



RESEARCH FINDINGS THAT ADDRESS EQUITY GAPS OF
NATIVE STUDENTS IN DEGREE ACHIEVEMENT

MEETING

HECC MEETING PORTLAND OREGON

AUGUST 22, 2019

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE MAIN BARRIERS TO STUDENT SUCCESS?

Study of Native American student perceptions and those of faculty and administrators at three Northwest universities on persistence factors and barriers to degree completion (Guillory, 2002. Studies in 1982, 1988 and 1998 estimated retention rate of AI students as low as 15%.)

Studies pointed to the following factors in student retention:

- Precollege academic preparation (especially if graduates of a reservation public school),
- family support,
- supportive and involved faculty,
- institutional support,
- home ceremonies and
- maintaining an active presence in home communities.

The study pointed out differences between Native student and institutional perceptions.

Raphael M. Guillory & Mimi Wolverson (2008) It's about Family: Native American Student Persistence in Higher Education, *The Journal of Higher Education*, 79:1, 58-87, DOI: [10.1080/00221546.2008.11772086](https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2008.11772086)

WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL CULTURAL ISSUES THAT WE SHOULD BE AWARE OF AS WE SEEK TO ERASE EQUITY GAPS?

With only 1.1 percent of college graduates being American Indian and only 13 percent of Native people earning a degree (U.S. Office of Management and Budget), *every* American Indian college student needs to succeed if we are to have what many elders stress: education in both mainstream and in traditional ways for our peoples not merely to survive but also to thrive in years to come.

Findings indicate that **many Native students experience racial microaggressions and structured disconnections from their home communities.** *Family* via the Native student center on campus provided a “home away from home” environment. Although important in helping students create a localized sense of belonging, this was deemed necessary **ONLY** to the extent that the culture of the institution served to invalidate the Native students’ peoplehood. **To support Native students’ sense of belonging, institutions must validate and incorporate Native culture and perspectives within the ingrained Eurocentric cultures of non-Native colleges and universities.**

What's been done in the past that we should be aware of as context for this work?

PSU has a long-standing history of recruiting and graduating AI/AN students since the mid-1970s when members of many Tribal Nations entered the Indian Social Work program directed by Dr. John Spence, Gros Ventre. The United Indian Students of Higher Education (UISHE) was organized and to this day still organizes a campus salmon bake widely attended by representatives of tribal nations as well as PSU.

- An annual spring pow wow initiated by UISHE continues to this day
- In 2010, Oregon Tribal Nations and community members contributed to building of the Native American Student and Community Center. It is this Center that provides a “home away from home” for Native students because it houses Indigenous staff including a counselor to provide academic support to undergraduate students.
- The Indigenous Nations Studies program (2008) has grown to offer a major in Indigenous Studies. Its director, Dr. Cornel Pewewardy approached the College of Education about initiating an American Indian Teachers project. This program received three USDOE competitive grants, graduating 35 teachers over 10 years.
- The First Nations and Knowledge Keepers program competitively funded in August 2021 has enrolled nine AI/AN teachers to become licensed administrators by June 2023.
- Indigenous faculty, staff and alumni continue to be involved in Portland Native community social and ceremonial activities which builds community and offers recognition of PSU's interest in community goals and well-being: “Let Knowledge Serve the City.”

What will it take to move the needle?

Qualitative interviews with 15 successful Native American college students who grew up on reservations identified the following themes related to their persistence in college:(a) family support,(b) structured social support,(c) faculty/staff warmth,(d) exposure to college and vocations,(e) developing independence and assertiveness,(f) reliance on spiritual resources,(g) dealing with racism, (h) nonlinear path, and (i) paradoxical cultural pressure. The results indicated a need for stable mentoring relationships and programmatic support.

Academic persistence among Native American college students, AP Jackson, SA Smith, CL Hill, Journal of College Student Development, John Hopkins University Press, Vol. 44 (4). July/Aug 2003. Pp. 548-565.

Thoughts for changing the educational paradigm in Oregon:

- Go2College campus visits for middle school students to become exposed to college and vocations
- Continued advocacy for *authentic* cultural sustainable pedagogy at Oregon institutions of higher education (IHEs)
- Strengthen transition points from community college to 4-year college
- Personalized academic supports for AI/AN students
- Funding to support tribal nation liaisons at all IHEs

- Task force to report on IHEs/school districts teaching of SB 713 curricula