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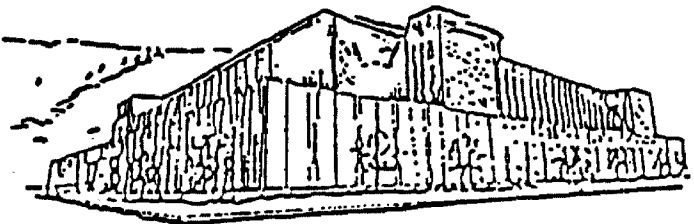
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Decolonizing Higher Education:  
Respecting Indigenous Cultures, Knowledge, and Scholarship

by

Danielle M. De La Mare

B.A. University of Montana, 2000

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

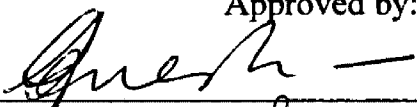
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Master of Arts

The University of Montana

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Approved by:

  
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**Decolonizing Higher Education: Respecting Indigenous Culture, Knowledge, and Scholarship**

Director: Shiv Ganesh 

While tribal colleges successfully retain and graduate Native American students, mainstream universities are failing. At mainstream universities, the retention rate for Native American students is significantly lower than for non-Native students. This paper argues that failures to retain Native American students lie in the embedded neocolonialist ideology of mainstream universities. In this way, mainstream universities often only see legitimacy in Westernized culture, knowledge, and scholarship.

A discussion of the successful history and progress of tribal colleges today introduces readers to this topic. Second, I examine colonialist ideology and link it to the neocolonialist ideology of mainstream universities today. Finally, I generate a list of suggestions, based on tribal colleges' success, that mainstream instructors and administrators may use to decolonize higher education at mainstream universities.

## Acknowledgments

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Additionally, it is necessary to acknowledge my parents. Thank you Mom and Dad, Debbie and Mel De La Mare, your devotion to me throughout my childhood and my adulthood, has not gone unnoticed. This accomplishment is as much your work as it is mine.

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## **Decolonizing Higher Education: Respecting Indigenous Cultures, Knowledge, and Scholarship**

“Growing up in a reservation environment, you have all kinds of support from your family and community. Then you move off to school and suddenly you’re just out there,” says Mandy Moccasin, an alumni of Little Big Horn Tribal College on Montana’s Crow Indian reservation (Belvin 1999: 22). Before attending Little Big Horn, Moccasin attended the University of Montana in Missoula. At the University of Montana, however, she felt lonely and unsupported by the university community, so a year later she moved back to the Crow Reservation.

Moccasin’s experience is not unique. Many Native American students experience similar hardships at large state universities. The purpose of this paper is to address the failure mainstream universities have encountered in retaining and graduating American Indian students. Also, I seek to negotiate, for mainstream instructors and administrators, a set of educational strategies that may work to combat these problems. While both colonialism and neocolonialism have global effects, for all practical purposes this paper will focus on Native Americans in the United States, primarily on those in the state of Montana. In order to see commonalities in other contexts, I will also refer to Indigenous people from other parts of the world. While I acknowledge that there are many differences between different Indigenous cultures, I will make reference to different cultures only to illustrate common effects that European colonialism has had on Indigenous cultures.

According to Duran and Duran (1995), the aftermath of the colonialist period has

left America's natives at increased risk of suicide, alcoholism, poverty, and low educational achievement. Accordingly, this paper will review arguments that colonialism's aftermath and today's neocolonialist ideology are major contributors of Native American social problems. It will also examine ways in which tribal colleges have addressed issues of colonialism, neocolonialism, and Native American identities. In addition, this paper will address some lessons mainstream universities can learn from tribal colleges.

It is extremely important for Native American peoples to nourish the development of a positive identity. After all, colonialism denied American Indians the opportunity to recognize and celebrate their own cultural identity and today neocolonialism continues to suppress the development of distinct, autonomous Native American cultural identities. Today, American Indians drop out of high school and college at a high rate because they often cannot identify with course material in mainstream educational settings (Gilliland 1995). The curriculum is most often designed to meet the needs of mainstream students, in the process reaffirming their cultural identity, but denying needs of Native Americans (Almeida 1998). Thus, Indigenous social problems around the world may be solved, in part, by introducing culturally relevant education into mainstream schools and universities.

Developing a sense of pride in Native American heritage may also help American Indian students by providing them with the esteem they need in order to see advanced education as something they can attain. So, culturally relevant education may offer a greater possibility for Indian students to achieve higher education. Higher educational

achievement may produce heightened awareness of American Indian issues, perhaps decreasing dysfunctional behavior that is so prevalent in American Indian families and communities, including suicide, alcoholism, poverty, and low educational achievement.

Four objectives will guide my project:

First, since education has been proclaimed the key to Native American survival (Almeida 1998), it is essential to gain an understanding of how indigenous identity issues are negotiated in contemporary tribal colleges. Second, because colonialism gave birth to neocolonialism, it is necessary to review literature pertaining to the history of colonialism in the U.S., with specific reference to Native American identity issues. Third, I will explain how contemporary identities of many Native students are adversely impacted by America's colonialist past and today's neocolonialist present in mainstream colleges and universities. Last, given my research, I will offer a set of suggestions whereby Native American identity issues could be better negotiated in mainstream educational contexts.

In order to accomplish these four objectives, I have divided the paper into three major sections. First, I engage in a brief overview of the history and progress of tribal colleges in order to orient readers to this topic. Second, I examine colonialist ideology and the extent to which today's neocolonialist ideology plays out in mainstream educational institutions. Third, I make suggestions for decolonizing higher education for instructors and administrators at mainstream institutions. I will start with the history of tribal colleges and the increased success they enjoy.

## Tribal Colleges: A Native American Success Story

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, as a result of the apparent need for college-educated American Indians, the availability of scholarships for Native Americans increased, and so did the population of Indian youth compared to the total Indian population, “War on Poverty” programs began to be implemented, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs made positive changes in their programs. All of this assisted Native Americans in their pursuits for higher education, making the 1960s and 1970s a ground breaking era for American Indians (Champagne 2001).

As more Native Americans pursued a college education, they discovered that higher education, as it existed, did not adequately serve Indian needs. Indians needed culturally relevant education, something not provided by mainstream colleges and universities. In response, many activists pushed for Native American Studies (NAS) Programs on college campuses. When implemented, however, these programs were not seen by universities as credible programs of study. According to mainstream universities, they lacked academic legitimacy. NAS programs, therefore, often lacked adequate funding from the state. So, the vision of a self-determined program of study for American Indians failed as NAS programs struggled, among other ethnic studies programs, to survive (Champagne 2001).

So, the tribally controlled college was founded and successfully received. The first tribal college, founded in 1968, was created on the Navajo reservation (it was then called Navajo Community College). Only ten years later, by 1978, fourteen new tribal colleges were founded on Indian reservations in six states--Montana, North Dakota, South

Dakota, Michigan, Washington, and California (Champagne 2001). Today, thirty-three accredited tribal colleges exist across the United States.

Although tribal colleges are similar to mainstream colleges in the programs of study offered, Montana's tribal colleges, as well as other tribal colleges across the country, are unique from mainstream colleges and universities for two major reasons. First, they work to develop a curriculum that is culturally relevant to Native American students, offering Native American Studies courses and language renewal courses, while emphasizing Native American values, such as the importance of family and community. Second, tribal colleges recognize the importance of community to Native Americans and actively address community needs (AIHEC 1998).

In order to understand these unique approaches it is first necessary to examine Native American worldviews and the cultural values important to the American Indian in more detail. While there are many aspects of Native American cultures that do not directly contradict Anglo culture, I identify two aspects of Native American culture that do so. First, the Native American cultural worldview shall be discussed. Following this, I will discuss Native American conceptions of community, in order to further shed light on the emphasis on community service in tribal colleges.

#### "All my Relatives": The Indian Worldview

The Seneca Indians believed that corn, squash, and beans were the Three Sisters of the Earth and because of their belief, they always planted these three plants together. While modern science has only recently discovered that, when planted together, corn, squash, and beans make a natural nitrogen cycle, keeping land fertile and productive

(Deloria & Wildcat 2001), the Senecas' connection and commitment to their surroundings allowed them to discover this much sooner than modern scientists. This fact illustrates the deep connection American Indians have had with the earth for centuries. The Indian paid close attention to mother nature, honoring her with an understanding that her trees, her mountains, and her animals were all relatives to humans. The Sioux Indians, for instance, exemplify this spiritual union with their natural environment. As they participate in traditional ceremonies, they repeat the words, "all my relatives" ("*mitakuye oyasin*"), referring to the earth's lands, animals, and plants (Gustafson 1997). By acknowledging a connection between humans and their environment, Native people ultimately learned the best way to survive on earth.

Native American viewpoints, then, regard the earth and all inhabitants as spiritually connected. In fact, one Indigenous author writes:

the drama that surrounds healing plants is symbolic of our worldviews as indigenous people. Each plant, the healer's visit with the patient, traditional concepts of disease, and the treatment are all microcosms of our culture and how we understand life. An indigenous plant/healing paradigm will locate a plant at the center of a circle. Cycling around the plant are four aspects of the plant/human relationship. Central to these aspects are the ideas for the mental physical, social and spiritual relationships to the plant. These aspects are anchored by history, identity, language, land base, and the beliefs of the culture (Salmon 1996: 72).

In fact, it is this spiritual connection and knowledge of the land that granted the Seneca people the knowledge to plant corn, beans, and squash together. By the same token, this spiritual connection also compels one Indian man, an instructor at Salish Kootenai Tribal College, to say, "the earth is now sick," referring to the environmental effects of modern technology. With water pollution, acid rain, and global warming, he

describes the earth as sickly, in the same way that a person might describe another human (a relative) as ill.

Because Native Americans link all things together, tightly interweaving their culture, identity, and history to their notions of trees, animals, and stars, it is no surprise that many Native Americans learn in a holistic way. After all, many of them have been taught by their elders to think holistically. In fact, ERIC Digests (1994) report that, rather than breaking a story down into segments, many Navajo third-graders insist on hearing their teacher read through an entire story before discussing it as a class.

In this way, Gilliland (1995) suggests that, because Indian students tend to be global learners, teachers of Native American students, should reveal the big picture of a specific concept, then draw out the pieces. Gilliland (1995) has found that Native college students also respond better to this type of learning. Because of this, he writes that, as an instructor, he will often advise students to read the conclusion of a chapter or article before reading the rest because it will help them see the big picture, before breaking down the conceptual pieces.

In this way, Western worldviews directly contradict Indian worldviews. While Native Americans have traditionally seen the earth and its plant and animal inhabitants as connected--as relatives, the Western worldview sees the earth as a plethora of resources, divorced from the human spirit, history, and identity. Western thinkers see themselves and the earth as two separate entities. In light of this, it logically follows that children in Western culture are not likely to view their world in a holistic manner. They separate concepts, easily drawing divisions. For example, school subjects may easily be separated:

math, science, history, social studies, etc. This, however, is not always true in Native Americans' culture. Divisions are not easily seen. So, as westerners view objects as separate, they tend to think in a "logical, sequential, linear fashion" (p. 77), learning best step by step as they work toward the big picture (Gilliland 1995), directly opposing Native learning styles.

Today, this cultural contradiction affects Native Americans who seek education at mainstream schools. Because the western worldview separates scientific education from first hand experience, for example, the Indian student is asked to memorize facts. These facts, however, are not meaningful to the American Indian student. They are separated from the student's experience and her spirit, creating a significant problem as the Native American fails to relate to the subject matter presented in mainstream schools and colleges. So the Western worldview, because of its omnipresence in mainstream education, creates problems for Native students who possess a more holistic worldview. These problems do not relate only to the curriculum.

In fact, Western society's emphasis on globalization, individuality, and competition also creates problems for Native American students attending mainstream institutions because they place more emphasis on local communities. This value contradiction shall be discussed below.

### The Indian Value of Community

This section discusses the strong value American Indians place on community. Two aspects of community are salient here: The value of a specific locale and second, the value of community relationships.



### The Value in the Local

Technological advances in today's global world have been described, by many, as the key to a utopian society--one that may provide, according to Friedman (2000), otherwise oppressed people a chance to take part in a more democratic world. In addition, cyberspace enthusiasts also celebrate and forecast a utopian society for similar reasons (Gunkel & Gunkel 1997). Hence, in order to achieve "utopia," programs to help oppressed and poverty stricken people around the world are being implemented with the use of global technology. For example, the American Protein Company (APC), with the help of Iowa State University, has found a way to provide protein to poor people, who live in protein-deficient areas around the world. By taking blood from slaughterhouses, APC and ISU are creating protein additives for human foods, such as cake mix (Robertson 2001).

This and other similar endeavors, however, contradict Native American cultural conceptions of community. Although, for example, APC delivers protein to communities in need (Robertson 2001), Jamie Robertson, president of Leech Lake Tribal College in Minnesota writes that, APC is "a world away from the communities it is designed to serve" (Robertson 2001: 41). Whereas supporters of globalization do not see this as a problem, many Native Americans question the value of these global efforts. In fact, Native American scholars Deloria and Wildcat (2001) argue that given mainstream America's preoccupation with modern technology (i.e. virtual reality and internet), people have forgotten the value in the local--what geographies, natural environments, and unique cultural identities may offer.

In fact, the local community requires a specific locale in order to create meaning-- a value that Western society does not possess (Deloria & Wildcat 2001). The Western world has been made too abstract (Deloria & Wildcat 2001). By pondering theories and working to achieve the apex of technology with “virtual reality” and “virtual communities,” mainstream society is disconnected from its immediate environment.

In this way, non-Indian communities, according to Deloria and Wildcat (2001), lack “context,” and without context or genuine place, non-Indian communities are continuously in transition. People come and go frequently, dictated by their job or educational pursuits. Without context, then, people do not have experience with the area, nor have sentimental concern for the area, failing to understand its history, its people, its environment, and how to identify with these things. So, according to Indigenous views, “Deep community is always related to the land in one form or another” (Gustafson 1997: 119).

#### The Value of Human Relationships

In addition to a common locale, human relationships are important to a Native American community. The American Indian values relationships with all community members, even referring to some who are not biologically related, as family members. For example, some individuals not related may be referred to as “aunt” or “uncle.” (Gilliland 1995). In addition, those that are related, even if distantly, are still viewed as close family. For example, “Crow and Navajo mothers consider their sisters’ children as close as their own” (Gilliland 1995: 34). Similarly, aunts and cousins may be just as responsible for disciplining children as their own parents are. The strong ties between

Native peoples illustrate the importance of community, fellowship, and camaraderie. For example, the Navajo greeting, *Ya at eeh*, means much more than “Hello, how are you?” It translates to “everything is good between us” (Ambler 2000). As this greeting enforces the importance of the relationship between those involved in the meeting, these words show how critical human relationships and community ties are to Native Americans.

Whereas communities are of the utmost importance to Native American cultures, it directly contradicts the values of individuality in most Western cultures. So, because relationships to an immediate locale and between community members are so important to the Indian culture, mainstream education, as it devalues and downplays community, fails the Native student. This appears to be very much the case in Montana. In fact, Michael O’Donnell, an alumni of the University of Montana and the current director of distance education at Salish Kootenai Tribal College (SKC) says:

There’s so many stories. I remember the president of our [SKC] student government trying to recruit another Indian student here. He said, ‘you’ll like us, Casey, you can be Indian here.’ I thought to myself, ‘gees, what is it like to go down to U of M [University of Montana]?’ I’ll tell you what it’s like. You go down there in financial aid and it’s like, ‘Here, pick this up.’ ‘Here, fill that out, here, blah, blah, blah.’ Here students are recognized as individuals and we try to work things out--keep them in school...if a student’s uncle dies and needs a week off, we try to work it out--we make him miss that week of classes because culture’s important. We make him go home and do that.

At the University, ‘screw ya, you miss that week, you’re screwed. You’re a lousy student, you should’ve stayed here. What the hell’s wrong with ya.’ Not here. Here it’s ‘go home, do what you need to do, then come back...here’s some work.’ Ya know, we try to work around all that (O’Donnell 2002).

O’Donnell’s insight as both an alumni of the University of Montana and as an employee of SKC shows that the University of Montana lacks community focus when

compared to a tribal college. This insight explains the introductory quotation--that "Growing up in a reservation environment, you have all kinds of support from your family and community. Then you move off to school and suddenly you're just out there," (Belvin, 1999: 22).

In addition, Ritzer (1996) discusses the emphasis on efficiency in mainstream higher education. He explains that often students may pay a small fee for lecture notes from top students, teaching assistants, and even professors themselves, allowing students to come and go as they please, making class attendance optional. In this way, students may easily become disconnected from the college community. Without requiring attendance, many students are there only to "get the job done," so to speak, rather than build meaningful relationships with members of the campus community. This becomes problematic for many American Indian students because, not only are they away from their reservations--the place they have grown up, they are away from the support they once received at home. The college "community" is a poor substitute.

In sum, the connection to the earth--its plants and its animals, the connection to the locale in which one grows old, and the connection to the community members in that locale, are all extremely important aspects of Native American "holistic" cultures--aspects that directly contradict the "separation" of objects, places, and people in Western culture. This contradiction plays out in mainstream education when an Indian student's worldview opposes the curriculum and culture of that institution, creating problems for the student in relating to the curriculum and finding a place in the campus community. Given this, it is no surprise mainstream education has failed to meet Indian needs.

Fortunately, today, these needs are met in the contemporary tribal college. The following section will explore how tribal colleges cater to the Indian worldview and culture.

### The Tribal College serving Specific Cultural Needs

Given the characteristics of American Indian cultures, it is no surprise that tribal colleges, in contrast to their mainstream counterparts, emphasize the Indian holistic worldview as well as the importance of community in an effort to avoid the harsh cultural contradictions met by most Indian students at mainstream colleges. I will address these efforts in two ways. First, I explain the way in which a culturally relevant education is accomplished by tribal colleges as they relate to the Indian holistic worldview. Second, I explore the ways in which tribal colleges provide a friendly, community atmosphere on their campus and assist the surrounding reservation community.

### Valuing Native Identity through Culturally Relevant Education

Here, I explore the importance of culturally relevant education as it relates to Indigenous students. I will show how certain American elementary and secondary schools, and some post-secondary educational institutions are incorporating a Native cultural consciousness. I will then discuss how tribal colleges are meeting Native American cultural needs.

### Introducing Culturally Relevant Education

Walt Novak, an eighth grade teacher in Hawaii writes of his difficulties in teaching native children--those that face poverty, homelessness, violent crime, teenage pregnancy, broken families, drugs, alcoholism, and low educational achievement (Novak 1996). He writes that his students are unaware of the city, state, and country they live in,

nor are they able to answer questions like: How many years ago did Christ live? Or, What's the name of the current U.S. vice-president? Although teaching these students is not easy for Novak, he has learned, over the last twelve years, how to adapt to his particular group of students. He says:

Hawaiian is a notoriously oral, tale-telling culture. I teach eighth grade English, so we do a lot of oral reading in my classes and ham it up like crazy. I rarely teach 'The Classics,' but rather, what I consider to be the best in adolescent literature. I make sure the lit heroes are teenagers, preferably 17-ish, as eighth graders idolize that age (Novak 1996: 2).

After teaching Hawaiian children for over a decade, Novak has made interesting adaptations to his teaching. By recognizing the most effective teaching strategies--drawing on Hawaiian oral tradition and reading material that is relevant to his students--students identify with his teachings and in doing so, they become motivated to learn.

Novak's work is important because, in many ways, mainstream education in colonial and neocolonial periods has fostered, for mainstream educational institutions, an opportunity for the ethnocide of Indigenous cultures (Almeida 1998). In fact, contemporary mainstream classrooms rarely acknowledge or celebrate Native identities, experiences, values, heritage, and history. (Gilliland 1995). In Novak's classroom, however, the Native Hawaiian oral culture is both acknowledged and celebrated, which helps students succeed. In fact, students whose culture is valued and respected, according to the Indian Nations at Risk Task Force are significantly more successful at school than children whose culture is not acknowledged and respected (Gilliland 1995).

In addition, as previously mentioned, Novak does not teach "the Classics." He has found them to be ineffective for his particular group of students and has instead found

material that students can better identify with. This is an important discovery because, “The [mainstream] school curriculum is geared to a whole set of concepts and literary background too often totally unfamiliar to an [Indigenous] child” (Gilliland 1995: 7-8).

The issues Novak has discovered with his Native Hawaiian students are not issues unique to Hawaiians. The high drop-out rates among American Indians is evidence that mainstream schools have not met the needs of Native American students either. In fact, on American Indian reservations across the country, fifty and even as high as sixty percent of Native American students do not graduate from high school (Gilliland 1995). With school curricula irrelevant to the life experience and culture of students, many are unable to identify with class material and school as a whole, eventually dropping out.

Thus, with its emphasis on material that only students from the mainstream society can identify with, the education system does not provide Indigenous students with representations of native values and worldviews. It therefore perpetuates the belief amongst Indigenous students that their cultures are inferior to Euroamerican cultures (Almeida 1998).

It is not surprising that in recent years, education--elementary, secondary, and post-secondary--has been proclaimed by both Native Americans and Native Hawaiians as the most powerful way to reclaim cultural identity and decrease indigenous social ills. By voicing the right to self-determination, Native movements geared toward culturally relevant education are gaining momentum. Through culturally relevant education, schools and colleges may successfully retain indigenous students, helping Native students to identify with class material and develop a proud sense of cultural identity thus providing a

path to escape the high rates of poverty, alcoholism, and domestic violence that has historically plagued native communities. Gilliland (1995) resolves how teachers may accomplish a culturally relevant approach to teaching:

The Indian culture should become an integral part of basic instruction. Bring the Indian heritage, Indian values, Indian contributions to thought and knowledge into the discussions in every subject whenever possible. Show the students that you value their heritage. Impress upon the students that they have a great heritage and that their values are important. Help them to put their values into words that they can use to defend these values. Give them assurance that they can learn to live in the dominant society without rejecting the culture and heritage of their families and their community. Make the Native American culture a visible part of your instructional program. Give it a place of honor (p. 11)

More teachers are understanding and implementing culturally relevant education by making Native American values, identity, and history a fundamental part of their instruction. The United Nations International School in New York, for instance, has become committed to this agenda in a number of innovative ways. For example, text books and other reading material written by Native Americans, are selected and integrated into the curriculum, in order to both provide accurate information to students about history and help them to acknowledge and respect Native American cultural ways. In addition, Susan Knox, a seventh grade English teacher at the same school, initiates writing assignments by first inspiring students with Native American oral poetry, hence emphasizing native oral traditions. Also, books that are written in both the English language as well as Native American languages, have been integrated into the curriculum at the New York School, which help students to understand the numerous Native cultures and languages (Cutforth 1991).



### Culturally Relevant Education at Tribal Colleges

Similarly, tribal colleges across the United States are founded on the idea of culturally relevant education. In fact, “all parts of the colleges’ curricula are designed from an American Indian perspective, and the individual courses reflect this effort” (AIHEC 1996: E-1).

For example, Braithewaite’s (1997) analysis of the innovative educational communication practices at Navajo Community College (now Dine College) on the Navajo Nation concludes that culturally relevant education--education that draws on Native beliefs and perspectives--is, for Natives, the key to a positive identity. In fact, because indigenous people are classified as those from “fourth world” nations--those that believe people belong to the land-- as opposed to the people from first, second, and third world nations, who believe the opposite--that the land belongs to people (Almeida 1998), this “fourth world” belief is integrated into the Navajo education. So, “by focusing attention on the role of the sacred mountains, rivers, and other sacred places on the Navajo Nation, the students are taught to see their land as part of who they are as a people” (Braithewaite 1997: 230).

In addition to this focus, tribal colleges further promote the Native worldview as they support Native American language revival courses for both college students and reservation children. The U.S. government, throughout history, banned or discouraged Native languages (Yamauchi & Ceppi 1998), both those of Native Americans and Native Hawaiians, in an effort to rid the nation of “inferior” cultures. Not surprisingly, however, the government’s past still affects Natives. In fact one Native Hawaiian I interviewed,

says the following about his native language:

When I was growing up, we were told not to be Hawaiian and not to speak Hawaiian...um, basically I didn't speak. I just didn't say anything because I didn't know standard English and that whole feeling of I didn't want anyone to know I'm Hawaiian.

This is an interesting point that all Native American people, including those in Montana can relate to. Because, in the past, Indian children were banned from speaking their own language and made to feel ashamed by parents who spoke Native languages, language revival courses, provided by tribal colleges, offer a way to beat the shame (Boyer 2000). Since language is culture-sustaining, and provides a way for people to address culturally-specific concepts, language revival is one of the most important concerns at tribal colleges. After all, “without a language to speak there is no culture” (Real Bird in Boyer 2000: 14).

Because of the importance of language, all seven Montana tribal colleges formed what is called the Learning Lodge Institute, whereby each college focuses its attention on rebuilding the Native language specific to their tribal affiliation. Although each college goes about this goal differently based on differing community needs, colleges are working on projects that “include the certification of language teachers, documentation of medical and ceremonial plants, development of language handbooks, sponsorship of culturally-based immersion programs, and creation of partnerships with Head Start classrooms and public schools” (Boyer 2000: 12). Thus, although courses are offered to tribal people at the college, tribal colleges support programs that target community children. These programs include Head Start programs and language immersion programs in elementary

schools.

The Head Start Program serves underprivileged children younger than age five, seeking to prepare them for a successful future. "The program is designed to maximize the strengths and unique experiences of each child and family" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1993: 1). In this way, with tribal college support, Native American childrens' experiences and cultures are valued--one aspect of this involves valuing their Native language by promoting the learning of that language. Such language revival efforts have become an important way to sustain languages that are quickly disappearing.

In fact, many Native American people are learning about immersion programs through Hawaii's successful immersion model. In such immersion schools, instruction is given solely in the Native Hawaiian language until fifth grade, at which point students are introduced to English for only one hour per day. English, then, although spoken by almost all students at home, is introduced in the same way that foreign languages are introduced in mainstream schools, setting aside one hour per day to work on English. These programs are proving extremely successful. In fact, students involved in immersion programs are excelling when compared to other Native children. In fact, they are scoring higher on nation-wide standard examinations (Yamauchi & Ceppi 1998). Along with this, some people believe that language programs actually improve physical and mental health as well (Ambler 2000). Perhaps people believe this for spiritual reasons similar to Patrisia Gonzalez, a Kickapoo Indian, who writes:

As I speak words I have never known, it is as if they are an energy circling

within my being, reordering some genetic memory to return me to my origins. To return me to the energy I have always been, untouched by forced separations, to Creation itself (Gonzalez 2001: 57).

Such spiritual connection to history and culture, may have profound effects on physical and mental health. Hence, tribal colleges, by promoting language revival in college classrooms, in Head Start programs, and in immersion programs, are not only defeating the long held shame of their Native languages, but improving children's academic success and possibly their physical and mental health. They are teaching Indigenous people to be proud of their culture and with that comes pride in their languages. Thus, tribal colleges, as they recognize Native languages, recognize Native people, which leads to self-esteem and increased academic success among tribal people (Ambler 2000), not to mention an increased connection to traditional values and concepts--promoting the holistic worldview. "A strong sense of identity and self-respect is critical to any student's success in learning. Students say that at tribal colleges, 'it's okay to be Indian'" (Belvin 1999: 23). Thus, a focus on culturally relevant education may be the first step, for Indigenous people, in reclaiming a positive self concept. After all, as the Mohawk people say, "Education is the bottom line to our survival" (Almeida 1998: 6).

In addition to culturally relevant education that promotes (as opposed to mainstream colleges) the Indigenous worldview, tribal colleges also recognize the Native American value of community and thus encourage a strong community atmosphere on the tribal college campus itself as well as in the surrounding community. Below, I focus on ways in which tribal colleges in Montana promote community.

## The Tribal College's Commitment to Community

Tribal colleges in Montana encourage community in two different ways. First, tribal colleges encourage campus community. Second, tribal colleges encourage community in what lies outside of the tribal college--the reservation area.

### Tribal College Community

First, tribal colleges attempt to build community into campus life. Jerry Slater, vice-president of Salish-Kootenai Tribal College, says:

We try to de[centralize]. We're a much more classless system here. It's hard to know whether a student's in truck driving or if they're headed for...to become a medical doctor. They just don't know. It's people interacting with people and...There's just much more of an inherent respect for one another, regardless of what their chosen area of study is and what their profession is. Those are somewhat separate. It's that we're all individuals and all individuals are worthy of respect and should be treated that way, so there's that kind of atmosphere that's somewhat different here, I think than you'll find [at] many college campuses. 'Well, I'm in pre-med or I'm in pre-law, or I'm in...it's I'm, I'm, I'm,' but here it's not. There's much more of a "we" concept, much more that 'we as people' or how we treat each other and what we expect in relationship to one another. There's real basic differences there and I think those carry through into the classroom and have allowed for a lot more success (Slater 2002).

The importance of community is reflected in the "we" concept, Jerry Slater speaks of. As people refrain from competitiveness and status based on programs of study, people collectively work together, providing a campus community of support. Similarly, SKC's director of distance education, Michael O'Donnell says:

We have a hard time gettin' students to leave. They graduate from here and go down to the University and say, 'Do I have to stay down here? I don't like it here. They're not as nice. They don't help us.' It's [SKC] a small campus, everybody knows everybody else. There's just so many good things about being here. So many miracles happen here that [at]

other places, they're just-- they're lost...It's just amazing what happens. It's like a holy place (O'Donnell 2002).

Again, the supportive campus community is reflected in O'Donnell's above words. He reports that, at SKC, "miracles happen" as students, staff, and faculty support each other. He describes SKC as a "holy place" as opposed to the mainstream university. In addition, John Gritts, a Native American who worked as a financial aid administrator at a mainstream college for over two decades says:

After 22 years as one of the few Native American financial aid administrators, I left the profession because I felt it was becoming too formula-driven. I think financial aid administrators are in a unique position to be a college student's best friend and supporter. I wanted to make things easier--not more difficult. Working at the American Indian College Fund and with tribal colleges lets me do that (Gritts in Belvin 1999: 23).

In light of the above, it is evident to see why Native American students have trouble adjusting to mainstream university life. Often students miss their family, their community, and the sense of belonging they experienced at the tribal college. In addition, these feelings are compounded when students are forced into the impersonal, unfriendly, and competitive atmosphere characteristic of the mainstream campus. The sense of community and belonging at the college campus is not all that the tribal college offers, however. The tribal college also offers a place to study at home--in the reservation community. It recognizes the importance of community to the American Indian and works to build community, not just at the college, but in the community that the campus is located.

### Reservation Community

Billy Jo Kipp, a Blackfeet Indian from Browning, Montana speaks of her

experience, after leaving for college, as one of regret. Now that she is attending the University of Montana, earning her Ph.D. in clinical psychology and half finished with her dissertation, she often regrets uprooting her family--her husband and two youngest children--in order to earn an education. She mentions that her children want to return to the Blackfeet Reservation where they can be around the rest of their family, play for the ball teams at the local high school, and be the majority, rather than the minority. For her children, living in mainstream society, Kipp says, is "a loss of who they are and the loss is because we're a collective people, we're not an individual people. Up here, we're individuals. At home, we're a collective people" (Kipp 2002).

Leaving home is the most difficult part of schooling for Kipp. It is not only that the mainstream campus is difficult to adjust to, but that the individualist lifestyle, off the reservation, is difficult to adjust to.

This illustrates the importance of community for the people living on reservations. Additionally, Kate Shanley, chair of the Native American Studies (NAS) department at the University of Montana says that, in her opinion, part of what prevents some Native American students from graduating from UM is something that "is just so Indian--missing home--just plain missing a community, missing the familiarity of it" (Shanley 2002).

Shanley's words exemplify the Native American value of community. The tribal college understands how important community is to reservation residents and in response works to build the community. After all, tribal colleges' health rests on the health of their surrounding communities. For example, "if child care is not available, the college

enrollment drops. If drugs or gangs are a problem on the reservation, the students are affected because their children, parents, or friends are affected” (Ambler 2001: 9). For these reasons, tribal colleges take an active role in their community. They often provide benefits that reservations would not have without the colleges, such as “radio stations, workshops on racism, libraries and archives, entrepreneurial training, and community gardens” (Ambler 2001: 9). For many reservation communities, the college provides the only library on the reservation.

Another example of community service that tribal colleges provide can be seen at Dull Knife Memorial College in Lama Deer, Montana. Here, many tribal people who have never seen their native language in writing, refer to the college for correct spellings of Native names for their use in obituaries.

Also, in order to raise Indian reservations from their depressed economical conditions, many tribal colleges support small business development (AIHEC 1998). Nancy Warneke, director of the Business Information Center at SKC, for instance, teaches workshops for American Indians who aspire to own businesses. In Elmo, a small town on the Flathead Indian Reservation, Warneke is currently assisting potential business owners as they develop their business and marketing plans. This work will pay off in two years when approximately twenty new business owners will proudly open their businesses.

Additionally, tribal colleges help their communities by providing vocational education specific to community needs. Examples of such needs are education in home health, hospitality, natural resource technology, and heavy equipment operation (St.



Pierre 1998). In contrast to mainstream schools, these vocational certificate offerings at tribal colleges are important because they respond directly to the community. For example, under the G.I. bill, after World War II, many Native Americans received vocational training from mainstream institutions only to return to their reservations skilled in a trade irrelevant to local needs. In effect, tribal colleges often observe the reservation community's labor markets, paying close attention to job placement opportunities, training needs, and economic trends, so they may offer training in needed areas. Stone Child College, located on Montana's Chippewa-Cree reservation, for example, graduated twenty-six vocational students in 1997. Of those, nine are employed, eight of which, despite the seventy percent unemployment rate, are employed on the reservation and of the remaining seventeen students, fourteen went on to higher education. So, vocational training specific to reservation needs is exemplified at Stone Child College. Students are going on to succeed (St. Pierre 1998).

In addition to reservation vocational needs, tribal colleges also encourage family support. Because the average student at a tribal college is a single mother in her late twenties, family is of major concern. After all, "What do you do when the baby is sick, and they can't go to day care, or the baby sitter doesn't show up?" (Mainor 2001: 10). In response, four Montana tribal colleges (Fort Peck Community College, Salish Kootenai College, Blackfeet Community College, and Stone Child College) have collectively established what is called the Kellogg Family Collaborative Project. Through cultural/family activities, counseling, mentoring, and life-skills, families play a significant role in supporting students at these four colleges. The Kellogg Family Collaborative

Project, in addition, helps families who experience problems with money, transportation, child care, as well as alcohol and drug abuse (Mainor 2001).

In addition to vocational training, family programs, and other valuable community support provided by tribal colleges, distance education also plays an important part in keeping families and communities intact. Thus, as tribal colleges support the family and community collective, they have developed programs for students whose community does not have a college and for those who cannot or do not want to leave their community. For example, in order for students to stay with their family and in their community, Salish Kootenai Tribal College as well as Fort Peck Community College provide distance education to distant students. For example, SKC provides distance education to other Native American tribes across the nation, the Indigenous Sami students studying from Finland and Norway, and to Aboriginal people in Australia. Still others from China, New Zealand, Russia, South Africa, and South America have inquired about the educational opportunities at Salish Kootenai Tribal College, according to Michael O'Donnell, the director of distance education at SKC (2002). In this way, tribal colleges value students' family and community by granting them an opportunity to stay with their loved ones. Thus, the community focus of tribal colleges in Montana, both on campus and in the surrounding reservation area, validates the Indian value of community for students and other reservation residents.

### Discussion

Montana's tribal colleges are similar in many ways to other tribal colleges in the United States. While tribal colleges in Montana focus on culturally relevant education

and value community, tribal colleges outside Montana do the same. As mentioned above, for example, Navajo Community College (now Dine College) emphasizes the sacredness of the waters, mountains, and trees in its college curriculum, promoting culturally relevant education.

In addition, tribal colleges outside Montana value community, both campus and reservation communities. For instance, Michael Price, Chairman of the Science and Mathematics Department at Leech Lake Tribal College in Minnesota expresses the importance of a friendly, supportive campus community. He says, "I think what mainstream colleges and universities are missing is a sense of kinship, community and a non-competitive learning environment" (Price in Belvin 1999: 20). In addition to this, Oglala Lakota College in South Dakota exemplifies a commitment to its reservation community. For example, in response to the disturbingly high rates of pneumonia, influenza, cirrhosis, and diabetes on the reservation, the college formed the Oglala Lakota Nation Wellness Team in 1997 in order to address, in the Indian holistic way, the health issues facing their people (Ambler 2001).

Although tribal colleges across the United States value community, their differences lie in their differing community needs. Thus, while Oglala Lakota College finds a need to address health issues in its community, Salish Kootenai Tribal College, in Montana, may find it more pertinent to support family programs.

In sum, tribal colleges, by emphasizing the Indian cultural worldview and the importance of the campus and reservation communities, are offering an education to Native Americans that is sensitive to their cultural backgrounds. Students are valued for

their culture and worldview and finding that education is attainable for them, which fosters a positive self-concept. As Marla Jimerson, a 32-year-old mother of two and student at Dull Knife Memorial College, says, "I am grateful that Dull knife Memorial College has given me the opportunity to be an outstanding student" (Jimerson in Cournoyer 1999: 32).

Thus, because tribal colleges offer important educational programs and degrees from accredited institutions, Indian students with limited financial income and opportunity are provided with a chance to educationally succeed in an environment that is sensitive to their cultural identity. As a result, students are succeeding.

In fact, the attrition rate for Native American students, at some mainstream colleges is as high as 75%. While, the retention rate at Navajo Community College in 1997, for example, was a whopping 88% (Braithewaite 1997). Additionally, American Indian students attending tribal colleges immediately after high school have been found eight times more likely to graduate from a mainstream university with a Bachelor's Degree than students who, directly after high school, attend off reservation mainstream universities. Such evidence implies that when culture is acknowledged, celebrated, and respected, Native American students tend to enjoy increased academic success (Champagne 2001). Jerry Slater, vice president of SKC echoes this sentiment when he says:

I see a lot of students come through and graduate every year and know what a change that is in their lives. I have known some of them over the years and know how much change this has been and what a positive thing it has been for these people--to come through and accomplish this--and [I] have seen some that have made such major leaps and gains from living on

welfare, to going to college, to getting their advanced degrees to, ya know, accomplishing so much; to some who had alcohol and substance abuse problems quit, become involved with school, find a way to make a living for themselves (Slater 2002).

In addition to Slater's powerful testimony, the Carnegie Foundation found tribal colleges to be "the most significant development in American Indian communities since World War II" (Belvin 1999: 19). Accordingly, tribal colleges, with hopeful pursuits to build reservation communities and educate their own tribal people, provide college students and their communities a place to develop stronger feelings of self-worth and as a result, Native Americans are finding that it is "okay to be Indian" (Belvin 1999: 23).

In this way, through celebration of tribal culture, and local efforts to build the reservation community, Native Americans are exercising their self-determination rights. They are finding that Indian cultures are worth celebrating and that the modern world may be successfully undertaken without repressing the Indian worldview and culture. Mainstream colleges and universities have not, however, experienced the same sort of success with their American Indian students. The following section will explain that the neocolonialist ideology embedded in mainstream colleges and universities creates problems for Native American students.

### The Neocolonialist Ideology of the Mainstream University

Because mainstream colleges and universities have not yet "decolonized" higher education, the college experience becomes difficult for American Indian students. The following section shall orient readers to the fundamental characteristics of colonialist ideology--an ideology, whose remnants exist today in mainstream colleges and

universities, making college life difficult for Native Americans.

### Colonialist Ideology

While power and financial gain forcefully motivated colonizers to commit barbarous acts of genocide and ethnocide, colonialist ideology justified these disturbing events for the sake of *progressive* science and technology and couched this justification in a moral rationale. Scholars have made detailed arguments as to how Natives were successfully tossed into a world of identity ambivalence, by being stripped of their culture and forced to behave differently. In this way, they were forced to be white, while simultaneously making it impossible to achieve “whiteness” to its full extent (McClintock 1995, Fanon 1967, Morris 1997). Such identity confusion that Indigenous people faced as they mimicked colonizers, provided colonizers with increased power. After all, without a clear Indian identity, natives could not threaten hegemonic forces (McClintock 1995).

While it is beyond the purview of this paper to examine the complexities of colonial ideologies, we may see it as dictating three major beliefs. First, because the progressive white man saw Natives as savages, he believed it his moral duty to teach Natives “civilized ways” in an effort to help them step above their prehistoric, animal-like lifestyle and progress (Bess 2000). Second, with progress dictating scientific discovery, colonizers believed that unscientific Native ideas, such as Native Americans’ belief of the “Three Sisters,” were not legitimate. Native knowledge, in this way, was replaced by Western scientific knowledge (Loomba 1998). Third, since colonizers, with progressive ideas, viewed Natives as prehistoric people who lived an animal-like lifestyle and whose beliefs of myth were childish, at best, colonizers believed Natives should mimic

European ways in order to “save the man inside the Indian.” The Native American boarding school era is exemplary of this belief. In the United States, beginning in the nineteenth century, many Native American children were legally taken (abducted) from their families and sent to boarding schools, in an effort to cleanse children of the “inferior culture” they had been raised in (Yellow Bird & Chenault 1997). In such boarding schools American Indian children were physically abused for practicing anything reminiscent of their Native culture, including “dress, modes of living and learning, ritual, beliefs, religions, ceremonies, [and] speech” (Morris 1997: 157). With Native American students punished for practicing their own culture, colonizers forced American Indians to practice Euroamerican culture, confusing Natives’ identity and ultimately fortifying colonialist hegemony. Native oppression has not remained in the past. In fact, the ideology in which the mainstream university works, finds its roots in the colonialist era. Thus, neocolonialist ideology is embedded in the structures of the mainstream university. It is to this issue that I now turn.

### Neocolonialist Ideology

Today, the neocolonialist ideology of progression has not fundamentally changed. Just as colonialism oppressed Natives by displacing their knowledge systems and stripping them of their cultural identity through forcible mimicry, neocolonialism in mainstream colleges and universities also functions to dominate and oppress native people. In what follows, I will discuss neocolonialist ideology as it is articulated in mainstream universities. After this, I will expand on the notion of forcible mimicry in the context of higher education.

Neocolonialism: “Progress continues to be God”

Today, the idea of progress continues to be exalted at mainstream educational institutions. In fact, Cook-Lynn (2000) describes the controversy surrounding the publicized Native voice. She writes of the book *I, Rogoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* translated by Ann Wright and of the book, *House Made of Dawn*, a novel for which N. Scott Momaday won a Pulitzer prize, acknowledging that these and other publications by Native American people have been defamed by many mainstream scholars. Many have claimed that these Native American works are “made-up”-- fraudulent-- or that they are exaggerated accounts, written to benefit a leftist political agenda. They are often criticized because they are not written in a way that is traditionally academic-- they are unscientific, so to speak.

One example of this defamation is the published 1990 work called, *The Invented Indian: Cultural Fictions and Government Policies* (Cook-Lynn 1997). This work was a collection of essays written by white scholars in an attempt to discredit the Indian voice.

In addition, because, for example, *I, Rogoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* is a personal narrative of a young woman’s encounter with colonialist rule, her story according to several white scholars is not legitimate, since according to historian Patricia Limerick and others, it lacks specific references to historical truths about Indian life (Cook-Lynn 1997). In fact, anthropologist David Stoll, has worked to discredit this account on the grounds that it serves only to push a leftist political agenda and because it lacks “scientific” data--hard facts and evidence. In response to Menchu’s book, he has published counter claims, with his work being funded through foundations such as the



Rockefeller Foundation, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, and the Fundamentalism Project of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences; with much of his work published in *Christian Century*, *Hemisphere*, and the *Miami Herald* (Cook-Lynn 2000). So, although Stoll clearly represents his own political agenda, his work is regarded as legitimate scholarly writing because it is not a personal narrative. Instead, he writes in “scientific” prose that is acceptable in the neocolonialist academic world.

Additionally, Indigenous healers from all over the world, including North and South American people, have been knowledgeable and competent in their chosen fields for centuries, but because their knowledge is not based on scientific discovery, but instead based on the cumulative knowledge of their tribes, it is not considered legitimate. So, Westerners take the knowledge of these people, test it scientifically, synthesize it, and document their findings. With this knowledge packaged in science, it is suddenly valid to the academic community. What academics do not see is that, “[Indigenous] healers are intellectually equal to Western physicians in performance; it is only their scientific paradigm that differs” (Salmon 1996: 72).

This may also be said about some Native American social scientists and historians. Although their work is not considered “scientific,” they are just as competent, if not more competent, at representing the Native American experience accurately. But just as the Indigenous healer is not valued, neither is the Indigenous scholar. After all, many Native American Studies topics are often written by politicians, policy makers, and funding agencies rather than Native scholars and writers, themselves (Cook-Lynn 1997).

According to Smith (2001), “ ‘authorities’ and outside experts are often called in to verify, comment upon, and give judgements about the validity of indigenous claims to cultural beliefs, values, ways of knowing and historical accounts” (72).

Thus, the enlightenment period brought with it an obsession with progress, dividing the “civilized” from the “savages” and finding legitimacy only in the progressive, scientific knowledge of the “civilized.” As neocolonialism lives on into the twenty-first century, the academic world continues to view the knowledge systems of Native Americans and other Indigenous people as illegitimate and unequal, seen only as “traditional folklore or superstition” (Salmon 1996: 72). In this way, mainstream universities and colleges continue to colonize knowledge and education--they control, oppress, and marginalize Native American scholars because of their differing worldviews. Native knowledge--their knowledge, their worldview is not validated in the mainstream educational context.

#### Neocolonialism: Mimicry continues

In this way, American Indians find themselves, once again, “mimicking” the dominant society. They must adopt Westernized epistemologies, write papers according to the Western standard, and take tests created by Western-trained professors. Stephen Greymorning, a Native American professor, reports that while teaching an introduction to Native American Studies class at the University of Montana, he introduced his students to the Native American worldview. As a class, he had his students discuss differing realities and perceptions of the world. He also warned them that their upcoming quiz would not be written according to a Westernized structure, instead it would be adjusted according to

an Indigenous worldview. Despite Greymorning's numerous warnings, irate non-Indian students accused Greymorning's quiz to be filled with "trick questions" that were unfair and illogical (Greymorning 2000). So, Greymorning's students failed, became upset, and became accusatory because the quiz they took was not consistent with their worldview. This example illustrates the problems that many Native American students run into daily at the mainstream university because the material presented is inconsistent with their worldview.

Often, in order to escape poverty, Native Americans go off to mainstream colleges and universities to earn an education, but when they get there, they find that the only way to succeed is to disregard their Indian culture and worldview. So, in order to succeed, their college papers must reflect a Westernized approach inconsistent with their upbringing. After all, Indigenous scholars that succeed are the scholars who adopt the Westernized worldview as their own. In fact, because they view the world in colonial-inspired, Western ways -- "legitimate" and "valid" ways, Maori scholars trained in the West have been described as "saviors of the people" and as "examples of real leadership" (Smith 2001: 70)

Thus, as Native people have attempted to indigenize colonial academic disciplines and mainstream universities, they have run into numerous struggles ranging from debates over what is and what is not knowledge and language to debates surrounding curriculum and academic freedom (Smith 2001).

Take, for example, the fight for legitimacy that Native American Studies departments at mainstream universities have struggled with. As they demand an

academic discipline to call their own, Native American people ask to study First Nations people in an endogenous way--a way "that would emerge from *within* Native people's enclaves and geographies, languages and experiences, and it would refute the exogenous seeking of truth through isolation [--the way anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists might study Native American people] (i.e. 'ivory tower')" (Cook-Lynn 1997:11). Endogenous inquiry, however, is problematic because it is not viewed as "traditional academia"--it lies outside of colonialist academic structures and traditional "scientific" epistemologies (Cook-Lynn 1997).

Because of this, Native American Studies departments suffer from a host of colonialist-related problems. They exist:

at the margins of academic life, [they] suffer bigotry and ignorance of conservative right-wing scholars and think tanks, [they are] directed by inefficient intellectuals (some Indian, some white) who are content to simply occupy space or reiterate failed theories in the social sciences as the core of Native intellectualism, [they] serve as hotbeds for professional malcontents and student victims, [they are] staffed mostly by non-tribal scholars and professors who, often, do not see as their major constituencies the hundreds of First Nations and Peoples on this continent [and] worst of all, [Native American Studies departments are] irrelevant to modern, contemporary Indian life (Cook-Lynn 1997: 16-17).

All of these problems may be contextualized with the neocolonialist ideology of mainstream scholars and the institutions they work at. So, in the same way that Native American Studies departments have failed at universities, the Native American student, who does not conform to traditional academia may also fail. Thus, in order to succeed at universities, the Native American student is forced to mimic Euroamerican ways of thinking and producing academic work. These ways, among others, include scientific and

exogenous analysis as well as individually competing for teacher acknowledgment and grades. Mainstream college education is akin to the banking model of education as described by Freire (2000). Freire contrasts a banking approach with a “conscientizing” approach: he is critical of the former and advocates the latter. In the banking model, teachers look to simply “deposit” knowledge into empty containers--the minds of students. The teacher speaks and the students listen. The students are expected to memorize the information learned no matter how meaningless it may be to their life experiences. According to Freire (2000), the Banking model of education was set in place in colonialist times. As boarding schools sought to “civilize” Native American students, students’ Native cultures were successfully oppressed. Students listened to the teacher and memorized what was said. Colonialist endeavors across the globe used the Banking education for the same reasons--to promote mimicry of Western knowledge and education. For example, one Tanzania Native recalls his childhood educational experience:

We read stories and sung songs about having tea in an English garden, taking a ride on the train, sailing in the open seas, and walking the streets of town. These were unfortunately stories far removed from our life experiences (Semali & Kincheloe 1999: 9).

In this way, the traditional lecture, the most widely used instructional method at mainstream universities and colleges, utilizes the banking model just as colonizers did to oppress their students. As an instructor, one must guard against colonizing the classroom. Suggestions for doing this follow.

Rather than reinforcing neocolonialist ideology, non-Indian instructors and

administrators at mainstream colleges and universities should reaffirm the Indian worldview and help Indian students develop a sense of community at these colleges and universities. Suggestions for accomplishing these goals will be provided in the following section.

### Suggestions to Decolonize Higher Education

This section provides suggestions for helping Native American students succeed at mainstream colleges. With the tribal college success story, it is natural to see that mainstream colleges should address the contradiction inherent in the Anglo culture and the Indian culture just as tribal colleges have. Mainstream institutions of higher education may successfully decolonize education in the U.S. by specifically addressing two things: one, the Native American worldview and two, the Native American value of community.

#### Culturally Relevant Education: Addressing the Indian Worldview

It is obvious that culturally relevant education is very important to the success of Native students. No place shows more evidence for this success than tribal colleges. As students learn in ways that are meaningful to them, they succeed, develop a higher sense of self-worth, and ultimately come to believe that higher education is attainable. As a result of culturally relevant education, retention is incredibly high at tribal colleges.

In light of this, mainstream instructors and administrators may learn how to help their Native American students succeed by educating students in a way that is culturally relevant to them. First, because most Native American cultures stress cooperation and

sharing, instructors should incorporate instructional methods that allow students to learn as they cooperate and share in group settings. One suggestion that is effective with American Indian school children is called the “instructional conversation.” This method allows students, in small groups, to jointly solve problems, make plans, build something, etc., while the teacher participates, helping students as problems arise (ERIC 1994). Although this study reported on children learners, it is safe to assume that Indian college students would also benefit in instructional conversation. Given the collectivist culture they come from, Native Americans at any age may learn quicker and easier as they work together with other students, rather than working on their own, competing against other students.

In fact, Cooper and Mueck (1990) found that “cooperative learning,” (another name for “instructional conversation”) at California State University Dominguez Hills was, for the general college student, without specification of race, ethnicity, or culture, overwhelmingly preferred to the traditional lecture format. Additionally, “all students performed well when exposed to Cooperative Learning, but lower achievers, females, and minorities performed particularly well” (Cooper & Mueck 1990: 71). Thus, the teacher that implements cooperative learning--that is learning in small group discussions-- into their classroom may reap the benefits that go along with it. That is, despite their cultural background, more students will enjoy it and more students will learn more from cooperative learning as opposed to lecture.

Second, mainstream instructors who desire to decolonize their classroom through culturally relevant education, should take Fuhrmann and Grasha’s (1983) advice. With

reference to college students in general, Fuhrmann and Grasha suggest that real world examples be incorporated into course material, making information personally meaningful to students. With specific reference to Indian college students, this suggestion is important. After all, Native American students often have trouble relating to Anglo-specific course material. Thus, they often feel alienated. So college teachers, by first learning who their students are, their backgrounds, and a bit about their personal lives, then may relate this learned knowledge about students into class material, using experiences of Native American students to connect them to the course content, providing for them an opportunity to relate to the curriculum.

Third, instructors should “stress concepts not facts,” because college students, in general, learn more easily this way (Fuhrmann & Grasha 1983) . But, Native American students, by the same token, learn much easier this way. Because of their more holistic worldview, much of the time, they learn better by looking at the broad picture, rather than separating specific facts from major concepts (Deloria & Wildcat 2001).

Fourth, instructors should be aware of different learning styles. Many Indian students do not learn the same way white students do and in addition, they are not competitive like their Anglo counterparts (Kipp 2002). For these reasons, college instructors should present information in a variety of ways, catering to individual differences in learning styles and personality traits. For example, some students learn better with hands-on assignments and group work, while others learn better by listening to lecture, and still others learn more effectively in whole-class discussions. To cater to all learning styles present in any given classroom, Fuhrmann and Grasha (1983) suggest



using a variety of instructional methods. In this way, certain instructional methods will jive with Native American students' learning styles, thus helping them to understand class material and reaffirming the importance of their presence in the classroom.

In sum, instructors may help their Indian students succeed by incorporating more cooperative learning activities into their instructional methods, by stressing entire concepts, not just facts, by making examples meaningful to Indian experiences, and by understanding that different students learn in different ways.

Mainstream college administrators may also help their Native American college students by supporting and celebrating their culture. First, Braithewaite (1997) suggests universities and colleges provide "culturally specific 'survival' classes for Native Indian students to assist them in the transition to [mainstream] college life" (11). While, freshmen as a general population receive such courses, specific ethnic populations, according to Braithewaite, should also be served with such classes.

Second, Native American Studies (NAS) programs should be valued and given the opportunity to exercise Indian self-determination. In this way, Native Americans will receive the freedom to learn and produce academic epistemologies, conducive to the Indigenous worldview. For example, as Deloria and Wildcat (2001) suggest, professional internships should be "indigenized." Hence, perhaps students in fields such as engineering, science, and business could, in conjunction with the university's NAS program, serve internships in reservation communities (Deloria & Wildcat 2001). In this way, although students are interning with a mainstream university and learning material relevant to their fields, they may learn in a way conducive to their culture as well as

exercise their cultural beliefs and values in accordance with their respective fields.

In addition, if NAS departments are granted freedom by higher education institutions, other academic disciplines may more willingly accept Indigenous scholarship. After all, as Menzies (2001) writes:

If anthropology is to play a useful and progressive role in the process of decolonization, it will ultimately require a political commitment in support of Indigenous peoples and an unambiguous recognition of the colonial role played by mainstream social science paradigms (p. 33).

Thus, the “political commitment” and “progressive role” Anthropology must play for decolonization, may be pushed along as institutions of higher education welcome new NAS programs and encourage Indigenous knowledge and growth.

Additionally, Shanley (2002) says that the NAS department at the University of Montana lacks adequate resources as well as an explicitly defined role. Problems such as these may also be solved as the NAS discipline becomes valued by universities and its academic sub-cultures.

In addition to incorporating cultural relevance in the curriculum at mainstream universities, the value of community must also be addressed in order for Indians at mainstream universities to succeed, as they have at tribal colleges.

### Valuing Community: Addressing Indian Values

With broken promises and treaties, Native Americans have learned from their ancestors to distrust mainstream society (Gustafson 1997). These beliefs, however, are reaffirmed when tribal people have bad experiences with mainstream society. For example, in transferring to mainstream universities from tribal colleges, many Indian

students experience hardships. In fact, Braithewaite (1997) writes of a tribal college student who, after graduating with her two-year degree and needing to transfer to a mainstream university, spent thirty minutes on the phone with a large state university, before she ever got in touch with a “real” person. She received automated messaging, rather than someone who could help her. Thus, the supportive atmosphere at tribal colleges may be harshly contrasted with the bad experiences Native American students often have with mainstream universities, leading them to view the dominant educational system in a negative way (Braithewaite 1997).

Because mainstream universities, with their bureaucratic focus, do not foster a sense of community for their students, there are certain things that can be done to help Indian students feel a sense of support. First, as suggested by Braithewaite (1997), university instructors should “encourage communication” with their Indian students, initiating conversation whenever possible.

As a way to initiate conversation and establish rapport with students, an instructor may, as Bailey (1989) suggests, arrive to class a few minutes early and chat with students about the weather, their other classes, local news stories, etc. Although Bailey’s suggestion is not specific to Indian students, his suggestion may prove to be particularly effective with Native Americans. By appearing open and willing to communicate with students, an instructor may show students that he cares and, by doing this, may establish a sense of trust in Indian students. On the other hand, Indian students may not be willing to talk when other students are listening. If this is the case, instructors, in order to establish rapport with students should, require that each student visit during office hours at least

once in a semester (Bailey 1997). Again, although Bailey's recommendation is generalized to all college students, his suggestion may help Indian students feel more comfortable. After all, personalized visits with instructors may help Indian students feel valued and supported, things that most Native students miss when they leave their reservation.

In light of this, however, there are certain things non-Indian instructors should keep in mind during these out-of-class visits. Lockart (1981) writes of Native American distrust of mainstream society and offers suggestions for non-Indian counselors to help foster, in Indians, a sense of trust in the counselor. Although her work is specific to counselors, her suggestions, written below, should be used by non-Indian instructors in out-of-class meetings with Native students. First, instructors should not dismiss Indian students as careless students if they come across as aloof. Much of this is "a result of fear and mistrust of non-Indians." Hence, instructors should be both aware and sensitive to this during meetings with Indian students. Second, instructors should "be real". Non-Indian college instructors must not come across as "all-knowing" and/or condescending. Indians are much more receptive to personable interactions (as are most).

In addition to these strategies, Braithewaite suggests that instructors keep up with American Indian students by making use of electronic mail. After all e-mail, according to McKeachie (2002), promotes communication with students who may otherwise be unwilling to take the teacher's time or those who find a trip to a faculty office, inconvenient.

Hence, as instructors encourage communication in out-of-class exchanges, they

will build a friendly rapport with Native students. In effect, students may feel a sense of place or a sense of community--something that most miss when they leave their reservations. In fact, to show students you care is, according to Jerry Slater (2002), the best way to retain Native students. Similarly, Billy Jo Kipp of SKC (2002) says Native American students must miss school for reasons foreign to those from the dominant society--ceremonies, frequency of deaths and funerals, etc.

Kipp's insight is important because it shows the lack of understanding most non-Indian persons have of Indian hardships. But, as instructors actively communicate with their Native American students out of the classroom, instructors' will stay informed about the struggles their student's may be facing, providing a safeguard against misunderstandings and showing students that their instructors care.

Second, in addition to increased communication between faculty and students, administrative staffs should "strongly encourage the formation of Native Indian Student Associations" (Braithewaite 1997: 11) in order to further facilitate a sense of belonging and community in the mainstream university. Such groups could provide, for Indian students, a supportive environment of people who face similar hardships.

Third, just as many tribal colleges have retention departments that contact students at home when they miss class or seem to be struggling (Slater 2002), the development of a retention office in mainstream universities may also be effective. After all, as vice-president of SKC says, "They're not just a number here [at SKC], [if students are struggling] we know they're not making it" (Slater 2002). By keeping track of students in this way, tribal colleges are able to take appropriate steps in correcting the

problems students face, whether it be helping them find a support group for alcohol or drug addiction or loaning them money so they can, for example, get their car fixed and return to school. A retention department at mainstream universities would prove useful for not only American Indian students, but other students as well. After all, when students run into problems, very few seek help, but with a department like this, students would receive help without asking for it, showing students, once again, that they are cared about.

These suggestions for instructors and mainstream institutions are important because as students develop rapport and friendships with staff, faculty, and fellow students, they are more likely to feel the sense of community that most students miss when they leave their reservation communities to attend mainstream universities.

These things could not only provide a sense of community for the tribal student, but also foster, for the Indian student, a sense of trust in mainstream society. With these suggestions, I do not intend for mainstream colleges to replace tribal colleges. After all, the cultural, familial, and community support students find at tribal colleges could never be replaced at mainstream universities. But, at present, most tribal colleges are only two year colleges. Some offer four year degrees, a few offer Master's degrees, and Ph.D. degrees are not yet offered (Slater & O'Donnell 1995).

Thus, many students who want to continue their education past the Associate's degree level are forced to earn their education at mainstream universities. Hence, these suggestions, if implemented, will assist Native American students who want to continue their education. After four-hundred years of marginalizing the Native American, it is

only right that U.S. educational institutions do what it takes to decolonize higher education--celebrating the Native American culture and ultimately helping Native Americans to succeed.

Before I conclude, it is important to acknowledge the fact that mainstream universities do support Native American students in various ways. In fact, at the University of Montana, the NAS department provides student support to American Indians. For example, they are able to provide scholarships, a link to other Native American students, financial support, emotional support, academic support, and even computer services. However, not only does the department lack funding, but there are only a handful of NAS departments in the United States (Shanley 2002). This means that because there are so few NAS departments, the support provided by them is limited. Thus, the majority of Native American students attending mainstream universities do not have the support of NAS departments.

In conclusion, as one student of Dine College says, "The best attribute of Dine College is the intertwined strength of culture and location" (Gorman in Cournoyer 1999). This quote illustrates the central theme of this paper. Tribal colleges success at retaining and graduating Native American students lies within their attention to the Indian worldview and the Indian value of community. Because mainstream society's values differ, efforts must be made by individual instructors and mainstream educational institutions, as a whole, to support these Indigenous cultural views. After all, Native Americans should be given the same opportunity for success as any other American citizen.

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