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BARRIERS AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO AMERICAN INDIAN ACADEMIC

SUCCESS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA:

A QUALITATIVE STUDY

by

Jiraporn Angspatt

B. S. University of Illinois, 1991

M. S. University of Wisconsin, 1993

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Doctorate of Education

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2001

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Jiraporn Angspatt, Ed.D., May 2001

Barriers and Contributions to American Indian Academic Success at The University of Montana: A Qualitative Study

Advisor: Catherine Jenni 

American Indian students are highly underrepresented in postsecondary education. Of those who do attend, high student drop-out rates exist. Consequently, few American Indian students have earned a four-year degree in comparison to other minority groups. The purpose of this qualitative study is to learn about successful American Indian college graduates' experiences at The University of Montana between May 1995 and August 1998 and to identify what factors limited and contributed to their success toward graduation. The study addresses the following questions: (a) What factors limited American Indian success at The University of Montana? (b) What other factors contributed to their success at The University of Montana? (c) What types of support systems did American Indian students find helpful at The University of Montana? (d) How were these services useful to American Indian students? From the interviews and data analysis, seven themes emerged: (a) limited academic preparation, (b) psychosocial adjustment problems, (c) cultural dissonance, (d) academic mentoring, (e) family support, (f) goal-orientation, and (g) personal motivation.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

American Indian students are highly underrepresented in postsecondary education (O'Brien, 1992). Of those who do attend, high student drop-out rates exist (Wetsit, 1992). According to Tierney (1992a), statistics reveal that for every 100 American Indian students entering ninth grade, 60 will graduate from high school, about 20 will enter a postsecondary institution, and perhaps 3 will receive a four-year college degree. Only 9% of US American Indians have completed a college degree in comparison to 20% of the US general population (Russell, 1998). In the fall of 1995, 75% of all college students were Caucasian and only 1% were American Indian (Chronicle of Higher Education 1997-98 Almanac, 1997). Few American Indian students have earned a four-year degree in comparison with other minority groups (LaFromboise & Graff Low, 1989).

A review of past research studies indicates a number of problems contributing to the high college dropout-rates of American Indian students in predominantly White institutions. Barriers to educational success include: alcohol or substance addiction (LaFromboise & Graff Low, 1989; Sue & Sue, 1990); emotional and social adjustment problems caused by cultural conflicts (Pipes, Westby, & Ingelbret, 1993); family responsibilities (LaFromboise & Graff Low, 1989); financial difficulties (Lin, LaCounte, & Eder, 1988); high absenteeism (Senate Report, 1969); lack of a clear sense of educational and career goals (Lin et al., 1988); language differences (; McNamara, 1982;

Senate Report, 1969) low self-esteem (Senate Report, 1969); parental or peer pressure (Sue & Sue, 1990); poor educational preparation (LaCounte, 1987); and racism (Sue & Sue, 1990).

Despite the underrepresentation and high drop-out rates of American Indian students in higher education, the attainment of postsecondary education is very important to the American Indian community's goal of self-determination (Garrett, 1995; Russell, 1998). Many American Indians see education, especially higher education, as the best long-term way to accelerate this progress (Garrett, 1995).

Statement of the Problem

Although American Indians have a longer history in American education than any other minority group, the continuing academic failures common among American Indian students have been discouraging (McNamara, 1982). Research on American Indian college students has been focused on trying to understand the dynamics of academic failure. Little research exists on the transition and development of American Indian students who have successfully completed a degree in higher education. Only a few researchers (Benjamin, Chambers, & Reiterman, 1993) have focused their attention on the success of American Indians who persist, are doing well, and are successfully completing their schooling. Little attention has been paid to American Indian students who have successfully completed their bachelor's degrees at predominantly White Doctoral II institutions, such as The University of Montana.

Significance and Rationale of the Study

According to the 1972 Montana Constitution, the State of Montana recognizes the distinct and unique cultural heritage of American Indians and is committed in its educational goals to the preservation of their cultural integrity. American Indian education, K-12 and higher education, are singled out as critical to the progress and development of the American Indian people. Thus, through its constitution, the State of Montana is unique amongst all of the states in its the position of assuming leadership in American Indian education (Montana Constitution, 1972).

Enacted House Bill 528 (1999) updated the 1972 Montana Constitution in its commitment to American Indian education. These amendments include:

Section 1. Recognition of American Indian cultural heritage -- legislative intent.

- (1) It is the constitutionally declared policy of this state to recognize the distinct and unique cultural heritage of American Indians and to be committed in its educational goals to the preservation of their cultural heritage.
- (2) It is intent of the legislature that in accordance with Article X, section 1(2), of the Montana constitution: (a) every Montana citizen, whether Indian or non-Indian, be afforded an opportunity to be educated about the distinct and unique heritage of American Indians in a culturally responsive manner; and (b) every educational agency and all educational personnel will work cooperatively with Montana tribes or those tribes that are in close proximity, when providing instruction or when implementing an educational goal or adopting a rule related to the education of each Montana citizen, to include information specific to the cultural heritage and

contemporary contributions of American Indians, with particular emphasis on Montana Indian tribal groups and governments.

(3) It is also the intent of [sections 1 through 3], predicated on the belief that all school personnel should have an understanding and awareness of Indian tribes to help them relate effectively with Indian students and parents, that educational personnel provide means by which school personnel will gain an understanding of and appreciation for the American Indian people." (H.R.Res.528, 1999)

However, despite these Montana Constitution mandated obligations, there has been insufficient federal or state funding, to this point, to accommodate American Indian's higher educational goals in Montana. Attrition problems have continued for American Indian students attending conventional colleges and universities. In addition, Beck (1999) asserted, "Neither the structure nor the content of higher education in America has ever met American Indian community needs" (p. 21).

Overall, American Indians have had limited access to higher education in the historical context. The historical attempts at education are significant because assimilationist educational philosophy has existed unsuccessfully in American Indian education in the United States, whether at the college or precollege level. Unlike other minority groups, the federal and state government has unique educational responsibilities for American Indian success in higher education. For this reason, this study is unique in its emphasis and focus on the perspectives of American Indian graduates who successfully negotiated the system at The University of Montana, a predominantly White Doctoral II institution.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to learn about American Indian college graduates' experiences at The University of Montana between May 1995 and August 1998 and to identify what factors limited and contributed to their success toward graduation. Specifically, the study addresses the following questions:

1. What factors limited American Indian academic success at The University of Montana?
2. What factors contributed to their academic success at The University of Montana?
3. What types of support systems did American Indian students find helpful at The University of Montana?
4. How were these services useful to American Indian students?

Definition of the Terms

The following terms are used throughout this study and are defined accordingly:

Academic Success

Academic success is defined as the completion of a bachelor's degree, or higher degree, from a postsecondary institution.

American Indian

Students who are and have self-identified as being American Indian when they applied for admission to The University of Montana.

American Indian Student Support Services

American Indian student support services include areas such as indigenous cultural and counseling centers, organized Native American peer-mentoring programs, and tribal clubs.

Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity refers to an individual's sense of belonging to an ethnic group. Ethnic identity is a group classification in which the members share a unique social and cultural heritage passed on from one generation to the next.

Nontraditional-Aged Student

A nontraditional-aged student is an adult learner who took a break between graduation from high school and entrance to college (Cross, 1981) or took a break part way through college. Cross (1981) defined the nontraditional student as the adult who returns to school, either full or part time, while maintaining responsibilities for family, employment, and other adult life tasks.

Racial Identity

Racial identity is the biological race one claims.

Support

Although definitions of support vary, most include tangible (e.g., financial assistance and physical aid) and intangible components (e.g., encouragement and guidance). In identifying common elements of support, O' Reilly (1988) defined support as an interactive process in which particular actions or behaviors can have a positive effect on an individual's social, psychological, or physical well-being.

Tribe

Tribe is used to describe a close-knit cohesive group of American Indian people of common custom, language, and ancestry who live in the same geographic location (Stein, 1992)

Tribally Controlled Community College

Tribally controlled community college is a two-year college chartered and controlled by a federally recognized American Indian tribe. Its principal mission is to provide comprehensive academic and occupational education, which is culturally relevant to its tribal community (Stein, 1992).

Delimitations

This study confines itself to interviewing recent American Indian graduates from The University of Montana between May 1995 to August 1998. In addition, the scope of the study focuses on interviewing graduates rather than interviewing people close to graduation. The subjects in this study had some distance and time for reflection on the process, which differs from being in the midst of it.

Another delimitation is that the American Indian student body at The University of Montana may be more culturally traditional than in other areas of the country due to the extremely rural nature of the state. The American Indians at the university level are a self-selected group, as many American Indian people leave the formal educational systems well before reaching college (Wetsit, 1992). In addition, at least some of the graduates had parents and older relatives who were familiar with higher education. Many American Indians have spent considerable time in off-reservation locales (i.e., urban

areas, in the armed service, in employment settings, and in educational settings), however this may have been less true of American Indian graduates of The University of Montana.

Limitations

This study was limited by the following conditions:

In interviews with former students, issues such as the time lapse since attending college are likely to pose threats to the study. Despite the richness the interviews may provide, it is likely that there will be gaps in memory when people discuss historical events. Their impressions may be distorted and recalled events may differ from when the actual event took place.

Furthermore, the initial low response rate raises some concerns. Graduates seemed more likely to participate via the snowball sampling method rather than in an anonymous and impersonal approach. When students were familiar with others who had already participated in this study, they seemed willing to participate. These connections increased rapport between the participant and the researcher. For example, if participants suggested to their friends that this interview was interesting, fun, or worthwhile, their peers seemed more willing to participate through this route than through the initial attempts. This informal communication seemed less intimidating than responding to a request to participate in an unknown study via mail. Anonymous subject recruitment may not be successful for non-American Indian researchers. In addition, even if the researcher is American Indian, perhaps impersonal approaches are unlikely to work. Additionally, another limitation of this study may have been that some settings were not private. For example, most of the interviews were conducted at places such as work sites,

the Union Center, or coffee shops. Students may not have been as forthcoming in a public setting as they might have been had the setting been more private.

Finally, graduation, a standard criterion established by the university, is the only measure of success addressed in this study.

Summary

To reiterate, the purpose of this qualitative study is to learn about American Indian college graduates' experiences at The University of Montana between May 1995 and August 1998. This study is organized into six chapters. Chapter II addresses a review of relevant literature of American Indian higher education. Chapter III describes a qualitative research methodology, specifically the constant comparative method. Chapter IV consists of the results based on emergent themes from the data. Chapter V is a discussion of the emergent themes in relationship to the existing literature. In addition, chapter five presents conclusions and implications for mental health professionals, student service providers, faculty, and future researchers based on the outcomes of the study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

In addressing the unique needs of American Indian students, a historical perspective regarding American Indians in higher education is necessary to understand previous and existing “failures” in American Indian education. Furthermore, historical attempts at education are significant because an assimilationist educational philosophy has prevailed in American Indian education in the United States, especially at predominantly White institutions of higher education (Wright & Tierney, 1991). At these institutions, American Indian students experience several barriers, such as significant challenges to academic adjustment, psychosocial adjustment problems, and cultural dissonance (LaCounte, 1987; Pipes et al., 1993; Sue & Sue, 1990). To overcome these barriers, factors such as academic mentoring, family support, goal orientation, and personal motivation appear to significantly contribute to American Indian success in higher education (Falk & Aitken, 1992; Gordon, 1994; Lin et al., 1988). For these reasons, the literature review is organized into the following sections: history of American Indian higher education, barriers to American Indian success at predominantly White institutions, and contributions to American Indian success at predominantly White institutions.

History of American Indian Higher Education

This section is divided into the following six sections: The Colonial Period, the Treaty Period, the Forced Assimilation Period, the Restoration Period, the Termination Period, the Self-Determination Period.

The Colonial Period

Commitment to education for American Indians dates back to the early development of education in the United States. The first attempt to educate American Indians occurred in 1618 with the Henrico Proposal, introduced by the Virginia Company, which set up a college for American Indians (Stein, 1992). It failed when a feud developed between the colonists and the American Indians, who killed the colonists and destroyed the college. Despite the feuding, the colonists continued their efforts to educate American Indians (Stein, 1992).

Some early colonial colleges stated their commitment to American Indian education in their charters. Several prestigious colleges founded during the colonial time (e.g., Harvard, Dartmouth, Columbia) had missions that included instructing American Indians; however, few American Indians were educated at these institutions. In 1654, Harvard created Harvard Indian College, “a special college-within-a-college,” for American Indian students (Boyer, 1997). Of the 20 American Indian students sent to Harvard’s school in Cambridge, only two survived to receive their bachelor’s degree. The rest died from sickness, changes in lifestyle, and loneliness (Stein, 1992). In 1723, the College of William and Mary opened special facilities to house American Indian students who enrolled at the university (Wright, 1997). Likewise, Dartmouth College,

founded in 1769, included a provision for Indian education in its charter (Wright, 1997). Government officials removed many American Indian children from their homes and sent them to these colonial colleges. Three American Indians graduated from Dartmouth in the eighteenth century (Oppelt, 1990).

Besides deaths from illness and isolation, other obstacles prevented early successful education of American Indians. Wright (1997) addressed how the colonists deceptively neglected to fulfill their intentions to educate American Indians. The Virginia Company proposed funding for a college, "The College of the Infidels." Colonists, educational administrators, and private organizations carried out major fundraising for educating American Indians. However, the treasurer of the Virginia Company delayed such funding and supposedly used the money toward the advancement of the company's own economic plan. Although England gave large amounts of money, "not a penny went toward the conversion and education of would-be scholars" (Wright, 1997, p. 74). Additionally, Oppelt (1990) stated these institutions were not true colleges in terms of collegiate curriculum and quality standards. The curriculum for American Indian students was essentially the continuation of a very elementary grammar school program, which included simple basics of reading, writing, and religion (Oppelt, 1990). The standards of training were equivalent to a good manual-training high school (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997), or even elementary education. Education emphasized agricultural, industrial, and domestic arts rather than higher academic study (Wright & Tierney, 1991). Overall, the primary purpose of early educational programs, such as those at Harvard, William and Mary, and Dartmouth colleges, was to civilize, colonize, and Christianize

their American Indian students (Wright, 1997; Wright & Tierney, 1991). These educational efforts generally ended in failure—with disastrous effects (e.g., high drop-out rates, low self-esteem, and even death) for American Indians and failure to understand cultural differences of American Indians. In their efforts to assimilate American Indians, early educational programs contributed significantly to destroying American Indian indigenous cultures.

After the Colonial Period, there are five major federal government policy periods in American Indian history (Szasz, 1977). The Treaty Period (1778-1871) is the first policy period in American Indian history. The second policy period is called the Forced Assimilation Period (1887-1934). The third policy period is the Restoration Period (1934-1951). The fourth policy period is the Termination Period (1951-1974). Finally, the fifth policy period is the Self-Determination Period (1974-Present). To a large degree, education policy fits into the periods of federal Indian policy. As Szasz (1977) noted, whenever federal policy changed, American Indian education also changed. For this reason, these federal policy periods are the focus to discuss education policy.

The Treaty Period (1778-1871)

The Treaty Period (1778-1871) is the first policy period in American Indian history. The US government made 800 treaties and provisions with American Indian nations between 1789-1871. Of these 800 treaties, 120 treaties contained provisions for American Indian education. The federal government assumed responsibility for the educational needs of American Indians through treaty. The abrogation of education treaties signed between the US government and American Indian tribes occurred

regularly. While the government issued regulations, created special funds, and sold Indian land to finance American Indian education, the most common mechanism to educate American Indian children before 1870 was by treaty (Olivas, 1997). American Indian nations ceded their lands to the federal government with great reluctance and they did so, in the end, partially based on federal promises to educate their children (Olivas, 1997).

Although treaties were one-sided, the government did not even meet these responsibilities. A congressional report noted of educational treaties, “Many treaty provisions for education were never effective since Congress failed to appropriate the funds to fulfill those obligations” (Olivas, 1997, p. 679). In 1871, the federal government quit making treaties and American Indian families were relocated to concentrated reservations and were expected to live in these confined areas.

The Forced Assimilation Period (1887-1934)

The second policy period is called the Forced Assimilation Period (1887-1934). The federal government made new attempts to bring education to the American Indians (Stein, 1992). Federally subsidized church groups established manual training and industrial schools on the reservations and, again, coerced assimilation practices.

Off-reservation boarding schools started during this period. Religious institutions believed that children could be more easily educated if they were removed from their families and communities (Boyer, 1997). In 1879, Richard Henry Pratt, the founder of the Carlisle Indian School, attempted to “civilize” American Indians by abolishing their language and culture and incorporating them into the mainstream of American life

(Boyer, 1989). The Carlisle Indian School was the first off-reservation boarding school of its type with the purpose of teaching American Indian students academic, vocational, and social skills. According to Boyer (1997), advocates of the boarding school system viewed Carlisle and similar boarding schools as institutions of hope and inspiration. However, “living conditions and the quality of education were very poor. Discipline was harsh, and with limited federal funding, much of each student’s day involved manual labor needed just to maintain the campus” (Boyer, 1997, p. 12). Carlisle Indian School and other off-reservation boarding schools exemplified detrimental educational practices for American Indian students. For example, Boyer (1997) described these difficulties:

The drop-out rates at [American] Indian boarding schools were always high. Young students, to stay in school, had to be away from home and family for long periods. For the minority that did graduate, there was little chance for advancement either on or off the reservation. The Indians who passed through these schools were no longer considered a part of their tribal culture. Further, there were few jobs, since most graduates were trained for work not available on reservations. (pp. 12-13)

Boyer (1989) noted early American Indian school policies were strict and abusive by current standards. School officials cut the students’ hair and prohibited native dress and speaking (Pipes et al., 1993). Teachers dropped students’ American Indian names and renamed students with Christian names, or the names of contemporary White leaders of the time (Boyer, 1989).

Sometimes, institutions boarded students year round, fearing that students might fall back into traditional ways if allowed to go home for the summer (Pipes et al., 1993). The length of time students were away often averaged about eight years (Mann, 1997). In the United States, for some tribes, this was accomplished through treaty and eventually through compulsory education statutes. Government officials attempted to “cleanse” the children of their American Indian heritage (Boyer, 1989). They gave the children Christian names, forced them to worship the Christian God, and forbade them to speak their native language.

In the case of the early schools, federal and state agencies removed children from the supposedly uncivilized and heathen influences of the tribe and family. Many children displaced by such policies experienced adjustment difficulties as children and as adults (Blount, 1996). American Indian boarding schools were a traditional way of life for American Indian families that lasted into the 1950s. Several generations (i.e., grandparents, parents, and children) have attended off-reservation boarding schools.

From 1926 to 1928, Dr. Lewis Meriam conducted a comprehensive study on the socioeconomic conditions of American Indians and the effectiveness of the federal administration of Indian Affairs (Meriam, as cited in Mann, 1997). The findings from this study, also known as the Meriam Report, asserted that the government’s assimilation policy condemned American Indians to a disadvantaged life of poverty, suffering, discontent, ill health, and inferior education (Meriam, as cited in Mann, 1997). A major finding was that American Indians were excluded from participating in the management

of their own affairs. The significance of the Meriam report is that it documented the failure to carry out the federal trust responsibility for the education of American Indians.

The Meriam Report had an instant impact. Within 5 years, 12 boarding schools had closed or changed to daytime school. In addition, some schools had introduced programs encouraging American Indians to teach classes (Boyer, 1997; Szasz, 1977)

The Restoration Period (1934 - 1951)

In addition, the Meriam Report provided a basis for the development of federal Indian policy, such as the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. The Indian Reorganization Act reversed the allotment process and prevented further erosion of the Indian land base. Three objectives of the Indian Reorganization Act included economic rehabilitation, tribal self-government, and civic and cultural freedom and opportunities for American Indian people (Mann, 1997). Since 1934, American Indian education has been in a constant state of reorganization. The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 represented a major turning point leading to a number of educational acts and efforts, during and since the 1960s. Boyer (1997) noted that a new set of policies emerged based on the acceptance of the culture variation and American Indian self-government. Self-determination, for the first time, became the primary focus for Indian policy (Szasz, 1977).

The Termination Period (1951-1974)

During this period, a movement to terminate government supervision of Indians began (Prucha, 1981). Termination laws soon provided for the end of federal reservation status for the Menominee Indians of Wisconsin, the Klamath Indians of Oregon, and

others (Prucha, 1981). In 1954, President Eisenhower signed the Menominee Termination Bill, which resulted in a loss of special status and of federal funds. In 1973, President Nixon signed the Menominee Restoration Bill.

Overall, according to Boyer (1997), reformist energy was lost as World War II shifted the priorities of the nation. Government policies terminated selected American Indian reservations and their educational programs, and relocated individuals away from reservations into urban areas (Pipes et al., 1993). They exposed these individuals to poorly funded vocational training programs, while providing no assistance in learning English or adjusting to the urban conditions. The students eventually returned to their reservations after several years away. Urban relocation policies caused extreme poverty and disease on reservations and the creation of American Indian ghettos in the cities. American Indians grew increasingly and justifiably suspicious of government motives for every policy, program, or action concerning them (Pipes et al., 1993).

The Self-Determination Period (1974-Present)

Boyer (1997) stated, "Out of the wreckage of termination," a new policy of greater self-determination emerged. In 1968, President Johnson declared that the government must be committed to a policy of choice and a policy expressed in programs of self-help, self-development, and self-determination for American Indians (Boyer, 1997). Many of the termination-era programs were abandoned.

In 1969, four decades after the Meriam results were published, Senator Edward Kennedy submitted a historic report, titled *Indian Education: A National Tragedy, A National Challenge* (Senate Report, 1969). The Kennedy Report contained similar

findings to the Meriam Report. It was highly critical of the American education system and its failure to prepare American Indians to live successfully between their own cultures and the dominant society. Specifically, the Kennedy Report (Senate Report, 1969) identified educational failure and its effects on American Indian students because schools failed to understand cultural differences and did not encourage students to bring their cultural knowledge into the classroom. Assimilation practices dominated educational philosophy and teaching.

In 1975, Congress passed the Self-Determination Act, a policy promoting desirable social and economic level for American Indians. According to Boyer (1997), self-determination has not eliminated federal responsibility to American Indians, but brought a renewed commitment to them. This policy funded technical training, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) staff support, and federal programs. For tribes, these changes offered new opportunities.

Tribally Controlled Community Colleges

In this new era of self-determination, American Indian leaders viewed higher education as an opportunity to serve practical needs of a tribe, rather than as another form of assimilation. During the early 20th century and the World War II era, advocates for higher education reform suggested that American Indian children needed to be close to their home and family environment. After World War II, the Higher Education Act in 1965, the GI Bill, provided financial assistance for returning soldiers, including American Indian soldiers, to enroll in college. Boyer (1997) noted, "As higher education became more accessible, it also became more desirable, and even necessary" (p. 23).

In response to the unsuccessful experiences of American Indian students on mainstream campuses, tribally controlled community colleges evolved. According to Boyer (1997), American Indians still faced the struggle to get into college and the struggle to successfully complete a degree once enrolled. Thus, the primary philosophy of the tribal colleges provided American Indian students with open admission, job training, and community development, which closely matched the needs of the reservation.

The first tribal community college, Navajo Community College, located in Tsaile, Navajo Nation, Arizona, was established in 1969. Currently, there are more than 30 tribally controlled community colleges to serve the educational and vocational needs of American Indian students (Boyer, 1997). Tribal colleges, along with other two-year institutions, are the entry points of higher education for over half of American Indian students enrolled in higher education (Wright & Tierney, 1991).

In contrast to predominantly White colleges, tribal colleges have been very successful in their overall education of American Indian students (Braithwaite, 1997; Stein, 1992). According to Boyer (1997), for tribal college administrations, their first priority is to support students and ensure their success. Braithwaite (1997) indicated American Indian students are academically successful when they start their education at tribal colleges. At tribal colleges, they are taught by their own people, live in an educational context that adapts to their unique cultural background, and are more likely to move to other forms of higher education. In his book Native American Colleges, Boyer (1997) described the remarkable success and progress of the American Indian community

colleges toward preparing American Indian students for professional, vocational, and tribal careers. Huff (1997) concurred that the tribal community colleges have had an impressive record of retaining and graduating American Indian students.

As previously mentioned, the historical attempts at education are significant because assimilationist educational philosophy has existed in American Indian education in the United States, whether at the college or precollege level. At this time, many American Indians have parents, and certainly grandparents, who have attended any one of a number of the boarding schools that operated to “acculturate” American Indian children (Henderson, 1992). According to Mann (1997), the negative impacts of the boarding school education are still embedded in the memories of family members and elders. She described this type of “de-Indianizing” through education as “historical grief”—generations of removal of tribes, war, relocation policies, and assimilation. Researchers (Pipes et al., 1993; Sue & Sue, 1990) have observed that generations of subjugation and overt racism have contributed to a sense of cultural isolation, a loss of identity, and a sense of inferiority by some American Indian students today.

Barriers to American Indian Success in Higher Education

American Indian students face tremendous barriers to success in colleges and universities. A review of the research studies indicates a number of problems American Indian students face in predominantly White institutions. The existing research on barriers to educational success include: alcohol or substance addiction (LaFromboise & Graff Low, 1989; Sue & Sue, 1990); emotional and social adjustment problems caused by cultural conflicts (Pipes et al., 1993); family responsibilities (LaFromboise & Graff

Low, 1989); financial difficulties (Lin et al., 1988); high absenteeism (Senate Report, 1969); lack of a clear sense of educational and career goals (Lin et al., 1988); language differences (McNamara, 1982; Senate Report, 1969;) low self-esteem (Senate Report, 1969); parental or peer pressure (Sue & Sue, 1990); poor educational preparation (LaCounte, 1987); and racism and stereotyping (Sue & Sue, 1990). Educational barriers pertinent to this study include: limited academic preparation (LaCounte, 1987); psychosocial adjustment problems (Pipes et al., 1993); and cultural dissonance (Pipes et al., 1993).

Limited Academic Preparation

LaCounte (1987) noted American Indians at predominantly White institutions had limited academic preparation. Minner (1995) interviewed American Indian students who dropped out of Northern Arizona University. He found that poor academic preparation was sometimes a barrier to higher education for American Indian students. Lee (1997) suggested that academically underprepared American Indian college students experienced a clash of educational cultures as they moved from structured and supervised learning environments in often rural high schools to autonomous and competitive learning environments at urban, research universities. For example, Garrod and Larimore (1997) noted:

Rote learning, memorization, and regurgitation of facts enabled them to garner top marks in public high school, but in college they find that critical thinking, analytical reading, independent research, and twenty to thirty-page papers written in formal academic prose are the required minimum. Many American Indian

students must not only learn large amounts of unfamiliar material quickly, they must also acquire a new set of academic skills to master new information (p. 6)

Psychosocial Adjustment Problems

Psychosocial adjustment problems are another factor that has hindered American Indian success in higher education (Sue & Sue, 1990). Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) indicated the transition from high school to college for all students is viewed as a form of culture shock, which involves significant social and psychological relearning in the face of encounters with new ideas, new teachers and friends with quite varied values and beliefs, new freedoms and opportunities, and new academic, personal, and social demands.

Sue and Sue (1990) have stated that American Indian students in predominantly White institutions suffer from loneliness, depression, and school failure. In their collection of essays, Garrod and Larimore (1997) interviewed American Indian students and graduates from Dartmouth to learn about how students navigated the transition from home to college and what factors aided or impeded that transition. They discovered that leaving home to attend college could cause intense feelings of loss and isolation. In Lee's (1997) study, American Indian students experienced feelings of homesickness early in the academic year but later appreciated their independence.

Several students in Garrod and Larimore's (1997) essays reported feeling out of balance. Garrod and Larimore (1997) also indicated many American Indian students enter college wanting very much to fit in and participate in the larger peer society, but end up straining to resist the dominant culture and its values. Sue and Sue (1990)

indicated that feelings of hopelessness and despair stem from exposure to negative stereotypes about themselves.

Pipes et al. (1993) believed that a long-standing history of racist attitudes continues to pose significant obstacles for American Indian students. Bowker (1993) identified racism and stereotyping directed at American Indians, cultural discontinuity, and ethnic or tribal identity problems as factors contributing to the lack of success of American Indian female students. Ambler (1997) documented instances of racism that have served as barriers to American Indian students' academic success. Thus, the existing research suggests issues of racism, segregation, forced assimilation, and ignorance of appropriate needs and services still exist in current educational practices.

Cultural Dissonance

Researchers (Garrod & Larimore, 1997; Jenkins, 1999; Pipes et al. 1993; Thomason, 1999) have noted that cultural dissonance also poses significant barriers to retention and graduation for American Indian students in higher education. Pipes et al. (1993) indicated that as American Indian students enter formal education at predominantly White institutions of higher education, they often feel stranded between two cultures. American Indian students traverse two worlds: first, the community of their tribal members and second, mainstream society. During, and subsequent to, their higher education experience, many are neither comfortable in the mainstream culture nor in their native culture (Pipes et al., 1993), an experience that is called "cultural marginalization."

LaFromboise, Berman, and Sohi (1990) noted American Indian bicultural identity poses problems for American Indian students in higher education. In traditional

American Indian families, the American Indian extended family has been the primary, social, economic, and political unit. Edwards and Edwards (1984) indicated many urban American Indians have found it necessary to maintain continued close contact with their families on reservations in order to promote their children's identification with American Indian cultures. They also noted American Indian students from extended family networks in either reservations or urban areas face unique problems on predominantly White campuses away from these relational networks. There are often considerable "pulls" to reservations from other American Indian people, particularly parents, uncles and aunts, and grandparents (Edwards & Edwards, 1984). Family responsibilities and expectations become problematic at times for many American Indian students.

Benjamin et al. (1993) verified a tendency for American Indian students to frequently return home during the school year, which is at least partially influenced by family and ceremonial responsibilities. In addition, American Indian students also reported a tendency to go home to help their families or attend ceremonies or special activities, even when such trips meant missing classes (Benjamin et al. 1993). Many American Indians who have relocated to cities from reservations and other traditional areas have felt isolated from their families and other social support networks (Edwards & Edwards, 1984; LaFromboise & Graff Low, 1989). Researchers (Edwards & Edwards, 1984; Henderson, 1992; LaFromboise & Graff Low, 1989) claimed professional or academic pressures and time constraints on mainstream campuses may prevent American Indian students from observing culturally valued practices or tribal responsibilities.

Bicultural roles and demands often require American Indians to fulfill multiple and, perhaps, conflicting social roles. According to Henderson (1992), there are conflicting values between being American Indian and succeeding academically in a non-Indian environment. On the one hand, the parents would like the student to “break out” of the reservation or other American Indian environment and take advantage of educational opportunities. This wish, however, is countered by the wish for the student to remain submerged in the American Indian environment, to learn their language, their stories, their culture, to learn the “old ways,” and to be as traditional an American Indian as possible (Henderson, 1992).

If the process of integrating these roles conflicts with achieving harmony in spirit, mind, and body, one’s psychological well-being may suffer (LaFromboise et al., 1990). In addition, many students may speak an entirely different first language, practice an entirely different religion, and hold different cultural values than the dominant culture. At the same time, they are expected to perform successfully according to conventional Anglo-educational criteria (LaFromboise & Graff Low, 1989).

Pipes et al. (1993) documented cultural differences in learning styles among American Indian students. For example, many American Indian cultures stress listening and watching as the preferred means of learning skills (Henry & Pepper, 1990). Much of the formal learning that occurs in American Indian communities is nonverbal in nature (Henry & Pepper, 1990). Pipes et al. (1993) reported a watch-then-do, rather than trial-and-error, preference to learning. Yet, most university programs rely on a verbal, sequential learning process (Pipes et al., 1993). Additionally, Pipes et al. (1993) noted

the American Indian student's achievement in higher education suffers, in part, because of failure by those schools to recognize and adapt to American Indians' culturally ingrained learning styles. Charleston (1990) stresses that American Indian students, with their intuitive, visual, and pictorial orientation, must learn to adapt to White schools, which reward auditory processing, abstract conceptualization, and language skills. Therefore, it is not surprising that American Indian students develop poor self-concepts, become uninterested in school, and are at high risk for dropping out (Charleston, 1990).

Even within small groups, discussion styles between Anglo and American Indian students are different. American Indian students typically take more time to consider a response to a question, sometimes, a few seconds longer than most Anglo instructors or peers are willing to wait (Thurston, 1998). Thurston (1998) indicated American Indian students tend to take more time, are more thorough, and are more in-depth than their Anglo peers. Additionally, Garrod and Larimore (1997) have described how class discussion in small groups captures the cultural clash between mainstream and traditional American Indian values. In these informal settings, the professor often becomes a participant in the discussion rather than its leader, and students are expected to demonstrate knowledge by engaging one another in academic dialogue and even debate.

This behavior differs from traditional American Indian values of cooperation, harmony, and humility (Garrod & Larimore, 1997). Wetsit (1999) noted that cultural differences in areas such as time management and goal orientation pose significant implications for American Indian students. Overall, the cultural dissonance experienced

by many American Indian students has led to many adjustment problems impacting academic success on predominantly White campuses.

Contributing Factors to American Indian Success in Higher Education

Researchers have identified factors that contributed to American Indian students remaining throughout graduation. These factors include academic mentoring (Minner, 1995), family support (Falk & Aitken, 1992; Lin et al. 1988), personal motivation (Falk & Aitken, 1992) and goal orientation (Lin et al., 1988).

Academic Mentoring

The literature suggests academic advising serves as a contributing factor in American Indian academic success. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) addressed the influence of academic advising services on individual college students persistence and educational attainment. Interactions with faculty positively affected students' attitudes toward college, academic achievement, and persistence in school (Brown & Robinson-Kurpius, 1997). Terenzini, Blimling, and Pascarella (1996) noted that most researchers have found a positive relationship between contact with faculty and academic achievement.

However, research on academic advising specifically for American Indian students is sparse. Researchers (Tate & Schwartz, 1993; Wright & Tierney, 1991) note a lack of role models in American Indian communities and in institutions of higher education. Thomason (1999) suggested retention of American Indian college students could be improved by making reasonable accommodations for mentoring relationships. Researchers (Lee, 1997; Thomason, 1999) concurred that American Indian students were

interested in having a faculty mentor in their field of study. Betz (1991) reiterated the need for a strong support person in the education of American Indian college students. Kidwell (1991) observed that, initially, few American Indian students had college-educated parents or relatives who could give them any ideas or advice about what college education would be like. Lintner (1999) noted the mentoring process allows faculty to provide not only advising, but emotional support. As Lin et al. (1988) noted, efforts to promote academic integration of American Indian students could include informal faculty or student activities that would lead to positive interaction inside and outside the classroom. Faculty and advisors can help students negotiate the academic system—between the student’s culture and the institution’s culture, as Pipes et al. (1993) noted. In sum, researchers (Jenkins, 1999; Lintner, 1999; Smith-Mohammed, 1998) documented the benefits of a mentoring relationship for American Indian students in higher education.

Gordon (1994) reiterated the need for effective academic and career advising for culturally diverse students, specifically American Indian students and transfer students. Padilla and Pavel (1994) suggested that the process of academic mentoring could be strengthened for American Indian college students to prevent academic withdrawal.

Family Support

Researchers (Falk & Aitken, 1992; Jenkins, 1999) reported that family support is a major factor linked to retention of American Indian students. O’Reilly (1988) defined support as an interactive process in which particular actions or behaviors can have a positive effect on an individual’s social, psychological, or physical well-being. Weiss (1975) examined the receipt of economic and emotional support from family members as

valuable. In particular, extended kin often are helpful by making their homes available, offering services such as child care, providing companionship, and lending money (Weiss, 1975). This support might allow the individual to continue to maintain necessary roles and fulfill ordinary obligations at school and in the community (Weiss, 1975).

Brown and Robinson-Kurpius (1997) noted that for minority students, family background and support for educational attainment are particularly important. Specifically, researchers (Falk & Aitken, 1992; Jenkins, 1999) found significant positive relationships between parents' educational background and attitudes and college completion rates of American Indian college students. Dodd, Garcia, Meccage, and Nelson (1995) found that a majority of American Indian college students in Montana indicated that family support was the most significant factor in their success. McInerney (1997) found that parents and extended family were the prime reference groups in influencing American Indian students, specifically Navajo students progress in their academic endeavors. McInerney (1997) noted a generally supportive family or home environment was seen as essential for educational progress. Overall, several researchers identified family support as a contributing factor to academic success for American Indian students in higher education.

Goal Orientation

The literature on goal orientation as a contributing factor to American Indian success in higher education is sparse. Betz (1991) identified the need for long-range and short-term goals and objectives in American Indian higher education. In her personal

essay, Begay-Campbell (1995) stressed the importance of goals and persistence for American Indian women in their pursuit of higher education.

However, a major source of difficulty for a number of American Indian students is the mainstream orientation to time, planning, and organizing (Pipes et al, 1993). American Indian students have frequently grown up in environments where planning was not done and where time was not rigidly scheduled. Thus, they may not be consciously aware of the reasons why they tend not to plan ahead (Pipes et al, 1993). Wetsit (1999) indicated higher education focuses on a time-management, goal-orientation, and competitive mindset. Wetsit (1992) found that students' goal-orientation or goal-directness was directly linked to their personal motivation.

Personal Motivation

Researchers (Falk & Aitken, 1992; LaCounte, 1987) indicated that personal motivation might affect retention for American Indian students in higher education. According to Kidwell (1991), a new generation of American Indian college graduates recognizes the practical application of a college education. Today, American Indian students are more likely to know someone who has been to college and are likely to see college as a stepping stone to a graduate degree and a professional career (Kidwell, 1991).

Edwards and Edwards (1984) indicated that the development of American Indian leadership is an important issue. Many American Indian tribal groups have promoted the need for "self-determination" among their people (Edwards & Edwards, 1984). This recognized need has led to the involvement of American Indian men and women in

leadership positions (Edwards & Edwards, 1984). Overall, several researchers (Falk & Aitken, 1992; LaCounte, 1987) have reiterated the significant impact of personal motivation for American Indian success in higher education.

Summary of the Literature Review

American Indian college students have confronted numerous educational barriers (i.e., assimilation, cultural conflicts) from the colonial period to current educational practices. Most educational institutions have failed to recognize and respond to the unique needs and problems of American Indian students (McNamara, 1982). Educational issues continue to confront American Indian students in higher education programs (Edwards & Edwards, 1984). Several researchers noted some inhibiting factors to American Indian success in higher education. These factors include limited academic preparation (LaCounte, 1987; Sue & Sue, 1990); psychosocial adjustment problems (Pipes et al., 1993); and cultural dissonance (Pipes et al., 1993; Sue & Sue, 1990; Tate & Schwartz, 1993; Thurston, 1998). Over the past three decades, American Indian educators in higher education have attempted to make significant progress in increasing educational opportunities. Researchers have identified some contributing factors to academic success in higher education, such as academic mentoring (Lintner, 1999); family support (Falk & Aitken, 1992; Lin et al., 1988); personal motivation (Falk & Aitken, 1992); and goal orientation (Lin et al., 1988).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to learn about the experiences of American Indian college graduates at The University of Montana between May 1995 and August 1998, and to identify what factors limited and contributed to their academic success at the university level. Information currently available about the experiences of American Indian students at higher education institutions and about the existing programs and policies for American Indian students is primarily quantitative (i.e., statistics on enrollment figures, completion rates, course enrollments, program costs). These statistics are used for making decisions about programs and policies in higher education, often with little contextual knowledge to their meaning. Furthermore, inadequate attention has been given to American Indian students who have succeeded in higher education.

Overall, the research addresses the experiences of American Indian graduates of The University of Montana to unfold “rich” voices through “thick description” (Geertz, 1973). The research design for this study is qualitative in nature to gain unique perspectives and meanings from American Indian graduates. Through the use of direct quotations, thick description, emerging patterns, meanings, and process, qualitative research provides access to a holistic understanding of the culture (Creswell, 1984). For these reasons, qualitative methods, specifically semistructured interviews, are utilized to obtain perspectives of successful graduates.

Pilot Study

Prior to conducting the interviews, a protocol (Appendix A) was developed that consisted of essential questions that were based on the literature review and professional experience working with American Indian families. In a preliminary pilot study, interviews were conducted with the Advisor and Native American Peer Mentor Coordinator at the Educational Opportunity Program and a female American Indian undergraduate student currently attending The University of Montana. The interviews focused on academic and emotional needs and support services on campus for American Indian students. The purpose of the pilot interviews was to gain preliminary information, to seek feedback regarding the study, and to modify the interview protocol. From both pilot interviews, it was evident that programs such as the Native American Peer Mentor Program, the Native American Faculty Mentor Program, and Upward Bound at The University of Montana were resource programs assisting American Indian students in the transition and adjustment to the university environment -- socially, emotionally, and academically. Both the staff member and the students made several suggestions that were incorporated into the interview protocol.

The Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) is a federally funded program that provides academic advising, tutoring, peer mentoring, and financial counseling to low-income and first generation students at The University of Montana. Sixteen percent of the students in this program are American Indian (Educational Opportunity Program, personal communication, May 31, 2001). Because of the direct involvement in providing academic assistance and retention services to American Indian students, the Director of

EOP expressed an interest in this study. He reviewed the interview questions and gave helpful feedback and revisions. The Director also confirmed the need for continued research on the needs and concerns of American Indian students at the postsecondary level.

After making significant revisions in the protocol interview, the researcher conducted another pilot interview with an American Indian female graduate from The University of Montana. From this pilot interview, the interviewee provided positive feedback on the protocol interview and the research topic in general. The piloting process contributed to making a few minor revisions and to utilizing the questions as noted in the interview protocol.

Instrumentation

The data-gathering procedure used in this study involved an extended, structured and open-ended interview with American Indian graduates who had successfully completed their college education at The University of Montana between May 1995 and August 1998. Tierney (1992b) described the structured interview as a standardized set of questions asked of the entire sample and the open-ended interview as a protocol of general questions that need to be covered. According to Tierney (1992b), the open-ended structured interview operates within a standardized set of questions asked of the entire sample.

The same initial questions were asked to each participant. While the researcher developed a protocol (Appendix A) of general questions that needed to be covered, she also asked additional questions to follow a direction that appeared interesting and rich in

data, based on what a subject said (Tierney, 1992b). Probes and follow-up questions were used to clarify responses and to encourage participants to offer a rich interpretation of their reality.

This method was selected because it allows for an approximation of the storytelling process, a traditional form of oral transfer of information from one generation to the next for American Indian people (Red Shirt, 1996). Storytelling or narrative research is a form of qualitative research approach that includes a broad range of accounts, from first-person narratives to studies that interpret the stories others tell about their lives (Fairbanks, 1996)

Qualitative research is well suited for addressing American Indian issues, because members of many traditional native communities still practice oral traditions as a means of communication. Oral traditions serve many purposes including defining cultural values and traditions, teaching and maintaining native languages, entertaining, communicating between past and present generations, and teaching social and cultural skills (Pipes et al., 1993). For American indigenous people, oral traditions maintain each group's cultural identity and world view, documents history, and links the group's past, present, and future (Montejo, 1994). According to Ortiz (1995), American Indian storytelling contributes to the maintenance of native cultures; development of individual identities rooted in awareness of family, community, heritage, land; and the flourishing of contemporary American Indian fiction. Storytelling has been a major mode of passing moral values and teachings to children, as well as passing sacred and specialized knowledge to new generations (Montejo, 1994). Qualitative research provides a natural

and culturally congruent forum to hear American Indians' voices after "generations of being silenced, being unheard, and names the ongoing contemporary struggle to be acknowledged" through poems and stories (Flynn, 1996, p. 2). This approach is helpful in describing effective and useful practices in higher education.

Population

The State of Montana has one of the largest American Indian populations. Only five other states have American Indian percentages greater than Montana. The University of Montana, a mid-sized (12,000 students) Doctoral II institution, has a predominantly Anglo-Saxon student body (87%). The American Indian populations at The University of Montana are primarily affiliated with seven rural tribes (Blackfeet, Fort Peck, Northern Cheyenne, Flathead, Rocky Boy, Crow, and Fort Belnap) throughout Montana. Approximately 400 American Indian students were enrolled at The University of Montana in the Fall, 1997. This is approximately 4% of the total student population.

Recruitment and Selection

The Director of the Registrar's Office provided a list of recent American Indian graduates from The University of Montana between May 1995 and August 1998. The list included the following information: name, address, telephone number, gender, matriculation and graduation date, and major at the time of graduation. Upon receipt of accurate and pertinent information, the researcher started recruiting participants to interview.

Participants chose whether to participate. Because the graduates who participated were self-selected, the method of sampling was purposeful in that participants were

willing to share their experiences. This research procedure ensured that a variety of types of subjects were included, but it did not identify how many or in what proportion the types appeared in the population. In purposeful sampling, subjects are included because they are believed to facilitate the expansion of the developing theory (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

The researcher mailed 125 letters including the consent forms and explanations for the research (Appendix B) to prospective participants to solicit their participation. Thirty-one letters were returned due to insufficient or unknown addresses. Thus, the sample was reduced to 94. Six out of the 94 graduates responded to the request. Five of the six respondents agreed to participate. Then, the researcher made follow-up telephone calls to those five respondents. The researcher reached two prospective participants; both of them scheduled an appointment but failed to appear at their interviews. Thus, the researcher was not able to conduct any interviews from the original 125 contacts.

The researcher recruited participants via telephone contacts to those who did not respond to the initial request via mail. After several attempts to reach graduates, the researcher scheduled a few interviews. From these interviews, the researcher utilized the snowball sampling technique, in which participants recommended others to participate in the interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992), until the sample consisted of 20 graduates.

The researcher traveled to various locations in Missoula, Ronan, Browning, and Helena to conduct individual interviews. Most of the interviews were conducted at places participants chose (i.e., work sites, Union Center, coffee shops), which were convenient and familiar for them. Individual interviews were tape-recorded upon

consent. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes to 1 ½ hours. After each interview, the researcher reviewed the interview and tape, clarified data, wrote a cover sheet, underlined or highlighted quotable quotes, noted unique aspects of the person or the interview, and evaluated the process. After all of the interviews were conducted, the researcher transcribed all the data. The time frame to complete the scheduling, interviewing, and transcribing occurred over a period of 4 months, between January and April 1999.

Sample

The research sample study consisted of 20 American Indian students who had completed at least a bachelor's degree from The University of Montana between May 1995 to August 1998. Another criteria for selection included graduates' willingness to participate. Of these 20 graduates, the sample fell into the following categories: 13 were females; 15 were nontraditional-aged students; 15 were transfer students; 11 students grew up on reservations; and eight were first-generation students. Six students majored in business and six students majored in psychology or social work. The rest of the sample varied in majors such as biology, elementary education, sociology, Native American studies, forestry, and history. Nine students identified their tribal affiliation as Blackfeet, the majority tribal affiliation in this sample. The rest of the sample consisted of members from each of the following tribes: Apache, Assiniboine, Blackfeet/Chippewa-Cree, Cherokee, Crow, Fort Peck Dakota, Gros Ventre, Mandan-Hidatsa, Navajo (Dine), Salish, and Wampanoag. The majority of the students participated in traditional cultural events like pow-wows, Sun Dances, ceremonies,

“sweats,” or various religious activities. Additionally, some students sought out cultural activities by participating in Kyi-yo, the Indian club at The University of Montana. All the participants spoke English as their primary language. Two students spoke their native language. Overall, the cross-section of graduates consisted of different tribal and native groups, with differences in customs, family background, and cultural and religious activities.

Data Analysis

The researcher gathered data by interviewing and tape-recording 20 American Indian graduates of The University of Montana. The data consisted of transcriptions from all of the interviews and the researcher organized them in chronological order by date of interview. The researcher analyzed the data with the constant comparative method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Analysis of the data was guided by the principles of the constant comparative method of data analysis espoused by Strauss and Corbin (1990). In this process, data are analyzed by reading and rereading transcripts. Initially codes are identified to start to make sense of the data. These codes are then compared to other codes to identify coherence of ideas and then combined into categories; it is from these categories that the over arching themes start to emerge. The codes are the most minute pieces of data, the categories become a way to start to group codes together (again through a process of constant comparing between the categories), and then analysis of the categories yields the themes that are the final result of the analysis (Bodgan & Biklen;1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

For example, the transcripts were initially reviewed to identify initial meanings and yielded 60 codes ranging from educational history to siblings influence to financial issues. The codes were then compared with one another and grouped into categories that captured similar meanings with regard to the codes. Example categories included: academic assistance, advising needs, education, family support, peer support, time management, and personal motivation. Analysis of the categories led to the identification of themes that captured more general meanings, such as family support, student services, and goal orientation. This process enabled the researcher to move from general understandings of the data to meaningful analysis that was paired with the literature on Native American students and their success.

According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), the first basic analytical step involves the naming and categorizing of phenomena through a close examination of the data. During the coding process, “the data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, compared for similarities, differences, and questions are asked about the phenomena” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 62).

The researcher followed these steps:

Step 1: Transcription

The researcher transcribed 20 tape-recorded interviews word for word. During this process, the researcher became re-familiarized with the content of each interview and participant.

Step 2: Readings

The researcher read all the pages of the interview transcription text, which gave an overview of the collected data.

Step 3: Initial Codes

The researcher reread all of the pages two more times and identified preliminary codes. From the transcriptions, the researcher gave each word, phrase, or sentence that contained a single meaningful thought or concept a code. The codes or concepts will be identified as separate “units.” After re-reading the transcriptions and identifying preliminary codes, the researcher cut apart the pages of the interview transcription text and sorted the pieces into the piles of initial codes. In a peer dissertation group, the researcher presented these initial codes and asked for feedback to limit codes and to discuss ideas for categories and themes. With peer feedback, the researcher revised or deleted codes several times to obtain 60 codes (Appendix C).

Step 4: Categories

The researcher labeled the 60 codes on an index card. Then, the researcher grouped these codes into piles of similar categories. After grouping and re-grouping these codes, 15 categories emerged (Appendix C and D).

Step 5: Themes

From these codes and categories, seven themes emerged (Appendix D).

In summary, the researcher transcribed each interview. From the transcriptions, the researcher gave each word, phrase, or sentence that “stands alone” a coding unit. The researcher labeled each code on an index card. Then, the researcher grouped these

coding labels into piles of similar categories. The researcher started clustering these piles of categories into emerging themes and patterns. These emerging themes and patterns became the foundation of the data.

Reliability and Validity

According to Bogdan and Biklen (1992), “In qualitative studies, researchers are concerned with the accuracy and comprehensiveness of their data” (p. 48). Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss reliability and validity in terms of establishing quality criteria such as “trustworthiness” and “authenticity.” A primary concern for qualitative research is the trustworthiness and accuracy of the data (Tierney, 1992b).

In traditional quantitative research, external validity, internal validity, reliability, and objectivity are significant. Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss areas to demonstrate efficacy of qualitative research in terms of credibility, applicability, and objectivity. Some activities that I utilized to ensure credibility, applicability, and objectivity (i.e., “rigorous research”) are thick description, member checks, peer debriefing, literature checks, negative case, and audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Thick Description

Patton (1980) defined thick description as a way of presenting solid descriptive data so others reading the researcher’s results, interpretations, and recommendations can comprehend the context within which the conclusions were formulated. Specifically, the researcher relied on exact quotations from the interviews in order to provide a thick description of their experiences.

Member Checks

Member checks are the process of checking back with subjects to verify the accuracy of transcriptions and records. The researcher called participants on the telephone to clarify and verify the content of their interviews. The researcher asked subjects, "Is this what you meant?" or "Would you explain this point?"

Peer Debriefing

Peer debriefing refers to the activity by which the research is reviewed with a peer (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Educational Leadership and Counseling doctoral students and faculty working on qualitative studies were asked to review the methodology, the findings, and the content, and to make editorial comments and give constructive feedback about the content. This group also provided a check for potential bias in this approach.

Literature Checks

Literature checks are the constant and continuous process of checking back into the literature for the purpose of continued investigation, verification, and study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In addition, literature checks are a way to compare findings with what is in the literature.

Audit Trail

In an audit trail, another researcher can go back through the transcriptions and records of the study and determine the pathway of the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In particular, the researcher kept a journal including data collection and analysis, ongoing progress, and changes. Individuals who wished to obtain the actual interviews could request copies from the researcher.

Summary of Methods

In summary, a qualitative method, specifically the constant comparative method, was utilized in this study in order to gain unique perspectives and meanings from 20 American Indian college graduates from The University of Montana between May 1995 to August 1998. The research methods involved open-ended semistructured interviews based on related literature and professional experiences with American Indian college students. The emergent themes from these interviews will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

First, as mentioned previously, the initial low response rate raises some concerns. Graduates seemed more likely to participate via the snowball sampling method rather than in an anonymous and impersonal approach. When students were familiar with others who had already participated in this study, they seemed willing to participate. These connections increased rapport between the participant and the researcher. For example, if participants suggested to their friends that this interview was interesting, fun, or worthwhile, their peers seemed more willing to participate through this route than through the initial attempts. This informal communication seemed less intimidating than responding to a request to participate in an unknown study via mail. Anonymous subject recruitment may not be successful for non-American Indian researchers. In addition, even if the researcher is American Indian, perhaps impersonal approaches are unlikely to work. To illustrate, one of the subjects admitted his initial hesitancy to participate because he had received several requests to participate in insensitive or insignificant research about American Indians. He stated, "We're like test rats, lab rats."

From the interviews and data analysis, 60 codes and 15 categories emerged. From these codes and categories, seven themes emerged: (a) limited academic preparation, (b) psychosocial adjustment problems, (c) cultural dissonance, (d) academic mentoring, (e) family support, (f) goal orientation, and (g) personal motivation. The first four themes address the first research question: What factors limited American Indian

academic success at The University of Montana? The four latter themes are those seen as contributing factors to American Indian students' academic success, namely, retention and graduation, at The University of Montana. These themes address the following research questions: What factors contributed to their academic success at The University of Montana? What types of support systems did American Indian students find helpful at The University of Montana? How were these services useful to American Indian students? The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to the interview participants. To preserve confidentiality, graduates have been given pseudonyms.

Nearly all of the participants, both as incoming freshmen and transfer students, described several obstacles they encountered when they first arrived on campus. Obstacles refer to situations or circumstances that hinder progress toward American Indian success at The University of Montana. Based on the emergent themes, American Indian graduates experienced several obstacles at The University of Montana. These obstacles included limited academic preparation, psychosocial adjustment problems, and cultural dissonance.

Limited Academic Preparation

Many students reported limited academic preparation prior to attending The University of Montana. In particular, students seemed to have several academic challenges that posed initial barriers in higher education, especially during their initial transition to college. Some students needed assistance in study skills, test-taking, proofreading, tutoring, and writing skills. A few of these students grew up in rural American Indian communities with "a lack of [educational] opportunities on reservation

communities,” as Annika, a traditional-aged student who grew up in Browning, mentioned. She recalled, “I wasn’t prepared. Learning how to take notes and doing term papers was really a big adjustment.” Several graduates described their initial experience as “a culture shock” to arrive on such a large campus. Such descriptions confirm the work of Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) who indicated the transition from high school to college is viewed as a form of culture shock involving significant social and psychological relearning in the face of encounters with new ideas, new teachers and friends with quite varied values and beliefs; new freedoms and opportunities; and new academic, personal, and social demands.

Three quarters of the participants were transfer students from other four-year institutions, community colleges, or tribal colleges. Gwen, a nontraditional-aged student, attended a tribal community college prior to The University of Montana. She wondered if she received adequate preparation from the tribal college she attended for a four-year institution:

In the tribal college, they baby you more. They don’t expect as much as at a university setting. So, I was really unprepared. I was overwhelmed to think that we had to do this much work!

Several American Indian students emphasized the limited academic preparation in their initial adjustments during their first year on campus.

Psychosocial Adjustment Problems

When students first arrived on campus, several of them experienced psychosocial adjustment problems as obstacles to success at The University of Montana. They needed

to become familiar or acquainted with the university and its surroundings. From the data, graduates expressed feelings of disorientation, overwhelmed feelings, loneliness and isolation, feelings of inferiority, and loss of identity.

Disorientation

Most of the graduates reported feeling lost and confused. Often, they “didn’t know where to go,” as Talia mentioned. Similarly, Crystal recalled her first day on campus: “My classes were all scattered, they were in every different building....I didn’t even know where all the buildings were.” In addition to feeling “just kind of lost” around the campus, students reported they did not receive “very much direction on which classes [that were] absolutely needed to take and the quickest way to get done with graduating,” as Patrick claimed. Consequently, they felt confused and frustrated. Kirby had a difficult time when she first arrived, “You’re out on your own. I didn’t know where I was going from one minute to the next with financial aid and classes and how the process really works. I was really confused.” Overall, a sense of confusion and disorientation prevailed with all of the graduates at The University of Montana.

Feeling Overwhelmed about Size and Anonymity

Graduates reported feeling overwhelmed with the choices, classes, the campus size, and the workload. Talia disagreed that tribal community colleges were less academically rigorous, and stated she needed the individualized attention. She recalled, “I’m not really saying SKC [Salish-Kootenai College] is easier, but there’s not so many in a class. They’re more individualized and they help you out. Here, you’re just a number. Whether you make it or not, it doesn’t matter.” Like Talia, students addressed

the lack of individualized attention at The University of Montana. Talia illustrates the difficulties and the cultural adjustment from a community college environment to a large university.

In addition to feeling overwhelmed about the classroom sizes and large campus, nearly all of the students reported how chaotic the registration process seemed. Saxon described registration as “an organizational nightmare.” Slade articulately described the chaotic nature of registration:

The major shock was registration.... It's total chaos. You have no idea where [to go]. It's probably one of the worst experiences I ever went through. It was a struggle, you stand in long lines, you get to the end of the line, you find out the classes are full, you go to a different line, and you're fighting just to get the minimum credits. It was frustrating. Therefore, it was a major shock factor going from a small community to being thrown into gym of 500 people trying to get classes. It was just hectic.

Marissa also had a chaotic registration experience:

I stood in line and I didn't know I was in the right line. I remember being so shook up. I stood there a long time, not knowing what to do. I remember getting out of the line and I said to my husband, crying, 'I want to go home.'

Marissa found the whole process so disorienting that her sense of security was disrupted. She continued, “I was scared. ...Then, I found out the classes were bigger, I was dealing with financial aid, I was more of a number than a person.” Angela reiterated common thoughts of her initial experiences at The University of Montana. She mentioned,

“[Registration] was just crazy. I was pretty isolated my first quarter. It was hard to figure out where everything was, get around, walk around, what was due.”

Even after registration and the initial “organizational nightmares” were over, students continued to feel overwhelmed with their classes. Madison described her sense of being overwhelmed: “My god. I’m swamped. When you first start college, there is no light at the end of the tunnel. I thought I’m never going to get done.” Talia remembered her experience: “Everyone else looked like they knew where they were going and what they were doing. There were a lot of people. Everyone knew where they were going except me.” Annika, as was true for most of the students, reflected on how overwhelmed she was with all the choices:

I just floundered because I didn’t know what to do with myself. Too many choices in a way. It can be overwhelming if you have too many choices at once; it was a big transition for me. I really screwed up my Freshman year because I wasn’t really used to having all the choices and being responsible for them.

As mentioned, American Indian graduates at The University of Montana reported feeling overwhelmed with the choices, classes, campus size, and the workload.

Loneliness and Isolation

In addition to feeling lost and overwhelmed about the anonymity, size, procedures, and unfamiliarity they experienced, students repeatedly reported a sense of loneliness, cultural isolation, or alienation. They experienced a lack of support when they first arrived. Gwen shared her feelings, “When I first got here, I cried a lot. At home, I was so plugged into my support group, my church, my family, and my extended

family. Then, all of the sudden, being here, I was just pulled out.” Graduates noted an inability to identify with the institution. Madison mentioned she did not belong to any social groups:

I just did my work. I didn’t really feel like I fit in anywhere. I didn’t really hang out with anybody but my classmates. I didn’t go and do many things at the University, except with my study groups. That’s all the support I got. I didn’t go through any programs. I didn’t get help anywhere.

Kirby, another nontraditional-aged student, noted how difficult it was for her to participate in groups:

It seemed I was always left out....I would try to participate [in groups], but it was hard when you have a lot of other people that are participating too much, or not much, but all the time. It was hard, because I wanted to express myself in the classroom. I never had the chance to because there was always somebody else talking or somebody else expressing their own opinions.

Students repeatedly identified themselves as “the only one” in their classes. In addition, not only did they feel inferior, inadequate, or isolated in their classes, but others often felt the pressure to speak for their whole culture. Again, Kirby described her experience:

When anything came up to do with Native Americans or minorities, in general, I was, of course, the only person in the classroom that had any kind of color. It was hard sometimes. I thought everybody was staring at me or looking at me waiting for me to say something.

As mentioned in the literature review, Jones (1993) identified a number of issues that were common in the experiences of “the only ones.” For instance, the comments or behavior of these individuals tended to be enlarged and generalized to the groups they represented. In addition, the individuals often experienced social isolation, often leading to feelings of loneliness; they often encountered false assumptions and stereotypes. Finally, the individuals were expected to serve on committees to represent a minority perspective (Jones, 1993). Gloria noted:

There was cultural ignorance. I don't think many people really understand Native Americans. If there is only one or two of us in a classroom, sometimes, we're singled out and expected to answer for all tribes and all Indians, but we are all different. We have different traditions. However, we were expected to know what other people's tribes do. The only one I would know would be the tribe that I'm from, so I can only speak from my experience and for my tribe and the things that we do. I wouldn't be able to speak for anyone.

All of the students who identified themselves as traditional American Indian noted a sense of isolation or alienation. Overall, students expressed a common theme that they did not “fit in anywhere,” suffered from loneliness and isolation. A sense of cultural isolation and alienation prevailed as a recurring theme.

Sense of Inferiority

Students, especially nontraditional-aged students, expressed difficulties dealing with culturally different learning styles in the classrooms. Voicing one's opinion aloud differed from the communication styles that are found with American Indians.

Consequently, American Indian students often “felt stupid” or inferior or alone. In particular, students reported feeling inadequate or inferior in group exercises. Talia articulated a common feeling:

It was hard in a group. I was put into a group with five guys, they're really talkative, and they, not one time, were they ever silent. That doesn't happen, as far as Indian people go. A lot of it is listening. I felt like they were fighting. I felt they were arguing because they were really talking loudly, one right after the other, someone cutting someone else. I always felt a little out of it.”

These feelings of inferiority seemed prevalent among nontraditional-aged students, as well. Kirby stated it was somewhat intimidating to be an American Indian on this campus. She noted she often felt alone a lot of the times. She indicated, “In most of my classes, I was the only Indian [student]. In addition, I was an older student. Maybe, being Indian, being a nontraditional-aged student, I felt I couldn't compete with all the young White kids.” Marissa experienced an incident that led her to question herself:

When I walked into my first professional position, I was soft-spoken. I was inferior....I remembered Christmas time, we gave gag gifts. [My colleagues] gave me a paper mache' microphone because they used to tease me about how soft-spoken I was. I thought there was something wrong with me. I was so upset. I laughed at the time, but I remembered sitting there with my mother, 'Am I supposed to be talking all the time? What do they expect from me?' I didn't fit in. That's when she started telling me, 'That's who you are. That's how you

were raised. That's part of being an Indian person. There isn't anything wrong with that.'

Loss of Identity

As Pipes et al. (1993) noted, institutional racism has contributed to a loss of identity. Mihesuah (1998) indicated American Indian identity conflicts are critical and ongoing psychological problems. He also noted an American Indian may have several identities (individual, occupational, religious, social, etc.) that correspond to their allegiances (such as family, tribe, community, state, country). American Indian identity constantly develops in response to the person's social, political, and economic environments (Mihesuah, 1998). According to Sheets (1998), American Indian students who have knowledge of Indian history and understand the historical and legal implications of "Indianness" are more confident. They are able to understand what has happened and reject mindsets of oppression, colonialism, and assimilation that have existed in history (Sheets, 1998).

Some of the participants in this study seemed more acculturated than others, which may have been a result of generations of historical efforts toward assimilation. Interestingly, graduates who seemed more acculturated responded a bit differently when asked about adjustment issues. For Matt, he did not define himself by race. He described what it was like for him as an American Indian on this campus:

Relative to the other Native Americans I've seen up here, I have it pretty good.

To me, race was never an issue. I don't define myself in that way. For me, it was not problematic at all. Just I don't think of myself as race.

Slade, a nontraditional-aged student who “was raised without a lot of Native American upbringing” described what it was like for him to be American Indian on this campus: “Personally, it didn’t make that much difference to me. I recognized [my traditional background], but [other American Indians] weren’t a strong part of that experience.” Patrick’s description may have reflected his own stereotypes about Native Americans. When I asked him what it was like for him as an American Indian on this campus, he replied:

Most people don’t know that I’m Native American. When they find out, they just can’t believe it, which is a sad reflection on the way people perceive Native Americans. I think that if someone sees a very clean-cut guy, then that’s what they think. It’s sad that people look at that culture with a negative perception.

These students’ perceptions of the barriers they faced, especially about racism and discrimination, seemed less intimidating than for other students. Perhaps their lack of awareness prevented them from observing the types of racism other students observed. However, for a majority of the students, as mentioned previously, it appears the cultural dissonance experienced by many American Indian students has led to adjustment problems impacting academic success on predominantly White campuses.

Despite these barriers, students succeeded in terms of receiving a Bachelor’s degree from a predominantly White four-year institution. Some factors that strongly connected to graduation and overall success for American Indians are academic mentoring, family support, goal orientation, and personal motivation. In the following section, these factors of success in higher education will be discussed.

Academic Mentoring

Students repeatedly reported academic mentoring as a major contributing factor to their success at The University of Montana. As mentioned previously, nearly all of the students remembered feeling lost, overwhelmed, lonely, or isolated or alienated when they first arrived at the university. The lack of mentoring support represents the lack of personal connection and assistance students received from university faculty or staff in order to navigate through these obstacles. For example, they needed assistance about how to register for classes. Madison recalled:

When I first started, I didn't know what I was doing. I had no direction. I was lost, standing in the wrong line all day. By the time I got my ID picture, I was on the verge of tears. I didn't know what to do. I had no help. I was pulling my hair out.

Patrick said, "I jumped around from major to major. I wanted to get a feel for what I was good at, but I didn't really have any clear direction on how to do that." Overall, the majority of the students indicated they needed academic assistance. When I asked graduates, "What types of academic support might have been helpful at this time," several people expressed a need for some type of academic assistance, specifically advising or mentoring. They expressed a need for some sort of one-on-one relationship or personal connection with faculty or student support services. Most of them expressed a desire for someone who could guide them in the basics.

Students sought out university assistance from a variety of resources. Students wanted someone who could assist in mapping out academic or financial plans, more so

than emotional support. People who served as advisors played an active role in student success. Advising needs were major concerns for new and transfer students.

In addition, they reported helpful characteristics for advisors as genuineness, personal, practical, and concrete. Students often needed very specific, direct, and practical advice—the “nuts and bolts.” Several students expressed a need for “somebody to say this is what you need to do to get finished.” Essentially, they wanted help in mapping out their courses. Graduates repeatedly sought guidance from academic department advisors, American Indian and non-American Indian faculty and advisors, Educational Opportunity Program, and peer mentors.

Academic Department Advisors

Many students mentioned they received help from their academic department advisors. Several students mentioned their academic advisor as an extremely helpful person in mapping out the specifics. Marissa, one of many, appreciated the help she received from her department advisor:

I learned that real people were in the School of Business. [My advisor] was the one that she sat down with me. She mapped it out. ‘These are the classes you need to take. These are the kind of grades you need to get.’ Once she mapped it out, I just followed that map. It was fairly easy and well-outlined.

Patrick agreed, “[My advisor] basically laid the blue prints for me on how to graduate, which classes I needed to take. She was very encouraging. She was very positive.”

Talia also appreciated her advisor’s genuineness and personal connection; “She was a real person. She’d take the time to help you get through. She’s not fake.” These “blue

prints” were exactly the kinds of help students requested. More importantly, the department advisor seemed genuine in her interactions with students, which probably eased the transition into the university system.

American Indian and Non-American Indian Faculty

All of the participants reported how both American Indian and non-American Indian faculty provided useful and genuine academic advising. Many students acknowledged the significance of challenging professors. Annika reiterated how challenging and positive relationships with faculty helped her academic success:

I had a couple of good professors. You know the type that you could tell that they cared about you, that you weren't another number....They were all good, still demanding and expecting everything, but making me feel like a real person.

Many suggested or advised new students “to seek out their professors” as resources or when they needed assistance. Saxon indicated:

When you reach a roadblock where you cannot break through, and you've been listening to lectures and reading the book, go to office hours. Discuss your differences with the professors. Let them know where you are coming from. Get a sense of where they're coming from. Ask them for help. Confront your problems in the classroom through the office hours.

While many people suggested that talking to professors helped in their academic success, often they “didn't learn that [until] their second year.” Kirby mentioned

My second year, I finally started talking to teachers and actually visited with them about papers. It helped to push my grade point up. I got to know about more

about what I was doing, what was going on. When I get the syllabus, I'd go talk to [my professors] after class or go to his office after class about the syllabus.

That was important.

The majority of these graduates felt especially comfortable in seeking out American Indian faculty and advisors for assistance. Several students reported that a faculty member at a Native American Studies department helped students identify their cultural background. In particular, Talia recalled this faculty member helped her explore and appreciate her identity. She recalled, "Actually, her lectures made me identify myself and my behaviors." Marissa stated she sought help at Native American Studies department to get some guidance:

There was a woman [at Native American Studies]. Had she not sat me down a couple of times or made telephone calls on my behalf to financial aid or whatever, I would have quit. I would have walked away. I felt real lost for probably the first year.

Likewise, Saxon sought out the Native American department: "I went there and just sat down. 'I'm lost. I'm going to class. I think I can handle the information, but it's overwhelming.'"

Overall, relationships with faculty were significant to American Indian success in higher education. Students in this study identified faculty support and academic mentoring relationships as a crucial aspect to their academic success and adjustment to the university setting.

Educational Opportunity Program

In addition to department advisors and faculty, students sought assistance from Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) advisors. The Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) is a federally funded program that provides academic advising, tutoring, peer mentoring, and financial counseling to low-income and first generation students at The University of Montana. Most of the students in this program are American Indian. Gwen raved about EOP:

[The EOP advisor] was my guardian angel here because I went to her for [many] things. I went to her for counseling. I went to her for advising. I went to her if I had a problem, if I was confused. She just helped me in more ways than I can say, not only as the academic side, but also emotional part of it, being available for me.

Peer Support

In addition to faculty and staff relationships, graduates reported seeking peer assistance. Slade indicated, "Advisors were helpful to tell you what classes you needed to take to get through. But, when it came to actual help for certain classes, you were better off to go to the students in that particular class." Peer mentoring is an important resource available to incoming college students.

Through the Peer Mentor Program at The University of Montana, students were able to get information on professors, classes, registration, and the "ins and outs" of the university. Students met informally as an opportunity to talk about career, academic issues, and, sometimes, personal issues, or just to hang out with them. American Indian

students at the junior and senior levels knew the campus, the instructors, and the formal “ins and outs” of campus life, and their knowledge can provide valuable assistance to new and transfer students.

Family Support

In addition to university support, students sought family support, the fourth theme from the data, for assistance. Family support includes the following categories: college-educated parents, first-generation college students, and emotional guidance and encouragement.

College Educated Parents

Education became instilled as a family value that led to family expectations to attend college. Twelve graduates in this study had college-educated parents. These students and their parents have assumed all along that going to college is what one does after completion of high school (Terenzini et al., 1994). College was simply the next, logical, expected, and desired stage in the passage toward personal and occupational achievement. Students explained their decision to attend college as a family expectation

There are several advantages for students with college-educated families. First, students had role models in the education system. Marissa stated “having a role model or two role models that had higher education degrees helped establish my sense of direction in education.” Furthermore, they had academic support and guidance in dealing with the practical aspects of registering for classes or navigating their way around the university system. Talia stated her husband’s family helped her with those sorts of things. She stated, “My husband’s family are educated. His sisters [received] their degrees from

here. They told me what to take, who to talk to, where to go, and what classes not to take.” Similarly, Slade often sought advice from his father, who already had a bachelor’s degree. He stated, “Since [my father] had already gone through college, he told me a lot about the process and what needed to be done to get through.” Crystal also sought her family for assistance:

My sister-in-law was like my mentor. She would say, ‘You go here to get this and you go there.’ She took me through the whole registration process. I would have been completely lost if she weren’t there to help me. It can be overwhelming.

American Indian students from college-educated families received a lot of academic support to aid them toward their success.

First-Generation College Students

For first-generation college students, going to college was not a part of their family traditions and expectations. First-generation students were the first in their family to attend college. While these students did not have academic role models in their families, nearly all of them recalled their parents’ sense of pride in their accomplishments. Gwen noted her family viewed her as “the hero.” She stated, “[My parents] didn’t graduate from college. I’m the hero of that family because I’m the first one to get a Bachelor’s degree and a Master’s [degree]! My mom is very proud of me and how far I’ve come.” Dan exclaimed he received “a lot of encouragement. People were very happy that I was going to school. First one to graduate. That was original.”

Students received a wide range of emotional support from their family. As Madison recalled:

Thinking, helping me, getting through papers, talking things out, brainstorming... That's what helped. A sounding board to clear my mind. If I had trouble figuring out how, [my sister] showed me a whole new light. She'd say, 'What about this?' So, academically, it was probably one of my sisters.

Overall, first-generation students seemingly lacked parental academic support and encouragement to perform at their full potential. Yet, all of the first-generation students in these interviews reported that their families were exceptionally proud and extremely supportive (emotionally) of their son or daughter who was attending college.

Emotional Guidance and Encouragement

Whether students had college-educated parents or were first-generation students, all of the graduates in this study received guidance and encouragement from their family members, which helped them get through and stay in school. Students' families were helpful by making homes available, offering services such as child care, companionship, and money.

For the most part, only three students indicated that their parents or other family members were able to provide financial support, but nearly all of the students described the "immeasurable" amounts of emotional support they received from their families. For some nontraditional-aged students, their spouses took care of household responsibilities. For example, Talia shared how her husband supported her education.

I did want to quit. I was doing so badly. I wasn't going to make it. If I didn't have [my] family, I wouldn't have made it....My husband did the dishes, did the laundry, kept the kids away from me while I studied or let me go to library for four hours and just study.

Gwen received similar assistance from her husband who "supported [her] in ways by taking care of my children." In an unusual case, Angela's mother even attended her class for her: "One time I was sick and I couldn't go to this required class. So, my mother went for me." This type of support allows students to continue to maintain necessary roles at home with their families and to fulfill their obligations at school.

In addition to tangible support described by the participants in the study, families provided nontangible support such as listening, providing encouragement, and reinforcement, giving advice, or providing companionship. Emotional support from family members seemed widespread among this group. Angela received: "Emotional support. [My family] was always willing to listen or help out if they could." Halona recalled: "I didn't have a car for a long time. So, [my parents] would always visit me." Kirby's father provided encouragement and positive reinforcement: "My dad was the one that was really [encouraged me.] 'I know you can do it. I know you can do it. Just keep going.'" Annika's family helped her to stay on track:

One of the most helpful things was probably meeting [my husband]. I was a little adrift before. He just helped center me because part of it was he was always a good student. He was just a good role model. He really helped me and pushed

me to do well. He knew that I had the potential to do it. He's kind of a big impetus. I don't know if things would have been the same if I hadn't of met him.

These excerpts illustrate that American Indian graduates in this study identified family support as a contributing factor to their academic success at The University of Montana.

Goal Orientation

Another factor related to success at The University of Montana was goal orientation. Goal-orientation involves having a purpose and directions toward an endeavor (in this case, completing a bachelor's degree), and a structured, planned focus. The graduates noted recurring themes of the importance of planning schedules, setting goals, identifying priorities, and managing time as significant factors in completing their degree.

Students, especially nontraditional-aged students, needed to learn how to balance school, family, and personal time. They needed to evaluate their demands and set their schedules accordingly. Consequently, the nontraditional-aged students in this study reported a lack of time to participate in campus activities. For example, Kirby stated: "Part of the reason why I was not involved in a lot of the student organizations was because I worked, and I had a family and studies. There was just no time." Gwen agreed:

I didn't get involved because of my work schedule and my class schedule. If I got so involved, then I was never home. So, I had to learn how to choose and pick what I wanted to be involved in and really be involved in it.

To reiterate, all of the nontraditional-aged students stated they did not have time for socializing. They preferred to spend their time focusing on their academics. For example, Saxon, another nontraditional-aged student, viewed some of the extracurriculars as “a burden.” When he completed his first full year on campus, he quit getting involved in all “these organizations because it’s just a detriment to the education process. Carrying the load of classes the way [he] did and trying to keep good grades was very difficult to do.”

When graduates were asked where they fit in at the university, repeatedly, they identified themselves “strictly as a student.” Matt, who graduated with a bachelor’s degree and continued his education as a graduate student, still struggles with the tension to balance his academic and social life. He indicated:

I’m not really a socialite. I’m 28 years old. I don’t have a lot in common with the younger crowd. I just fit in the flow of academics. I see myself as a student foremost and socialite when the opportunity comes. When I got up here, I tried to avoid [the social scene] like the plague because I saw that was where I got into a lot of trouble.

There is real tension between the problem of social isolation and the need for study time. For the most part, many nontraditional-aged students reported difficulties in defining a balance between family obligations and responsibilities, campus involvement, and academic responsibilities. Nontraditional-aged students usually have the added responsibility of family and financial pressures with which to contend, along with adjustment problems engendered by the university and the majority cultures.

All of the students reiterated the importance of setting goals as a significant contributing factor to success at The University of Montana. Once students acknowledged their values, they set or identified their goals, and they took steps to accomplish these goals. Several students gave the following advice to incoming students. Gwen gave the following advice:

[Incoming American Indian students] need to know what they want to do and how to do it and set small goals for themselves until they can reach the bigger goal. Promise themselves to keep moving on.

Annika suggested:

Make and keep long-term goals with what you want to do. Even try to be specific with them and then try to take small steps in order to get there. I remembered just getting swamped and feeling, 'This is too much.' Getting discouraged over one little thing and not keeping the big picture in mind and keeping the successes in mind. You just have to keep going at it even if you don't like it. Keep those big picture goals in life.

Saxon strongly reiterated:

It all really comes down to priorities. What did you come down here for? If you came here to party there's partying on the reservation. If you came here to go to school, be a student. Set your priorities to the classroom, on learning information.

Thus, those students who were able to plan assignments, deadlines, and long-term goals were the ones who succeeded at The University of Montana. These student

recommendations confirmed Wetsit's (1992) findings in that goal-orientation or goal-directness was directly linked to their personal motivation.

Personal Motivation

The final factor related to American Indian success at The University of Montana is personal motivation. Who am I? Where am I going? Why am I doing this? These are important questions that graduates asked themselves at various times during their pursuit toward a college degree. These decisions determined what they majored in at college, what kinds of jobs they accepted, and, essentially, what their priorities were. Part of identifying their priorities was the need for students to assess crucial values that motivated their life decisions. Students continually face new experiences and challenges. How they choose to respond to these situations and the decisions they make will be influenced by their values.

All 20 of the graduates in this study acknowledged pursuing higher education as a significant aspect of their value system. Getting their degree became a priority for a variety of reasons such as expanding career and job opportunities, making money, getting approval from their family or their tribe, contributing community service, feeling personal satisfaction, and seeking empowerment. Personal motivation is an aspect several students addressed as a factor in their success at The University of Montana. Typical motivations included career development, personal growth, political or social obligations, external expectations, and perseverance.

Career Development

All of the graduates expressed the belief that higher education was a vehicle for benefiting other goals, such as career advancement. Higher education was a means to an end for some students. Angela called it “jumping through the hoops.” Slade agreed:

I just wanted to get through the minimum requirements necessary to get me out of school....I just wanted out, so I could get on with a career. School was a hoop. It didn't measure your full ability. It was more a personal initiative of what you did after school that proved your career, it wasn't your actual grades. I took a stronger initiative after school and before school to set the stage for a career.

Dan also had professional motivations to attend college. He claimed, “The professional community wouldn't take me seriously without it.” For Crystal, turning 30 was a turning point for her:

It was my 30th birthday. I turned 30 and I wasn't going any place. I had all this work, but they were all secretarial jobs. I just thought I can't be a secretary forever. I was tired of being a secretary, so I quit work and just went back to school.

Patrick, a traditional-aged student, had monetary motivations to get a college degree. He told an animated story about something that motivated him to attend and subsequently succeed in school:

I was living down [at St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands]. I [saw] this place called The Boutique Riveria and it was a very exclusive men's clothing store. It had shirts in there that started for \$500. We saw people coming in there everyday and

buying clothes. It was amazing! Money was a primary motivator for me because I had such a lack of it all my life. I don't see it as a means to an end, but I have seen [money] give people a lot of flexibility. So, that was the point at which I need to get back into college or I need to finish college. So that one thing really drove me or motivated me to go to school.

The expectation that a college degree will provide greater employment possibilities and financial security tended to be strong motivators for striving in school.

Personal Growth and Empowerment

However, the individualistic goal of earning a degree to acquire job skills and a lucrative position after graduation is not enough to sustain many American Indian students (Garrod & Larimore, 1997). In addition to striving toward career or monetary advancements, many students sought higher education as a means of personal growth and empowerment. Dan's motivation stemmed from internalized self-esteem issues. He stated, "It became very important for me to do well to repair all those negative messages and that stuff I internalized." In other words, self-improvement or personal growth served as motivation to pursue a degree in higher education for some American Indian students.

External Expectations

For some, to prove to themselves, to their families, or to society, as a whole, that they "could do it" became the primary motivator to finish their degree. In particular, Halona told a story about something that helped her succeed in school:

What helped me succeed really is I had to prove to my parents and to myself that I could do it. I could finish and do well and I could do it on my own. That one thing helped me succeed. Personal motivation. Self-worth.

Kirby reinforced Halona's comments:

Emotionally, I pushed myself to succeed because I thought about my family and myself. I thought, 'I'm not going to let anybody down. I'm not going to let myself down [despite] how the classes are or how people treat me or whatever. I'm just going to do it and show them.'

For some students, they indicated a desire to dispel negative stereotypes of American Indian students as a primary motivator to complete their degree at The University of Montana. Angela asserted:

In Montana, [educators] tend to think if you're Native American, you're not going to do well. There is an expectation of failure for Native American people. They just think, 'I wonder how long that one is going to stay in class.' There is a lot of enjoyment in proving them wrong. There's a real prejudice against Native American people in Montana.

Marissa also wanted to "prove others wrong":

Back when I was in high school, my teacher told me that I would end up barefoot and pregnant. High school educators, administration, told me that I was never going to make it. It was unbelievable the impact that had on me. So, it was in many ways, it was to prove them wrong.

All of the graduates expressed external expectations as motivators to start, continue, and complete their degrees.

Political and Social Responsibility

A sense of political and social responsibility motivated students toward their success at The University of Montana. Several students remarked on a dominant notion that they wanted to earn a degree, go back to the reservation, and help their people. Students wanted to get involved with some type of service as a way to give back to their community. Students often wanted to contribute to their tribe after they completed their degree. In particular, Dan stated, "I hope to work for a tribe somewhere. [American Indian people] have a lot to do." Madison worked as a construction worker in Browning. She had a difficult time finding a job in her field in Anthropology and Native American Studies. She expressed, "If I could get a good job here doing something that would benefit my tribe, then I'll stay." Marissa reiterated this idea of giving back to the tribe. She stated, "I decided to go to graduate school because tribal economics development was real big. I wanted to work within an Indian environment." Angela explained her motivation to "stick through it:"

I knew I had to finish. I had to finish [my degree] for myself. I had to finish for my family. My tribe expected it. 'What are you going to do for society? What are you going to give back? What are you going to be able to offer us?'

Overall, "helping our people" tended to be a strong motivator for completing a degree.

Perseverance

All of the graduates reported their own perseverance as the primary contribution to their success at The University of Montana. The researcher asked students, “What advice would [they] give to an incoming or transfer American Indian student at The University of Montana. All of them strongly recommended or reiterated the importance of “being committed to going to the end and working hard, being dedicated to [their] goals. The researcher asked all of the interviewees, “Who was the most important person to your success at The University of Montana?” Angela responded,

Myself....It's the truth. If I didn't put any effort into it, I would never have gotten through it. I would have just bombed out of it. Everybody can talk to you until they're blue in the face, but if you don't do it, you're not going to make it. That's it.

This sense of personal motivation was a recurring theme. For example, Halona, Patrick, and Dan articulated how their own determination led to their success in higher education.

Halona replied:

Me (laugh). I felt proud of myself when I did graduate because at one point, it seemed like such a long way. I was so tired of school. I had so many classes to take. My parents weren't there to help me figure out my classes. It was all me and my major. Everything was my decision and how I dealt with it, so I feel I helped myself that way.

Patrick claimed:

Me. I hate to be focused on me, me, me. Honest to God, I think the only reason I have put myself where I am is because of my actions. I'm continually striving for the next level.

In addition, Dan stated:

The most important to my success here? I don't mean to sound egotistical, but it's definitely me. I had the potential to success and just about anything I wanted to do. But, no one, but me, can get me out of bed in the morning. No one, but me can sit down and read the very thick information. No one can interpret the information for me because I have to filter so much of what I read through my own cultural beliefs and sift and analyze that application to the real world through that set of eyes. No one else can really do that for me. Things I have to do for myself. No one can make me sit up until 2 a.m. writing a paper, get up at 6 a.m. to continue before an 8 a.m. class. So the motivation and drive is something internal.

Students repeatedly claimed they "just knew what they wanted" or they "made a commitment to graduating," or "there was no turning back." Crystal stated she did not ever consider quitting "because I set that goal to get my bachelor's degree and I knew I had to do it." "A real strong desire to succeed" motivated American Indian students to persevere in higher education despite the obstacles. They took initiatives and personal responsibility and the dedication to do it. Again, all of the students listed their own motivations as the single factor that contributed most to their high academic achievement.

Despite institutional, family, and tribal efforts to increase retention, it is still necessary for each student to persevere through difficult times.

Summary of Results

In sum, this chapter consisted of the results based on the emergent themes, which represented the barriers and contributions toward American Indian success at The University of Montana. These themes include: (a) limited academic preparation, (b) psychosocial adjustment problems, (c) cultural dissonance, (d) academic mentoring, (e) family support, (f) goal orientation, and (g) personal motivation. The first four themes addressed the obstacles American Indian students in the study encountered. The latter four themes addressed contributing factors of American Indian success at The University of Montana. These interrelated themes, for the most part, supported the existing literature on American Indian higher education, which will be discussed in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to learn about American Indian graduates' experiences at The University of Montana from May 1995 to August 1998 and to identify contributing and inhibiting factors toward success at The University of Montana. As mentioned previously, this study addresses the following questions from successful graduates' perspectives: (a) What factors limited American Indian academic success at The University of Montana? (b) What factors contributed to their academic success at the university level? (c) What types of support systems did American Indian students find useful at The University of Montana? (d) How were these services useful to American Indian students? Seven themes emerged from the data. These themes include limited academic preparation, psychosocial adjustment problems, cultural dissonance, academic mentoring, family support, goal orientation, and personal motivation. In this chapter, the above research questions, findings, global impressions, and implications are addressed.

What Factors Limited American Indian Academic Success at The University of Montana?

From the emerging themes, American Indian students identified three factors that limited their academic success at The University of Montana. These barriers include limited academic preparation, psychosocial adjustment problems, and cultural dissonance.

Limited Academic Preparation

Graduates in this study indicated limited academic preparation prior to their arrival at The University of Montana as significant barriers to their success, which supports much of the existing and bleak literature (Braithwaite, 1997; Garrod & Larimore, 1997; LaCounte, 1987). American Indian students at The University of Montana often compared their experiences with the help and assistance they received from their high school or at a tribal college near their reservation, as Braithwaite (1997) found.

While results confirm existing literature, the findings are disconcerting because academic outcomes for American Indian college students have changed only slightly in American Indian history in higher education. Despite significant higher educational efforts, academic setbacks continue to plague American Indian students attending conventional colleges and universities, even those receiving federal support, as Beck (1999) indicated.

Traditionally, educators have blamed students for their academic difficulties (Pipes et al., 1993). They expected American Indian students to accommodate, adapt, and integrate into the culture of the mainstream American university (Pipes et al., 1993). Many educators have attributed poor performance of American Indian students to individual characteristics such as poor motivation, lack of skills, or an inability to deal with a difficult situation (Pipes et al., 1993). To continue to blame the victim perpetuates the problems that exist for American Indian students. These findings suggest that educators still expect American Indian students to accommodate, adapt, and integrate into the

culture of the mainstream American university. Educators still need to actively assist American Indian students navigate through the academic pipeline.

Psychosocial Adjustment Problems

In addition to academic setbacks, another barrier toward American Indian success at The University of Montana was psychosocial adjustment problems graduates experienced. All of the participants described disorienting, alienating, and overwhelming feelings. Students reported feeling unprepared, lost, and overwhelmed in their transition to college and all the demands of university pressures. American Indian students at The University of Montana suffered from loneliness and depression, as Sue and Sue (1990) also indicated.

Although students felt overwhelmed when they first arrived, their community college experiences seemed to ease the transition in terms of dealing with advising, registration, financial aid, and other logistical barriers of attending a large university, as Braithwaite (1997) noted. Garrod and Larimore (1997) mentioned leaving home to attend college could cause intense feelings of loss and isolation, as students in this study reiterated. These students experienced much emotional turmoil during their initial transition to The University of Montana. The psychological impacts of these experiences further led to self-doubt, depression, and alienation.

In addition, graduates repeatedly noted they experienced some form of discrimination or racism that existed in many forms, such as overt discrimination or uniformed indifference, as Benjamin et al. (1993) noted. Socially, graduates repeatedly indicated experiencing some form of discrimination or racism, as researchers

(Braithwaite, 1997; Pipes et al., 1993; Sue & Sue, 1990) noted. The excerpts indicate the cultural ignorance or insensitivity that was present among the faculty and student body on this campus. Specifically, these findings infer that institutional racism has contributed to the sense of cultural isolation, a sense of inferiority, and a loss of identity, consistent with the findings of Pipes et al (1993).

While community college or tribal college preparation seemed helpful in the long-term, most of these students experienced some type of culture shock in their initial transition to The University of Montana. As mentioned in the literature review, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) indicated the transition from high school to college is viewed as a forum of culture shock involving significant social and psychological relearning in the face of encounters with new ideas; new teachers and friends with quite varied values and beliefs; new freedoms and opportunities; and new academic, personal, and social demands.

Thus, American Indian students, similar to other college students, are, in some ways, pressured to unlearn certain current attitudes, values, and beliefs, and behaviors (desocialization), and pressured to learn and participate in a new culture and social arena (socialization). While much of the findings support the substantial amount of literature (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991) about new college students, in general, American Indian students' psychosocial adjustment is compounded by cultural differences. The findings are similar to the findings in the Kennedy Report (Senate Report, 1969). Specifically, the Kennedy Report, more than 30 years ago, identified educational failure and its effects on American Indian students because schools failed to understand cultural differences and

did not encourage students to bring their cultural knowledge into the classroom. Assimilation practices dominated educational philosophy and teaching. Again, the results suggest that educators have not adequately addressed the cultural needs for the American Indian community. American Indian college students still experienced significant adjustment difficulties at predominantly White institutions, much like during the Colonial period. Much of the psychosocial adjustment problems students encountered seemed directly related to the next theme, cultural dissonance.

Cultural Dissonance

Graduates repeatedly described cultural dissonance as a barrier to their success at The University of Montana. Brown and Robinson-Kurpius (1997) found that traditional students fared poorer on academic measures than did nontraditional students. They found that traditional students were more likely to drop out than nontraditional students. The most assimilated students reported the least campus racism (Huffman, 1991) “Traditional” students, especially, reported experiencing racist attitudes that were not addressed in the existing literature. Those American Indian students who may have had a higher degree of acculturation believed that cultural differences played a less important role in terms of being an actual barrier toward success in higher education (Tate & Schwartz, 1993). These findings suggest that the impact of early assimilationist efforts have been unconsciously or consciously ingrained for some American Indians.

For the American Indian students in conflict with their identity, their college experiences can provide the opportunity for the resolution of this conflict and subsequent growth, not only intellectually but also personally. While the existing research suggests

that bicultural and even acculturated students demonstrated better psychosocial adjustment than nonbicultural students, results from this study do not confirm these findings. Regardless of their acculturation, students in this study succeeded in their goals toward graduation; however, students were selected because they were successful.

Overall, factors such as limited academic preparation, psychosocial adjustment issues, and cultural dissonance were common barriers graduates faced in their academic endeavors. Despite these barriers, these American Indian students at The University of Montana persisted to graduation. Some contributing factors to American Indian success at The University of Montana will be discussed.

What Factors Contributed to their Success at The University of Montana?

From the emerging themes, four factors contributed to American Indian success at The University of Montana. These themes include academic mentoring, family support, goal orientation, and personal motivation.

Academic Mentoring

The barriers students experienced indicated that students needed some guidance and assistance to navigate these difficult and frustrating experiences. American Indian students reported the most useful services involved academic advising and planning “step-by-step” how to get through their degree requirements. For academic assistance, many students expressed a desire for an academic mentor—a personal, genuine, caring connection to “map out the blue prints” for them. Consistent with Pipes et al. (1993) findings, students in this study have identified faculty support and a mentoring

relationship as a crucial aspect to their academic success and adjustment to the university setting.

Students appreciated concrete, practical, and specific advising needs, such as mapping out coursework. Findings suggest that academic advising for American Indian students needs to occur on an ongoing basis rather than at the orientation, registration, or the beginning of a new semester to provide a sense of encouragement and consistency for students. However, previous researchers did not address the need for specific, practical advice as strongly as interview participants noted. Research (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991) on academic advising has primarily focused on college students in general rather than academic advising specifically for American Indian students.

Most university programs rely on a verbal, sequential learning process (Pipes et al., 1993). These wishes to gain the specific “blue prints” suggest that students are having a difficult time with this process. Once again, the predominantly White institutions’ mainstream orientation to time, planning ahead, and organizing is inconsistent with American Indian value systems (Garrod & Larimore, 1997; Pipes et al., 1993). Institutions of higher education may still undermine cultural differences and community needs and expect assimilation in their educational efforts toward retention and graduation.

Furthermore, these findings suggest that American Indian students’ needs may involve much more than simply “showing students the ropes,” although this is essential, as well. Findings are consistent with the existing research (Jenkins, 1999; Lintner, 1999; Smith-Mohammed, 1998), which document the benefits of a mentoring relationship for

American Indian students in higher education. In addition to “showing students the ropes,” students needed a personal and genuine connection with someone who has already succeeded in the academic pipeline at The University of Montana. Therefore, often, the end of the academic tunnel seemed never-ending. The prospect of a four-year education seemed to have little relevance to their lives and cultures. Given the high attrition rates for American Indian college students, graduates in this study often needed an academic mentor to restore faith and hope that getting a bachelor’s degree was indeed attainable.

Family Support

In addition to academic mentoring, another contributing factor to academic success that American Indian graduates identified was family support. This finding confirms existing research (Falk & Aitken, 1992; Jenkins, 1999) that family support is a major factor linked to retention of American Indian students.

In the past, the tribe, through the extended family, was responsible for the education and training of their children. Although many students did not describe historical impacts, the history of American Indians in higher education affects the current success of American Indian graduates. Saxon described how his grandmother reacted when he told her about his decision to attend college:

I have a very elderly grandmother, [who] went through the Boarding School Era. She felt European-related education, English, the school system were such a detriment to our culture that it was hard for her to support too much of [my education].

This excerpt is illustrative of the negative impacts of the boarding school education, which are still embedded in the memories of family members and elders. Historical educational efforts and attempts to “civilize” American Indians have been traumatic for American Indian families and, in many cases, disrupted their cultural traditions.

Nevertheless, all of the students, even Saxon, relied on family members for emotional support. Family members, whether college-educated or not, offered numerous amounts of tangible and intangible assistance such as offering child care or housing, providing positive reinforcement, or giving practical advice. The graduates’ family members in the study played a significant role in student success in higher education. These findings confirm Brown and Robinson-Kurpius’ (1997) conclusions that family support is important for minority students in their educational attainment. With very few exceptions, students in this study unhesitantly named one or more members of their immediate (extended) family as the most important people in their academic success. This finding confirms the research of Terenzini et al. (1994) that students’ families played a significant role in providing encouragement to attend, to persist, and to succeed in college.

Results confirmed Falk and Aitken’s (1992) study, which indicated that the support of their families is a key to helping students remaining in school. Results from this study also reiterated Medicine’s (1981) assertion that extended families provided support during times of crisis. Looking at the extended family as a source of support suggests that American Indian students who identify strongly with family members see

the value of extensive support systems and are likely to function effectively in their adjustment to college life.

Findings suggest that student support services, academic advisors, and faculty need to involve family members of American Indian college students. Conferences with the family and enlistment of the support of the extended family members are crucial toward success for American Indian students at predominantly White institutions. As LaFromboise and Graff Low (1989) pointed out, the extended family, rather than conventional service delivery agencies, has remained the forum for personal and social support in American Indian communities and most traditional interventions involved the extended family to ensure success. Thus, student support services become the reconstituted extended family network (LaFromboise & Graff Low, 1989).

In sum, American Indians have a long history of closely knit family relationships, and there appears to be a strong linkage between family support and academic success. The support of family and the American Indian community is important to American Indian students, and efforts to maintain and expand this type of support may help increase retention among American Indian students.

Goal Orientation

The third contributing factor to American Indian success at The University of Montana is goal orientation. Consistent with Tate and Schwartz's (1993) research, American Indian students tend to enroll at an older age than traditional age students. Nontraditional-aged students usually have the added responsibility of family and

financial pressures with which to contend, along with adjustment problems engendered by the university and the majority cultures

As mentioned previously, students indicated a need and a concern for guidance and counseling related to degree requirements. Students in this study, who were able to plan assignments and deadlines, were the ones who were able to do well, which is consistent with Pipes et al.'s (1993) research. In other words, students had to adapt to the dominant culture concept of time.

These findings are also disconcerting in that, generally, a major source of difficulty for American Indian students is the mainstream orientation to time, planning, and organizing, as Pipes et al. (1993) described. American Indian students have frequently grown up in environments where planning was not done and where time was not rigidly scheduled. Thus, they may not be consciously aware of the reasons why they tend not to plan ahead. However, higher education focuses on time-management, goal-orientation, and competitive mindset. These contradictory value differences suggest the expectation is that minority students still need to assimilate to Western expectations of learning in order to be successful in the university level. Again, educational efforts have not changed much in its attempts to incorporate culturally different value systems. An understanding and clarification of goals for attending college (including career choices) is important to success in college. Therefore, student support services should continue in their efforts to help students clarify their college and career goals, particularly during the first semester of college, as dropout rates are high during this initial time in college (Hoover & Jacobs, 1992).

Personal Motivation

Finally, despite institutional and family support, the most significant factor to academic success was students' perseverance and personal motivation toward their goals to graduate from The University of Montana. Despite institutional, family, and tribal efforts to increase retention, it is still necessary for each student to persevere through difficult times.

Once again, graduates repeatedly listed their own motivations as the single factor that contributed most to their high academic achievement, and this confirmed Brown and Robinson-Kurpius' (1997) research. Students are motivated by activities that help them achieve a goal, gain social approval, or attend to developmental tasks. Students' motivation is not only affected by such "needs" but also by their expectations for success. These expectations are based on such factors as prior learning experiences (positive and negative), how feedback is given and received, and whether they feel they have earned their success.

As Garrod and Larimore (1997) found, the individualistic goal of earning a degree to acquire job skills and a lucrative position after graduation is not enough to sustain many American Indian students. This attitude is especially prevalent when American Indian students equate a college education with assimilation into the dominant culture. For some, to prove to themselves, to their families, or to society as a whole, that they "could do it" became the primary motivator to finish their degree. Many students expressed a sense of social, political, or civic responsibility toward their community.

These findings supported results from Garrod and Larimore (1997) that American Indian students wished to contribute to their home communities.

The desire to pursue a college education came as much from a love of learning imparted to them by childhood role models as from a deep-seated need to disprove racist stereotypes of American Indians as underachieving, unintelligent, and alcoholic (Garrod & Larimore, 1997). The individualistic goal of earning a degree to acquire job skills and a lucrative position after graduation is not enough to sustain many American Indian students, as students in Garrod and Larimore's (1997) narratives expressed as well. This attitude is especially prevalent when students equate a college education with assimilation into the dominant culture.

According to Garrod and Larimore (1997), the majority of American Indian students would rather sacrifice their educational goals than abandon their cultural identities and values. Graduates in this study attained their educational goals despite their various acculturation levels. These findings are consistent with Cross' (1997) results that such an emphasis on time-on-task is indicative of successful college students overall. The similarities between findings for American Indian students and the overall college population suggests that systems of higher education still expect an assimilated approach to academic success. Perhaps, students do not really wish to sacrifice their cultural identities and values. Yet, they recognize that in order to survive and compete with the academic standards, they must learn to incorporate a more time and goal conscientious approach, as Pipes et al. (1993) suggested.

The research (Brown & Robinson-Kurpius, 1997, Sheets, 1998) suggests American Indian cultural orientation can be a factor in college performance. The best independent predictors of college success among American Indians were a general degree of identification and social integration with Caucasians on campus (Brown & Robinson-Kurpius, 1997). Falk and Aitken (1992) suggested students' experience with their ties to traditional culture has been a particularly supportive factor in their ability to compete successfully in the academic setting of the dominant society. The support gained from their Indianness is perceived as a benefit in their academic perseverance, despite the indication that it may also be related to some of the challenges to learning that are experienced by American Indian students in majority classrooms (Falk & Aitken, 1992).

What Types of Support Systems did American Indian Students Find Helpful in their Success toward Graduation?

In addition to family support, the graduates sought guidance from academic department advisors, American Indian and non-American Indian faculty and advisors, Educational Opportunity Program, and peer mentors. Brown and Robinson-Kurpius (1997) found that American Indian students who persisted were satisfied with the overall institutional environment, used a number and variety of support services, and were integrated into academic and social systems. Attaining social integration with peers, faculty, or support services can be particularly crucial to the educational persistence of American Indians. Brown and Robinson-Kurpius (1997) reported that a minority student's sense of cultural fit within the university environment significantly affected a sense of belonging and desire to stay in school. A sense of fitting in can be fostered by

involvement with peers, with faculty, and support staff on campus (Brown & Robinson-Kurpius, 1997).

How were these Services Useful to American Indian Students?

LaFromboise and Graff Low (1989) noted that some contemporary American Indian families are less able to establish social support networks, and without the benefit of extended-family life, may experience greater stress in daily living than their more traditional relatives. In recent years, increased movement to urban areas has complicated Indian extended-family functioning. While the American Indian extended-family system can serve as a support system, the urbanization movement of American Indians has affected the extent of opportunities for extended family involvement and participation in tribal activities (Edwards & Edwards, 1984). Many American Indians who have relocated to cities from reservations and other traditional areas have felt isolated from their families and other social support networks. To combat this sense of alienation, American Indian people in urban environments often seek support from other American Indians, neighbors, and nonfamily members to reconstitute their extended-family network, as mentioned, (LaFromboise & Graff Low, 1989). Therefore, these support services are useful in this reconstituted extended family network.

This study has implications for practice and theory. Based on the findings, the research addresses distinct recommendations for mental health professionals, student support services, faculty, administrators, and future researchers.

Implications for Mental Health Professionals

Herring (1998) suggested several practical recommendations for college counselors: (a) evaluate the degree of acculturation of the students. Counselors can use cues from dress or daily activities; (b) be open to allowing other family members, family elders, and tribal members to participate in the counseling session; and (c) consider using nontraditional methods of counseling that rely on myth-making and metaphor as alternatives to straight-talk therapy. Cultural sensitive counseling approaches with American Indian college students use a variety of nonverbal techniques. These techniques include using art and play therapy, becoming comfortable with long pauses in conversation, and facilitating group work rather than individual counseling.

Similarly, LaFromboise, Trimble, and Mohatt (1990) recommended service providers incorporate American Indian traditional healing methods (i.e., spiritual and holistic approaches, traditional ceremonies, sweat lodge ceremony, rituals, religious practices, medicine men, community empowerment and extended family network, collaboration with elders, talking circle groups) into conventional support services.

Implications for Student Support Services

There needs to be strong and numerous student support services available (e.g., advising, tutoring, financial assistance, bridge and orientation programs, support for student organizations, good distribution of information, physical space for students, block scheduling for groups of students and housing options). Programs and services for minority students can be coordinated and integrated within the larger university system.

Some implications for student support services include the following:

Based on the data, a few students gave recommendations to create an orientation program specifically designed for subsets of the American Indian student population. Required first-year orientation activities could instruct students about how to locate and use various academic resources and cultivate student support networks on campus in order to improve classroom performance (McNamara, 1982).

In addition, the difficulties surrounding the cultural differences between the majority university setting and the American Indian cultural experience could be improved by the addition of American Indian student support groups upon admission to The University of Montana. Colleges should develop culturally specific “survival” classes for American Indian students to assist them in the transition to college life, as Braithwaite (1997) suggested. The primary focus could include career and academic issues. These groups could provide didactic presentations on university survival skills, and draw upon the experiences of group leaders. Topics for discussion could center on developing social support and coping with cultural isolation. Other topics could include self-esteem issues, and social interaction techniques to increase American Indian presence on campus. The addition of support groups for American Indian students, especially nontraditional-aged students, would increase their sense of community and decrease their sense of isolation as they experience university life. Support groups could help students apply their unique American Indian linguistic and cognitive styles to academic tasks, clarify students’ cultural identities, improve their sense of self-esteem, and finally, help the students deal with cultural conflict.

With regard to family support, support services need to examine ways to include American Indian families in orientation programs. Our colleges and universities should seek to encourage parental interactions in their students' education while minimizing institutional barriers. Traditional activities such as open houses or family weekends should be specially tailored to encouraged American Indian parental participation.

Paraprofessional training for peer counseling should be encouraged. Perhaps American Indian junior and senior students could be recruited and compensated as assistant resident hall advisors to serve as role models for American Indian students new to campus and living in dorms. In addition, to address the feelings of isolation prevalent among minority students, perhaps, units or floors within dorms could be designated for American Indians students, and these students could choose whether to live there or in more integrated units.

Student services professionals need to acknowledge that many American Indians possess some degree of acculturation and that any one individual might show different degrees of acculturation across different behaviors and settings.

Implications for Faculty

Implications for faculty include the following: To enhance cultural relevance, the academic curriculum should include American Indian cultural issues and concepts, particularly those pertinent to the specific native or tribal background of the enrolled students. Boyer (1997) encouraged colleges to enrich their curricular and incorporate the preservation of the arts, philosophy, science, and religious studies of specific tribes. American Indian students indicated that inclusion of native cultural characteristics and

view points in the standard course work, and opportunities to observe and gain practical experiences with American Indians, was a key element to their academic success (Pipes et al., 1993).

Cultural awareness experiences in the classroom for non-American Indian students could be beneficial. This could increase non-American Indian student understanding of American Indian culture and possibly reduce prejudice and bias.

Braithwaite (1997) suggested that faculty and staff take responsibility for initiating communication between themselves and American Indian students. All faculty should be responsible for the success of minority students, not just minority faculty (Redmond, 1990), and all faculty should acknowledge the effects of cultural differences on academic achievement and success and deal with them appropriately (Smith-Mohamed, 1998).

Implications for Administrators

Some implications for administrators include: Boyer (1997) suggested that connections between tribal colleges and non-Indian higher education institutions grow stronger and that mainstream colleges learn how to support American Indian students successfully. Furthermore, students who transfer from tribal colleges are more likely to succeed (Boyer, 1997).

Colleges and universities should continue to work with tribal colleges joining in partnerships that will benefit both institutions. Predominantly White institutions that can learn about native cultures into mainstream institutions are more likely to succeed (Boyer, 1997).

Minority faculty members need to be actively recruited and supported. Recruiting and retaining more minority faculty would certainly enhance the cultural diversity of our postsecondary institutions while providing role models for minorities and countering the resurgence of racism on many campuses (Smith-Mohamed, 1998). Boyer (1997) recommended the need for a comprehensive program for faculty development. Programs may include faculty exchanges with surrounding non-Indian institutions, summer research programs, and increasing the number of American Indian faculty. Administrators need to offer all faculty members training, incentives, and rewards for developing and using multicultural approaches in their teaching and research.

Administrators may want to include mentoring activities in faculty job descriptions and evaluation procedures. Unfortunately, university faculties have numerous time constraints in fulfilling job expectations of teaching, community service, research, and student advisement. Therefore, faculty time for mentoring may only be possible for a few high-risk categories. The tandem use of both faculty and peer mentors may provide the added support that American Indian students need to be successful in higher education.

The results of this study suggest that retention among American Indian students can be promoted by encouraging parents and the American Indian community to support students in their efforts (Falk & Aitkin, 1992). Effective linkages with American Indian communities need to be developed and maintained. Minority communities and groups (including family, village, tribe, minority political structures) can be involved with the university in a wide variety of ways (e.g., meaningful advisory boards, university

representation in minority communities, a curriculum that reflects local and regional needs and priorities, and strong connections between school, school districts, and the university).

Implications for Future Researchers

Implications for future researchers should include: Acculturation and within-group differences need to be considered when working with American Indians. For example, the types of adjustment problems may differ depending on a variety of behaviors and lifestyles such as: growing up on or near a reservation, tribal affiliation, age (i.e. traditional or nontraditional-aged students), parental responsibilities, extended family orientation, involvement in tribal religious and cultural activities, education on or near a reservation, social activities primarily with other American Indian students, knowledge about or willingness to learn about their own culture, values and communication styles. These differences may present various issues to individual students.

Future studies can also include additional four-year predominantly White institutions because many of the tribes that were represented in this study tended to be from Northern Plains in rural settings in Montana. Thus, this study may be replicated at similar four-year institutions.

Another area for future researchers to explore is the experiences of graduates on a longitudinal basis.

Conclusion

Overall, results from this study are consistent with the existing literature.

However, the emphasis on academic mentoring and goal orientation is unique in this study. First, the existing literature on academic mentoring for American Indians is limited. Research has focused on their academic advising or mentoring for American Indians, but does not adequately address the combination of both. In addition, the existing literature on goal orientation for American Indians is sparse. Another unique aspect of this research is the comparison of academic mentoring and goal orientation to a predominantly White mainstream orientation to time.

Consequently, educators need to consider the following questions in the future include: How is success defined within a university community? Is this definition compatible with the definition of success in the wider community of American Indian people, in general, and for American Indian students at The University of Montana, in particular? What factors enter into becoming a successful American Indian person and a successful university graduate? Is it the expectation that minority students must become Western in order to be successful in the university setting (e.g., adjustments in interaction patterns, daily life patterns, friendship and family relationship patterns)? Are minority students allowed, or encouraged, to maintain their distinctness in many and widely varied spheres of campus life? How is institutional racism present in American Indian higher education? What obligations do universities that actively recruit American Indian students have to provide specialized academic or support services?

In conclusion, as mentioned previously, education, as a whole, has fallen short in providing American Indians with quality education as exemplified by the negative experiences of boarding schools and by the failed attempts in higher education. According to Wright and Tierney (1991), the history of American Indians in higher education impacts current problems and challenges that American Indian students have faced in the past. In other words, many of the same challenges that confronted American Indian students 300 years ago face American Indian college students today. American Indian student retention is one of the biggest challenges for universities.

Recently higher education policy and practice has become dominated by materialism, individualism, and competitiveness, at the expense of attention to the affective aspect of student development and, in a broader perspective, to the emotional and spiritual divisions that threaten humanity (Astin, 1992). Jointly, higher education, as a whole, needs to bring together a sense of lost humanity. Educators in all areas of study must make every effort to address the needs of American Indian students, not only in terms of teaching, but in helping them succeed as students and individuals and in paying particular attention to the issues surrounding their commonly documented difficulties in mainstream education (Smith-Mohammed, 1998). Academic success, retention, and graduation are systemic concerns involving students, family members, educators, and administrators.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

I am interviewing American Indian graduates to learn about your experiences as a student at The University of Montana. In particular, I am interested in learning about what support services and personal characteristics helped you succeed.

Demographics

- 1) When did you begin attending The University of Montana?
- 2) What year did you graduate from The University of Montana?
- 3) Tell me about your previous educational experience in higher education (i.e., tribal college, junior college) prior to attending The University of Montana. Once you started at The University of Montana, did you skip terms or were you enrolled continuously? Did you come to The University of Montana as a transfer student or a new freshman? Were you enrolled at The University of Montana before?
- 4) How did you decide to attend The University of Montana?
- 5) What was your major at the time of graduation?

Identity

- 6) Where did you grow up?
- 7) What type of community was it?
- 8) How did it affect your educational experience?
- 9) What is your tribal affiliation?
- 10) What language(s) do you speak (in your home)?

11) What kinds of cultural activities do you participate in?

12) What was it like for you to have been an American Indian on this campus?

Family

13) What educational background do your parents have?

14) What were their and other family members' reactions to your decision to attend college?

15) What types of support (financial, emotional) did you receive from your family and other extended family members?

Academic / Emotional Support

16) What, if any, academic adjustment problems did you experience while you were attending The University of Montana?

17) What types of academic support might have been helpful to you at this time?

18) Which of those did you receive?

19) What helped you stay in school? Did you ever consider quitting? What kept you from quitting? What helped you get through school?

20) Whom did you seek help or advice from when you needed emotional support?

21) Whom did you seek help or advice from when you needed academic support?

22) Who was the most important person to your success at The University of Montana?

Social

23) What social groups did you belong to?

24) Where did you see yourself fitting into at The University of Montana?

25) Did you feel you belonged to any particular group?

26) Were there student organizations (i.e., Native American Studies, Educational Opportunity Program, etc.) that were helpful or useful for you? Which ones?

Tell Me a Story

27) Tell me a story about what it was like for you when you first arrived.

28) Tell me a story about something that has helped you succeed in school.

Future

29) What advice would you give to an American Indian student currently attending The University of Montana?

Appendix B: Research Study Consent Form

This form indicates consent to participate in a research project to learn about American Indians' experiences at the postsecondary level and to identify which support services helped them succeed in school. The research methods include interviews with American Indian students who have recently completed their bachelor's degree. Results from these interviews will be used for educators and service providers to help American Indian students succeed in college. Understanding of the following facts is necessary prior to participation in the project:

The researcher, a doctorate candidate in Educational Leadership and Counseling at The University of Montana, will conduct, audio-tape, and transcribe interviews in their entirety, with the exception of identifying information. Interviews will be approximately one to two hours long. In the data, subjects will be identified by sequential numbers to insure anonymity. Each participant will be provided with a copy of the complete transcript and invited to review it and make any changes or corrections deemed necessary for anonymity. Any or all part of this interview may be quoted in published reports of this research. The interviews will be held at 724 Eddy at The University of Montana or a convenient and quiet location preferable to participants. During the duration of the project, the tapes will be stored at 724 Eddy in a locked file until the project is completed. Upon completion of the project, the tapes will be erased. The researcher will be the only person whom has access to the stored tapes.

The transcription will be combined with others to examine the experiences of American Indian college graduates and how support services have helped them succeed

in higher education. The conclusions will be compared to findings in the current literature.

Depending upon the content the participant chooses to discuss, participation in this study may be disturbing to some individuals. Should this happen, the researcher will provide a list of resources to all participants.

Participants are free to withdraw consent or to discontinue participation from this project at any time.

Inquiries concerning the methods or outcomes of this procedure may be addressed to Jiraporn (Dow) Angspatt, Counselor Education, University of Montana, 724 Eddy Street, Missoula, MT 59812. Telephone number (406) 243-5252. Inquiries may also be addressed to faculty advisor, Cathy Jenni, Counselor Education, University of Montana, 724 Eddy, Missoula, MT 59812. Telephone number (406) 243-2608.

Dear Participant,

Thank you for consenting to take part in this research study. The purpose of the study is to learn about American Indians' experiences at the post-secondary level and to identify which support services helped them succeed. The current literature on American Indians students suggests high under-representation, high drop-out rates, numerous problems contributing to the high drop-out rates of American Indians students, and overall academic failure. Research has been so focused on trying to understand academic failure that little attention has been paid to American Indians who have successfully completed their bachelor's degrees. For this reason, this study will focus on characteristics of American Indians who succeeded at the post-secondary level. I obtained your name and address from a list of recent graduates compiled from the Registrar's Office at The University of Montana.

The research method includes qualitative interviews with American Indian students who have recently completed their college education. Results from these interviews will be used to discuss implications and recommendations for future educators, counselors, and service providers to help American Indian students succeed in higher education. In addition, these interviews will be discussed to provide information regarding the design of an effective and comprehensive program at the post-secondary level to help American Indian students succeed in college.

As stated in the Consent Form, please feel free to address any questions regarding methods or outcomes of this research to Jiraporn (Dow) Angspatt, Counselor Education,

University of Montana, Missoula, MT 59812. Telephone number (406) 243-5252.

Inquiries may also be addressed to faculty advisor, Cathy Jenni, Counselor Education,

University of Montana, 724 Eddy Street, Missoula, MT 59812. Telephone number (406)
243-2608.

Please return this form in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope.

Your signature indicates an understanding of the above statements and intent to participate in this research project.

Please contact me at

Signature

Date

_____ I am not interested in participating in this project.

Thank you.

Appendix C: Codes and Categories

Academic Assistance

- Positive orientation
- Classmates or study groups
- Faculty
- Family members
- Department advisors
- Educational Opportunity Program
- Misc. student services

Academic Concerns

- Nontraditional-aged students
- Transfer students
- Different curriculum
- Large classes and large campus
- Math skills
- Writing skills
- Group exercises
- Cultural differences or learning styles
- Lack of high school preparation
- Advising needs (i.e. orientation, registration)

Emotional Support

Family

Friends

Family Role

College-educated parents

First-generation students

Financial assistance

Money

Financial aid advisors

Native American fee waiver

Scholarships

Work-study opportunities

Goal Orientation

Time management

Personal motivation

Jumping through the hoops

Vision of long-term goals

Identity

Student

Friends

Geography

Not "fit in"

Indian Affiliated Support

Faculty

Financial and academic advisors

Student services

Personal and Social Problems

Dysfunctional families

Peer pressure

Drinking or alcoholism

Cultural insensitivity

Discrimination, prejudice, or racism

Cultural differences

Self Esteem

Positive experiences

Academic performances and capabilities

Success

Negative Emotions

Self-doubt

Dissatisfaction

Frustration

Lost and confusion

Overwhelmed

Lonely

Intimidated

Personal Motivation

Self motivation and determination

Racial Identity Development

Acculturated

Bicultural

Traditional

Community Service

Work

Service

Recommendations

Recommendations

Appendix D: Categories and Themes

Obstacles

Academic Needs

Financial Issues

Personal Issues

Social Issues

Family Support

Emotional support and assistance

First Generation College Students

Family expectations and college educated parents

Family Activities

Mentoring

Academic Assistance

Financial Assistance

Goal Orientation

Goal-Setting

Time Management

Personal Motivation

Perseverance