Miracle Survivor (*Pisatsikamotaan*): An Indigenous Theory on Educational Persistence Grounded in the Stories of Tribal College Students

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all my relatives that come from these families: HeavyRunner, PrettyPaint, White Grass, Bull Chief, Takes Gun, Walking Bear, Horn, Ground, Three Iron, Guardipee, Siemion, Soup, Pace, Many Fingers, Healy, Gets Down First, Singer, Real Bird, Bull Calf, Running Wolf, Bear Quiver, Reevis, Owens, Schildt, No Runner, Chandler, Walters, Sits Down Spotted, Has Things, Red Woodpecker Woman, Woman Without a Name, Woman on Top of The Mountain, Eagle Calf, Wolf's Gun, Kills Three Men, Bulls Eyes, Plenty Medicine Rocks, Dancing Woman, Long Gun, Stands Up, Takes the Iron, Boiled Leggings, and Limpy.

Abstract

MIRACLE SURVIVORS: AN INDIGENOUS THEORY ON EDUCATIONAL PERSISTENCE GROUNDED IN THE STORIES OF TRIBAL COLLEGE STUDENTS

BY IRIS HEAVYRUNNER-PRETTYPAINT

For the last two hundred years, higher education for American Indians has been an Anglo institution involving compulsory Western methods of learning, reoccurring attempts to eradicate tribal culture, and high departure rates for American Indian students at mainstream institutions. In direct response to this history, American Indian leaders drew upon the philosophical framework of the "self-determination" movement of the 1960s to rethink the role of higher education. These leaders recognized the importance of post-secondary education and fostered among themselves the awareness that American Indian colleges could strengthen reservation economies and tribal culture without forcing the students to accept acculturation. In 1968, the Navajo Nation created the first tribally controlled community college - now called Dine' College in Tsaile, Arizona. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching reported in 1997, "[w]ithout question, the most significant development in American Indian communities, since World War II, is the creation of tribally controlled colleges."

The purpose of this study was to develop an Indigenous theory on educational persistence for American Indian students. This indigenous theory emerged from the stories of tribal college students, faculty, and staff. This qualitative study is two-pronged: (1) what constitutes educational persistence in a tribal college setting and (2) how students believe they came to "persist" in the tribal college.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Indian Education in America: A Brief Synopsis

Formal education of America's First People dates back to the colonial period, sporadic and selective as it was. In the latter half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, Indian students were exposed (some might say subjected) to a wide range of reservation day schools, boarding schools, and public schools. The span of Indian education in America stretches all the way from reservation preschools in rural Native communities to prestigious urban universities far away from Indian cultural centers (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001). Harvard had an "Indian College" as early as 1614; Yale, William and Mary, Princeton, and Dartmouth all had early programs promising educational opportunities to Indian students. Despite the promises, throughout this long period, there has been a tension between traditional knowledge and "Western" knowledge, a tension that contributed to student and family stress.

The tension caused by cultural conflicts (at many levels) contributed to disappointments and failures, common at the elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels. Frustration with the "educational system" continues to this day. In this study, we explore the educational system and ways students cope and manage their responsibilities. While this study refers often to "Indian Education," much of what is discussed applies to all levels, but the focus is on American Indian higher education.

The history of American Indian higher education is one of compulsory Western methods of learning, recurring attempts to eradicate tribal culture, and high dropout rates for American Indian students at mainstream institutions (HeavyRunner, Murray, and

Shanley, 2003). As late as 1969, a congressional report titled, "Indian Education: A National Tragedy—A National Challenge," concluded that despite federal efforts, children from Indian families continued to rank at or near the bottom of every educational and economic indicator (National Indian Education Association, 2004). Regardless of the centuries-long collision with European civilization (Bordewich, 1996), American Indians were discovering ways to preserve their traditional way of life, while learning to survive in two worlds.

While one can easily cite statistics and "broad-brush" pictures of the struggles (and occasional successes) Indians have had with the nation's educational system, greater insight into the issue can be gained by exploring the survival story of a Yankton Dakota woman**:** Ella Cara Deloria. Deloria epitomizes how "Indians in America" navigated the higher education system. She found a balance between her formal training and her traditional upbringing. In her book, *(Native American Woman: a perspective),* Bea Medicine (1978) writes that Deloria:]…

> produced a definitive dictionary …, provided [a] thorough description of traditional social organization and religious life, edited and translated texts dictated by various storytellers, and composed commentaries and annotations to these texts. At the same time, she honored her family obligations as a Dakota woman and left a lasting legacy for scholars and for the culture that had sustained her. (p. 49)

In 1889, Deloria was born to a prominent Dakota family (i.e., her grandfather was a tribal leader; her father a deacon in the Episcopal mission church; her nephew is the historian

Vine Deloria, Jr.). Her Episcopal upbringing and strong ties to her Dakota heritage were two great influences on her personal and professional development. Preparing to become a teacher, she enrolled first at Oberlin College in 1910 and then at Columbia Teachers College in 1913. While at Columbia, she met and later began work for the preeminent anthropologist of the time, Franz Boas, first as a translator and later as a field researcher studying the language and culture of her own people. Her collaboration with Boas, and later with his student Ruth Benedict, continued until his death in 1942 and Benedict's death in 1948, and resulted in Deloria's production of a number of valuable published and unpublished manuscripts--all concerning aspects of Dakota language, storytelling, and social relationships (Murray, 1974; Medicine, 1988).

Deloria was a remarkable individual, one of comparatively few Indians who managed to succeed in the American educational system. Countless other stories could be told of Indian students who dropped out of high school, left community colleges, liberal arts schools, or universities, or who simply succumbed to the many escape routes open to the culturally disenfranchised: drugs, alcohol, low-paying employment, suicide, rage, poverty, and homelessness.

In the late 1960s, Indian leaders recognized that the American educational system was failing their students and they took steps to assert greater control over the education of their students, steps that would make formal education more supportive and nurturing rather than treading curious minds underfoot, steps which led to the creation of what are now known as “Tribal Colleges and Universities” (see Appendix A). Rick Williams, President of the American Indian College Fund, states that tribal colleges “are changing

the history of Indian education in America. This is our legacy" (AICF, 2003, pg. 4). This study will describe and analyze the perceptions of tribal college students and contribute to a deeper understanding of educational persistence at tribally controlled community colleges in Indian country.

Tribally Controlled Community Colleges

Tribally controlled community colleges would not exist but for the support of tribal councils and tribal communities. This support came in the form of tribal charters, which articulated the necessity of preserving tribal culture, language, and history (Stein, 1992). In other words, tribes want tribal colleges to find the balance between cultural integrity and academic excellence. The Navajo Tribe took the first momentous step toward educational self-determination of Indians by establishing Navajo Community College (now Diné College) in 1968. Diné College, the oldest and largest, set a precedent for the creation of additional tribally controlled community colleges.

Tribal colleges have a dual mission: to rebuild, reinforce, and explore traditional tribal cultures using unique curricula and institutional settings; and to address Western models of learning by providing courses in traditional disciplines that are transferable to four-year institutions (HeavyRunner, Murray, and Shanley, 2003). All of this is accomplished in the midst of insurmountable economic and social challenges. For instance, tribal colleges have been forced to operate from make-shift facilities—empty trailers, converted warehouses, abandoned buildings and the like. Most tribal colleges are located on economically depressed, isolated Indian reservations that face unemployment rates ranging from 45 to 90% (AIHEC, 1999; Boyer, 1997; Karger &

Stoez, 1998), high alcohol related deaths, and suicide rates twice that of any other racial or ethnic minority group (O'Brien, 1992). Although unnoticed and chronically underfunded, tribal colleges have survived (AICF, 2005, AIHEC, 1999).

In 1972, the presidents of the nation's first six tribal colleges founded the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC). Today, AIHEC has grown to represent 36 colleges in the United States and one Canadian institution (see Appendix A). AIHEC's mission is to support the work of these 37 colleges and the national movement for tribal self-determination. AIHEC's objectives are to: (a) maintain commonly held standards of quality in American Indian education, (b) support the development of new tribally controlled colleges, (c) promote and assist in the development of legislation to support American Indian higher education, and (d) encourage greater participation by American Indians in the development of higher education policy (AIHEC, 2004). Muscogee National Tribal College (OK) and llisagvik College (AK) are among the newest institutional members of AIHEC. The progress that Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) have made in preparing students for success in life has led to increases in funding from $38.1 million in FY 2001 to $48.6 million in FY 2004 (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2004). All but four of the TCUs are on reservations. Most offer two-year associate degrees; however, eight have grown to add four-year, baccalaureate degree programs and five have master degree programs (AICF, 2003).

These institutions of higher education play a vital role in helping to mitigate the effects of the legacy of misaligned federal acculturation policies and mismanagement of

tribal resources (AIHEC, 2000). Within this context, this study will explore the "lived" experiences of students, staff, and faculty at Fort Peck Community College.

Fort Peck Community College

The Fort Peck Sioux and Assiniboine Tribal Executive Board officially chartered Fort Peck Community College in 1978. The college received accreditation in 1991 from the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges. The college serves the constituency of the reservation population by maintaining vocational and technical programs based on the needs of the people living on and near the reservation and on potential employment opportunities available in the region.

Statement of the Problem

The lack of research on retention in tribal colleges, and the importance of developing a grounded theory on student persistence, provides the rationale for this study. To establish the need for this study, it is necessary to understand the complex pattern of participation by American Indian students in higher education. The lack of research on tribal college student retention creates a void in knowing where to begin to improve outcomes for tribal college students. This study is designed to explore the "lived" experiences of tribal college students regarding how they believe they came to "persist" in a tribal college setting, and to generate a theory of persistence grounded in students' stories.

As with other ethnic or minority groups, American Indians' participation in higher education is a complex picture. Although the proportion of American Indian students who participate in higher education is slightly higher than their representation in the

nation's total population, American Indian student enrollment remains low. Thus, the parity in this instance is very evident (see Table 1 in Chapter 2, which shows that American Indians compose 0.9% of the American population and that American Indian enrollment is 1% of total student enrollment). Of the more than 14.2 million students in the nation's colleges and universities, only 145,500 are American Indian (all statistics are drawn from *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2001). African American and Hispanic students participate below parity, but far greater numbers of these students attend college than do American Indians (see Table 1). The fine distinctions between parity and achievement are important because the presence of a significant number of co-ethnics on any campus leads to greater individual success in terms of retention and college satisfaction (Tinto, 1997).

A close look at patterns of participation of American Indian students reveals areas of additional concern as well as evidence of success. According to *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (2001), during academic year 1997-98, American Indian students received only 0.6% of the bachelor's degrees, 0.5% of the master's degrees and 0.4% of the doctoral degrees awarded (see Table 2 in Chapter 2). Furthermore, a study of the educational progression of freshmen admitted in 1989-1990 indicated that only 15.8% of American Indian students who began their college careers received their bachelor's degree by 1994 and only 11.9% received their associate's degree. However, there are strong signs of improvement. For instance, the number of American Indian students enrolling in higher education has been rising each year since 1976. In addition, in the past several years, American Indians' patterns of attendance in sectors of higher

education have shifted from majority enrollment in two-year colleges to majority enrollment in four-year colleges and universities (50.4%). This shift may signify the success of transfer for tribal college students to four-year mainstream institutions.

Part of the higher education enrollment picture includes the 30,000 students who choose to begin their college careers at a tribal college. This choice is appropriate for students who wish to, or need to, remain close to home, who value culturally relevant higher education, and who find the low cost of tribal colleges attractive (Wright, 1989). Tribal colleges have experienced a continuous increase in their student enrollment over the past three decades.

In 1981, tribal college student enrollment was 1,689; one year later it reached 2,100, and by 1982 it was almost *seven times* that many, with an enrollment of 13,800 (representing 14% of the total number of American Indian students enrolled in higher education). By 1996, enrollment reached 24,363 undergraduate students and 260 graduate students (AIHEC, 1999). Enrollment continued to climb rapidly, and many tribal colleges are struggling to keep up with the growing demand (Boyer, 1997a). More than 30,000 students attend Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), up from 2,000 since the 1980s (AICF, 2003). Despite inadequate federal funding, geographic isolation, and the lack of state-of-the art facilities, enrollment continues to increase for tribal colleges. The following vignette describes some of the obstacles tribal college students face, but with the help of caring staff, faculty, and community they continue to persevere:

> Betty began attending classes after she was divorced. She lived about 30 miles from the tribal college campus. Betty excelled and made the honor roll every

> semester she attended. During the fall semester, her car broke down and she could not afford to fix it. She also became ill and missed two weeks of class. Her ex-husband refused to give her any financial support and she was nearly evicted from her home because she had no money to pay rent. Betty went to the counselor and said she intended to withdraw from college. The counselor suggested that she not withdraw until she could speak to her instructors. Later, Betty went to the counselor to report that the instructors had gone to their church congregations and asked for donations to help her get a car. They were able to get enough money so Betty could buy a used car. As she told her story to the counselor, Betty was so overcome by their concern that she could not stop crying. Thanks to two caring instructors, Betty continued to do well in her classes and graduated in 2000. (B.F., personal communication, April 20, 2000)

Many tribal college students begin classes with good intentions and high expectations. Unfortunately, for more than half who enroll, these expectations of completing a college degree and finding a better life are not realized. Students bring with them the baggage of many years of failure—failed marriages, and relationships, periods of unemployment and welfare dependency, and, for some, histories of drug and alcohol addiction (Bowker, 1992; O'Brien, 1992; HeavyRunner, Murray, and Shanley, 2003). Experiences in college often include difficulties concerning how to balance family and social responsibilities as well as academic challenges that their pre-college experiences have not prepared them for. Enrolling in college represents a new beginning, but to improve

outcomes, we must learn more about how students perceive their ability to persist regardless of past failures.

Student retention is one of the most challenging issues facing higher education today. As the literature indicates, there are serious adverse consequences for individuals, families, and communities when students fail to complete their educational programs. Therefore, it is imperative that we strengthen our understanding of the complex picture of tribal college student retention.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to develop a theory on educational persistence grounded in the stories of tribal college students. The theory will emerge from the stories of students and how they believe they came to persist in the tribal college setting. The intent is to offer a useful perspective to administrators, policy-makers, and tribal leaders as they seek to improve retention rates for tribal college students.

Research Questions

In the tradition of qualitative research, the research questions are broad in nature and form a basis for the focus group questioning route. The development of the research questions drew from the work of Vincent Tinto (1993) and the student departure framework describing the key concepts of *membership* and *integration.* They also drew from the four types of grounded theory questions by Strauss & Corbin (1998): sensitizing, theoretical, practical/structural, and guiding. Finally, the focus group questions were developed using Richard Krueger's (1998) principles: asking questions in

a conversational manner, clear questions, getting feedback, allowing sufficient time to develop, and what works is right.

The research questions are exploratory and seek to discover the meaning tribal college students attach to integration, how they interpret community and college situations, and their perspectives on issues related to cultural memberships (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Woods, 1999).

Exploratory Questions:

1. What is it like for tribal college students to manage the integration of academic, social, and cultural responsibilities?
2. How do community and college memberships influence educational persistence for tribal college students?

The research questions are supported by the following focus group questions:

a. What changes have you noticed in yourself since attending the tribal college? (Probe: holistic--mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical)
b. What role does your culture play in your educational experience? (Probe: cultural values, beliefs, attitudes, practices)
c. What challenges did you encounter in regards to your tribal identity while attending the tribal college? (Probe: isolation, conflicts, kinship, language, and interests)
d. What are your family responsibilities? How do you manage being a full-time student with family responsibilities? (Probe: adjustment, balance, awareness)
e. When you hear the word persistence, what comes to mind? In your language, how would you translate this word persistence? (Probe: speakers only)

f. Which academic activities posed the greatest challenges for you? (Probe: admissions, counseling, advising, academic programs, classrooms, student life)
g. Describe the academic activities that have provided the most positive experiences for you? (Probe: faculty, staff, programs, classrooms, tutors, mentors, etc.)
h. Describe the ideal classroom environment that you felt was supportive to you? (Probe: unsupportive classroom environment)
i. What have faculty done to support your educational goals? What have faculty done that was *not* supportive of your educational goals? (Probe: staff)
j. What social activities/events have you participated in? What was this experience like for you? (Probe: student organizations, extra-curricular, cultural activities)
k. Were you ever at the point of giving up attending college? If so, what helped you deal with this challenge?
l. What did you do to overcome obstacles? Who helped you?
m. What can be done to help students be persistent and successful in tribal colleges?

Definition of Terms

American Indian: the terms Native American, American Indian, Native, and Indian are used interchangeably throughout this paper. These remain the most common forms of identification for the indigenous peoples of the lower 48 states (Boyer, 1997a).

American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC): in the United States and Canada. A central organization founded in 1972 by six tribally controlled community colleges to mobilize a concerted effort to deal with common challenges. AIHEC is now a

cooperatively sponsored effort on the part of 35 member institutions known as TCUs and serves over 30,000 students from more than 250 tribal nations.

American Indian College Fund (AICF): refers to the nation's largest provider of privately funded Indian scholarships. Created in 1989, the FUND supports primarily tribally controlled colleges. Based in Denver, CO, the College Fund also supports tribal college programs in Indian teacher training, facilities construction, and cultural preservation.

Analytic Induction: refers to an approach to collecting and analyzing data as well as a way to develop theory (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

Coding: refers to the analytic processes through which data are fractured, conceptualized, and integrated to form a theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Conceptual Ordering: refers to organizing (and sometimes rating) data according to a selective and specified set of properties and their dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Constant Comparative Method: refers to a process that supports the discovery of important categories, identifying the properties of those categories and relationships between categories, extension of discovered categories to higher levels of conceptualization or abstraction, and the arrangement of those categories in relation to each other (Locke, 2001).

Epistemology: the study of the nature, methods, and limits of knowledge. For many social workers and family therapists, the term means how we know what we know (Barker, 1999).

Focus Group: refers to a special type of group in terms of purpose, size, composition, and procedure. The purpose of focus groups is to listen and gather information (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Fort Peck Community College (FPCC): refers to an institution of higher education, which has been formally chartered by the Fort Peck Sioux & Assiniboine Tribes since 1973. Its principal mission is to provide comprehensive academic and vocational education that is culturally relevant to the tribe and community.

Grounded Theory: refers to the systematic inductive guidelines for collecting and analyzing data to build middle-range theoretical frameworks that explain collected data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Indian Country: refers to all land within the limits of any Indian reservation under the jurisdiction of the United States Government, notwithstanding the issuance of any patent, and, including rights-of-way running through the reservation; all dependent Indian communities within the borders of the United States whether within the original or subsequently acquired territory thereof, and whether within or without the limits of a state, and all Indian allotments, the Indian titles to which have not been extinguished, including rights-of-way running through the same (Code of Federal Regulations, Title 18, Part I, Chapter 53, Section 1151).

Indian Student Count (ISC): is the same as full time equivalent, except the term refers only to legally enrolled members of any federally recognized tribe of American Indians, enrolled in at least 12 credits (AIHEC, [federal register publication defined by the Bureau

of Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior and distributed to the tribal colleges along with request for Annual Reporting Information], 2002).

Indian Tribe: the term used to describe a group of Indian people of common custom, language, and ancestry. The term is used to identify those Indian tribal groups who still view themselves as separate distinct nations within the greater boundaries of the United States. They believe in tribal sovereignty and jurisdiction for themselves separate from state governments, based upon treaties they have made with the federal government (Boyer, 1989a).

Ontology: refers to the nature of reality. It is the most general branch of metaphysics, concerned with the nature of being.

Inductive Reasoning: refers to the process by which theories and generalizations are evolved from a set of particular observations. Specific observations may be chosen to create explanations about a larger set of phenomena (Barker, 1999).

Phenomenological Approach: refers to researchers in the phenomenological mode attempting to understand the meaning of events and interactions among ordinary people in particular situations (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

Purposive Sampling: refers to the selection of a sample of observations that one believes will yield the most comprehensive understanding of the subject of study, based on the intuitive feel for the subject that comes from extended observation and reflection (Rubin & Babbie, 1997).

Theory: refers to a set of well-developed concepts related through statements of relationship, which together constitute an integrated framework that can be used to explain or predict a particular phenomenon.

Theoretical Sampling: refers to sampling on the basis of emerging concepts, with the aim being to explore the dimensional range or varied conditions along which the properties of concepts vary (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Tribally Controlled Community College Act of 1978: refers to the federal authorization of Tribal Colleges and Universities to exist under tribal jurisdiction. Funds are based on the Indian Student Count (ISC) and appropriated annually by Congress.

Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs): refers to the 35 tribal colleges in the U.S. and Canada that are accredited and located either on or near a federally recognized Indian reservation.

Delimits and Limitations

This section provides a description of the focus of the study, identifies what will and will not be accomplished by this research, and specifies the generalizability of findings. The anticipated result of this research, from a tribal college perspective, is a grounded theory on educational persistence. The theoretical framework of this grounded theory is drawn from Tinto's (1993) model. The concepts of *membership* and *integration* underlying Tinto's (1993) research presents a cogent synthesis of the rights of passage study (Van Gennep, 1960) and the theory on suicide (Durkhiem, 1951) with respect to student departure.

This study is limited in scope in terms of the research sample and the specific research site selected. The research sample will be limited to full-time, second-year students that are of Native American or First Nation (Canada) descendants. In addition, only full-time Native or non-Native staff and faculty were selected as focus group participants. Finally, the selected research site, Fort Peck Community College, is representative, compared to the other 37 tribal colleges, in terms of location, high unemployment rates, and student enrollment.

It is important to note the limitations associated with this study. Even though tribal college students were carefully recruited to reflect the demographic characteristics of the student population being examined, these focus groups only included the opinions of a small number of students. Those who seek to use the results may examine the focus group procedures, methods, and analysis, and then decide to what degree this study might be applied to their situation (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Significance of Study

Only 20 to 30% of all students who leave college before graduating do so because they are unable or unwilling to meet the minimum academic standards of the institution (Tinto, 1997). There are many reasons why students leave college. This study will describe and analyze the perceptions of tribal college students and how they believe they came to persist at a tribal college.

First, this study will be significant not only to tribal colleges, but also to mainstream institutions that serve American Indian students, particularly those students that transfer from tribal colleges. A theory on educational persistence, derived from

tribal college students, faculty, and staff, can offer invaluable insight through the examination of culture, language, family, and community (holistic perspective).

Second, this study will enhance the understanding and practice of tribal college personnel that provide direct support services to students and their families. This study holds the potential to inform staff, faculty, and administrators of the practices that best tap into the family, community, and college factors that enhance educational persistence for tribal college students.

Finally, this study will provide a meaningful guide to action for policy makers, administrators, and tribal leaders interested in improving outcomes for tribal college students. In the past, tribal colleges made enormous efforts to apply retention theories that were not grounded in the lived experiences of their students. This study provides a phenomenological perspective utilizing the concepts of *integration* and *membership* from Tinto's (1993) student departure theory to capture the students' voices and to develop an indigenous theory of educational persistence, which is "grounded" in the stories of tribal college students. Therefore, the theory is not a true grounded theory, rather, a theory grounded in the voices of American Indian students attending a tribal college.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the sections are organized around a brief synopsis of Indian education in America, the resilient story of Ella Cara Deloria, the birth of the tribal college movement, the founding of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), a brief introduction to Fort Peck Community College, the statement of the

problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, definition of terms, delimits and limitations, and the significance of the study.

The brief synopsis of Indian education in America provides an introduction to early colonial reservation day schools, prestigious east coast “Indian colleges” and the boarding school. This synopsis sets the context for understanding the conflict between Western methods of teaching and learning and tribal students trying to preserve their traditional ways of knowing.

Next, the story of Ella Cara Deloria was explored to gain a deeper insight into how American Indians in the 20th century navigated the higher education system. Her story epitomizes the challenge American Indian students encountered in mainstream institutions of higher education. Regardless, she persevered and became the first Dakota woman to graduate from Columbia Teachers College.

The chapter chronicles the birth of tribally controlled community colleges and how Indian leaders recognized that the American educational system was failing their students and how they began to assert greater control over the education of their youth. In 1972, the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) was founded by the original six tribal colleges. AIHEC has grown to represent a total of 37 Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) across the United States and one in the province of Alberta Canada. This study takes place at Fort Peck Community College, located on the Fort Sioux and Assiniboine Indian Reservation in Montana. This chapter concludes with a detailed statement of the problem, purpose of the study, the two research questions and

specific focus group questions, definition of terms, delimits and limitations, and concludes with the significance of this study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature as a means of laying the foundation for the methodological approach used to generate a theory on persistence for tribal college students. This chapter contains supportive ideas, concepts, facts, and research necessary to understand the historical and cultural experiences of American Indian students in higher education. Although the issue of student retention continues to grow in importance for mainstream institutions, very little research exists concerning the retention of American Indian students within tribally controlled colleges.

The references represent a thorough and exhaustive review of the literature. However, because *emergence* is the foundation of the grounded theory approach to theory building, Glaser and Strauss (1998) suggest not letting the literature hinder, constrain, or stifle the creativity of generating a theory. This methodology has the ability to generate a theory that is solidly grounded in data. The literature review is organized with respect to culture, history, language, values, and knowledge, which together serves as a foundational framework from which theory can emerge.

This chapter examines the relevant literature pertinent to student retention, with a focus on American Indian students. The first section of the chapter constructs a framework around the cultural issues in American Indian higher education. The subject of the second section is the historical development of Tribal Colleges and Universities. The third section of the chapter is focused on the value of student retention within tribally controlled colleges. The final section introduces the theory on student departure, which

initially informed the development of the research questions for this study, and concludes with past theories of student departure.

Review of American Indian Higher Education

Historically, the goals of the colonial education of American Indians have been to transform Indian people and their societies and to eradicate Indian self-government, self-determination and self-education (Lomawaima, 1999). In fact, we have just begun to recognize the oppressive role colonization theory has played in the social, political and economic hardships faced by indigenous peoples (Yellowbird & Chenault, 1999). Yet, even the most severely eroded Indian community today still has a substantial fragment of the old ways left, and these ways are found in the Indian family. Even the badly shattered families preserve enough elements of kinship so that whatever the experiences of the young, there is a sense that life has some unifying principles that can be discerned through experience and that guide behavior (Deloria and Wildcat, 2001). A supportive family often accompanies student success. Equally, a student's family in crisis can be deeply disturbing and distracting (HeavyRunner, Murray, and Shanley, 2003).

It is through this cultural lens that we begin to address the issues of colonization, assimilation, and paternalism. A significant challenge accompanying these phenomena is the remarkable diversity in Native America, which encompasses hundreds of communities with distinct languages, cultures, philosophies, and educational systems (Lomawaima, 1999). Higher education educators, administrators, and policymakers must understand the causes, dynamics, and consequences of oppression in the life of American Indians students pursuing degrees (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Van Soest & Garcia, 2003). The original leaders of the tribal college movement recognized the importance of

understanding these phenomena and fostered among themselves the awareness that tribal colleges could strengthen the Indian family and community without forcing students to accept acculturation.

The centuries of early colonial education (1500-1800) of American Indians took many forms. In 1512, the Laws of Burgos (Spanish rule), had only a few Indian leaders' sons entrusted to Franciscan missionaries for four years of formal training. By and large, the Laws of Burgos functioned to legitimize forced labor and assimilation (Utter, 1993). In 1568, a school was established in Havana, Cuba that began a long history of colonial education for Indian children (O'Brien, 1989). At the simplest level, colonists took Indian children into their homes and educated them in the way of Euro-American civilization. Benefactors of institutions such as Harvard University, William and Mary College, and Dartmouth College, are alleged to have recognized the value of extending education to American Indians. In 1650, Harvard University accepted the Indian College from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Among the Heathens, agreeing to educate 25 Indian students per year. William and Mary College (chartered in 1693) also had an Indian College as part of its original mission (Noley, 1993), as did the nation's ninth oldest college and the last institution of higher learning established under colonial rule, Dartmouth College (chartered in 1769), which was originally established to educate American Indians (Stein, 1992; Swisher & Tippiconnic, 1999).

The history of Indian education in America is usually described in the language of oppression, assimilation, and hopelessness. Oppression is defined as a situation in which one segment of the population acts to prevent another segment from attaining access to resources or which acts to inhibit or devalue them in order to dominate them (Bulhan,

1985). As a result of oppression, Indian education in America has been filled with images of American politicians, missionaries, isolated boarding schools, and flawed government policies (Hoxie, 1984). Congress blithely and arrogantly dictated what would happen in Indian country and neither the Indians nor the federal government agencies that served them had much to say about it (Deloria, 1985).

At first contact, there were more than 200 distinctive American Indian groups, with a population of 10 million in North America and 10s of millions in the rest of the hemisphere. By about 1850, only about 200,000 American Indians remained in North America, and the high cultures of Meso-America had been wiped from the earth (Dobyns, 1966). In contrast, American Indians now make up about 2.3 million of the United States population (U.S. Census, 2000). It is a tribute to their adaptability and resilience that tribes have survived.

During the assimilation era, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) literally took charge of Indian life. The BIA looked upon itself as the parent and regarded Indians as children, deciding what was best for them and forcing their compliance (O'Brien, 1989). Paternalism is defined as a principle of authority in which one person or institution manages the affairs of another (Barker, 1999). This term is often used to describe the BIA, which carries out the federal responsibility for the education of American Indians. For example, in 1860, the first BIA school opened on the Yakima Indian Reservation in Washington state. By the turn of the century, the BIA was operating 147 reservation day schools, 81 reservation boarding schools, and 25 off-reservation boarding schools for American Indians in various parts of the country (McNickle, 1978; Hoxie, 1984; Utter, 1993; Adams, 1995).

At the end of the treaty period, new attempts were made to bring colonial education to American Indians. This was done in post-secondary education with the Hampton Normal and Industrial Institute (1878-1923). During its 45-year lifespan, Hampton opened its doors to more than 1,300 Indian students from 65 different tribes. By mid-1879, Richard Henry Pratt had secured permission to use a deserted military base in central Pennsylvania for the Carlisle Indian Industrial School (1879-1918). In the 39-year history of Carlisle, 10,000 Indian children were recruited from reservations across the United States. In addition, Haskell Institute (established in 1884 and presently known as Haskell Indian Nations University) was founded in Lawrence, Kansas and the Croatan Normal School (now known as University of North Carolina at Pembroke) was founded in North Carolina in 1887. Very little true higher learning transpired in any of these institutions until the early 20th century (Haymond, 1982; Stein, 1992).

Over the past three decades, a renaissance has been witnessed in American Indian education through the expansion of tribal involvement, resurgence of tribal languages, and the birth of the tribal college movement (Boyer, 1989; Boyer, 1997a) Benham & Stein, 2003). Today, hardly a thought is voiced in the area of Indian policy without first consulting a wide variety of Indian people. At last, the process of formulating the federal government's posture toward Indians has changed substantially and definitely for the better in almost every instance (Deloria, 1985).

At the heart of these images is a renewed understanding of the legal status and governmental powers of the nation's sovereign tribes, particularly as it relates to American Indian education. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor articulated the status of Indian tribes when she stated, "Today in the United States, we have three types

of sovereign entities—the Federal government, the States, and the Indian tribes. Each has its own judicial system, and each plays an important role in the administration of justice in this country" (O'Connor, 1997, p. 1).

This unique legal relationship between Indian tribes and the federal government is set forth in the U.S. Constitution, federal statutes, treaties, and court decisions. Generally, the Indian Commerce Clause in the Constitution is recognized as acknowledging the broad federal authority and special trust responsibility the United States has over Indian affairs. Although the primary responsibility for public education is reserved respectively to the states, the education of Indian children is an exception, as it is viewed as a federal responsibility (Bureau of Indian Affairs, Department of Interior, 2004). The federal government carries out this responsibility through the BIA and through education legislation that targets federally recognized tribes. Given this complex situation, it is necessary for educators to have a general understanding of the federal government's trust responsibility to tribal entities.

A critical examination of trust responsibility unearths many promises for American Indians and their education. For example, the Northwest Ordinance Act of 1787 pledged to provide appropriate education for American Indians. Article III of the act states, "Religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, Schools and the means of education shall be forever encouraged" (Northwest Ordinance, 1787, pg.50 . This was the beginning of the government's historical policy of trying to "civilize" the American Indian. Civilization meant conversion to Christianity, learning to read and write, developing agricultural skills, and adopting "white" values (Utter, 1993; Juneau, 2001; Lomawaima, 1999). In

fact, for many centuries whites scorned the knowledge of American Indians, regarding it as gross, savage superstitions and insisting that the white view of the world--a complex mixture of folklore, religious doctrine, and Greek natural sciences--was the highest intellectual achievement of the species (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001).

This perspective held dominance in Indian education until recently, due to the fact that the number of American Indians becoming educated—and being heard—is increasing (Boyer, 1989). Furthermore, this group is challenging the notions of oppression, assimilation and cultural bias by acknowledging the complexity of colonization and self-determination, by tolerating the contradictions of power and privilege, and by providing a critical appraisal of empirical evidence and indigenous ways of knowing (Gilbert & Terrell, 2001; Van Soest & Garcia, 2001; Cajete, 2001). For these reasons, Indian educators and the general higher education community need to find answers to fundamental questions concerning underrepresentation, achievement, and retention of American Indian students in higher education.

Of the more than 14.2 million students in our nation's colleges and universities, only 145,300 are American Indian (see Table 1, which shows that American Indians compose 0.9% of the American population and that Indian student enrollment is 1.0% of total student enrollment). African American and Hispanic students participate below parity, but far greater numbers of these students attend college than do American Indians (*The Chronicle of Higher Education,* 2001). In fact, the majority of the retention research on minority students in higher education focuses mainly on African American and Hispanic students. Because the presence of a significant number of minorities on campus leads to greater individual success in terms of retention and student satisfaction

with college, the fine distinctions between parity and achievement of critical mass are important (Tinto, 1997).

Table 1

Participation in Two- and Four-Year Institutions, by Ethnic Group

Ethnic Group	Two-Year Institution	Four-Year Institution	Total Population	Total Student Population/Enrollment
American Indian	72,100 (49.6)	73,400 (50.4)	(0.9)	145,300 (1.0)
Asian American	355,800 (39)	553,900 (61)	(3.6)	909,700 (6.0)
African American	687,700 (41)	962,000 (59)	(12.3)	1,640,700 (11.5)
Hispanic	735,100 (55.8)	581,400 (44.2)	(12.5)	1,316,600 (9.2)
White	3,670,400 (35.8)	6,592,200 (64.2)	(75.1)	10,262,500 (71.9)
Total	5,512,100 (38.6)	8,762,700 (61.4)		14,274,800 (38.7)

Note. Foreign students were not included in the analysis. Percentage of ethnic group distribution in percentages.

A close look at patterns of participation of American Indian students reveals areas of additional concern as well as evidence of success (Ortiz & HeavyRunner, 2003). As shown in Table 2, American Indians received only 0.6% of the bachelor's degrees, 0.5% of the master's degrees, and 0.4% of the doctoral degrees awarded in the United States in academic year 1997-1998 (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2001).

A study of the educational progression of freshmen admitted in 1989-1990 indicate that only 15.8% of American Indian students who began their college careers received their bachelor's degree by 1994 and only 11.9% received their associate's

degree. In addition, in the past several years, American Indian patterns of attendance in sectors of higher education have shifted from majority enrollment in two-year colleges to majority enrollment in four-year colleges and universities (*The Chronicle of Higher Education,* 2001). This shift may signify the success of tribally controlled colleges offering four-year degrees or encouraging American Indian students to transfer to four-year mainstream institutions (Ortiz & HeavyRunner, 2003).

Table 2

Degrees Conferred in 1997-1998, by Ethnic Group

Ethnic Group	Associate Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Doctorate Degree	Professional Degree
American Indian	6,200 (1.0)	7,894 (0.6)	2,049 (0.5)	187 (0.4)	561 (0.7)
Asian American	25,047 (4.4)	71,592 (6.0)	21,088 (4.9)	2,334 (5.0)	7,712 (9.8)
African American	55,008 (9.8)	98,132 (8.2)	30,097 (7.0)	2,066 (4.4)	5,483 (6.9)
Hispanic	45,627 (8.2)	65,937 (5.6)	16,215 (3.8)	1,270 (2.7)	3,547 (4.5)
White	411,336 (73.6)	900,317 (76.0)	307,587 (71.5)	28,747 (62.5)	59,273 (75.4)

Note: Percentages of total degree category in parentheses.

Another piece of the picture includes the participation of women and older students in higher education, which has changed quite dramatically over the past 20 years. For instance, in fall 1996, 56% of the undergraduates at all public institutions were women, as compared to 64% at tribal colleges (U.S. Department of Education, 1990-1997). In fact, from the beginning of the tribal college movement in the 1960s, most

tribal college students have been older and most have been women; the typical tribal college student is often described as a single mother in her early 30s (American Indian College Fund, 2000). Additionally, even with the recent surge of interest in retention, we still know relatively little about the specific attributes of attrition among older women.

After reviewing numerous retention studies on American Indian students attending mainstream colleges and universities (Falk & Aitken, 1984; Huffman, Sill, and Brokenleg, 1986; Lin, LaCounte, and Eder, 1988; Hoover & Jacobs, 1992; Benjamin, Chambers, and Rieterman, 1993; Pavel & Padilla, 1993; Tate & Schwartz, 1993; Dodd, Garcia, Meccage, and Nelson, 1995; Brown & Robinson Kurpius, 1997), none reported that prior enrollment at a tribal college was a retention factor. According to Boyer (1997b), "American Indian students who attend a tribal college before transferring to a four-year institution are *four times* more likely to complete a four-year degree than those who enter a mainstream institution as a freshman" (p. 34).

Tribal colleges serve over a third of all American Indian students enrolled in 2-year colleges. While tribal colleges confront problems with funding, jurisdiction, and governance (Stein, 1992), tribal college students face problems of equal complexity. An estimated 90% are first-generation college students, 85% live below the poverty level, and 100% live in poor communities. Thus, poverty contributes largely to the difficulties students and their families face, though other struggles include learning to successfully balance academic, family, and community responsibilities, as well as dealing with challenges that stem from inadequate pre-college academic training (American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 1999; Ortiz & HeavyRunner, 2003; HeavyRunner, Murray, and Shanley, 2003).

Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities

The tribal college movement began nearly four decades ago in order to make the U.S. higher education system more responsive to the needs of American Indians. Tribal leaders realized that only through local, culturally based, and holistic methods could many American Indians succeed in higher education (White House Initiative on Tribal Colleges and Universities, 1999). Actually, 40 years is a relatively brief period of time to achieve the task of founding a community-controlled college and even more challenging is the task of maintaining such an institution (Benham & Stein, 2003). In fact, all Indian-controlled colleges share the common goal of cultural understanding and tribal development, but there is diversity in educational philosophy from college to college and each curriculum reflects the priorities of that tribe. Each Indian-controlled college focuses on the needs of its own community and provides educational opportunities to students who choose to remain on the reservation (Boyer, 1989). For example, in 1973, the Fort Peck Tribal Executive Board chartered Fort Peck Community College (FPCC) with the following educational philosophy/mission:

> To meet the unique educational needs of Indian people, FPCC believes that the opportunity for higher education must be provided on the reservation. Since many of the people choose not to leave their homeland, it is necessary that education be brought to them. FPCC is committed to preserving Indian culture, history, beliefs, and to perpetuate them among the Indian people of all ages. FPCC promotes self-awareness through education necessary to build a career, a lifestyle, and to achieve a true sense of self-pride. Although FPCC does not deny

anyone the opportunity for higher education, the institution's primary purpose is to serve the American Indian population of the Fort Peck Reservation.

> FPCC serves the people of the Fort Peck Reservation and northeastern Montana as a medium of Indian awareness, enabling increased self-awareness. The College offers an academic program that enables students to earn credits designed to transfer to other post-secondary institutions of higher education. The College serves the constituency of the reservation populations by maintaining programs based on the needs of the people living on and near the reservation and on potential employment opportunities available in the region. The College serves the people by initiating and supporting community activities and organizations based on the needs and wishes of community members. (p. 1)

Tribal colleges are probably the most significant development in American Indian communities since World War II and are often described as small tenacious institutions that serve the smallest and poorest minority group in the United States (AIHEC, 1999; Stein, 1992). Today, more than 30,000 students attend 37 Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) in the United States and Canada (see Appendix A). This success is demonstrated by the colleges' designation in 1994 as land-grant institutions, referred to as Public Law 103-382; the 1996 Executive Order, which mandated that all federal agencies develop strategic plans to increase services and resources to tribal colleges; and the $22 million W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Native American Higher Education Initiative (NAHEI) to strengthen and improve tribal colleges and other higher education institutions (Boyer 1997b; Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999; Benham & Stein, 2003).

In 1973, six tribal colleges (Diné College, Oglala Lakota College, Sinte Gleska University, Sitting Bull College, Turtle Mountain Community College, and DQ University) founded the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC). Although AIHEC was created primarily to stabilize the financial base, advocate politically, and provide technical assistance (Ambler, 2002), it has matured into an effective voice dedicated to promoting interests, concepts, and requirements of this diverse group of institutions on the national stage (AICF, 2003).

The main AIHEC office is located in Washington, DC, which allows the TCUs to learn about and take part in a wide range of government-funded programs sponsored by departments as diverse as Defense and Agriculture. Out of necessity, the TCU administrators and staff have become among the most politically aware in higher education (Boyer, 1997a). AIHEC speaks with one unified voice supporting the hopes and dreams of American Indian students attending tribally controlled colleges, which Dr. Henrietta Mann refers to as miracles of persistence, places of hope, and symbols of the enduring spirit (Benham & Stein, 2003).

In 1978, AIHEC succeeded in convincing Congress to pass the Tribally Controlled Community College Act to provide core funding for qualifying institutions, though the colleges still struggle to get the institutional support authorized by Congress. In fiscal year 2002, tribal colleges received only $3,900 per student, compared with the $6,000 authorized, which is far below the amount used by other colleges (Ambler, 2002). Currently, most tribal colleges receive little or no funding from state governments, as states have no obligation to fund them due to their location on federal trust territory (AIHEC, 1999).

In 1989, the AIHEC college presidents established the American Indian College Fund (AICF) primarily to help raise money for scholarships. In addition to scholarships, the Fund also provides capital dollars and endowments to develop facilities and funding for teacher training and cultural preservation programs. Consequently, the cultural preservation efforts have helped preserve indigenous languages, reclaim artifacts, preserve oral tribal histories, and develop American Indian studies classes. Ten years from its inception, the AICF launched a fundraising campaign, Campaign *Sii Ha Sin*, to fulfill its mission of meeting the needs of tribal colleges. This campaign raised nearly $45 million and another $88 million in leveraged funds from private donations and local, state, tribal, and federal governments. As a result, the AICF has been able to disburse approximately $3.6 million in scholarships and program support for the seventh year in a row (AICF, 2000; AICF 2004, AICF, 200, Ambler, 2002).

Today, AIHEC and the AICF support 37 TCUs that serve as stewards of tribal culture, traditions, and language. In addition to the academic programs, they maintain tribal archives, operate tribal museums and libraries, and preserve and teach Native languages. Tribal colleges are gaining prestige in their communities, becoming institutions of first choice, not last chance, for tribal members (Boyer, 1997b; AIHEC, 2003).

Tribal College Student Retention

The reasons American Indian students either drop out or persist in institutions of higher education are varied and complex. The social, academic, and cultural backgrounds of those students play a major role in how they react in a post-secondary environment. In addition to societal, institutional, and family factors that affect student

persistence, individual factors also play an important role (Ness, 2001). American Indian students in higher education have found ways to navigate the higher education journey and find the balance between the individual and professional development. This study is an attempt to understand the deeper meaning students find in their tribal college experience.

After nearly 40 years of work, there have been only a few attempts to formally investigate students' attitudes toward the tribal colleges they attend (Boyer, 1997a). The first student survey, conducted at a tribal college, focused on student attitudes regarding academic programs, support services, instruction, and transfer issues. The study found that tribal colleges were meeting a broad range of students' needs. Furthermore, students were overwhelmingly satisfied with the Native studies programs and basic skill services. In fact, three-fourths of the respondents chose to attend a tribal college because they did not have to leave their community to attend college (Wright, 1989).

In 1995, the Carnegie Foundation commissioned a comprehensive survey that was the first major step toward understanding the background, interests, and future goals of tribal college students. This survey successfully captured student opinions and profiled a population that many in higher education or in the American public knew very little, if anything, about. One of the clearest, most important, findings of the Carnegie Foundation survey was the high regard held by students for their instructors and the quality of instruction. For example, over 94% believed their instructors were accessible outside the classroom, and 96% said their professors appeared to enjoy teaching. In these related questions, truly dissatisfied student represented no more than 1% of the responses (Boyer, 1997a). Rarely do we read about the educational successes of American Indian

students. Too often we get bogged down with negative aspects and overlook the positive experiences (Wenzlaff & Biewer, 1996).

Although the 1,614 respondents from 24 tribal colleges who participated in the Carnegie Survey expressed concern regarding financial resources, inadequate facilities, and rudimentary student services, the survey was—above all—a strong endorsement of the philosophy of education, staff, teachers, and curriculum found at tribal colleges (Boyer, 1997b).

Prior to the large-scale Carnegie Survey, Dr. Carty Monette (1995), President of Turtle Mountain Community College (TMCC), completed the only other investigation of tribal college student opinion, though it was much smaller in scope and ultimately addressed another aspect of retention and graduation at tribal colleges: persistence. Monette surveyed 278 TMCC graduates from 1980-1990 and found that 56% continued their education at a non-Indian college or university and that 32% of these earned four-year degrees. He believed that these rates exceeded the transfer and graduation rates of community colleges across the nation. Additionally, a 1999 AICF alumni survey found that 91% of tribal college graduates become employed or seek a higher degree after having had a successful educational experience at a tribal college (AICF, 2000). While data on tribal college retention and graduation are still missing, there is growing evidence that persistence is rewarded (Boyer, 1997a).

A prime example of this is the story of Renae Merrick, a young diabetic student from Fort Berthold Community College (New Town, North Dakota) who spoke at an AICF event honoring outstanding scholars. Her story revealed her determination to complete her degree while caring for a diabetic father. Through her tears she expressed

her deep feelings for her father and her heartfelt wish to prevent diabetes among her people. She spoke of how challenging this was for her and encouraged other students not to give up. As other students accepted their awards, they talked about how family, faith, and sobriety had inspired them to stay in college (HeavyRunner & Marshall, 2003). Most tribal college students are first-generation, low-income, female, single parents, which are all factors considered to be major causes of student departure from higher education. This study will explore how these students persist despite enormous family, cultural, and academic challenges.

Student Departure Theory

Vincent Tinto (1993), a leading authority on retention, provides an intriguing perspective on the process of student departure. He used Emile Durkhiem's (1951) theory of suicide and Arnold Van Gennep's (1960) study on the rights of passage to discuss the key concepts of *integration* and *membership*. The theory on student departure presents a framework for understanding the compelling link between the process of integration and the importance of creating competent memberships within college communities. The above concepts were used to inform the development of the research questions for this grounded theory study.

Theory of Suicide

Emile Durkhiem's (1951) interest in the study of suicide emerged from his belief that studying suicide patterns would reveal much about the character and problems of the society within which it occurred. It is not our intention to imply that institutional departure necessarily leads to suicide or that it represents a form of suicidal behavior,

rather, suicide and student departure are seen to signal similar forms of rejecting norms regarding the value of persisting in a community (Tinto, 1993).

Durkhiem's theory of suicide identifies three types of suicide: *anomic, altruistic,* and *egoistic*. Anomic suicide involves an imbalance of means and needs, where means are unable to fulfill needs. For example, the Great Depression of 1929 is one of many temporary upheavals associated with this type of suicide. The second type, altruistic suicide, occurs as a result of extreme social integration. Self-sacrifice is the defining trait, where individuals are so integrated into social groups that they lose sight of their individuality and become willing to sacrifice themselves to the group's interests, even if that sacrifice is their own life. The third type, egoistic suicide, occurs as a result of isolation from social groups. Those individuals who are insufficiently bound to social groups are left with little social support and guidance, and therefore tend to commit suicide on an increased basis. For example, unmarried males with less to bind and connect them to social values, traditions, norms, and goals, commit suicide at a higher rate than do married people (Durkhiem, 1951).

Durkhiem maintained that the first two types, though useful in explaining suicide rates, were insufficient in accounting for the continuing characteristic differences in suicide rates that mark most societies. He argued that one had to concern oneself with the character of egoistic suicide in society, and with the social conditions in society, which give rise to its occurrence (Tinto, 1993). Thus, egoistic suicide provides the analogue for our thinking about institutional departure from higher education. As Tinto (1993) stated, this is "not so much because voluntary leaving may be thought of as a form of educational suicide, but because *it highlights the ways in which the social and*

intellectual communities that make up the college come to influence the willingness of students to stay at the college" (p. 104).

Integration

At predominantly white colleges, academic and social integration are strong predictors of retention and degree completion (Tinto, 1993). The same was confirmed for American Indian students in a study by Pavel & Padilla (1993), who found that academic integration and students' intentions to complete their degrees were among the most important variables that directly and indirectly affect post-secondary retention and graduation outcomes. Academic integration is important because pre-college academic factors such as high school rank, SAT scores, and grade point averages do not predict college success for American Indian students. High-achieving students were found to be just as likely to have difficulty as their less prepared Native peers (Benjamin et al., 1993). Academic integration is a function not only of success in courses, but also of relationships with faculty and staff. Students reported that having professors who were caring and willing to find answers helped them succeed in college (Dodd et al., 1995). Staff and/or faculty at tribal colleges provide first-generation Indian students with academic advice and guidance that others may receive from family members who have college experience (Taylor, 2001).

Social integration also plays a significant role in the success of Indian students. Friendships in general and those formed through student organizations and activities enhance student retention (Dodd et al., 1995; Wenzlaff & Biewer, 1996). Students in Taylor's (2001) study speculated that having Native cultural centers on campus, places symbolizing the center of the community, would promote student retention. Cultural

centers are key because it is important for students to feel that they are a part of the institutional culture and experiences. Institutional and student culture and values need to be congruent for social integration to be successful. Tinto (1993) posited that when students are in close alignment with the culture of the institution, their social integration is more complete. When students' values differ significantly from those of the mainstream institution, the incongruence can lead to a sense of isolation and early attrition. Taylor (2001) found that American Indian students in his study believed that their values were incongruent with those of the mainstream institution. They thought the university had capitalist values, was Christian in nature, had competitive ethos, was materialistic, and had a Western orientation. They also thought the university had limited definitions of family and family obligations, making it difficult for Indian students to manage their family obligations and succeed academically.

Faculty members in predominantly white institutions also pose challenges to American Indian students. Because academic integration is important for student success in higher education, faculty play a crucial role in the lives of Native students (Bowker, 1992; Dehyle, 1992; Tate & Schwartz, 1993). In the classroom, faculty members determine pedagogy. Wilson (1997) found that American Indian students tended to prefer an active-experimentation orientation to learning, in which they learn by engaging in projects and small-group discussions. This contradicts the preferred style of white students (abstract conceptualization) and the dominant form of teaching in the university—lecturing. Nearly half of the nation's faculty reported that they used extensive lecturing in their courses (Sax, Astin, Arrendondo, and Korn, 1996). In

contrast, only a third of the faculty used cooperative learning methods and only 20% used experiential learning (Sax et al, 1996). The content of the course is also important.

In tribal colleges, faculty play an instrumental role in making sure that American Indians are depicted in the material used in class. They have the ability to provide some of the assets of the tribal college experience through integrating tribal culture and values into the course (Boyer, 1997a; Taylor, 2001).

Tribal college faculty who are accessible, approachable, and available motivate students to succeed (Wilson, 1997). Boyer (1997b) found that many students expected their professors at four-year institutions to be similar to the faculty at their tribal college, where students perceived faculty as being more dedicated to students. Conversely, Tate and Schwartz (1993) found that poor faculty contact was a barrier to retention. Furthermore, students thought that faculty at mainstream institutions did not understand their educational needs or family responsibilities.

The concept of integration presumes that students leave college because of a lack of social or academic integration. The lack of integration is held to result from two phenomena: incongruence and isolation. Incongruence occurs when there is a misfit between the needs, interests, and values of the student and the institution. Isolation occurs when there are not sufficient personal interactions to bind the student to other people at the college (Machomer, 2000). Successful adjustment, Tinto argues, is in part a function of whether students feel they belong at the college--socially and academically--and their ability to establish connections between themselves and others at the school (National TRIO Clearinghouse, 2000). Evidence suggests a correlation between feelings of isolation and academic performance for American Indian students attending

mainstream institutions (Lin et al., 1988). Again, drawing from the analogue of egoistic suicide, this concept will serve to inform the development of the theory by exploring the support and guidance that both social and academic groups provide for tribal college students.

Rights of Passage Theory

The Dutch anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep (1960) first used the term “rights of passage” in his classic study of tribal societies. His study provides a way of looking at the longitudinal process of student persistence among tribal college students. Van Gennep (1960) identified three stages in the rights of passage: *separation, transition,* and *incorporation*. Each stage has its own specialized ritual and ceremony to mark the movement of individuals through the basic life changes such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death (Tuzin, 2001). Van Gennep regarded rituals and ceremonies as important because they announced the movement of the person to a new membership in the community and provided a visible structure to assist the person in coping with the difficulties that movement might entail (Tinto, 1997).

The first stage, separation, involves the separation of a person from past associations. It is characterized by a marked decline in interactions with the old group. The use of ceremony points to the ending of views and norms of the old group and the beginning of new behaviors and expectations. The second stage, transition, was a period during which the individual began to interact in new ways with members of the new group. Isolation, training, and sometimes ordeals were employed as mechanisms to insure the separation of the person from past associations and the adoption of new behaviors and norms. The third stage, incorporation, involved the taking on of new

patterns of interaction and the establishment of a competent membership. Full membership or incorporation into the new group was marked again by special ceremonies, which announced and certified not only the rewards of membership, but also the responsibilities of the new membership. Remarkably, tribal college students somehow learn to balance several social, cultural, and academic memberships, and serve as role models for other students considering attendance.

Membership

Van Gennep (1960) was concerned with the movement of individuals and societies through time and with the mechanisms that promoted social stability in times of change. On one level he was interested in the "life crisis" that individuals and groups faced during the course of their lifetime. Thus, his interests in ceremonies and rituals also reflected his broader interest in social stability. The concept of membership does not imply that a student's career is clearly marked by a symbolic rite of passage. Rather, it provides a way of thinking about the process of persistence using three distinct stages (separation, transition, and incorporation) and how they interact with other members in the college community. One of the clearest, most important, findings of the 1997 Carnegie Foundation Survey was the high regard held by tribal college students for their teachers and the quality of instruction provided. To recount, over 94% of students surveyed believed their professors were accessible outside the classroom, and 96% said their professors appeared to enjoy teaching. In these and related questions, truly dissatisfied students represented no more than 1% of the responses (Boyer, 1997a). Therefore, we "must not forget that student education is the source of student retention,

enhance student learning and the vehicle through which improved retention arises" (National TRIO Clearinghouse, 2000, p. 2).

First-generation students, which include most tribal college students, find the college experience as somewhat isolating and stressful. For some, it may be so difficult as to significantly interfere with their persistence in college (Pascarella, 1999). For example, Tinto (1997) writes, "a white child of a college educated family may look forward to and be rewarded for making the transition to college whereas an American Indian student from a poor family may find that he/she is seen as abandoning the family and local community in going to college" (p. 95). In addition, first-generation students face obstacles such as a lack of financial resources, lack of academic preparation, lack of knowledge about the college experience and bureaucratic operations of higher education, and lack of family support (Thayer, 2000). In conclusion, the potential stress and isolation students' experience in the first year of college, plus adapting to a new environment and learning to manage roles, can all serve to inform the development of a grounded theory on persistence.

Past Theories of Student Departure

Early studies refined, supplemented, and, in some cases, challenged our understanding of the complex forces shaping retention (Tinto, 1993). Astin (1977) focused on the characteristics of those students who did not persist and such studies were used as evidence for higher admission standards or more quality control of recruitment. However, beginning in the 1970s the research began to focus on reasons students remained enrolled and how colleges and universities could make changes or develop programs to increase the retention of their students.

The past theoretical perspectives on student departure all attempt to provide an understanding of this complex issue. For example, the psychological views on student departure all share a common theme, namely that retention and departure are primarily the reflection of individual actions and therefore are largely due to the ability or willingness of the individual to successfully complete the tasks associated with college attendance (Tinto, 1997, p. 89).

In addition, Ethington (1990) suggests that psychological theories tend to see student departure as reflecting a personal failure on the part of the individual and ignore those institutional forces that contribute to student departure. For instance, the institutional forces facing tribal college students might include financial difficulties, poor faculty contact, or lack of mentors or role models. Tinto (1993) argues that the psychological perspective does not provide a suitable model of departure for either institutional research or institutional policy.

Past theories of student departure have also emphasized social, economic, and organizational factors. One variant of the environmental perspective, social theories of departure, see educational attainment as only one part of the broader process of social attainment and the success or failure of students in higher education as being molded by the same forces that shape success generally (Tinto, 1993). The environmental theories, although helpful in describing broad trends in retention, are much less useful in explaining those institutional forces that shape different forms of student departure (Tinto, 1993).

Organizational theories of student departure (Bean, 1980, 1983), like environmental theories, are concerned with the impact of environmental forces on student

behavior (Tinto, 1993). The strength of the organizational view lies in its reminder that the organization of educational institutions, their formal structures, resources, and patterns of association, impacts student retention.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, fundamental concepts and issues were presented with the goal of providing a framework for generating a theory. The beginning point for such a framework was the focus on colonization and assimilation as the fundamental forms of oppression from which other cultural and social issues can be understood (Lomawaima, 1999; Yellowbird & Chenault, 1999; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Van Soest & Garcia, 2003).

I proposed that early colonial education is best understood through the lens of paternalism and critically examined the early colonial attempts to “civilize” Native students and societies (Utter, 1993; O’Brien, 1998; Boyer, 1989; Boyer, 1997a); Juneau, 2001). In addition, the concept of sovereignty was presented as a tool to help explore a deeper meaning of tribally controlled education and the ethical principles of self-determination and social justice (O’Brien, 1998; Deloria, 2001). This study will explore, through a tribal lens, how students believe they came to “persist” in higher education; and generate a theory grounded in stories and experiences.

Next, the history of the tribal college movement was presented as a way to understand the significant challenges American Indian students encounter as they pursue completing a degree in higher education (Stein, 1992; Boyer, 1989; Boyer 1997a); Ambler, 2003; Ortiz & HeavyRunner, 2003). Finally, the theory on student departure

was presented. The basic premise of student departure theory is that social and academic integration are essential to student retention.

The lack of literature on the persistence of tribal college students, and the importance of the development of grounded theories by indigenous scholars--which explain student persistence at a tribally controlled college (as opposed to retention theories constructed in mainstream institutions--provides the impetus for this study. Consequently, this study will show that a new theory of persistence will illustrate how and why tribal college students are more likely to attain their educational goals than students who begin their education at mainstream institutions.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to develop a theory on educational persistence for tribal college students. The theory emerged from the experiences of American Indian students and their beliefs concerning how they came to "persist" in a tribal college setting. I followed Patton's (2002) idea of capturing how student's perceived, described, felt, judged, remembered, made sense of, and talked about their own educational persistence. Thus, the central research questions for this study are: (a) What is it like for tribal college students to manage the integration of academic, social, and cultural responsibilities, and (b), how do community and college memberships influence educational persistence for tribal college students? The research questions were investigated using a qualitative double layer focus group design (Krueger & Casey, 2000) and a method of analysis called grounded theory.

A double-layer focus group design is another version of a traditional design using multiple layers (Krueger & Casey, 2000), which involved students in the first layer and the staff and faculty in the second layer. This study engaged 56 participants from Fort Peck Community College located on the Fort Peck Sioux and Assiniboine Reservation in Poplar, Montana.

This chapter provides an overview of the procedures used in this study. The steps are organized into six sections with detailed subsections. In the first section, the rationale for selecting a qualitative research design is presented. In the second section, the role of the researcher is presented with a summary of the access to the research site, reciprocity, ethics, and a personal biography. In the third section, the

double-layer focus group design is described. The fourth section outlines the sample characteristics, student organizations, academic majors, and theoretical sampling. The fifth section details the procedures used for data collection. In the sixth section, the approach to data analysis and interpretation is provided along with a chapter summary.

Selecting A Qualitative Design

Vincent Tinto (1993), renowned retention theorist, argues that "the effective assessment of retention requires the use of a qualitative interview method to enable the institution to uncover how students make sense of their experiences" (p.27). Thus, the qualitative paradigm, selected for this study, facilitates the exploration of how students make sense of their higher education experience and supports the creation of a new and theoretically expressed understanding of tribal college student persistence. The qualitative paradigm was particularly amenable to the study of student persistence because flexibility is required to study a new phenomenon about which we know very little, or when we seek to gain insight into the subjective meanings of complex phenomena to advance our conceptualization of them and to construct theory (Rubin & Babbie, 1997; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Qualitative inquiry requires a *commitment* to extensive time in the field, *engagement* in a complex, time-consuming process of data analysis and the ambitious task of sorting through large amounts of data, *writing* long passages providing evidence to substantiate claims and show multiple perspectives and participation in research that does not have a firm set of guidelines or specific procedures and is

evolving and changing constantly (Creswell, 1998). Moreover, Bogdan and Biklen (2003) describe five features of qualitative research: (a) naturalistic setting as the direct source of data and the researcher as the key instrument, (b) the collected data is descriptive, (c) it is concerned with process rather than simply with outcomes or products, (d) is analyzed inductively, and (e) it focuses on how different people make sense of their lives (p. 4). The selection of the qualitative design was based on the students being the direct source of descriptive data explaining their lived experience of attending college.

All of the above characteristics, when applied to exploring the experiences of tribal college students and generating a theory on persistence, support the use of a qualitative design rather than a quantitative design. Although several studies have been conducted on American Indian student retention, none explored the experiences of tribal college students within the context of their natural setting. Thus, the qualitative approach selected is a good match for focusing on tribal college students' experiences; in other words, it is a good way to understand the students' multiple views of reality and the meanings students construct around events in their daily lives.

Researcher as the Instrument

A qualitative approach requires the researcher to become the research instrument. The researcher must have the ability to observe behavior and the skills to conduct face-to-face interviews. The role of the qualitative researcher, like that of a dance choreographer, demands a presence, an attention to detail, and a powerful use of the researcher's own mind and body in analysis and interpretation of the data

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Two goals guided my role as the researcher: (a) to determine the perceptions, feelings, and thinking of tribal college students, staff, and faculty, and (b) to generate a theory on educational persistence for tribal college students. The researcher's role is directed by *four* factors: entry to the research site, reciprocity, ethics, and personal biography (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

The selected research site, Fort Peck Community College (FPCC), was chartered in 1978 to meet the unique needs of American Indian people living in and around the northeastern region of Montana. Since many of the people choose not to leave their homeland, they believe the opportunity for higher education must be provided on the reservation. FPCC is committed to preserving Indian culture, history, and the beliefs of the Sioux and Assiniboine Nations. Therefore, the institution's primary purpose is to serve the American Indian population of the Fort Peck Reservation (Fort Peck Community College, 2005).

Access to the students, staff, and faculty at the research site was obtained through approval from the FPCC President and FPCC Institutional Review Board (IRB). The FPCC IRB checklist form required the signature of my dissertation advisor and copies of the recruiting and consent forms (see Appendix B). After receiving full approval on the FPCC IRB checklist form, letters were sent to the FPCC President, Vice President of Academic Affairs, Vice President of Student Services, and the Vice President of Community Services highlighting the purpose of the study and seeking additional input on student groups that might be considered for inclusion (see Appendix C).

The *reciprocity* issues in this study included the following accommodations: scheduling focus groups at convenient times for students, staff, and faculty; providing prior notification to receptionist for campus location of focus groups; posting a "Do Not Disturb" sign on the door of the conference room; presenting results to students, staff, faculty, and Board of Directors upon completion of dissertation; and providing a copy of the completed dissertation to the Fort Peck Tribal Library.

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) includes a significant number of important *ethical* standards related to research. The NASW Code of Ethics most relevant to this study includes Human Subjects Approval, informed consent, and confidentiality (Reamer, 1999). The Human Subjects Approval was obtained on April 7, 2003 from the FPCC IRB committee and from the University of Minnesota's IRB committee on May 1, 2003. The consent form was approved by both IRB committees and clearly stated the purpose of the study, focus group procedures, risks and benefits, confidentiality, voluntary nature of the study, and contact information. The confidentiality agreement stipulated that the information conveyed would be kept private and any report or publication would not include any information that would make it possible to identify any participant in the study.

My *personal biography*, particularly my tribal heritage, affects my entire sense of self and worldview. My Blackfoot worldview philosophy is the lens through which I learn how to nurture, protect, guide, and dream for the future. Acknowledgement of how personal values and how viewpoints influence practice is a hallmark of ethical practice (Gilgun, 2005). Therefore, in this study, my Blackfoot

viewpoint (i.e., nature of reality, cosmology, ways of knowing, logic, process), and 30 years of practice in Indian education highly influenced the way I approached the development of this theory. I would not have been able to construct this theory without my own personal experience in higher education and my professional experience with student retention. In this study, I served as the key focus group facilitator, listener, and analyst, as well as a community member, colleague, and mentor. There were times when research participants would decide to go have coffee after the focus groups and ask if I would join them. Unquestionably, I would go because I was a part of their community.

In 1997, I developed the theoretical framework for a family-centered retention model, called the Family Education Model (FEM) (HeavyRunner, Shanley, Murray, 2002). The FEM theoretical framework was based on principles in the strengths-based perspective (Saleeby, 1997) retention theory (Tinto, 1993), resilience research, family support models, student development theories, and empowerment evaluation methods. The research on FEM influenced my thinking about American Indian student persistence. In addition, the bias of having close professional working relationships with the tribal college staff and faculty may have affected how they responded to certain questions regarding the institution.

Research Design

A double-layer focus group design (Krueger and Casey, 2000) was used to conduct this study using the grounded theory approach for data analysis. The purpose of the double-layer focus group design was to have the first layer generate the

theoretical constructs and the second layer refine and construct the theory on student persistence. The layers were scheduled based on the theoretical sampling strategy to saturate, refine, and find the relationships between the categories. A total of 14 focus groups were conducted with four student focus groups being conducted in the beginning of the study. The remaining focus group schedule alternated two from the first layer and two from the second layer (see Table 3).

First Layer: Tribal College Students

The first layer of focus groups involved 35 student participants selected based on ethnicity, full-time sophomore status, student organization membership, and academic majors (see Table 3). The focus of this study was on the processes American Indian students used to create, sustain, and discuss their own tribal college reality. Therefore, the only demographic information collected was ethnicity, gender, and full-time student status.

Second Layer: Tribal College Staff and Faculty

The second layer of focus groups involved 21 staff and faculty participants who taught, counseled, or advised tribal college students in their programs of study (see Table 3). The second layer of focus group participants were selected based on the emerging concepts from layer one. This layer was used to help refine the categories and identify relationships between the constructs.

Table 3

Focus Group Schedule

Layer 1	Layer 2

Student	Staff/Faculty
09/30/03	11/17/03
10/24/03	11/20/03
10/27/03	--
10/28/03	--
12/16/03	02/10/04
12/18/03	02/12/04
03/17/04	03/26/04
03/19/04	03/30/04

Strengths and Weaknesses

The double-layer focus group design exhibits a synergy that individuals alone did not possess. The focus group method is a collectivist rather than an individualist research method that focuses on the multivocality of participants' attitudes, experiences, and beliefs (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Patton, 2002). Ideas emerged from the focus groups because they possessed the capacity to become more than the sum of their parts. This design was well suited for making comparisons and building creative, grounded, and dense theory (Krueger, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The focus group method provided a way for me to listen to the plural voices of research participants, discover their observed experiences, and to explore which factors influenced the academic persistence of American Indian students. The strengths of this method include the following:

1. Large amounts of information can be produced in a limited period of time.
2. Flexible format.
3. Stimulating for respondents.
4. Relatively inexpensive.

5. Enables researchers to observe the interactive processes occurring among participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 836).

On the other hand, the limitations of using the focus group method included the following:

1. Poor ability to generalize results to other populations.
2. Difficulty in researching sensitive topics.
3. Group domination by one or a few persons.
4. Reserved participants.
5. Getting responses from all members on particular topics (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 836).

The intent of this study was not to generalize the findings, but to transfer the results to policy makers, administrators, and tribal leaders interested in improving outcomes for American Indian students. Many tears were shed when students' discussed children and recent deaths in the family. Consequently, the length of the focus groups was a reflection of the openess and sincerity of the research participants.

Research Sample

The sampling plan was linked to the aim of addressing the research questions and generating a theory on student persistence. Sampling, collection, and analysis were done together (Locke, 2001) and both purposeful (Patton, 2000) and theoretical sampling were used (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to select research participants.

Sampling Plan

The research participants were selected purposefully, based on ethnicity (American Indian student attending FPCC), full-time status (enrolled in 12 semester credits), sophomore status (31+ credits), student organization membership, and academic programs of study. The staff and faculty focus group participants were selected based on full-time employment and whether or not they were providers of direct student services (e.g., instructor, counselor, or mentor).

Theoretical sampling formed the basis for constructing the conceptual categories from the focus group data, with the aim of exploring the dimensional range or varied conditions along which the properties of concepts vary (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This type of sampling represents a defining property of grounded theory and relies on the comparative methods within the grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2000). The originators of grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss (1967), provide the following definition:

> Theoretical sampling is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges. This process of data collection is controlled by the emerging theory, whether substantive or formal (p. 45).

The initial categories emerged from the first layer of student focus groups, which enabled the selection of the second layer of staff/faculty focus groups to refine the categories and properties. The critical questions for selection were: (a) Which student

groups would further the development of the categories and its properties? and (b) which staff or faculty would further refine the theoretical constructs of the theory?

The inclusion and exclusion criteria in the sampling plan applied to the following target populations: 120 (fall/spring enrollments) full-time students; 20 full-time staff members; and 20 full-time faculty members (FPCC Annual Report, 2004). The criteria used to select focus group participants were:

1. Must be between the ages of 18-65.
2. Must be a full-time (enrolled in 12 semester credits) student at Fort Peck Community College.
3. Must have sophmore (31+ credits) and above status at Fort Peck Community College.
4. Must be an American Indian student at Fort Peck Community College.
5. Must be a full-time staff or faculty member who provide direct student services (i.e., instruction, counseling, advising, mentoring) at FPCC.
6. Staff or Faculty members can be either American Indian or non-Indian.

The FPCC registrar verified enrollment status and academic standing of selected student participants and the Vice President of Academic and Vocational Programs confirmed the full-time employment status of selected staff and faculty.

Recruitment Report

The recruitment flyers were posted in various campus locations, particularly in the student lounges and on bulletin boards. Electronic (email) announcements were posted on student, staff, and faculty list serves. The major academic

departments, family and community services, student services, and others (e.g., retention officer, counselors) were contacted to help identify potential participants. This recruitment process was designed to inform study participants of confidentiality and efforts made to protect their privacy.

The recruited student participants were grouped according to their organization affiliation and academic major. The staff and faculty participants were aligned to get a mix throughout the second layer of focus groups. Each focus group participant was contacted in person to determine their capability to provide consent and to discuss the purpose of the study, the risks, and benefits of participation. All participants were notified in person of the times and dates of their specific focus group.

Sample Characteristics

This research was conducted between September 2003 and March 2004, involving a total of 56 sample group participants. All study participants were either second-year, full-time students or full-time employees, and lived within the boundaries of the Fort Peck Sioux and Assiniboine Reservation.

Among the student focus group participants, 19 (54%) were male and 16 (46%) were female (see Table 4). One hundred percent of the 35 student participants were American Indian, primarily enrolled members of the Fort Peck Sioux and Assiniboine tribes.

Table 4

Tribal College Student Participant Profile (IRB Code – 0304S4689)

Name	Date	Total	Male	Female
Student Senate	09/30/03	3	2	1
Bluestone Indian Club	12/24/03	4	2	2
Vocational Majors	10/27/03	3	1	2
Computer Technology	12/28/03	4	2	2
Business Administration	12/16/03	3	1	2
Business Administration	12/18/03	2		2
English Majors	03/11/04	4	1	3
Machine Technology	03/12/04	12	10	2
Totals	8 groups	35	19	16

The staff and faculty focus groups were comprised of 14 (67%) female participants and 7 (33%) male participants. In addition, 11 (52%) of the staff and faculty participants were American Indian, primarily enrolled members of the Fort Peck Sioux and Assiniboine tribes and 9 (48%) were non-Indian (see Table 5).

Table 5

Tribal College Staff and Faculty Participant Profile

IRB Code - 0304S46089 **Name**	**Date**	**Total**	**Male**	**Female**	**Indian**	**Non-Indian**
Staff & Faculty	11/17/03	3	1	2		3
Staff & Faculty	11/20/03	2	1	1	1	1
Staff & Faculty	02/10/04	4	2	2	2	2
Staff & Faculty	02/12/04	5	3	2	5	
Staff & Faculty	03/26/04	4		4	2	2
Staff & Faculty	03/30/04	3		3	2	1
Totals	**6 Groups**	**21**	**7**	**14**	**12**	**9**

Student Organizations and Academic Majors

The student participants were recruited from the Student Senate and the Bluestone Indian Club. A total of seven students were recruited from these two organizations. The academic programs students were recruited from included Business Administration, Computer Technology, Machine Technology, English, and the Native American Vocational and Technical Education Program (NAVTEP). A total of 28 students volunteered from these student organizations and academic majors.

The student organizations and academic majors represented in this study had consistent participation, high enrollments, and senior faculty advisors. The Machine Technology major was chosen because it represented the newest program being offered at the college. The student focus group participants in this study were among the first cohort for this program.

The student focus group participants were recruited from the following student organizations and academic programs:

1. Student Senate – the purpose of this organization is to advocate for student issues or concerns. It consists of eleven representatives elected by the general student body. Any part-time or full-time student may be elected. The President of the Student Senate is a voting member of the FPCC Board of Directors.

2. American Indian Club, known as the Bluestone Indian Club - provides social and extracurricular activities, conducts various fund-raising projects and promotes the cultural traditions and interests of all FPCC students. The governing body of the Indian Club includes a president, vice president, secretary/treasurer, two student representatives and one faculty advisor.
3. Business Administration Major - prepares students to for occupations and careers in the business sector. The students learn basic accounting principles, contract law, business ethics and economic principles to aid them in starting and managing their own business and are prepared to enter management positions in other businesses. They become acquainted with the history of the federal government's relationship with Indian tribes and its legal effect on conducting business on the reservation. This program is designed to be transferable to a four-year institution to complete a Baccalaureate program.
4. Computer Technology Major - prepares students to resolve problems related to printing, word processing, program languages, email and operating systems in the workplace. Students learn to perform general maintenance of the computer system, selecting and installing software, specifying appropriate hardware and installing upgrades. The program is designed to be transferable to a four-year institution Baccalaureate program.

5. Machine Technology Major - prepares students for occupations in the industry field. Students learn the theory of Computerized Numeric Control machinery, basic safety requirements, essential skills of hand and power tools, how to use precision-measuring instruments, and how to read, understand, and interpret blueprint architectural drawings. This is an Associate of Applied Science program designed to prepare students for immediate employment following graduation.
6. English – these courses assure a coherent introduction to American literature yet allow students to shape individual programs around their particular interests. They are part of the core requirements for graduation.
7. Native American Vocational and Technical Education Program - This program is designed to improve the academic, career, and technical skills of Native Americans and Alaska Natives attending a tribally controlled community college (Fort Peck Community College, 2003-2005, p. 8-34).

The staff focus group participants represented the following institutional positions: Librarian, Vice-President of Student Services, National Science Foundation Curriculum Coordinator, Rural Systemic Initiative Coordinator, Admissions/Placement Officer, Financial Aid Officer, Retention Officer, Student Support Services Director, Student Support Services Counselor, and the Learning Center Coordinator. The faculty members participating in the focus groups represented the following disciplines: American Indian Studies, Computer

Technology, Mathematics, Life Sciences, Business Administration, Economics, Business Technology, and English.

Data Collection Procedures

This section describes how data for the study was obtained and the timelines involved in collecting the data. The data collection process occurred between September 2003 and March 2004. It continued until enough student groups were interviewed to provide a solid empirical foundation and enough staff and faculty groups used to refine the theoretical foundation. A total of 56 participants provided a substantial empirical base for the grounded theory on educational persistence.

Access to Research Site

The following steps were taken to gain entry into the Fort Peck Community College to receive permission to involve tribal college students, staff and faculty in this study. The steps are listed as follows:

1. Letter explaining the purpose of the study sent to the President, Vice-President of Student Services, Vice-President of Academic Affairs, and Vice-President of Community Services (March 1, 2003).
2. Explained in the abstract why Fort Peck Community College was chosen for the study, what would be done at the site during the study, data collection, through the use of student, staff and faculty focus groups, how the researcher would report results of study, guaranteed a copy of the summary of the study upon final approval of dissertation committee, and explained the $50 cash incentive for participation in the study.

3. Obtained written approval from the Fort Peck Community College Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the study (April 7, 2003).
4. Obtained written approval from the University of Minnesota Institutional Review Board (IRB) for this study (April 24, 2003).
5. Presented a research abstract highlighting areas of inquiry to the Vice-Presidents and key staff. Sought input about other student groups that might be considered (May 1, 2003).

Focus Group Method

The purpose of the double layer focus group design (Krueger & Casey, 2000) was to first, obtain the students' stories to develop the theoretical categories and secondly, to refine the categories using staff and faculty input. Carefully planned discussions were designed to obtain perceptions of students, staff, and faculty on the topic of retention. The following six-step process was used to develop the questioning route for the focus groups in this study:

1. Invited four people, familiar with student retention, to brainstorm the questions.
2. The group approach was excellent for generating the questions questions, however, the group approach was not efficient for refining the focus group questions.
3. Examined the list of generated questions and edited the key retention questions (i.e., excluded jargon, changed to open-ended).

4. Sequenced the edited questions from general to specific. The general (opening) questions provided context for the participants.
5. Estimated amount of time for opening and introductory questions. Allowed the most time for key questions.
6. Sent the edited questions back to original brainstorm group for feedback.
7. Pilot tested questions for flow, possible confusion and clarification (Krueger & Casey, 2001, p. 56).

The focus group questioning route (see Table 6) was piloted with students similar to those in the study (but not included in the actual sample) from Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College in Cloquet, Minnesota on February 15, 2003. The pilot addressed the following questions for further development of the questioning route: (a) How easy was it to ask the questions?, (b) Did the words flow?, (c) Did the questions seem confusing?, (d) Did they hesitate too long?, and (e) Did they ask for clarification? The results from the pilot were used to revise the questions for the first focus group. A complete list of questions are in Appendix D and E.

The focus group questioning route drew from the work of Vincent Tinto (1993) and his student departure framework describing the key concepts of *membership* and *integration*. I wanted to discover the cultural meaning students attached to these two concepts. Equally important, these questions were influenced by my own personal experiences of struggling to manage my social and ceremonial memberships with a full academic load; and professionally deciding to focus on the cultural persistence, rather than constructing a theory based on reasons for departure.

Table 6

Categories of Focus Group Questions

Category	Questions
Introductory Questions	What changes have you noticed in yourself since attending the tribal college? What role does your culture play in your educational experience?
Transition Questions	What challenges did you encounter in regards to your tribal identity while attending the tribal college?
Key Questions	What are your family responsibilities? Which academic activities posed the greatest challenges for you? Describe the ideal classroom environment that you felt was supportive to you? What have faculty done that was <u>not</u> supportive of your educational goals? What social activities/events have you participated in?
Ending Questions	Were you ever at the point of giving up attending college? What can be done to help students be persistent and successful in tribal colleges?

The following procedures were used by the lead facilitator in the collection of data from layer one of the student focus groups:

1. Posted recruitment letters on the bulletin boards on the Poplar and Wolf Point campuses.
2. Verified academic status with the registrar.
3. Scheduled focus groups with student participants.
4. Completed consent forms prior to beginning the focus groups.
5. The lead facilitator and assistant moderator completed the student focus groups (120-250 minute interviews) in the conference room that was convenient and comfortable for students.

6. The lead facilitator tape-recorded student focus group interviews.
7. The lead facilitator and assistant moderator recorded field notes (i.e., noteworthy quotes, non-verbal activity, additional questions and sketched seating arrangements) during and immediately after each focus group.
8. The lead facilitator and assistant moderator discussed notes after each focus group session.
9. The typist transcribed an unabridged (verbatim) transcript as the student focus groups were completed.
10. The lead facilitator manually coded data from each student focus group.

The following procedures were used by the lead facilitator in the collection of data from layer two of the staff and faculty focus groups:

1. In person contact with staff and faculty on the Poplar and Wolf Point campuses.
2. Verified employment status.
3. Scheduled focus groups with staff and faculty participants.
4. Completed consent forms prior to focus group beginning.
5. The lead facilitator and assistant moderator completed the staff and faculty focus groups in the conference room that was convenient and comfortable for participants.
6. The lead facilitator and assistant moderator discussed notes after each focus group session.

7. The typist transcribed an unabridged (verbatim) transcript as the staff and faculty focus groups were completed.
8. The lead facilitator manually coded data from focus groups.

Focus Group Process

The focus group process involved a pre-session to prepare recording equipment, prepare consent forms, hang "do not disturb" signs, and prepare snacks for the participants. In keeping with cultural protocol, it is a sign of respect to offer food and drinks prior to asking the participants' for their stories. The beginning of the focus group included the welcome, overview of the topic, ground rules, and the first question. The moderator's introduction included the following statement:

> Good Afternoon. You are invited to be in a research study on tribal college student retention conducted by the University of Minnesota. You were selected as a possible participant because you are either a full-time sophomore or a full-time staff or faculty member. The purpose of this study is to develop a theory on student persistence in tribal colleges. The theory will emerge from the stories of students and how they believe they came to 'persist' in a tribal college setting. The intent is to offer a useful perspective to educators, policymakers, administrators, and tribal leaders interested in improving outcomes for tribal college students.

The initial procedures were explained to the focus group participants. These procedures included: the size of the group, the topic of student retention, the rationale for using a tape recorder, the 90-minute session (student focus groups ranged between

120 – 250 minutes), the risks and benefits of being in the study in terms of harm or discomfort, direct benefits, and the $50 cash incentive provided at the end of the focus group. Equally important, participants were provided assurances of confidentiality regarding identification and the protection of the recorded session.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

The procedures for data collection were clearly described to participants to enhance students' trust and confidence. These procedures included the questioning route, selection of participants, moderator skills, assistant moderator field notes, and the electronic recordings to capture the comments. The focus group equipment and supplies served the purpose of verifying the procedures. Each focus group used a variable speed tape recorder, remote microphones for quality sound, transcription machine, and refreshments. The recruitment letters, consent forms, incentive receipt forms, field notes, and transcripts served to document the overall research process.

Data Analysis Procedures

A vision of new understanding and the construction of a new theory were the driving forces behind the selection of the method for data analysis in this study. Grounded theory analysis emphasizes systematic rigor and thoroughness from initial design, through data collection and analysis, culminating in theory generation (Patton, 2001). The chosen focus group analysis was a disciplined process, with systematic steps, a defined protocol, with verifiable results, and multiple feedback loops throughout the analysis process (Krueger, 1998).

Systematic analysis meant the strategies were documented, understood, and clearly articulated. In this study the analysis was verifiable because there was sufficient data to constitute a trail of evidence. The data stream began with recordings and field notes taken during each focus group and continued with an oral summary (verification) of key points after each focus group, which included 14 unabridged transcripts. As the study progressed, each student focus group was analyzed and compared to earlier student groups. Data collection, data analysis and eventually the theory stand in close relationship to one another. This allows for sampling on the basis of emerging categories, but it also enables validation of the categories and linkages as they develop (Krueger, 2000; Fern, 2001).

Grounded Theory Methodology

The focus of grounded theory methodology is on the process of generating a theory using systematic guidelines for collecting and analyzing data. This study did not begin with a preconceived theory, although the Family Education Model and the student departure theory did inform the development of the research questions and data analysis. Rather, this study began as an inquiry into tribal college student retention, and the theory emerged directly from the students' stories. Interestingly, "the act, let alone the art and science, of theorizing our own existence and realities is not something many Indigenous people assume possible" (Smith, 1999, p. 29).

Throughout this study, the analytic interpretations (open, axial, and selective coding) aided further data collection (theoretical sampling), which in turn, informed and refined the developing theoretical analyses (constant comparison). Therefore, as

the grounded theorist, I was comfortable with the unknown and trusted the process of memoing, diagramming, and coding of transcripts.

Transcription Report

The transcriber for this study was provided an overview of the study and instructed in the specific requirements needed to capture multiple voices of tribal college students, staff, and faculty. The initial meeting discussed the challenges of transcribing multiple voices that might involve side conversations, laughing, and movement of chairs and paper. We also discussed the equipment, confidentiality of tapes, and the time involved in transcribing a 90-minute interview.

The initial step in the process emphasizes the need for unabridged transcripts to be single-spaced with double-spacing between different speakers. In addition, the moderator's words were in bold and capitalized for easy review. The unabridged (verbatim) transcripts also captured the pauses, gasps, laughing, and crying in the focus group. The final step in the transcription plan was to introduce the transcriber to the actual focus group questions to familiarize her with the format. A list of the questions was provided and reviewed for introductory, transition, key, and ending questions. A total of 14 focus groups were transcribed along with the field notes taken immediately after each focus group session.

Coding Procedures

In this study, I employed the constant comparison method, the hallmark of grounded theory, as the primary approach to content analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I read through each data set, consisting of 600 pages of focus group

transcripts, field notes, and theoretical memos. The constant comparative method involves level by level comparisons of similar data to produce sequential comparisons (Charmaz, 2006). In this study, the double-layer focus group design (Krueger & Casey, 2000) was used to make comparisons among student focus groups. At the same time, the staff and faculty data were used to refine codes and categories.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) recognized that researchers are not blank slates but do indeed bring ideas with them into research. As the researcher, my coding was influenced by my cultural frame of reference and professional experiences in student retention. Although I did not start with a preconceived theory, as the coding process began, I called upon the theoretical framework I developed for the family education model, a methodology called deductive qualitative analysis (DQA) (Gilgun, 2006) and a reflexive essay on the relationship between an autobiography and research (LeCompte, 1998) to help me think about theory building.

Grounded theory coding consists of three phases: open, axial, and selective coding. These analytic types of coding did not flow from initial through focused in any strict manner. Rather, the coding was a free-flowing and creative process, which moved quickly back and forth between types, using analytic techniques and procedures (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During the open coding phase, fragments of data were closely studied for their analytic content. The second phase, axial coding, systematically developed and linked categories with subcategories. Finally, the selective coding phase integrated and refined the core categories of the preliminary theory.

During the initial coding phase, I used the long-table approach (Krueger & Casey, 2000), which is a time-tested method and breaks down the process into manageable pieces. This approach helped to identify codes based on numbering each line of each transcript and color-coding each focus group transcript (see Table 7). Different quotes from focus groups were tracked using this method. Throughout this phase, I adopted the students' special words (*in vivo* codes) to help preserve the meaning of their experiences (Charmaz, 2000).

The first step in the long-table approach was writing the key focus group questions at the top of the newsprint paper and laying them out on long tables, on the floor, and on the walls. Second, I divided the newsprint page into two sections to represent the student data and the staff and faculty data. Next, I began to cut and categorize quotes from the color-coded transcripts. Finally, after cutting up the transcripts, I was ready to begin line-by-line coding.

Our cultural heritage affects our sense of self and how we view the world, though we may not be aware of all the influences (intellectual, spiritual, political, emotional, social, and physical) (Gilgun, 2005; Cajete, 2000). In this study, I acknowledge these influences as the sources of the codes. Intuitively, my grandmother taught me to, "Step behind the words and listen good to what they're telling you. Listen for their feelings and try to picture what they are describing." I stepped behind the student's words and coded based on the feelings and pictures they described. Spiritually, she taught me what was real in our Blackfoot world, to make sense of the order and arrangement of things, to understand the many places

knowledge come from, and to determine what had value in my life. I tapped into this cultural frame of reference to do the initial coding.

Table 7

Grounded Theory Initial Coding Example

Realizing Stress of balancing family, work and caregiving Aware of multiple levels of responsibilities; lack of rest Prioritizing health and academic responsibilities; self-control	My mother was diagnosed with cancer a couple of months Ago and I had to take days off to stay and take care of her along with my two children. My family responsibilities lie outside of school, and I also work part-time and manage all Of this with very little time and sleep, plus I take lots of vitamins to stay healthy. My homework is done after my kids go to bed, sometimes until 12 midnight to 2:00am.
Parenting issues Home schooling; household Commitment; prioritizing Balancing responsibilities Time management Lack of sleep; scheduling	I am raising two of my grandchildren. I am doing home schooling for them right now. I cook, clean, wash their clothes, playtime, and provide education time. Once they are taken care of I get my housework done and do home-work, which is around 10:00 or 11:00 until after midnight. I then get up and have to be here (college) by 8:00am.
Determination; aware of work Working double time Dreaming of academic success Committing Asking not to be disturbed Scheduling study time Playtime; free-time Questioning decisions Procrastinating; Nurturing; fear; hard work (Single parenting issues)? Supervising	I think I must be crazy. I have two part-time jobs and they are both hard manual labor; cleaning houses and washing cars. I don't know why I just keep coming back (to school); I'm tired but yet I feel I still need to get there. I manage by telling my family to just leave me alone once in a while. There are times when I'm trying to study and my child wants to wrestle. So, I put my book down and wrestle with him. It's a tough choice. What are you going to do? Ignore you child, or study? You can always study later, my children need my attention. They are going to hate college If it's taking their mother away. I have two children at home; eleven and sixteen.
Daily scheduling; full-time roles Being in the moment Household chores; extended	I go to school until 11:00am and then go to work full-time until 7:00pm. I then go home and I'm there for my fiancé'; I cook and clean and then my family starts calling. By the

family; late hours Despair; reflecting Sense of belonging Balancing roles Adapting	time I get time for myself its 1:00am or 3:00am. Sometimes it's all overwhelming to me. I wouldn't tell my family or fiancé' no for anything. They mean too much to me. I know it affects my schooling, but I'm willing to be average and keep my family together.

Axial coding was the second phase in the coding process. This phase meant the relating of categories to their subcategories, termed "axial" because coding occurs around the axis of a category, linking categories at the level of properties and dimensions. Procedurally, this type of coding is the act of relating categories to subcategories along the lines of their properties and dimensions. It looks at how categories crosscut and link (Glaser, 1998). These codes were more directed, selective, and conceptual than word-by word, line-by-line, and incident-by-incident coding (Glaser, 1998).

My culture, once again, became a source of the codes in the axial coding process. To sharpen the explanation of persistence, I wanted to code the beginning or entry point for students in college. In my culture, I observed the importance of understanding the beginning of a ceremony, the beginning of a vow, or the beginning of making a drum, rattle, or song. The cultural protocol always involved asking for prayers or going to the elders for guidance. Similarly, I wanted to code the insights students had about persisting in college, the natural order to their insights, and the metaphors used to describe this experiences.

During the second phase of coding, the initial codes were analyzed using an adapted version of the Conditional/Consequential Matrix (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I

called the adapted version the Conditional Indigenous Matrix (see Table 8), which mapped the range of conditions and consequences related to entry points, insight points, natural order sequence, and cultural metaphors. In addition, I explored the causal conditions, identified the cultural context, intervening conditions (e.g., class schedules, family illnesses, advising, and identity issues), and delineated the consequences (e.g., loss of sleep, feeling out of balance, and poor advising). Such matrices sharpen explanations and predictions about the studied phenomena (Charmaz, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Table 8

Conditional Indigenous Matrix Focused Coding Example

	Entry Point	**Insight Point**	**Natural Order Sequence**	**Cultural Metaphor**
Counselor	support	comfortable	opportunity	"you are one of my kids"
Retention Officer	search & rescue	concern friendly reminder	understanding Respect	"busted when I see him pull into the driveway"
Faculty	algebra	teaching style	understanding	"like a maze"
	science	step-based	Opportunity	“It's a step-by-step learning process”
	automotive	challenging		"tightrope"
	business	Plan	Realization	"It was like a killer"
Advisor	availability	personal interest	encouragement	"planting a seed and watching it grow"
	core classes	Focus	awareness	"good pair of glasses"
	plan	sense of direction	awareness	"knowing how to read a compass"
Programs	writing	brainstorm		"let your thoughts flow"

(Programs Cont.)	english	perfectionism		"a minor glitch"
		three attempts		"like a paced runner"
	research	consuming	commitment	"blind-folded process"
	algebra	long period	determination	"I felt invincible when I passed"
	biology	different style		"we are not all the same learners"
		over my head		
	history	happy; excited	realization	"walking on air"
	speaking	Shy	awareness	"my blood pressure went up"
	transfer	family role	searching	"one door closing before the other can open"
Children	single parent	family support	commitment	"like three big rivers"
	grandchildren	home school	opportunity	"a marathon"
	classes	schedule	daily practice	"the first year is the hardest"
	work	exhausting	determination	"my dream"
	child care	grateful	understanding	"my mom is my stronghold"
	cook	quietness	realization	"need some earplugs"

The focused codes were selected to help capture, synthesize, and understand the main themes in the data. Again, I kept the codes active and close to the data (*in vivo*) and was able to move across student focus group interviews and compare students' experiences, actions, and interpretations. In doing so, the initial categories of *children* and *circles of support* merged with each other. I witnessed many tearful moments when students discussed the category of children and noted these in the field notes and memos.

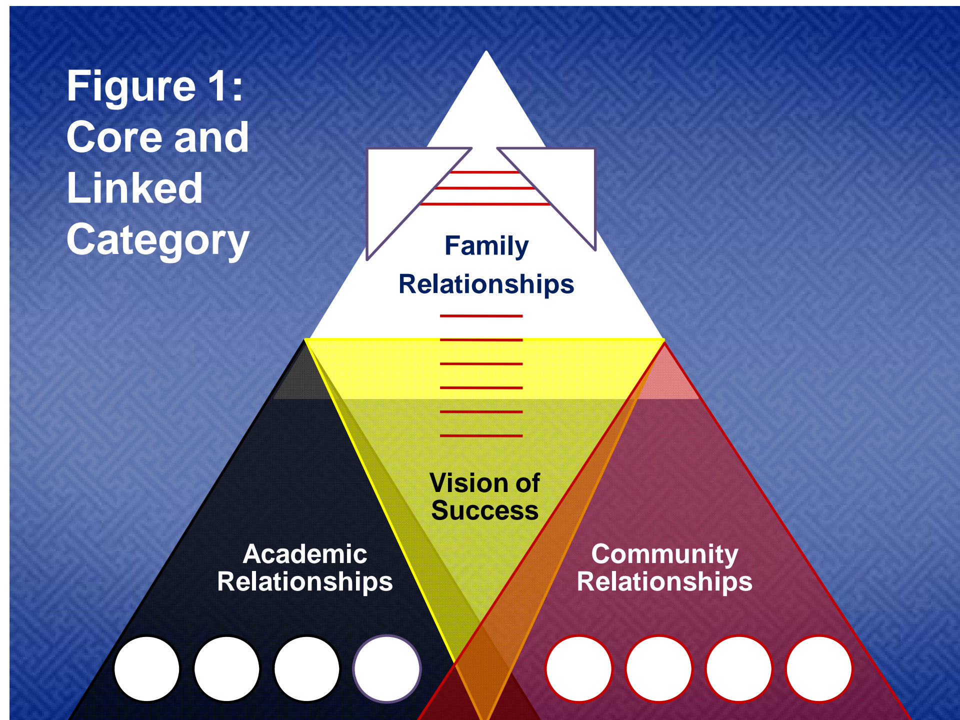
After each coding step for student data, the staff and faculty data were used to refine codes and categories. The focused coding procedures made the emerging theory denser, more complex, and more precise (Charmaz, 2000). When the core concepts were integrated to form a larger theoretical scheme the research findings took the form of a *theory* (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The third phase, selective coding, was the process of integrating and refining the theory. During the integration of the theory, categories were organized around a central explanatory concept; *vision of success* (see Figure 1). Once a commitment was made to the *vision of success* category, other categories were related to it through explanatory statements of relationships. Several techniques were used to facilitate the integration process. These included the use of the conditional indigenous matrix, the diagram on responsibilities and memberships, the memos on the statements of relationship among categories, the sorting and reviewing of memos, and writing the "storyline."

Once the theoretical scheme was outlined, I was ready to refine the central category, trimming off excess codes and filling in the poorly developed categories of *circle of relationships* and *personal hope*. Finally, the theory was validated by comparing it to raw data and by presenting it to several tribal college educators for their reactions. This theory was grounded in student data and was recognizable to tribal college educators. It does not fit every student, but the larger concepts apply to the multiple realities American Indian students' experience.

Figure 1

Core and Linked Category



Memoing

I tracked the analysis process through the use of memos (e.g., code notes, theoretical notes, and operational notes) and visual diagrams (conditional indigenous matrix, properties and dimensions of core categories, and responsibilities and memberships). This reflexive practice helped to conceptualize and articulate substantive codes and their theoretically coded relationships. In addition to storing information, the memos and diagrams forced the consolidation of raw data into concepts. In using grounded theory methodology, I assumed that the theory was concealed in the data for me to discover. Coding made some of the theory's

components visible. Memoing and diagramming added the relationships which linked the categories to each other.

The memos caught my thoughts, captured comparisons and connections, and crystallized questions and directions for me to pursue. Memoing helped define leads for collecting data--both for further open coding and later for theoretical sampling. Memoing was primarily conceptual in intent and did more than report data; it tied together different fragments of data in a recognizable cluster. Memoing constituted a crucial sense-making method because it prompted me to analyze the data and codes early in the research process (Charmaz, 2000; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Locke, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The memos were sorted to help create and refine theoretical links. The purpose of using the 4 by 6 inch index cards was twofold. They were easier to carry, so I could record memos and notes whenever ideas occurred to me and they were easier to sort. For the sorting I used a large table and the floor. First, I grouped them on the basis of the similar categories they addressed. Then I arranged the groups to reflect on the sorting surface of their relationships. The intention was that their layout in two-dimensional space would capture the structure of the eventual theory. I then gathered the cards in the sequence which allowed the structure to be described. This provided the basis for the writing up of the theory.

The memos kept track of ideas that developed when comparing incident to incident and then concept to concept in the evolving theory. The memoing was an opportunity to write about the implicit arguments, provide cultural context, make

links with the literature, critically examine the categories, present the analysis, and provide data that supports the analytic argument (Charmaz, 2000). For example, the theoretical memo (see Table 9) on educational persistence outlined the core categories with beginning conceptual definitions and setting the cultural context for the subcategories. I quickly jotted down everything that came to mind about the category, subcategories, codes, and data. This memo was written to help clarify and direct the subsequent coding.

Table 9

Theoretical Memo on Educational Persistence

Creating a Vision for Support and Hope in Education
Persistence is a profoundly ancient concept as well as a centuries-long spiritual experience for indigenous peoples in America. Greater insight into persistence was gained by exploring tribal college student encounters, by listening to their stories. Tribal college students have discovered a unique balance between their formal academic training and their traditional upbringing. In higher education, tribal college students have a dual mission: to preserve, protect, and promote their unique traditional ways of life; and to learn Western models of research, history, policy, and practice. All of this is accomplished in the midst of Insurmountable economic, social, and academic challenges. For some students, the confluence of culture and education is filled with feelings of fear, vulnerability, and disconnection. Inevitably, our hope is that this educational journey takes a turn and tribal college students begin to experience feelings of confidence, exhilaration, and excitement. Students described a *vision*, as a sense of knowing, a sense of trusting the process, and believed there was a reason they were in college. Their *vision of success* was like an expectation; a high expectation that everything they did turned out good. Students learned to trust their feelings and this made success much easier. On the whole, their *visions of success* were grounded in the context of their culture, language, history, values, and ways of knowing.

Students recognize the need for a mutual understanding with their families regarding chores, parenting and caregiving; they also acknowledge the constant search for balance between responsibilities and memberships.

Students possess a deep sense of p*ersonal hope* to *Igah kimah* (try hard) and to *Pinah muht sko sit* (not give up hope). Tribal college students discovered this clarity in their dreams and listening to their elders.

In the final analysis, I listened carefully to how tribal college students, with multiple memberships and responsibilities, persisted in the tribal college setting. Memos helped capture the meanings and implications of memberships and responsibilities to develop a theoretical rendering. The theoretical memo (see Table 10) below captures the logic of the substantive theory of relationships between visioning, relationships, and hope.

Table 10

Memo on Statement of Relationships among Core Categories

A vision of success becomes a reality as students acquire additional responsibilities and memberships, reflecting a positive change in how they achieve a sense of balance and hope. The types of relationships needed constitute three layers of support needed to support their vision. These circles of relationships include: (1) the family relationships, a reflective system demanding allegiance; (2) the cultural/community relationships, which form their sense of belonging; (3) and the academic relationships, involving a match of caring and supportive staff and faculty.

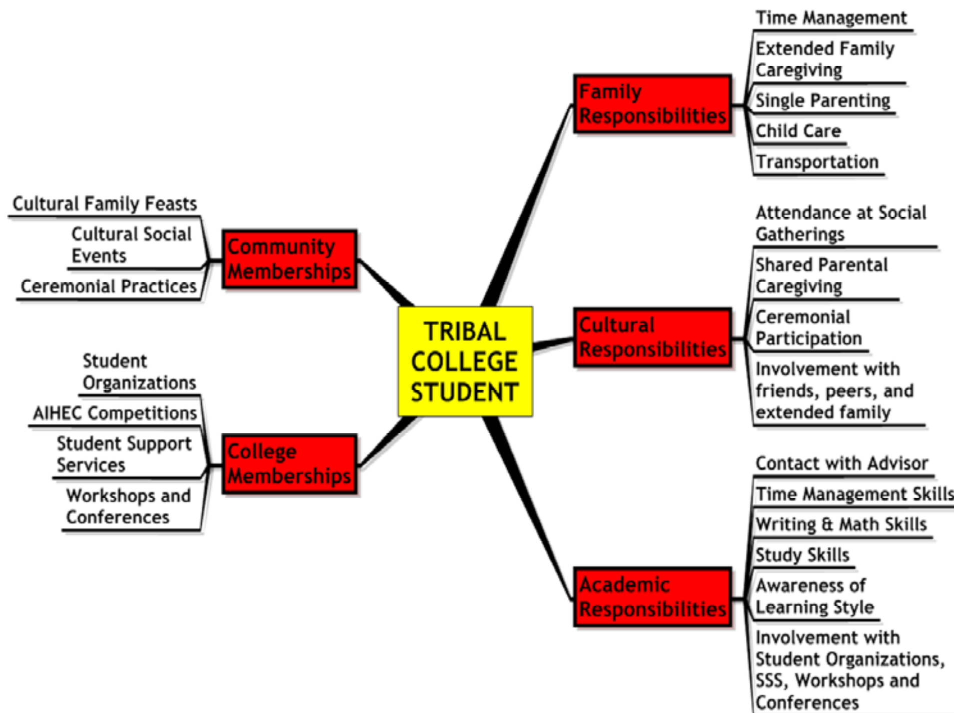
Experiencing success in college often means understanding decision-

making, which impacts your family, community, academic goals. Thus, trusting your vision of success means seeking meaningful relationships and discovering the innate resilience to commit to your vision.

Equally important, in the analysis process, I used diagramming to help conceptualize and articulate relationships which linked the categories to each other. The diagram (see Figure 2) below is a visual representation of the memberships and responsibilities students identified.

Figure 2

Diagram of Tribal College Student Responsibilities and Memberships



Chapter Summary

This chapter provides a six-step overview of the procedures used in this study. The first section introduced the rationale for selecting a qualitative design. The second section presented a summary of the role of the researcher, access to the research site, reciprocity, ethics, and a personal biography of the researcher. The third section describes the double layer focus group research design. The fourth section outlines the characteristics of the research sample, introduces the student organizations and academic majors used to select student research participants, and the theoretical sampling plan. The fifth section details the procedures used for data collection. Finally, the sixth section describes the approach to data analysis and interpretation.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter provides the findings of the study in two sections. Each section contributes to a clearer understanding of the educational persistence of tribal college students. The findings of the research questions, categories, properties, dimensions, and relational statements are all grounded in student stories and refined using staff and faculty focus group data. The first section provides the analysis of the two research questions using Tinto's (1993) conceptual framework for analyzing the influence of *integration* and *membership* on student persistence. The second section provides a description of the theory on educational persistence using Strauss & Corbin's (1998) grounded theory analysis, which details the process of developing the theory and concludes with a chapter summary.

Research Question One

The theory on student departure (Tinto, 1993) provided the conceptual framework for analyses of the two research questions. Vincent Tinto (1993) used Emile Durkheim's (1951) theory of suicide (anomic, altruistic, and egoistic types) and Arnold Van Gennep's (1960) study on the three stages (separation, transition, and incorporation) in the rights of passage to understand the compelling link between the concepts of *integration* and the importance of *membership* within college communities.

The findings for research question one, *What is it like for tribal college students to manage the integration of academic, social, and cultural responsibilities*?, are organized around the following themes: (1) student challenges and changes and (2)

managing the integration of responsibilities. The two themes interweave the lived experiences of second year tribal college students and how they believe they came to *integrate* their multiple family, cultural, and academic responsibilities. The following focus group questions (see Table 10) were used to analyze student challenges, changes, and responsibilities: (1) What challenges did you encounter in regards to your tribal identity while attending the tribal college? (2) What changes have you noticed in yourself since attending the tribal college? (3) What are your major family responsibilities? (4) How do you manage being a full-time student with family responsibilities? (5) Which academic activities posed the greatest challenges for you? (6) What have staff and faculty done to support your educational goals? (7) What have staff and faculty done that was not supportive of your educational goals?

Theme 1: Student Challenges and Changes

The students identified family, community, and academic challenges, which influenced their persistence in college. The family challenges included time management, extended family caregiving, single parenting, child care and transportation. The time management challenges for tribal college students involved; parenting, involvement in their children's school activities, household chores, cooking and cleaning for the entire household while still finding time to study. Students, with children, explained that they did not study until after their children went to bed, which found them up after midnight doing homework. When asked what students noticed in themselves since coming to the tribal college, they said, "I noticed the dark circles under my eyes."

> I have to go to school for my family and myself. I just put everything else aside, I got a family to raise now and I'm not getting any younger. I've been out of school for 12 years and getting back into the study routine, it's hard. You've got kids running around screaming and yelling, watching TV and you're sitting there trying to study. Sometimes you've got to wait till they go to bed to actually open a book. Basically, I told myself you've got a family to raise and you need to get back into school to educate yourself, you've got to start somewhere. (Indian Club Student)

As students identified the challenges they encountered with their families, they, in turn, recognized the support they needed from family members to be successful in college. Vine Deloria (2001) reminds us how challenges are viewed within a tribal value system, "we sometimes forget that life is exceedingly hard and that none of us accomplishes everything we could possibly do, or even many of the things we intended to do" (p. 45). The family challenges for students appeared to be overwhelming at times, yet students seem to find time to do more than when they were not in college:

> When I go to class my wife takes care of my three children, they go to school all day but there's those 3 or 4 hours in the evening that I used to be home all the time. On family life it really does take its toll as my wife gets a little grouchy sometimes but she's behind me 100% on what I'm doing, knowing that in the future I'm going to better my life and theirs. [Going to college] makes me more of a better provider for my children. They'll see how persistent I am and want to learn that stuff and hopefully it'll rub off on them and I can tell it has been

> because they've become honor roll students at school. I am their role model (Machine Technology Student).

The <u>cultural challenges</u> identified by students were: role reversals, loaning money, feelings of isolation, peer pressure, discrimination. The challenge for a female student was the role reversal with her significant other, which included sharing child care, cleaning, cooking, and transporting family members to and from school. Young mothers, spoke about sadness as they realized their class schedules would not allow them to breastfeed their infants. Moreover, students willingly loaned money to family members for light bills, gas, and food. One student stated, "It's like a savings account. They are there to give it back when I need it later in the semester". As students became scholars, they heard comments like, "do you really have to study?" or "we don't want you to change." from friends and cousins not attending college. In the same way that cultures change and evolve over time, so do the value systems of tribal college students. One student believes we have to take a look at belief systems:

> I think we have to go into the beliefs systems that we have. I would like to see more traditional things in the classes than we have. Some of us don't have to take certain classes and I've wanted to take the native language class for a long time (Machine Technology Student).

Students identified the following <u>academic challenges</u>: finding quiet places to do homework, the lack of math and writing skills, and funding. The challenge of finding a quiet place to do homework was more prevalent at home than at the college, particularly, for students with small children. During the day the students utilized the library, student

lounge, or found quiet places outside during warm weather. The students struggled with their lack of writing and math skills. One student described math as being her only challenge to completing her degree. Above all, funding remained the greatest challenge students identified.

> My greatest academic challenge was my college writing. I attempted it three times before I passed (Business Student).
>
> For me it took a different instructor to pass the algebra class. The first two times it was the same teacher and I didn't like the way they taught over my head (Computer Student).
>
> Writing has always been difficult for me to understand. I realize now it was something that a lot of people struggled with. I do the best I can, but I still have a lot to learn when it comes to writing final papers. It's not like I'm running from it, but I do have some fear (English student).
>
> I've been out of school for 12 years and getting back into the study routine, it's hard. You've got kids around screaming and yelling, watching TV and you're sitting there trying to study. Sometimes you've got to wait till they go to bed to actually open a book. Basically, I told myself you've got a family to raise and you need to get back into school to educate yourself, you've got to start somewhere. My first opportunity I had was coming to Fort Peck. There are people here that actually want you to go to school. I feel like I got a better chance, because there are people here pushing me. (Indian Club Student).

The most significant changes students identified were an increase in self-confidence, the ability to ask more questions in class, an improved sense of self-worth, the inclination to be more helpful to classmates, as well as feeling more comfortable and relaxed at the college. Interestingly, the staff and faculty observed a parallel set of changes in students since starting at the tribal college. They noted students had more confidence, an improved attitude; more eye contact with instructors; asked more questions; showed improved self-esteem; bonded with classmates, staff and faculty. They began to openly practice their spirituality; and attendance improved (see Table 5). For example, a student said he was quiet when he started college and after awhile realized he had changed:

> I actually talk more. When I first got here, I really didn't talk to anybody. I was quiet. It was like I wasn't comfortable with my self. I was just feeling my way through the classes, and so, I wasn't really talking to anybody. I kept to myself. After being at the college for a while, I talk all the time now. The college helped me realize that we live in a small community. We all know each other and that helps us grow strong. (Vocational Student)
>
> I do know of one girl I've known since she was in high school; she's one of our students now and I'm totally impressed with how she's persevered. High school was hard for her and she's doing well here and did really well at AIHEC (Female Faculty).

For tribal college students, the challenges and changes were noteworthy because they provided insight into the importance of family-friendly class schedules, an understanding of the lack of writing, math, study and time management skills, and the need to create

new community membership in the college community. In addition to all this, most tribal college students were first generation, female, low income, and single parents. In mainstream institutions of higher education, these challenges are considered factors leading to student departure from higher education (Tinto, 1993). Despite this profile, tribal college students continue to persist in higher education.

Table 11

Tribal College Student Change Matrix

	Most Significant Change in Students
Student Focus Groups	Confidence Talk More Improved Self-Esteem More Helpful to Classmates Comfortable Relaxed
Staff and Faculty Focus Groups	Confidence More Eye Contact Ask Questions Stronger Voice Assertiveness Improved Self-Esteem Supportive Friends and Networks Practice Spirituality Increased Attendance Walk Tall and Proud

The staff and faculty focus group data were used to refine what it was like for tribal college students to manage their family, cultural, and academic responsibilities. The staff and faculty reflect a deep understanding of the challenges and changes students experience at the college. They clearly recognized the importance of managing the added

academic responsibilities, balancing parenting and caretaking roles, and support from family members.

> To me they are good managers because they're resourceful. They know where to go to get something, or to get it done, and they listen to what other people tell them, they look it up and they go after it (Male Staff).
>
> Our students take care of other people's children. Some students bring the child to class because they have nowhere for them to go, they couldn't just leave them alone (Male Faculty).
>
> I had kids at school, a full-time job and it was really hard. [Students] need a family that will support them. If my husband didn't support what I was doing; I would've really had a hard time. I knew he was getting tired of me being gone a lot, but he knew it was for a good reason. If you don't have family support, it's pretty overwhelming (Female Faculty).
>
> The ones that do it and the kids are supportive of mom; do better than the ones whose kids aren't supportive. A lot of the times the kids are the ones who get less attention while our student is working or at school and sometimes the kids act out. That's one way they manage is when the extended family and the kids really buy into and support the goal of mom or dad getting this degree (Female Faculty).
>
> The horrible problems they deal with are drugs and alcohol. I take my hat off to our students for surviving sometimes when I know what they go through. They handle it (Male Staff).

> Tribal members that go to college here actually have it better than those that don't, because they receive their Pell and higher education funding. They have more benefits. So as far as challenges, they break the mold by going to school and not letting other family things interfere. That's one of our student's main challenges; you've got to come no matter what (Female Staff).
>
> I think some of the students actually learn about the culture after they get to the [college]. Through some of the courses that are offered in American Indian Studies, the activities that happen just enhance that knowledge that they've learned (Male Faculty).
>
> Academically I think its math. Math really seems to be a huge barrier. There are so few of our students that get through the college algebra courses. I know if they don't get good advising at the beginning it really messes them up and that could be a really big challenge because they don't know the system (Female Faculty).

Theme 2: Managing the Integration of Responsibilities

The tribal college students described the different ways they found to navigate the higher education journey and how they sought balance among their responsibilities. Initially, students identified becoming aware of the need for family support in their decision to attend college. Equally important, students identified staff and faculty with whom they discussed adjustments they were experiencing as new students. This was particularly important for students who had been out of school for a few years or were first generation.

The tribal college students viewed the family as an integral part of their learning to manage multiple responsibilities. One student used the cultural metaphor of the river to capture the struggle of learning to manage the roles of parenting, full-time student, and working full-time:

> Learning to manage everything I have to do is like three big rivers coming together. When the rivers meet it looks like a huge whirlpool. There are times when I feel like I'm being pulled under by the current and other times when I just tread water until the waters calm down (Computer Student).

Another students explains, "Going to school is like carrying a heavy backpack; it's with you wherever you go." Another describes the camaraderie he discovered at the college:

> When I wanted to quit, was when I lived in Wolf Point and there wasn't a center or anything and I had to hitchhike to get [to Poplar]. It was winter and blowing snow…30 degrees below zero. I asked myself, "Why am I putting myself through this?" Afterwards, I found it was the camaraderie with other students and talking to other people that helped me. Walking that far with a backpack while it's snowing and everybody's flying past you, and you get so down. I didn't come to school for a couple of days, I stayed home. Then I started calling people. I knew I had to get to Poplar and get a ride (Computer Student).

Tribal college students, like many students, enter higher education unfamiliar with the academic responsibilities. Some tribal college students are 'steeped' in the teachings from their families and community and struggle to balance the transition to college, especially if they are first generation students. This correlates with the causal flow of the

conditional matrix, because some of these students entered the tribal college with solid family and community relationships; yet, still needed to develop the academic relationships needed to be successful.

Research Question Two

To respond to the second research question, *How do community and college memberships influence the educational persistence for tribal college students*?, the findings provide insight into the meaning students attach to the *integration* of community and tribal college *memberships*. The following focus group questions and probes were used to identify memberships: What role does tribal culture play in your educational experience? When you hear the word persistence, what comes to mind? In your tribal language, how would you translate this word persistence? What social activities/events have you participated in? What was this experience like for you? Were you ever at a point of giving up while attending the tribal college? If so, what helped you deal with this challenge? What did you do to overcome obstacles? Who helped you?

Theme 1: Tribal Community Memberships

The community memberships identified by tribal college student were: 1) involvement in preparing and attending feasts for births, namings, funerals, *Wopila* (thank you), memorials, and marriages; 2) participation in social cultural events such as making star quilts, beading, fishing, hunting, community speakers, powwows, and harvesting medicinal plants and foods, and 3) participation in ceremonial practices such as smudging, building and attending sweat lodge, going to church, song services, pipe ceremony, and attending the annual Sundance. These community memberships function

on a multi-generational level, involving a fluid movement of relationships within a social and ceremonial context. Thus, the community memberships identified by students provide the context for understanding the cultural roots of educational persistence (Tierney, 1992).

Cultural Family Feasts

The transition from community feasts to the college sponsored feasts allowed students and their families an opportunity to incorporate new group memberships. The cultural family feasts helped to integrate the student's experiences—academically, socially, and culturally. The role a student assumed in the feast was dependent on: the type of feast being planned, how they were invited (formal/informal), how closely related they were to the sponsor(s), and the location of the feast (public/private). If a student sponsored a feast, they had more responsibility than if they were invited guests. The social and ceremonial feasts were a time of socializing and showing respect to the sponsors or host family. Students explain:

> Feasts are kind of our cultural way. They mean your helping somebody else and that's the natural way of getting along with one another, by helping. That's a big part of our culture (English Student).
>
> I have to take time to participate in things in our community. It's a part of who I am and without that connection, I'm not sure I could handle all of this school stuff (Indian Club Student).

Consequently, when the tribal college sponsored a student feast, which involved their families, the college was promoting a natural way of creating new memberships. The

feasts served to transition the students from their community memberships into college memberships by creating new interactions and the possibility of adopting new behaviors and norms.

Cultural Social Events

The music, drumming and songs had particular significance for tribal college students. The students identified powwows as one of the most significant cultural social event they attended and participated in. The powwow provided them an opportunity to reconnect to their traditional way of life. The annual college powwow brought students together and set a time and place apart from everyday academic life. To illustrate this point, students explained their reactions to the powwow experience:

> I'm an enrolled Assiniboine, but I go to a church. More than anything, I carry around the Dakota Presbyterian values that my father instilled in me. One thing I have a hard time understanding is the Native American ceremonies. I'm just now starting to like them; I was never brought up around them. We were brought up different. I'm just now starting to get back into powwows. I ask all kinds of questions to anybody that will listen. I've noticed our college is starting to do a lot of cultural things. With the drum group that was started; I am interested and would like to get involved next year. It was difficult to get back into my culture. (Indian Club Student).
>
> I was brought up with powwows and wouldn't be happy if I couldn't go to one. I go there and just relax and enjoy the dancing and singing. I'm still

> thinking about school, but not in a worried way. We get to see all our powwow friends and laugh and visit (Student Senate).
>
> I was not brought up around the traditional ways until I met [my wife]. The first powwow I went to, I sat down and started watching some of the dancers and started getting goose bumps (Bluestone Indian Club Student).
>
> I myself participate in powwows. Out of school, I go to sweats and attend ceremonies (Computer Student).

Students valued the opportunity to participate in the planning of the annual college celebration. Involvement was viewed as an opportunity to not be isolated, to meet other students and community members, and to gain management skills. For example, one student shares:

> I thought it was good when we had our first powwow. I think [the college] should do it every year. I grew up around ceremonies and powwows. Helping with the powwow had a lot to do with inner strength, because sometimes I felt like I was alone. After meeting other students at the powwow and someone crossing your path that was meant to, this gave me knowledge and helped me spiritually, emotionally, and family wise. Just knowing other students are out there, gives me a lot of strength" (Business Student)

In this study, students identified other traditional practices, such as, beading, sewing, hunting, fishing, gathering plants and medicines and listening to invited speakers, which help them stay connected to their culture and support their educational goals. For instance, students participated in a gardening project and then shared the crop with

community members. This activity still continues today for those families that understand the importance of planting, picking, and distributing food to their families and community. One student shares:

> I would have to say the gardening project. The family was required to participate in the planting, harvesting, and distribution of the corn. It wasn't an option, they required community participation and that's what I like to see. It made all of us happy because everybody at the end of the semester knew what they did, or at least who helped and who didn't (English Student).

The tribal college offered a class on star quilt making and the instructor offered the course in the auditorium of the college. The students set up the trellises for holding the star blanket and took their place around the edge to hand stitch the intricate designs. The quilting class introduced students to new "quilting" friendships while teaching them a cultural skill that served their families and community. The group of quilters could finish an entire star quilt in less than three hours; they would make one for the community and one for the student. In short, it was not enough for the student to just attend the cultural social event, rather, the right of passage occurred when students were fully engaged in the feast, powwow, or making of a star quilt.

Ceremonial Practices

In this study, the concept of spirituality was regarded by students as intensely personal, private, and sacred. Tribal college students understood the importance of ceremonial practices and the key influence this membership had on their persistence in college. Students used words such as cleansing, singing, coming from within, deep

feeling, praying, and dancing to interpret their meaning and intuitive realizations of spirituality. For example, one student shared, "When I get overwhelmed by it all, the first thing I do is pray. Praying helps me find the time to accomplish more."

Likewise, students identified the ceremonial practice of smudging. As they encountered the challenges of balancing their responsibilities, they used smudging to help regain a clearer perspective on their purpose of going to college. The "smudging ceremony" has been passed down from generation to generation. It's used daily with prayer to purify the mind, body and spirit. This ritual is used by most tribes and involves burning sweetgrass, cedar, sage, or tobacco. The students described how they smudged their books before a difficult exam; how they smudged themselves when they were having family struggles, and how often they smudged during finals week. In particular, the smudging ceremony was a way for students to reconnect to their inner spirit (soul) and tap into their innate wisdom about their health and well-being.

Tribal college students grounded in their tribal identity expressed the value of knowing how to help themselves during stressful times. To illustrate, these students explain:

> I've done more searching while being in school. I've wanted to learn more about the culture and spirituality of my people; that we were here before the white people. Spirituality was there, it existed, it was abundant and I'm hoping to bring that back into my own family, my own children, and to my mother (Business Student).

> I notice when things begin to pile up on me like deadlines or my bills. I try to slow down and pay attention to what I can do for just that day. It helps me to pray and talk to someone close to me. It's hard when everyone around you seems to be falling apart. I try to help as much as I can, but feel when I start taking on the stress of others it affects me in school. I don't go sweat all the time, but when I do, it lasts me a long time. I try to go there for help (Business Student).

The students described their part in attending the annual Sundance and sweatlodge ceremonies. They kept their descriptions to a minimum and I understood their privacy and did not probe for further explanations. Interestingly, the students recognized the need to get back in balance with trying to manage their family, social, and academic responsibilities; they discussed knowing when it was time to "go in" the lodge.

Staff and faculty described the student's spirit, their confidence, and ability to make relationships as spiritual:

> If I could just change the word from spiritual to spirit; I think it actually comes together with what we're talking about. As people gain confidence and their self-esteem rises and as they learn more, they learn about other culture, their way of life, and the way other people actually live. They learn they don't have to get beaten up. When that happens it changes their individual spirit so they do become more spiritual, but it isn't necessarily in a religious sense. I haven't seen that much in terms of spirituality religious wise, but I have seen [student's] spirits

> change. [Students], who were down, are laughing and smiling and learning, and they get excited about learning and want to delve into things (Female Staff).
>
> The relationship you have with a student is very important. It might change in certain instructors, but perhaps not with others. I have a student who has all sorts of complaints about [other instructors]. I have a very good relationship with him and I get quite a spiritual feeling from him. He's not religious and I get a good feeling and I know that not everyone does. The personal relationship with students is very, very, very important (Male Faculty).

Theme 2: Tribal College Memberships

The tribal college memberships student's identified as being supportive of their educational goals included the following: Student Organizations, AIHEC Student Competitions, Student Support Services (SSS), Workshops, Conferences, and invited Guest Lecturers. The new memberships provided a way of thinking about the process of persistence and how new memberships interact with old memberships.

Student Organizations

The student organizations identified by students were: Student Senate, Bluestone Indian Club, and the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES). None of the business students identified participation in the American Indian Business Leaders (AIBL) organization. In the sampling process, the student organizations were not targeted. However, student organizations were identified by the student focus group participants.

The student organizations offered the opportunity for students to practice leadership skills. Students were looking for leadership examples and requesting that meetings planned in advance were not cancelled. Their frustrations were with the management of funds which were raised and then used for other purposes. For example, one student states:

> The student senate was frustrating for me. The frustration came from needing money. It's tough to do anything without money and raising money was considering that people were sick of bake sales (Female Student).
>
> I wanted to join the [student organization], but the first two weeks they were arguing and I didn't want to be a part of that. They were arguing over leadership (Male Student).
>
> When I joined the [student organization] all the decisions were already made (Male Student).

The student organizations, which had a supportive staff or faculty member, were well attended and students became more involved in fundraising activities and participating in conference competitions and activities.

AIHEC Student Competitions

Each year the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) holds an annual conference that focuses on student success. The students identified the following competitions they participated in: knowledge, business, and science (oral/poster) bowls, web design, art exhibition, athletics, critical inquiry, speech, theater, fashion show, Mr. and Mrs. AIHEC, and research symposiums.

One student stated that he was selected as "student of the year" at the annual American Indian Higher Education (AIHEC) conference. He expressed what a huge accomplishment this was for him and he thought an award like this would never happen to him. Other students placed first in the accounting competition and third in the business communications competition. The students viewed this annual conference as fun, exciting, and a chance to get away and enjoy oneself. In addition, students appreciated the experience of applying classroom knowledge and skills in the competition:

> [AIHEC] is like a five day vacation away from everything (Business Student)!
>
> The chance I got going to AIHEC. Using the skills I learned and everything from the classes I had taken. Just going somewhere and competing, just being there and winning made it even more exciting (Computer Student).

The staff and faculty similarly observed the role of the AIHEC competitions in the development of the student's confidence and perseverance:

> I do know of one girl I've known since she was in high school; she's one of our students now and I'm totally impressed with how she's persevered. High school was hard for her and she's doing well here and did really well at AIHEC (Female Faculty).
>
> They're more assertive and more confident. The AIHEC group that went down did very well. That's showing everyone they are learning what there suppose to be learning and can compete with others and do very well. I think that was really a boost for those students, they were so proud of themselves and were

> walking on clouds. They were really supportive of each other and they had to do it as team (Female Faculty).

Student Support Services (SSS)

The students identified the following Student Support Services (SSS) as supportive of their educational goals: counseling, mentoring, grant aid, cultural enrichment activities, tutoring, and campus visits. The support services provided opportunities for academic development, assistance with basic college requirements, and served to motivate students toward successful completion of their educational goals. For example, students mentioned the Search and Rescue (early intervention), recognize the value of SSS staff and their willingness to offer many different kinds of support:

> The Search and Rescue is pretty good. They're concerned about why you haven't been in class, but don't hound you to come back (Male Computer Student).
>
> The Search and Rescue team gives you friendly reminders to come back to class (Vocational Education Student).
>
> I like the fact that there are people to physically show you how to get a tutor, find gas money, and talk to someone that will listen (English Student).

Workshops and Conferences

The students identified specific workshops and conferences that influenced their persistence at the tribal college. They included: the Dakota/Nakoda Language Classes, Advanced Technological Education (ATE) Conferences, the Montana Campus Compact, Lewis and Clark Institutes, and the Upper Missouri River Institute. Student participation

in the above workshops and conferences exposed them to positive role models and leaders in future career choices:

> I got to go to an ATE conference in Washington, D.C. last week and that was really great. I got to know a lot of people from all over the country and have kept in touch with them. I didn't realize how much you learn about yourself at these gatherings (Computer Student).
>
> Our group advisor always provides words of encouragement and by just being there is a big help to us. She always offers support and takes a personnel interest in us (Female Business Student).
>
> We were gone for two weeks at training and it was actually hard for us to miss classes. We did ask for the homework assignments and what needed to be done while we were gone. When we got back it was not that big of an issue, we just flowed back into the class (Machine Technology Student).
>
> Particularly [the Business instructor], gave me direction when I was bouncing around and not knowing where to go academically. Overall, the instructors go above and beyond the call of duty to help you out (Business Student).

The Integration of Memberships

The tribal college students used metaphors to describe the integration of cultural and academic memberships. Student's viewed the integration like "building bridges between two worlds." Tinto (1993) describes *academic integration* as a function not only of success in courses, but also of relationships with faculty and staff. Tribal college staff

and faculty provided students, who are first in their families to attend college, with academic advice and guidance that others may receive from family members who have college experience (Taylor, 2001). The students clearly recognized the importance of supportive relationships with faculty and staff.

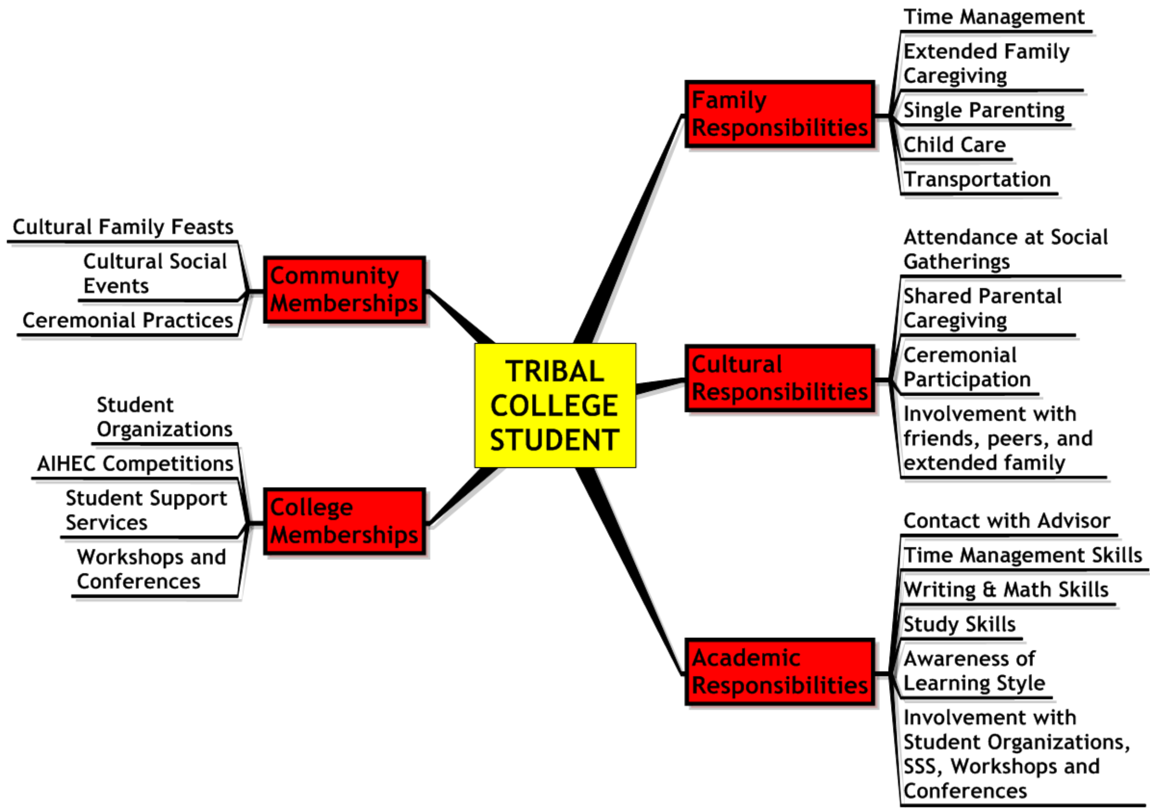
The integration of academic, family, and cultural memberships occur at the same time students come to the realization they have been out of school for a number of years, awareness of their family commitments, and determined to not let go of their cultural values and beliefs. The students' memberships in both the college and community overlap. The students find themselves developing relationships not only with staff and faculty, but with friends and family members of other students, which impacts the perception they have as students. As one young male student stated, "You don't feel like you're alone in this. There are other people going through this too."

It is not uncommon for tribal college students to find themselves participating on similar student organizations, traveling with some of the same students to a campus visit, sharing the same tutor and being blood relatives or related through marriage. One student stated, "Being a tribal college student is like building a bridge between two worlds, your culture and the college. It's like walking a tightrope to keep it all straight in your mind."

The integration of memberships for tribal college students is at the core of understanding the factors that influence their educational persistence. When students feel isolated and overwhelmed they will depart from the tribal college. On the other hand, if students learn to balance responsibilities and manage memberships, they find ways to persist in college.

Figure 3

Tribal College Student Responsibilities and Memberships



Findings from the Grounded Theory Analysis

The goal of this section is to present the findings from theory analysis as a set of interrelated concepts and to establish the "groundedness" of the theory on educational persistence. This section begins with a brief description of the theory on educational persistence for tribal college students and then details the process of how the theory was developed using the analytic grounded theory techniques and procedures designed to build theory. Next, the evidence is provided to explain the categories, properties, dimensions and relational statements between categories. The evidence is provided to

make the case that the categories represented were found in the focus group data. Finally, the literature is brought in to show how these findings relate to what is already known about American Indian student persistence. The section concludes with a chapter summary.

This grounded theory allows us to see the persistence of tribal college students where once we only saw student departure; cultural strengths where we once found deficits; and achievements where we once perceived failure. From this perspective, this theory refers to a "work in progress" rather than to an established formal theory (Hobfoll & Shlomo, 1986; Turner, 1996). It is important to note from the beginning that although the term "theory" was used throughout this study and is commonly used in student retention literature, many of the elements of this grounded theory are only beginning to be formulated and few have been rigorously tested (Charmaz, 2000; Smith, 1990; Siedman, 2007).

Emergence of the Grounded Theory

This study developed a grounded theory on educational persistence for tribal college students. The two categories are grounded in the stories of students and consist of six properties and seventeen dimensions. The categories represent not one individual's story but rather the stories of many [students] reduced into, and represented by, several highly conceptual terms (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This theory on educational persistence is rooted in the experiences of American Indian students and refined using focus group data from tribal college staff and faculty.

The central category (sometimes called the core category) of the theory on educational persistence, *Vision of Success*, consists of two properties. The two properties include awareness and expectations. They help to define and give meaning to the core category. The property of awareness includes the dimensions of thought recognition and a sense of knowing one's feelings. The expectation property includes the dimensions of confidence and a sense of hope. In summary, the core category, *Vision of Success*, is defined as an awareness of the spiritual connection among thought, feeling, and behavior and the hopeful expectation of success. In this study, as students came into a deeper understanding of their personal *Vision of Success*, they simultaneously sought support from people, culture, and activities.

The linked category (sometimes referred to as the second category), *Circles of Relationship*, consists of three properties. The first property, family relationships, includes the dimensional range from parents to grandparents, children to grandchildren, spouses to boyfriends, and cousins to close friends. The second property, community relationships, includes the dimensions of elders to spiritual advisors, Sundance to Church, and peers. Similarly, the third property, academic relationships, includes the dimensional range from advisor to faculty, and counselor to retention officer, and financial aid officer to peers. These dimensional relationships helped define and give meaning to each interlocking layer of support needed to accomplish the student's *Vision of Success*. The linked category in this grounded theory, *Circles of Relationship*, is defined by the three interconnected layers of culture, people, and activities, which provides a seamless web of family, cultural, and academic support for tribal college students to persist in college.

The two relational statements to emerge between the categories were *caregiving* and *worthiness.* The challenge of balancing *caregiving* with the added academic responsibilities took a toll on students and their families. Most of the students in this study were able to find ways to manage successfully. They "leaned on" other family members, spouses, and friends to assist them with caregiving. The second relational statement between the categories was *worthiness*. Students wondered if all the challenges, sacrifices', and family stress was really worth the effort. They described coming to terms with this dilemma and deciding to continue on regardless of the struggles. The students dealt with unhealthy relationships; the lack of boundaries with family members; facing unrealistic expectations; asking for help; and accepting responsibilities. It was not an easy process, but in the long run it strengthened their ability to decide if college was *worth* the effort.

The Process of Grounded Theory Development

The primary objective of the grounded theory analysis was to expand upon an explanation of the phenomena of educational persistence by identifying the key elements of that phenomenon, and then categorizing the relationships of those elements to the context and process of this study. In other words, the goal was to go from the general to the specific without losing sight of what makes tribal college student persistence unique. The 14 focus groups were transcribed and analyzed using grounded theory coding, memoing, and sampling. This process produced 2 theoretical categories with 6 properties, 17 dimensions and 2 relational statements.

Data collection, analysis and theory formulation was undeniably connected in a reciprocal sense, and the grounded theory approach incorporated explicit procedures to guide this process. This was especially evident in that according to grounded theory, the processes of asking questions and making comparisons was specifically detailed to inform and guide analysis and to facilitate the theorizing process. For example, the focus group research questions were open and general rather than forming specific hypotheses, and that the emergent theory did account for a phenomenon that is relevant to tribal colleges and universities (TCUs).

There were three distinct yet overlapping processes of analysis involved in the development of this grounded theory. They were: open coding, axial coding and selective coding. Open coding was based on the concept of the focus group data being "cracked open" as a means of identifying the relevant categories. Axial coding was used when the two categories were in an advanced stage of development; and selective coding was used when the core category correlated with the second category in the theory.

Initially, the open coding technique produced four categories: children, vision of success, sense of hope, and circles of relationship. The staff and faculty focus groups (second layer in the double layer research design) were used to refine the differences and similarities among these four initial categories. As a result, the initial category, *children*, became a dimension within the property on family relationships. Similarly, the initial category, *sense of hope*, became a dimension within the property of expectation. The grounded theory procedures and techniques carried out the steps of theory building—conceptualizing, defining, and developing categories in terms of properties and

dimensions—and relating these two categories through statements of relationship (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Once the categories were named, development began in terms of their specific properties and dimensions. Through specification and dimensionalization the patterns of *Vision of Success* and *Circles of Relationship* emerged. Thus, the foundation and beginning structure of the theory on educational persistence was formed. The category names were chosen because of the imagery and meaning they evoked when examining data comparatively and contextually (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and were taken directly from the words of the students. The *in vivo* codes helped to preserve the meaning (Charmaz, 2006) of student's stories of persistence.

The next logical step in the process of theory development was memo writing. Memos were written from the beginning of data collection and throughout analysis. The memos helped to clarify and direct subsequent coding. They prompted me to elaborate processes, assumptions, and actions covered by codes and categories. They helped to take the emergent categories apart and break them into their components. Raw data was brought into the memos and 'grounded' the abstract analysis and laid a foundation for making claims about it. Thus, defining the categories started by explicating its properties and dimensions through memoing.

When building theory inductively, the concern is with representativeness of the concepts and how concepts vary dimensionally (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 214). In this study, the data collection was directed by theoretical sampling, which meant that the student focus group sampling was based on the two theoretically relevant categories and

the relationship between them. Student sampling was complete when the two categories were saturated. The second layer (staff and faculty) of focus groups were used to help refine the constructs, properties, and dimensions.

Data collection and analysis were consciously combined, and the initial data analysis was used to shape continued data collection. This increased the "density" and "saturation" of the two categories. Interlacing data collection and analysis in this manner increased the insights and clarified the parameters of the emerging theory. At the same time, the method supported the actions of initial data collection and preliminary analyses before incorporating previous research literature. This guaranteed that the analysis was based in the focus group data and that pre-existing constructs did not influence the analysis and/or the subsequent formation of the theory. No previous theoretical constructs were utilized in the development of this theory.

The grounded theory analysis provided detailed and systematic procedures for data collection, analysis and theorizing, but it was also concerned with the quality of the emergent theory. Strauss & Corbin (1998) state that there are four primary requirements for judging a good grounded theory: 1) It should fit the phenomenon, provided it has been carefully derived from diverse data and is adherent to the common reality of the area; 2) It should provide understanding, and be understandable; 3) Because the data is comprehensive, it should provide generality, in that the theory includes extensive variation and is abstract enough to be applicable to a wide variety of contexts; and 4) It should provide control, in the sense of stating the conditions under which the theory applies and describing a reasonable basis for action.

This theory is grounded in the cultural context of American Indian students residing on a federally recognized Indian reservation and provides a clear understanding of the complex memberships and responsibilities they learn to manage while going to college. The grounded theory provides variation and is abstract enough to be applicable to a wide variety of tribal college contexts.

Central Category: Vision of Success

Tribal people believe a vision is something given to us from the creator.

I have now completed the analytic work required for the development of a theory on educational persistence. I have written down my ideas based on my own cultural and professional experience, research, and observations in a tribal college setting. I have researched the many meanings and Indigenous translations of the word *persistence*. I have consulted tribal elders, research and theory on related topics.

Using these sources, I constructed the following theory:

The core category, *Vision of Success*, is composed of three parts:

1. an awareness of thought,
2. a way of knowing feelings, and
3. expectation of success.

Awareness of Thoughts

The first part, *awareness of thoughts*, is the ability to notice one's thinking. It is the realization that we create thoughts based on how we perceive things. Students described insights into how their thinking was connected to how they felt. I wanted to capture these thoughts and understand the dimensions associated with this property.

The concept of *visioning* is a creative exploration of choices as students begin their journey into higher education, particularly for first generation students. The Conditional Indigenous Matrix (see Table 13) was used to help locate the cultural metaphors students used to express the dimensions of self-awareness. For example:

> I took a deep breath and stepped through the front door of the college; I could see myself at a crossroads in my life and I made the decision to go down the road of education; I saw myself walking across the stage and actually reaching out my hand to receive my diploma, that's how much I wanted this; I saw myself as confident and determined to finish school no matter what I encountered (Business Student).
>
> It was like building a bridge between two worlds. It's like walking a tight rope at times. I'm the only one in my family that has seen this bridge. There are times when I'm not sure what to expect. My wife is the one that talked me into trying this and she encourages me everyday (Bluestone Indian Club student).

I decided to call these mental images, *visions,* because each cultural metaphor shared the characteristic of "sight." The metaphors held the following traits in common: They helped to create an awareness and understanding of what the students desired. To help refine the dimensions of this category the staff and faculty focus group data were used to identify the most significant changes in students since attending the college. The most significant changes reported by both layers of focus groups were: asking questions, improved self-esteem, confidence, and increased attendance (see Table 5). This helped to refine what student's noticed and what staff and faculty observed.

The *in vivo codes* students used to express thought recognition were "noticing," "realizing," and "seeing." They noticed how clear or busy their thinking was; realized the impact of decisions; and saw the need for balance. For example, one student explained, "while going to school here, there were times when I just needed to take time off or take a break and listen to my folks and grandparents. This is how I get clear on what they expect of me and then I can take care of what I need to do." Another student said, "It was my willingness to embrace uncertainty and to turn things over I had no control of; and everything else just seemed to fall into place." The thought patterns to emerge were feelings of comfortableness and a willingness to help others. Following are student quotes expressing these patterns:

> I been back to the college several times to take new programs and get another certificate. I feel comfortable here. This is my home. Plus, I have relatives that work here and my grandkids go here. I was waiting for another opportunity and here comes this new program that will help me in my job. (Machine Technology Student)
>
> I try to pay attention to my thinking and hold onto the thoughts of finishing and taking care of my family. I have learned to encourage myself and make up my mind to do the best I can while I'm here (Student Senate).
>
> I can still remember how scared I was to come here. I wondered if too much time had went by from the time I graduated high school to now. I didn't know anything in the beginning. I must have looked like a deer in headlights, but over time I learned how to get around this place. It's funny, but today I find

myself helping other students that are just as lost as I was. It's funny how the tables are turned now and I'm the helper. (Computer Student)

When I saw myself entering a new part of my life, I felt excited and wondered what was coming next. I've been taught to pay attention when things come to me and listen to that little voice inside that tells me when something is meant to be. (Indian Club Student).

Students noticed their thoughts regarding the decision to go to college; they described a sense of clarity and the experience not seeming real; it was real. It was a new reality because they re-defined a successful self-direction. Cajete (1994) refers to this as the creative thought process, which establishes meaning and context. One student said, "It was my willingness to embrace the uncertainty and to turn things over I had no control of; and everything else just seemed to fall into place."

As students' experienced success, they realized it was like giving back to their family and community. They became helpers to other students when they least expected to. When they were successfully managing responsibilities, they experienced a renewed sense of energy in their lives. They found themselves doing things they did not have time to do before. A student's *Vision of Success* is part of the foundation for persisting in the academic setting. A vision is about recognizing the thoughts you have as you journey through the process of learning and noticing what you attract into your life (Theoretical Memo, July 5, 2005). The most practical thing we can achieve in any kind of work is insight into what is happening inside us as we do it (Palmer, 1990).

Self-awareness enables us to see our place and our responsibility within the movement of history and is in turn experienced by our communities (Deloria and Wildcat, 2001). Following Maenette Benham (2000), the concept of crafting a vision implicitly takes into account the coexistence of both Native and Western worldviews, the sharing of stories and acknowledging the debilitating effects of western ideology, assimilation and cultural genocide on aboriginal peoples.

Way of Knowing Feelings

Knowing how one feels, or the understanding of the connection of feeling to thought, is the second and necessary key to educational persistence. Students are aware of the emotions of fear, vulnerability, and disconnection when they first enter the college. After the first year, the students experience feelings of excitement, exhilaration, and confidence. A student shared, "I was scared to enter certain offices and ask for help. Now I'm everywhere on campus and I know who to go to for help." The following quotes illustrate how students intuitively come into a "knowing" how they feel about this experience:

> When I first came back to school I was scared. I didn't know what to think about the tribal college because I had given up before. Coming back to the college has given me more confidence in myself. I have gained a lot of knowledge and it shows in how I reflect this knowledge to everybody I encounter, even my children. (Business Student)

I had negative thoughts when I first started here. I thought to myself, I probably won't finish. I'm not smart enough. Now I'm tutoring other students. I keep encouraging myself everyday to not give up. It works! (Business Student)

For me, not giving up is a personal feeling, a personal goal. The reason I was so persistent is because back then I had nothing, I felt I was nothing. In my mind and in other people's eyes I was a drunk and a drug addict and I grew up dealing. I've been trying to build myself up and prove these people wrong. There is something else out there; you don't have to live that life. People need to realize what they have and show themselves they want something better. It's a personal thing; they're going to have to want to do it themselves. They're going to have to want their own growth and be sick and tired of where they were. (English Student)

When I first walked into the college, I thought, no big deal. Now, when I walk into the college, it's a challenge for me to learn more and more. (Computer Student)

I've seen a lot of things going to school, a lot of culture and I'm happy about it. A lot of [students] come in with a mindset of, "I'm just going to go to school and not make friends with anybody. I'm not going to worry about anybody else but myself." Until one person actually helps somebody out, it opens up their eyes a lot more than going to a big university. Here at the college, everybody's like family. The people are here to help. It's amazing, and that's

> one of the reasons it's hard for me to move on from here and if I go to a big university, what's going to happen? (Indian Club Student)
>
> One good thing about college is there's Indians here that you can relate to that are maybe going through the same stuff you are. Because, growing up in the big cities you don't see a lot of Indians… and here you're surrounded by them. I think that's a good way to start asking questions with friends or someone you don't know. Asking about their culture or what they believe in. Or going to different rez's and you see there are people out there that are going through the same struggles you are. (Computer Student)

One student describes her initial feelings of fear and desire to learn more about her culture for her children:

> When I first came back to school I was scared. I didn't know what to think about the tribal college because I had given up before. Coming back to the tribal college has given me more confidence in myself. I have gained a lot of knowledge and it shows in how I reflect this knowledge to everybody I encounter, even my children. (Business Student)

Almost a half century ago, Helen Harris Perlman (1957) suggested that "relationship leaps from one person to the other at the moment when emotion moves between them" (p. 65). This description seems almost mystical at first; but a second look reveals that it was prescient of current multidisciplinary research, which promises to offer all the helping professions exciting new tools for conceptualizing and making use of the relationship in their work (Salzberger-Wittenberg *et al.* 1983*: ix)*. Supportive

relationships are a fundamental source of support for American Indian students. By paying attention to the nature of the relationships between students and culture, it is argued, we can make a significant difference. In particular, the quality of the relationships deeply influences the hopefulness required to remain curious and open to new experiences, and the capacity to see connections and discover meanings (Salzberger-Wittenberg *et al.* 1983: ix).

Expectations of Success

The third component of educational persistence is an expectation of success. It is the desire to create internal and external measurements of success. An expectation of success was measured by students as a strong sense of hope, being confident, and positive mental images. Students described these images as dreams of a better life and the determination to not give up. Students identified individuals (family members, participation in community events, and staff and faculty) who communicated high expectations to them. In their own words they explain:

> Coming back has given me more confidence in myself. I have gained a lot of knowledge and it shows in how I reflect this knowledge to everybody I encounter, even my children (Business student).
>
> Nothing new can come into my life unless I'm grateful for what I already have I have my job, my kids, my health. I'm just here waiting to see what this opportunity might bring (Machine Technology student)
>
> I've done more searching since coming to college than I ever have. I've wanted to learn more about my culture, the spirituality of our people that was here

> before anything. Our spiritual beliefs were there, it existed, it was abundant and I'm hoping to bring that back into my own family, my own children, and my mother. I've even realized that my mom basically depended on me through my dreams. My dreams are basically dependent on what she taught me, and it will be the same with my children (English student).

In the process of refining the dimension of expectations of success, I used the staff and faculty focus groups. I coded the questions regarding examples of how staff and faculty supported the student's educational goals. Interestingly, their examples went above and beyond their job description. They communicated taking extra time with students, supporting them with private family challenges, and deeply caring for their students. Equally important, I used memoing to help refine the dimensions and look for patterns. Following are excerpts from the memos:

> Students expected to be treated with respect by staff and faculty, they wanted an education, but they did not want to change who they were as Indians, they expected to be challenged in the classroom, and they expected to find support to go to college. They did not want to "loose themselves" in the process of getting an education. They felt strongly about trying to find the balance between being full-time students, full-time mothers and fathers, and for many working full-time (Theoretical Memo, July 17, 2005).

Persistence is a profoundly ancient concept as well as a centuries-long spiritual experience for Indigenous people in America. Greater insight into persistence will be gained by exploring tribal college student encounters, by listening to their stories. Tribal

college students who persist have discovered a delicate balance between their traditional upbringing and formal academic training. In American Indian higher education, tribal college students have a dual mission: to preserve, protect, and promote their traditional way of life; while learning western models of research, history, policy, and practice. All of this is accomplished in the midst of insurmountable economic, social, and academic challenges.

Ihtsi patah piyopah (the source of all life) is the lens through which students learned to nurture, protect, and dream for their future. High expectations teach them to stand strong, to *Igah kimah* (try hard) and to *Pinah muht sko sit* (never give up hope). The students learned to trust feelings and the process. On the whole, these *expectations of success* are grounded within the deep structural context of indigenous ways of knowing, history, and values. Tribal colleges have created a place for students to discover the interconnectedness of learning, spirituality, and identity:

> I walked into the college the other day and was kind of shocked when I noticed the smell of sage. At first I thought someone was getting high. The staff was smudging downstairs and I thought that was pretty interesting. That people felt free to smudge and pray and they didn't have to hide it. It made me feel better too, that I could talk about my religion freely. I can be who I am here (Indian Club Student).

Again, the Conditional Indigenous Matrix (see Table 8) was used to help sharpen explanations and map the range of conditions and consequences of the dimensions of confidence and hope:

> Coming to the college was like planting a seed; hoping it would grow and turn into something good. I pray to fill myself with good thoughts along this journey. I'm not sure what the seed will look like, but I hope for the best. My beliefs guide me on how to take care of the seed and to help it to grow. I understand that anything can happen to it. It might storm and freeze; someone might drive over the top of it; it might get too much water or not enough. If I water it and take care of it, it will turn into a big tree. This is how I look at hope (Indian Club student).

The tree is a metonym for state of mind, relationship growth, and reality. The use of the tree metaphor is a vivid expression of how students express hope. Even the smallest belief that they can get through college, as others have, fuels the persistence process. Early in the educational journey, it is possible for an advisor, friend, or family member to carry the hope for the student. However, at some point, students develop and internalize their own understanding of hope. I define hope as a feeling; something we wish for that is likely to happen; a feeling of trust or a desire.

Tribal college students do not separate their spiritual beliefs from other parts of their lives. In fact, spirituality and beliefs permeate our entire existence (The Blackfoot Gallery Committee, 2001). These metaphors give voice to the student's stories of integration and management of family, community, and academic responsibilities. Through stories, symbols, analogies and metaphors, American Indian students are able to determine the future of their educational vision.

Linked Category: Circles of Relationship

Persistence is really all about relationships, it's that simple.

This category is linked to the core category in that each circle of support serves to shape and inform the student's *Vision of Success*.

The linked category, *Circles of Relationship*, is composed of three parts:

1. family relationships,
2. community relationships, and
3. academic relationships.

Family Relationships

The first part, *family relationships*, are members united through bonds of kinship, clan, marriage, adoption (formal and informal), and ceremonial memberships. These relationships provide students with companionship, socialization, protection, and security. Students identified the following *family relationships* as personal sources of support: parents/grandparents, children/grandchildren, spouse/significant other, and friends. Similarly, students referred to the tribal college like their "second family."

Students found it challenging to manage parenting, household chores, child care, and caretaking of other family members. According to tribal college students, the family memberships had the most influence on their persistence. A Machine Technology student shared, "It's not just my [blood] relatives that help me. It is a whole *circle of relations* that I lean on when I can't do it by myself. I pray a lot and things just seem to be provided to me. I don't just sit and wait for someone to help me. I go and ask for help from anyone that will listen to me." I decided to use an *in vivo code* to capture the meaning of this category, *Circles of Relationship.*

> And that's what I've noticed in what I would call our successful students; the ones that persevere till the end. They seem to have formed friendships and

supportive networks where they help each other out. It's really strong between our students and they don't tend to come in bonded as a group. They seem to form them as a group after they get here (Female Faculty).

> The biggest challenge is making sure our son is taken care of and making sure everybody's health is taken care of in a good way. Managing is hard, but with my father, mother, sister and in-laws to help me. I just can't thank them enough for their support. (Computer Student)

> My seventeen year old has been my little backbone; he's given me a lot of support. I've given him his own responsibilities like getting to school, or making his own supper sometimes. I'm teaching him to be more independent. He looks at going to college with excitement; he's looking forward to it. (Business Student)

In each focus group student's expressed affection toward children and their way of life. In fact, in each student focus group, someone cried when discussing their children. Students recognize the challenge of balancing responsibilities and the impact this can have on their families. For example:

> I don't want to neglect my children in the process of getting a degree. I feel strongly about trying to find the balance in caring for my kids, husband, and homework. (Business Student)

> I am okay with being a "C" student. I do the best I can at things. But the truth is that I want to keep my family. I don't want to overdue school and run the risk of loosing my wife and kids because I paid too much attention to school. I'm

okay with being an average student in school. I know I could do better, but I want my family too. (Indian Club Student)

I used the faculty focus group data to help me refine the notion of relationships in the academic circle. I coded the student descriptions of an ideal classroom and compared it to the faculty focus group data. Interestingly, faculty described getting books on time, engaging course content, noise control, room temperature, comfortable chairs, and good lighting as an ideal classroom environment. Students described it in terms of how comfortable they felt, if they felt they were being heard, the kind of rapport they had with faculty, and wanting to be called by their first name. Another student said, “We want to be called by our first names and then we know the instructors really know who we are.” The importance of relationship was highly valued among tribal college students. In fact, one student described an ideal classroom as watching the instructor throw their head back and laughed out loud. She said, “Then we know they’re human.”

In *Fostering Resiliency in Children and Youth: Promoting Protective Factors in School,* Benard (1997), described a sense of autonomy and self-efficacy and the belief that one can have some degree of control over one’s environment as another characteristic of resilient children—a sense of purpose and future. This sense of purpose and future appears to be a powerful predictor of positive outcomes (Saleebey, 1992).

Community Relationships

The second part, *community relationships*, included a web of relationships and interactions among kinship, ceremonial, and family structures. The web included people living on the reservation; people with a common background; and a tribal nation with a

history. The reservation community provided students with a place and sense of belonging. Students identified the following community relationships as sources of support: elders (e.g., extended family, spiritual advisors), ceremony (e.g., sundance, sweat lodge, pipe, singing), Church (e.g., Christian/Native American), and activities (e.g., powwows, feasts, beading, hunting, quilting) and peers.

The community feasts, social events, and ceremonies provided opportunities for students to be involved in the planning, preparation, and participation. A Bluestone Indian Club student shared, "I have to take time to participate in things in our community. It's a part of who I am and without that connection, I'm not sure I could handle all of this school stuff." These community relationships serve a multi-generational purpose, involving both the young and elderly members, members from different tribal affiliations, and members who reside off the reservation.

> I've lived here all my life. I enjoy living with people I know and going to basketball games, powwows, and things at the college. I also want a degree and good paying job. Maybe I want too much, but my way of life is important to me, plus, I want to give back one day. (Vocational Education Student)
>
> I turn to my culture when I'm faced with stressful situations in school. Remembering to slow down and taking time to pray and talk to someone older than me to get a better idea of what I'm doing. I don't do this all the time, just when nothing else seems to be working for at school (English Student).

Tribal college students tap into their culture to gain a sense of purpose; they understand the importance of ceremony; know how to seek encouragement from family and

community relationships; and overtime acquire a sense of self-confidence in managing their community memberships and responsibilities. The staff and faculty speak to the sources of support:

> From observations over the years that I've been here, I think their culture has a very important role. The evidence is from their attendance at events over attending classes. It's a very important part of their lives, whether it's attending powwows, honoring ceremonies, funerals, or births. The culture is very important to them (Female Staff).
>
> Our AIHEC student of the year is a prime example. He was into drugs very heavy, his life with his wife wasn't the greatest and now everything spiritually has changed in him. He's coming to school, he's straight "A", almost a 4.0. Not in the sense of going to church but to me as a spiritual being, he's changed for the good and it's working for him and his family and everybody around him. He's a pleasant student to be around (Male Faculty).

Greg Cajete (2000) writes that it is within our communities that we come to know what it means to be a people of a place and to have a sense of belonging:

> The community is the place where the forming of the heart and face of the individual as one of the people is most fully expressed. It is the context in which the person comes to know relationship, responsibility, and participation in the life of one's people.

Having a community with which students can identify, and from which they can receive support, is critical to their academic success (Sedlacek, 2004). Through it all, [students]

have survived as distinctly tribal people, with much of their culture intact and a growing sense of collective strength. The very fact we are still here and [as] strong in our ways stands as a testament to our resilience (Bergstrom, Cleary, & Peacock, 2003).

Academic Relationships

In the third part of the category, *Circles of Relationship*, students identified academic relationships that fostered their persistence at the tribal college, they were: advisors, faculty, financial aid and retention officers, counselors, peers and even the janitor. These academic relationships provided assistance with admissions, financial aid, advising, counseling, tutoring, and participation in student organizations and conferences. As a result of their experience, students realized that in the process of learning how to manage their responsibilities, they became mentors, tutors, and advisors to their peers. The following quotes illustrate their perception of the importance of *academic relationships*:

> It was Ron [retention officer] who helped me. He's basically really the only one who is willing to take the time afterwards to come to your house. He'll ask you what's going on buddy. I see you on my list, and I don't want you on there no more. He'll coax you back. He wants to help you fix your problems. When I had a problem with rides, he'd be there at 7:30 a.m. to pick me up. (Vocational Student)
>
> I noticed at the tribal college that it's mostly Indians. Run by Indians so they have a natural feeling toward Indian students. If students have problems there is an understanding like a family. The [staff and faculty] turn around and do

everything in their power to help you. If they can't, they try to find someone who can. It's one of the best places I've been at (Indian Club Student).

The academic relationships were rewarding for both staff and students. However, faculty found the relationships challenging due to heavy credit loads, decisions concerning other activities, scholarship, and faculty development interests. These tribal college professionals serve above and beyond their own self-interest and are committed to American Indian student development; to understanding the social and economic conditions on the reservation; and valuing the interaction of family, community, and academic relationships.

> There's something in [students] that allow them to keep moving forward no matter how bad yesterday was; tomorrow's going to be a better day. We'll get through it somehow, cry, yell, or scream, whatever…somehow they get up every morning (Female Faculty).
>
> The majority of the students are women and it's usually the women that worry about the bills, daycare, potty training, and where they are going to live. It's good to see more men taking part in that responsibility, but I think that's our culture here, it's the woman who is always hustling for food or borrowing money (Female Staff)
>
> I had an older student who, aside from going to Williston occasionally had never been off the reservation, and was provided an opportunity to go to school elsewhere and it scared her. She was over forty and she was telling me she didn't feel comfortable being off the reservation (Female Faculty).

> You can actually leave [the college] and walk by your instructor at Albertson's, and they say hello to you. What instructor would do that at any other school? The instructors here make an extra effort to get to know you. (Senate Student)
>
> [Students] struggle and make a lot of sacrifices and sometimes they'll miss out, but the ones that are succeeding are really goal orientated. What my staff and I try to do is support them. We're there for them by offering support, letting them use our office, and just being there for them (Female Staff).

In *Common Purpose: Strengthening Families and Neighborhoods to Rebuild America*, Schorr, (1997) commented that those who engage in community service or serve as mentors send out ripples of hope as they enlist in a purpose that extends beyond self-interest (Schorr, 1997, p. 381). The role of [tribal college professionals] as leaders within the college community is not taken lightly. Each member of the college community has insight, knowledge, and skills that enhance the collective efforts of the whole (Benham & Stein, (2003).

Statements of Relationship

Double-Edged Sword
Caring is part of our culture, caretaking has negative as well as positive consequences.

The statements of relationship provide insight, understanding, and a meaningful guide to action for American Indian student persistence. This section is reserved for the relational or explanatory statements that help to show how the categories are interrelated into a larger theoretical scheme (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The first statement of

relationship between the two constructs was <u>caregiving</u>. Doing double, sometimes triple duty took a toll not only on the student's emotions but also on their sleep, finances and their progress toward completing a degree. Increasingly, tribal college students—and families—are looking for ways to manage the *double-edged sword.*

Not all tribal college students were able to manage the often conflicting demands of parenting (particularly single-parenting), caregiving, and being full-time students. This study found that tribal college students departed college or stopped out because they struggled with managing the demands of college and caring for children, spouses and parents. In the focus groups, students expressed mixed feelings about their triple-duty of managing household chores, homework, and spending time with children. The flipside is that these duties, in turn, also served as sources of support and opportunity for students and their families.

Worthiness
Is this good for me? Is this what I really want? Do I really need an education?

The second statement of relationship between the two theoretical categories was <u>worthiness</u>. Their individual stories held the key to understanding how they decided to persist or stop out from college. Not all students were able to find the meaningfulness of the experience and ultimately departed the tribal college. The measurements of success can only come from within the student and how they determine if they can manage their new responsibilities and memberships.

The student's questioned, "Is this good for me? Is this what I really want? Do I really need an education? Each student assigned their own merit and worth to these

questions and responded accordingly. For example, some decided to detach from unhealthy relationships; ask for more study time from family members; scheduled more contact with advisors; stopped loaning money; cut-back on caretaking; engaged a tutor earlier; made arrangement for homework when they were going to gone; and missed class less often. The students measured success based on what was pleasing, useful, and valuable to their family and community. Among the highest good was their happiness and deciding that education was *worth* the effort.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the findings were organized around two research questions and the findings of the grounded theory approach to educational persistence. The study sample included a total of 56 participants selected from students, staff, and faculty from Fort Peck Community College in Poplar, Montana. All of the student participants were second year, full-time American Indian students and the staff and faculty research participants were full-time employees providing direct services to students. The student organizations were selected based on consistent student participation and the academic majors were selected based on high enrollment and graduation rates.

The findings to the two research questions addressed the themes of student challenges, changes, responsibilities, community memberships, and college memberships. As a result, the grounded theory on educational persistence illustrates how tribal college students perceived their lived experiences of managing the integration of responsibilities and the influence of memberships on their educational persistence.

The conceptual framework introduced two theoretical categories with their properties and dimensions and concluded with two statements of relationship between the categories. The two categories were: 1) *Vision of Success*, a process defined as the spiritual awareness of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and a conscious expectation of confidence and hope, and 2) *Circles of Relationship*, which provides interlocking layers of support.

In conclusion, the related literature focused on the relationship between theory and oppression, Native student retention, cultural resilience, and the effects of departure upon students in higher education (Boyer, 1997; Benham & Cooper, 2000; Cajete, 2001; Day, 1999; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Dodd et al, 1995; Falk & Aitken, 1984; HeavyRunner & Morris, 1997; Lin et al, 1988; Myer, 2004; Monette, 1995; Ortiz & HeavyRunner, 2003; Tinto, 1998; Wildcat & Deloria, 2001; Wright, 1989). The remaining chapter will present the discussion and conclusions based on the above findings.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

In the late 1980s researchers began surveying the attitudes of American Indian students primarily attending mainstream institutions of higher education (Lin, et al, 1988; Huffman, et al, 1986; Falk & Aitken, 1984). Subsequently, more researchers began a closer examination of the departure and persistence rates of American Indian students (Benjamin et al, 1993; Brown et al, 1997; Dehyle, 1992; Hoover & Jacobs, 1992; Pavel, et al, 1993; Tate and Schwartz, 1993). However, very few researchers focused on tribal college student retention. As tribal college students began to transfer to mainstream institutions, questions were raised regarding applicability of academic programs, support services, instruction, and retention (Boyer, 1989; HeavyRunner, et al, 2003; O'Brien, 1992; Pavel and Colby, 1992; Rousey and Longie, 2001). The purpose of this study was to explore the stories of tribal college students and develop an Indigenous theory on educational persistence from one tribal college in northeastern Montana.

The participation of tribal college students in higher education has been limited by obstacles, such as ninety percent being first generation, eighty five percent living below the poverty index, and inherent differences between the culture of higher education and American Indian culture (AIHEC, 1999; American Indian College Fund, 2000; Lin, LaCounte and Eder, 1988). The two research questions guiding this study were: (1) What is it like for tribal college students to manage the integration of academic, social, and cultural responsibilities? (2) How do community and college memberships influence educational persistence for tribal college students? The grounded theory method was

used because it fostered the discovery of a student perspective in relationship to the integration of responsibilities and memberships. Data was collected from semi-structured focus group interviews, researcher memos, and field notes.

Overview of Significant Findings

An indigenous theory was developed as educational persistence for tribal college students. The theory included two constructs: (1) *Vision of Success*, and (2) *Circles of Relationship*. The two constructs made up a total of six properties and seventeen dimensions. For tribal college students, the process of persisting in college was rooted in discovering an appropriate balance among academic, family, and community relationships and while maintaining critical membership in both the community and college. Without this balance (or cultural fit), students experienced stressful demands and pressures from home as well as in the academic environment. Finding a sense of balance between these responsibilities and memberships was essential to the persistence of American Indian students.

The results of this study are consistent with Tinto's (1993) findings of academic and social integration as strong predictors of retention and degree completion. The study found three *circles of support* and guidance from family, community, and academic groups. A student's *vision of success* involved an understanding of the link between integration and the importance of memberships within a college community.

Interestingly, there were several negative cases or stories which dealt with the issue of racism. The student's stories on racism included examples in the classroom, among faculty, and between Native and Non-Native student couples. For example, one

student shared a story of having a conflict with his Non-Indian wife regarding the history of the tribe. He was expressing his anger at how the Non-Indians treated Indians and what had happened to his tribe. His partner felt attacked and they argued. He realized he had to come to terms with his anger because his children were half white. Another example, was a student not eligible to be enrolled, but was recognized as an affiliate member of the tribe. He was not eligible for tribal funding and felt discriminated against because he did not have enough Indian blood to be enrolled. Although he grew up on the reservation all his life, he felt marginalized by not being "fully counted."

I chose to not continue the coding and analyzing of these negative cases because it I was looking for stories of persistence. I chose to put them to the side and not incorporate them into the theory. I realize now that this could be a study in and of itself. A part of persistence is learning to navigate the system of racism.

Links are made in this chapter to family, community, and academic persistence factors based on the findings of current literature and this study. Where findings mesh with the literature, references are made to the literature in the discussion of the findings. Implications are presented here for administrators, policy makers and tribal leaders. In addition, suggestions are made for further research to support the body of knowledge about the success of tribal college students in higher education.

A Discussion of the Results of the Developing Theory

The main findings of this study include the two significant theoretical constructs of (a) the dimensions of the *Vision of Success*, and (b) three kinds of supportive *Circles of Relationship*. Tribal college students reported a "coming to know" the connection among

thoughts, feelings, and their behavior toward not giving up. Furthermore, students who reported "seeing" in their mind, themselves being successful led to increases in supportive family relationships, increased participation in cultural activities, and establishing meaningful academic relationships. Consequently, increases in awareness, expectations, confidence, and hope led to a positive self-concept, realistic assessment of strengths and weaknesses, and the setting of long-range goals.

Research question one, wanted to know what the experience was like for students to manage the integration of academic, social, and cultural responsibilities. This question was soundly answered by the results. Significant evidence of responsibilities was identified by students in the areas of family, community, and academics. expectations, caring and supportive relationships, opportunities for participation (Benard, 1997; Boyer, 1997a; Dodd, et al, 1995), approachable faculty (Boyer, 1997b; Bowker, 1992; Dehyle, 1992; Tate and Schwartz, 1993; Wilson, 1997), and Native cultural centers (Taylor, 2001) has been soundly established in prior studies. Integration has been found to be a strong predictor of success, and has been found to be especially critical to first generation students facing a lack of financial resources, lack of family support, academic preparation, and lack of knowledge about the college experience and bureaucratic operations of higher education (Thayer, 2000). Poverty and being first generation compounds the student's ability to continue. Several of these students "stopped out", yet returned as they found resources and "learned the ropes."

The second research question wanted to know the influence of college and community memberships on the persistence of tribal college students. The memberships

functioned concurrently and caused student to realize their commitments and, in turn, they developed an increased determination to not "let go" of their values and beliefs. Students that participated in the Sundance ceremony could not take summer classes because of the conflict in commitment. The students balanced their participation in powwows with their class schedule and homework assignments. Students commented on the "camaraderie" they discovered among friends, staff, faculty, and family members of other students. They came to realize they were not alone in this journey.

The Relationship of the Results to Previous Theory or Research

The results of this study have theoretical implications for understanding educational persistence for American Indian students in higher education. The following areas will be discussed in reference to possible ways the current study clarifies or extends the theoretical understanding of tribal college educational persistence.

One of the theoretical aims of this study was to address the issues of colonization, assimilation, and paternalism in understanding tribal college student retention. Previous research indicated an oppressive (Hoxie, 1984) and paternalistic (Barker, 1999) approach to Indian education in America. Although participants studied were not born during the colonial educational system, this study provides some evidence that the complexity of colonization and self-determination, the contradictions of power and privilege, and providing a critical appraisal of empirical evidence and indigenous ways of knowing (Cajete, 2001; Gilbert and Terrell, 1998; Van Soest and Garcia, 2001) are critical to the educational persistence of American Indian students.

An important contribution of this study that extends the previous literature and theoretical understanding of indigenous educational persistence is that the exploration is grounded in the student's stories and provided a conceptual framework for tribal colleges. The majority of the retention literature that studied American Indian students attending mainstream colleges and universities neglected to include tribal colleges (Falk and Aitken, 1984; Huffman and blank, 1986; Benjamin, Chambers, and Rieterman, 1993; Pavel and Padilla, 1993; Tate and Schwartz, 1993; Dodd, et al, 1995; Brown et al, 1997). Previous tribal college studies explored attitudes or graduation rates (Boyer, 1989; Wright, 1989; Monette, 1995) without attempting to link these indicators to a theoretical framework on retention. This study extends the current literate and theoretical conceptualizations of retention by incorporating the cultural context of place, the importance of family and community, and sovereignty in terms of language, history, and our political reality in America.

Furthermore, the findings of this study suggest that poverty, lack of pre-college academic training, and being first generation contributes to a student's ability to manage the integration of responsibilities and memberships. Future research should continue to explore the influence of complex factors and the persistence of tribal college students.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

The findings of this study in context with past research have significant implications to the provision of tribal college student services. Taken as a whole, the results of this study indicate that persistence for American Indian students is interwoven with family, community, and academic relationships and the development of culturally relevant

retention practices can facilitate the retention of American Indian students. This is particularly true for first generation tribal college students.

Student retention has roots in pre-school, elementary, secondary, and post-secondary higher education. But while it is important for student service practitioners to understand student retention, it is equally important to understand the implications this view of persistence has for policy makers, administrators, tribal leaders, and also mainstream institutions that serve American Indian students.

Two important notions orbit around the theory on educational persistence. The first is that students construct a vision of success using what they already know. There is no *one way of knowing* on which a vision is created. Rather, American Indian students come to academic situations with knowledge gained from family and community experiences, and that prior knowledge influences what the new expectations of success will be.

The second notion is that support is active rather than passive. Students confront their challenges in light of what they encounter in parenting, finances, household chores, and caregiving. If what students encounter is inconsistent with their current expectations, their perception changes to accommodate the academic experience. Students remain active throughout this process: they apply current perceptions, note relevant elements in new relationships, judge the consistency of prior and emerging relationships, and based on that assessment, and modify their vision of success.

A grounded theory on educational persistence has important implications for tribal college faculty. First, teaching cannot be viewed as the transmission of knowledge

from enlightened to unenlightened; tribal college teachers do not take the role of the "sage on the stage." Rather, teachers act as "guides on the side" who provide students with opportunities to test the adequacy of their current expectations.

Second, a supportive family and community system (biological or surrogate) often accompanies academic success for tribal college students. Equally, if a student's family is in crisis it can be deeply disturbing and distracting (HeavyRunner & Murray, 2003). The family is integral to the educational persistence of American Indian students. Student services practitioners should become familiar with the interrelatedness of how students perceive the family, particularly the extended family structure.

Third, as noted by Pavel and Padilla (1993), academic integration and students' intentions for degree completion were among the most important variables that directly and indirectly affect post-secondary retention and graduation outcomes. Student support services practitioners should become aware of the challenge to manage the integration of academic, family, and community responsibilities. Likewise, practitioners should become familiar with the process students encounter as they make the transitions between community and college memberships.

Fourth, in Tinto's (1993) conceptual framework, he used Arnold Van Gennep's (1960) rights of passage stages (separation, transition, and incorporation) to discuss the rituals and ceremonies students encounter in higher education. Each stage had its own ritual and ceremony to mark the movement of individuals through the basic life changes (Tuzin, 2001; Tinto, 1993). The transition stage was important because students' announced their movement into a new college membership.

For students, the challenges and changes are noteworthy because they provide insight into the importance of “family-friendly” class schedules, an understanding the lack of writing, math, study and time management skills, and the need to create a “new community membership” in tribal colleges. In addition to all this, most tribal college students are first generation, low income, single parents, and female. In mainstream institutions of higher education, these challenges are considered factors leading to student departure from higher education (Tinto, 1993). Despite this profile, however, tribal college students are persisting in numbers never before seen in the history of American Indian higher education.

There are several potential areas of future research that focus on why tribal college students persist in higher education. Continued studies on the implications of oppression can help faculty and staff better address the needs of students. These studies could also help American Indian students learn to ‘heal’ and support student self-exploration and discovery. Continued explorations about cultural resilience and the struggle for balance between the Indigenous and mainstream cultures and the various levels of assimilation would be useful. Studies about family resilience could help Indigenous students and practitioners support each other. Further studies on the success rates of tribal college transfers would be useful in expanding knowledge of transitions for Indigenous students. Studies on the impact of various strategies such as American Indian student support services, Native American Studies courses, Native outreach, Native bridge programs, peer mentors, and role models would help administrators know more about effective retention strategies. Studies that specifically explore the retention of

tribal college students whose family members actively participate in college transition and adjustment activities would also shed light on possible support models.

Finally, an additional study testing this theory should be designed for urban American Indian students. A study like this could help tribal leaders and administrators understand the challenges of maintaining connections with community, language, oral history and family. In addition, the urban study could be conducted by Indigenous graduate students pursuing their degrees.

In conclusion, this indigenous theory offers policy makers, administrators, tribal leaders, and mainstream institutions a unique perspective on the complex functioning of culture in creating culturally-responsive relationships and memberships in higher education. This cultural perspective contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamics and interconnectedness of various relationships and offers hope that retention interventions can occur at any level of an American Indian student's family, community and college network.

Methodological Implications

This study has several methodological implications that can strengthen future research in the area of student retention. The methodological purpose of this study was threefold: (1) the sample characteristics; (2) the procedures used for data collection; and (3) the approach to data analysis and interpretation. The results of this study extend our understanding of the expert literature in each of these areas. Further discussion of these areas and their implications for future research is warranted.

Charmaz (2006) stated that the quality of theoretical sampling is to seek people, events, and information to illuminate and define the boundaries and relevance of the categories. Initially, a purposive sampling technique was used with the student sample, which included a total of 35 full-time sophomore American Indians (primarily enrolled members of the Fort Peck Sioux and Assiniboine tribes), 19 (54%) were male, and 16 (46%) were female. The ultimate quality of this theory was profoundly affected by the selection of these 35 tribal college students. All are enrolled members; many steeped in the traditions of the culture, and have a sense of belonging to this community. They were able to reflect on their experience and provide detailed descriptions of the phenomena of educational persistence.

The data collection methods used in this study included: semi-structured focus group interviews, memos, and diagrams. The purpose was to obtain a deep understanding of the student's experience and to use staff and faculty perspectives to help refine the categories and properties. The focus groups had several semi-structured questions (see Table 6). The process of developing the questioning route proved to be invaluable in the process of developing this theory on educational persistence. The questions had a natural flow that brought out the deep feelings and insights students held regarding their persistence in college, in their parenting, and most important in their spiritual development. Krueger & Casey (2000) discuss the amount of time put into the development of the questioning route is critical to the whole process.

When using the constant comparative method in grounded theory, data collection, coding, and analysis occurred concurrently throughout the research. First, the

phenomena must be continually compared for similarities and differences and when concepts emerge this process must be repeated. The second step is to continually decide which category or property of category the phenomena being analyzed belongs to, and then name this category. These two steps ensure the generation of categories and their properties from the data. Furthermore, they highlight the need for expansion of the theoretical sample to further clarify, define, or consolidate categories and properties identified throughout the coding.

Limitations of Study

This study is limited in scope in terms of the research sample and the specific research site selected. The research sample was limited to full-time, second-year students that were Native American and/or First Nation (Canada) descendants. In addition, only full-time Native or non-Native staff and faculty were selected as focus group participants. Finally, the selected research site, Fort Peck Community College, is representative, compared to the other 38 tribal colleges, in terms of location, high unemployment, and student enrollment.

It is important to note the limitations associated with this study. Even though the tribal college students were carefully recruited to reflect the demographic characteristics of the student population being examined, these focus groups included only the opinions of a small number of students. In addition, the results do not reflect a distinction between male and female responses to the questions. Those who seek to use the results may examine the focus group procedures, methods, and analysis; and then decide to what degree this study might be applied to their situation (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Summary and Conclusions

This study has striven to advance the current knowledge and understanding of educational persistence among tribal college students. Interest in this field has been stimulated by the rapid growth in the number of TCUs, the need for improved retention rates, and development of Indigenous theory in higher education. Few studies have examined the persistence of American Indian students in higher education, specifically among the 38 tribal colleges. With the rapid growth of enrollment in TCUs, institutions will be called upon to develop support systems sensitive to the needs of tribal college students and to enhance their transfer experience into mainstream institutions. A deeper understanding of this phenomenon can help tribal college practitioners in designing culturally appropriate retention strategies for students holding an Indigenous worldview philosophy. Finally, in considering cultural teachings in relationship to student persistence, researchers and theorists can no longer ignore the role of culture as a major indicator of educational persistence. As the theorist, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) points out, “the struggle is to make sense of the Indigenous world while also attempting to transform what counts as important in the world of the powerful (p. 39)”.

This theory is intended to extend our knowledge of American Indian student retention that has been a part of Indian Education, namely, the importance of building on cultural assets. The grounded theory on educational persistence is not yet a theory—although developments in that direction become bolder (Benham & Stein, 2004; Pavel, 2007). It is a way of thinking about what we do with students coming from tribal colleges and universities. It provides a distinctive cultural lens for examining the world

of student services practice. Any approach to American Indian student services practice, in the end, is based on interpretations of the experiences of students and is composed of assumptions, ethics, and a set of methods.

In conclusion, this qualitative research study has advanced the knowledge of tribal college student retention delineating the parts to a vision of success, specifying the dynamics of supportive relationships related to retention, and providing insights into stress and worthiness as perceived by the tribal college students. The study generated a grounded theory on educational persistence about what it was like for students to manage the integration of academic, social, and cultural responsibilities and the influence of community and college memberships on educational persistence. These students described the actions they took in response to stress and if college was worth it. The focus group itself seemed to have the effect of expanding students' ideas of success. Any retention strategy should include this sort of self and group reflection. Strategies that fail to consider or include the dynamics of identity, family, and a sense of belonging would probably be unsuccessful. A grounded theory emerged to explain the characteristics supporting a vision of success and supportive relationships while in college.

Appendix A: Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs)

REGULAR MEMBERS

Bay Mills Community College	Michael Parish, 12214 West Lakeshore Dr., Brimley, MI 49715, 906.248.3354, (Fax) 906.248.2011
Blackfeet Community College	John Salois, PO Box 819, Browning, MT 59417, 406.338.7755, (Fax) 406.338.3272
Cankdeska Cikana Community College	Cynthia Lindquist Mala, PO Box 269, Fort Totten, ND 58335, 701.766.4415, (Fax) 701.766.4077
Chief Dull Knife College	Richard Littlebear, PO Box 98, Lame Deer, MT 59043, 406.477.6215, (Fax) 406.477-6219
College of Menominee Nation	Verna Fowler, PO Box 1179, Keshena, WI 54135, 715.799.5600, (Toll Free) 800.567.2344, (Fax) 715.799.1308
Diné College	Ferlin Clark, PO Box 126, Tsaile, AZ 86556, 928.724.6669, (Fax) 928.724.3327
Fond du Lac Tribal College	Patty Petite, 1720 Big Lake Rd., Cloquet, MN 55720, 218.878.2688, (Fax) 218.879.4146
Fort Belknap College	Carole Falcon-Chandler, PO Box 159, Harlem, MT 59526, 406.353.2607, (Fax) 406.353.2898
Fort Berthold Community College	Russell D. Mason, Jr., 220 8th Avenue North, PO Box 490, New Town, ND 58763, 701.627.4738, (Fax) 701.627.3609
Fort Peck Community College	James Shanley, PO Box 398, Poplar, MT 59255, 406.768.6300, (Fax) 406.768.5552

Haskell Indian Nations University	Linda Warner, 155 Indian Ave., PO Box 5030, Lawrence, KS 66046-4800, 785.749.8404, (Fax) 785.749.8411
Ilisagvik College	Beverly Patkotak Grinage, PO Box 749, Barrow, AK 99723, 907.852.3333, (Fax) 907.852.1821
Institute of American Indian Arts	Robert Martin, 83 Avan Nu Po Rd., Santa Fe, NM 87508, 505.424.2300, (Fax) 505.424.0050
Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa Community College	Danielle Hornett, 13466 West Trepania Rd., Hayward, WI 54843, 715.634.4790, (Fax) 715.634.5049
Leech Lake Tribal College	Leah Carpenter, PO Box 180, Cass Lake, MN 56633, 218.335.4200, (Fax) 218.335.4215
Little Big Horn College	David Yarlott, Jr., PO Box 370, Crow Agency, MT 59022, 406.638.3100, (Fax) 406.638.3169
Little Priest Tribal College	Darla LaPointe, Acting President, PO Box 270, Winnebago, NE 68071, 402.878.2380, (Fax) 402.878.2355
Navajo Technical College	Elmer Guy, PO Box 849, Crownpoint, NM 87313, 505.786.4100, (Fax) 505.786.5644
Nebraska Indian Community College	Micheal Oltrogge, College Hill, PO Box 428, Macy, NE 68039, 402.837.5078, (Fax) 402.837.4183
Northwest Indian College	Cheryl Crazy Bull, 2522 Kwina Rd., Bellingham, WA 98226, 360.676.2772, (Fax) 360.738.0136
Oglala Lakota College	Thomas Shortbull, 490 Piya Wiconi Rd., Kyle, SD 57752, 605.455.6000, (Fax) 605.455.6023

Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College	Karen Radell, 2274 Enterprise Dr., Mount Pleasant, MI 48858, 989.775.4123, (Fax) 989.772.4528
Salish Kootenai College	Joseph McDonald, PO Box 70, Pablo, MT 59855, 406.275.4800, (Fax) 406.275,4801
Sinte Gleska University	Lionel Bordeaux, 101 Antelope Lake Circle, PO Box 105, Mission, SD 57555, 605.856.8100, (Fax) 605.856.5401
Sisseton Wahpeton College	Diana Canku, Agency Village Box 689, Sisseton, SD 57262, 605.698.3966, (Fax) 605.698.3132
Sitting Bull College	Laurel Vermillion, 1341 92nd St., Fort Yates, ND 58538, 701.854.8000, (Fax) 701.854.3403
Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute	Jeffrey Hamley, 9169 Coors Rd., NW, PO Box 10146, Albuquerque, NM 87184, 505.346.2348, (Fax) 505.346.2343
Stone Child College	Melody Henry, RR1, Box 1082, Box Elder, MT 59521, 406.395.4875, (Fax) 406.395.4836
Tohono O’odham Community College	Olivia Vanegas-Funcheon, PO Box 3129, Sells, AZ 85634, 520.383.8401, (Fax) 520.383.8403
Turtle Mountain Community College	James Davis, PO Box 340, Belcourt, ND 58316, 701.477.7862, (Fax) 701.477.7807
United Tribes Technical College	David Gipp, 3315 University Dr., Bismarck, ND 58504, 701.255.3285, (Fax) 701.530.0605
White Earth Tribal and Community College	Robert "Sonny" Peacock, 210 Main St. South, PO Box 478, Mahnomen, MN 56557, 218.936.5610, (Fax) 218.935.0708

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

College of the Muscogee Nation	James King, Ed.D., Acting President, 600 N Mission, Okmulgee, OK 74447, 918.758.1480, (Fax) 918.293.5313
Comanche Nation College	Colin K. Winkelman, 1608 SW 9th St., Lawton, OK 73501, 580.591.0203, (Fax) 580.353.7075
Keweenaw Bay Ojibwa Community College	Debra J. Parrish, 111 Beartown Rd., PO Box 519, Baraga, MI 49908, 906.353.4600, (Fax) 906.353.8107
Wind River Tribal College	Marlin Spoonhunter, PO Box 8300, Ethete, WY 82520, 307.335.8243, (Fax) 307.335.8148

INTERNATIONAL MEMBER

Red Crow Community College	Marie Smallface Marule, PO Box 1258, Cardston, Alberta, Canada TOKOKO, 403.737.2400, (Fax) 403.737.2101

Appexdix B: Consent Form

Tribal College Student Retention Study
Consent Form

You are invited to be in a research study on tribal college student retention conducted by the University of Minnesota. You were selected as a possible participant because you are either a full-time sophomore or a full-time staff or faculty member. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in this study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to develop a theory on student persistence in tribal colleges. The theory will emerge from the stories of students and how they believe they came to "persist" in a tribal college setting. The intent is to offer a useful perspective to educators, policymakers, administrators, and tribal leaders interested in improving outcomes for tribal college students.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

1. You will be asked to take part in a one-time only focus group discussion lead by Iris HeavyRunner. The focus group will vary from 2-8 participants and the topics discussed will relate to the issue of tribal college student retention. An audiotape will be made of this discussion. The discussion is expected to last about ninety minutes.

2. The focus groups will take place on the Fort Peck Community College campus.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

The probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information you provide may help student support services staff, faculty, and administrators improve retention rates for tribal college students.

You will receive a $50.00 cash incentive at the end of the focus group. Each subject will be required to sign a form with the date and name of the focus group moderator.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report or publication we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records, including audiotape transcripts, will be kept in a locked file; only the researcher will have access to the records. The audio tape recordings will be erased on October 1, 2003.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota or Fort Peck Community College. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships. The cash incentive will be adjusted to $25 due to early withdrawal.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Iris HeavyRunner. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact her at (612) 991-1489. Also, you may contact her advisor, Ronald Rooney at (612) 624-3712.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, contact Research Subjects' Advocate line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware Street Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; telephone (612) 625-1650.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature____ Date______________

Signature of Investigator___________________________ Date______________

Iris HeavyRunner

Appendix C: Checklist for Focus Group Interviews

1. **Advance Notice**
   _____ Contact participants by phone two weeks (or more) before the session.
   _____ Send each participant a memo confirming time, date, and place.
   _____ Give the participants a reminder phone call prior to the session.

2. **Questions**
   _____ Questions should flow in a logical sequence.
   _____ Key questions should focus on the critical issues.
   _____ Use probe or follow-up questions as needed.
   _____ Limit the use of "why" questions.
   _____ Use "think-back" questions as needed.

3. **Logistics**
   _____ The conference room should be satisfactory (size, tables, comfort, sound, etc.)
   _____ Arrive early.
   _____ Check background noise so it doesn't interfere with tape recording.
   _____ Have name tents for participants.

Appendix D: Sample Student Focus Group Questions

1. What role does tribal culture play in your educational experience? (Probe: cultural values, beliefs, attitudes, and practices).

2. When you hear the word persistence, what comes to mind? In your tribal language, how would you translate this word persistence? (Probe: speakers only).

3. What changes have you noticed in yourself since attending the tribal college? (Probe: Holistic Perspective (mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical).

4. What challenges did you encounter in regards to your tribal identity while attending the tribal college? (Probe: isolation, conflicts, kinship, language, and interests).

5. What are your major family responsibilities? How do you manage being a full-time student with family responsibilities? (Probe: adjustment, balance, and awareness).

6. Which academic activities posed the greatest challenges for you? (Probe: admissions, counseling, advising, academic programs, classrooms, student life). Describe the academic activities that have provided the most positive experiences for you? (Probe: classroom, faculty, staff, programs, tutors, mentors, etc.)

7. Describe the ideal classroom environment that you felt was supportive to you? (Probe: unsupportive classroom environment).

8. What have staff and faculty done to support your educational goals? What have staff and faculty done that was not supportive of your educational goals?

9. What social activities/events have you participated in? What was this experience like for you? (Probe: student organizations, cultural activities, extra-curricular).

10. Were you ever at a point of giving up while attending the tribal college? If so, what helped you deal with this challenge?

11. What did you do to overcome obstacles? Who helped you?

12. What can be done to help students be persistent and successful in tribal colleges?

Appendix E: Sample Staff and Faculty Focus Group Questions

1. What role does tribal culture play in student's educational experience? (Probe: cultural values, beliefs, attitudes, and practices).

2. When you hear the word persistence, what comes to mind? In your tribal language, how would you translate this word persistence? (Probe: speakers only).

3. What changes have you noticed in students attending the tribal college? (Probe: Holistic Perspective (mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical).

4. What challenges do student's encounter in regards to their tribal identity while attending the tribal college? (Probe: isolation, conflicts, kinship, language, and interests).

5. What are student's major family responsibilities? How do you manage being a full-time student with family responsibilities? (Probe: adjustment, balance, and awareness).

6. Which academic activities posed the greatest challenges for students? (Probe: admissions, counseling, advising, academic programs, classrooms, student life). Describe the academic activities that have provided the most positive experiences for you? (Probe: classroom, faculty, staff, programs, tutors, mentors, etc.)

7. Describe the ideal classroom environment that you felt was supportive to students? (Probe: unsupportive classroom environment).

8. What have staff and faculty done to support student's educational goals? What have staff and faculty done that was <u>not</u> supportive of student's educational goals?

9. What social activities/events do student's participate in? What was this experience like for them? (Probe: student organizations, cultural activities, extra-curricular).

10. Were students ever at a point of giving up while attending the tribal college? If so, what helped them deal with this challenge?

11. What did you do students do to overcome obstacles? Who helped them?

12. What can be done to help students be persistent and successful in tribal colleges?

Appendix E: Sample Staff and Faculty Focus Group Questions

1. What role does tribal culture play in student's educational experience? (Probe: cultural values, beliefs, attitudes, and practices).

2. When you hear the word persistence, what comes to mind? In your tribal language, how would you translate this word persistence? (Probe: speakers only).

3. What changes have you noticed in students attending the tribal college? (Probe: Holistic Perspective (mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical).

4. What challenges do student's encounter in regards to their tribal identity while attending the tribal college? (Probe: isolation, conflicts, kinship, language, and interests).

5. What are student's major family responsibilities? How do you manage being a full-time student with family responsibilities? (Probe: adjustment, balance, and awareness).

6. Which academic activities posed the greatest challenges for students? (Probe: admissions, counseling, advising, academic programs, classrooms, student life). Describe the academic activities that have provided the most positive experiences for you? (Probe: classroom, faculty, staff, programs, tutors, mentors, etc.)

7. Describe the ideal classroom environment that you felt was supportive to students? (Probe: unsupportive classroom environment).

8. What have staff and faculty done to support student's educational goals? What have staff and faculty done that was <u>not</u> supportive of student's educational goals?

9. What social activities/events do student's participate in? What was this experience like for them? (Probe: student organizations, cultural activities, extra-curricular).

10. Were students ever at a point of giving up while attending the tribal college? If so, what helped them deal with this challenge?

11. What did you do students do to overcome obstacles? Who helped them?

12. What can be done to help students be persistent and successful in tribal colleges?

Appendix F: Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) Map

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