Native American Student Perspectives on Tribally Affiliated **Osteopathic Medical School Education**



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INTRODUCTION

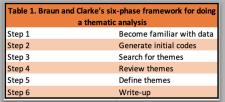
Students' sense of belonging is linked to positive academic outcomes1, including higher grades, increased engagement², self-confidence³, and acceptance. However, little research has been conducted regarding Native American (NA) students' sense of belonging in universities, and no research investigates this in medical school. Documenting NA medical students' sense of belonging, perspectives on culture, relationships, closeness with their tribe, and what it means to them to be medical students in the inaugural class at Oklahoma State University College of Osteopathic Medicine at Cherokee Nation (OSUCOM-CN) provides a landmark opportunity to study these topics.

OBJECTIVE

To evaluate NA medical students' cultural perspectives related to selfidentity, cultural engagement, and importance of attending a tribally affiliated medical school as the inaugural class at OSUCOM-CN, the first tribally-affiliated college of medicine in the United States

METHODS

A social constructivist⁵ approach using mixed methods was adopted for qualitative evaluation. Data included a Sense of Belonging survey6 and semi-structured interviews. Participants were recruited from all medical students in the inaugural class at OSUCOM-CN identifying as tribally enrolled or tribal descendancy alone or in combination with other race(s). Sense of belonging surveys were collected electronically and hard copy. Interviews were recorded via camcorder for transcription with Rev. Thematic analysis7 was conducted using Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework8. MAXQDA software was used for data management. MH generated inductive codes with themes identified from coded data. AG and RT reviewed transcripts separately to code data. Discrepancies were resolved with 100% inter-reviewer reliability met.



RESULTS

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS





Affiliation. Themes, subthemes, and interviewee quotations above.

"I think it's changed...grown a little bit deeper...with my tribal affiliation, just because I am in the actual headquarters now heing with your people and being on community land makes a difference."

"In the past, I was...Native but...didn't really feel like it mattered, but now that I'm at a tribal affiliated school...I've felt a more sense of pride, being at this school and being able to represent my tribe."

"The Cherokee culture...have more of a reliance on natural medicine... for healing...I would say that incorporating those more holistic techniques and just non-traditional medicine, that has influenced me a little hit more since I came here '

I got to be with some Native speakers That was really amazing, Also just working in the clinic, we get to see a lot of Native patients [who] share ome of their insight on the language and the culture that I wouldn't have known just by studying it."

"The building (is) filled with "You have the support of Cherokee artwork and Cherokee history, so that's a great learning teachers, faculty... and feeling like I belong has definitely... made me ronger student. I feel The whole mission is to go king for help if I need help. serve tribal and rural healthcare, and we're all in "I think we felt that as the this together. I think if I wasn't here, and I wasn't in that first class here, because we are setting the standards for environment, I don't think I'd the classes to come. It's, "How are you going to treat

Sense of Belonging

those that come after you?

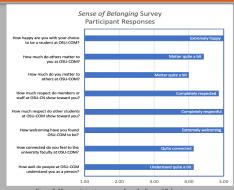
We're going to encourage people here; we're going to "The family atmosphere has been the most important part because without feeling safe and without feeling included, it's really hard to try to learn and grow as a person, if you don't feel like you're a part include people." of something important...

be succeeding as well as I am

figure 1. Semi-structured interviews were conducted one-on-one resulting in coded themes of 1. Native Tribal Culture & Heritage: Participation (past), Participation (present), and distorical Oppression (within family): 2. Psychosocial & Social Identity: Native American, Medical Student, Gender, Sex. and Tribal Affiliation: 3. Community Perception: Change Over Time and View of Medicine; and 4. Tribal Affiliation OSUCOM-CN: Campus, Belonging (faculty), Belonging (medical students), Belonging (community), Importance of Tribal

DISCUSSION

In this study, our findings suggest that OSUCOM-CN is facilitating a cultural environment for NA medical students' academic success. Promoting inclusion for students without proof of tribal enrollment or those identifying as multiracial could expand these effects. Strengths of this study include concordance with previous studies supporting the link between sense of belonging and academic success. Limitations include the overall sample size, though it is a majority of the eligible population. Further research is needed to determine the significance of interventions for academic medicine milestones, such as board exam pass rates, graduation, and residency



CONCLUSION

This is the first study exploring NA medical students' perspectives on sense of belonging in a tribally affiliated medical school. NA medical students in this study reported an increased sense of belonging related to their NA heritage, expressed the importance of bridging past and present cultural involvement, and discussed positive changes in personal and community perception of NA culture and medicine. All participants placed personal and community-level importance on tribal affiliation for their sense of belonging and success in becoming NA osteopathic physicians.

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