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Abstract

Colleges and universities have witnessed a significant increase in the number of underrepresented student populations but are just beginning to become aware of their needs. These students encounter academic and social problems prior to and after entering colleges and universities. Institutional awareness and support are just a start in an effort to retain and assist underrepresented students in college. Among these underrepresented groups are Native American Indians who are challenged to succeed in a Eurocentric higher education setting.

NATIVE AMERICAN INDIAN FEMALE STUDENTS
IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A Research Paper

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Counseling, and Postsecondary Education
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Becky YoungBear

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Colleges and universities have witnessed a significant increase in the number of underrepresented student populations but are just beginning to become aware of their needs. These students encounter academic and social problems prior to and after entering colleges and universities. Institutional awareness and support are just a start in an effort to retain and assist underrepresented students in college. Among these underrepresented groups are Native American Indians who are challenged to succeed in a Eurocentric higher education setting.

Native American Indian female students in higher education in particular have encountered problems. Female tribal members of the Meskwaki tribe from Tama, Iowa, have been challenged to overcome these academic and social problems in their journey through higher education. These problems include too little unawareness of high school core requirements, ACT or SAT test scores, academic support services, and the responsibilities and expectations of higher education students. Furthermore, these students are unaware of Native American Indian student organizations on college or university campuses.

In spite of these encounters, Meskwaki Indian female students have graduated from college. However, colleges and universities need to become more aware of the academic and social problems encountered by these students. From past research and analysis of my research on Meskwaki females in higher education which follows, institutions will hopefully better understand problems encountered and implement programs to assist these students.

This paper will review literature on Native American Indians in higher education and present findings of interviews with two Meskwaki female students from two Midwestern universities. It will include a historical overview of Native American Indians in higher education, problems they encountered, applicability of Chickering's psychosocial theory to Native American Indian students, analysis of data from interviews with two Meskwaki females, and recommendations for Native American Indians in higher education.

History of Native American in Higher Education

Native American Indians undoubtedly educated their own children from the very beginning. The education of Native American Indians by non-Indians started as early as 1568, when missionaries began schools to Christianize Native American Indians (Palmer, 1996). Wright and Tierney (1991) state, "Euro-Americans have persistently sought to remold Native Americans in the image of the white man--to "civilize" and assimilate the "savages"--but native peoples have struggled to preserve their cultural integrity" (p. 12).

In the 1600s, higher educational institutions attempted to enroll Native American Indians and received financial assistance from benefactors to educate Native American Indians but rarely followed through on these agreements. In 1665, Harvard College received a charter to construct a building to enroll 20 Native American Indians. The establishment only housed six Native American

Indians but provided housing for other non-Indian students (Wright & Tierney, 1991). Harvard is only one example of how colonists said they would provide funding for the education of Native American Indians and ended up using the money for other students' benefit.

In the 1800s, the U. S. government became involved with Native American Indian education in the form of treaty agreements. The federal government proposed these treaties but conditions of these agreements were rarely met. Vina Deloria (in Olivas, 1989) states:

Treaty records and related correspondence in the nation's archives relate only to a fraction of the nearly 400 treaties negotiated from 1778 to 1971. Many agreements were oral: many records were lost. Records that do exist show conclusively, however, that Indian nations ceded their lands to the federal government with great reluctance and they did so in the end largely on the basis of federal promises to educate their children. (p. 561)

In the 1930s, the government began supporting Native American Indian education with the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. The act allocated \$250,000 in loans for college expenses of 515 Native American Indians in higher education. In 1952, the Bureau of Indian Affairs established the higher education scholarship grant program. In addition, Native American Indian veterans of World War II were made eligible for the GI Bill (Wright & Tierney, 1991). With these financial programs available more Native American Indians enrolled in higher education.

Recently, the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 and the Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act of 1978 contributed to the increase of tribal colleges. Native American Indians took control of their educational affairs and contributed to the increase of Native American Indian students enrolling in these colleges (Wright & Tierney, 1991). Native American Indians also are in larger numbers enrolling at major predominantly white colleges and universities.

Problems Encountered

Native American Indians encounter academic and social problems prior to or during their years at colleges or universities. Low retention and matriculation are due to three major problems: lack of academic preparedness, inadequate financial aid, and difficulty in adjusting to the institutional climate (Mulder, 1991; Wells, 1989). With an increase of Native American Indians in higher education, programs and services need to be provided to assist in these areas.

Many of these students are unaware of high school requirements for attending a college or university. These high school requirements include core courses, ACT or SAT scores, and class rank. Reasons include inadequate high school counseling or unavailable bridge programs to introduce students to higher education. Without adequate counseling or bridge programs, Native American Indians may not know how to prepare academically prior to entering a college or university.

Also, students may be unaware of the classroom atmosphere and professors'

expectations in higher education. Cultural differences could be a barrier to Native American Indians in a higher education classroom. The Eurocentric culture in the classroom is different from the Native American Indian culture; Native American Indian cultural differences may include refusing to question authority, respecting elders, and avoiding direct eye contact, any of which may affect their success (Carter, Pearson, & Shavlik, 1988). Introduction to a pre-dominantly white campus and a supportive faculty could contribute to the success of Native American Indians in college. Institutions should not generalize tribes as having the same beliefs or culture. Tribes differ from their religious beliefs, language spoken, and traditional customs passed on to tribal members from one generation to the next. Colleges and universities need to be aware of Native American Indian tribes in their specific geographical area and assist these students in adjusting to the institutional climate.

Financial assistance may be another barrier to Native American Indians' road to success in higher education. Ferron (in Carter et al., 1988) states, "myths run the gamut, from a belief that every Indian has a free ride through colleges (treaties, it is imagined, guaranteed a free education to every Indian) to the notion that Indian students are likely candidates for academic scholarships" (p. 100). However, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the main source of financial aid, has faced budget cuts which has affected financial assistance for many Native American Indians. For Native American Indian women, financial problems are unique

because of cultural factors. The family organization of many tribes is of an extended family system which obligates members to contribute financially to the family. Furthermore, Native American Indians may be unfamiliar with how to apply for financial aid and unaware of grants or scholarships available.

Another area of concern for Native American Indian students is adjustment to the institutional climate. A student's perception of the college campus may determine her or his persistence beyond the first semester or year (Malany & Shively, 1995). Students at these colleges and universities must adjust socially to a Eurocentric environment. In a survey, minority educators found social isolation and culture shock as barriers to educational attainment (Wright, 1985). Native American Indians often must attempt to adjust from a Native American Indian environment to one that has limited minority students on campus.

Establishing connections with other students, support service professionals, and professors are important for one to succeed in higher education. For most Native American Indian students, finding a peer support group or role models at colleges and universities is virtually non-existent or limited (Kulig, 1991). In addition, research indicates students involved in student organizations or campus activities have a better chance to graduate than those who do not (Henderson, 1991). In sum, student participation, awareness of support services, and a campus environment which values diversity could contribute to a student's decision to continue and succeed in higher education.

Chickering's Psychosocial Theory

Chickering and Reisser (1993) define psychosocial development as "a series of developmental tasks or stages, including qualitative changes in thinking, feeling, valuing, and relating to others and to oneself" (p. 2). They propose seven vectors of development an individual encounters or experiences in her/his life: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity. From the interviews of the two Meskwaki students, this paper will explore three of these vectors of development: establishing identity, establishing mature interpersonal relationships, and developing purpose. These were the most prominent issues identified in the women's comments.

The focus is on the individual's sense of self in a social and cultural context. Chickering and Reisser (1993) define establishing identity as "growing awareness of competencies, emotions, values, confidence in standing alone and bonding with others, and moving beyond intolerance toward openness and self-esteem" (p. 173). Though there are many identity models, there are none specifically for Native American Indian students development, but Chickering's psychosocial development model can be applied with modification to explore how Meskwaki female students develop a sense of self and how they proceed to value their culture and others.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) state “developing mature interpersonal relationships involves tolerance and appreciation of differences and capacity for intimacy” (p. 48). Students meet other individuals, begin to learn differences, and form relationships based on honesty, sensitivity, and unconditional regard (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Chickering and Reisser (1993) state “developing purpose entails an increasing ability to be intentional, to assess interests and options, to clarify, to make plans, and to persist despite obstacles” (p. 209). Students begin to explore what they want to do with their lives and establish goals and ideals. There are three major elements students explore: vocational plans, personal interests, and interpersonal and family commitments. Values and beliefs play a role in one’s purpose and provide the student’s image of the world. The meaning of life provides a sense of an individual’s purpose in society.

Chickering and Reisser’s psychosocial theory provides colleges and universities an understanding of important elements which affect a student’s development. Colleges and universities could utilize this information to improve services and to provide opportunities for growth and development. Higher education services could contribute to the growth of college students in their intellectual, social, spiritual, emotional, and physical development.

Interviews

The Native American Indian female students interviewed were born and reared in the Midwest. Kris graduated from the University of Iowa (U of I), while Toni graduated from the University of Northern Iowa (UNI). The data were collected in open-ended interviews. The questions were aimed at the student's cultural background, influences which contributed to their decision to attend college, challenges experienced by the students during college, and recommendations on how to assist other Native American Indians in higher education. Their responses were analyzed using Chickering and Reisser's psychosocial theory. Students' responses were related mostly to three of the vectors: establishing identity, developing mature interpersonal relationships, and developing purpose. It is hoped that the responses from the two Meskwaki students will provide a better understanding of how these students developed and how to assist Native American students in higher education more effectively.

Student Influences

A brief background of and influences on Kris and Toni seems necessary. Kris's major influences for her decision to attend college were her paternal grandmother and mother.

They encouraged me to go to college. They taught me the traditional things girls are taught. They did not really expect me to be prepared to be a wife, get married, and have kids. My grandmother told me to make my

own money.... Her message was not to be dependent on a man for your living and livelihood.

Another influence in Kris's life was the Upward Bound Program. The program enabled her to participate in preparatory courses and an opportunity to live on the Iowa State University campus for summers. The program staff explained high school academic requirements for, admission process to, and orientation to college to the participants.

Toni's influences to attend college came from constant reminders from her parents to go to school. She remembered her mother taking her brothers back and forth to college.

I remember my parents saying to me, "Go to school. If you want a job, you need to go to school." The awareness of a college education became familiar to me...as my brothers struggled to succeed through higher education in the 70s. They did not graduate but realize there were not a lot of support services for Native American Indians. Also, I did participate in the Iowa State Upward Bound Program which introduced me to university environment. I regret quitting the program in eleventh grade because I was unaware of the importance of high school requirements and ACT scores.

Establishing Identity

Establishing identity, one of Chickering and Reisser's seven vectors of college student development, was an important factor in Kris's life. Kris was aware of her ethnic background and maintained her Meskwaki identity. During her first few years at the University of Iowa, she became friends with black female students. She was interested in their culture but was never assimilated into that culture or into the dominant culture.

There was a black girl I went to Upward Bound with...who I hung around with because I did not know of any other Indians. I considered a black sorority...I felt comfortable with them ...but I always knew I was Indian. I went to their rush parties and stuff but I knew who I was and was not trying to act black.

As a child, Kris's parents followed the Meskwaki traditions which influenced her awareness of their religious beliefs and obligations. From forming this strong identity, Kris knew her cultural background. Kris recalls her parent's influence in forming her Meskwaki identity.

My parents were active in the traditional religion...my friends they would be on the week-ends going to Easter egg hunts...I had to go to the ceremony. Looking back....It became apparent to me this was something I want my son to know....We would go to pow-wows, speak Meskwaki, attend community activities, and have frybread. My dad and brothers

hunted and we ate wild game. This made us separate from the rest of society.

Toni's experience at the University of Northern Iowa had a different affect since she assimilated herself into the dominant culture. Her years at UNI were spent with friends from the dominant society. Because she was unaware of other Native American Indians on campus, she established relationships with white female students in her residence hall.

I wanted an education and knew I would have to be at UNI by myself. There were not any other Native American Indians on campus. It was hard but I was able to make friends with other girls in my dorm hall. But as the years went by I could remember my mother telling me, "You are not white. You got to remember you are an Indian." I guess I did not notice I had changed...the way I spoke, English, and the way I dressed.

Now, Toni has returned to her tribe and struggles to regain her Indian identity. She has lost some of her Meskwaki language because of time spent with the dominant society. Re-learning the culture she lost during her time in college is sometimes difficult for her. Pursuing her master's degree, she must balance two worlds: one of her Meskwaki tribe, the other of the dominant society at the University of Northern Iowa.

Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships

In developing mature interpersonal relationships, Kris showed considerable growth as she established new friendships. As a freshman, she associated herself mostly with a girl she had known from the Upward Bound Program. After that they grew apart and Kris was able to establish new relationships on her own with other minority females.

When they saw me with this black girl [referring to her first roommate], I got to know other black girls. First, it was like I was just hanging around with her and maybe that is why she felt like I was just hanging around her. After a while, I developed friendships...on my own and hung out with black girls even when she transferred. I became friends with the black girl across my hall. I seemed more compatible with her than my first roommate. I moved away from just hanging around with blacks and I met a Chicana, a young woman who was in the social work program, and I got to know her.

At first Toni usually felt isolated and alone, but her desire to get a college education motivated her to continue and succeed. Initially she spent most of the time studying. Later she got involved in the hall program, establishing relationships with other residents.

I did not know anybody when I started college. Classrooms and the campus environment was just like another world. There were not a lot of

minority students on campus or any female Native American Indians. It did not bother me because all I wanted was to attend college and graduate. I was lucky to have lived in a dorm, which had girls who were supportive and friendly. We hung out and ended up having a great college experience.

Both students were able to establish relationships with girls in their resident halls. Both related to individuals whom they already knew or with whom they had associated with in high school-- a "comfort zone," an atmosphere which an individual relates to others for support and acceptance. Throughout the interviews, the two students did not mention participating in student organizations, but mentioned the support of minority student professionals who were helpful in their success in college.

Developing Purpose

Developing purpose became evident in Kris's life quite early. Kris knew she would attend college and become someone who would assist others.

In junior high it seemed like I was a counselor. They [other students] would come to me and ask for advice. It was natural to me. I took an introduction to social work class and chose social work as my major. I was interested in working with people and in administration. My future goals include returning to the University of Iowa and possibly pursuing my masters in social work and law.

Toni explained what she wanted but once she reached her first goal, she needed more in her life. She re-enrolled as a graduate student at the University of Northern Iowa and found another purpose in her life.

When I enrolled as an undergraduate at college, I knew I wanted to become a teacher and teach Meskwaki children of my tribe. My goal came true and I taught for five years, but it became too redundant. I needed a position which was more challenging. I still wanted to assist Meskwaki tribal members, so I enrolled in a higher education masters program.

Both students were well aware of what they wanted before and after completing college and reached their goals, determined to assist other tribal members.

Kris and Toni were unaware of any support services, Native American Indian organizations, other Native American Indian students on or off campus, or Native American Indian role models while in college. In spite of the lack of services or knowledge of any other Native American Indians, Kris and Toni were able to succeed in college. Both students mentioned that much of their success was due to the encouragement from their families and self-motivation.

Recommendations

With the increasing numbers of Native American Indians in higher education, colleges and universities need to be aware of problems encountered prior to or after matriculation. The interviews with the two Meskwaki female students brought to light areas of concern with which higher education institutions should

be aware. A commitment to providing support services to the students and individuals who care are essential to Native American Indians' success in college. The following recommendations which are based on interviews conducted for this paper.

1. Bridge programs need to be implemented so that students become more aware of high school requirements prior to enrolling at a college or university. Visitations to the campus should be provided to introduce the students to the atmosphere and environment. Colleges and universities should consider providing summer orientation programs specific to these students.
2. High school counselors need to provide Native American Indians information on high school core requirements long before they enroll in a college or university. Counselors should also provide these students assistance in visiting colleges and universities. Admission programs may also target their recruitment and retention efforts toward Native American Indian students.
3. Hiring of Native American Indians to the college or university staff probably would contribute to a more comfortable atmosphere for Native American Indian students. Native American Indian role models are needed at college and universities.
4. Academic and social support targeted to Native American Indians should be provided. All too often, minority programs target only a single minority group.

5. Mentor programs would be beneficial in providing Native American Indians the support needed to succeed in higher education institutions.
6. Native American Indian student organizations need to be provided to assist students feel a connection with other students and faculty. If there are not any Native American Indian organizations, the college or university should provide a multicultural organization for students in which all ethnic groups are encouraged to participate.
7. Institutions should make a commitment to establishing a diverse institution which supports and enhances all students' development. A basic understanding of the diverse student population is necessary to assist and support students to succeed in higher education.

Conclusion

Just recently have programs been established to assist Native American Indian students in higher education. But there are still colleges and universities which do not have academic or support services targeted for these students. Diversity awareness at higher education institutions has just surfaced due to the increase of the underrepresented student body. With this increase, colleges and universities need to learn about the diverse student population. Institutional commitment for diversity awareness is just the beginning, but there has to be faculty, administrative, and student affairs professionals commitment. Individuals need to become more aware of the various underrepresented students and attempt to assist all

groups in their journey through higher education.

From my higher education experience, I have discovered how research literature on Native American Indian is limited. And attempting to understand student development models and applying them to Native American Indian students is complicated. These Eurocentric models are not always appropriate to the Native American Indian culture and lifestyle. Further research of Native American Indians in higher education is needed in order to provide adequate services for this group of students. I have suggested a few recommendations to assist Native American Indian students through higher education. Colleges and universities can provide these services, but it is the student who must have the motivation and desire to succeed.

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