policy and practice.

A campus climate has many dimensions. It encompasses student interactions across race and ethnicity, perception of the climate regarding racial and ethnic tension, experiences of overt discrimination, and the ethnic and racial diversity of the student

body (Laanan, 2001). Many educators erroneously believe that students drop out of college because they simply cannot pass their courses; however, most students who leave do so because they have had unsatisfactory experiences in college, often outside the classroom, not because they earned poor grades (Evangelauf, 1990).

Biasco, Goodwin, and Vitale (2001) make reference to a recent study that revealed students at three U.S. colleges have a "hidden reservoir of racial animosity and suspicion" underneath a "veneer of anti-racist attitudes". In another study, it was found that racial discrimination on college campuses was increasing and that prejudices have become more complex and covertly expressed. In the same study, most minority students could detect subtle racism from the white faculty and students and white students felt resentment and hostility toward minorities primarily because of minority based financial assistance (Biasco, Goodwin & Vitale, 2001).

Cullinan (2002) wrote that any campus that makes statements like, "we have few problems with discrimination" is being wildly presumptuous. "What about the second-guessing that tends to happen whenever people don't get the automatic assumptions of innocence, worthiness, and competence that frequently follow those of us with dominant-culture membership – the 'are you sure?' and the 'can you explain?' and the 'what are you doing here?' that can be conveyed in a look, or a pause, or a raised eyebrow?" (p. 38). She recommends that we refrain from referring to experiences of racism as isolated incidents and recognize that each circumstance where someone has been treated with disrespect might be part of a web of discrimination that we must continually strive to recognize and remove.

One reason why educators believe minorities fail to graduate is a result of the minority students' feeling unwelcome on many campuses. Magner (1989) reported that colleges go through three stages in their attempt to attract and hold more diverse populations of students. In the first stage, colleges eliminate admissions barriers and recruit more minority students. In the second stage, institutions realize they must do more than simply recruit, so they create special retention programs. In the third stage, the colleges change the learning environment to adapt to students. The third stage can be accomplished by employing a more diverse faculty that devotes more attention to the students and their teaching.

## Summary

The literature has revealed that there are many possibilities for improvement in the transfer process relevant to the themes uncovered in this study. The general literature about transfer students has revealed that "native" four-year college students have better academic performances in their junior and senior years than those who began their collegiate experiences at community colleges (Astin, 1993; Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Laanan, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). The students in this study indicate that they would not be at four-year institutions at all if not for their tribal college experiences. Based on the data from this study and the review of the literature, Chapter VI contains recommendations for tribal colleges and four-year institutions as well as recommendations for further research.

# CHAPTER VI

# SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## Summary of Themes

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions transfer students from Tribal Colleges have upon entering The University of North Dakota regarding their own readiness for a four-year institution. The findings of the study are summarized in the following sections.

*Theme One: The participants expressed concerns regarding their transfer to UND*

Most of the participants expressed some form of complaint about or suggestion to facilitate a smooth transfer from a tribal college to UND. Some thought the advising they received from either the tribal college personnel or UND personnel was inadequate. Although they understood the limitations the tribal colleges have, they wished the colleges could have offered more and degree-specific coursework. Finally, several of them alluded to the need for programmatic articulation agreements, sometimes called "two-plus-two" programs. All three of these concerns were found in the literature, to some degree. The first step toward seamless transfer is to identify potential transfer students and advise them accordingly. Also, tribal colleges are reminded to not lose sight of the transfer function and to ensure there are knowledgeable staff members on hand to assist the transfer students as they progress.

*Theme Two: The participants identified personal motivation as a factor toward the completion of their degrees*

Most of the participants articulated personal motivation as a factor increasing the likelihood of completing their degrees. They expressed determination to obtain their desired degrees and had confidence they would overcome any barriers. All but one participant experienced transfer shock in their first semester at UND, but it did not deter them from their ultimate goal of degree attainment. Also, it was notable that they all accepted responsibility for their shortcomings and had plans to prevail over these in the future.

*Theme Three: Family plays an important part in the participants' educational experiences and decisions*

All of the participants mentioned family in the interviews. Some were single students who went directly to a tribal college out of high school and then transferred to UND. Others were either single parents, married without children, or married with children who attended college as their individual situations allowed. The family situations were all unique, but overall, the influence of their families was evident. Most of the study participants saw education as a means to avoid or escape the poverty so common on the reservations. For some, the need for an education was so great that they sacrificed by leaving their families back home while they pursued their degrees. The literature suggests that although family can be a distraction to a student's education, and may even cause the student to "stop out" for awhile, the desire for an education is so great that many will eventually return to complete their degrees.

*Theme Four: The participants experienced various financial concerns*

Most of the participants in this study were considered fully-funded by federal and UND guidelines. Since the majority of them were high-achievers with GPA's of 3.0 and above, most were recipients of numerous and generous scholarships. Given that most were fully-funded, it seems that some of the participant's financial difficulties could have been remedied with financial counseling of some sort. That said, the living expenses in Grand Forks were greater than the students expected and most found themselves running out of resources and looking for more. Some were feeling the pressure to get good grades to continue qualifying for their scholarships. Some of the literature suggested that the need for adequate financial aid was exaggerated as a factor to persistence because financial reasons were not likely to be the primary reason a student leaves college. However, given the poverty rate for American Indians and the lack of resources, literature written by those familiar with minority populations said just the opposite.

*Theme Five: The participants report that the faculties at tribal colleges have different teaching styles than the faculties at UND, thus, they have had to adjust their own learning styles and study methods*

The participants indicated that they had to adjust to different teaching styles once entering the university. The faculties at the tribal colleges seemed to believe that Indian people learn best visually and hands-on and made pedagogical changes to accommodate them. The literature confirms that nationwide, most community college faculties are more responsive to their students, primarily because of class size. At tribal colleges, the faculties take it a step further and make provisions such as the inclusion of tribal

perspectives in the curriculum. Clearly, this is seen as one of the benefits of attending tribal colleges, but the students who transfer find they have some difficulty adjusting their learning styles and study methods.

*Theme Six: The participants thought the faculty at their respective tribal colleges was too lenient*

More specifically, by lenient, the participants meant that the faculty did not strictly hold them to deadlines and that the content covered was sometimes less than what was identified in the course requirements. They said being allowed to hand things in late or sometimes be exempt from assignments gave them bad habits that did not serve them well at the university. The students seemed to appreciate the instructors who were the most rigid, who made them "work for their grades" and who "gave them the grades they deserved." The literature confirms that the expectations faculty convey to students carry the greatest potential for impact. Additionally, when the content covered does not match the content for the same course at a four-year institution, the community colleges are seen as lesser institutions by some.

*Theme Seven: The participants recommend that others attend Tribal Colleges before attending four-year institutions*

Overall, the participants say their experiences at tribal colleges were excellent. Many felt that they wouldn't be at UND if they hadn't attended a tribal college first. The literature indicated that the convenience of being able to stay close to home and family, the cultural components of the curriculum, and the strong sense of community are just some of the reasons American Indians benefit from attending tribal colleges. Most of the

participants in this study highly recommended that others attend tribal colleges for their first year or two of college.

*Theme Eight: Participants expressed the importance of the Indian Center and the Native American Programs staff and support services at UND*

The fact that the researcher is an employee of Native American Programs (although on leave at the time of the interviews), and the fact that the interviews were conducted at the American Indian center, could have subconsciously brought this theme to the forefront for the participants. Nevertheless, it came up so many times it had to be named as a significant theme. The literature supports this theme as there are numerous studies that point to the importance of ethnic centers and programs and stress that they should not only exist, but be adequately staffed and funded to provide quality services.

*Issue: The participants discussed racism at UND and the Grand Forks community*

Two students mentioned incidents of overt racism that occurred either at UND, or in the Grand Forks community. One student mentioned the Fighting Sioux nickname and logo controversy, and they took a neutral stance on it. Although the incidents were few, the literature suggests that administrators refrain from referring to overt experiences of racism as isolated incidents and be reminded that the covert atmosphere of racism needs to be constantly and consistently addressed.

## Conclusions

Regardless of how well-prepared the participants were to transfer to UND, or how well-prepared they perceived themselves to be, most of the participants in this study had

some degree of difficulty transferring to UND. North Dakota tribal colleges were found to have different educational systems than UND. It was found that family plays an important part in the students' educational decisions and that financial aid is almost always a concern. The students were appreciative of special support services provided by Native American programs, as well as the American Indian center on the UND campus. Most of the participants highly recommend attending a tribal college before transferring to a four-year institution.

## Implications

Tribal colleges have vastly different educational systems than other higher education institutions. Faculty expectations differ at tribal colleges, cultural aspects are prominent, and faculty-student relationships are exceptionally strong. No matter how well-prepared they were, or perceived themselves to be, the tribal college transfer students in this study had some degree of difficulty transferring to UND. Implications of this study could be of benefit to the North Dakota tribal colleges and UND, as well as other tribal colleges and four-year institutions.

## Recommendations for Tribal Colleges

1. The first recommendation derived from this study is for the faculty at tribal colleges to hold students more accountable in their classes. Faculty should continue to be mindful of special circumstances and understanding when there are personal issues that hinder completion of assignments, but on the whole, they should hold students to the rigor and standards of any other college student. Tribal college faculty need to recognize that students pay a price at UND for not getting the full content of courses.

2. Tribal college recruiters should work with area high school students who might benefit from beginning their collegiate experience at a tribal college.

3. Because American Indian students transfer to a variety of four-year institutions, and realizing that it can be quite traumatic, it is strongly recommended that tribal colleges employ a transfer officer to advise potential transfer students, gather information on student's strengths and weaknesses, inform students on the transferability of courses, and keep track of student progress.

4. Faculty and staff should consciously create activities for students to develop realistic and achievable goals.

Recommendations for UND

1. UND should bolster retention services for American Indians.

2. In light of the transfer shock found in this study, UND should expand advising to be more pro-active, as students in this study indicated they appreciate the attention they receive from concerned staff and faculty.

3. UND should provide a more adequate facility for American Indian students to gather, study, and socialize since ethnic centers play such an important role in retention.

4. UND faculty and staff need to be aware that American Indian families play a key role in students' retention and success; therefore, greater efforts should be taken to involve the families in orientation and socialization Efforts might include encouraging students and parents to be involved in UND's orientation program, faculty-student mentoring, and inviting more family, faculty and staff to annual picnics, pow-wows, and

other social events. A special program should be designed for the spouses of students on how they can be more involved in their spouse's education.

5. When recruiting, it would be helpful for UND's enrollment services personnel to be aware of the advantages of attending tribal colleges for potential transfer students and recognize that some would be better served by attending a tribal college before transferring to UND.

6. UND is strongly encouraged to make greater efforts to curb racism on the campus.

7. UND should collect the necessary data to allow for further studies of tribal college transfer students, such as patterns in GPA and long-term graduation rates.

Recommendations for Collaboration

1. Although the tribal colleges currently have strong course articulation agreements with the UND, a recommendation for collaboration is to develop articulation programs, sometimes called two-plus-two programs, between tribal colleges and UND whenever possible.

2. Although most of the students in this study were receiving adequate financial aid, given the importance placed on finances, tribal college and UND faculty and staff should work together to maximize the resources available to all students.

3. Realizing that financial aid is a huge factor in enrollment and retention of American Indian students, collaboration should occur among the financial aid staffs at tribal colleges and four-year institutions, tribal higher education scholarship personnel, and the North Dakota Indian Scholarship director. This collaboration should address

topics such as budget modifications, deadlines, scholarship policies, and an awareness of extenuating circumstances like housing deposits, daycare expenses, etc.

4. A professional development program should be organized for faculty from tribal colleges and the university to talk about the learning styles and study methods of American Indians and to discuss the transfer function along with faculty expectations, teaching styles, and learning styles.

Finally, it is recommended that tribal colleges, UND and other four-year institution personnel (administrators, faculty, student support service) be urged to review the content and the recommendations in this study for possible incorporation to improve the transfer of future American Indian students.

## Recommendations for Future Research

1. A study of tribal college transfer students should be done to further investigate transfer shock and transfer shock recovery.

2. A longitudinal study of tribal college transfer students should be done to investigate long-term degree attainment.

3. It is recommended that a study of all tribal college transfer students at UND be done, not just those with GPA's above 3.0 and 45 or more credits.

4. It is recommended that a study be done to see whether tribal college transfer students perform better academically in upper-level courses than those who skipped the tribal colleges and went directly to a four-year institution.

## Personal Reflections

Early in my doctoral studies, a professor was giving our class a talk on searching for a dissertation topic. He said, "I know you all want to save the world, but you'll become completely frustrated looking for 'the perfect' topic. The topic that is right for you is likely right under your nose." That was over three years ago, and at the time I thought it just can't be that easy. I *have* to come up with something groundbreaking. I *want* to save the world! I dreamt of publishing a book that the masses would want to read and use to develop student support programs on campuses across the country. Of course, I became completely frustrated. About a year later, I started to think about what he had said. I stopped "looking" for a topic altogether and over the course of several months it came to me. It was in bits and pieces and I didn't really have a name for it, but I knew I wanted to study the tribal college transfer student population.

One of the reasons why I am interested in tribal college graduates is because I am one myself. I attended the Turtle Mountain tribal college for awhile and graduated from Sitting Bull College, formerly known as Standing Rock College. I can honestly say I would not be in the final stages of my doctoral degree if it wasn't for my experiences at those colleges.

The most compelling reasons why I am interested in this population though are the people I have met over the past ten years while working with American Indian students at UND. Some students successfully complete their degrees at UND and some don't. It seemed the students who had transferred to UND from a tribal college though, took it the hardest when they had to leave. They came to UND with confidence and high

expectations and were extremely disappointed, even embarrassed when they could not succeed at UND. This was definitely the population I wanted to know more about.

Conducting this study was truly an amazing experience. It was difficult at times, but each step was rewarding. By far he most rewarding part, though, was conducting the interviews. In the beginning, I thought I had to conduct two interviews with the students, one to break the ice and another to get information. It seemed there was no ice to break. Their willingness to participate surprised me. Also, they were very open and seemed to trust me completely after just five minutes or so. I was truly interested in what they had to say and I think they knew that. It was a great feeling.

# APPENDICES

# APPENDIX A

# LETTER OF SUPPORT AND COOPERATION FROM

# NATIVE AMERICAN PROGRAMS

UNIVERSITY OF UND NORTH DAKOTA

NATIVE AMERICAN PROGRAMS
DIVISION OF STUDENT AND OUTREACH SERVICES
P.O. BOX 8274
GRAND FORKS, NORTH DAKOTA 58202-8274

(701) 777-4291
FAX (701) 777-3292

September 26, 2001

Ms. Donna Brown
3332 Cherry Lynn Drive
Grand Forks, ND 58201

Dear Ms. Brown:

I truly appreciated the opportunity to meet with you to thoroughly discuss your proposed study titled, "Perceptions of Tribal College Transfer Students Attending the University of North Dakota". Be assured that I wholeheartedly support your research, and commend you for your interest in exploring ways to increase the retention of American Indians in higher education.

I agree to provide you with a list of American Indian tribal college transfer students who are currently enrolled at the University of North Dakota for the fall semester of 2001. As per your request, the list will be comprised of only the names and addresses of transfer students whose cumulative grade point averages are above 3.0 and who have transferred to UND with at least 45 credits. After you obtain consent from the students, I can then provide you with the actual GPA's and number of credits.

I can also accommodate you with office space to allow you conduct interviews. Be reminded that confidentiality is of utmost importance!

I wish you lots of success with your study! If I can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Leigh D. Jeanotte
Director

UND is an equal opportunity/affirmative action institution

# APPENDIX B

# INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE LETTER

September 28, 2001

Dear,

I am a graduate student at the University of North Dakota in the department of Educational Leadership. I am pursuing a doctorate in Higher Education Leadership in preparation to become a college level administrator. I would like to invite you to participate in a study for my dissertation on the perceptions American Indian students have as they transfer from a tribal college to the University of North Dakota. Your help with this project may be very valuable to students in the future. Hopefully, the information I gather will assist both Tribal College and UND personnel to better assist American Indian students as they transfer to UND.

I am asking you to allow me to interview you two times, once in the fall semester, and once early in the spring semester. The interviews will last approximately one hour. The interviews will be audio taped and I may take notes during the interview. The audio tapes and transcripts will be destroyed once the study is complete. When writing the final paper I will assign pseudonyms to all participants. There is a chance that others reading the study may recognize you, but I will do my best to make sure your privacy is protected. I will never mention your real name. This study will be shared with my dissertation committee, but even they will not know your name.

I will be calling you within one week to discuss this study further and answer any questions you may have. If you are interested in participating, I would also like to set up the first interview during that conversation.

I look forward to speaking with you and I hope we can schedule an interview.

Sincerely,

Donna Brown

# APPENDIX C

# CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE LETTER

Consent to Participate Form

Perceptions of Tribal College Transfer Students
Attending the University of North Dakota

Hi, my name is Donna Brown and I am a graduate student at the University of North Dakota. I am conducting research for my doctoral dissertation under the direction of my adviser, Dr. Dan Rice, Dean of the College of Education and Human Development.

You and approximately fifteen other students are invited to participate in a study on the perceptions of tribal college transfer students attending UND. You probably will not receive any immediate personal benefits from participating in this study, however, your help with this study may be very valuable for students in the future. The interviews will give me a better understanding of what students from tribal colleges go through when they transfer to UND. With this information, I may be able to make suggestions to both tribal colleges and UND to better assist transfer students in the future.

You will be asked to participate in two interviews that will take approximately one hour each. The duration of the interviews is dependent on your schedule. These interviews will be audio taped, transcribed, and I will look for themes. In addition to the interview questions I will also be filling out a personal data form (college you transferred in from, cumulative GPA, fall semester GPA, your tribe, marital status, number of children, etc.) in your presence, and with your assistance. I may also take notes during the interviews. All data collected must be kept for at least three years after the study is completed. All data items (audio tapes, transcriptions, notes, and personal data forms) will be kept in a locked file cabinet that only I will have access to. All of the above mentioned data items will be assigned pseudonyms to mask your identity.

The consent forms that have your real name on them will also be kept for three years, but in a separate locked file cabinet that only I will have access to. At the end of the three years, I will destroy all the tapes and dispose of them. I will also shred all paper data and the consent forms and dispose of them.

There is a risk in participating in this study. Because of the low number of participants (<15) and how small the Indian community in North Dakota is, there is a chance that someone reading the study may recognize you. To minimize this risk, I will not use your real name or the name of the college you attended on the audio tapes, or when writing the dissertation. I will assign a pseudonym to you and to all the participants. Not even my adviser, Dr. Rice, will know your real name. In addition, I will take care to not mention any other potentially identifying information in the interviews, on the tapes, in the transcripts, or in the final writing of the dissertation.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose not to participate you will suffer no loss or penalty of any sort. You may also feel free to withdraw from the study at any time. Please inform me if you choose to withdraw. If you wish, I will share the results of the study with you. A copy of my dissertation will also be available at the Chester Fritz Library after it is published. If you have any questions about the research please contact me or my adviser by telephone or e-mail:

)nna Brown, Principal Investigator:
:one: 701-775-5383
nail: donna_brown@und.nodak.edu

Dr. Dan Rice, Adviser:
Phone: 701-777-2674
Email: dan_rice@mail.und.nodak.edu

If you have any other questions or concerns, please call the office of Research and Program Development at 701-777-4279.

Please sign below indicating that you:

1. have read this consent form,
2. understand the purpose of the study,
3. are willing to participate in this study, and
4. have been given a copy of this consent form

| Print Name | Participant's Signature | Date |
|---|---|---|

| Principal Investigator's Name | Principal Investigator's Signature | Date |
|---|---|---|

# APPENDIX D

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

# Research Questions

NOTE: These questions have been written as guides for the interviews. They have been designed to keep the interview on the topic, yet allow the participants to freely express individual perceptions and concerns. In the event of brief answers, I will probe the participants to Atell me more@ about a topic.

Interview #1:

1. Tell me about your educational background.
    A. Tell me about your experiences at the tribal college you attended.

2. How well do you feel you were prepared to attend UND?
    A. In what areas do you feel well prepared?
    B. In what areas do you feel less well prepared?

3. Tell me what you expect to happen while you are at UND?

Interview #2:

1. When I first interviewed you, back in September, I asked how well you felt you were prepared to attend college at UND. How do you feel about your preparation now that you've had a full semester at UND?

2. Knowing what you know now, what do you wish the tribal college had done to better prepare you?

3. What did UND do for you that you found helpful in the transfer process to UND?

4. Were you aware of any support services available to students at UND? If so, did you take advantage of any of these services.

5. Was coming to UND what you expected it would be? Why or why not?

# APPENDIX E

# PERSONAL DATA FORM

**Personal Data Form**

Pseudonym_____ Date_____

Age_____ Marital Status_____

Number of Children and their ages_____

_____

Employment Status_____

Financial aid/scholarships received _____

_____

Tribal College Attended_____

Number of Credits transferred in_____ GPA transferred in_____

Tribal Affiliation_____

Living arrangement while at UND_____

Notes:

# APPENDIX F

# STAGE TWO DATA FORM

Stage Two Data

Pseudonym_____ Date_____ _____

Major_____ Fall Semester GPA_____

Fall Semester Credits Completed_____ Gender_____

1st Generation College Student? Y N 1st in Family to Attend College? Y N

Emerging Issues from Fall Interview:

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