

Understanding the Academic Persistence of American Indian College Transfer Students

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Abstract

Student academic transfer from two-year to four-year institutions is a well- documented phenomenon. Many students earning a four year degree begin their academic careers at two-year institutions. However, there is little known about the inter-institutional transfer behavior of American Indian students. The authors provide an overview of student transfer behavior, identify characteristics of this behavior, and offer suggestions on ways in which institutions can increase the likelihood of successful transfer.

Introduction

The college transfer process has become an important means of achieving the bachelor's degree for a number of students (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009), particularly for low-and middle-income students (Dowd, Cheslock, & Melguizo, 2008). In the United States, nearly half of all first-year college students begin at community colleges with the intent to transfer (Boswell, 2004; Doyle, 2006).

Despite significant and recent gains, American Indians lag behind other students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds in educational attainment (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008). College dropout rates for American Indians are higher and their graduation rates lower than their non-native peers (Roksa & Calcagno, 2008). Guillory and Wolverton (2008) contended that American Indians make up just over one percent of American college students, with a small percentage of native students who enter college graduate, including graduate and professional schools.

According to Doyle (2006), approximately half of first-year college students in the United States began at community colleges with the intention of transferring to upper-level institutions. Bowen, et al. (2009) has argued that the transfer process—moving from a two-year college to a four-year college or university—is a cost-effective way of increasing bachelor's degree recipients. Matriculating from a community college, especially two year tribal colleges, to a four-year institution through the transfer process has become a way to effectively increase bachelor's degree graduates among American Indian students. Tierney, et al. (2007) suggest that American Indian students are more likely than Caucasian students to begin their college careers at a community college.

While the college transfer process provides an alternative way of obtaining a bachelor's degree, not every student who begins at a community college with the aim of transferring to a four-year college is ultimately successful (Berger & Malaney, 2003). According to Handel (2007) only half of community college students successfully transfer to four-year institutions. In recent years, the struggle college transfer students experience on their way to degree completion have received increasingly more attention (Alexander, Ellis & Mendoza-Denton, 2009).

Research by Wang (2009) indicated that for students attaining the bachelor's degree by means of the community college to university transfer process, four year degree attainment was linked significantly with such factors as high school curriculum, educational expectations of college, community college GPA, campus involvement, as well as academic performance. According to Peterman (2000), attrition

rates for first-semester, two-year students have been estimated at over sixty-seven percent, with the highest percentage being students from poor socio-economic backgrounds. Findings published by Wassmer, et al. (2004) pointed to a high degree of correlation between race/ethnicity and other important causal factors such as socio-economic status and academic preparation in the successful pursuit of higher education. The researchers argued that the most significant predictor of persistence through the bachelor's degree for all students, including those beginning their post-secondary studies in community colleges, was the degree of the academic rigor of their high school curriculum (Wassmer, et al., 2004).

The Challenges Facing American Indian Transfer Students

The problem of matriculating American Indian students through higher education and to the completion of the baccalaureate degree is not new nor novel (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Oaks & Maday, 2009). Low retention, high dropout rates, and low achievement levels continued to be a challenge for American Indian students (Oaks & Maday, 2009; Tierney, et al. 2007). Native college students complete the under-graduate degree at lower rates than their peers (Scholl, 2006), and they were more likely than Caucasian students to begin their college education at a community college (Tierney, et al. 2007). Students of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds (except Asian students) were already over-represented among low-income populations, and as research suggested, they performed at lower levels than students from families with higher incomes (Burney & Beilke, 2008).

American Indian students attended schools in all 50 states, although the largest concentrations were found in just 11 states (Oaks & Maday, 2009). Since the turn of the twentieth century, the number of people in the United States reporting to be American Indian or Alaskan Indian has increased more than 15 percent (Fleming, 2007).

Family Support for Degree Attainment

Family support is a major non-scholastic factor in the academic persistence of American Indian college students and an important predictor of success in higher education (Burney & Beilke, 2008; Roksa & Calcagno, 2008). A lack of family support creates a critical barrier for those students who did not have it. American Indian students report family and community support to be important to their academic success. The students insist that wisdom impressed upon them by the experiences they have shared with their elders and mentors has provided a source of internal encouragement.

Research also shows that a lack of parental involvement is a challenge for some American Indian students, especially during their teen years, when academic planning and preparation are crucial (Mackety & VanBershot, 2008). According to Guillory and Wolverton (2008), maintaining family ties is important for American Indian students who may occasionally experience resentment from other family members who may see their educational pursuit as an estrangement from the fabric of the family. Consistent with research by Guillory and Wolverton, Neuman (2008) found that some Indian students are apprehensive about becoming educated because it might alienate them from their family and friends who were less well educated.

Many American Indian students are first-generation students. No other family members have ever attended post-secondary education (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008), and whose parents often are less educated and poorer. According to Nomi (2005), the parents of first-generation college students are less likely to be supportive of their children's academic aspirations, by not providing encouragement and

moral support, but also financial support. While financial aid is available to students through several sources, it was usually not enough and first-generation students found themselves working more full-time jobs than students who had the financial support from their parents who had college educations. First-generation students are also reported to take fewer classes than their peers, suggesting that they have more responsibilities in their homes and jobs (Nomi, 2005).

Striplin's (1999) early research regarding first-generation students and family support gives validation to the suggestion that lack of family support could have negative influences on student success. "Their families sometimes discourage these 'educational pioneers,' and this can lead to alienation from familial support" (Striplin, 1999, p. 2). Iverson (2007) noted that the behavior of families in poverty is different from that of families in the middle and wealthy classes and in generational poverty situations, relationships are more important. Burney and Beilke (2008) referred to this generational poverty as a "culture of poverty" when discussing the values embraced by some poor families. The authors contend that in some cases, low-income families pass negative values to their children that perpetuate low standards of education and job achievement. They state that this "culture of poverty" is a "barrier" to students who may possess high potential. For this reason, institutions should be more sensitive to relationship building when dealing with students who come from low-income backgrounds. Enhancing self-esteem through a sense of belonging and connectedness should be paramount for colleges and universities who are trying to help American Indian students succeed.

Social Factors Affecting Educational Progress

Another level of support exists within the structure of social relationships, in particular, the support of friends (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Swenson, Nordstrom & Hiester, 2008). According to Tinto (1993), without outside support, many students are more likely to leave college because they find it difficult to achieve assimilation into social groups. Tinto found that every college student integrates into social membership to some degree, and according to Tinto, integration is essential to college persistence. Further, Swenson, et al., (2008) and Mattanah, Ayers, Brand and Brooks (2010), posited that peer social support can have a positive impact on the adjustment to college for students. This research was supported by Dennis, et al. (2005) whose research indicates that social support can have a positive impact upon students of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Savitz-Romer, Jager-Hyman, and Coles (2009) also found that peers can offer emotional support, helping students to develop self-esteem, and they can provide informational support, which takes place through an exchange of information in the form of advice, suggestions, and guidance.

While friends can offer general encouragement, their most important contribution to the success of their peers was when they have direct impact on social integration (Tinto, 1993). Scott and Brown (2008) studied the experiences of Lumbee Indian students who attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where they found that the support of friends was most effective when Indian students connected with other students who shared the same goals. Scott and Brown, documenting the experiences of Lumbee students as they adjusted to life away from home, observed that the students who maintained social contact with other Indian students on campus through organizations for Native Americans, courses, or other means, made fewer non-persistence decisions.

Peer interactions outside of the classroom can have positive impacts on college student persistence. According to Walsh (2012), recent studies show that social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, have a positive effect on college retention and more schools are advocating their use in strategies to retain students.

Attrition

American Indian students continue to be greatly affected by academic attrition, as evidenced by their rates of dropout, retention, and degree attainment (Morgan, 2010; Oaks & Maday, 2009; Tierney, et al., 2007). According to Iverson (2007), problems related to American Indian dropout rates are not exclusive to students who live on or off reservations and they are constant in both one- and two-parent homes. Neither are they germane to students with inadequate academic skills.

Presuming that underachievement in college can be influenced by personal persistence just as much as by personal intelligence, Shaughnessy (1989) found that some of the factors that influenced student failure included, but are not limited to, lack of commitment, poor interpersonal skills, defensiveness, indifference, and fear. According to Scholl (2006), student failure may also be associated with college adjustment. Other dynamics that are most likely to affect the academic persistence of American Indian students include sense of alienation, lack of family support, poor teacher-student relationships, and negative community involvement. A school culture that promotes connections among students, between students and teachers, and between students and their materials developed resiliency, which give students at risk the ability to prevail over negative factors associated with their environments (Iverson, 2007).

Additionally, Gloria and Kurpius (2001) provide three basic factors that can positively or negatively influence the persistence of American Indian Students: self-beliefs, social support, and the school environment. Self-esteem and self-efficacy are two forms of self-beliefs related to academic persistence, thus Gloria and Kurpius suggest that high self-esteem and a strong sense of cultural identity are likely to help American Indian students persist in college. This is supported by Smith and Blacknall (2010), who state that social support is vital to students' development of self-efficacy. Scott and Brown, in support of this claim, found in their 2008 study done to examine the link between dialect and identity development that Lumbee Indian students were more resilient when strong in their cultural identity.

Academic Preparation

Guillory and Wolverton (2008) found that lack of academic preparation prior to attending college is a barrier for American Indian students seeking post-secondary education. Many students enter community colleges without the proper academic preparation, suggested Roksa and Calcagno (2008), and only 20 percent made successful institutional transitions. Even though some community colleges make better efforts than others to prepare their students, under-prepared students often do not perform as well as their peers who were adequately prepared for college-level work. While this issue of academic preparation has been viewed as a community college issue, but does not take away from the fact that these students were usually academically unprepared before they enter community college.

The demands placed on community colleges to prepare students for transfer to four-year institutions has increased. According to Glass and Harrington (2002), the community college GPA has the most significant influence on the attainment of the bachelor's degree for transfer students. Both qualitative and quantitative studies conducted at a California Community College to study the effects of race and ethnicity on transfer students found that academic preparedness and higher levels of academic preparedness have a positive influence on transfer rates (Glass & Harrington, 2002).

Lack of academic preparation is a key factor in the failure of many transfer students, according to Roksa and Calcagno (2008), who found that academically under-prepared students transferred at a rate of 80 percent less than their better-prepared peers. It was also possible that transferring from community colleges to four-year colleges could leave these students feeling stigmatized by negative perceptions that they were less smart than students who entered a four-year university as freshmen, or that they took an easy route to university admission by entering the community college first (Alexander, et al., 2009). Wassmer, et al. (2004) found that disparities in transfers have a higher correlation to disparities in racial and ethnic composition. Oaks and Maday (2009) in support of this argument contend that American Indian students often do not feel empowered by education systems but, instead, feel powerless and misunderstood.

Burney and Beilke (2008) suggested that giving adequate attention to students' confidence levels in terms of academic proficiency can help those from low-income backgrounds increase academic performance. The authors argued that school achievement had a positive effect on self-efficacy, and the motivation to do well was affected by the goals and engagement of the learners. Burney and Beilke (2008) also found that the completion of rigorous courses such as advanced mathematics courses was another powerful predictor of success in colleges and university matriculation. They contend that higher academic expectations and preparation was even more important for successful matriculation than even socio-economic status. Burney and Beilke, however, argued that college and university preparation of students for advanced courses was often missing in low-income students. They noted that some colleges in an effort to attract quality teaching staff, ignored the needs of their minority and low-income students.

The level of education attained by the students' parents, as well as their parents' expectations for educational achievement, had positive implications for academic success (Dubow, et al., 2009). Students of families with better educated parents tended to have been exposed to reading materials and computers, giving them a higher likelihood to succeed while students from lower income families, who may equally possess the same inborn potential, may be held back (Burney & Beilke, 2008). In addition, students from lower economic income homes were less liable to have opportunities for academic enrichment programs that bolster confidence, self-efficacy, and social skills outside of school. Even if students could have gained access to these programs, they probably could not have afforded the fees required for these programs. However, Burney and Beilke (2008) believed that if these students had been provided the same opportunities as those provided to those from higher socio-economic backgrounds, their chances of benefitting academically might be greater.

Whether or not students took the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), other standardized tests such as the American College Testing Program (ACT), played a major role in college and university admission, as well as the possibility of transferring. Research indicated that American Indian students scored lower than their non-Indian peers on standardized tests (Huffman & Ferguson, 2007). In some cases, their scores were too low for admission to schools considered to be more selective (Roksa & Calcagno, 2008).

Transfer Shock

Transfer shock is a complicated and well-documented set of conditions that negatively affect the performance of some college transfer students (Flaga, 2006; Ishitani, 2008). Referring to a 1992 study in North Carolina, Glass and Harrington (2002) argued that transfer shock was evident at higher rates for community college transfer students than their peers at private junior colleges. Ishitani (2008) used a study sample of three cohorts, from 1999 to 2001, who matriculated to a four-year comprehensive public university in the fall semester. The 7,631 sample included both native and transfer students. The enrollment status of these students was followed for a six-semester observation period, and the different types of student departure, such as dropout, transfer, academic dismissal, and stop-out (when students leave and then return and resume their enrollment after a certain period of non-enrollment) were categorized. Summaries of these different types of departure by student type (native and transfer) were presented in tables, and the mean time to departure was calculated. The persistence behaviors of native and transfer students were then tested to see if significant differences in departure behavior existed across different student types. Ishitani (2008) found that sophomore and junior transfer students were retained at higher rates than native and freshman transfer students. Over six semesters, native students were retained at higher rates than freshman transfer students (Ishitani, 2008).

Research by Berger and Malaney (2003) was consistent with Ishitani (2008) and Glass and Harrington (2002) in its recognition of the effects students' experiences have when transferring from a two-year college to a four-year university. Community college students were often provided with more assistance than they would normally receive at the university level. In their study, Berger and Malaney examined satisfaction ratings of students at both the community college level and the university level, and found that students were not as satisfied with institutional support they received in the latter. They found, particularly, that students spent more time on their homework in community college, but did not commit to their academic work as much at the university level. Researchers argue that this difference may be closely associated with the experiences of students who undergo transfer shock.

Support During The Transfer Process

Flaga (2006) employed a qualitative study to achieve a more in-depth look at "the nature of transition for community college transfer students during their first semester at a large" four-year institution and "how ...transfer students' experiences change between their first and second semester at the four-year university" (2006, p. 5). In the study, Flaga (2006) used the term "negotiating" to describe the adjustments students make in terms of their behavior and their relationships with the new surroundings in an effort to be successful (p. 8). The participants in the study were evaluated within three different environments: academic, social, and physical. The first environment included in-class interactions with

instructors, study groups, advisors, and their interest in career information. Interactions outside the classroom constituted the second environment while the physical environment comprised of not just buildings and traditional classrooms but also the planning, organization and structure of the campus.

Tinto (2012) posited that the classroom was important because it was a place where skills were taught, support is offered, and learning was assessed. The classroom was also a place where social change could occur and where students could make friends and important social connections. Through the process of negotiating, students actively changed their behavior to become more successful, as well as to make necessary connections. For example, some students preferred sitting in the same place in class because it made the class feel smaller and familiarity helped them build relationships in the classroom. As Flaga (2006) observed, becoming familiar with their surroundings helps students find a sense of belonging at the four-year institution.

Additionally, O'Banion (2012) advocated for the positive merits of advising in the success of students. Not only did advisors help students successfully navigate the registration process, but the advice that they received was beneficial in the choices they made regarding a vocation. Faculty who advised students could be helpful in guiding students to make career decisions, and O'Banion suggested that advisors made personal interactions with students over multiple semesters. This was supported by Jackson, Smith and Hill (2003), whose research suggested that mentoring was vital to the academic success of American Indian students, and by Savitz-Romer, et al. (2009), who added that peers could contribute informational support that assists other students with the transfer process.

Theoretical Framework and Study

The study examined the college persistence experiences of American Indians in the transfer process from a two-year community college to a four-year university. Nationally, American Indians trail their peers of other races and ethnicities in many measures of educational attainment (Nichols & Nichols, 2006; Roksa & Calcagno, 2008) and they complete undergraduate degrees at lower rates than their peers (Scholl, 2006). Because the college transfer process is meant to help students transition to bachelor's degree attainment, this study sought to understand what characteristics make American Indian students more persistent.

An understanding of the lack of bachelor's degree attainment by American Indian transfer students may be found within the social and cultural contexts of student departure that affect students of all races and ethnicities. The characteristics that define most college transfer students were published more than two decades ago by Lee and Frank (1990) and more recently and in more depth by Nomi (2005), whose work focused on first-generation college students, a trait found in many American Indian families. Self-efficacy was a contributing factor in the success of some American Indian transfer students. Interviews with American Indian college students, conducted by Montgomery, Miville, Winterowd, Jeffries, and Baysden (2000) found that internalized resiliency characteristics, ways of learning, academic identity, and perceptions of social support systems were important to student success.

Vincent Tinto's Model of Institutional Departure (1993) provided the first of two frameworks for examining American Indian transfer persistence through the process of transitions. Borrowing from the Bass & Harrington. Understanding the Academic Persistence of American Indian Transfer Students 7

anthropological theories of Van Gennep's, *The Rites of Passage* (1960), Tinto's model suggested that student success depended upon how well individual students' personality characteristics interact with factors that take place in the context of institutional environments. Tinto proposed that there are three states of transition— separation, transition, and incorporation—and throughout these stages students must disassociate from some former social connections and norms, engage with the new settings, and finally, adjust to and incorporate new cultures and norms. Experiences in each stage influence integration and persistence of students. These social events can have a direct effect on academic performance because the two are linked contextually. Tinto's model also explains that during these stages of transition, students become members within groups, for example, in their courses and in social organizations. Tinto further states that membership does not require any certain degree of full membership but that students must have membership at some level. Tinto observes that on campuses with diverse student populations, membership in racial and ethnic communities may provide "safe havens" for some students (p. 124). Membership in clubs and organizations helps students to "break down the university into smaller knowable parts where social integration is more readily possible" and make integration easier (p. 124).

Within the context of social membership, Tinto, an advocate for support both at the family and social level, believes that support and academic success are linked; that interactions of various support sources have an influence on personality development and help shape students' participation in communities. This belief is also supported by the Family Systems Model, presented by O'Connell (1985), which suggests that support exists within four subsystems: (a) the spouse subsystem (husband and wife interactions); (b) the parental subsystem (parent-child interactions); (c) the sibling subsystem (child-child interactions); and (d) the extra-familial subsystem (nuclear family interactions with extended family and networks of social, community, and professional support) (p. 117).

The second framework for examining American Indian college transfer persistence was the Dimensions of Transition model provided by Flaga (2006). Flaga's research focused on the student transitions from two-year community colleges to four-year universities. As with Tinto's Model of Institutional Departure (1993) and the Family Systems Model (O'Connell, 1985), Flaga's Dimensions of Transition suggested that social support is instrumental in encouraging students to persist to completion of the bachelor's degree. Both Tinto and Flaga argue that student commitment is essential in the transfer process to degree completion. Flaga also suggested that successful degree completion depends on a partnership between both institutions involved in the transfer, as well as a commitment to complete the degree on the student's behalf.

Tinto's framework accounted for the influence of both students' personal motivations and institutional factors that affect students. "Social and intellectual interaction are essential" (Tinto, 1993, p. 137). In *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition*, Tinto emphasized that positive student interactions with faculty and with students had positive effects on persistence. According to Tinto (1993) when students had good interaction with faculty and staff, they had the tools to make judgments about the institution that could weigh on their personal decisions to leave or stay (p.117). While Tinto insisted that full immersion in social systems was not mandatory, he posited that some minimum participation in the academic and social communities was necessary for persistence to the

bachelor's degree. The fewer the interactions there were, the greater likelihood of isolation from intellectual life on campus.

Tinto's framework holds particular relevance for examining college transfer persistence at institutions like Robeson Community College and UNC Pembroke where many students did not live on campus and were not exposed to many of the academic and social elements afforded to resident students since commuting and non-residential students have more obligations such as family, work, and social demands that might marginally conflict with the beliefs and norms of academic campuses.

Research Design

The study adopted a grounded theory qualitative approach. While Huffman and Ferguson (2007) evaluated the experiences of American Indian college upperclassmen using quantitative methods, Flaga (2006) and Guillory and Wolverton (2008) advocated for the qualitative method of data collection. According to Guillory and Wolverton, minority groups have the ability to speak for themselves, therefore "in reality, Native Americans were the experts at being Native American; hence it was imperative that when creating policy that could directly or indirectly affect their educational lives, the voices of Native Americans be heard" (p. 63).

Flaga's (2006) research provided a good model for studying the traits of American Indian transfer students through qualitative methods because statistical data did not explain why some students persist to completion while others do not. Jackson, Smith and Hill (2003) offered that persistence in post-secondary education could be influenced by personal persistence as much as personal intelligence. Scholl (2006) found that other dynamics may possibly affect the persistence of American Indian students may include economic status, sense of belonging, family support, relationships with teachers, and community involvement.

Flaga (2006) recommended interviewing students before and after the transfer process. Glass and Harrington's (2002) study suggested that the junior year of college was a pivotal point for students because those students who made it through the third year were more prone to persist, while most students in the study who dropped out, did so in their junior year. This study acted upon the recommendations by interviewing students who had not yet transferred into the four-year institutions, as well as those who were engaged in the process, and those who had completed the process as a way of examining the spectrum of participants in the transfer process.

The study also used the qualitative questionnaire method (Jansen, 2010) which consisted of open-ended questions to identify common persistence of prospective American Indian transfers at the community college, as well as those of students and graduates from the university. The intention of the questionnaire was to identify patterns that could demonstrate whether there were some traits that were consistent among the students who make successful matriculations from the two-year to the four-year institution. The questionnaire contained general questions about the experiences of students during various stages of the transfer process. It also asked questions about the perceptions students have of their learning environment, and whether their families and friends supported their educational pursuits. The participants were also asked if they felt that they had been adequately prepared for the transfer

process. All in all, each participant answered a total of five open-ended questions and five closed questions.

A structured interview protocol was designed to obtain more information from the participants about their experiences as they navigated through the transfer process. The questions included a variety on topics related to the students' transfer experience. The questionnaire included open-ended questions about the students' perceived levels of family support, academic preparation, and campus involvement. The interview instrument also had five questions.

Research Questions

This research makes the assumption that persistence behaviors among American Indian college students have implications on the way these students navigate their education, particularly for those students transitioning from a two-year college to a four-year college to matriculate with an under graduate degree.

Two basic research questions guided the current study:

1. Were there common characteristics of persistence behavior shared among American Indian students who successfully matriculate from the two-year college to the four-year university?
 - a. Was the positive achievement of American Indian students based on certain aspects common to the students who succeed?
 - b. Could persistence behavior traits be held accountable for the success of American Indian students?
2. What major sources of support do American Indian transfer students credit as part of their transfer persistence?
 - a. How do American Indian families provide support for their American Indian college students?
 - b. Were there social groups that could provide the support or information needed by college going students?

The themes and topics that emerged from the review of literature formed the basis for short answer online questions that were sent out to a random sample of American Indian transfer students and graduates of a four-year university and prospective transfer students at two-year community college. Family and social support, for example, were popular themes found in academic journal articles about college persistence in American Indian students (Flaga, 2006; Gloria & Kurpius, 2001; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Tierney, et al., 2007). In order to inquire about the experiences of Indian students and graduates at the two institutions, questions were designed to elicit responses that might provide deeper understanding of the participants based on information from the literature. The questions were

reviewed by higher education administrators with experience in American Indian educational programs.

Sources of Evidence

Evidence in the study came from qualitative responses gathered from online questionnaires and from face-to-face interviews. The participants in this study were American Indian college students who were categorized into three segments: a) those who plan to transfer from a community college to a four-year university, b) students who had transferred to a four-year university from a community college, and c) those who transferred credits from the community college to the university and successfully completed the bachelor's degree. While questionnaire questions sent out represented all three segments of the transfer process, responses received, however, were anonymous.

Instrumentation and Collection

Following the collection of questionnaires, two participants from each of the three segments (pre-transfer, post-transfer, and graduates) were purposefully selected and interviewed one-on-one. Interview participants were chosen for specific reasons; for example, one of the graduates had gone on to earn a Master's degree and his experiences offered rich possibilities for an interview. Interviews aimed at mining in-depth information from the participants, and they attempted to gain a deeper understanding of the barriers students face and the ways they have learned to cope with them. Interviews were held in person, recorded, and transcribed. One-on-one interviews allowed for further questioning, clarification of responses, explanation of responses, and narratives from the students who described their experiences.

Analysis of Data

A qualitative approach was utilized to analyze data about American Indian transfer students and graduates. Following the collection of questionnaire responses, the results were tallied and analyzed. Three main categories were established based on the themes that surfaced during the literature review: 1) Support, 2) American Indian Courses and Activities, and 3) Persistence Motivators. The results of the questionnaire were then color-coded with each category receiving a different color. Each category was separated into different folders and all related responses were grouped into individual category folders. For example, the theme "support," was coded in yellow, and then underneath that theme were the sub categories such as family and social support. In addition to color-coding, the researcher used abbreviations such as FS for "family support" and SS for "social support" to identify the different sub categories under the major category. During the coding process, the researcher also used memos for elaborated data analysis. These memos were written in red text and asterisks were used to denote one from the other. The researcher then used these memos to comment on, make notes about, and highlight relevant and emerging information. Simple percentages were used to measure the frequencies of recurring themes as a way of highlighting their importance among participants.

At the conclusion of the questionnaire, which lasted about three weeks, the interview phase of data collection began. Interviewees were purposefully selected, and meetings were arranged at one of the two campuses selected for the study.

After consent forms were signed, interviews were conducted and recorded using a hand-held digital recording device. The recorded interviews were saved as MP3 audio files and uploaded to the website of a professional transcription company for processing. Within a week of submission, the recorded interviews were converted to Microsoft Word documents and returned to the researcher. The transcribed interviews were color-coded the same way as the questionnaires, analyzed, and separated into categories and themes as those for the questionnaire data.

Assumptions and/or Limitations

This study was limited to American Indian college transfer students and graduates. The underlying consideration was that all participants were either American Indian college transfer students, prospective transfer students with plans to transfer their credits toward the attainment of a bachelor's degree, or graduates who had completed the transfer process between institutions.

Presentation of Results

In keeping with the suggestions of Flaga (2006) and Guillory and Wolverton (2008) who recommend a qualitative approach to examining the experiences of American Indian subjects, the responses of both questionnaire and interview participants were presented verbatim whenever possible. Editing was done only to correct misspelled words or grammar that might have caused some misrepresentation of the subjects' intent. In some interview transcripts, for example, heavy accents caused some words to be misinterpreted during transcription. The data that came from the online questionnaires and interviews influenced the method of analysis for the categories and themes presented in the study. Open-ended questions and follow-up questions encouraged the interviewees to speak freely about their experiences and to also sometimes elaborate on their meaning.

The qualitative methodology was selected for collecting and analyzing data for the current study as advocated by Creswell (2008). In addition to the qualitative data collection method, this study grounded its interpretation of data on the Critical Race Theory. Generally, the Critical Race Theory was acclaimed for its ability to provide a major framework for examining the experiences of minority experiences including those of American Indians. It thus provides the oppressed with a vehicle for expressing their frustrations through narratives and storytelling (Chandler, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1999). Ogbu (2004) argued that Oppositional Culture Theory takes place when non-Caucasian students feel pressured to "act white." This perceived pressure results in behavior characterized by an unwillingness to accept what was perceived as dominant culture because the culture to be assimilated into was associated with a culture that was sometimes considered foreign by the student. The foundations of these theories stated upon an understanding of how race affects people of diverse backgrounds. Scholars including Ladson-Billings (1999) and Chandler (2010) agree that because issues of race permeate culture and politics, the effects were subsequently felt in education.

Results of the Study

Introduction

To examine the transfer experience for American Indian students, three different groups of transfer students were studied: a) students at a two-year community college preparing to transfer to a four-year university, b) students who transferred to a four-year university from the two year community college, and c) graduates of a four-year university who began their college career at the two-year institution.

Two main research questions guided the study:

1. Were there common characteristics of persistence behavior shared among American Indian students who successfully matriculate from the two-year college to the four-year university?
2. Were there any major sources of support (family, social, or institutional) that American Indian students who transfer credit as part of their successful transfer persistence behavior?

The study began with an online questionnaire based on questions derived from the literature review and also created using a professional online questionnaire tool. At the conclusion of the questionnaire, two participants from each segment were selected for one-on-one interviews.

Participants

A total of 49 students participated in the online questionnaires, and some participants who had taken the online questionnaire were then invited to take part in face-to-face interviews. The participants were divided in three separate groups.

- Group 1 had ten (10) participants who were graduates of a university and began their college careers at a local community college.
- Group 2 had sixteen (16) participants comprised of the current university students who had transferred from the local community college.
- Group three had twenty-three (23) participants who were local community college students who had indicated that they planned to transfer to the nearby university.

Online Questionnaire

Table 1
Questionnaire Participant Segments

Segments	Participants
Graduates	10
Student Transfers	16
Prospective Transfer Students	23
Total	49

Source: *Online Questionnaires*

Questionnaire Results

Research Question 1

Were there any common characteristics of persistence behavior shared among American Indian students who successfully matriculate from the two-year college to the four-year university?

The first of the two guiding research questions focused on identifying common characteristics of persistence behavior shared by the three different groups of participants in the transfer process (a) American Indian students who plan to transfer to a four-year university from a two year community college, b) students who have transferred from a community college to a four-year university, and c) graduates of the four-year university who had transferred from the community college. Participants of both the online questionnaires and interviews were asked to provide information about their perceptions of the different characteristics related to their transfer experience. The transfer students' experiences were based on their perceptions of the following: a) levels of family support, b) parents' level of education, c) mentors, d) American Indian faculty and staff, e) college preparedness, and f) American Indian courses and activities.

The findings of the online questionnaires and interviews were presented through the personal responses. This original format of the responses was kept so as to preserve the uniqueness of each response. Participants in the online questionnaire identified five characteristics that they most have in common namely: a) high levels of family support, b) high levels of support from friends, c) American Indian institutional faculty and staff, d) the importance of American Indian courses and activities, and e) the importance of mentors.

Participant Group Responses

Former students of both institutions were presented first, followed by those students who were still at the university, and finally were the students who are still at the community college who indicated that they plan to transfer to the local four-year university.

Participants of the online questionnaire identified five factors: a) high levels of family support, b) high levels of support from friends, c) American Indian institutional faculty and staff, d) the importance of American Indian subjects/curriculum, and e) the importance of mentors, as the most important in aiding their pursuit of a bachelors' degree through the transfer process. On the other hand, the participants identified the following factors as the least common: a) parents' level of high school graduation, b) K-12 education on college preparedness, c) participation in American Indian courses, d) participation in formal college orientation activities, and e) parents' levels of college graduation.

In general, respondents said that they had some kind of mentor in college—a friend, teacher, staff, member, or someone in their community—that helped and positively encouraged their success. Mentor then will be an umbrella term included in the different sections of the support system such as family, friends, and educators.

Common Persistence Characteristics

Table 1
Most Common Characteristics of Persistence

Most Common Characteristics	Questionnaire Responses
Family Support	93.8%
Friend Support	89.7%
American Indian Faculty and Staff	83.6%
American Indian Courses and Activities	68.3%
Mentors	53.0%

Source: Online Questionnaires

Family Support

Online questionnaire participants identified family support as the most important factor in the influence of academic persistence behavior identified by the online questionnaire participants. Most of the participants (93.8 percent) indicated that their families supported their decisions to transfer their credits and pursue bachelor's degrees.

Table 2
Family Support

Segments	Response
Graduates	90.0%
Student Transfers	100.0%
Prospective Transfer Students	91.3%
Total	93.76%

Source: Online Questionnaires

Friends Support

The second most common persistence characteristic the participants identified was the support of friends. A majority of participants (89.7 percent) of all three segments said that their friends were supportive of their transfer decisions.

Table 3
Friends Support

Segments	Response
Graduates	100.0%
Student Transfers	75.0%
Prospective Transfer Students	95.6%
Total	89.7%

Source: Online Questionnaires

American Indian Faculty and Staff

The third most common component characteristic identified by the participants was the perception that American Indian faculty and staff were important in the successful transition of Indian students from the two-year college institution to the four-year university. In this area, 83.6 percent of online questionnaire participants agreed that having American Indian faculty and staff was important.

Table 4
Perception of American Indian Faculty and Staff Importance

Segments	Response
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Graduates	80.0%
Student Transfers	68.7%
Prospective Transfer Students	95.6%
Total	83.6%

Source: *Online Questionnaires*

American Indian Courses and Activities

Table 5
American Indian Courses and Activities

Segments	Response
Graduates	70.0%
Student Transfers	44.0%
Prospective Transfer Students	90.9%
Total	68.3%

Source: *Online Questionnaires*

The fourth most common factor important to academic persistence identified by the participants was the belief that the inclusion of American Indian courses and activities into both the college and the university curriculum has a positive effect on the success of Indian transfer students navigating the transfer process. Of all questionnaire participants, 68.3 percent said they believed that exposure to college and university courses and activities with a focus on American Indian culture would have a positive effect.

Half of the participants said that they had taken a course in American Indian history. The majority of those respondents were students at the university, which has a formal American Indian Studies program, as opposed to the community college, where no courses were offered specifically in American Indian studies. Surprisingly, fewer of the graduates in the study had taken any courses (four out of ten respondents). It was encouraging, however, to note that while many students had not taken any courses, they reported that they might have but were unable to because their programs did not include these courses or because they did not have time because of work and school schedules. Their attitudes towards the courses were very positive and many of the participants believed that taking such courses would have positive effects on their transfer persistence.

Mentors

The study participants identified having mentors as the fifth most common characteristic of persistence behavior that they shared. In this area, 53 percent of the respondents said that they had some kind of

mentor in college—a friend, teacher, staff, member, or someone in their communityB that helped and positively encouraged their success.

Table 6
Mentors

Segments	Response
Graduates	90.0%
Student Transfers	56.6%
Prospective Transfer Students	43.4%
Total	53.0%

Source: Online Questionnaires

Least Common Characteristics of Persistence Behavior

Five factors least shared by the online questionnaire participants were also identified. They were: a) the level of the graduation of the participants’ parents from college, b) their participation in formal orientation activities for transfer students, c) their participation in American Indian courses and activities, d) their parents’ levels of graduation from high school, and e) the participants’ perceptions of the effects of their K-12 education on their preparedness.

Table 8
Least Common Characteristics of Persistence

Least Common Characteristics	Responses
Parents’ College Participation	32.6%
Participation in Formal Orientation Activities	41.0%
Parents’ High School Completion	43.4%
Participation in American Indian Courses/Activities	50.0%
Preparedness	51.0%

Source: Online Questionnaires

Parents’ Levels of College Graduation

The least common characteristic shared by the participants in the online questionnaire was their parents’ levels of college graduation. Only 32.6 percent of the study participants said that their parents had graduated from college.

Participation in Formal College Orientation Activities

Slightly less than 41 percent of the participants said that they had attended any kind of formal orientation or activity designed to prepare students for the transfer process.

Parents' Levels of High School Graduation

The third characteristic least shared by the online questionnaire participants was their parents' levels of high school graduation. Just 49 percent of the participants said that their parents had finished their high school degrees.

Participation in American Indian Courses

The fourth characteristic of persistence behavior that the participants had the least in common was participation in American Indian courses. Exactly 50 percent of the participants said that they had not taken courses in American Indian history and culture.

Perception of K-12 Education on College Preparedness

The final characteristic that the online questionnaire participants shared the least was their perception of the effect that their public school education had on their preparedness for college level course work. Slightly more than half of the questionnaire participants (51 percent) said that they believed that they had been adequately prepared.

The results of this study suggested that persistence behavior traits may be held accountable for the success of American Indian students. The literature review for this study found family and social support to be important factors in academic success of these students (Burney & Beilke, 2008; Dennis, et al., 2005; Roksa & Calcagno, 2008), and the participant responses were consistent with the research. Additionally, research by Guillory and Wolverson (2008) and Nomi (2005), posited that the parents of first-generation college students tend to be less supportive of their children's academic endeavors. In the current study, 49 percent of the participants indicated that they were first-generation college students. Finally, Huffman and Ferguson (2007), Guillory and Wolverson (2008), and Roksa and Calcagno (2008) stated that lack of pre-college academic preparation was a hindrance to success for Indian students, and in this study, only 51 percent of the respondents believed they had been adequately prepared for college by their K-12 institutions, and only 41 percent said that they had attended orientation events that help prepare transfer students to make the transition from the community college to the four-year university.

Interviews: Section I

Interview Results

The purpose of the interviews was to gain deeper insight into the perceptions of the participants in the study. The interview participants were also online questionnaire participants who had volunteered to take part in face-to-face interviews. Two interview participants represented each of the three study segments. Three major themes guided the interviews and five questions were asked; however, the researcher chose to revisit the basic themes of the online questionnaire questions, and some of the same

questions that were asked in both the questionnaire and the interview in order to probe the participant for more descriptive information.

The three guiding themes were:

- The participants' transitions through the transfer process
- Their perceptions of and participation in American Indian curriculum and activities
- Their internal success motivators

Interviews: Section II

Graduates

The five questions that guided the interviews with American Indian graduates of UNCP were:

- Was your first post-transfer semester made difficult by your arrival on a new campus?
- What would you describe as challenges you experienced as a transfer student?
- Did participating in American Indian organization and activities make you feel closer to your campus, institution?
- Did you participate in organizations or events that strengthened your American Indian knowledge and identity?
- What motivated you to succeed in school? Did you possess internal drives to succeed despite obstacles?

The interviewee's responses to the questions were summarized under the following themes: Support, American Indian Curriculum and Activities, and Persistence Motivators. The responses were presented below.

Support

In order to understand how support was perceived by each interview participant, the discussions began with asking the participant to describe what he/she perceived to be challenges to their academic persistence. The first interview participant was Sharon, a single mother who at the time worked full-time, and who described her biggest challenge as balancing family responsibilities with work and school. One of the significant themes that came from the interview involved the role of family support

in college persistence. Sharon explained that as a single-mother, it was the support of her family that made her successful.

Interviewer: So, family was a big balancing act for you as a transfer student?

Interviewee response: It would have to be. You ever heard the saying that ‘it takes a village to raise a child’? ... That [was] literal because it took my entire family to help me raise mine because I’m a single mom... It takes a commitment also from not only my family, but also my son.

This interviewee suggested that a divide between the culture of regional students and the sometimes foreign-faculty and staff of the university presented a challenge. She described a “language barrier” with faculty from other countries. “I had a professor at one point [...] that his dialogue... the way he communicated information might not be the way that we’re used to it.” Sharon was referring to the speech and dialect of many of the American Indian students from Robeson and surrounding counties (Dannenberg, et al., 1996).

The interviewee insisted that it was necessary for American Indian students in the region to switch their dialect in favor of a more Standardized American English when speaking in academic and professional settings. She also insisted that faculty and staff could do well with their students if they take the time to listen to them and get a feel for their speech.

We all know that we have an Indian dialect that was called—what we call Lumbee talk. [...] I do have a strong—I mean a very strong—country accent and people from the north know that I’m country when I talk. But, being able to change it or switch it up you have to do that, I think because if you don’t, then you’re holding yourself back from other opportunities.

During the interview, the interviewee also talked about the influence mentors had on her college persistence. This role took on a duality in her experiences; she talked about faculty and staff at the university that encouraged her and she shared her own stories about helping Indian students who come to the University as new students. She talked about professors who advised her and others who were sympathetic when she needed to drop a class because of issues beyond her control. In her role, now, as an orientation director at the local university, she talks to the parents of new students when they arrive, and she offers her own advice for their smooth transitions to campus.

Another graduate interviewee offered a different perspective on the question of challenges. He insisted that he had not experienced any challenges in his transfer from the community college to the university. He credited his success with having instructors that emphasized hands-on learning and positive class attendance as part of his study program. “It was more of a one-on-one, more structured learning environment,” he said. In terms of general preparedness, he suggested that his experience at the university level was greater because he had instructors who emphasized the importance of class attendance, as well as hands-on learning and one-on-one learning.

Later, when asked about “Lumbee talk,” the male interviewee concurred that the local Indian dialect could have an effect on the social experiences of American Indians from the region. “I have always been judged by my accent. It could have a negative effect on those that were not prepared to handle being looked upon by others as uneducated or ‘country’,” he said. “Once you leave the comfort zone of being surrounded by ‘ya people’, it was difficult [...] I have friends that enrolled at Chapel Hill after

high school who suffered culture shock and had to adapt to their new surroundings quick. This adaptation dealt mostly with changing their dialect and the way they wrote.”

According to the graduate, “I think that the biggest thing that holds Native Americans back was just the perception of being Native American. . . I don’t know if you have ever heard the term Indian cricket. . . that’s the perception of an Indian that’s trying to better themselves and being pulled down by other Indians and that could be related to any race. But that’s just a phrase that you hear a lot in [our] county—Indian crickets referring to Native Americans who were trying to improve themselves but that were being pulled down by other Native Americans who were not trying to do better for themselves.” He added that he believed that in order to be successful as an American Indian, students must develop a self-awareness that allows them to see the opportunities available to them and to understand the path that leads to prosperity.

The male graduate interviewee felt that mentors positively influenced his college persistence. However, they were not only his professors; they were also professionals who had practical experiences to share with him. The earliest experience he mentioned of having a mentor was high school. He said that the school resource officer played a role in his decision to pursue a career in law enforcement. “[He] was Native American himself. . . very influential in ensuring that I get out and meet various individuals that have influence in the—or play parts in the law enforcement community when I was in high school”.

From the community college, he talked about the basic law enforcement program director who he credited with advising him as well as helping him to network with other professionals in the law enforcement field. Additionally, he mentioned a professor at the university in the criminal justice department who also had a diverse network of academic and legal professionals.

American Indian Courses and Activities

The American Indian graduates were asked if they participated in American Indian organizations and activities, and if it made them feel closer to their campus. The first interviewee confessed to not having participated in many activities on campus. As a single, working mother, she did not have the time to. Now, after completing her degree, she wishes she could have. She said that she also would have preferred to take some American Indian Studies courses at the university because she values the link to her Indian heritage that the university offers. She said that one reason why she did not take any classes was because they were not part of her curriculum. She said the subject of American Indian history and culture was interesting to her.

The male graduate interviewee, who was able to enter community college as a young, unmarried man with no children, had more time for activities, and he took advantage of them. He was also the student body president, which allowed him to interact more with other students. He said that once he transferred to the university, he had less time available for extra-curricular activities because of time constraints and employment priorities. Both of the graduate interviewees said that it was important that students of all races learn about American Indians in school because they were a small minority in the country. “It’s very important that Native American students take Native American classes and learn Native American history. . . It’s important to see where we’ve come as a people and how it’s important for us to continue on this track of progression to better ourselves and only way we could better ourselves as the people was we better ourselves individually”. He went on to make the point that American Indian students were more successful in college when they were connected to their heritage

through learning. He feels that this connection helps American Indian students become oriented to the purpose their education serves in the professional world.

Persistence Motivators

The graduates were asked what motivated them to succeed in school. Did they possess internal drives to succeed despite obstacles? Both graduates credited their academic persistence with high levels of support from family and friends. The first graduate interviewee depended on the help of her family while she worked to instill the value of education in her son; the other, whose parents were divorced, depended on both of his parents for moral and financial support.

In addition to her family, the first graduate interviewee credited the support of her friends through social networks as something that encouraged her to persist with her studies. During the interview, she spoke of an example of a friend who posted on Facebook that she was about to take a test and needed moral support. She called the social network “an encourager” and said that it could be used as a motivational support mechanism.

The second graduate interviewee’s parents were divorced and did not always have money for him, but he said they were both very supportive and made sure that he had everything he needed to succeed. This was consistent with Dennis, et al. (2005), who posited that family support could positively affect the educational outcomes of first-generation college students. In addition to the support of family, Rudy said that he also got support from his employers. “When I transferred over to UNCP my first semester, I took... 18 hours... and I was a full-time employee... I really wanted to get in and out because it was very difficult to manage a full-time job and take a full course load and I guess that was a tribute to my supervisors working with me and allowing me to negotiate my schedule which [allowed] me to take morning classes and night classes.”

UNCP Students

The second segment of interview participants was students who transferred credits from the community college to the university with the intention of completing a four-year degree. The two students who participated in the interviews were also one male and one female. These participants were asked the same questions as the graduates who had started out at the community college. Again, three themes were the focus of the five questions: Support, American Indian Courses and Activities, and Persistence Motivators.

Support

When asked what challenges she faced when she arrived at a new campus, the first interviewee, a female, initially responded that she had none, but when asked more specifically about her academic performance, she said, “When I was at RCC, I was an AB student. Here at Pembroke I have so much other going on [from] full time employee, mother... now I’m a BC student”.

In terms of support, she credited her family and friends as her primary sources of support. “...my family was very supportive, just like right now I take two night classes and my husband has to meet me to get my little girl... I have a couple of friends who also attend here... they were supportive.”

The female interviewee said that she did not have any mentors, but she did say that working with alumni of the university through her job, she was inspired by the many graduates she had met. "... I saw how so many graduates had this love for [this university]. So that helped me to want to go back, so I would have that same affinity... that feeling of home, I want that same feeling that they experienced."

At first, the second interviewee, a male, said he had not experienced any challenges at his new campus, but when asked if he had experienced a drop in his grade point average, he responded that he had. He described his biggest challenge as the number of online classes he took. "... I've taken [11 classes] since I've been here and nine of them has been online and... it's different from being in class..." The interviewee explained that it was difficult for him to get answers from his online professors, and that if his work schedule allowed, he would rather take face-to-face classes.

Similar to the first interviewee, the second interviewee said he did not have any mentors, although he said his brother, who was one of the only members of his family to have a college education and who earns a large salary, was the closest thing he could think of. He did say that he had received good support, mainly from co-workers. He also credited several of his instructors at the local community college with not only being good teachers but also for encouraging him to continue pursuing his bachelor's degree.

American Indian Courses and Activities

Both interviewees were asked about their participation in American Indian courses and activities as well as if they thought they were important in their college careers. Neither student admitted to being involved in American Indian activities. However, the first interviewee said that she had taken one course, and she said that she had enjoyed it. "... it was American Indians Before 1897, I think... and I enjoyed it". She said she took the course as an elective, and she especially preferred the professor who taught the course. "[The course] showed us where our people came from and where we were today. So, yes I would say that, I came out with a positive outlook." She also said that she felt that the presence of American Indian faculty and staff was important because it gave her something "you could relate to." She explained, "... you've pretty much been down the same road that they have been down... it just gives me encouragement as a Native American student to see some of our people who have went on to get better education. It just gives me a better outlook."

On the other hand, the second interviewee did not share the same perspective. He was not involved in activities and courses, primarily because they were not in his program of study and because he lacks the additional time between work and school to get involved. "I'm just too busy," he said. "I mean, I wake up in the morning at between 6:00 and 6:30 and I don't get home to about 10:30, 11 o'clock at night. I just don't have the time right now." When asked if American Indian faculty and staff were important, he explained that they were only to the extent that they were good teachers. When asked if he thought that taking American Indian courses would bring him closer to his American Indian identity, he agreed.

Persistence Motivators

The interviewees were both asked what they believed were motivators that helped them to succeed in school. When asked what motivated her, the first interviewee said it was her family. First, she said that she wanted to do well as a means to giving her daughter a better chance to succeed in life, but she also

referred to the lack of degree attainment in her family in general as a motivator. She said that both of her parents were high school dropouts, although her mother went back to school and earned a GED.

The first interviewee earned an associate's degree at the community college, but she said she sees the importance of going beyond the two-year degree and earning a bachelor's degree. "I feel like once I get my degree, of course, no one could take that from me, and I feel like I've accomplished something and hopefully once I do get my degree, I could move forward, and further my career".

The second interviewee also said that his family provides an internal drive for him to succeed. He said that he wanted his mother to see him attain a college degree. "She was pretty old now, and I want her to see me walk across that stage. That's my biggest motivation," he responded. Similar to the female interviewee, the male said that very few people in his family have obtained more than a high school education, and he would prefer to be one to change that. He said he was also motivated to get his degree, so that he could give back to his community. He said he also believes that getting his education could motivate American Indian children when he finishes school and becomes a teacher.

Prospective Transfer Students

The final segment of interview participants was made up of students at the community college who plan to transfer credits to the university with the intention of completing a four-year degree. The participants were asked five questions, just as the graduates and the transfer students. This time, however, instead of being asked about their perceptions of the challenges they face and the support they receive, participants were asked questions to examine their preparedness for making the transition. Emphasis was placed on three areas: college preparedness; perception and participation in American Indian courses and activities; and persistence motivators. The five questions they were asked were:

- How familiar were you with the articulation agreement between RCC and UNCP?
- Have you attended any function, event, orientation or formal program regarding your transfer?
- Do you have an American Indian role model or mentor?
- Would you (do you) participate in organizations or events that strengthen your American Indian knowledge and identity?
- What motivates you to succeed in school? Do you possess internal drives to succeed despite obstacles?

Support

The two interview participants for the final segment were both female. When asked what they knew about the articulation agreement between RCC and UNCP, the first said she was not familiar with the

arrangement at all, but the second said that she was. The second interviewee said that she knew about the articulation agreement because she had first applied at the university but was not admitted because her SAT score was too low. She said that an advisor at the university encouraged her to take courses at the community college and then transfer them to the university. Next, she was asked if she had attended any kind of formal events offered at either institution to educate students about the process. Her response was negative. The second interviewee also responded that she had never attended any kind of official event or orientation for students who wanted to transfer.

During the opening stage of the interview, the theme of support was probed in more detail with an additional question also found on the questionnaire. The participants were asked to talk about their levels of support, and both volunteered that they received high levels of support. However, upon question, both interviewees revealed much different realities about the quality of support they received from family and friends. For example, when at first asked to describe the support she received from her family, the first replied, "All of my family supports me getting my education. It's the big thing in my family." However, when asked if anyone had ever discouraged her from getting an education, she responded, "I have had, well, I really haven't had a good childhood and some of my family has put me down, and I've always been told 'you're never going to be nothing' and 'you're going to be just like your mama.'"

The first interviewee did not have any professional or academic mentors, but she did respond that members of her family served in that role. Many of her female relatives, including her grandmother and aunts, were deeply involved in Indian culture. She also said that her boyfriend, who attends the university, serves as a mentor, advising her on what classes to take, what administrative steps to take, and other activities related to her preparation to transfer to the university.

Interviewee two described a different set of circumstances regarding levels of support from her family. She explained that her parents were divorced and both have different influences on her educational decisions. Her mother, a graduate of the local university, strongly encourages her to transfer there and earn a bachelor's degree in nursing; however, she insists that she was not really interested in the degree. Her father, who was a tribal leader in a regional tribe, she says, does not want her to pursue a college education at all. "My father ...he says that it's the white man's way to go out and get an education and work for life ...he was really against education because he wants us to work more with the tribe ...he supports me, but [...] he was not really for the education thing." The second interviewee went on to say that her boyfriend was her closest friend, and while he was supportive, "...some friends, they say like, 'You think you're better than everyone because you're going to college?'" She added that the people who tell her this do so because they themselves did not finish high school.

The second interviewee only mentioned her mother as her mentor. She said that her mother, who strongly encourages her to transfer to the university, has been in college for several years and was currently working on a degree.

Both interviewees stated that one of their primary reasons for wanting to persist in college was to prove wrong the people who said that they could not succeed. One added that she also wants to be successful, so that she could give back to her community, and she also said that since her grandparents, on her mother's side, were supporting her financially.

American Indian Courses and Activities

Both interviewees were asked about their perceptions of American Indian courses and activities and whether or not they had participated in anything. The first interviewee said that she had not but indicated an interest in being more involved in the Indian community and related activities. She said that her primary reason for not doing so was a lack of time. Although the second interviewee said that she was not active, her response, however, indicated that she had, in fact, been exposed to cultural gatherings/activities. “I mean, that’s the culture I’ve been raised in, and my aunts and other people in my family, they dance in the pow wows and we go the pow wows and we do the regalia, and we had to do pine needle basket weaving and sew, pretty strong,” she added. She indicated that she was once a member of the Native American Student Association in public school. The second interviewee said that if more courses were offered at the community college, she would prefer to be involved. She believed that her peers would, as well. When asked if she thought that American Indian faculty and staff were important, she said that having Indian teachers was not as important as having teachers that know their subjects. However, in terms of staff, she expressed a desire to see people to which she could relate in those positions.

The second interviewee said that she would welcome the opportunity to take American Indian Studies classes. She attended a private school, where she said Indian history was superficial. She explained that at her high school, she experienced racism on both the personal and institutional levels:

“It’s a very racist place anyways,” she said. “They didn’t really talk about Indians much there [. . .] and the teachers, I was actually thrown out of class for taking up for Indians, one day. [. . .] I enrolled there in 9th grade, and 10th grade, another Indian guy came, and we were the only two Indians there. While we were in history class, and my teacher was white. She was an old bitter white woman, and she just said that Indians were savages [and] it made me furious. She was - they fired her, and I don’t know how the other teachers took it, but they didn’t say anything else about Indians [. . .] this whole school was racist so they just threw it out of the window after it happened.

Common Persistence Characteristics

Research Question 1

Were there common characteristics of persistence behavior shared among American Indian students who successfully matriculate from the two-year college to the four-year university?

The five most common characteristics of persistence behavior shared by all three segments, in order of frequency within the interviews were: a) support from family and friends, b) racial identity, c) internal persistence motivators, d) mentors, and e) participation in American Indian cultural events and activities.

Family and Friends Support

The most frequently identified persistence behavior that was shared by all six interview-participants was that of “support” from family and friends. Support was referred to 42 times within the interviews. Participants considered support to mean many things from financial (paying for college expenses) to moral (offering advice, helping with young children, and other family matters). Family support was identified 29 times in the interviews and social support, or friend support, was mentioned 13 times.

Graduates

The female graduate interviewee, a single mother of an 18-year-old son, discussed the support she received as coming from multiple sources in terms of both family and friends.

Now I went to school a long time after I started back working [...]. And I didn't think it would ever end. But now my very last semester before I graduated out to the four classes—which was a full load and working full time— [...] now what I did before I took those four classes, I communicated to my mom because she was my major support person. I communicated to my son. And really I communicated to my church too. I need prayers . . .”

The theme of support was cyclical in the interview. While the interviewee talked about the support she received from her mother and son, she also talked about how she attempts to give that support back.

During her face-to-face interview in the current study, the female interviewee said that she was encouraged when she posted on Facebook that she was going to take a test, and her friends responded with well-wishes for her success. Research by Walsh (2012) supports that social media play an increasingly more significant role in college student persistence. One of the student interviewees said that she was encouraged by knowing that she had friends at UNCP who were in the same program because she often felt a sense of knowing that she was not alone. The two prospective transfer interviewees said that they already had friends at the university who helped them make decisions about transferring there. These experiences were supported by Dennis, et al. (2005), Jackson, et al. (2003) and Mattanah, et al. (2010), whose research suggested that positive peer support was significant in college persistence.

Making the adjustment from one institution to another could be made easier by having friends at the institution in which the student was transferring. Flaga calls the process of making the adjustment “negotiating” (2006, p. 5). While making transitions to new campuses, students encounter new experiences, make new friends, and get used to new ways of doing things. The help and advice they get from friends (especially those who were in similar programs) serve to make those transitions easier. Iverson (2007) was an advocate for students making social connections through cultural engagement. While students are adjusting to new environments, they can make new friends while attending social activities on campus, where they tend to meet students with similar goals. Similarly, Burney and Beilke (2008) and Kuh (2007) stated that making friendships that are linked to culture and heritage can positively impact students' self-efficacy.

The male graduate interviewee in the study said that he was a first generation college student whose parents had divorced when he was young. “They were very supportive,” he said of his parents who he says realized the importance of him getting a college education. He also credited his friends with supporting his transfer persistence. While many of them chose to go to the university right out of high school, he chose to begin at the community college. He said his friends were disappointed at first, but by their sophomore year at the University, he had graduated with an associate's degree, and when they learned that he planned to transfer his credits to the university, they were all supportive. However, while working at the local sheriff's department and attending college, he was sometimes met with adversity to his choices to complete a degree. He reported that, “an individual that I . . . worked for . . . discouraged me pursuing my education.” He said that he perceived this to be someone who feared that if he attained an education, then it might threaten that person's job security.

He persisted in spite of it. He said, “I knew the benefits of having a four-year degree were going to be beneficial to me ...[It’s] going to help you get a better job and I think that’s exactly what happened.”

Transfer Students

Interviewee one, a young wife and mother balancing work and school, said her family was very supportive of her educational pursuits. At the time of the interview, she was taking two night classes, and she said that her husband often had to meet her at work to pick up their young daughter. “If your parents aren’t supportive, your family was not supportive, it could make it harder for American Indians students ...especially if you were like me—a married, couple—it’s hard to get help.” She described not being able to spend more time with her family as her “biggest sacrifice,” but she re-iterated that “when she grows up she’ll see that I tried to provide her a better way of living”.

When talking about support, interviewee two said that while his family was supportive, he especially had strong support from friends at work. Gaining their support was not always easy, he said. He reported that some of his friends do not have college education, so they do not understand the social sacrifices he must make, such as missing parties or social events, in order to pursue his education.

Prospective Transfer Students

Interviewee one said that even though the majority of her family supported her pursuit of a university education, some family members were not as supportive as others. She said that her parents were not in her life when she was growing up, and she spent time moving from family to family. However, she said that she was determined to prove to her family that she could succeed in spite of her disadvantaged childhood. “[It] caused [to] want to be better and not be like my mama. I showed them I’m nothing like her, when it comes to doing the things I need and taking care of my daughter.”

The interviewee’s comments during the interview indicated that she had very solid support from friends, many of whom she reported were not only enrolled in community colleges, but were also at four-year schools in the state. She added that her friends at university campuses make their support more valuable by sharing vital information about the university experience that was helping her prepare to make the transition.

Interviewee two shared a unique account of family support that also took into account her Indian culture. According to the 18-year-old college freshman, her mother was her primary family support, as well as the person who was encouraging her most to want to transfer from the community college and pursue a degree at the university. She also talked about her grandparents, whom she said paid for her education so that she does not have to work while attending school. However, she says that her father was not supportive of her education. She lives on a small Indian reservation, as opposed to her American Indian peers who do not live on reservations. Her father was not supportive of her college education because he believes that it is “the white man’s way” and counterintuitive to their tribe’s beliefs.

Interviewee two described having a small group of friends, but she confirmed that she knew other Indian students who had attended the community college and transferred to the university. She also said that they had made successful transitions. She reported that her closest friend was her boyfriend, and while he was not enrolled in college, she said that he was highly supportive of her endeavors because he had not attended college and wanted her to have the opportunity.

Racial Identity

The interview participants identified racial identity as being an important factor in their persistence to obtain the bachelor's degree through the college transfer process a total of twenty-one (21) times. In some cases, the participants discussed how their local Indian dialect or helped them and other Indian students to identify with each other and their culture. This recognition of Indian identity helped some participants to persist, while in other cases, it became a basis for Opposition Culture Theory. As Ogbu (2004) posits, some people of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds deliberately oppose behaviors, such as being highly educated, because they see them as representing characteristics of a white society.

Graduates

Having been a student at the university and now working in the University's admissions office as well as being enrolled at a historically American Indian institution, the first interviewee said that she believes a lot of Indian students are comfortable in their community. During the interview, she made connections between American Indian culture and education, and she talked about it as a means of preserving the culture and of educating the community. Culture was something that she sees as an important factor in her own son's education.

Transfer Students

"I'd say that I'm proud to be an American Indian. I'm proud of my heritage," said interviewee one when discussing American Indian identity and persistence behavior. She also mentioned that she was aware of a distinct dialect shared by Indians in her region, and she agreed that the dialect could be embarrassing for students who become self-conscious of it, especially in the presence of peers who do not share it. "I'm not a big talker just because of my dialect, and I don't want anybody sitting back, laughing or whatever else."

Interviewee two became aware of his unique dialect before attending college and while serving in the Navy. He admitted experiencing situations when with his fellow servicemen that made him aware of his speech, and as an aspiring teacher, he hopes that he could help students from his region expand their horizons. During the interview, he expressed the importance of Indians leaving their home and getting more in touch with the world outside of their county because communication, travel, and the Internet are closing the gaps.

Prospective Transfer Students

Interviewee one describes her family as being very connected to their Indian culture. They attend pow wows, and some of them dance in them, wearing Indian regalia (a word used to describe the outfits worn at traditional American Indian events). She also mentioned being involved in the Native American Student Association at her high school and having Indian friends at the university that she could turn to for help, demonstrating that Indian identity and an established network of people of the same culture can help with the transition.

Indian identity was especially important to interviewee two, who lives in a close-knit Indian community on a small reservation in southeastern North Carolina. Despite not being a member of the larger regional tribe in her area, she acknowledged that there are cultural connections between the tribes

by virtue of living in an area where tribal culture was distinguished most exclusively by Indians, and not by other races and ethnicities.

One of those cultural connections was the regional Indian dialect. She said she was aware of the dialect spoken by Indians in the county. She said that it was easily recognizable. It's "who we are," she said. She admits speaking with an accent herself, but she said that attending a private school with mostly white friends from places outside of the region had an effect on her speech; it helped her to become aware of her dialect and to begin to change.

Internal Persistence Motivators

During the course of the interviews, participants were asked what personal motivations helped them to succeed in school. Participants mentioned—both with and without direct questioning—behaviors and motivators that contributed to their persistence fifteen (15) different times. In some instances, the participants said they were determined to succeed because someone had told them that they would not succeed. Some participants said that they were determined to persist because no one in their family had attained a college degree, while some said they were determined to succeed because they wanted to please their parents or other members of their families.

Graduates

When interviewee one, the female participant, was asked what motivated her to persist through her college transitions, her response was simple: "myself." Being a single mother, raising a teenage son, she possesses a self-realization that it was up to her to provide for his well-being and education. She described self-realization as a means for improving one's station in life. She knows that it is up to her to achieve her goals and to, ultimately, be a role model for her son. In the interview, she described how she had to set goals and work towards them, although there were obstacles along the way, including losing a close loved one. Keeping focus was a priority for her.

A major internal drive to succeed for interviewee one, the male participant, was seeing the limitations of his family's education. Both of his parents were manual laborers, and they continue to work in those professions. He described how growing up and seeing them working in tough conditions had left a sad impression on him.

"My motivation was, I wanted to better myself and for my family as well as for me ...I wanted my family to take pride in me when they see me. I wanted to be an inspiration for other people and show them where I came from that they could do it as well. I didn't come from a wealthy family. My family was not rich. I lived down a dirt road in a single-wide trailer and I had to walk down the dirt road to catch the bus every morning. So, if I could do it, you could do it," he said.

He said that he does not consider his motivation to succeed as making him better than anyone else. Although he said he went to school with students whose parents were able to provide advantages for their students, he did not feel that his friends were more advantaged than he was. He said it makes him feel good to know that he has achieved his goals despite not having those same advantages, and he believes that other Indian students could do the same.

Transfer Students

The first interviewee found that her internal drive to succeed was in knowing that once she earns her college degree, no one can take it away from her. She also says that she was motivated to persist towards her degree by her family. Her mother and father dropped out of high school; however, she has two sisters who recently obtained bachelor's degrees, and she would prefer to be next. Earning her degree will have positive consequences, and she knows it. It will give her upward mobility, and that was good for not only her, but also for her young daughter, who would also benefit from her mother's degree.

Interviewee two also acknowledged that he was motivated to succeed because he wants to achieve what his parents never did. Besides a brother who earned a college education, no one in his family has earned a college degree. He also wants to see other Indian students succeed. He had to join the military and leave his home to find out what life was like outside of the place where he grew up. He believes some of his students will not have the same opportunities, and it is important for him to help them find those opportunities. One of the schools where he was a student teacher was predominantly American Indian. She said he wants to earn a bachelor's degree so that he can be in a position to help the students he meets to stay in school and better their lives. At the time of the interview, he was earning a degree in Special Education, and he works with autistic children. He sees the work he was doing and the career he was working towards as, "motivation—to give back to his community. Watching them succeed in class," Charles goes further and notes: "To see their face light up ...how happy they would get. You know, that's motivation right there [...] as far as besides my mom seeing me graduate, for one of those kids to be able to come back to me later on and find out I was the mentor for him or her."

Prospective Transfer Students

The first interviewee admits that she finds her own motivation to persist within herself. She has not declared a major, although she has decided that the college transfer path was the best way to achieve her goal of earning a bachelor's degree. She revealed in the interview that her plan was to keep advancing her education as a way of keeping up with the changes and demands of the workplace. Motivation, she said, was implicitly important for students, and she admitted that not all of her peers share the same enthusiasm for advancing their educations. She believes each person is responsible for making his or her own decisions. The opportunities are available for those willing to take them, she insists.

On the other hand, for interviewee two, giving back to the community is an internal motivation that pushes her to accomplish her educational goals. She has seen others struggle to earn a living and become victims of social problems, so she wants to be a model of success to them. As a young American Indian woman, she said feels pressure from within her own community and from outside of her community, as well. Having attended a predominantly white private high school with classmates who were from out of state, she has experienced racism. She recounted having a teacher who called Indians "savages," and fitting in with students who were not similar to her. She also feels pressure from her father, who she describes as being against education because he thinks it makes Indians conform to white society.

Mentors

Graduates

Participants mentioned 15 separate times throughout their interviews the importance of mentors in their college transfer persistence. Mentors included mostly family members, as well as friends, teachers, school administrators, peers, professional acquaintances, and church staff.

Interviewee one admitted that her instructors went beyond their regular duties as teachers. She said that one of her professors often challenged her to beat her personal best, to do even better in each class. She said the experience motivated her to persist in each successive class. She spoke of another professor that showed compassion for her during a difficult time when she was considering dropping a course. Then there was her math teacher. She said that she was taking a difficult course, but she had to pass it as part of her curriculum. She said this professor made the class understandable for her, and ultimately, she made an A.

Interviewee two credited several individuals as having been his mentors throughout his college career. One of them was American Indian and the other two both direct career mentors were criminal justice professors, one at the two-year school and the other at the four-year university. He also mentioned people in his career field that were influential in his professional decisions. The first person he mentioned was the resource police officer at his high school. "He was influential in me pursuing a career in law enforcement ...[and] was Native American." Interviewee two said this officer introduced him to the former sheriff in his county, who was also the county's first Indian sheriff. He also added that the sheriff took time with him, gave him access to chief administrative offices, and shared the inner workings of the department with him. "...that was something that I felt was a great experience," he said, and an experience that made a positive impact on his decision to pursue a career in law enforcement.

When he became a student at the community college, interviewee two met the director of the Criminal Justice program at the college, who played a pivotal role in his education. He "always encouraged me to go to [the university] and get my four year degree" Interviewee two took his advice, and when he arrived at the university campus, he met the chair of the Criminal Justice department at the university. He "was always available for anything and always answered any questions I had" She said the chair continued to be a mentor when he entered a graduate program at the university.

Transfer Students

The first interview said no mentors came to mind when she was interviewed. However, she did mention that while working in the university's alumni relations office, she was often inspired by the many graduates that she met through work. They sometimes gave her advice and they sometimes encouraged her. She used words such as "affinity" to describe the connection the alumni had with their alma mater. Affinity was something that she hoped to achieve by earning her degree.

During his interview, participant two credited his brother with being his mentor. He said that his brother was the only other family member to obtain a college degree. "As far as a mentor [...] I could say if it was would be my brother, my older brother [...] just seeing how he has improved his life, I mean he makes six figures a year now, just because he got a university education, and I don't want to live in poverty. I want to make money too." Although he would not go as far to call them mentors, he said his

instructors were encouraging as well. She shared that their encouragement left an impression on him, and as a school teacher, he hopes he can do the same for his students.

Prospective Transfer Students

Interviewee one said she has mentors—her family members, who include many of her aunts, who she said were all deeply involved in American Indian culture. She also credits her boyfriend, who was a student at the local university. She said that he models good study habits and he shares information from his perspective of being a student at the university, and introduces her to other friends. “I could pretty much go to him or any of my friends who were attending [there],” she said.

Interviewee two also mentioned her family when asked about her mentors, particularly her mother. “She was very successful when it comes to education. She went to school for six years and she was going now for her nursing degree. She wants me to go into nursing...” Interviewee two also shared that because she has siblings who have not finished high school, and have not considered college as an option, she wants to be a role model for them in hopes that she might make a change in their lives.

American Indian History and Culture

Participation in American Indian courses and cultural events was mentioned 12 times in the interviews. Not every interviewee had participated in events or enrolled in courses, but to some degree, they all believed that participation in American Indian courses and events contributed to their transfer persistence. The interview participants said that even if they did not participate in American Indian courses or activities, they believed that participation in cultural subjects and events could have a positive influence on the persistence of Indian students.

Graduates

The first interviewee said there is importance in the participation of cultural programs for Indian students. Although she did not participate in many American Indian organizations or events as a student, she wished that she had been able to. “I feel like if I would have had that support system then I don’t think it would have been that bad for me because I would see other people in the same situation that sort of like talk my same languages ...it’s just that support mechanism.” She said she believes she missed out on a lot of student connections by not living on campus. She also revealed that she has friends who have taken courses, and she believes she would have learned more about her heritage and culture had she been involved. She also wants this kind of interaction for her son.

The second interviewee had much different experiences. He was very involved in student life. He was the student body president during his second year at the community college, and he not only participated in events, he helped coordinate them. When he transferred to the university, however, his interaction slowed down because he was working full-time, and he was focused on his studies. “I tried to attend as many of the Native American Student Association events on campuses I could, but with the time constraints with employment and as well with school, it was difficult.”

Interviewee two said he believes that it is important for Indian students to learn about their history and culture. During the interview, he mentioned that while American Indians are plentiful in the local region, globally, Indian populations are dense, and the majority of Americans know little about them. He believes that Indians will be better equipped to function in a global society when they know who

they are and how they relate to others in the world. He also believes that American Indian students will do better in college if they are better oriented to the purpose their education serves in the professional world.

Transfer Students

The first interviewee was not a member of any American Indian organizations on campus, but she had taken at least one American Indian Studies course. She said she took the course as an elective and it had a positive impact on her as a student.

Interviewee two also did not participate in American Indian organizations. “I’m too busy,” he said. “I just don’t have the time right now.” He said that he sees the importance of taking courses in Indian culture and history, and if his schedule permitted him, he would. He believes Indian students can benefit from courses about their history and culture, but he thinks they need to take them with the perspective that there is a greater world outside of their local region.

Prospective Transfer Students

The first interviewee of this group also said that she does not have time to participate in extracurricular organizations or events. She said she would prefer to learn “more about the culture.” As a student in public school, she was a member of the Native American Student Association, and she has attended pow wows with her family. She has seen pow wows on the campus at the university, and she associates them with campus life on the campus.

The second interviewee gets excited when she talks about pow wows, which because of her strong connection to her Indian culture and heritage, she and her family attend regularly. It was something she sees as a positive attribute of the university campus, especially the fact that it was deeply rooted in Indian heritage and culture.

Research Question 2

What major sources of support (family, social, or institutional) do American Indian transfer students credit as part of their transfer persistence?

Interview participants identified three major sources of support. In order of importance, they credited their mentors as: family, educators, and friends—with supporting them during their transfer process.

Family Support

Participants identified family as the single major source. Participants mentioned family more than twenty-nine (29) times and said they considered family support to mean much more than financial (paying for college expenses), and extending to moral (offering advice, helping with young children, and other family matters).

Mentor Support

Mentor support was the second major source of support identified by interview participants. It was mentioned 15 times in the interviews. Many of the interview participants mentioned family members as being their mentors. One of the prospective transfer students' mother wanted her to transfer to the university, where she was also a student, and pursue a bachelor's degree in nursing. The other prospective transfer credited her aunts, who were also deeply involved in their Indian heritage. The two university transfer students did not have family mentors, but they mentioned that their professors encouraged them to persist.

One of the graduates, a first generation college student, and now a law enforcement officer, began his college career at the community college and transferred to the university, along the way earning an associate's, a bachelor's, and a master's degree. He had mentors through every phase of his transfer experience.

Friends Support

The support of friends was the third major source of support identified by interview participants. It was mentioned 13 times. A little more than half of the questionnaire respondents (53 percent) said that they had some kind of mentor. Their definitions of a mentor varied between friends, family members, teachers, community members or educators.

Summary

Online Respondents

Participants in the study discussed their experiences at various stages of the college transfer process. Prospective transfer students at the local community college, transfer students at the local university, and graduates of the university shared their perceptions of the process as well as what motivated them to persist through the various stages. The study began with an online questionnaire and ended with one-on-one interviews of two participants from each the three segments mentioned above. The results of the data collected were analyzed beginning with responses from graduates, followed by those of students who transferred to the four-year institution from the two-year, and finally those of prospective transfer students, to determine if common characteristics of persistence existed among the three questionnaires.

Participants in the online questionnaire identified five elements present in their lives that they have most in common. These were: (a) high levels of family support, (b) high levels of support from friends, (c) the importance of mentors, d) the importance American Indian courses and activities have on their persistence, and e) the importance of having American Indian faculty and staff at their institutions.

The five most common characteristics of persistence behavior shared by the participants from all three study segments were: a) support from family and friends, b) racial identity, c) internal persistence motivators, d) mentors, and e) participation in American Indian cultural events and activities.

The most frequently identified persistence behavior that was shared by all six-interview participants was the "support" of family and friends. Support was referred to 42 times within the interviews. Participants considered support to mean many things from financial (paying for college expenses) to moral (offering advice, helping with young children, and other family matters). The most common

source of support shared by all questionnaire and interview participants was family support. More than 93 percent of the study participants said that the support of their family was important in their pursuit of the bachelor's degree. During the interviews, family support was identified twenty-nine (29) times, more times than any other source.

The support of friends was important to approximately 90 percent of the questionnaire participants. Some of the study participants indicated that having friends or family at the university was beneficial to their persistence. Friends and Family not only helped with social and financial support but also helped disseminate information as well as keep students focused.

The study participants indicated having American Indian faculty and staff was important to them. Some participants reported that their professors and school administrators were people that they could relate to, while some shared that seeing other Indians in the role of teachers, mentors, and leaders motivated them and gave them the hope that they could achieve their dreams also. The participants also agreed that American Indian courses and activities have a positive effect on the success of Indian transfer students navigating through the transfer process. Of all three segments, 81.6 percent said that they believed exposure to college courses and activities with a focus on American Indian culture would have a positive effect.

Face-to-Face Responses

The participants in the face-to-face interviews identified four major common characteristics of persistence behavior as: family, friends, racial identity, internal motivations, and educators. Family and friends was the most common characteristic that provided students with support—financially, socially, and morally. The examples they gave ranged from paying for college expenses to offering advice, babysitting, and helping out with family matters to allow the student more schedule flexibility.

After the support of family and friends, racial identity was the most common element to increasing persistence behavior. Interview participants reported that their identities as Indians gave them a sense of pride and helped them to feel connected to their instructors and peers. The experiences they shared indicated that they felt that they were not alone in their journey to the bachelor's degree. The study participants expressed that their regional dialect helped some Indian students identify with each other and with their Indian culture. This recognition of Indian identity helped some of the study participants to persist, while in other cases, it became a basis for what Ogbu (2004) called Opposition Culture Theory, which explains that some people oppose the culture of the majority (white people) because they see education as emphasizing the culture of others.

The third most common persistence behavior was internal motivation. The participants reported that they were motivated to persist for various personal reasons. Some of the participants were determined to do well despite being told that they would never succeed. The majority of the study participants (67.4 percent) came from families that lacked college degrees, and they wanted to do better than their parents.

Finally, the interview subjects gave credit to their educators for helping them to persist. Interviewee two of the graduates group, the only interview participant to persist to graduate school, shared the most illuminating example of mentorship. As a student in high school, he held great admiration for the school resource police officer. His admiration turned into a desire to work in law enforcement, which

later brought him to the community college's Basic Law Enforcement Training program. After graduating with his associate's degree, he transferred his credits to the university to pursue a bachelor's degree in criminal justice, and to later pursue a Master's degree with an emphasis in criminal justice. Along the way, he reported having mentors at each institution that gave him advice and helped him navigate the curriculum. He also made networking relationships with law enforcement officials in various stages of the profession. They also encouraged him and provided advice.

Conclusion and Call for Action

Earning a four year degree by way of the college transfer process offers a strategic and affordable alternative for American Indian students. Historically, American Indian students have not performed at the same rates as their non-native peers (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Roksa & Calcagno, 2008). Tierney, et al. (2007) suggest that American Indian students are more likely than Caucasian students to begin their college careers at a community college. For educators and institutions, an opportunity exists to promote the success of native students by attending to their needs more purposefully.

Research by Wang (2009) indicated that factors such as high school curriculum, educational expectations of college, community college GPA, campus involvement, as well as academic performance was linked significantly to students attaining the bachelor's degree by means of the community college to university transfer process. Research by Peterman (2000) suggests that of the more than sixty-seven percent of first-semester, two-year students who are not retained, most of them come from poor socio-economic backgrounds. Additionally, Wassmer, et al. (2004) found that there exists a high degree of correlation between race/ethnicity and other important causal factors such as socio-economic status and academic preparation in the successful pursuit of higher education. The researchers argued that the most significant predictor of persistence through the bachelor's degree for all students, including those beginning their post-secondary studies in community colleges, was the degree of the academic rigor of their high school curriculum (Wassmer, et al., 2004).

Institutions that design programs with the college transfer progression in mind may offer a solution. For example, in South Dakota, a 2+2+2 system has been implemented between high schools, tribal colleges and South Dakota State University to ensure smooth transitions of American Indian students between educational institutions. By allowing students to remain in their home communities and begin their course work makes the transition to the four-year university more successful. Nichols and Nichols (2006) suggested that this model helped students to develop stronger Indian identities and increase success in predominantly non-Indian classrooms. The success of these programs comes from emphasis on articulation agreements, curriculum development and a commitment to faculty and student support and development (Nichols & Nichols, 2006).

Institutional transition models that place value on support systems are likely to encourage success for American Indian college transfer students. Because large numbers of native students are first-generation students as well, they often get little support from family. Since their parents had little or no post-secondary experience, these students lack encouragement and informed advice, thus the challenges they faced in the pursuit of the bachelor's degree are more than those faced by the average student. Their chances of dropping out are higher (McConnell, 2000) and the probability of persisting beyond the associate's degree is decreased (Nomi, 2005). Tinto specifically mentioned the support of husbands and wives as being integral to the persistence of students with families of their own (Tinto, 1993, p. 120). Research also suggests that parental involvement in the planning of students' educational

plans may have a positive influence on their confidence and be an indicator of their persistence to graduation (Dubow, et al., 2009).

Institutional support is also important. Although students must make their own choices and navigate their own experiences on campus, campus advisors could be helpful in the transition by offering advice and direction (O'Banion, 2012; Savitz-Romer, et al., 2009). Advisors and mentors also play in the role of guiding students as they navigate the transfer process. They could also help students prepare for expected obstacles during the transition, and guide them to both formal and informal learning resources. Meeting with a university advisor prior to transferring could help the student make important decisions such as what credits they should acquire before transferring and whether the major was right for them. Many students who fail to meet with their advisors before transferring become frustrated when they discover that some of their credits will not transfer, which adds time to their expected graduation (Flaga, 2006). American Indians may also see mentoring as a way of passing knowledge to other Indian students from their community (Montgomery, et al., 2000). American Indian students who have mentors may tend to make fewer non-persistence decisions. These programs could be both formal and informal in nature, taking the form of student mentor programs, as well as professional mentoring programs that connect alumni or faculty with students (Flaga, 2006; O'Banion, 2012; Savitz-Romer, et al., 2009).

Institutional faculty and staff should be provided with professional development as a means for enhancing their cultural knowledge of the student body. In an article about mentoring and helping students become comfortable with technical knowledge, Brandt (2007) advocates the need for mentoring relationships that help students break down barriers between professional discourse and students' comprehension of information. This experience provides a proper environment for students to learn terms and meanings associated with technical jargon which some students recognize as "the realm of professors and those with scientific authority." As an example, the author stated that it was helpful for mentors to joke about laboratory colloquialisms because it removes the formality of technical terms. "Scientists like to use all these words that other people can't understand" (p. 835).

Considering the educational environments of American Indian students may boost persistence for transfer students. Earlier research by Tinto (1993) and Astin (1993) suggested that integration in social groups and activities has an impact on college persistence; however, research by Guillory and Wolverton (2008), Oaks and Maday (2009) and Moore and Slate (2010) go further to posit that an understanding of the historical and cultural differences of Indian students should be considered in the education provided to them. Self-efficacy and self-esteem are two benefits that Fleming (2007) and Morgan (2010) suggested that Indian students may derive from curricula infused with American Indian history and culture. Further, Oaks and Maday (2009) stated that the historical and cultural uniqueness of Indian populations should be considered within the geographical areas where Indian students reside. Further, research suggests that students' sense of identity are important factors in their college success. When they are comfortable in their identity, they do well in school (Iverson, 2007; Neuman, 2008). Iverson suggested that institutions that created opportunities for enhancing the cultural identity of American Indians could have a positive impact on their educational attainment. Moore and Slate (2010) suggested that the culture and learning styles of American Indian students should be considered during the planning of curriculum and instruction, and Chandler (2010) stated that subjects such as history and social studies could be taught with the point-of-view of Indians in mind.

Encouraging students to be active and involved with campus activities and events may have positive effects on their college persistence (Kuh, 2007). This could be done at the two-year college level, but it should be stressed as well for students who were transitioning to another campus. Making the adjustment to campus life was one of the biggest challenges for transfer students at four-year institutions. Campus involvement was a way for students to become connected to the institution and to campus organizations which offered networking opportunities as well as informal learning resources for students (Flaga, 2006). Mingling with peers in other places than the classroom was important for building relationships. Improvements in students' social integration into college activities could be made by spending more time on campus, which could be accomplished with on-campus employment programs and with learning communities within classrooms (McConnell, 2000).

For American Indians, becoming members of American Indian organizations on campus offers an outlet for socialization. In a 2008 study of Lumbee Indian first-year students at a four-year institution, Scott and Brown discovered that social interaction had a positive impact on persistence. The researchers found that students within that group provided comfort and familiarity to other Indian students who were considering leaving school. Community college students might also perform better at four-year universities if they were involved, and use those experiences to prepare them for interaction with people from diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, organizations, and campus-affiliated social groups (Urso & Sygielski, 2007). Urso and Sygielski even suggested a transfer student organization as a way to help transfer students deal with various issues common to their experience.

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