

*GROWING OUR OWN: INDIGENOUS RESEARCH, SCHOLARS, AND EDUCATION*  
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## **Indigenous Factors Contributing to Successful Attainment of Doctoral Degrees by Alaska Native Scholars: A Mixed Methods Study**

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This research project gives an overview of my proposed dissertation topic, *Factors Contributing to Successful Attainment of Doctoral Degrees by Alaska Native Scholars: A Mixed Methods Study*.

This study will examine a range of factors influencing the motivation and success of the demographically underrepresented population of Alaska Native PhD and EdD graduates. My research will involve quantitative surveys distributed to all living Alaska Native PhD graduates (approximately 64 living graduates in total). I will correlate and analyze resulting survey data. From these results, a qualitative personal interview methodology will be utilized to further identify and describe variables and factors of success. I propose to select eight to twelve participants from the survey to participate in a detailed interview designed to inform the study topic.

Some questions driving my research are: What factors or sets of factors do these Alaska Native PhD's have in common which led to their success? What variables contribute to their successes? What challenges and barriers are unique to the Alaska Native demographics? If patterns of successful factors exist, can these factors be replicated to expand Alaska Native participation in PhD programs? Are there 'lessons learned' that would assist University PhD programs seeking to attract and graduate Alaska Native doctoral students?

The goal of this research is to directly study the population of Alaska Native PhD's to bring a more precise understanding of the contributing factors and variables of their academic achievement. Another goal of this study is fill information gaps necessary to increase the number of Alaska Native PhD graduates. The results of my study will contribute to the understanding of the underrepresented population of Alaska Native doctoral graduates. This study will likely inform future efforts to advocate and provide support for Alaska Native graduates and scholars in their pursuit of PhDs or other postsecondary degrees. That increased sense of awareness with regard to what academic and social support systems work for Alaska Native PhD graduates will also benefit as well as increase Indigenous representation at the postsecondary levels. Fall 2014 shows approximately 69 Alaska Native PhD/EdD graduates, according to the University of Alaska Fairbanks Alaska Native Knowledge Network site.<sup>1</sup>

Depending on the results, the study's findings may potentially have a positive impact on Alaska Native students at secondary and postsecondary levels. Moreover, having a demographically proportionate Alaska Native PhD graduate population has implications for indigenous self-

determination as it broadly relates to leadership, education, business, and public policy. An increased population of PhD-educated Alaska Natives will increase self-governance, business expertise, and ownership of decision-making outcomes. The current doctoral graduates have stories to tell and advice for future Alaska Native PhD/EdD graduates.

**Keywords:**

*Success:* My initial research question targets what factors makes doctoral students successful. I understand *success* comes in many forms and doesn't strictly have to be based within the world of academia. For purposes of my specific research topic, when I refer to *success*, I am referring to students who attain their doctoral degrees, although I well understand, that is not the only measure of student success for Alaska Natives.

*Doctoral:* As used in this writing, *doctoral* graduates include philosophy (PhD) and Education (EdD) doctorates.

*PhD:* As used in this writing, PhD includes EdD's. An example of an *EdD* program is at Harvard University, which has several Alaska Native *EdD* graduates in Anthropology or Education. I will use *doctoral*, *PhD*, and *PhD/EdD* graduates intermittently throughout this paper

## Overview of My Research Process

Before you continue reading, think about an Alaska Native college graduate you may know. Consider what support networks were in place for this student's scholastic journey: Was their path guided by parental expectation? Were they a first generation college graduate? Who were their social and emotional supports on during their college years? Was there financial or institutional support through a college scholarship, corporation, or agency? What attracted them to seek a college education? Were there any barriers that were unique to them being an Alaska Native person that factored into their ability to graduate and what do they think might factor into the Alaska Native population having proportionally low graduation numbers?

Alaska Native PhD's are rare and Alaska Natives are significantly underrepresented as a proportion of PhD graduates to general population (by ethnicity) or when compared with many Indigenous populations in other locations, such as Hawaii or New Zealand.

Examining factors that led to Alaska Natives being attracted to and successfully completing PhD programs may yield important information for academic institutions seeking to serve a broader ethnic student population and for individual Alaska Native students facing the challenges of advanced degree work. In the context of advancing Alaska Natives' voice and leadership roles in governance, business, and education, the goal of increasing the proportion of Alaska Native PhD's to a rate comparable to other ethnicities is essential. Doctoral and post-doctoral research conducted by Alaska Native scholars

has the potential to bring culturally unique perspectives to research topics that provide special relevance and meaning. Gains made in the level of professional education of Alaska Natives are most likely to create positive outcomes in terms of self-governance, ownership of decision processes, and sustained cultural values.

Other Indigenous groups, such as the Native Hawaiians and New Zealand Maoris, have a significantly greater proportional number of ethnic PhD's compared with the educational attainment of Alaska Natives. The academic successes of other indigenous cultures may bear on this investigation. A cross-cultural comparison of motivational factors leading to successful completion of doctoral degrees among non-Alaska Indigenous groups would likely contribute to this study's relevance.

I will examine what motivated and contributed to the success of the statistically small number of Alaska Native doctoral graduates. My research topic will discover and examine what factors have led to this population's successful completion of their program. I will likely discover patterns among individuals that contributed to their resilience through a lengthy and demanding doctoral programs.

My research begins by exploring the need for more Alaska Native PhD/EdD scholars. I share recent statistics demonstrating the proportional gap in Alaska Native PhD's. I explore literature suggesting that closing this gap may have a positive influence on economic, social, and cultural factors of importance to this ethnic group. I then share historical accounts and proactive steps Indigenous groups have taken to increase their doctoral numbers. I will compare Alaska's

educational initiatives with similar programs in New Zealand. I provide an updated list of my research population of Alaska Native PhD's, inherited from Perea's earlier work on this topic, now with the addition of 19 graduates. Finally, I will provide relevant research on non-Alaska populations and American Indian graduate information. In closing I present a research-based summary of recommendations and common success factors based in my survey results and literature review.

### **The Need for the Study**

Alaska Native education continues to be a topic of high interest in Alaska. Given the grim reports on low student scores, student dropouts, and suicide rates among Alaska Native youth, effective education across all age levels is vital in the world of Alaska Native academia. Having more Alaska Native leaders involved in the development of educational curricula and assessments can be a proactive measure to increase performance of Alaska Native youth. Increasing the number of Alaska Native PhD's would likely benefit all age levels of Alaska Native students and school programs. For example, Alaska Native PhD's can inform K-12 policy, develop pedagogically and culturally appropriate curriculum, and provide leadership and oversight in various school settings. Some of these PhD's will be teaching pre-service teachers at colleges. Some will be making decisions as committee board members in programs in education. Three examples demonstrate the contributions PhD's give to K12 education in their communities.

The first example is a candidate who works as an assistant professor in another Alaska University. He is a leader in his local Native dance group. Another example is an Alaska Native PhD candidate who is a retired teacher/education grant administrator and a

site council member for the local high school. She is also an assistant professor of her local college. The third example is a PhD student who is a board member on a nonprofit group with education as one of their main support programs. She also serves as a director in her Native organization's business sector. They partner with the local school district.

Several of the recent Alaska Native PhD graduates work at Alaska's universities. Those recent PhD graduates organically serve as mentors for many of the current Alaska Native PhD students. They voluntarily provide support and guidance to the current Alaska Native and non-Native PhD students. Some of the mentor PhD's play vital roles in educational policies at the main educational institutions in Alaska. They are Alaska Native leaders in promoting publications and organizing conferences that support K12 and postsecondary Native education.

Many of the Alaska Native PhD graduates work at a wide range of universities throughout the United States, teaching, researching, and publishing in a wide range of fields from Theology to Neurosciences and Molecular Biology. Many are willing to share their journeys. There is a need to hear their stories, not only to inspire their people, but to motivate those following in their footsteps.

In 2005, National Education Association (NEA) leaders, along with the assistance of the Alaska Native/American Indian Caucus, published a report (Trujillo & Alston, 2005) revealing distressing data on Alaska Native/American Indian students. It states:

In 2003, 15 percent of Native youths 16- to 24-years old had not completed high school or earned a G.E.D. credential. This rate was more than twice the rate for white youths (6 percent), four times that of Asian American/Pacific Islanders (AA/PI) (4 percent) and about the same

as Black youths. Only Hispanic students dropped out at rates higher than AI/AN students. Persistence to graduation is difficult for students who are not achieving at high levels. AI/AN students, like other students, get discouraged when they are unable to feel success in their schoolwork. Native students generally score lower than white or AA/PI students in both reading and math in the fourth and eighth grades.

Emphasis on Alaska Native postsecondary education is a proactive, asset-based measure to promote a pathway to academic success with Alaska Native students. Although much emphasis tends to be focused on preK-12 education, postsecondary momentum has been increasing over the past few years among several international Indigenous groups. A well-published New Zealand Maori professor, Dr. Graham *Hingangaroa* Smith, stated that there would be “deaf ears until you have a PhD” (Smith, 2013). Smith advocates self-determination through the advancement of graduate education, with the goal of having Indigenous groups continue to research, publish, present, and advocate for their people.

Dr. Jessica Bissett-Perea of the University of California Davis completed a list of what she calls the “Alaska Native Scholars Project,” which is a compilation of Alaska Native PhD holders. Dr. Gordon Pullar and Dr. Ray Barnhardt, professors at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, started the list, with Perea completing it. Some UAF PhD students, faculty, and I have been adding to her Alaska Native Scholars list, which is the critical resource for my research as described in my proposal’s methodology section. Since Perea published her list in fall 2013, the number of identified Alaska Native PhD’s has grown from 50 to 69. My initial idea for this research emerged after reading Perea’s document that

included the Alaska Native Scholars table of Alaska Native PhD and EdD graduates (Bissett-Perea, 2013, p. 16).<sup>2</sup> Perea’s research coincided with the UAF’s newly established doctoral program in Indigenous Studies and a new wave of statistics on Alaska Native and American Indian underrepresentation in doctoral degrees over the past two decades. Perea’s work inspired me.

The National Science Foundation (NSF) released a January 2014 web report with startling statistics: “Participation in doctoral education by underrepresented minority U.S. citizens and permanent residents is increasing, as evidenced by an 87% increase in the number of doctorates awarded to blacks or African Americans over the past 20 years and a more than doubling of Hispanic or Latino doctorate recipients” (NSF, 2014). Alaska Native and American Indians’ doctoral attainment numbers have decreased from 1992-2012, as NSF has shows (Figure 1).

A recently published document by the Education Trust shared the latest startling academic data from grades 4, 8, high school, and college level for Alaska Natives, Hawaiian Natives, and American Indians. The data were developed by the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (Education Trust, 2013). The public school data for Alaska Native/American Indians indicates declining educational success, while the college data seems to have remained constant. The study states that 54% of high school graduates went on to college in 2004, compared to 75% of white students. Of those numbers, 39% of AN/AI students who enrolled in 2004 graduated with a bachelor’s degree by 2010, as compared to 69% of white students who also enrolled that same year (p. 11). Awareness of these statistics from public school through postsecondary would benefit Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and American Indians. As the Education Trust

## Doctorates earned by members of U.S. underrepresented minorities: 1992–2012

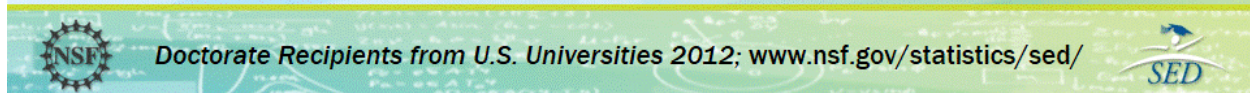
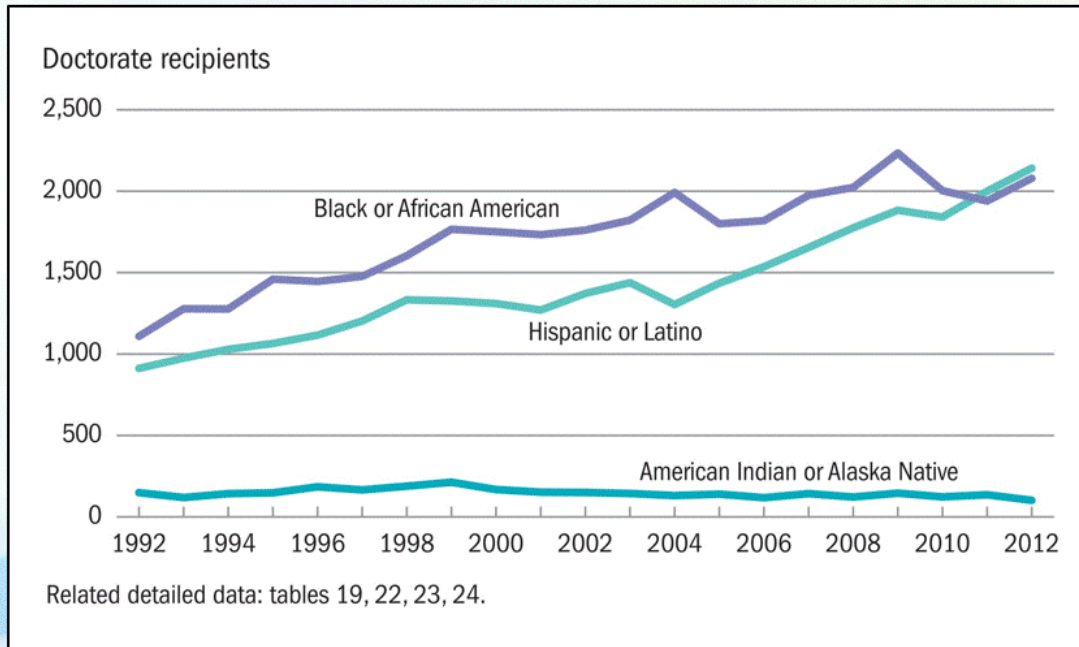


Figure 1. Recent data showing 20-year span of earned minority doctorates. National Science Foundation (<http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/sed/digest/2012/theme1.cfm#6>)

document states, “We hope that these data will help spark much needed conversation and action to ensure that we, as a nation, reverse these trends” (p. 3).

There are a number of factors that support persistence and success for Indigenous graduate students. While the greatest predictor for PhD success in other cultures may be generational (offspring of PhD’s following their parents’ educational path), the 69 Alaska Native PhD’s are first generation doctors (Bissett-Perea, 2013, p. 16). The literature review, a survey of the approximately 64 living Alaska Native PhD’s, followed by interviews of a subset of this population will provide the basis for some meaningful insight

into the rare group of Alaska Natives.<sup>3</sup>

The compilation of research data and findings will be interesting and an important contribution to Indigenous research in postsecondary education. My research hypothesis is that this information holds great value for addressing the low demographic population of Alaska Native PhD’s.

I am excited and encouraged to consider how a better understanding of one factor (success) may influence the other (more PhD’s) with respect to recruitment and mentoring of future Alaska Native graduate students, and the impact on other Indigenous groups.

As I conduct my research, I will pay attention to some advice from Shawn Wilson. I choose his quote because he was such an inspiring Indigenous author and speaker in my doctoral methods coursework. His work spoke to me: he said to have faith and it will all be as it is meant to be; conclusions will unfold from the research in their own time. Wilson said that conclusions might change as new relationships develop. He also said we will get different messages through his concept of “Research is Ceremony” (Wilson, 2008, p. 134). I particularly appreciate what Wilson said about indigenous research: “If my research doesn’t change me as a person, then I haven’t done it right” (Wilson, p.135). It was incredibly inspiring to read works of Indigenous researchers.

### **Project Contributions to the Field**

My findings from the use of literature review, a well-tailored survey instrument, and personal interviews will be compiled and interpreted in the final section of this research. I anticipate this research will benefit and potentially serve to motivate graduate and undergraduate Alaska Natives, as well as other Indigenous students and researchers. As a PhD student, it is exciting and inspirational to read published work by Alaska Native authors in many different fields, not just education. More researchers and “experts” in fields will contribute to our Indigenous knowledge base.

I foresee some powerful testimony regarding resilience, relationships, and relevance of content and culture in my research work from review of the literature and the interviews. Alaska Native students who were resilient also had some form of a cultural and spiritual connection they believed in (Strand & Peacock, 2003). They list four known themes or Native beliefs that Native people value which foster resilience:

- Spirituality – living according to the belief in the interrelatedness of all things
- Mental well-being—having clear thoughts
- Emotional well-being—balancing all emotions
- Physical well-being—attending to the physical self

They also share four ways to build self-esteem for Native youth, which begin at birth:

- Sense of belonging—with parents and family
- Mastery of skills, through story telling and role modeling
- Independence and motivation to do things
- Generosity—giving to the community and giving back to others

### **Historical Accounts Leading to Proactive Steps by Indigenous Groups**

The premises underlying this research are that, “Education is opportunity” and that an increasingly higher attainment of education will positively influence Alaska Native society, economics, and culture. To that end, I will also examine a small focus in my review of the literature to contain a theme of education as a path towards self-determination. This approach is consistent with other examinations of educational attainment in minority populations. Although the body of my work will be researching and reporting on what is known about Alaska Native PhD’s, this study will support the concept that advancing the size of this small subset of the Alaska Native population is worthwhile (answering the “So What?” question), and therefore will require structure and support. An examination of the educational path of other Indigenous and

minority populations will also provide useful comparisons to understand values, benefits, and barriers of graduate PhD Alaska Natives.

### **The Alaska Native Education Advocacy and Alaska's Initiatives**

There is a critical need for more Alaska Natives in higher education. Barnhardt (2008) published a study relevant to the need for Alaska Native PhD's. He makes a strong point that Native people have historically been the subjects of research rather than conducting it and sharing it themselves. He indicated:

Native peoples in Alaska have usually been the subjects of research rather than the ones responsible for conducting it. However, the role of Alaska Natives in research is changing due to a concerted effort on the part of the University of Alaska and Native people themselves to develop new programs aimed at recruiting and preparing Native scholars in all academic fields who can take on leadership roles and bring an Indigenous perspective to the policy arenas at the local, state, national and international levels (p.1).

Barnhardt, Graham Smith, and Bryan Brayboy have been instrumental investing years of gathering data and testimony in support of increasing the number of Alaska Native doctoral graduates. Likewise, University of Alaska President Hamilton was also supportive of their tenacious efforts.

Barnhardt, Kawagley, and many others involved in this effort recognized the need for capacity building in rural communities. Hearing Indigenous voices and perspectives is critical for the future of the Alaska land and resources, as well as honoring the centuries of Indigenous knowledge of Alaska Native people. Alaska Native involvement with non-

Native researchers and decision-makers is imperative. Capacity building in the graduate arena is critical for advocacy aimed at growing and preserving Indigenous knowledge, Alaska's resources, and Alaska Native education. Barnhardt (2008) has made a strong case for this by consistently praising the work of his late colleague:

Most critical in this regard for purposes of bringing Indigenous knowledge out of the shadows in Alaska was the seminal scholarly work of Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley (1995), whose research revolutionized our understanding of the role of Indigenous worldviews and ways of knowing and their relevance to contemporary matters. (p. 5)

Kawagley worked in tandem with Barnhardt for decades. Over several decades, Kawagley played a significant role in the growth of Alaska Native education programs. In one of Barnhardt and Kawagley's most recent publications, Kawagley articulately stated, "Our educational mission is to produce human beings at home in their place, their environment, their world. This is slowly being brought to fruition through the effort of the Native people themselves, with support from others of like thinking" (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2010, p. xiv).

Many people were involved in Alaska's Indigenous education movement during the groundbreaking stages decades ago. Some of them were Frank Hill, Moses Dirks, and Andy Hope, as well as other elders, staff and faculty members supporting this difficult endeavor. There were many influential female educators, leaders, and elders around the state who were key supporters, often times working behind the scenes to promote and strengthen Alaska Native education. These key Alaska Native female educators include Cecilia Marks, Virginia Ned, Loddie Jones, Lolly Carpluk, Jackie Kookesh, Terri Schneider, Olga



Pestrikoff, Marie Olson, Esther Ilutsik, Nita Reardon, Martha Stackhouse, Bernadette Alvanna-Stimpfle, and Ruth Sampson.

A benefactor of the hard work of these early pioneers in the Alaska Native education movement has been the University of Alaska Fairbanks Indigenous Studies PhD Program, created in 2009. “UAF’s PhD program is unique in that it breaks down barriers of access” for Alaska Native people, as stated by Perea (personal communication, July 15, 2013). She also stated that “it is uniquely positioned to get advanced degrees” with their distance education PhD program.

### **New Zealand’s Maori PhD Expansion and Alaska’s Proactive Measures**

A prominent study that influenced my own thinking on the value of research into participation rates of Alaska Natives in graduate studies was Caulfield’s work on the New Zealand’s Maori culture. My review of existing studies will draw on some of Caulfield’s 2003 account of his sabbatical to New Zealand that occurred during the time that Smith was in the process of creating the dream of graduating 500 Maori PhDs in five years. He stated, “The process of strengthening Indigenous higher education is well underway in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The goal of educating 500 Maori PhDs as part of that process is ambitious but not beyond reach. In Alaska, we have similar opportunities. We simply need to embrace them and then act” (p. 23). Caulfield’s paper, based on his Maori observations, includes several insights with relevance to my proposed thesis. Caulfield stated, “Smith and his colleagues are embarking on a proactive effort to cultivate and mentor the next generation of Māori academics and leaders.” In brief summary, he acknowledged the Maori five-year plan was based on three premises:

- 1) Strengthening higher education for Māori requires *building critical mass of university faculty*.
- 2) The plan is premised on the need for *effective indigenous leadership within the university*.
- 3) Universities can best serve indigenous students through *innovative partnerships that acknowledge desires for indigenous self-determination*.

Caulfield’s response to the Maori challenge was to share their initiative with his home base campus, UAF. He felt it would benefit Alaska Native education due to the historical parallels Maoris have with Alaska’s Indigenous people. He shared his insights for Indigenous higher education in Alaska and at UAF in his sabbatical paper (2003). Interestingly, within the last decade, Alaska has embraced many of the objectives and steps demonstrated by the Maori people, as documented by Caulfield.

The Maori model has been widely embraced by Alaska academics, as the three University of Alaska main campuses (Fairbanks, Anchorage, and Juneau) have focused on efforts to increase indigenous faculty and also cultural curriculum into their programs.

Another significant document in my literature review is Malia Villegas’ dissertation, which supports the advocacy, the need, and the mission for more Alaska Native PhD graduates. Her qualitative case study also drew on the Maori model and related initiatives involving being immersed with the Maori educational community and exploring how they accomplished the 500 Maori PhD’s in five years project. Villegas is an Alutiiq-Sugpiaq Harvard doctoral graduate. She spent time in New Zealand studying the Maori effort to quadruple their PhD graduation rates. Her visit occurred in 2008, eight years after Caulfield’s 2001 sabbatical. Villegas’

qualitative study (2010) “explores why Maori are focused on doctoral development; how they achieved this goal; and what kinds of changes it has inspired” (p. 6). She was attracted to this research because it was inspirational and it held implications for the Alaska Native population. She indicated the objective of the 500 Maori PhD’s in five years initiative was “to prepare a critical mass of indigenous education leaders across an entire nation through largely mainstream institutions” (p. 6). This echoes Caulfield’s findings.

Villegas was one of the many early advocates for more Alaska Native PhD’s. She shared her interest in this topic at the 2014 Alaska Native Studies Conference (ANSC), and said the Maori topic evolved partly from a conversation with Maori leader Graham *Hingangaroa* Smith (Villegas, 2014). Villegas chose to explore this topic as a contribution to increasing the critical mass of Alaska Native PhD graduates. Her research question was “What made the goal of graduating large number of Maori with doctorates desirable, possible, and inspirational?” One of her interesting sub-questions was “What insights emerge from it that might be instructive for other indigenous communities seeking to develop education leaders?” (Villegas, 2010, p. 58). Villegas’ work describes reasons why the doctoral program was desirable from the standpoint of Maori students. She recognized students’ intrinsic motivation as it related to the Maori culture. She observed Smith’s leadership, which emphasized the importance of increasing Maori PhD graduates and the effects that would have for his people. He framed it as an important endeavor to define who they were and the importance of knowing their genealogy. Villegas wrote:

When I asked participants why so many Maori would be willing to undertake such a significant pursuit, they

consistently pointed to the whakapapa (genealogies) of this doctoral effort, which is rooted in a “tradition” and “system” of Maori education that predates contact with European people, cultures, and institutions. (2010, p. 70)

When Villegas asked what this meant, the Maori said they have always had culturally based knowledge traditions with culturally based institutions. These institutions have had set standards and protocols with their curriculum. The spaces had rituals and ceremony. This may be similar to a long house with Alaska Native people in Southeast Alaska. Set protocols and procedures occurred in these spiritual spaces. Villegas’ interviews noted the positive value of the Maori’s attainment of their doctoral degrees. She mentioned it was for success in education and not to address the gap or deficits the Maori people have had in the system (Villegas, 2010).

Villegas noted implications for Alaska’s higher education institutions. She acknowledged that Alaska Natives have many researchers in occupational and academic fields. She also reflected on what she learned in New Zealand and determined that it may not always be the right approach for Native education in her Alaska homeland. Villegas reflected heavily on what research means to the Maori people and how Alaska can use the information to its best advantage while we work to increase our population of graduate-level researchers.

As part of her doctoral research, Villegas also explored and discussed alternative methods of gathering research with community-based groups. She recognized “higher education being a space where indigenous people find new applications for indigenous knowledge and meaningful ways to express their creativity and culture.” She emphasized the

importance of culture and knowing our personal stories and history (Villegas, 2010, p.283). I believe this has implication for my research as I develop survey instruments that lead personal interviews. Knowing this will help me pay closer attention to the personal stories and messages participants will be sharing with me. It is possible this could generate unforeseen stories and perspectives that will bear on my findings.

Villegas is an example of an Alaska Native scholar wanting to give back and advocate for her people, a common theme among Indigenous scholars. Both Caulfield and Villegas appeared intrinsically motivated to explore and import other cultures' educational models of success in ways that increase Alaska Native post-secondary and doctoral student populations.

### Existing Alaska Native PhD Graduates: Perea's Tribalography

Perea's "Alaska Native Scholars Project," as expanded, will be a baseline resource for research described in the methodology

section. Perea describes how she came to use the term *tribalography*:

My theoretical approach applies an Alaska Native perspective to what Choctaw author and playwright LeAnne Howe calls "tribalography" – a dialogic methodology that offers critical interventions to historic and contemporary erasures that are simultaneously informed by the cumulative injustices of colonization yet guided by optimism for future self-determination. (Perea, 2013, p. 3)

For purposes of my specific research project, I am focusing on Perea's Working List (2010, accessed 2013). Her table shows Alaska Native Men and Women Earned Research Doctorates, as listed below in updated Table 1 and spatially mapped in Figure 2 (ANKN, 2014).<sup>4</sup>

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### Alaska Native Earned Research (Ph.D. or Ed.D.) Graduates

*Table originally created by Dr. Jessica Bissett Perea (10/2013)*

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<b>Bold</b>	=	currently works in UA system (or retired from UA system)
^	=	previously worked in UA system
+	=	currently works outside of Alaska
×	=	currently works in Alaska (not in UA system)
*	=	deceased

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Name (Cultural Affiliation)	Year: Degree, Institution	Field
1. •James Simpson (Athabascan)	1970: Ed.D., University of Washington	Education
2. Michael F. Tillman (Tlingit) +	1972: Ph.D., University of Washington	Fisheries Science
3. Raymond Carroll (Athabascan) +	1972: Ph.D. University of Michigan	Physics
4. *William Demmert (Tlingit/Oglala Sioux) +	1973: Ed.D., Harvard University	Education

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<b>Name (Cultural Affiliation)</b>	<b>Year: Degree, Institution</b>	<b>Field</b>
5. <b>*Louis Jacquot (Tlingit)</b>	1973: Ph.D., University of Oregon	Education
6. <b>*Paul A Goodwin (Iñupiaq)</b>	1979: Ph.D., University of Alaska Fairbanks	Physics
7. Robert D Stearns (Alutiiq) +	1983: Ph.D., Stanford University	Anthropology
8. Elizabeth Parent (Athabascan) +	1984: Ph.D., Stanford University	Education
9. Lora L Johnson (Alutiiq) ×	1984: Ph.D., Brown University	Classics
10. Larri Fredericks (Athabascan) +	1990: Ph.D., University of Calif., Berkeley	Medical Anthropology
11. <b>John Weise (Yup'ik)</b>	1990: Ph.D., University of Oregon	Education
12. Ted Wright (Tlingit) ×	1990: Ph.D., Pennsylvania State University	Political Science
13. Dorothy Pender (Iñupiaq) ×	1991: Ph.D., Stanford University	Electrical Engineering
14. Jeanmarie Crumb (Athabascan)×	1992: Ed.D., University of Southern California	Education
15. <b>*Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley (Yup'ik)</b>	1993: Ph.D., University of British Columbia	Education
16. Brian Wescott (Athabascan/Yup'ik) +	1993: Ph.D., Yale University	American Studies
17. <b>Milo Adkison (Yup'ik)</b>	1994: Ph.D., University of Washington	Fisheries
18. <b>Jeane Breinig (Haida)</b>	1995: Ph.D., University of Washington	English
19. Edna Ahgeak MacLean (Iñupiaq) ×	1995: Ph.D., Stanford University	Linguistics
20. Catherine Swan Reimer (Iñupiaq) +	1995: Ed.D., George Washington University, DC	Education (Counseling)
21. Jay Corwin (Tlingit) +	1995: Ph.D., Florida State University	Modern Languages
22. <b>Dolores Garza (Haida)</b>	1996: Ph.D., University of Delaware	Marine Science
23. Shari Huhndorf (Yup'ik) +	1996: Ph.D., New York University	Comparative Literature
24. <b>Maria Williams (Tlingit)</b>	1996: Ph.D., University of Calif., Los Angeles	Ethnomusicology
25. Gordon Pullar (Alutiiq Sugpiaq)^	1997: Ph.D., The Union Institute, Ohio	Anthropology

<b>Name (Cultural Affiliation)</b>	<b>Year: Degree, Institution</b>	<b>Field</b>
26. Denise Dillard (Iñupiaq) ×	1997: Ph.D., Colorado State University	Counseling Psychology
27. Cheryl Ann Denesha Wilga (Aleut/Athabascan) + (Kenaitz/Athabascan)	1997: Ph.D., University of Southern Florida	Biological Sciences
28. Phyllis Fast (Athabascan)^	1998: Ph.D., Harvard University	Anthropology
29. Jeanne Longley (Iñupiaq)×	1998: Ed.D., Portland State University	Education
30. Joyce Shales (Tlingit) ×	1998: Ph.D., University of British Columbia	Education
31. Bernice Tetpon (Iñupiaq) ×	1998: Ph.D., University of Alaska Fairbanks	Cultural Education
32. Rosita Worl (Tlingit) × ^	1998: Ph.D., Harvard University	Anthropology
33. *Deanna <i>Paniataaq</i> Kingston (Iñupiaq) +	1999: Ph.D., University of Alaska Fairbanks	Anthropology
<b>34. <i>Kanaqluk</i> George Charles (Yup'ik)</b>	2000: Ph.D., University of Calif., S. Barbara	Religious Studies
35. Linda Crothers (Athabascan) +	2000: Ph.D., University of Calif., S. Barbara	Psychology
36. Sven Haakanson, Jr. (Alutiiq) ×	2000: Ph.D., Harvard University	Anthropology
37. Steven Verney (Tsimshian) +	2000: Ph.D., University of Calif., San Diego	Clinical Psychology
38. Kamilla Venner (Athabascan) +	2001: Ph.D., University of New Mexico	Psychology
<b>39. Dalee Sambo Dorough (Iñupiaq)</b>	2002: Ph.D., University of British Columbia	Law
40. Lisa Rey Thomas (Tlingit) +	2004: Ph.D., University of Washington	Clinical Psychology
41. *Mary Grantham Campbell (Iñupiaq)	2005: Ph.D. Stanford University	Anthropology and Education
42. Alexis Bunten (Yup'ik/Aleut) +	2006: Ph.D., University of Calif., Los Angeles	Anthropology
<b>43. Beth Leonard (Athabascan)</b>	2007: Ph.D., University of Alaska Fairbanks	Cross-Cultural Studies
44. Sarah (Hicks) Kastelic (Alutiiq)+	2008: Ph.D., Washington University in St. Louis	Social Work
45. Eve Tuck (Unangax Aleut) +	2008: Ph.D., City University of New York	Education
46. Cayenne Nikoosh Carlo (Athabascan/Tlingit) +	2008: Ph.D., University of Calif., San Diego	Neurosciences/Molecular Biology

<b>Name (Cultural Affiliation)</b>	<b>Year: Degree, Institution</b>	<b>Field</b>
47. ^Jordan Paul Lewis (Aleut) +	2009: Ph.D., University of Alaska Fairbanks	Cross-Cultural Community Psychology
48. Kathryn Milligan-Mhyre (Iñupiaq) +	2009: Ph.D., University of Wisconsin-Madison	Microbiology
49. Malia Villegas (Alutiiq/Sugpiaq)+	2010: Ed.D., Harvard University	Education
50. Nancy Jean Furlow (Tlingit) × ^	2010: Ph.D., University of Calif., Santa Barbara	Religious Studies
<b>51. Theresa John (Yup'ik)</b>	2010: Ph.D., University of Alaska Fairbanks	Indigenous Studies
<b>52. Roy F. Roehl II (Aleut)</b>	2010: Ph.D., University of Alaska Fairbanks	Education & Mathematics
<b>53. April G.L. Counciller (Alutiiq)</b>	2010: Ph.D., University of Alaska Fairbanks	Interdisciplinary
<b>54. Walkie Kumaggaq Charles (Yup'ik)</b>	2011: Ph.D., University of Alaska Fairbanks	Applied Linguistics
55. Jessica Bissett Perea (Athabaskan) +	2011: Ph.D., University of Calif., Los Angeles	Musicology
56. Thomas Michael Swensen (Alutiiq) +	2011: Ph.D., University of Calif., Berkeley	Comparative Ethnic Studies
57. Kutraluk J.D. Bolton (Iñupiaq) +	2011: Ph.D., Stanford University	Anthropology
58. Nadia Jackinsky-Sethi (Alutiiq) ×	2012: Ph.D., University of Washington	Art History
59. Alisha Drabek (Alutiiq)×	2012: Ph.D., University of Alaska, Fairbanks	Indigenous Studies
60. Darin Woolpert (Alutiiq)+	2012: Ph.D., Loma Linda University, CA	Language & Communicative Disorders
61. Tina Woods (Unangax Aleut) ×	2013: Ph.D., University of Alaska (Joint Anchorage-Fairbanks)	Clinical Community Psychology
62. Adelheid Herrmann (Athabaskan-Dena'ina) ×	2013: Ed.D., University of LaVerne, CA	Organizational Leadership
63. Jeremy Gilbreath (Aleut)+	2013: Ph.D., Uniformed Services U.	Emerging Infectious Diseases
64. Kenneth Samuelson (Tsimshian/Tlingit/Yup'ik)+	2013: Ed.D., East Tennessee State U., TN	School System Leadership
65. Miranda Belardi-Lewis (Tlingit/Zuni) +	2013: Ph.D., University of Washington	Information Science
<b>66. Edgar Blatchford (Iñupiaq)</b>	2013: Ph.D., University of Alaska Fairbanks	Interdisciplinary Studies
67. Cara Burnidge (Aleut) +	2013: PhD., Florida State University	Religion

Name (Cultural Affiliation)	Year: Degree, Institution	Field
68. Gail Cheney (Haida/Tlingit) ×	2014: Ph.D., Antioch University	Leadership and Change
69. ^Barb QasuGlana Amarok (Iñupiaq)×	2014: Ph.D., University of Alaska Fairbanks	Indigenous Studies

Table 1. Updated version of Perea’s list

10/06/14 updated by Jones

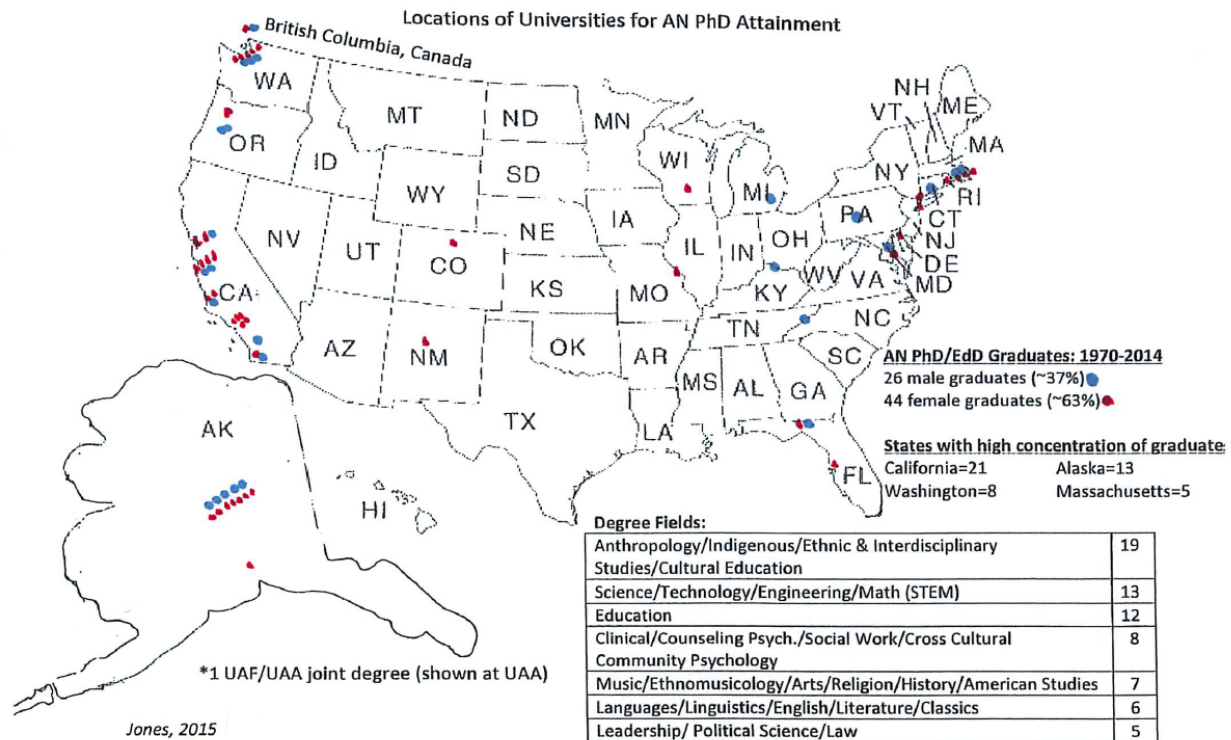


Figure 2. Map of Alaska Native PhD recipients

Perea conducted extensive research gathering names and degrees of all Alaska Native PhD graduates up to her fall publication. UAF graduate students have been seeking other names and adding to this working list, which originally was initiated by UAF’s Gordon Pullar and Ray Barnhardt. This small pool of individuals will be the target population of my study. My survey population will consist of all living Alaska Native PhD graduates.<sup>5</sup> Given the small population (N = 69) and the likelihood of a high motivation to respond to the survey, I anticipate this phase of data

gathering will result in a strong data set. The list itself provides insight into the diversity of degree specialization.

**Relevant Research on Non-Alaska Populations: An Overview**

One intriguing study, a dissertation by Antoinette Rogers (2006) at Virginia Commonwealth University, examines factors leading to successful attainment of PhD degrees among African American women. This work has strong similarities to my proposal in both the research design and integration of qualitative data. Rogers’ work

also looks at factors contributing to attrition among female African American degree seekers (p. 9), a relevant research question I hadn't initially contemplated. Due to the short nature of this paper, I'll briefly summarize some key components of her dissertation.

She emphasizes, "Socialization encompasses integration into the academic setting in both the social and academic domains. This integration is key to progression along the path to the doctorate" (p. 11). Rogers notes that students working in isolation, both academically and socially, have a difficult time finishing.

My personal experience in the UAF Indigenous Studies echoes Rogers' findings. Although my student cohort is located in various locations around Alaska and the Lower 48, we have strong social media communications and support networks. That has been particularly important for moral and academic support.

One significant variable Rogers noted is the fundamental role financial resources play in enrollment status. Rogers makes a statement that mirrors my experience with the Alaska Native population when she discusses how minority students must enter and finish academic programs at various levels. Rogers states, "Without a critical mass of doctoral candidates and degree-holders, there will continue to be a gross underrepresentation and uneven distribution of African American doctorates in the U.S. workforce (pp. 25-26).

Along with the need to understand factors that lead to success, I hope to shed light on how Alaska institutions can attract greater numbers of Alaska Natives into doctoral programs. There is a need to increase representation of Alaska Natives in research, business, and education professions in Alaska. This is something that Rogers advocated for--having

more minorities in the leadership roles in the workforce.

An interesting part of her study was Michelle Maher's team, from South Carolina and George Mason Universities in 2004. They conducted surveys of Stanford doctoral graduates. Results showed that attrition was a factor due to lack of funding, family responsibilities, poor advising, personal illness, lack of preparedness with dissertation study, and lack of motivation (Maher et al., 2004, p. 389). Rogers' exploration of financial factors affecting advancement to PhD and completion of program merits examination as it relates to Alaska Natives moving from master's to PhD programs and successfully completing their doctoral requirements.

Rogers' study produced some relevant findings that will influence my research direction. The early and middle degree completers scored high on a "strong commitment to finish in a timely manner." Some other markedly high responses were "having a helpful advisor/committee" and "productive prior professional experience." Another response receiving strong scores was "help/support from other doctoral students" (Maher et al., p. 392).

The late finishers had highest responses in "supportive, helpful, or actively involved advisor (86%), being well prepared to conduct a dissertation study (78%), financial support from sources outside of the university (75%), and taking a special class or linking with a particular faculty mentor" (72%) (Maher et al., p. 393).

One other relevant study cited by Rogers was the Sister of the Academy (SOTA). Rogers identified the organization's emphasis of support networks. Some of those support areas included networking, individual and collaborative scholarship, and promoting



professional development. SOTA is known as a successful support network organization for African American women with at least a graduate degree (Rogers, 2006, p. 50). Some elements of this work shed light on my study design.

Rogers displayed her findings in a Venn diagram figure (p. 142). The institutional factors shown on the diagram were departmental support, academic support, and financial support. The external factors were moral support and spirituality: family, friends, and personal spiritual beliefs. Social support was shown by the merging of the two areas in a section that included colleagues in program, advisor, mentor, community of scholars, warm and nurturing environment, dedicated writing time, organizational membership, and ease of transition and adjustment to graduate school. Rogers also listed personal factors: ownership of doctoral process, knowledge of self, self-determination, full-time matriculation, plan of action, and response/navigational skills (p. 142).

### **Research on American Indian Graduates**

Brayboy, Fann, Castagno, and Solymon (2012) analyzed higher education among American Indian and Alaska Native students. In a report examining postsecondary education they provide insight on critical issues, conditions, and solutions for Alaska Natives and American Indians. A relevant section discussed support factors for Indigenous graduate completers. Resiliency and self-motivation were vital areas for “students of color” (Brayboy, Fann, Castagno & Solymon, p. 87). They concluded, “There are a number of factors that support persistence and success for Indigenous graduate students; including mentoring, and the desire to give back to one’s tribe and support Native communities” (p. 87). The research team mentioned self-descriptors from Indigenous doctoral students as being “persistent, tenacious, determined, and goal

committed,” and mentioned the significance of “spiritual, mental, social, and physical well-being as contributors to their success and resilience” (p. 87). I anticipate these individual characteristics as contributing factors in my research with Alaska Native doctoral students’ success and resilience.

Brayboy’s team discovered the positive influence and significance of having Indigenous faculty supporting Alaska Native and American Indian degree completers. If they were not available, other “faculty of color” contributed to their success. The Indigenous graduates found support networks at other institutions if not available in their own area and used conferencing to overcome distance. A final noteworthy finding was that Indigenous students had a desire to give back to their communities (Brayboy et al., p. 88). This parallels with tribal values of various Alaska Native groups. This is also something Villegas expressed in her dissertation. I will seek more North American Indigenous research relevant to my study as I advance through the literature review.

### **Research-based Summary of Recommendations for Strengthening Indigenous Student Success in Doctoral Programs**

There are many common factors that contribute to successful attainment of a doctoral degree which are independent of the student’s ethnicity or socioeconomic background. Based on my review of literature, factors contributing to doctoral degree success include:

- Being resilient, having character traits of tenacity, persistence, and self-determination, and being goal-orientated

- Having social supports, whether from peers, faculty members, counselors, or family members
- Having academic supports, whether from faculty members or financial support
- Having moral support and spirituality from family, friends, or personal belief systems—emotional, spiritual, physical, and mental
- Having the desire to give back to the community or tribe

I will research additional studies on American Indians, First Nation and Native Hawaiian doctoral students, as well as undertake a more exhaustive search on existing Alaska Native studies on the subject.

The measure of my success will be the degree to which my study gives-back to my indigenous community and the university in a meaningful way that contributes to an increased awareness of factors leading to attracting, retaining, and graduating Alaska Native PhD students.

### **Conclusion:**

Most of the Alaska Native PhD's are alive today. There is something to learn from the stories of this rare group of individuals. They are a modest number within a small group. They likely have a strong motivation to tell their story, particularly if it will advance the numbers. I suspect there will be themes and correlations in their academic path that will inform those coming behind them and lessons for institutions that seek to address their small numbers. After all, they are their own best advocates and mentors, having been conferred a PhD with an Alaska Native bloodline.

The degrees vary widely and span across the United States, as they will continue to do. As Alaska Native PhD students, we look forward to their messages, stories, and learning from

their contributions and mentorships. Importantly, I expect this project to significantly contribute to the critical mission of “growing our own” by working collaboratively to increase the number of Alaska Native doctoral students and thereby taking ownership of our peoples’ work.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> The Alaska Native Knowledge Network (ANKN) website is a clearinghouse for a wide range of indigenous research. Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors, educators, scientists, and research contribute to the site, which gets over a million “hits” per month, according to the webmaster, Sean Topkok (2014).

<sup>2</sup> Jessica Bissett-Perea is a Dena’ina Athabascan PhD graduate of University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). She is currently an assistant professor at University of California Davis. She completed the AN PhD/EdD list by finding an additional twenty names from University of Alaska Fairbanks’ (UAF) Professor, Dr. Ray Barnhardt’s original list.

<sup>3</sup> Of the original 69 PhD’s, five are deceased.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Perea has graciously shared her Alaska Native Doctorate list, which is now easily accessed at the University of Alaska’s ANKN website, but the original list is in her *Tribalography* document, located in my References.

<sup>5</sup> I will not examine other terminal degrees, such as MD or JD, due to the specific nature and time constraints of my dissertation topic.

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