

American Indian and Alaska Native College Students

AMERICAN INDIAN AND ALASKA NATIVE student attendance and persistence in institutions of higher education are well below the national averages. As with their access to higher education, Indigenous students' participation in higher education is shaped by multiple factors at the individual, familial, community, tribal, and national levels. This chapter reviews what the data tell us about American Indian/Alaska Native student participation in college. We examine enrollment and retention statistics, the nature of Indigenous students' experiences in predominantly White colleges and universities, and the role of tribal colleges and universities.

It is important to note that sweeping statements about the achievement levels and experiences of Indigenous students are inherently problematic because of significant differences between tribal nations, between urban and reservation communities, and between traditional and less traditional Indigenous students. Just as the nation-building efforts are not exactly the same from one tribal nation to the next, so too is there important variability between the experiences of various Indigenous students in higher education. We must not lose sight of this diversity, but we also need to understand better the patterns and trends related to AI/AN students in colleges and universities. Only then can those of us working in institutions of higher education support the goals and desires of students, communities, and nations.

Enrollment Patterns

Although American Indian and Alaska Native enrollment in higher education has more than doubled in the past thirty years—from 76,100 in 1976 to

TABLE 5**Percentage of Population Ages Eighteen–Twenty-Four Enrolled in College or University, 2006**

<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	<i>Enrollment Rate</i>
All students	37 percent
American Indian/Alaska Native	26 percent
Latina/Latino	24 percent
African American	33 percent
Asian American	58 percent
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	39 percent
White	41 percent

Source: NCES (2005a, p. 108).

166,000 in 2002 (NCES, 2005a)—the incredibly small overall numbers and percentages of Native students in higher education demonstrate the imperative for more research on Indigenous students' participation in postsecondary education. American Indian and Alaska Native students between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four remain less likely to be enrolled in a college or university than their White, Asian Pacific American, or Black/African American peers (DeVoe and Darling-Churchill, 2008). Table 5 shows the number of AI/AN students enrolled in college in 2006. Only 26 percent of American Indian/Alaska Native eighteen–twenty-four-year-olds were enrolled in college, compared to 37 percent of the total population.

In the past thirty years, college enrollment for American Indian/Alaska Native male and female students grew at different rates. In 1976, the number of AI/AN males and females was nearly equal; however, by 2006, there were 111,000 AI/AN females (61 percent of all AI/AN students) enrolled in higher education compared to 71,200 males, or 39 percent of the total (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, and Ginder, 2008, p. 159). There is a dearth of research addressing the particular needs and experiences of Native males in regards to college access or persistence and, as we have suggested elsewhere (Brayboy, 2010), health care, employment, and other economic issues may figure into the growing gender gap in male and female college attendance.

In addition to examining the general enrollment patterns for Indigenous students, educators and policy makers must also consider the types of institutions in which students are enrolled. There clearly exists a hierarchy among institutions of higher education, and some types of institutions only offer degrees in particular fields or up to a particular level. As Lowe (2005, p. 34) notes, "little has changed with respect to the types of institutions at which Native American students are enrolled. Data show that Native Americans continue to be underrepresented both in the more prestigious private and four-year sectors of higher education and over-represented in the less prestigious public and two-year sectors."

Native students are more likely to attend two-year colleges than four-year institutions (Cunningham, McSwain, and Keselman, 2007; DeVoe and Darling-Churchill, 2008; Pavel, 1999; Pavel and others, 1998; Pewewardy and Frey, 2002). This is not surprising given issues of proximity to four-year institutions, high school academic preparation, and socioeconomic status. Low-income students tend to aspire to less selective institutions than middle- and high-income students with comparable academic records (McDonough, Korn, and Yamasaki, 1997), and they are less likely to enroll in their first choice of institution (Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, and Rhee, 1997; Perna, 2000). Students who enroll in four-year institutions at the outset are more likely to complete degrees than those who enroll in two-year colleges (Astin and Oseguera, 2004; Bowen and Bok, 1998). Although two-year colleges remain the most financially, geographically, and academically accessible routes to higher education for nontraditional, minority, and rural students (Cohen and Brawer, 2003; Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen, and Person, 2006; Townsend, 1997), only 22 percent of students who start at the community colleges with intentions to transfer actually do so (Cohen and Brawer, 2003). Table 6 shows the enrollment patterns of Native students across institutional types.

These data may be indicative of the type of education that Indigenous students are receiving. The point here is not to make judgments about the quality of public education, but to highlight the limited access to more private, elite institutions. The fact that students of color are more apt to attend larger, less well-funded schools is clearly articulated by Swail, Redd, and Perna (2003). Indigenous students comprise 87 percent, compared with 78 percent of all

TABLE 6**Percentage of AI/AN Enrollment by Institutional Type, 2006–2007**

	Two Year	Public, Four Year	Private, Not for Profit	For profit	Other
AI/AN	45.8 percent	31.1 percent	6 percent	5.3 percent	11.8 percent
All under- graduates	40.7 percent	30 percent	13.5 percent	7.8 percent	8 percent

Source: NCES (2005b).

students, who attend two-year and public institutions (Swail, Redd, and Perna, 2003). In 2008, 21 percent of White, 18 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander, and 17 percent of Black students attended private not-for-profit institutions, while 11 percent of Hispanic and 12 percent of AI/AN students did so (NCES, 2010). According to the NCES Higher Education General Information Survey (NCES, 1998), between 1976 and 1996 the numbers of AI/AN students in private institutions increased from 0.4% to 0.6%—up 50% from 8,600 to 17,700. Although any increases in the numbers of Indigenous students are promising, we still do not see equitable representations of Indigenous students in more elite institutions of higher education.

Retention Patterns

Once enrolled in institutions of higher education, AI/AN students experience the lowest graduation rates among all racial/ethnic groups. Whereas 4 percent of the Indigenous population in the United States has a bachelor's degree, 27 percent of the White population holds this degree (Native American Higher Education Initiative, 2005). In other words, for every one American Indian or Alaska Native who has a bachelor's degree, seven White individuals do. This number is stunning, given the economic, political, and social benefits that accrue for college-educated individuals in U.S. society. When measured according to six-year graduation rates, retention gaps exist between Indigenous students and their peers. See Table 7.

TABLE 7**Six-Year Graduation Rates**

	<i>Six-Year Graduation Rates for AI/AN Beginning College in 1996–1997</i>
American Indian/Alaska Native	36.7 percent
Latina/Latino	38.2 percent
African American	44.8 percent
Asian American/Pacific Islander	62.6 percent
White	57.2 percent

Source: NCES (2005b).

Compared to White students, the graduation rates are lower for students of all underrepresented groups, except Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders. American Indian and Alaska Native students have the lowest aggregate graduation rate among all racial/ethnic groups; Indigenous men are less likely to graduate than Indigenous women: the six-year graduation rate for AI/AN men from the 1996–1997 academic year is 34.3 percent, compared to 38.6 percent for AI women (NCES, 2005a).

The enrollment of AI/ANs in institutions of higher education has increased significantly in the past thirty years, but as we noted above, AI/AN women have experienced a significantly higher increase in enrollment over AI/AN men. A similar pattern holds for the distribution of degrees during the past thirty years. Table 8 illustrates the change in degree distribution for AI/AN men and women between the years 1976 and 1994. For example, among AI/AN students, female bachelor degree recipients increased 135 percent between 1976 and 1994, whereas male bachelor degree recipients increased by just 51 percent during those same years. Likewise, female doctoral degree recipients increased by 143 percent, whereas male doctoral degree recipients *decreased* by 0.1 percent during those years. A similar pattern of higher rates of degree distribution holds for all degree levels.

As indicated in Table 8, the trend for American Indian men is distressing, particularly when examining the fact that American Indian men are receiving fewer doctoral degrees now than they were thirty years ago. This decrease indicates a crisis that must be addressed. Nation building among tribal nations

TABLE 8**Percent Change in Degree Distribution Between 1976 and 1994**

<i>Type of Degree</i>	<i>AI Women</i>	<i>AI Men</i>
All degrees awarded	135 percent	45 percent
Associate	137 percent	51 percent
Bachelor	135 percent	45 percent
Master	126 percent	33 percent
Doctorate	143 percent	-0.1 percent
Professional	303 percent	40 percent

Source: Pavel, and others (1998).

requires both men and women who pursue higher education in order to develop and sustain healthy communities, institutions, and knowledge.

The Experiences of Indigenous College Students in Predominantly White Institutions

Overall, the literature about retention and persistence of Indigenous college students points to a number of factors related to their success and failure. Consistent with studies of persistence for other underrepresented groups, a number of studies argue that AI/AN postsecondary persistence is positively related to involvement in culture-related extracurricular activities (Hoover and Jacobs, 1992), relations with faculty who have an understanding of Indigenous cultures and histories (Reyhner, 1997), and financial support from either personal or institutional sources (McNamara, 1982). In their interviews with 125 Indigenous college students, Falk and Aitken (1984) found that support from family and the larger Native community, adequate academic preparation in multiple subject areas, institutional support services, increased access to financial aid, and adequate personal motivation on the part of the student were all related to higher levels of AI/AN student retention. Bowker's (1992) study of Indigenous women's educational experiences found the strongest relationships between Native women's departure from postsecondary institutions and their

poverty, their lack of a strong sense of ethnic identity (either identifying with the Indigenous or White culture), pregnancy, fear of acting White, and racism.

Given the extremely low rates of enrollment and graduation, it should not be surprising that much of the research describing the state of Native America in college centers on either explaining why the graduation rates are low or outlining prescriptions for fixing the problem. Most of this research focuses on the individual student. However, there is some work that focuses on both the student and the larger structural barriers that influence the experiences of Indigenous college students. This work moves away from locating the lack of academic success in the student and instead examines the role of the institution and larger American society in the problems encountered by Indigenous students. In what follows, we review both sets of scholarship.

The higher education literature relies on a few main theories for explaining student participation in colleges and universities. Although W. Tierney (1992) and others have criticized the use of Tinto's (1975, 1986) model of student departure in scholarship on Indigenous higher education, the model continues to be used. But there are at least two alternative models developed to explain Indigenous students' experiences in institutions of higher education specifically. HeavyRunner and DeCelles (2002) developed the family education model (FEM) to explain student retention for Indigenous students better than more traditional models (i.e., Tinto's theory of student departure, Astin's theory of involvement, and Pascarella's general model for assessing change). The FEM is Indigenous based and suggests that universities ought to recreate the extended family structure within institutional settings in order to enhance Indigenous students' feelings of belonging and support. McAfee (1997, 2000) offers another model, and her work reminds us that statistics about degrees earned may be unreliable because the majority of Indigenous college students will have at least one "stepping out" experience some time in their college career. She uses the concept of *stepping out* rather than *dropping out* because she argues it is more accurate to portray Indigenous college attendance in terms of stepping stones; those that were successful and eventually earned a degree in her study were able to find the needed stepping stones to navigate the institution. "Each stepping stone is identified with positive factors that kept students in school or brought them back into higher education,

and with negative factors that served to pull them out and kept them disengaged from higher education . . . However, no particular stepping stone is singularly necessary and sufficient for the participants [in her research] to remain in school" (McAfee, 2000, p. 3). The stepping stones she identifies are cultural identity, academic preparation, financial resources, motivation, family support, academic performance, alcohol and drug use, and institutional interface; she notes that cultural identity was the most prominent factor that emerged from her research.

At the heart of these issues is the manner in which institutions operate and the ways in which classrooms are run. Is there room in institutions for students who quietly do their work? Are there different ways to negotiate the institution and maintain a connection to other cultural ways of being? Most qualitative studies agree that students can accommodate. The more important piece to arise from an examination of these studies is whether or not institutions can do thorough, honest assessments of their campus climates. Are the institutions hostile to other ways of thinking and interacting? Is the institution welcoming to divergent viewpoints, and is there a place for Indigenous students to engage in schooling in ways that are comfortable for them?

As we have been suggesting, institutions of higher education must provide culturally responsive schooling that is grounded in Indigenous knowledge systems, sovereignty, and nation building. Education must be relevant to the current issues and struggles facing Indigenous students and communities, and it must provide opportunities for Indigenous students to learn about the policies, rights, and status of Indigenous peoples and nations in the United States. This would demonstrate a commitment by mainstream institutions to ensure higher education for nation building.

Cultural Differences

The differences between life at and in universities and at home on reservations, urban areas, or other highly concentrated pockets of Indigenous people can be dramatic. The differences between these lives is, perhaps, the most studied area in educational research on Indigenous students (Carroll, 1978; Lin, LaCounte, and Eder, 1988; Scott, 1986; St. Germaine, 1995). Many scholars draw on cultural-difference theories for understanding the low educational

attainment of students of color at predominantly White colleges. Watson, Terrall, Wright, and Associates (2002), for example, found that the "notions of the ideal institutional environment" for minority students was "often at odds with many traditional institutional environments." Similarly, a common theme in the literature about Indigenous students in mainstream institutions of higher education is the overwhelming cultural discontinuity that often exists between the Native students and the culture of the institution. The stories compiled from Indigenous graduates of Dartmouth illustrate the dissonance felt by many students (Garrod and Larimore, 1997). From learning the correct way to make appointments with college administrators (Bray, 1992), to hearing harshly spoken words (Worl, 1992), to setting aside cooperation for individualism and competition (N. Adams, 1992), there are often multiple and various cultural differences between Indigenous students and mainstream universities.

Other scholars focus on the competing worldviews and conceptions of legitimate knowledge and argue that these differences impact how Indigenous students experience college (Brown, 2000; Carney, 1999; Fixico, 1995). Fixico (1995), for example, notes the following:

In the educational process of American Indian students attending mainstream schools, students are compelled to understand or perceive everything from the mainstream point of view. But the instructor should be cognizant that traditional Indian youths also possess a Native perspective that is likely incongruent with mainstream thinking. For these students, they are learning in an alien culture. This unacknowledged and unaccounted for conflict between perspectives has resulted in many Indian students doing poorly in school and dropping out [pp. 108–109].

According to Fixico, and others, our schools fail to recognize how Indigenous students' perceptions, values, and worldviews might be different from those of the majority. In a similar vein, Gilmore, Smith, and Kairaiuak (1997) argue that "the institution views students as individuals; the students, in contrast, view themselves as part of a connected web of family and community" (p. 95). They go on to describe how the incompatible notions about the very nature and

purpose of higher education cause clashes between Indigenous students and the institution. As an example, they explain how “the need to separate facts from values or feelings and to make decisions on the basis of facts alone” is one of the tenets of the positivism that characterizes Western institutions (Gilmore, Smith, and Kairaiuak, 1997, p. 95). Unfortunately, they argue, this epistemology “seriously clashes” with the Alaska aboriginal society in which they conducted their research.

We learn, then, that multiple and fundamental cultural discontinuities exist between many Indigenous students’ cultures and the culture of their college or university. Some scholars believe that this cultural dissonance is especially prevalent for Indigenous students. Because some AI/AN students come to the university after having spent their entire childhood in a community of Indigenous people separated from the mainstream White community, the likelihood that these students will experience more acute cultural differences is high.

But we should not lose sight of the diversity among Indigenous students. Most of the available research is based on AI/AN students from rural or reservation communities. The studies talk about the cultural dissonance felt by these students and make it seem as if *all* Indigenous students are coming from these more traditional backgrounds. Although this research is extremely important, it seems to ignore the experiences of students who are from urban or suburban predominantly White communities. In *American Indians and the Urban Experience*, Lobo and Peters (2001) argue that limited information exists about urban Indigenous peoples because of the widespread assumption that Native people reside in rural settings and the tendency of academics (and especially anthropologists) to focus on rural communities. This argument is important to keep in mind in analyses of Indigenous participation in institutions of higher education because significant numbers of students are coming from these communities and are often more assimilated than the extant literature would have us believe. In two different qualitative studies of Indigenous students in colleges, for example, students indicated a range of identities among Indigenous students—some of whom were very assimilated or less culturally connected, and others who were very much connected to their tribal nations and cultures (Brayboy, 1999; Castagno, 2003).

Thus, there are a number of issues commonly cited as potential pitfalls for Indigenous students' successful negotiation of institutions of higher education (IHEs). First, AI/ANs are often viewed as placing a premium on cooperation when competition is valued in universities. Individually centered students do well at universities, but many Native students are more community centered; hence, they do not perform as well as non-Indigenous students. Indigenous students tend to fare well in small-group settings or in one-on-one encounters; at most universities these types of interactions are limited. More recently, Brayboy (1999, 2004, 2005b) and Waterman (2007) have found that those students who are focused on completion so that they can give back to their communities are more successful in completing college than their peers who are focused solely on themselves and individual achievement. Those students who are trained to be aggressive and orally combative fare well in some university settings. The academic aggression necessary to succeed is anathema to many Indigenous ways of being, so many students resort to silence in classrooms. Ultimately, the price of silence is great among Indigenous students. There is contradictory evidence that shows that students who are more traditional or bicultural do worse in college because of the incongruities (Carroll, 1978), and others who argue that these students actually perform better in schools (Brayboy, 2004, 2005b; Kirkness and Barnhardt, 1991). Either way, the campus context is an important factor in how Indigenous students experience and negotiate postsecondary education.

Campus Context

Tierney (1992) characterizes Indigenous student experiences in higher education as "official encouragement and institutional discouragement." Despite positive rhetoric, many mainstream universities are not hospitable places for Indigenous students (Bass, 1971; Benjamin, Chambers, and Reiterman, 1993; Houser, 1991; Kahout and Kleinfeld, 1974; Kirkness and Barnhardt, 1991; Pavel and Colby, 1992; Woodcock and Alawiye, 2001; Wright, 1990a). The campus climate is shaped by many factors, but there are a handful of studies that focus specifically on how campus context and climate relate to Indigenous students.

Guillory and Wolverton (2008) compared Indigenous students' perceptions with the perceptions of university faculty and administrators regarding

the barriers and facilitators to persistence. Through interviews with thirty students and fifteen faculty and administrators at three different public universities in the western United States, these authors found that although the faculty and administrators identified financial support and academic programs and preparation as the primary persistence factors affecting Indigenous students, the students identified family, giving back to their tribal communities, and on-campus social support as key persistence factors and family, single parenthood, lack of academic preparation, and inadequate financial support as core barriers to persistence. Although we have concerns about these authors' interpretation of some of the data they present—particularly around failing to identify deficit models within some of the faculty and staff interview data—their general point regarding the “somewhat contrary views” between students and faculty and administrators is illuminating and important (Guillory and Wolverton, 2008, p. 80). Waterman's (2007) research with 12 Haudenosaunee college graduates reveals that the average time needed by her participants to complete a four-year degree averaged nearly eight years. She also notes that high school guidance counselors provided little help to these students, most of whom navigated the college application and financial aid processes alone and with the help of their families. Community college was an important “mediating experience” for almost all of these students, particularly for those who did not have a high school diploma and those who needed to raise low grade-point averages from earlier years in college. The social support for Indigenous students in Waterman's study came primarily from Native friends and family and their home communities, and they all maintained cultural integrity by “remaining centered in their culture, community, and family” (Waterman, 2007, p. 31). These studies help us better understand the campus experience for some American Indian and Alaska Native students; they also highlight how patterns in high school regarding lack of counseling support and the importance of culturally responsive schooling are relevant in the higher education context as well.

Recently, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) issued a motion to remove all Indigenous mascots from institutions of higher education; sanctions were attached to the failure to justify the use of these mascots. Many institutions with these mascots and their alumni were vehement in their

response to the NCAA's requirement. Several institutions have appealed, and some have been granted a waiver; others have not. In an era when individuals in the United States drive Cherokees, Dakotas, and Pontiacs, and when the U.S. Congress is disheartened by the loss of a Kiowa, Comanche, Blackhawk, or Apache attack helicopter, there appears to be little attention paid to the lives of the Cherokee, Dakota, Kiowa, or Apache peoples. The American Psychological Association recently released a statement regarding the use of American Indian mascots and symbols; they argued that the use of these symbols was not only detrimental to the education and well-being of Indigenous people, but also to society at large. Citing empirical studies, the statement argued that institutions should move away from the use of these mascots and symbols because of the detrimental effects on the lives of students and citizens in general. Issues of climate include, but are not limited to, the use of Indigenous mascots and symbols.

Other research has pointed to the prevalence of racism and policies inconsistent with the goal of supporting Indigenous students across college campuses (Castagno and Lee, 2007; Pewewardy and Frey, 2002, 2004). Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) address the ways that colleges and universities continue to perpetrate policies and practices that historically produced abysmal graduation rates for American Indian students. Their work focuses on institutional discrimination and racism that presents barriers to American Indian academic success. Brayboy's (2004, 2005b) work highlights the ways that American Indian Ivy League college students used strategies that enable them to be academically successful. He examines the notion of visibility and the ways that structures can be both constraining and enabling. Importantly, American Indian and Alaska Native Studies programs on mainstream campuses have provided spaces that offer more culturally relevant environments for Indigenous students. This is an important development in the last thirty-five years, but does not excuse mainstream universities from making changes.

Paying for College

Indigenous youth disproportionately come from economically poor families and require financial assistance to pursue higher education (Cunningham, McSwain, and Keselman, 2007). A report published in 2007 concludes that

improve college access for White students and students from middle-income backgrounds, they do not have similar results for students of color. Further, states have not made comparable investments in need-based grants to equalize opportunity for poor and working-class students. In addition, Heller (2005) points to the fact that many merit-based financial aid programs often benefit students who may have attended institutions of higher education without aid. In fact, in Georgia, over 90 percent of the expenditures went to students who would have attended college anyway and actually increased the gap in college participation between White and Black students. In Florida and Maine, grants were awarded disproportionately to White students and students from wealthier communities (i.e., those students who already have higher participation rates in college). Ultimately, calls for more merit-based aid help many individuals who do not necessarily need it and hurt individuals who are most in need.

Aside from privately funded scholarship programs, Indigenous students potentially have access to federal, state, and tribal monies to support postsecondary education. It is important, therefore, that we better understand what these forms of support generally look like. Federal aid often comes in the form of much larger loan amounts than grant amounts—leaving potential students wondering if they will be able to repay money borrowed if they decide to pursue a degree. State aid varies drastically depending on where a student lives, but most of the states with the highest populations of Indigenous people rank toward the bottom in terms of their ability to provide student aid that meets anticipated student need. Variation also exists between the funding available from different tribal nations, but many of the largest tribes process far more applications for aid than they are able to fill in any given year (Tierney, Sallee, and Venegas, 2007).

Some critics have argued that Indigenous students do not need financial assistance to attend college because their tribal nations already receive income from both casino revenue and the federal government. This argument, however, is seriously flawed because it fails to recognize the heterogeneity in both sources of income between tribal nations. Table 9 illustrates some of the discrepancies by comparing the casino revenue and federal aid available to members of various tribal nations.

TABLE 9**Casino Revenue and Federal Aid for Members of Various Tribal Nations**

<i>Tribal Nation</i>	<i>Total Population</i>	<i>Casino Revenue per Member</i>	<i>Federal Aid per Member</i>
Navajo	260,010	\$0	\$912
Hopi	11,267	\$0	\$2,006
Mississippi Choctaw	8,823	\$25,048	\$5,717
Seminole	2,817	\$87,682	\$8,540
Mashantucket Pequot	677	\$1,624,815	\$2,304
Miccosukee	400	\$250,000	\$20,560
Santa Ynez	159	\$1,257,862	\$8,360

Source: Bartlett and Steele (2002).

Clearly, blanket arguments about the “advantages” accrued through Indian gaming are uninformed. Furthermore, as *Indian Country Today* has noted, “Indian gaming is self-reliance” and has created over 300,000 jobs nationwide—many of which go to non-Indigenous employees of the gaming industry (J. Adams, 2002; Stevens, 2002). Casinos on tribal lands thus benefit a range of constituencies, because tribal nations have numerous service agreements with other tribal nations to support their endeavors and with state and local governments to share revenue and provide infrastructure support. Still, however, the presence of these casinos on some tribal nation lands does not mean that Indigenous students as a whole are financially able to support themselves through the attainment of a higher education.

Tribal Colleges and Universities

In addition to mainstream colleges and universities, tribally controlled institutions of higher education play a significant role in the educational attainment of Indigenous students. Most tribal colleges and universities (TCUs) are operated and run by tribal nations. However, two of the tribal colleges (Haskell Indian Nations University and Institute of American Indian Arts) are operated by Native peoples, but run by the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), part of the U.S. Department of Interior. In many ways, TCUs are an exception in

regards to American Indian and Alaska Native postsecondary participation. TCUs have a unique institutional capacity for promoting tribal students' academic success, transfer, and four-year degree completion (AIHEC, 1999, 2000, 2001; Benham and Stein, 2003; Cunningham, McSwain, and Keselman, 2007; Gonzalez, 2008; Pavel, Inglebret, and Banks, 2001; Stein, 1992, 1999). TCUs play a critical role in tribal workforce development and, because of their location on reservations in areas far removed from other college opportunities, provide postsecondary access to many students who would otherwise not be able to attend.

Tribal colleges and universities serve as a major destination for Indigenous students entering higher education. After a two-year campaign, TCUs became land-grant institutions through a 1994 Act of Congress. This status was awarded as part of the Elementary and Secondary Educational Act (ESEA). This bill also authorized a \$23 million endowment from which TCUs would receive interest payments each year for operating costs and student scholarships. The role of tribal colleges and universities in the experiences of Indigenous students in higher education has, until recently, been missing from the research literature. We believe, however, that the role of these institutions will become more central to examining the experiences of AI/ANs in higher education. We also believe that other IHEs will need to examine and explore what TCUs are doing to meet the needs of their students and utilize these strategies as a blueprint for their own institutions.

There are currently thirty-six TCUs in the United States, the majority of which are chartered by their own tribal government, each offering courses and training that meet the particular development needs of the reservation community (AIHEC, 1999, 2000, 2001). Eight percent of AI/AN college students are enrolled in a tribal college (DeVoe and Darling-Churchill, 2008). TCUs are located in fourteen states—the majority in the west and midwest, with one in Alaska. Seven of the colleges and universities are four-year institutions and twenty-nine are two-year institutions. Most if not all TCUs collaborate with regional universities and/or other community colleges through distance education and articulation agreements, offering students access to additional courses and advanced degrees. TCUs also provide critically needed services to support the surrounding community, such as libraries, health care facilities,

support for entrepreneurial and economic development, and cultural preservation projects (AIHEC, 2000, 2001). Enrollment in TCUs range from a couple hundred students to a few thousand, and the proportion of Indigenous students in the overall enrollment at each TCU varies from 60 to 100 percent (Snyder and Dillow, 2010).

The Kellogg Foundation, which invested \$30 million in American Indian and Alaska Native higher education between the mid-1990s and early 2000s, notes that, "together, the Native-controlled colleges represent the most significant and successful development in Native American educational history. Their unique blend of quality education with Native American culture and values promotes achievement among students who may never have known educational success, but who are now emerging as leaders, cultural intermediaries, and changemakers" (Native American Higher Education Initiative, 2005, p. 2). According to a report commissioned by the Kellogg Foundation, "policy efforts, such as the Executive Order on Tribal Colleges and Universities, signed in 1998, have also led to emerging funding opportunities with various federal agencies" (American Indian College Fund, 2004, p. 4). Additionally, TCUs "have increased efforts to work together with other diverse higher education institutions, particularly Historically Black Colleges and Hispanic-Serving Institutions, to help shape national agendas and collaborate for the common good. For example, these three groups of institutions joined forces for the first time by forming the Alliance for Equity in Education for the purpose of informing policymakers about common concerns" (American Indian College Fund, 2004, p. 5).

There is clearly some evidence that TCUs are making a difference for both individual students and for their communities. A 1983 American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) study found a 75 percent greater completion rate for AI/AN students who completed a course of study at TCUs and then continued on to a four-year degree program than among AI/AN students who went directly to four-year institutions. Surprisingly, there have not been any follow-up studies to further examine these rates of completion. We also know that about 85 percent of tribal college graduates who remain on reservations were employed (Pavel, 1998). Hill (1991) has argued that one in every four jobs on tribal lands is held by a non-Indigenous person, most of

which are professional jobs that require college degrees. Thus, if TCUs can educate tribal nation citizens and have them stay on their tribal lands or prepare them to work with Indigenous communities, the institutions are meeting the needs of many. In this way, TCUs are engaging in their own form of nation building. Although TCUs are meeting many of the needs of reservation and rural Indigenous communities, there is still much work to be done.

There is also some evidence that relying solely on TCUs to educate Indigenous peoples in the United States may be problematic. A recent study of the enrollment and graduation patterns of 1,135 tribal college students who studied at the Fort Berthold Community College (FBCC) on the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation in New Town, North Dakota between 1987 and 1995 found that by spring of 1997, only 232 students (20 percent) received either a two-year degree or nine-month certificate as their first degree (Patterson, 2002). This study identified tribal affiliation, full-time student status, and higher levels of financial aid as factors that contributed to higher rates of degree completion among tribal college students. Although tribal colleges and universities clearly play an important role in improving the educational attainment and economic development of tribal nations, the larger higher education community must also work with these institutions to ensure equitable access to all postsecondary institutions.

Conclusion

Viewed through the lens of nation building, it is clear that Indigenous student participation in higher education is an issue that tribal nations, Native communities, families, and institutional leaders must address. There are significant challenges facing Indigenous students who want to enroll in and complete college. There are few Indigenous role models, which is a pattern likely to continue unless the initial college-going and completion rates are not addressed immediately. The cultural differences between institutions are intense and, in some cases, counterproductive. Without some clearer sense of how education serves a public good, that individuals can succeed in college without assimilating, and that universities can shift their focuses and policies to meet the needs of a broad range of students, there will be continued challenges. Tribal

colleges and universities offer some promising models for how postsecondary institutions might more effectively engage Indigenous students and Indigenous knowledge systems. By doing this, they can support tribal nations' sovereignty, self-determination, and nation-building agendas. Financially, students across the country continue to struggle with paying for college. Given the extreme poverty found in Indigenous communities and the complex financial issues tied to economic models within tribal nations, this issue will persist. A nation-building approach offers an opportunity to rethink how college is paid for and the positive contributions to be gained by completion. Finances cannot be addressed, however, without a realistic perspective of how this is influenced by poor academic preparation. This chapter and the previous one point to the need for strong K-12 preparation and the need for coordination between elementary and secondary education with tertiary education. These connections are vital to the success of students and their tribal nations. Finally, predominantly White colleges and universities may thus improve their ability to serve all students, advance equity, and facilitate social justice across various contexts.