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ABSTRACT
                To determine the factors that have contributed to
persistence in successful Native American students, this study investigated
student expectations, life experiences on campus, perceptions of support and
lack of support for cultural identity, difficulties encountered, perceptions
of how the Native American's college experience differs from that of majority
students, degree of institutional support, and the factors that make the
college experience worthwhile. The study was conducted at a large,
predominantly white research university in a racially homogeneous state. A
diverse group of 13 Native American undergraduate students who had persisted
for more than one semester were interviewed; their tribal relationships and
family structures varied, eight were the first generation to attend college,
and some expected to return to tribal life. Their reported experiences of
alienation stemmed from academic struggles, skin color and appearance, covert
and overt racial hostility, lack of respect, stereotyping, loneliness and
lack of role models, and lack of institutional support. Another factor
important to understanding the life experiences of these students related to
their reasons for attending college: the two strongest factors for their
attending college and persisting were supportive people (instructors,
advisors, parents) and their own determination. (Contains 28 references.)
(CH)

# America's First People: Factors which Affect their Persistence in Higher Education

## Janis Swenson Taylor

# ASHE

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for the Study
of Higher
Education*

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# America's First People: Factors which Affect their Persistence in Higher Education

## Janis Swenson Taylor

"Why don't our students survive when they come to your universities?" came the question from the president of a two-year tribal college on a Native American reservation. "I wish someone would study the reasons why." He referred to the fact that nationally Native American students are the single most underrepresented ethnic group in American colleges and universities (McDonald, 1993, Tijerina & Biemer, 1988). And when they reach college American Indians have long been reported to be among the least, if not the least, successful (Astin, 1982; Falk & Aitken, 1984; Tijerina & Biemer, 1988), and findings of current research on achievement and retention of all multicultural students are discouraging (Stage and Manning, 1992).

Why are Native students still the most underrepresented minority group in colleges and universities? After thirty years of programs to encourage diversity in higher education, why does the dream remain out of reach? Why are the retention and graduation rates for this group so abysmal? It is not news that the students we have called minority groups in the twentieth century will be the numeric majority in our society and in our schools in the twenty-first. That higher education continues to fail these groups is a national tragedy.

### The Purpose and Research Question

Seeking answers to these questions I went to a large, predominantly white research institution in an overwhelmingly racially homogeneous state. On a campus that prides itself on its efforts at diversity, what are the perceptions of Native American students? Could I find answers to the question from the Tribal College president, why many don't persist, why many don't graduate. By asking successful students what are the factors that have contributed to their persistence? This became the central research question: What are the factors that contribute to persistence among

Native American undergraduates? To unearth these factors I investigated student expectations, life experiences on campus, student perceptions of support and lack of support for their cultural identity, their thoughts about what they have found difficult, how they have handled difficulties, what they feel makes their college experience different from that of majority students, what they feel they have needed and not gotten, and what they feel has made the college experience worthwhile. Also a part of this study were the views of the student services personnel who counsel these students and observations of Native student organizations in action.

## The Qualitative Tradition I Follow

To study these factors I chose a qualitative paradigm. Louis and Turner (1991) suggest that "qualitative approaches are particularly useful in studying minority student experiences where cultural differences and small numbers make the advantage of survey research less clear." Similarly Attinasi (1989) suggests that the data needed in order to understand minority student retention are " the student's own perception of the process." Furthermore Fetterman (1991) believes that "an individual's subjective perception of reality has its own validity and the individual will act according to that perception." Much of the research on minorities in higher education has not been of this type. Much has been survey research or studies looking at institutional databases of test scores and high school rankings. Even surveys purported to use both closed and open-ended questions are quite directive in terms of the answers students are allowed make (Loo & Rolison, 1986). As a qualitative researcher I ask, "are we really getting to the roots of the problem when it is only our questions that we consider and our logic that we follow?" Indeed Turner (1994) found in-depth interviews valuable in uncovering an unwelcoming climate in the perceptions of University of Minnesota students. Peshkin (1997) also used qualitative and ethnographic methods to seek causes for Native American lack of success in our educational systems.

I borrow from both postpositivist and constructivist ideas, drawing much from the grounded theory style of Strauss and Corbin, and following ideas put forth by Lincoln and Guba.

Ontologically I believe there is not one reality, one truth, but that each person's reality is what he sees and understands it to be. My epistemological and axiological stance is that researcher interacts with the "researched," that the work is collaborative and that our values and biases are open to scrutiny, and to each other.

## My Findings

### Differences Make Them Unique

As researchers we have a strong tendency to aggregate. Quantitative methods find means and modes, the bell curve; they look for large enough numbers to be able to generalize about those who fit into one of the large categories. Even qualitative researchers, who hope to frame our findings in the context of our respondents' lives and to give voice to perspectives that have not historically been heard, have that same tug toward grouping, labeling, categorizing, seeking patterns, creating codes into which we place people's lives. Much of this is necessary for we recommend policies in education that we hope will well serve the largest number of people, the greatest good.

However, before I follow in these footsteps and talk about the patterns, the "samenesses" that I have seen in my data, I want to speak first to the uniqueness of each story I have heard. In my small sample of thirteen case studies, allowing students to self-select participation with no attempt at randomization, I was struck by their differences, their individuality.

Deborah LaCounte, in her chapter "American Indian Students in College," (1987) noted the cultural diversity among American Indian tribes that becomes quickly evident to any scholar of Indian affairs. This comes not only from the huge number of individual tribes (547 Indian tribes recognized by the federal government, 17 recognized only by their states, and 52 recognized by neither level of government) each with its own history and culture, but also from the differing levels of contact today's Native American students may have had with their heritage.

The focal university with a student body of 27,000 has only 143 students who identify themselves as Native American. Some of these are in professional schools; some are in other graduate programs. Some are first semester students, and we have yet to see whether they will persist. But of 56 who fit the qualifications of undergraduates who had persisted for more than one semester, the thirteen who were willing to be interviewed are as diverse a group as I could imagine.

Their biological ancestry represented fourteen Native American tribes and one had spent time with a fifteenth tribe into which her grandfather had been adopted. Their relationships with their tribes varied from those who had never been away from the reservation until they came to college, those who visited their relatives on the reservation regularly all of their lives, those who had made only token visits, to those who had never been to the reservation of the tribe from whom they are descended.

The families in which they grew up also varied. One was raised by two parents one Native, one white in an urban setting. One was raised by a Native single parent and grandmother in a very traditional way on the reservation. One was raised by a single white parent and thinks of herself as Native; another raised by a single white parent thinks of herself as white. One spent her life in foster homes on or near the reservation, another was adopted away from the reservation by a white family and not told about her Native heritage until she turned eighteen. Another was raised by grandparents, seeing her parents only very occasionally with little talk of her heritage.

Eight were the first generation of their family to attend college; five had parents who had gone to college before them. When I tried to make that very subjective call on which were assimilated into the dominant society and which were traditional, I relied on how they describe themselves, yet found these categories totally inadequate in describing this aspect of these students. So I will say that three described themselves as traditional, but I saw variation; five considered themselves assimilated, yet I heard traditional values in their stories, and five fell somewhere in between. The category of blood quantum used so much by the federal government in

determining their rights was even more confusing. Some were clearly half Native and half white. Others admitted that although their parent or parents consider themselves full-blood, the lightness of the skin and the impreciseness of lineage records along with the realities of history make them question the true percentage of Native blood running in their veins. They, as well as the student services staff who were interviewed, spoke of the problem of "which box to check." This tendency of our society to categorize people on admission applications, financial aid forms, on the U.S. census and countless other official documents raises the quandary of "which part of myself am I to deny?"

Some have strong aspirations to return to their people; college is only a way to help in the work they plan to do there. In their voices, "What I want to do is go back." "I think in order for me to help other Indians and in order for me to do what I have to do for myself I have to have the certificate (diploma). Then I can go back and help my Indian people." Others say "I don't know if I want to go back to my reservation or if I could go back to any reservation. I'm changed. We don't speak the same language now." Others aren't sure where they will end up, but they just want to make a better life for their children. Seven of them are parents; six do not have children.

There are differences, too, in how much they want the university to provide for their ethnicity, how much they need the association with other Native Americans. One felt uncomfortable with colleges who pushed her to associate with Native students and chose the focal university because it presented Native associations, but didn't push or insist that she participate. Others were lost and lonely until they hooked up with other Native students. They felt that participating in Native activities was at the heart of their college experience. Some attended Native events, but felt unwelcomed. Fewer men than women participated in Native events.

This diversity would imply that not all will feel the same level of comfort when they first come to the university. For some it will be a totally alien environment with much for them to adjust to. For others their urban upbringing or their parents who have attended college will have

prepared them for the college life they might expect. This difference has strong implications for the types of services these students will need. Their goals differ. Does the curriculum, the practicum and intern experiences that are a part of their career programs prepare them for the life they will return to? Are we assuming that we are preparing them all for careers in the dominant society? Are we listening to their stories? Are we molding their college experience to fit their life needs or are we pushing them into a mold we've already decided upon?

Knowing Native students as individuals rises as the overarching need, but within their unique stories and individual needs patterns do emerge. Those threads of similarity run through multiple stories, for there are those factors at which I think we need to look closely because they affect many or all of the Native students with whom I spoke. As I listened to their stories I found that more pervasive than the reasons why they continue, were the stories of their struggles against a sense of not belonging, of not being welcome. One of the most powerful phenomena these students had to wrestle with and overcome was a sense of alienation. In this effort and their ability to stay in spite of the alienation may lie answers for how to help similar students persist. Before discussing how the students dealt with alienation, however, I will share their descriptions of it.

Alienation

More than financial problems which they admit to and the literature documents (LaCount, 1987, pp. 68, 73-74; Minner, 1995) or academic struggles to which some attest with their stories of being tutored, there came hints of small hurts, the looks people gave them on campus, absurd questions they had been asked, thoughtless comments by professors, racism in the form of unspoken hostility of white students toward their comments in class discussions, all the way to anger over overt racism. These and other incidents totaled up to create a climate in which they described feeling "out of place," "couldn't fit in," "isolated," that "it's all white students," and it "takes a lot of courage to speak up in class." They had been admitted, their tuition was paid, they had taken the same steps as their white counterparts, yet their words express feelings of not

belonging. Unspoken sometimes, just a look, a facial expression, a subtle tone of voice, but the message they read seemed clear and they felt alienated. The life experiences of almost all of the interviewed students told, in some form, this story. They experienced it walking on campus, in sessions with academic advisors, in classrooms, in the comments of faculty, in the climate of the community. Alienation grew from stereotyping and cultural misconceptions; from subtle, but felt hostility; from overt racism; from a lack of respect; from the paucity of people like themselves in administrative, staff or faculty positions; and from lack of institutional support for their culture.

The Looks

One factor contributing to a sense of alienation was the way whites looked at them at times. One young man voiced it as: "Well the whole issue of skin color, I mean like differences, appearance, you know. You see this guy walking to class with long hair, dark skin, you just think he's not the same as everybody else… like, what is he doing here?…this is not the place for him. Those kind of eyes were on me; they just thought differently of me. They weren't accepting." A Native woman said, "I always felt when I walked in the store somebody was watching." And another: "Indians over here get noticed. A lot of white people, they twisted their necks and that bothered my boyfriend big time." She gestured and showed me how they crane their necks to stare at her.

Hostility: Covert and Overt

Even on a campus where the white majority often think there are few racial tensions, students of color may experience hostility. One student described a subtle expression of this hostility. "I think there are times when it's hostile like in Native American studies when you're trying to explain things. I think there's almost a hostile feeling like white kids never speak up when someone of color tries to express something in my classes. White kids like never speak up; they're quiet, but you sense there is some hostility that they have some things they want to say."

A sophomore woman described a less subtle form of hostility as she reflected on her freshman year: "I was in a triple [three person room in the dorm] and I almost went home freshman year because of this situation. I was getting hate mail. Her friends were coming after me. I couldn't leave the house by myself...The police became involved. And she ended up getting kicked out of the room...And if she ever comes near me again, the police will take action and the university will kick her out, because it was that bad... I've never experienced anything like that before, so I just didn't know exactly how to take it and I almost left." Another woman speaking of an off-campus experience said, "I think there have been a couple of incidents where I thought they happened because I was brown...I was once stopped by a police officer and they told me I had to get my husband into the police station because they wanted to question somebody who they felt was passing bad checks. Because that somebody was supposed to be in a car like mine. And I thought that's just so weird. And when my husband went in it was just immediately dismissed because he was not what they expected. He's Irish American."

Lack of Respect

They say they feel they are not respected in the same way that white students are. One student reflected on a freshman year when she and a friend attempted to gain equal footing: "We used to dress up in...suits to go to class and...that's because we felt we were given respect if we dressed up. If we dressed like the same way the white students dress...we get nothing because we're students of color. Therefore we're automatically slouching or like it's assumed we're here because we got scholarships. Or we're here because of...quota. People don't think that we are real students and even gain the right to be here. We have to go the extra mile to prove that we are serious both to professors and to other students."

Another young woman said, "The school is made up basically of whites and all your programs are going to be basically white majority, and they're going to be coming from a white experience and you'll be maybe the only Native student...in the class and you're going to be shot

down...You're only one person, you're the minority and they just completely shoot you down and the teachers will ignore you. And I found that out when I discuss something American Indian...And you're the only person with that opinion...Nobody else has that experience so they don't have that opinion...The teacher will be like...that's inconsequential, let's move on."

A young man's perception of what his professors feel, "It's expected that the white students are going to do well and that the minority students are going to have to scrap for the rest of the grades." These perceptions all point to their feeling that they are not on equal footing with other students, they are somehow less.

Thoughtless Comments and Stereotypes

A perceptive student said, "I think it's hard, it's really hard for anybody who's different in any way to come into a place. Just because people are so judgmental and they don't really know how to act or what to say or what's the wrong thing to say or the right thing to say." A number of students mentioned things which were said, some of which they laugh off as humorous, but others they find more hurtful. An education student said, "I was student teaching and my cooperating teacher at the elementary school said something like, 'Oh, they're just wild Indians!' And she goes, 'Oh, I can't believe I said that!'" Another young woman answered my question about stereotypes by saying, "Oh, yeah, like 'do you still live in tipis?' I get that one all the time." Another articulate woman said, "We're faced with on a daily basis with things like 'Hey Pocahontas. I'm John Smith.' I mean you always meet stuff like that that other students don't. And it's funny for a while. But..."

One girl said that when her friends learn she's part Native American it is, "'Oh!' And I guess they half expect me to be wearing feathers and turquoise jewelry and this little leather getup with fringe or something and some leather moccasins. Because they just kind of look at me like 'Oh! Oh!'"

These students put up with being treated like objects to be talked about and studied. A brilliant female engineering student told me about her advisor. "I had met him at a picnic, him and his wife, and they had their grandson with them and I had my hair just pulled back into a braid that day and I had my key chain which has got a little beaded moccasin on it. They said, 'well do you know *what* she is?' And I kind of sat there. And he goes to this little boy who was probably four years old, 'she's an engineer and an Indian.' I wonder do they go around and say that about anybody else? Oh, and he asked me one time who I liked to date. You know if I liked to date Native American men or...and I was thinking well do you ask your white students who come in here who do you like to date?" Unintentionally discriminatory as these comments may be, their effect on the Native student is dehumanizing. She is the target of a joke, viewed as a stereotype rather than as person, or questioned as a statistic.

Aloneness

A student discussing her loneliness during her first year on campus said, "That was a big difference...I thought there would be a lot of Indians...and I thought there would just from what I learned from orientations." A student who had come from a large cosmopolitan city expressed it this way: "When I came here I about freaked out. I was walking down the street and everybody is white and that's just scary. You know I'm like, where are the black people? Where are the yellow people? Where are the brown people? There was nobody. They were all white people with blond hair basically." And another: "I'm the only person of color in all my classes." Another said, "I felt very isolated at times...Maybe if we can find some other Indian people it'll be OK...the community is so small...I mean you're right in the middle of nowhere...myself in a room with a bunch of all white people." From another, "When I first got here, which was last spring, I mean I just never felt so out of place, I mean from my background being out of place all the time, (she was adopted into a white family) when I got here, I never felt so out of place because of my color. I felt like I was the only Native on campus. Couldn't fit in anywhere. I'm like the only minority in

classes most of the time. I walk into a class you know, it's all white students." Discussing how it feels in class to be the only Native student, one said, "Most of my classes actually, it's like I'm usually the only Native American and there are just a few other minority students, so it kind of takes a lot of courage sometimes if you're talking about a certain topic and I can't just sit there and be quiet. I have to say something you know. And I have to voice my opinion and sometimes that's not an easy thing to do. Cause it doesn't seem like there's any support from the rest of the class." Loneliness, these comments show, can occur in a crowd for unless one feels a part of the group, that student is one Native American all alone. It is a characteristic of life both inside and outside of the classroom for these students.

Need for Role Models

This problem of feeling so alone on campus, might be alleviated one student services staff member said, if there were more staff and faculty members who were also Native American or other people of color. She spoke of the importance "for some students to see someone that looks like them that has in fact been successful." Students also voiced the desire for role models saying, "And we've wanted more Native faculty. It's sort of strange having a non-Native tell you about a Native subject. Not that they can't know a lot, but it's a different perspective." Another student: "I think that my experience here would have been different with an Indian professor." From a student talking about people of color in the Special Support Services office: "They've been through what we're going through, so I'm sure they'd be understanding." From a staff person in Special Support: "I think there need to be more faculty here that are people of color. I think even in our role as academic planner counselors, because students have so many needs, we burn out because there's not someone else that they can talk to." All of these comments speak of the need to talk with and be with people who have had like experiences, similar backgrounds, or have faced similar questions and look like you.

## Lack of Institutional Support

The students' harshest criticisms came in the area of university support for their ethnicity. "I don't think they're doing a great job at all for anybody...They say, 'You are Native American and we want to help'...But they really don't do anything." In answer to my question, "What would you say about the University's support for your ethnicity?" another responded, "Well, the first word I want to say is artificial." My sense is that these students hear an official rhetoric that the university supports diversity and recruits them to come, but that when they arrive they do not find support for them personally. I selected these quotes because they were typical of a negative perception that ran through many interviews. Support that exists for minorities in general or for all students on financial aid was not viewed as support for them as Native Americans. An appreciation for their culture, an openness to their perspective on issues is not a part of the campus. Annual events celebrating cultural diversity appear as tokenism to them. All of these factors contribute to a sense of isolation and alienation.

## Reasons for Coming to College

Beyond alienation, I found other factors salient to understanding the life experience of these students in higher education; their reasons for coming was one of these. For some, coming to college is not the goal in itself. Unlike white students who see getting the degree as the next step in their lives toward getting the job or career, for some traditional Native students, college is something they need in order to survive in a predominantly white society but do not personally want. It is not strongly tied to their ultimate goals. A Native student, adopted out of her culture, is struggling to find her roots and make her way back home. Her story helps me see why the goal of completing college is not a single-minded focus but is fraught with questions. She says, "My struggle, I mean just the effects of what has happened in our history, that is what I carry. I am the only brown student in all these white classes. My goals...are

not the same as theirs. This going to college is probably just normal for them, but I think I see it in a whole different way, just my whole journey thing and who I am. I think different…I think the degree is just paper. What I want to do is go back." She went on to say, "I think in order for me to help other Indians and in order for me to do what I have to do for myself I have to have the certificate (diploma). Then I can go back and help my Indian people. They'd probably accept me if I didn't graduate, but in order for me to try to bring the two worlds together I think I have to have it to show them who I am, and that we do go to college. We can graduate. Just to help the common Indian…I want to see them go to college." The engineering student said, "My plan is eventually to move close to the mountains, you know. Not necessarily into Montana where my family's from because I couldn't get a job in my degree." The pull for a number of these students is to return to their roots or to get as close as they can. This is not a goal that higher education helps them to achieve in any direct way.

There is a second conflict in goals and it is that in getting the white man's education they are being assimilated into his world and value system. Their relatives on the reservation question why they are getting a college education. When I asked one student if she got moral support from her mother to go to college she said, "it doesn't really mean much to her and she doesn't even know what I'm majoring in or anything. She just knows I go to school and she knows I study a lot. And she's just anxious for me to come home." Our assumption that the college degree is universally valued comes into question for these students; it is rather a contradiction in values for some of them. In spite of alienation and mixed feelings about coming to college, there are factors which strongly encourage their coming to college and completing a degree.

## Strong Factors in their Coming to College and Persisting

### Supportive People

Almost all of the students mentioned some person who had been there for them in special ways, planting the seed in their minds that they were capable of college, encouraging them, or providing support when things became difficult. Comments like the following are indicative of this important factor: "Of all the instructors I've had on campus she was the one who's always been there for you." Another said, "There was one teacher, she just took me aside and said, 'you know you have a lot of potential.' That was all I needed. I just need a little encouragement to say you can do it." One said, "My boss really encouraged me to go." A fourth said, "I had an advisor who was my mom on campus. She's always been there for me." At a difficult time in this student's life she said, "I'm not giving up on you so don't give up on yourself." The student's view is, "She took care of everything for me." Another says: "My dad has been there for me the most; he always says I can still do it...You're already Indian, you're already a woman, that two strikes against you...now you're a teen mom, that's another strike, but who said you can't overcome it?...My dad overcame it."

### Determination

In addition to external support some credited their own determination. One said: "I have a stubborn streak. It's the stubborn streak that kept me going." Another said, "I really had a hard time this last year; I've almost dropped out three times already. But I'm really determined." Her goal is to go home with a degree and help other Native people get a college education. A mother said, "The only thing that keeps me going...I'm trying to do something specially for my son. You know, he's going to college." A young male says: "My drive was always that I wouldn't let them beat me...my high school English teacher said that I would never succeed, I would never amount to anything." His fiancee said, "I'll never drop out. Can't drop out. It goes against everything I've

ever been taught." These two factors, supportive people and their own drive and determination

appear to be crucial to persistence when college gets difficult.

### Conclusions

In conclusion let me return to that overarching finding, that they are all very distinctive

individuals not a category of the group we call student. I see problems inherent in researchers' and

educators' emphasis on grouping and labeling. We group incoming students by ethnic category

and provide services to fit an amalgamation. We develop rather rigid degree programs designed

primarily with dominant culture students, their goals, their work world, and their culture in mind.

Are we in academe today making a mistake as we assume too much that minority groups are all

alike and worse that the people within them have the same needs, goals, characteristics? We fail to

see the individual because of our emphasis on his/her group, and we may well be failing many

students because of this proclivity to group and label.

Almost a decade ago Stage and Manning (1992) urged administrators and faculty in

institutions of higher education to adopt a model of culture broker, a reflexive approach that

includes deliberate and thoughtful choices of action based on knowledge of cultural differences and

education from a variety of perspectives. Generalizations may work with homogeneous

populations, but are not appropriate with diverse, heterogeneous populations. In these latter

settings, which most institutions in the country are quickly becoming, individual differences and

similarities rather than group similarities should form the basis of decision making, policy-making,

and administrative practice. Administration in a complex environment requires practices that

respond in an individual rather than normative way.

This was not a new idea in 1992. Arthur Chickering (1969) sent a warning to higher

education that we were shifting our focus from students to subjects, from persons to professionals,

that we should be about developing people. The motivational force to learn and to persist depend

upon what the student has been used to and what his purposes in attending are. In his update

twenty-five years later, (Chickering, 1994) proposed a broad-based development of human talent and potentials. This human relations view, he said, recognizes the importance of student differences and Chickering argues not for a single model, but to find the strength of higher education in its wide-ranging institutional diversity.

When we fail to look at minority students as people with unique perspectives based on cultural knowledge and individual differences, those students are only partially drawn into the college experience. Learning is not integrated with both their experiences from the past and their goals for the future; they are treated as entities whose parts can be separated from the whole. The Eurocentric compartmentalization of knowledge versus the holistic sense of the oneness of all of life is a huge discongruency for many Native cultures. When the dominant culture is presented to students as privileged over their own cultures, only the parts of them that correspond to the dominant culture are congruent with the learning process. A significant cultural dimension of their personas is ignored. (Stage and Manning, 1992) That differences in perception of the world and cognitive style become barriers to collegiate success has been noted by Osborne (1985), Topper (1972), Werner, Schoepfle, Bouck, Roan, and Yazzie, (1976). The Student Services personnel I interviewed emphasized what they have learned by experience; that they cannot assume, they must hear each student's story, for each is individual. These concepts, discussed within student services circles, have not made global changes in higher education, nor do I hear them debated in policy discourses.

Educational and administrative practice from a culturally pluralistic perspective means decentering the dominant Eurocentric perspective and recentering the view with multiple cultures as reference points so that the behavioral standards, symbols, and language on campus reflect the many heritages, rather than only one, of American culture. (Stage and Manning, 1992, p. 23) I would propose framing discussions of Native American persistence in a culture brokering and human development paradigm that would base programs and services on meeting the individual

needs not only of racial and ethnic groups who differ from the traditional student of earlier in this century, but of all of the diversity in age, class, ethnicity, disabling conditions, gender, race, and sexual orientation which make up today's student bodies.

The causes of alienation, my second major finding, cry out for education of our communities, of our student bodies, of our faculties and staffs in the value we as institutions place on each individual, education on the racial stereotypes and biases that lie behind words and actions we do not even realize are hurtful, and education on common misunderstandings about students on scholarship, about affirmative action, and about the achievement and abilities of minority populations. The Native American students' comments that people "just don't know," or people "assume," or people "don't intend" speak of a willingness not to blame people who "should know," "should not assume," and "should not be making these mistakes whether intentional or not." The lack of such training on our campuses or the failure of such training to produce positive results on our campuses should be reason for concern and action.

Native American students need individuals to whom they can turn, on whom they can rely, and whom they can expect to "be there for them." Individual encouragement from one person believing in the worth and abilities of another is vitally important. But in a larger sense the institutions that recruit them, the institutions whose missions and strategic plans talk of diversity goals and equity must also "be there for them," providing institutional encouragement, recognizing them and their culture as part of the family, celebrating what they bring to our campuses and giving public recognition of their accomplishments.

The significance of supportive people in these students' persistence cannot be overstated. The words "was always there for me" and "believed in me" and "was there encouraging me" rang loud and clear as strong factors in their success. These are the kind of terms we use when talking of mentor relationships. Adults mentoring students, faculty mentors, upper-level students mentoring incoming students, community members "adopting" a student in friendship are ideas

familiar in student services literature. The succeeding students in my study were fortunate enough to find mentors. Current educational research suggests an institutional effort fostering such relationships is needed. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) recommend elevating of the mentor's role in order to create environments that support meaningful faculty-student relationships. To encourage such climates they recommend using resource allocation processes, hiring criteria and standards, and faculty recognition, promotion, tenure and compensation policies.

Of importance for mentors and faculty working with Native students are learning from the students what their goals for the future are, helping to relate their academic programs to those goals, and fostering the students' own sense of determination to complete their degrees. There are implications here for academic policy and planning as well. Flexible programs allow for goals of diverse students to be met, rigid policy thwarts it. In 1969 Chickering stated, "Most of these divers entrants meet remarkably similar patterns of teaching and expectations for study, similar conditions for living and for faculty and peer relationships. High attrition rates and high transfer rates are not surprising when such diversity meets such singularity." The diversity of the higher education world he was viewing then has multiplied many times over to create the student bodies of today. The importance of meeting such diverse needs has likewise increased.

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