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HIED 846 College Students and Success

Constructing Your Own IEO Model

## Persistence of Native American Students in Higher Education

### Looking Through the IEO Model

According to Demmert (2005), the Native American student subpopulation is unique in that there is not a ton of research on how these students fare in higher education; each article I read spoke to frustrations trying to find research on this population. However, there were common threads regarding this subpopulation in higher education and how professional staff can better support them. Many variables should be considered when taking Native American students through Alexander Astin's IEO model. Colleges have tried to accommodate Native American students for centuries and still struggle to help the majority reach graduation. Guillory (2016) says to say Native American students are ill-prepared for college only scratches the surface of a deep, historically unresolved problem—getting Native American students through the mainstream higher education pipeline is the real dilemma. Estimates for attrition rates for Native students in higher education range between 75 and 93 percent (Larimore, 2005, p.17).

### **Input Characteristics**

Native American students come into college unprepared most of the time, and struggle to assimilate into college culture. According to Larimore (2005), there are a number of obstacles related to retention and graduation for Native American students including: inadequate academic preparation, vague concepts of educational or vocational goals, financial aid, discrepancies between high school and college environments, prejudice and social isolation. All of these things

contribute to the students input as they walk through the doors of college, these things can hold them back and weigh on them and their chances to complete college successfully. Native students many times struggle to find their social circle and can become isolated, which makes classes harder and leads to leaving school altogether. All of these barriers become interwoven and create a tough environment to thrive in.

Many of the articles argued that Native American students had to choose between achieving academic success through assimilation into the majority culture or maintaining their traditional culture at the expense of their education goals (Larimore, 2005, p. 20). This internal conflict of interest many times becomes too overwhelming for this subpopulation and adds to the stress they feel for leaving their families and tribes and pursuing their own goals.

From Guillory's (2005) study, Native American students spoke to the barriers that effected persistence, and the top barriers described were: family, giving back to the tribal community, and on-campus social support. Two of the three barriers are part of this population's input in Astin's IEO model. The universities have no control over the family barrier and the student's conviction to give back to their communities. Many students are first generation and feel guilty for leaving their families, which can make it too overwhelming to stay in school. Native students have extremely strong family bonds; but the family can also contribute to students staying in school as well,

“The connection for these Indian students to their families, whether nuclear or extended, was so strong that they were willing to overcome many difficult situations, such as an unwelcoming environment, lack of academic preparation, and inadequate financial support. To persist earning a college education brought hope of making life better for their families. It is a reflection of an Indigenous philosophy of putting community before

individualism. In other words, Native American children are taught to “stand in” versus “stand out,” (Guillory, 2005, p. 74).

Students can feel a strong pull to give back to their communities, so much so that they will spend each weekend during the year traveling back home to their community to participate in tribal rituals and events. Spending time away from campus can negatively affect their relationships with professors, other students and campus life as a whole.

Native American students come to college with more predispositions than most minority groups, and can find it hard to succeed. Many of these inputs make college challenging, but it does not mean that challenges cannot be overcome. The campus environment can also have a huge impact on the outcome and persistence factor of Native students.

### **Institutional Environment**

Larimore spoke of the resiliency theory, and pointed out that Native American students who are able to draw strength from their cultural identity while adapting to the demands of campus life are more likely to succeed in their academic pursuits than are either culturally assimilated students or those who are unable to establish a level of comfort within their campus environments (p. 21). For students to be successful and persist in college, campuses must create a warm, comfortable environment for them.

One major issue for minorities on college campuses is racism and its implications for persistence. Students who do not feel comfortable are not going to stay in school. Larimore also spoke to the role of perceived racism and stress; most Native students claim to have experienced racism on predominantly white campuses. That sort of hostility on a campus can drive students

away. Jackson (2003) did a study with Native American students and campus racism and found that, students reported experiencing both passive and active racism. The passive racism was experienced as either being ignored or being singled out as a representative of their race or culture. Most students didn't speak of active racism but found college campuses to be hostile and unaccommodating.

Students enter into college with certain inputs that make them who they are and shape their experiences and how they see the world. But the environment is just as important as the inputs as described here:

“An individual student's background and characteristics may influence and shape that person's initial educational intentions and commitments, but scholars believe that students' college experiences play a more substantial role into their integration into the academic and social systems of the college,” (Larimore, 2005, p. 22).

The environment is very important to the development of the students. Environmental factors include everything that students see and do day-in and day-out. The environment that the institution fosters includes: residence hall life and experience, classroom experience, dining experience, social experiences, and extracurricular experiences. In each of these scenarios a student will have an experience that either breaks or builds on the inputs that they come into college with.

Many articles speak to the importance of having a sense of belonging on campus. And we know that Native students already have a strong desire to give back to their communities at home. Johnson (2003) says that students have a fundamental need to feel that they are an important part of a larger community that is valuable, supportive and affirming (p. 527). This community is fostered during their time in school through the relationships they make in the

residence halls and in the classrooms. The campus environment is an important part of creating strong persistence rates.

One really successful strategy some colleges have implemented into their campus environments are clubs or organizations that support Native students specifically. Larimore also (2005) recommends,

“a much-expanded recruiting program that extends to the family as well as the student, and to those out of high school a few years, a much more elaborate socialization and orientation program, attention to monitoring and ongoing support, the development of Native American faculty; and job experience by the student” (p. 24).

By inviting students to be more involved and by making them feel like a larger and more important part of the community colleges can give Native students the tools they need to be successful.

### **Persistence Outcomes**

Among minority groups, Native American students are the least likely to attend college and be successful, this goes back to their high school education. According to Larimore, “more than 40 percent of Native American students who entered secondary education nationwide left without a high school diploma” (p. 18). And of the Native students who actually did graduate, only 40 percent will enroll in post-secondary education (Larimore, 2005).

This subpopulation enters the education world with many predispositions and have a hard time finding their way through the educational system that takes them away from their culture. Several studies have identified factors that are the key to persistence including support from family, support from faculty and staff, institutional commitment, individual commitment,

financial support and connections to homeland and culture. Larimore (2005) estimates that the attrition rates for Native students are between 75 and 93 percent, which means that the persistence of Native students is somewhere between 7 and 25 percent.

## **Conclusion**

What this means for educators is that more research needs to be done on this subpopulation in order to support their educational endeavors. What we've gathered is that although their precollege experiences are important, what the student experiences in college is much more important and indicative of their long-term success and persistence. Johnson (2007) says that, "practitioners in higher education would be wise to stay abreast of the challenging experiences of the secondary students who each year become college students," (p. 527). That is true of all higher education administrators, faculty, and staff; if they want to support this population, first they must take the time to understand where these students are coming from.

Most importantly, colleges and universities need to provide support for these students once they reach post-secondary education. Educational and cultural diverse faculty and cross-campus representation can help students feel more at home. Once students have reached post-secondary education the environment can be shaped by the institution and it is imperative that higher educational professional do the research and take the time to fully incorporate diversity training and rhetoric into all aspects of a student's holistic education.

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