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THE ROLE OF A TRIBAL COLLEGE IN THE ACADEMIC
PERFORMANCE OF AMERICAN INDIAN STUDENTS

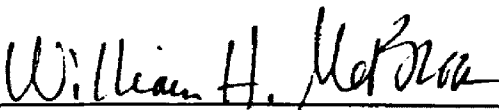
By

Hans P. Zaglauer

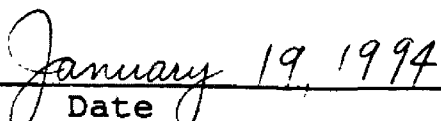
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Zaglauer, Hans P., M.A., May, 1993

The Role of a Tribal College in the Academic Performance of American Indian Students (29)

Chairman: William H. McBroom 

This research represents a preliminary investigation of the effects of a tribal college on the success of American Indians who transfer to a four-year school. American Indians are the largest minority group in the State of Montana (6%), yet they comprise only 2.7% of the student body at the University of Montana. Anticipatory socialization, which proposes that people rehearse their roles predicts that the experiences at Salish Kootenai College (SKC) will have a positive influence on the experience. The research examines the difference in grade point averages (GPA) of SKC transfer students and Salish Kootenai tribal members who come directly to the university. The research also examines the graduation rate within six years for the two groups and the relationship between time spent at SKC and GPA. Overall evidence to support the prediction that SKC influences positively the performance of American Indian students is not statistically significant; however, findings do show a consistent pattern of positive influence on transfer students.

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Hans P. Zaglauer

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

After the arrival of Europeans on the North American continent, one of their first goals was to lead the Indians to accept Western religion. Soon after the United States became a country the government chartered schools (Harvard, William & Mary, and Dartmouth) to educate the sons of the heathen (Haymond 1982). Though these efforts never quite materialized on the scale they were initially planned, they were the first instance of American Indian higher education.

The Office of Indian Affairs, which later became the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), assumed the responsibility of educating the American Indian. In the beginning, Christian churches were assigned to reservations throughout the United States to set up schools, but as public opinion toward churches receiving federal monies for running these schools changed, the BIA accepted full responsibility for Indian schools. In the late 1800s the BIA introduced secondary and post-secondary school unit programs for American Indians. Some of the earlier schools were Charlisle Indian Industrial Training School and Haskell Junior College. During the initial period of their existence these schools concentrated

on teaching farming and light industrial skills (Haymond 1982). The only school that has survived the years, is Haskell Junior College.

Schools that are in existence today on Indian reservations are a mixture of religious, BIA and public schools. This combination of dissimilar teaching philosophies and associated methods has resulted in one common outcome: Indian students are not doing as well as their non-Indian peers. This means that Indian students don't do well when they enter higher education systems (Szasz, 1974, p. 135).

Several events in the 1960s led to the birth of the first of the tribally controlled colleges in 1968: the election of President Kennedy and his emphasis on helping others; the civil rights movement; President Johnson's war on poverty; veterans of World War II gaining seats on tribal councils; higher education reaching out to reservations; young Indians demanding a chance in securing the American dream; and the vision of several people that a community college would work on an Indian reservation.

Early literature specific to American Indians and their education is generally focused on mission schools and nineteenth century Indian trade schools (Hamley 1985). The shift from predominately non-Indian community colleges that were available to American Indians to tribal controlled community college (TCCC) located on reservations has been a recent development in the education systems (Szasz 1974).

There is a substantial literature about higher education in America, yet a void exists concerning the role of the tribal controlled community colleges. For example, research to date has not demonstrated what influence, if any, experience at tribal controlled community colleges has on the successful completion of American Indian students transferring to a four-year college.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND

While American Indians living west of the Mississippi river have slightly higher levels of education than do those residing in the eastern part of the United States, they are still substantially less educated than the national average (Brod, 1986). Only 3.01% of Native Americans residing in the Western States have completed at least sixteen or more years of education, while the national average for Native Americans is scarcely 2.95%.

American Indians are under-represented in the general college population throughout the United States. At the University of Montana for example, the American Indian population comprises 2.7% of the student body. The 1990 census conducted on Indian reservations established that there are approximately 54,791 American Indians living on Montana reservations or 6.8% of the state population. Self-reported ethnicity in the 1990 census places the number of American Indians at 47,524 or 5.9% of Montana's population.

Universities and colleges are well established in the mainstream culture of our country. The concept of junior colleges flourished across the United States as numerous

school districts embraced the idea and several states, led by California in 1907, passed legislation instrumental to the establishment of community colleges. Those outside the mainstream of our society, however, have found it difficult to break through the cultural and ethnic barriers (Szasz, 1974). In recent years several tribes have established community colleges on their reservations. These community colleges have been primarily founded to meet specific needs of the Indian community and not necessarily as a stepping stone to a four-year institution (Boyer, 1989).

Community colleges have always been plagued with problems of accreditation and tribal colleges, with their nontraditional programs have found it even harder to maintain these requirements. For the most part, tribal community colleges try to remain distinct from traditional community colleges in order to fulfill their special mission of teaching their cultural history while fulfilling accreditation requirements. The boards of tribal controlled colleges are fearful of being drawn into programs that do not meet their cultural requirements. Salish Kootenai College arose out of a 1973 agreement between the Salish Kootenai Tribal Council and the Flathead Valley Community College of Kalispell, Montana. In 1977 the Salish Kootenai Tribal Council, through the use of recently authorized federal funds, established the Salish Kootenai College for the purpose of meeting the tribe's needs. Part of the consideration in establishing the Salish

Kootenai College was the goal to bridge the gap from traditional beliefs to current educational policies.

There exists a fundamental difference between the belief systems of American Indians and non-Indians and the lack of understanding about the native belief system has led to discriminatory treatment within the United States educational system (Button, 1983). Contemporary American culture has brought about an educational structure that is not well adapted to the American Indian culture. History has confirmed that Indian schools in the last two centuries have done a poor job of educating the American Indian in preparing them for the job market and self-determination (Button, 1983).

The research proposed here seeks to document the influence of one TCCC, Salish Kootenai. It is proposed that the experience at SKC will facilitate success for American Indian students from the Flathead reservation who subsequently enter the University of Montana (UM). Data provided by Salish Kootenai College (SKC), and University of Montana will be used to evaluate the effects Salish Kootenai College has on the performance of transfer students who enter the University of Montana.

CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Community colleges attract a disproportionate number of minority students, many of whom are working towards a baccalaureate degree. In the case of American Indians who enroll in higher education, 54% of those attend two-year colleges (El-Khawas et al., 1988). Yet despite these sizable enrollment numbers, American Indians exhibit the lowest retention rates and the highest transfer losses when compared with other groups of students (Commission on the Higher Education of Minorities, 1982; Hayward, 1985; Lee, 1985).

The most crucial problem for community colleges is not only how to facilitate the transfer of students but also how to make the transfer successful. The Commission on Minority Participation in Education and American Life, reports that the two greatest losses of minority students are at the pre-college level and at the community college level. For many minority students, access to a four-year college is contingent on transfer from a community college (1988).

It is commonly thought that American Indian students do not have the potential for succeeding at a four-year school because of their inability to achieve the necessary training

during high school on the reservation. Drawing on the theory of anticipatory socialization, it is suggested that transfer students are likely to be those who prepare themselves for the role of college student at a four-year school by attending a community college (Elkin and Handel, 1978).

"Socialization" may be thought of as learning how to function in society and is concerned with how people acquire the needed skills. The acquisition of role-specific attitudes and behaviors may be learned through anticipatory socialization. This process takes place after the decision to assume a specific role in one's life, but before actual entry into that role. Anticipatory socialization not only helps an individual decide on the role, but also facilitates the development of skills and familiarity with the values needed. Anticipatory socialization represents a "rehearsal" for roles before they must actually be fulfilled.

We can use this explanation to predict that anticipatory socialization is likely to function for the students who transfer from SKC to UM. Consistent with Merton's analysis (1957), individuals who choose to continue in their education learn to adopt the roles, norms, and values of the group to which they wish to gain membership. In the case of university students, the Confederated Salish Kootenai tribal members may ease their adjustment into the university by attending Salish Kootenai College. Despite being established to teach cultural heritage, attendance at SKC can be thought to facilitate entry

into UM. There are likely differences on these dimensions for those who do transfer and those who do not. Such differences, however, are beyond the scope of the present project.

While preparing themselves for the specific role at SKC, the students will also be able to maintain their ties to their culture. The time spent at Salish Kootenai College also provides the transfer students with some familiarity with the expectations associated with the position of student at the University of Montana. It is proposed that the time available to students at Salish Kootenai College will help prepare them for the expectations of a four-year school. That is, the more time spent prior to transferring, the better they will perform at UM.

The expectation that transfer students will be more successful is supported by Clark's thesis (1960). He noted that in the United States we generally expect that in post-secondary education there will be a high failure rate. This is because we encourage all to participate and some are poorly prepared. He particularly identifies the community colleges as having the function to "cool-out" those who are likely to fail. While pointing to the cooling-out function of the community college he argues that those students who do transfer are likely to be those whom anticipatory socialization has aided.

Thus, after having learned the initial role expectations, norms, and values of college students at Salish Kootenai

College, the transfer students should be better equipped to make a smooth transition to the new environment compared to those Indian students who go directly to UM from high school.

CHAPTER IV

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

RESEARCH PLAN

The analysis consists of examining the student records provided by SKC and UM for two different groups of reservation (tribal) students; 1) SKC transfer students; and 2) students who went directly to UM after high school.

The first group was comprised of students who after graduation from a high school attended SKC. The second group was made up of students who had come directly to the four-year school and who had completed high school within four years or, within the last four years.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the theory of anticipatory socialization leads to the expectation that American Indian students who first attend the tribal college and then transfer to the four-year school will do better than those who come directly to the four-year school from the reservation high school. Specifically it is hypothesized that:

1. American Indian students who had attended Salish Kootenai College will have a higher grade point average (GPA)

than those American Indian students who immediately attend a four-year college.

2. Transfer students who had attended Salish Kootenai College are more likely to graduate from a four-year college within six years than non-transfer students.

3. The more time that a transfer student spends at Salish Kootenai College, the more he or she will be familiar with the expectations of a student and, therefore, the better GPA.

DATA AND METHOD

Transcripts provided by the two colleges were used to measure the progress of students while at Salish Kootenai College and at the University of Montana. The initial list of Salish Kootenai students provided by the University of Montana contained both transfer and non-transfer students. It did not, however, contain all of the Salish Kootenai tribal members who had attended the university. By comparing the initial list with tribal rolls at Salish Kootenai College, I was able to confirm tribal affiliation. The list also made it possible to confirm the transfer status of several students not recorded as such by the University of Montana. The cross-referenced list was then checked against records of the University of Montana Alumni Association to confirm graduation status and major field of study. It is interesting to note that 77 (58%) of the 133 Salish Kootenai students who came to the University of Montana are not identified by their tribal

affiliation. Thirty out of 43 transfer students are not known as Salish Kootenai tribal students by the university.

While it is not within the scope of this project, it is clear that if the University of Montana is going to evaluate the American Indian students in general and tribal colleges in particular there will have to be a change in the method of identifying tribal affiliation. The results of the records search are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Tribal Affiliation as Shown by Salish Kootenai Tribal Council and University of Montana Records (1986-1992).

	UM		SKC
	UM Records of Salish Kootenai Students	Not Identified as Salish Kootenai Tribal Student	Identified by* Salish Kootenai Tribal Records
Directly to UM	43	47	90
SKC First	13	30	43
Total	56	77	133

* These are the result of taking the list of American Indian students from 1986 to 1992 and comparing them with the tribal rolls.

' The data provided by Salish Kootenai College included GPA on all students who had attended the college from autumn 1986 through autumn 1992. The list included the names, students identification numbers, and dates of birth. These data sets also included such information as quarters of attendance, year

of graduation from high school, tribal affiliation, major field of study at SKC, and credits transferred.

The data provided by SKC were used in conjunction with the student information available from UM to find those students who had attended SKC and then transferred to the UM. Information from Salish Kootenai College and the University of Montana included all American Indian students who have attended or are presently attending the school and who are members of the Confederated Salish Kootenai tribe. While the total N is 133, the number of cases available for analysis varies from comparison to comparison due to missing values for persons who seem to have withdrawn or for those without data on a particular dimension.

ANALYSIS

The entire Salish Kootenai student population from autumn 1986 through autumn 1992 at the University of Montana was utilized. The Salish Kootenai student population for the period over the investigation (1986-1992) in this research was 133. In order to maintain uniform reporting of student status, the Montana classification of traditional and non-traditional student was used: non-traditional students are those who attend a post-secondary unit four or more years after graduation from high school. Out of a total of 81 non-traditional students there are 53 non-traditional non-transfer students at UM. There are two reasons to be attentive to non-

traditional status 1) non-traditional status may influence the rate of progress and 2) there is a general notion that non-traditional students do better. Thus non-traditional status will be used as a control variable. The distribution of each of the groups is presented in table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of American Indian Students by Category.

	SKC Transfer Students	Non-Transfer Students	Total
Traditional Students	13 (30%)	37 (41%)	50 (38%)
Non-Traditional Students	28 (65)	53 (59)	81 (61)
Status Unknown	2 (5)	0	2 (1)
Total Number of Cases	43	90	133

Data were subjected to statistical analysis to see the degree to which the experience at SKC affected performance at UM. For example, in testing the first hypothesis a t-test was computed between transfer students and non-transfer students to test for a difference in the mean GPA score. These results and others are shown in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS

The problem under consideration in this research is to identify the influence that Salish Kootenai College has on the academic performance of transfer students to a four-year college. As stated in earlier chapters, it is suggested that transfer students will be more successful at the University of Montana than students who come directly to the university.

The first hypothesis predicted a higher grade point average of Salish Kootenai transfer students at the time of evaluation December, 1992. The mean grade point averages for the two groups are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Mean Grade Point Average of Salish Kootenai Transfer Students and Non-Transfer Students.

	Number of Cases	Mean GPA	Standard Deviation
Salish Kootenai Transfer Students	43	2.6	1.6
Non-transfer Students	90	2.3	1.3
Total	133	2.4	1.3

$t=1.4, df=131, p<.15$

The findings reported in Table 3 show that, as predicted the transfer students have a higher GPA. The difference, however, is not statistically significant. Table 3 illustrates that the mean GPAs between the groups is similar, but the Salish Kootenai transfer student GPA of (2.6) is slightly higher than the GPA of (2.3) for the non-transfer students.

As mentioned in chapter 4 there is a widely held belief that non-traditional students perform better than those who come to a university directly from high school. Also, it was shown in chapter 4 that not only is there a majority of non-traditional students in the total sample, but they are not evenly distributed in the two sub-samples as well. Accordingly, non-traditional status may operate independently of transfer status. To investigate this possibility a multiple regression analysis was conducted where both student status(1=Traditional 2=Non-traditional) and transfer status (1=direct to UM 2=SKC transfer student) were used to simultaneously predict GPA.

The results are shown in Table 4. It can be seen that as anticipated the non-traditional status has a statistically significant effect on the GPA of the students. The larger Beta (.357) indicates a substantial influence of non-traditional status independent of transfer status. Clearly non-traditional status is more important than transfer status in determining the GPA, the latter Beta being .052. Together these two variables explain about 12% of the variance in GPA.

Table 4. Regression Results Predicting GPA from Transfer Status and Student Status

	B	Beta	Significance
Student Status	.466	.357	.000
Transfer Status	.147	.052	.535
Adjusted R ²		.124	p<.0001
df=130			

While hypothesis two deals with graduation of Salish Kootenai students from the university within six years, it is important to know actual graduation rates. Table 5 presents the findings for those students who graduated from the University of Montana during the time period of this research (1986-1992). There are 43 cases with unknown outcomes and since success was counted as graduated or continued on to graduate school only 90 cases were evaluated. It can be seen that the rate of graduation of Salish Kootenai students who had completed their degree requirements at the University of Montana is slightly higher, the results however, are not statistically significant. While not significant, the results are in the predicted direction; there is a slightly larger proportion of transfer students who graduated within six years than those who came directly to UM.

Table 5. Distribution of Successful Graduation and Non-Graduates of Transfer Students and Non-Transfer Students (percent)

	SKC Transfer Students	Non-Transfer Students	Total (n)
Unsuccessful	67%	70%	62
Graduated	33%	30%	28
Total	(33)	(57)	90

Note: Out of the total of 133 students 43 were cases dropped from the student list because student had apparently dropped or data were missing.

The time that each individual student attended each school was not available on all cases. It was therefore necessary to restrict the analysis to the 28 cases where it was clear that the subject graduated from UM and was a SKC transfer student or came directly to the university. That is, these students are the only ones for whom data were available and for whom date of initial enrollment at UM was available. "Unsuccessful" is defined as not having not graduated. To find out whether Salish Kootenai transfer students graduate before non-transfer students, mean graduation rates were computed.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, non-traditional students are a majority of the total sample, but are not evenly distributed in the sub-sample. To determine the effects of non-traditional status a multiple regression analysis was performed on this variable. The analysis was

conducted where both student status (1=Traditional 2=Non-Traditional) and transfer status (1=Direct to UM 2=SKC Transfer student) with available data were used to simultaneously predict graduation success.

The results are shown in Table 6. It can be seen that as anticipated non-traditional status has a statistically significant effect on the graduation success of the students. The larger Beta (.236) for student status indicates an influence of non-traditional status independently of transfer status. Together with transfer status these two variables explain about 3% of the variance in the graduation rate.

Table 6. Regression Results Predicting Graduation Success from Transfer Status and Student Status

	B	Beta	Significance
Student Status	.119	.236	.030
Transfer Status	.014	.102	.889
Adjusted R ²		.033	p<.09
df=87			

Because variables used in analysis just reported were all dichotomous a logistic regression was also computed. While not reported in tabular form these findings are highly consistent with findings shown in table 6 where ordinary least-square

technique were used. Specifically, the coefficient for non-traditional status (.451) is approximately double that for transfer status (.287). Neither are statistically significant.

As with the preceding hypothesis where the influence of non-traditional status was shown to be significant, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the effects of non-traditional status on the GPA of SKC transfer students. In this analysis only Salish Kootenai College transfer students were used. The goal of this examination was to determine the effects on the GPA by the number of quarters transfer students attended SKC using non-traditional status as a control variable.

Table 7. Regression Results Predicting GPA from Number of Quarters Student Attended SKC and Student Status

	B	Beta	Significance
Student Status	.462	.606	.000
Number of Quarters Attended SKC	.005	.002	.981
Adjusted R ²		.335	p<.0001
.df=40			

The results are shown in Table 7. It can be seen that as anticipated in the previous analysis, non-traditional status has a statistically significant effect on the GPA of transfer

students. The larger Beta (.606) indicates a substantial influence of non-traditional status independently of the number of quarters a student attended Salish Kootenai College. Together the two variables explain about 33% of the variance in this analysis.

The last hypothesis of this research asserts that the more time transfer students spend at SKC the better their GPA will be after having transferred to the university. Table 8 shows that a curvilinear relationship exists between the number of quarters a student spends at SKC and the GPA. Students who spent between five to eight quarters at SKC have the highest proportion of good grades (67%) GPA=2.51 or more. The biggest difference is between those who spend 1-4 quarters (46% with high GPA) and those who spend 5-8 quarters (67%). Those who stay nine quarters or more before transferring decline to 53% of those with high GPAs. It is possible that those who stay longest are atypical by reasons of family circumstances, lack of preparation for university work, poorer students who needed more time or some other reason.

Table 8. Distribution by Grade Point Average by the Number of Quarters a Transfer Student Attended SKC (percent)

	Quarters Attended SKC			Total
	1-4	5-8	9 or More	
Lowest to 2.5	54%	33%	47%	(71)
2.51 to 4.00	46	67	53	(60)
Number of cases	(13)	(15)	(15)	

To further investigate the role that Salish Kootenai College plays in the academic performance of Salish Kootenai tribal students who first attend SKC, the following measures were taken. First, transfer and non-transfers students were divided into two groups, 1) traditional and non-traditional students who came directly to UM 2) traditional and non-traditional students who first attended SKC. Next each sub-group was examined to test their influence on the following areas: 1) Grade Point Average 2) Success Rate 3) Students who had graduated from UM. The results are shown in Table 9.

Table 9. Distribution of GPA, Success Rate and Students who had Graduated by Transfer Status and Student Status

	UM		SKC	
	Traditional Student	Non-Traditional Student	Traditional Student	Non-Traditional Student
GPA	2.15	2.40	2.12	2.64
Success Rate	14%	46%	40%	27%
Graduated	11%	24%	31%	25%

Note: For the purpose of this table "success" is defined as those students who have graduated or are still enrolled.

As in earlier findings this analysis also discloses the fact that non-traditional students have a higher GPA, however, Table 9 indicates that SKC non-traditional students have a moderately higher GPA than non-traditional students who directly to UM. The success rate for SKC traditional students predicts a more favorable outcome for those students because of their experience at SKC. The most important finding in this analysis comes in examining the percent of graduation in each of the sub-groups. In this category we can clearly see that SKC transfer students have a distinct advantage over non-transfer students. It becomes even more important when the number of cases involved is considered in the formula. There are only 43 SKC transfer students out of a total of 133 cases and despite their of numerical disadvantage, 11 SKC students graduated compared to 17 non-transfer students.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY and CONCLUSIONS

SUMMARY

This research presented an preliminary investigation of the effects of a tribal college on the academic performance of American Indians. In order to evaluate the impact that Salish Kootenai College has made on transfer students a comparison group of students from the same tribe with a similar cultural background were used. Following widely believed expectations that non-traditional students will perform better in college than those students who directly to a university from high school this research thought to control for that category of students. Each comparison group was then sub-divided into traditional students and non-traditional students. The influence of non-traditional status in the overall outcome of the research was as expected.

According to the theory of anticipatory socialization the experience at SKC should have a positive influence on the transfer students. Following the postulates of the theory of anticipatory socialization three hypothesis were created to test the reliability of the theory's application to the research.

These hypothesis investigated the relationship between the influence SKC has on the performance of transfer students and the effect the school had on the following areas: GPA and graduation rate. Also the effect of the amount of time spent at SKC was examined: more time at SKC would produce a higher GPA than students who went directly to UM.

The results of this research are mixed. Salish Kootenai tribal students who attend SKC before coming to UM do have slightly higher GPAs than non-transfer students. Controlling for non-traditional status showed this variable to be more important than transfer status.

On examining the graduation time of both groups it was found that Salish Kootenai College transfer students do hold a slight but not commanding advantage in the proportion of students that graduate from the University of Montana within six years.

When testing the hypothesis that the more time a transfer student spends at SKC the higher the GPA, a curvilinear relationship was discovered. The lack of statistical significant significance does not, however, mitigate these findings; The Salish Kootenai College transfer student did demonstrate a better outcome.

The possible influence of a factor such as non-traditional status was also anticipated and was used as a control variable during analysis when it became applicable. When introducing non-traditional status into the equation it became evident that the expected influences were indeed present and the predicted

outcome followed widely held beliefs concerning the academic performance of non-traditional students.

CONCLUSION

The results of this research have been mixed. Non-traditional status was found to be more important than transfer status. However, there was consistency in the findings that suggests the advantages of transfer status. It is apparent that the experience at Salish Kootenai College is beneficial for those students who later attend UM. The absence of more cases to analyze unfortunately reduced the scope of the research.

It is important to address the issues suggested at the beginning of this paper. In order to improve on the under-representation of American Indians in the general college population, tribal colleges can help reduce the number of students who dropout because of the lack of preparation for college level work at four-year schools.

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