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AMERICAN INDIAN ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION: WHERE ARE ALL THE NDNs?

Jameson D. Lopez

ABSTRACT

The rate of Native Americans attending institutions of higher education is much lower (24 percent) in comparison to their White peers (48 percent) (Ross et al., 2012). This chapter explores factors that contribute to the accessibility of higher education for Native American students (e.g., family, institutions, communities, and academic influences.) The extreme differences in the rate of Native Americans attending institutions of higher education are not attributed to one single problem. However, this chapter argues that it is imperative to see that an accumulation of experiences influence higher education accessibility and in order to increase the attendance of Native Americans in colleges and universities, a multifaceted approach informed by Tribal Critical Theory must be used.

Keywords: Native American; access; persistence; higher education; colonization; identity

Culturally Sustaining and Revitalizing Pedagogies: Language, Culture, and Power

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Native Americans come from all walks of life. Some are from urban communities, some from reservations, some are rich, some are poor. The most recent [United States Census \(2012\)](#) found that seven out of ten Native Americans are living in urban areas. There are discourses around what it means to be Native American ([Brayboy, 2006](#)) that don't necessarily represent the experiences of most Native Americans. For example, blood quantum, percentage of Native American blood lineage (i.e., $\frac{1}{2}$), is a metric that most tribes have adopted to determine tribal citizenship. My tribe set our enrollment blood quantum at minimum of $\frac{1}{4}$. I am $\frac{1}{2}$ Quechan and my wife is Hispanic, so my kids are now $\frac{1}{4}$ Quechan. My kids are citizens of the Quechan nation, but if my kids do not marry another member of our tribe that is a minimum of $\frac{1}{4}$, then my grandkids will not be enrolled Quechan citizens. However, some of our tribal members would argue that my grandkids are still Quechan, as long as they maintain knowledge of our history, language, kinship, and land. There are other tribal members who would argue that they are not Quechan. These are conversations that go on among many tribes and are often related to the environment in which we were raised as Native American. The environment between reservation and city life is vastly different, and Native American students have myriad different experiences. In some instances, Native Americans in the city may have trouble finding their identity as compared to Native Americans on the reservation who have no questions about their Native American identity. Despite all these variances in experiences and discourses about being Native American, there are major disparities in the rate of Native Americans attending higher education compared to our White peers.

Native American enrollment of eighteen to twenty-four year olds into higher education has doubled the last thirty years ([Wiedeman, 2008](#)). Nonetheless, Native Americans are still not enrolling into higher education at the same rate as their White peers, and only encompass about one percent of the higher education population. Furthermore, Native American students only account for 0.6 percent of those who graduate with bachelor degrees ([Ginder & Kelly-Reid, 2013](#)). There are several factors that contribute to this unfortunate fact. Specifically, despite efforts to increase accessibility for Native American students in college, inequities remain.

According to National Center for Education Statistics ([Ross et al., 2012](#)) seventy-eight percent of Native American eighth graders said that they wanted to attend college. Yet, the rate of Native Americans attending higher education is twenty-four percent compared to their White peers at forty-eight percent. So why are Native American students enrolling and graduating college at a lower rate than their White peers? The purpose of the present discussion is to examine factors related to access to higher education for Native Americans.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Tribal critical race theory (TribalCrit) emerged as a theory to allow Indigenous peoples to address the complicated relationship between Native Americans and the United States federal government and describe American Indians' liminality as racial and legal/political groups and individuals (Brayboy, 2006). The theory was needed as other theories based in western thought were not enough to address Native American issues through Indigenous perspectives, in particular through the lens of colonization. TribalCrit has nine different tenants that guide the theory, but I use the first tenant for this analysis; colonization as an endemic.

Colonization refers to European-American thought, knowledge, and power structures that dominate present-day society in the United States (Brayboy, 2006). My focus is predominately on the first tenant because it starts at the root of why inequality exists in the accessibility of higher education between Native American and White students. Brayboy (2006) wrote that,

The colonization has been so complete that even many American Indians fail to recognize that we are taking up colonialist ideas when we fail to express ourselves in ways that may challenge dominant society's ideas about who and what we are supposed to be, how we are supposed to behave, and what we are supposed to be within the larger population. (p. 431)

A key thought about colonialism is that it is interconnected with imperialism, and can be seen as an expression of imperialism (Smith, 1999). In other words, colonialism is a practice and imperialism is the idea. Colonialism has permeated as a disease within Indigenous communities since the start of European colonization and has manifested itself in different ways. Smith (1999) wrote that,

Imperialism tends to be used in four different ways when describing the form of European imperialism which "started" in fifteenth century: (1) imperialism as economic expansion; (2) imperialism as the subjugation of "others"; (3) imperialism as an idea or spirit with many forms of realization; and (4) imperialism as a discursive field of knowledge. (p. 22)

Researchers found that some Native Americans accepted the notion that our children must attend public schools that teach Native American children imperialist ideas and colonialist practices (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). As generations pass, these ideals eventually replace traditional ideals which is often done without recognition.

There is economic value that comes with higher education because mainstream society has made higher education more valuable than Indigenous epistemologies. By putting economic value on higher education, colonization is still regulating the economic expansion of Indigenous communities in the United States. Higher education is not a system that Native Americans created as means to be successful in mainstream society, but a construct that American society placed on Native Americans. The thought that Native Americans need higher education is an idea from European Imperialism that leads Native Americans to think about bettering *themselves* and not the tribe, family, or community. A prominent example is the Dawes Act ([Indian Affairs: Laws and treaties. Vol. 1, Laws, 1887](#)) that reinforced the idea of individuality, through the European-American model of individual ownership of land. Land ownership that expressed individuality was seen as an essential step to assimilating Native Americans. This type of assimilation through higher education that disregards Native American culture still promotes individuality, as higher education without Indigenous epistemological acknowledgment is promoted as a means of bettering oneself (without regard to the collective).

Higher education disregarding culture subjugates Native Americans to this form of colonialism by telling us that we need to put value in this system if we want to financially succeed or even survive in this world. Since Native Americans are subjugated to higher education, we had to put value in the education system and individual success. Yet, Native American voices, in some cases, have been silenced in public education to speak out on the needs of Native Americans. The silencing of our voice is in the policies that the US government imposed on Native American education. [Lomawaima and McCarty \(2002\)](#) state that, “the goal has been ‘civilization’ of American Indian peoples ... required is the complete and utter transformation of native nations and individuals: replace heritage languages with English, replace ‘paganism’ with Christianity, replace economic, political, social, legal, and aesthetic institutions” (p. 282).

The struggles as a result of colonialism and policies such as “Kill the Indian, Save the Man” ([Utter, 1993](#), p. 196), continue to impact the education of Indigenous communities. Native American epistemologies are endangered through western schooling, as evidenced by government standardized testing. Native Americans will not be able to decolonize as long as we are unable to, “... relinquish settler futurity, and abandon the hope that settlers may one day be commensurable to Native peoples” ([Tuck & Yang, 2012](#), p. 36).

The discourses around Native American K-12 schooling are experiencing some change because of the efforts of teachers and scholars to implement more culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogies as means of promoting Native American cultures and epistemologies (McCarty & Lee, 2014). However, Native Americans are still subjugated to traditional Westernized education through the colonization process that uses education as a means of economic expansion in Indigenous communities. One example is standardized tests, but there are other educational goals created by state and federal government that limit culturally sustaining pedagogies by dictating curricula without regard for culture (Paris, 2012). The performance of K-12 schools has also contributed to the inaccessibility of higher education that is further related to the instructional disconnectedness from culture, particularly when that instruction does not use culturally sustaining pedagogies, which can improve educational outcomes for Native American students.

Native American cultural knowledge is not a standard in public education. Though cultural knowledge is the means of how Native Americans create understanding. Traditions, ways of being, and knowing are what make an individual a member of a tribe. These knowledges remain with Native American students, but are often not recognized as knowledge by mainstream institutions (Brayboy, 2006). However, people use knowledge as a means of survival that shows ways change can be accomplished, and adjusted to move onward as a tribal member and tribe. Asking Native American students to remove their culture before entering the classroom is asking them to remove their very ways of adjusting to change and thus limiting their ability to move forward.

Because public education is not culturally sustaining, higher education becomes less attractive to students past eighth grade. These factors are also a reason why colleges and universities have been unsuccessful at increasing the enrollment and graduation rates of Native American students. The statistics and reports provide evidence that mainstream institutions of higher education are not serving Native American students to their capacity (Brayboy, Fann, Castagno, & Solyom, 2012; Shotton, Lowe, & Waterman, 2013). One common characteristic that remains is Native Americans are still forcibly, by law, subjected to the imperialist and colonialist ideals that the United States was founded on through public education. In the next section I use my own story as an example of factors influencing Native American access and persistence, followed by a discussion using further research evidence and the TribalCrit framework.

Personal Experience

To understand my story you need to know the context. I am from the Kwat'san (Quechan) tribe in Fort Yuma, CA. My Mother is Quechan and my Father is Cocopah, and both grew up on the Fort Yuma Indian Reservation. Each had rough childhoods with dysfunctional families. Nonetheless, it was my Mother who had more obstacles to overcome. She grew up in a one-bedroom mud house filled with her five brothers and two sisters with no running water or electricity. Unfortunately, she came from an alcoholic home that was referred to as the party house. She was abused in multiple ways and often did without the basic necessities of life as a child. Her father died in her arms at the age of 12. Despite all of these challenges she was able to make it to college at the age of 17. She was significantly deficient academically, but was able to graduate with her Bachelor's, and later on with her Master's degree in education. My dad also received a Bachelor's and Master's degree. With their degrees, they moved to the city to raise my two sisters and I, and worked at a small college for Native Americans. Due to their position at the college, I traveled to reservations across the United States and spent a significant amount of my childhood and adult years with these tribes. Since I grew up as an urban Native American in the heart of Phoenix, Arizona, I would often visit the reservation during the school year and summers. My parents never wanted me to forget where we come from.

In the city, I attended a predominately White school in North Phoenix. At this school, I happened to be the darkest and only "Red" kid in my class. Being what it was, I started telling kids that I was Black. I had never seen a real Black person in my life until a few years later, or at least none that I knew about. I told all of the kids in my class that I was Black until my teacher heard me say it. My teacher immediately called my mother and said, "Ma'am, it's not a big deal, but your son is telling all the kids that he is Black. He's not Black is he?" My Mother replied laughing, "No. He is Native American." That day I came home, and my Mom sat me down. She said, "Son, I have something to tell you... You're not Black."

I was in shock! For the first eight years of my life I was Black, and now she dropped this bomb on me. I was completely disappointed, because I thoroughly enjoyed being African American all those years. So I asked my Mother, "So what am I?"

She told me, "You're Native American." My face lit up, and with big eyes I looked up at her and said, "Are you serious?" My Mom said, "Yes." Immediately, I ran to the bathroom and threw my shirt on the

floor. I took my Mom's lipstick and began to put on my war paint across my face. I smeared it on my chest, and I started acting and looking like what I thought a Native American did. I took a steak knife from the kitchen, and from that day on my Mom would never be able to keep a hibiscus tree. I started cutting off limbs from that tree and made bow and arrows. I would use my home fashioned bow to hone my hunting skills in my backyard. I was so proud of who I was that day. Later on I realized that this ideal I had of who and what a Native American is and does, was wrong. Native Americans today do not run around with their shirts off and wearing war paint everywhere. I realize now that this very experience of being an Urban Native American in the city was a real American Indian experience.

I graduated high school, and I had high hopes of becoming a border patrol officer. When I found out I couldn't deport White people, I changed my mind. I always wanted to continue the warrior tradition of my tribe and family because I had two Grandpas in World War II, eight uncles in Vietnam, and too many individuals in my extended family to count that served in the military. My dad convinced me to go to college for a year, and see how I liked it. He said if I didn't like it, I could go to the army with a higher rank. I agreed, and went to the small private college for Native Americans that my parents previously worked at. Because of my low GPA, I wasn't qualified to enroll in a public university in the state of Arizona. When I went to college, I finally found other students like me. Although I was not raised on the reservation, I was raised around different Natives from tribes across the United States. More importantly, there was an accessible college that accepted my application despite having a low grade point average. That is where I started my elementary education program to become a teacher, which subsequently fueled my interest in education.

Today, I often wonder why it was difficult for me in my educational experiences. Even I, as a Native American, with an environment surrounded with advanced education, access to finances (we were still considered poor), family, and a Native American community, still struggled to get into an institution of higher education while learning and maintaining my culture and traditions. Even so, I attended college and graduated. My story shows that a Native American student pursuing higher education – even possessing what the literature says will make a successful Native American graduate – may still have difficulties finding his or her way to and through college. I believe that the reality is that Native American families adopt the imperialist idea of higher education at varying levels based

on their experiences with colonization. In order to be successful, by mainstream standards, Native Americans have to colonize themselves to some extent which influences tribal culture, traditions, and knowledge. This guides me to believe that the extent to which American Indian individuals and families adopt colonialist ideals is reflected in their enrollment and graduation from higher education.

CHALLENGES TO NATIVE ACCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

There are gaps in the amount of studies focusing on higher education access for Native American students. Specifically, there are very few studies that examine Native American students who qualified, yet failed to enroll in college. Since literature around access to higher education for Native Americans is scarce, research that examines Native American college persistence is included. Persistence in this context is when a student continues to enroll into college from one year to the next until graduation. While this is not a comprehensive list of factors influencing access and success in higher education or an extensive review of literature, this is a discussion of factors discussed often in literature influencing access that is informed by my own narrative and TribalCrit.

Factors Influencing Access

Access and persistence complement each other in the entrance and completion of Native American students. In order for a student to finish they first need to be enrolled. In order for a student to enroll, the student needs motivation or help from family, and the institution needs to prepare for Native Americans to achieve academic success. Researchers have conducted studies around accessibility and persistence and have identified key strategies for higher education success among Native Americans, and what essentially makes higher education more accessible. The overarching themes that emerge in the literature on successful enrollment and retention of Native Americans are; family support, institutional support, community support and academics (Brayboy et al., 2012; Fox, Lowe, Waterman, & McClellan, 2005; Shotton et al., 2013). These themes are discussed below.

Family Influence

Researchers found that student and family background have a significant role in access to higher education. Particularly parental expectations, education, and interaction between schools and students on academic topics influence the probability of American Indian students attending higher education (Falk & Aitken, 1984; Perna & Titus, 2005; Qian & Blair, 1999; Sandefur, Meier, & Campbell, 2006). The positive influence often comes in the form of academic conversations, academic support, K-12 parent involvement, and study resources (i.e., books, calculators, computer). This can be seen in my story through the conversation I had with my dad, when he convinced me to go to college for a year. Often encouragement from family members can motivate students to enroll in college. Carmen (2006) showed this when she asked students how they got to the university. One Native American student simply said he was told to pack up, and get in the car. Before that student knew it, he was told to get out in front of the doorsteps of the university. Another student in the same study, mentioned a family member had a vision of them attending college, so that student went to college. Furthermore, student background in relation to socioeconomic status, student expectations of oneself, and race significantly influences college enrollment for American Indians (Byun, Irvin, & Meece, 2012; Carmen, 2006; Conway, 2009; Titus, 2006). Our family was considered poor, but what I did have that many other students may not have had, was parents who understood how to obtain financial aid.

Thirty-three percent of Native Americans students are living below the poverty threshold, compared to ten percent of Whites (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010). If someone is living in poverty how much accessibility does a person have to the Internet or mobile technology devices? Also, someone that lives in poverty often does not think about an education, but survivability of self and family. Furthermore, Chen and St. John (2011) found that college students with a higher socioeconomic status persisted in college twenty-five percent more than students with a lower socioeconomic status. This relates back to what Smith (1999) wrote on imperialism used as economic expansion and imposing ideas on Indigenous people, as some Native Americans feel like in order to lift ourselves from poverty, we have to adopt colonialist ideals. In addition, these economic factors influence parents' ability to engage in their child's education, which is instrumental for several reasons.

Colonization is endemic, and the effects of the abusive government funded boarding school era on Native Americans are still found today.

Mmari, Blum, and Teufel-Shone (2010) found that the presence and availability of a parent was instrumental in the decrease of at-risk behaviors. This was partly because the parents were available for their children when they needed to discuss their problems. This is imperative as more than 60 percent of incarcerated young offenders under federal jurisdiction were American Indian (Mmari et al., 2010). Rutman, Park, Castor, Taulii, and Forquera (2008) used data from the national Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) for the years 1997–2003 and found that Native American youth were more likely to engage in unhealthy behaviors such as tobacco, alcohol, and drug use in and out of school. Due to the US government crimes against Native American humanity, some Native American families continue to deal with historical trauma (psychological and emotional wounding transcending generations) and have turned toward risky behavior. They also reported higher incidences of suicidal behaviors, feeling unsafe and experiencing violence at school, and needing medical treatment from a fight. Ramisetty-Mikler and Ebama (2011) found that suicide among Native Americans is significantly higher than other ethnic groups and especially White students. Substance abuse is another unfortunate characteristic among Native American people. In these instances, one can see that family can either increase or decrease access to higher education, depending on the support of the family. As in the case of my own family, my mother grew up in an alcoholic home, but she increased our access to higher education by going to college and subsequently supporting my siblings and I through college. Institutional influence can also enhance the family support system, or in some cases, fill the gap in case of a lack of family support.

Institutional Influence

Institutions have an opportunity to create more access to higher education for students through American Indian support services, mentoring, and financial aid opportunities (Shotton et al., 2013). Native American students need these services for several reasons. Foremost, some researchers found that discrimination, low teacher expectation, and disproportionate tracking of students cause low graduation rates among Natives in high school (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010; Ortiz & HeavyRunner, 2003). Furthermore, racism, discrimination, institutional culture, predominately White culture, and mixed institutional commitments hinder Native American higher education achievement (Carmen, 2006; Falk & Aitken, 1984; Flynn, Duncan, & Jorgensen, 2012; Saggio, 2000; Soroosh, 1995). Fortunately, I attended a predominately

Native American institution and had support from Native American faculty, the financial aid department, and felt like all the departments were somehow an American Indian support service. However, at larger predominately white institutions, there is a documented struggle of Native American students with discrimination continuing from high school to college, which demonstrates the need for American Indian Support Services to be advocates for students, especially on college campuses. American Indian support services also help mitigate feelings of isolation, inferiority, and lack of mentorships that were the leading factors found to contribute to academic probation or dropping out of college (Guillory, 2009). American Indian support services provide a space for Native Americans to network and opportunities for institutions to establish mentorships to help enroll and retain Native American college students. These mentorships also give incoming or continuing students avenues to engage other students on financial aid.

Financial aid is a major part of continuing in college not just for Natives but all college students (Byun et al., 2012; Conway, 2009; Titus, 2006). However, because many Native students come from low socioeconomic statuses as a result of policies limiting tribal economic development and various other reasons aforementioned, finances can become substantially large barriers to access and persistence (Carmen, 2006; Ness, 2002; Reyes, 2000; Shotton et al., 2013). Some research suggests that peer influence and counseling are ways that students overcome financial aid barriers (Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Tierney, Sallee, & Venegas, 2007). Strong and healthy mentorships that are culturally congruent between Native American students provide positive influences on access and persistence (Shotton, Oosahwe, & Cintrón, 2007). Relationships with Native American students are important to access and persistence in general, but especially with K-16 faculty.

Mmari et al. (2010) found that at-risk behaviors were evident when there was a lack of teacher support, and lack of role models. Native American students want instructors who show they care, and one means of doing that is through using Native American culture in the curriculum. Although higher education institutions may have the institutional characteristics that can positively predict persistence, a common challenge that Native Americans face coming to higher education is culture shock from the communities they are coming from. Again, asking Native Americans to leave their home culture behind and adopt institutional culture is a form of colonization still happening in some institutional settings. For that reason, having supportive faculty that incorporates culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogies can be beneficial (McCarty & Lee, 2014).

Some of the overwhelming failures in higher education enrollment and graduation rates for Native American can be attributed to higher education being a construct created by mainstream White society, and pushed on Native Americans as an act of colonization (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). As a construct created by White mainstream society, some Native Americans have not always put value on westernized education. For example, the lack of value may be a reason why Native American faculty members are absent from colleges and universities. However, by incorporating culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogies Native American students can find a new sense of belonging that decolonizes previous attempts to push imperialist ideals on Native American students. This would reverse this notion that Native Americans need to leave their culture at home, when in reality Native Americans draw much of their strength to enroll or persist from their home communities (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Waterman, 2012).

Community Influence

As college students may have the academic preparation for college, student and family background characteristics predict access and persistence that are theorized to be due in part to the strong connection Native Americans have to community by way of culture, tradition, and heritage (Angspatt, 2001; Garcia, 2000; HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002; HeavyRunner & Morris, 1997; Jackson & Smith, 2001; Ness, 2002; Napier, 1995; Reyes, 2000; Shotton et al., 2013; Strand & Peacock, 2002; Waterman, 2004; Wenzlaff & Brewer, 1996; Wiest, 1999). Contrary to the notion that Native Americans need to leave their culture home, probably the most prominent reason students enroll or persist is due to their desire to give back to their community (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008). For example, my family was considered poor by the US socioeconomic measures, but my parents did not get an education for financial wellbeing. They got an education to give back to our community, demonstrated by their willingness to take positions that often paid below their worth, in order to help other Native American students achieve academic success.

Research indicates that culture and need to maintain cultural identity tied to one's community factors into college persistence (Garcia, 2000; HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002; HeavyRunner & Marshall, 2003; Huffman, 2001; Reyes, 2000; Rousey & Longie, 2001; Strand & Peacock, 2002; Villegas & Prieto, 2006; Waterman, 2004). I grew up in the heart of Phoenix, but the college I attended was in Phoenix with urban Native

Americans. For me, being able to express my identity through humor (Lopez, 2015), stories, and participation in ceremonies with other students like me was important to my college persistence, especially being that there were students who could relate to my experiences growing up as the darkest student in class. For that reason, distance and access to one's tribal community plays a role in the college success of that Native American student. However, sometimes going home can cause decreases in academic performance, despite being a positive influence on persistence (Waterman, 2012).

Academic Influence

Native American students are still thought to be underprepared for the academic rigor of college. The difficulty with being underprepared for college is that academic preparation is one of the strongest predictors of academic success in higher education for not only Native students, but college students collectively (Adelman, Taylor, & Nelson, 2013; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Hoffman & Lowitzki, 2005; Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008; Pavel et al., 1998; Titus, 2006). As mentioned in my narrative earlier, I struggled through high school and definitely did not have the requirements to attend a public university. Looking back, I would consider myself to be underprepared for college but luckily I attended a college that actively worked with underperforming Native American students to engage in the academic rigor of college.

Champagne (2004) mentions that colleges need to train teachers to work with Native American communities. This implies that there are teachers on the reservation and working with Urban Native American students that do not know how to work with this group effectively. López, Schram, and Heilig (2013) argue that there is an absence of culturally responsive schooling in classrooms. Brayboy and Castagno (2009) came to a conclusion that curriculum with Native American students must be culturally responsive in order for them to be successful in K-12 classrooms. So there are obvious deficiencies in K-12 education that make higher education less accessible for Native American students. This further demonstrates that K-12 education needs to use more culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogies that engage Native American students (McCarty & Lee, 2014). The deficiencies are visible in the findings that researchers have discovered in the academic unpreparedness of Native American students in higher education and the lack of effective instruction methods in K-12 education (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008). Without effective instruction methods, it is inevitable that students

from the Native American community achieve academically lower than White students.

Conversely, Native American communities have often accepted the fact that our cultures are not evident in the public education of children, and subjected to assimilation (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). Some Native Americans feel that we must assimilate in order to achieve academic success, that assimilation may then lift Native American communities from poverty, given the economic value of an education. McCarty and Bia (2002) wrote about the assimilation process and reaction of the Navajos to westernized education through the analysis of the Navajo Long Walk. It was the beginning of the assimilation process for the Navajos in the mid-1800s. Navajos saw that they would need to adapt in order for their tribe to survive. They saw Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools – boarding schools – as a means to allow their tribe to prosper. This process was detrimental to the culture because assimilation essentially promoted “American Culture,” as opposed to maintaining their own cultures. However, Navajos saw education as the future of the tribe, and accepted the education although it assimilated them further into mainstream society.

On the other hand, there have been some studies that show Native Americans academically achieve higher if culture is incorporated into the instruction methods. Lipka and McCarty (1994) describe the success that Alaska Native teachers had by involving Elders and community members of the village in schools. The strategy connected knowledge of the culture, language, and schooling together to improve the academic capabilities of the community. This is a cultural renewal movement, where the tribes and schools moved to more of a community based schooling. This movement is a counter action to the assimilation process that Native Americans faced as a result of colonization (McCarty & Lee, 2014). Being able to connect learning to traditional values is effective instruction for Native Americans, and these are practices that some programs currently implement.

There are now several programs that try to bridge the gap between high school and college to create more access through using some more culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogies. Some of these programs are upward bound, Arizona State University’s SPIRIT program, College Horizons, and South Dakota State University’s Success Academy. These programs address an array of factors related to access such as Native American identity, finances, college essays, college applications, and so forth. The encouraging practice of some of these programs is that they incorporate curriculums that help students with their subjects that are imperative to college access while at the same time helping them connect to their own

cultural identity. Realizing your own identity as Native American can help institutions and students incorporate more culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogies that increase access and persistence. However, the success of these programs differs based on the students who participate in them.

College Horizons boasts that ninety-nine percent of their participants gain college admission, and eighty-five percent graduate from college within five years (College Horizons, 2016). However, other programs such as the Success Academy had less success with their high school senior students, which only had about forty-two percent of their participants enroll into college (Lee, 2013). This of course may be due to the requirements for participation, as College Horizons requires an application fee, essay, recommendations, 3.0 grade point average, parent tax returns, and program fee deposit. The Success Academy was a partnership between Flandreau Indian School (FIS) and South Dakota State University where all the boarding school students at FIS participated in the program. Needless to say the requirements to participate in the program were much less strenuous and the success of College Horizons may be due to their selectivity. Nonetheless, more research needs to be conducted on these recruitment and summer bridge programs.

Additionally, further research on access indicators should include students who qualify for college entrance but fail to enroll. In addition, students who enroll into college but dropout before they graduate should be included. This would provide a more complete picture as to why Native American students are not enrolling and remaining in higher education until completion. This may also allow for other factors to explain the lack of enrollment in higher education for Native American students such as, refraining from college enrollment as an act of resistance to colonization and imperialist ideals.

CONCLUSION

The loss of culture, traditions, and knowledge as a result of colonization is detrimental to the success of Native American in higher education. There have been suggestions in the literature that public colleges and universities need stronger family support, institutional support, community support, and academic support (Shotton *et al.* 2013) for Native American students. I think those recommendations are in the right direction. However, some tribal colleges and universities implemented these recommendations and

still struggle from devastating enrollment and graduation rates, similar to the college I attended. Which leads me to believe that there are other factors – specifically the degree to which American Indians adopt colonialist ideals – that contribute to the low accessibility and enrollment rates of Native Americans into higher education, and especially into teacher education programs.

There is an explicit need to expand institutional policies that advocate for Indigenous teacher education programs to include Native American students into institutes of higher education that they would otherwise not attend. The emphasis in what knowledge our Native American community values also needs to be adapted to obtain success in mainstream society. In the end, the inaccessibility of higher education will remain as long as the acceptance of colonialist ideals and denial of Native American cultural values and knowledge are excluded from the goals of K-12 education and colleges and universities.

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