

# A Comparison of Personal Assessments of the College Experience Among Reservation and Nonreservation American Indian Students

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This article compares the college experiences of one group of American Indian students who were raised primarily on a reservation with a second group who were reared primarily in nonreservation areas. Students were asked to evaluate their collegiate experiences in terms of perceived academic difficulties, financial difficulties, personal/social difficulties, satisfaction with college, difficulty in the transition to college, and impact of college experience on an appreciation of American Indian heritage. Two seemingly opposing differences were revealed from the students reared on a reservation. They were more likely to report academic difficulties and more difficulty with the transition to college; however, they were also more likely to report that being in college had resulted in a greater appreciation of American Indian heritage.

**A**merican Indian/Alaska Native higher educational achievement has traditionally lagged behind other minority groups and understanding the reasons why have been enigmatic to researchers (Astin, Tsui, & Avalos, 1996; Tijerina & Biemer, 1988). The examination of these reasons has also served as general investigative themes of scholarship in American Indian/Alaska Native education. Most prevalent among research findings are poor preparation for college, lack of academic motivation, perceived low value on education, financial difficulties, and cultural conflict (Carroll, 1978; Dehyle, 1989; Falk & Aitken, 1987; Huffman, Sill, & Brokenleg, 1986; Lin, 1985, 1990; Scott, 1986).

An emerging theme is manifested in the growing interest in the interaction between a Native student's perceived educational experience and his or her personal background. Tinto's model (1975, 1987, 1988) addresses the relationship between the personal background of students and the experience and assessment

of the college experience. Tinto argued that the way in which a student perceives, experiences, and ultimately assesses his or her time at college is shaped by a wide range of personal background factors. He also asserted that the student's home community was an especially influential factor in this assessment. Tinto (1988) proposed that college students typically proceed through a three-stage adjustment and integration process: separation, transition, and incorporation:

College students are, after all, moving from one community or set of communities . . . to another. Like other persons in the wider society, they must separate themselves, to some degree, from past associations in order to make the transition to eventual incorporation in the life of the college. In attempting to make such transitions, they too are likely to encounter difficulties that are as much a reflection of the problems inherent in shifts of community membership as they are either of the personality of individuals or of the institution in which membership is sought. (p. 442)

Tinto (1988) wrote that the shift from one community to another community is particularly difficult for minority students because routine life in minority communities is often so different from the values and norms incorporated in the mainstream structure of campus life. These differences make the three-stage process a treacherous one, potentially creating a negative personal assessment of college.

In the typical institution, one would therefore expect persons of minority backgrounds and/or from very poor families, older adults, and persons from very small rural communities to be more likely to experience such problems . . . than other students. (p. 445)

Because Tinto (1988) did little to further develop the hypothesis that transitions from one community to another for minority students are problematic, Tierney (1992) challenged the nature of some of Tinto's assumptions. Tierney felt Tinto's model lacked realistic consideration of cultural differences that often exist between American Indian/Alaska Native students and those embodied in mainstream educational institutions. Tierney saw Tinto's model as failing to conceptualize the transfer from one community to another as a movement from one culture to another:

Thus, an anthropological analysis of Tinto's model has two overarching concerns. On one hand, rituals of transition have never been conceptualized as movements from one culture to another. . . . On the other hand, a model of integration that never questions who is to be integrated and how it is to be done assumes an individualist stance of human nature and rejects differences based on categories such as class, race, and gender. (Tierney, 1992, p. 611)

Sociologists have long recognized that community life represents a primary socializing influence on an individual (Tonnie, 1988, original edition, 1887; Wirth, 1938). Tinto's (1988) notion that shifts in community represent serious challenges to minority students certainly makes intuitive sense. Clarification by Tierney (1992) on what Tinto did not address—that a shift in community includes

a shift in culture—would without a doubt involve a disruption in an individual’s social and cultural expectations. Therefore, it is entirely reasonable that the community background of many minority students is directly associated with their perceptions of collegiate experiences (Fleming, 1985; Huffman, 1999; Loo & Rolison, 1986; Smith, 1980).

The assumption that community life is directly linked to the assessment of college among American Indians/Alaska Natives has rarely been examined (Benjamin, Chambers, & Reiterman, 1993; Lin, 1985, 1990). This research contributes to the literature by comparing the personal assessments of the college experience among American Indian students who were reared primarily on reservations with the personal assessments of nonreservation American Indian students. A comparison of the view of reservation and nonreservation American Indian students is constructed on the assumption that within a group cultural variation will exist, reservation students presumably more influenced by traditional culture, and nonreservation students less so. The comparisons involve personal assessments of academic difficulties, personal/social difficulties, satisfaction with college, difficulty in the transition to college, and impact of college experience on appreciation of Native heritage.

### **Method**

This study utilized data collected from a survey on attitudes, perspectives, and experiences among American Indian students enrolled at a small midwestern university. A total of 232 American Indian students enrolled in the university during a five-year period were sent a survey, informed of the purpose of the research, and were requested to participate. Ultimately, 101 surveys were returned, and 86 completed questionnaires, representing a 37% response rate, were found to be usable in the research.

The university itself enrolls about 2,500 students per academic year. During any given academic year that this study encompassed, approximately 100 to 150 American Indian students were enrolled. Thus, American Indian students comprised about 4 to 6% of the total student body.

The sample was divided into two subsamples based on their self-reported reservation or nonreservation background. This determination was made based on “yes-no” responses to the question, “While growing up, did you spend most of your life on a reservation?”

#### Comparison of Subsamples

Generally, the two subsamples of American Indians appear similar on a variety of characteristics. For example, *f* chi square analysis reveals that the two groups are not significantly different in terms of gender composition, self-reported GPA, and year in college (Table 1).

There is, however, one significant difference between the reservation and nonreservation subsamples. Although the survey instrument did not elicit specific ages from the respondents, it did request that each individual provide his or her

Table 1  
**Comparison of Reservation and Nonreservation Respondents**

Background	Reservation		Nonreservation	
	N	%	N	%
Gender				
Male	20	.23	12	.14
Female	37	.43	17	.20
X <sup>2</sup> = .326, 3df, n.s.				
Age				
20 or younger	10	.12	3	.04
21 to 29 years	20	.23	20	.23
30 or older	27	.31	6	.07
X <sup>2</sup> = 9.06, 2 df, <i>p</i> < .05				
Years in college*				
Freshman	17	.20	10	.12
Sophomore	10	.12	6	.07
Junior	13	.15	9	.11
Senior	13	.15	2	.02
Graduate	4	.05	1	.01
X <sup>2</sup> = 3.98, 4df, n.s.				
Self-reported GPA*				
2.49 or lower	22	.27	10	.12
2.5 – 2.99	23	.29	8	.10
3.0 or higher	10	.12	8	.10
X <sup>2</sup> = 1.82, 2df, n.s.				
Total Sample	57	.66	29	.34

\*Totals do not equal 86 due to missing data

age within a range of options (20 years or younger; 21 to 29 years old; and 30 or older). Analysis of this age classification arrangement suggests that the reservation subsample is significantly different from the nonreservation subsample. Specifically, the reservation subsample contains substantially more individuals who were 30 years or older compared to the nonreservation subsample. Twenty-seven of the reservation subsample respondents indicated they were 30 years or older compared to only 6 of the nonreservation subsample individuals.

### Creation of Scales

The researcher was especially interested in a comparison of the two subsamples on perceived barriers experienced while in college. As such, scales were constructed in an effort to measure the student's personal assessment of three areas: academic difficulties, financial difficulties, and personal/social difficulties. Each of these variables was measured by asking respondents to assess the degree of difficulty they had encountered on a five-point scale to a series of items (Table 2).

Table 2  
Scales and Reliability Coefficients

Academic Difficulties Scale

On a scale for 1 to 5 (1 being not at all and 5 being a great deal), since you have been in college, how difficult has it been for you in each of the academic areas listed below?

*Inadequate academic preparation for college*

Not at all      1          2          3          4          5          a great deal

*Poor study skills*

Not at all      1          2          3          4          5          a great deal

*Time management*

Not at all      1          2          3          4          5          a great deal

Financial Difficulties Scale

On a scale for 1 to 5 (1 being not at all and 5 being a great deal), since you have been in college, how difficult has it been for you in each of the *financial* areas listed below?

*College financial aid*

Not at all      1          2          3          4          5          a great deal

*Tribal higher education aid*

Not at all      1          2          3          4          5          a great deal

*Budgeting finances*

Not at all      1          2          3          4          5          a great deal

*Meeting expenses*

Not at all      1          2          3          4          5          a great deal

Personal/Social Difficulties Scale

On a scale for 1 to 5 (1 being not at all and 5 being a great deal), since you have been in college, how difficult has it been for you in each of the *personal/social* areas listed below?

*Child care*

Not at all      1          2          3          4          5          a great deal

*Alcohol/drug use in home*

Not at all      1          2          3          4          5          a great deal

*Feelings of loneliness*

Not at all      1          2          3          4          5          a great deal

*Interaction (meeting, getting along) with others*

Not at all      1          2          3          4          5          a great deal

These scales were subjected to tests of reliability using Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha. Generally, the scales performed well under tests of reliability (academic difficulties, .835; financial difficulties, .768). Only the personal/social difficulties scale yielded a somewhat low, although still acceptable, reliability coefficient (.592).

In addition to the perceived difficulty scales, three other dependent variables were included in the research. These variables included (a) satisfaction with the college experience, (b) difficulty in the transition to college, and (c) impact of

the college experience on their appreciation of American Indian heritage. Each of these variables was measured by using a single-item question incorporating a Likert scale response selection. For instance, for the variable *impact of college on appreciation of their heritage*, students were asked:

*Overall, I feel that my experiences in college have caused me to appreciate and value my American Indian heritage.*

- A. Strongly agree
- B. Agree
- C. Disagree
- D. Strongly disagree

### Statistical Procedures

Statistical analysis of the data consisted of Pearson correlations and *t* tests. Pearson correlations served to provide a device for exploring the various relationships between variables and, thereby, rendering a feel for the data. The *t* tests provided the primary means to compare the two groups of American Indians on their perceptions and experiences.

### **Findings**

The zero-order correlations are presented in Table 3. In order to perform this analysis, several variables (gender, age, year in college, and self-reported GPA) were treated as dummy variables (Table 3). The independent variable (personal background) was also treated as a dummy variable (nonreservation background = 1; reservation background = 2).

Most notable among the zero-order correlations, perhaps, is the significant relationships between reservation-nonreservation background and the experience of academic difficulties (.183,  $p < .05$ ) as well as between reservation-nonreservation background and the experience of difficulty with the transition to college (.293,  $p < .01$ ). The dependent variables—financial difficulties, personal/social difficulties, satisfaction with the college experience, and impact of college on the appreciation of American Indian heritage—are not significantly correlated with reservation-nonreservation background.

The zero-order correlations for the three areas of difficulty scales are generally what one would expect. These scales are all significantly correlated with each other. In addition, academic difficulty is negatively correlated with self-reported GPA (-.442,  $p < .01$ ) and positively correlated with difficulty of the transition to college (.483,  $p < .01$ ). Curiously, this variable is also positively correlated with the self-reported satisfaction with the college experience (.330,  $p < .01$ ). Financial difficulty is additionally significantly related to self-reported GPA (-.215,  $p < .05$ ) as well as difficulty in the transition to college (.222,  $p < .05$ ). Also, personal/social difficulty is positively correlated to difficulty in the transition to college (.345,  $p < .01$ ) and impact of college on an appreciation of American Indian heritage (.209,  $p < .05$ ).

Table 3  
Zero-Order Correlation Coefficients

	BAC	GEN	AGE	YER	GPA	ACD	FID	PSD	EXP	TRA
BAC										
GEN	.062									
AGE	.130	.196*								
YER	.142	.097	.476**							
GPA	-.126	.260	.348**	.510**						
ACD	.183*	.073	.053	-.152	-.442**					
FID	.124	.098	-.019	-.043	-.215*	.446**				
PSD	.100	.090	-.038	.020	.075	.328**	.195*			
EXP	.097	.029	.294**	.299**	.352**	.330**	-.158	-.097		
TRA	.293**	-.022	.022	.007	-.162	.483**	.222*	.345**	-.151	
HRT	.176	-.034	-.034	.119	.151	.013	.055	.209*	.184*	.022

BAC = Reservation background (nonreservation = 1; reservation = 2) \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

GEN = Gender (male = 1; female = 2)

AGE = Age (younger than 20 = 1; 21-29 = 2; 30 or older = 3)

YEA = Year in college (freshman = 1; sophomore = 2; junior = 3; senior = 4; graduate = 5)

GPA = Grade Point Average (2.49 or lower = 1; 2.5 – 2.9 = 3; 3.0 or higher = 3)

ACD = Academic difficulties (lower scores = fewer perceived difficulties)

FID = Financial difficulties (lower scores = fewer perceived difficulties)

PSD = Personal/social difficulties (lower scores = fewer perceived difficulties)

EXP = Satisfaction with college experience (lower scores = less satisfaction)

TRA = Difficulty with transition to college (lower scores = less difficulty)

HRT = Impact of college on appreciation of N.A. heritage (lower scores = less impact)

The finding that financial difficulty is correlated to a number of variables typically related to college success (i.e., self-reported GPA and the difficulty in the transition to college) is particularly noteworthy. In one of the few studies to examine American Indian students' personal views on their college experiences, Falk and Aitken (1984) compared American Indians who were currently enrolled in college with American Indians who had left college before completion. These researchers found that inadequate financial support was the major barrier to educational success identified by both groups. They reported that 85% of the students who had left college and 67% who were still enrolled in college identified financial difficulties as the most serious threat to their persistence at the postsecondary level.

The zero-order correlations reveal other potentially important relationships. For instance, satisfaction with the college experience is significantly correlated with a variety of factors. Namely these include age (.294,  $p < .01$ ), year in college (.299,  $p < .05$ ), self-reported GPA (.352,  $p < .01$ ), and impact of the college experience on an appreciation of American Indian heritage (.184,  $p < .05$ ). As stated above, it is interesting that satisfaction with the college experience is significantly related to the report of academic difficulties (.330,  $p < .01$ ).

The zero-order correlations suggest a certain pattern in the college experiences of the American Indian students who participated in this study. Many of these patterns are, in and of themselves, not particularly surprising; for instance,

the finding that experience of academic, financial, and personal/social difficulties are correlated and, therefore, likely are interrelated. The fact that self-reported GPA is significantly and negatively related to two of the three areas of difficulty suggests how these difficulties can pose serious challenges for American Indian students. Moreover, the perceived difficulty in the transition to college is significantly related to all three areas of difficulty is further evidence suggesting the effects of academic, financial, and personal/social difficulties as barriers to a successful college experience.

However, while these relationships are generally understood, questions remain: “Do reservation and nonreservation American Indian students experience these difficulties in the same degree?” and “Do they assess their college experiences similarly or differently?”

The results of the *t* test comparisons between reservation and nonreservation subsamples are generally consistent with the patterns suggested by the zero-order correlations (Table 4). For instance, just as there is a significant correlation between reservation/nonreservation background and academic difficulties, the *t* test results too reveal that reservation and nonreservation American Indian college students do experience academic difficulties differently. Findings from the *t* test show a significant difference in the means between the two groups ( $t = 1.06, p < .10$ ). Specifically, the reservation subsample was more likely to report academic difficulties compared to the nonreservation subsample.

Although the two groups of American Indian college students appear to differ in their respective experiences of academic difficulties, this does not seem to be the case in regards to their experiences of financial difficulties and personal/social difficulties. The results of the *t* test reveal that the means of these two groups are not significantly different from one another on their perceived financial difficulties ( $t = 1.145$ ) on their perceived personal/social difficulties ( $t = 0.925$ ). This finding too is in keeping with the patterns implied by the zero-order correlations. Reservation or nonreservation background was not significantly correlated to either financial difficulties or personal/social difficulties.

Additionally, it is interesting that while the reservation and nonreservation subsamples are not substantially different in their reported satisfaction with the college experience ( $t = 0.897$ ), they significantly differ in their reported difficulty in transition to college ( $t = 2.779, p < .001$ ). This is a rather notable finding as it suggests that while ultimately both reservation and nonreservation American Indian students may hold similar levels of satisfaction with the college experience, the transition itself appears to be a considerably more difficult proposition in the minds of those from reservation backgrounds.

Finally, there is also a significant difference in the impact of the college experience on an appreciation of American Indian heritage between these two groups of students. Specifically, compared to those from nonreservation backgrounds, the reservation subsample was more likely to report that the college experience had generated a greater appreciation of American Indian heritage ( $t = 1.631, p < .10$ ).



Table 4  
**T tests Dependent Variables as a Function  
of Reservation/Nonreservation Background**

Variable	Background	Mean			S.D.	N
ACD	Reservation	10.246	3.192	57	$t = 1.706, p < .10$	
	Nonreservation	8.966	3.479	29		
FID	Reservation	13.281	4.578	57	$t = 1.145, n.s.$	
	Nonreservation	12.069	4.765	29		
PSD	Reservation	7.544	2.928	57	$t = 0.925, n.s.$	
	Nonreservation	6.931	2.853	29		
EXP	Reservation	3.158	0.621	57	$t = 0.897, n.s.$	
	Nonreservation	3.034	0.566	29		
TRA	Reservation	3.071	0.828	57	$t = 2.799, p < .001$	
	Nonreservation	2.500	1.000	29		
HRT	Reservation	3.158	0.797	57	$t = 1.631, p < .10$	
	Nonreservation	2.857	0.803	2		

## Discussion

Although analysis of the data reveals interesting similarities among American Indian college students from reservation and nonreservation backgrounds, nevertheless, it is important to recognize that the data also suggest that reservation and nonreservation American Indian students perceive the higher educational experience in fundamentally different ways. First, the two groups of students in this study did not share similar experiences with academic difficulties. Namely, students from reservation backgrounds tended to report greater academic difficulties while in college compared to those from nonreservation backgrounds. This perceived difficulty was evidenced in spite of the fact that both groups were not significantly different in terms of self-reported GPA.

Perhaps this finding is not too surprising given the fact that a persistent theme in the American Indian/Alaska Native education literature has been the alleged inadequate preparation for postsecondary education received by American Indian/Alaska Native students from reservation schools. Scholars have long lamented that reservation secondary schooling is not providing appropriate preparation for success in college. These indictments have taken on a variety of

forms. Some have suggested that secondary educational practices are at best culturally irrelevant and simply represent the prevailing learning assumptions, teaching techniques, curriculum, and standards of non-Indian culture (Butterfield, 1983; Coladarci, 1983; More, 1987; Phillips, 1983; Reyhner, 1992; Swisher & Deyhle, 1989; Van Hamme, 1996). Others contend that larger economic and social structural constraints (i.e., chronic poverty) inhibit secondary education success; consequently, this educational breakdown is ultimately and keenly felt at the postsecondary level (Boloz & Varranti, 1983; Ledlow, 1992; Ogbu, 1978, 1982, 1985, 1987).

Whatever may be the source of this difference in perception, clearly the reservation and nonreservation American Indian students in this study evidenced contrasting experiences with academic difficulties. A promising and extremely important area for future research would be to explore the source of this contrast more thoroughly.

The two groups of American Indian students in this study reported differing experiences with difficulty in the transition to college. As was the case for the perception of academic difficulties, students who came from reservation areas also reported greater difficulty with the transition to college compared to those American Indians from nonreservation areas.

Many studies have examined the problematic nature of college for American Indian/Alaska Native students. Some studies have focused their attention on a variety of social psychological dilemmas thought to be associated with enrollment in mainstream educational institutions. For instance, alienation, social isolation, and low self-esteem are routinely presented as prevailing features of the educational experience among American Indians/Alaska Natives (Dauphinais, LaFromboise, & Rowe, 1980; Mitchum, 1989; Sanders, 1987).

Moreover, cultural conflict, typically conceptualized in a wide variety of forms, is identified as a major problem complicating the education of American Indians/Alaska Natives. Sometimes cultural conflict is presented in a rather narrow manner with the focus on a particular cultural nuance such as time orientation (Sanders, 1987) or cooperation versus competition orientation (Duda, 1980), or even cognitive domains (Emerson, 1987). Other times usage of the term *cultural conflict* refers to more sweeping and broad phenomena, such as societal forces that shape cultural incongruities (Deyhle, 1992).

Despite the variations, the major premise found in the use of cultural conflict is that there is some discrepancy between the values, behaviors, and/or political economic power possessed by American Indian/Alaska Native students and those who represent the mainstream educational institution. As a result, the cultural discontinuity represents a major challenge in the educational experience of the Native student. More to the point, cultural conflict is thought to frustrate the transition to college among American Indian/Alaska Native students (Pottinger, 1989; Wright & Tierney, 1991).

While these features of the higher educational experience have been widely discussed, a relatively small number of scholars have specifically focused on the

dynamics of the transition itself. Nevertheless, a few studies have considered the nature of the transition to collegiate life among American Indians/Alaska Natives. For instance, Phyllis Schiller (1987) detailed the adjustments for college life required among a sample of American Indian students. She reported that while individuals from more culturally traditional backgrounds initially evidenced much more problematic adjustments to college, many of these students ultimately experienced greater successful adjustment (as well as achievement) in college compared to the more assimilated American Indian students.

Similar to Schiller, Huffman (1999) too found that the majority of the culturally traditional students who came from reservation areas experienced greater difficulties with the transition to college. Most notable among these difficulties were feelings of initial alienation. Nevertheless, a significant number of the culturally traditional students in his study were able to overcome their transitional difficulties and went on to experience highly successful and satisfactory college careers.

Research studies such as these suggest that while the transition to college among reservation American Indians/Alaska Natives may be extremely difficult, it need not be academically fatal. Indeed, the reservation students in this study, although reporting significantly higher levels of transitional difficulties than their nonreservation counterparts, were not significantly different in their reported satisfaction with the college experience. There can be little doubt that greater research exploring the nature and stages of the transition to college among American Indians/Alaska Natives (perhaps similar to that suggested by Tinto) would certainly prove highly productive.

Likely the most compelling finding emerging from this research is the relationship between appreciation of American Indian heritage and the college experience. Although impact of the college experience on an appreciation of American Indian heritage was not significantly correlated to the dummy variable *reservation/nonreservation background*, the two groups of American Indian students were significantly different from one another on this variable. As stated above, the students from reservation areas were more likely to report that college had positively impacted on their Native heritage compared to the nonreservation individuals.

This is a particularly revealing finding on a variety of levels. First, it would appear that contrary to much that has been reported in past American Indian/Alaska Native education literature, being in college does not seem to necessarily lead to a greater marginalization of students who are more culturally traditional—and who often come from reservation areas (Carroll, 1978; Scott, 1986). In fact, a growing number of studies have raised serious doubts on such long-held assumptions (Huffman, 1998; Huffman, Sill, & Brokenleg, 1986; Schiller & Gaseoma, 1983; Willetto, 1999). Thus, at the very least, this finding taken with more recent research revelations suggest the need for a reexamination of the assumptions regarding the relationship between cultural traditionalism and cultural marginality among American Indian/Alaska Native college students.

Second, this finding points to a basic difference in the disposition between the two groups of students. That is, this finding begs the question: Why was there a difference in the assessment of the college experience on a appreciation of American Indian heritage between these two groups of students? Unfortunately, the data produced in this research effort does not provide an answer to such a complex issue. However, certainly there is no shortage of possible working hypotheses on this phenomenon. Future work exploring the disposition toward Native heritage among differing groups of American Indian/Alaska Native college students is not only enormously theoretically interesting, but also could provide applied information that could be utilized in the college environment.

### **Conclusion**

Tinto's (1988) basic assumption that community background directly influences the manner in which an individual experiences and perceives the college setting is undoubtedly true. The reservation and nonreservation students in this study evidenced fundamental differences in the way they assessed their college experiences. Yet, just as Tierney (1992) forcefully argued that Tinto's model, as applied to the higher educational experiences of American Indians, remains underdeveloped. Thus, Tinto's model represents an important beginning point, but it does not answer the complex reasons behind the differences in personal assessments between these two groups of American Indians.

Further work exploring the personal accounts of American Indian/Alaska Native college students is critically needed. The insights provided by students themselves would most assuredly enable scholars to more fully appreciate the complex and dynamic relationship between community background and the experience of higher education. Future efforts exploring the personal attitudes and evaluation of the college experience and, in particular, its impact on an appreciation of American Indian/Alaska Native heritage among differing groups of American Indian/Alaska Native students would likely be nothing short of fascinating.

Specifically, future research could focus on at least two dimensions. First, as stated above, further examination of Tinto's (1988) hypothesis as it relates to American Indian/Alaska Native students needs to be elaborated. While Tinto's basic assumption regarding the disruptive effects involved in the transition from differing community settings is plausible enough, as Tierney (1992) pointed out, such a premise lacks context in relation to minority groups such as American Indians/Alaska Natives. Therefore, research that attempts to identify the unique stages and experiences in the transition from former community life to campus life could prove especially productive (Huffman, 2001). Such research could, for instance, examine the nature of family life/relations, academic preparation before coming to college, financial/cultural/personal difficulties and, perhaps most importantly, the stages of transition to college.

Second, further research on the policy implications of the findings emerging from this and related research is extremely important. Simply put, this research

suggests that reservation and nonreservation American Indian/Alaska Native students experience college differently. The pertinent policy question becomes, "How can the campus better serve differing American Indian/Alaska Native students given the differences in the manner they encounter college?" Research such as Falk and Aitken (1984) that inquired of the specific needs of American Indian students would be especially beneficial. These efforts would serve to facilitate a greater awareness and appreciation of the needs facing Native students and, thus, direct necessary efforts to meet those needs.

Moreover, the finding that students from reservation areas were more likely to report that being in college had strengthened their appreciation of Native heritage potentially holds significance on how institutions of higher learning may respond to the needs of these students. It has been well documented that culturally traditional American Indian/Alaska Native students often experience acute isolation and alienation while undergoing their initial transition to college (Huffman, 2001). However, it has also been reported that culturally traditional students who embrace and use their Native identity to anchor their values and personal orientations are more likely to persist and achieve while at college (Davis, 1992; Huffman, 1999; Schiller & Gaseoma, 1993). Thus, the opportunity exists for academic institutions to use the sense of heightened appreciation of Native culture as a means to communicate the value of American heritage and culture and, thereby, encourage students to retain and utilize their traditional self-identities.

For instance, institutions enrolling American Indian/Alaska Native students could attempt to incorporate American Indian/Alaska Native heritage and culture into the campus scene. Indeed, the campus environment can reflect an appreciation of American Indian/Alaska Native heritage in some rather simple ways. Colleges could adorn their campuses with traditional artwork, art of prominent American Indian/Alaska Native artists, and displays that recognize significant achievements of American Indian/Alaska Native alumni. This type of recognition expresses in a tangible way an appreciation for American Indian/Alaska Native heritage and accomplishments.

Colleges could also establish or expand regular campus American Indian/Alaska Native cultural and educational events. These events could bring to campus American Indian/Alaska Native speakers on a variety of topics ranging from American Indian/Alaska Native traditionalism to contemporary political/economic topics. American Indian/Alaska Native music, art, and foods would greatly enhance these events. Other events emphasizing reconciliation between American Indians/Alaska Native and non-Natives might also be considered.

American Indian/Alaska Native studies programs could be established or expanded. This recommendation clearly would require the greatest degree of resources and commitment. However, a strong American Indian/Alaska Native studies program concretely conveys the value and importance institutions of higher learning place on American issues and traditions.

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