

# The First Year Experience and Persistence of Native American Students at One Predominantly White Four Year Institution

## Chapter I: Introduction

According to the 2000 Census, the population of the United States was 290,809,777. Of this, 0.9% of the population reported being American Indian and/or Alaskan Native. For the state of Oregon, according to the 2000 Census, the population was 3,421,999 of which 1.3% reported being American Indian and/or Alaskan Native. The most recent Oregon State University enrollment summary reported that 19,162 students attend OSU in the fall of 2004 and of this population only about 2% or 299 of the students were American Indian and/or Alaskan Native. This demonstrates that American Indians and Alaskan Natives are not only the smallest population on Oregon State University's campus, but they are also the smallest minority population in Oregon and the United States.

Of all ethnic minority groups in the United States, Native Americans/Alaska Natives typically have the lowest retention and graduation rates (Cole & Denzine, 2002). For example, in a 1995 study, graduation rates of Native students at Division I NCAA universities were only 36% as compared to 56% for all students (United States Department of Education, 1998). According to Tierney (1995), if 100 native students enter the ninth grade only 60 will graduate from high school and of this 60; only 20 will enter an institution of higher education and of this 20 only 3 will receive a four year degree.

In Oregon, during the 2002-2003 school year, 6.3% or 227 of high school dropouts were Native American students (OUS Diversity Report, 2005). That same year

only 1.3% or 190 of four-year college degrees were awarded to Native American students (OUS Diversity Report). The following year only 1.1% or 173 native student's earned a four-year degree (OUS Diversity Report). The fact that there are more Native American high school dropouts than those receiving a four-year degree is alarming. So why is it that Native American students seem to have such a difficult time when it comes to attending and persisting in college? McDonald (1978) states that "When the Indian student must live with others who are obviously much better off, it is little wonder that he eventually leaves the academic institution" (p77).

According to researchers there are several reasons as to why native students do not persist in college. Some of these include:

- Inadequate high school education (Wells, 1997)
- Teaching using a Western style (Berrington, 2003)
- Negative Stereotypes and/or Racism (Hrabowski, 2005; Wells, 1997; McDonald 1978)
- Personal and family issues (Wells, 1997)
- Lack of finances (Wells, 1997; McDonald 1978)
- Lack of Native American Role Models or Professors (OUS Campus Climate Survey, 1996; McDonald 1978)
- Cultural differences and isolation (Hrabowski, 2005; Cole & Denzine, 2002; McDonald 1978)

Coming to a college campus for many Native American students is like entering into a different world, especially for those who have had limited experiences away from a reservation. According to Jones (2005) "First year minority students are more likely to

find themselves in surroundings similar to those reported by new international students where customs, values, and the culture are foreign and it is they, the first-year minority students, who make most of the adjustments” (p144). One student who attended Dartmouth College said that “On a regular basis, I felt as if I and the other students, as well as the professors, were existing on very different planes of reality” (Garrod & Larimore, 1997, p34). This student goes on to say “How could I tell my grandfather that I was in a place where by many of the values I was raised with, people were not only not decent, but not even sane?” (Garrod & Larimore, p35). Another student expressed their feelings by saying “At Dartmouth, I felt as if my classmates each had their own individual agendas, and cooperation and support were not necessarily priorities” (Garrod & Larimore, p104). These examples suggest how cultural values are taught to native students and how they view their new environment at college with a certain amount of hesitation and uncertainty.

The purpose of this study was to document the first year experiences of Native American students at one predominantly white, four year institution of higher education. Specifically, this study examines how these experiences affected the student’s quality of life and persistence in their first year on the Oregon State University (OSU) campus. The term “quality of life,” for the purpose of this study, refers to the student’s satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their experiences during their first year of college at one predominantly white institution of higher education. In other words, the students’ overall sense of well-being during their first year is explored. The results of this study provide predominantly white, four year institutions information on how to provide accurate and appropriate support to Native students while they transition to college life.

### *Research Questions*

This study is focused on the first year experiences of Native American college students at Oregon State University, a large, public, four year research university located in the Northwest. The three research questions are:

- What are the first year experiences of Native American/Alaskan Native students at Oregon State University?
- What barriers/challenges do Native American/Alaskan Native students face during their first year on campus?
- What has contributed to their success and satisfaction or dissatisfaction during their first year of study on the Oregon State Universities campus?

This study focuses on the experiences of Native American students. The opportunity for university administrators, staff, and students to learn from the experiences of its Native population will be invaluable. It is the hope of this researcher that, as a result of this study, non-Native students and faculty/staff will be more mindful, university administrators will be more deliberate, and Native students will feel like their voice has been heard.

### *Who Will Benefit*

As a result of this study, it is my hope that OSU, and other institutions like OSU, will benefit from hearing what the first year experiences of their Native American/Alaskan Native student population has been. Offices who will likely benefit from this study include:

- OSU Student Orientation and Retention Office
- OSU Minority Education Office

- OSU Office of Indian Education
- OSU Office of Admissions
- OSU Department of Student Affairs
- OSU Comparator Institutions
- Pre-College Programs
- Overall Body of Research related to Native Americans in Higher Education

These offices will be able to use the information learned in this study to better understand this population so that they may develop specific and targeted programming and activities for Native American/Alaskan Native students during their first year on campus. These programs and activities could directly relate to the retention, academic success, and positive student life experiences for Native students attending predominantly white, four year institutions like Oregon State University.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the experiences of Native American students while they are in their first year of college at Oregon State University and how these experiences affect their persistence and quality of life.

The following literature review is focused on three areas that set a context for this study on Native American student's attendance, participation and persistence in college. These areas include a historical background of Native Americans in higher education; the challenges and barriers of Native Americans in higher education; and the first year experience, support and programming for Native American students. A history is provided to explain why Native American students may experience and face many of the issues they do in higher education settings today. Challenges and barriers for Native American students includes coming from a different culture, family issues, finances, racism, and identity development. First year experiences, which contribute to Native student's success, focus on the role of orientation, role models, and out of class experiences.

### *History of Native American Higher Education*

According to Vine Deloria, history is "merely a selected collection of facts without the human dimension to give it flesh" (1978, p24). The history of Native Americans in Higher Education is one that is not well documented. Carney (1999) has stated that there is no "thorough and comprehensive history" of Native Americans in higher education (pxi). According to the literature, this may be because the history that we do have is primarily reported from the view of European Americans, not Native people. Therefore, what is known is that the educations of early Native Americans, by

early European colonists, began as a means of assimilating Native people into their European culture and impart Christianity into the Native peoples' lives. The first colleges established in the New World stated in their charters that they intended to educate Native people to become members of society. For example, the Dartmouth College charter states that part of its purpose was:

For the education and instruction of youths of the Indian tribes in this Land in reading, wrighing, and all parts of Learning which shall appear necessary and expedient for civilizing and Christianizing Children of Pagans as well as in all liberal Arts and Sciences; and also the English Youth and any others (Carney, 1999, p1).

Although Harvard did not mention Indian education in its initial charter in 1636 a statement was added in 1650 so as to receive additional monies from a fund in England (Carney). The Harvard charter then stated that part of their purpose was to promote:

The advancement of all good literature, artes, and sciences. The advancement and education of youth in all manner of good literature, Artes, and Sciences. All other necessary provisions that may conduce to the education of the English and Indian youth of this Country in knowledge; and godliness (Carney, p1).

Several other early, colonial colleges stated that they also intended to educate the Native peoples, but at some point, according to the literature, they fell short of their purpose.

Five Native students attended Harvard between 1650 and 1693 with only one graduating with a degree (Carney). Dartmouth had 25 Native students with three graduating before the year 1800 (Carney). According to literature, this suggests that Native students were not a priority nor important to the founding fathers of higher education for the purposes

that define education today. In other words, the literature indicates that Native students were to be educated so that they would be more like Euro-Americans and less like Native Americans. The curriculum for Native Americans was vocational in focus and study concentrated in such areas as agriculture, mechanics, Christianity, and domestic skills (Carney). Carney goes on to suggest that this curriculum consigned the Native American to the lowest level positions in society and wasn't offered or intended to be of benefit or use to the individual, but to benefit of the colonists. There are those who believe that this is still the case when it comes to the education of Native people today.

According to Deloria (1978), "Indian education has been built upon the premise that the Indian had a great deal to learn from the white man; the white man representing the highest level of achievement reached in the evolutionary process" (p10). He goes on to say that "Indian education is supposed to orient Indian children to the mysteries of the world of the white man" (Deloria, p10). According to Carney (1999) and Deloria. (1978) education meant assimilation and it is because of this history that many Native American communities still have a large distrust for the higher education system today. In many secondary school settings, Native and non-Native students learn that the displacement of the American Indian was attributed to "the old belief in progress and rugged individualism" (Deloria, p13). Deloria goes on to say, "Indians had to be replaced to create the great society of which we are the beneficiaries" (p13). The literature suggests that because of this teaching and belief, Native students have had to deal with many barriers and challenges when they attempt higher education.



### *Barriers and Challenges to Success in Higher Education*

The literature suggests that there are many different barriers and challenges that Native Americans face when they arrive on a college campus. Although there are many, research indicates that there are five significant areas that contribute to these challenges and barriers. These include coming from a different cultural value system, family issues, finances, racism, and identity development.

#### *Culture Influences*

For many Native American college students, they find themselves living between two cultures, their tribe and the majority, Euro-American culture (Brookeman, 1990). Huffman (2001) has stated that “no other single factor has been more frequently identified as a contributing reason for poor academic achievement among American Indians than cultural conflict” (p2). According to a study by Jackson, Smith, and Hill (2003), Native American students felt that while they were supported in their pursuit of an education by their communities and families, they worried about how they would be accepted back into the communities once they were finished. Another researcher, Whiteman (1978), said:

The reason for this displacement is subtle and oftentimes covert. It reflects feelings of alienation on the part of the less educated Native American to one who has acquired, in his estimation, a non-Indian orientation and education.

Conversely, the educated Native American often exhibits feelings of alienation because of a lack of contact with an Indian environment while in college (p106).

A traditional Indian culture holds the good of the tribe and its survival as the ultimate goal (McDonald, 1978). The individual is expendable in the sense that one is

expected to sacrifice personal goals and objectives for the good of the tribe (McDonald). This creates a tendency to promote cooperation, sharing, and contribution instead of competition when working with others either within their cultural society or outside of it (Van Hamme, 1995). Therefore, “in many cases the principle of higher education and the credentializing process is hard to incorporate into the sharing concept because it is seen as individual and personal gain, with little applicability to other people” (McDonald, p83). Collectivist cultures tend to “emphasize goals, needs, and views of the group over those of the individual” (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003, pg 57). They also place importance “on the community fabric and kinship networks then on the place of the individual” (Umbreit & Coates, 2000, ¶15). This can create problems for Native students in higher education. One example of this is in the classroom. A Native student in a college classroom may refuse to answer a question because it would put themselves above the other members of the class (Plank, 1994). Plank says that even if the Native student knows the answer to a question they will still not answer because, in their culture, it would be inappropriate to verbally express their knowledge. Most Native people tend to be rather quiet and calm when they encounter someone who is unfamiliar. They are typically soft-spoken (Fiordo, 1985) and have a fear of expressing their thoughts and ideas because they are unsure of how they will be received by the members of outgroups (Potts, 2001). Native cultures also do not typically challenge authority, which limits their ability to express opinions (Pewewardy, 1998). To use the classroom example from above, if a student knows the correct answer and the professor states a false one, the Native student will not correct the professor. These cultural values could lead to misunderstandings because if a Native student does not answer questions or express

opinions in a classroom, the professor and other non-Native classmates might believe that the material is unclear and or that the Native student does not understand. According to Beaty and Chiste (1996), “The behavior of students whose culture does not incorporate the Western idea of appropriate classroom decorum and participation may be negatively interpreted as lack of interest, intelligence, or manners” (¶6).

Time orientation may also play a role in cultural differences of Native and non-Native students. Time, like other aspects of Native American culture, is viewed in a circular manner (Torres, 2002). They see time as holistic and place a value on the activity as opposed to the time on a clock (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003, pg180). In non-Native situations, time is quantitative in that appointments start “on-time” (McDonald, 1978). However, for someone from a reservation culture, time is seen as relative (McDonald). Things or events will happen when they are supposed to happen which means that time is flexible and non-compartmental (Potts, 2001). It is important to concentrate on the meeting, relationship, or interaction rather than the amount of time it takes or doesn't take (McDonald; Wynia, 2001). Because of this, students may be late to class not because they cannot arrive on time, but because other situations may require more attention. This also makes it harder for Native students to envision the future. According to McDonald, from the standpoint of an Indian student dropout “it makes it very difficult to pressure him to come to class, work hard, and get good grades for some futuristic goal which is really unimportant and of questionable value” (p81).

Much of what is communicated in Native American cultures is non-verbal. For example, most Native Americans will not express non-verbal minimal encouragers while engaging in conversation (Umbreit & Coates, 2000). In addition, most Native American

listeners will not engage in eye contact while another is talking. These tendencies, while a sign of respect in their own culture, can again be misinterpreted to be rude and uninterested in the mainstream Euro-American university culture.

### *Family Influences*

Another major source of challenges for Native American students in college is their families. A Native student's family can be both a source of strength and distraction because they are a part of a collectivist culture in which family is very important to the Native student. Because of these close bonds homesickness can be a problem for students who are far from their communities. Winrow (2001) found that many students in his study went home as much as they could and when they were not able to go home as much as they would like, homesickness was more intense. Wells (1997) also reported that "lack of family support" and "homesickness" were factors that limit Native student achievement (p8). The literature states that one element that contributes to these feelings of homesickness is an unsupportive family network. According to Jackson et al. (2003) family members may not understand why their child needs to leave home for long periods of time and be away from the family and tribal events. McDonald (1978) reported that a student who makes the decision to leave the community and pursue a white man's education is making a choice to reject the "old traditional ways" and travel the white man's road (p83). In addition, Tinto (1993) stated that "A white child of a college-educated family may look forward to and be rewarded for making the transition to college whereas a native American child from a poor family may find that he/she is seen as rebelling against the family and local community in going to college" (p95). Often, because many Native students are also first generation students, the family does not

understand what these feelings are doing to their student and how hard it is for the student to concentrate on academics. In a study done by Minner (1995), students indicated that they left school because their families were not supportive of their higher education pursuits. They claimed that their parents never wanted them to go to college or their parents told them (the student) that they were being selfish for leaving (Minner). One student said that because their parent was sick, they needed to go home and care for them (Minner). Another student indicated that they tried to get home as much as they could and as a result did not have time to study (Minner).

Another situation which may cause a student to leave school is the financial condition of the family. According to Ortiz and HeavyRunner (2003), “there are also times when family systems and cycles of poverty do interfere with student’s educational pursuits. At times, family responsibilities disrupt school attendance, primarily because the student’s earnings are needed to sustain the family” (p221).

On the other hand, when the student has the support of their family, literature suggests that they tend to do very well. Students in Winrow’s (2001) study indicated that it was “crucial” for them to have the support of their family (p108). In a study done by Jackson et al. (2003), students who received encouragement from their families were more academically successful. One student said that because of the sacrifices of her parents for her education, she was more determined to do well (Jackson et al.). Tierney (1995) has offered five recommendations for families of Native students to help increase their chances of retention. These are to 1) talk about college from an early age and try to visit college campuses, 2) provide on going support once the student is on campus, 3) educate the faculty by encouraging them to learn about tribal cultures and take part in

tribal events, 4) develop high expectations for your student and other students within the family and tribe, and 5) work with local schools to develop curriculum that will prepare a student for higher education (Tierney). Winrow also suggests that parents, who do not know much about college, should educate themselves in order to help their students be successful.

### *Financial Factors*

Huffman (2001) indicated that in regards to minorities in America, “Because of a social status that operates much like a caste in a highly regimented society, opportunities for educational (and particularly economic success) are scarce” (p5). Many studies list the lack of personal finances as a main reason that Native American students leave or drop out of college (McDonald, 1978, Wells, 1997, Huffman 2001). As mentioned before, many Native Americans are first generation college students and therefore filling out financial aid forms is a foreign concept to them. Students in Minner’s (1995) study stated that they thought the whole process was confusing and they didn’t understand the forms. According to Jackson et al. (2003), “Lower levels of financial support from both family and intuitional sources...have been identified as personal variables that impact persistence” (pp2-3).

Another challenge when it came to finances for students was working with their tribal governments to gain funding for higher education. One student in Minner’s (1995) study stated that they were supposed to receive a scholarship from their tribe, but it never came through. Winrow’s (2001) study found that many Native students were supposed to receive tribal scholarships “but many of them (the student) indicated that it was necessary for them to stand up and fight to get the support they needed” (p46). Winrow’s study

goes on to find that students indicated that they were frustrated but “didn’t give up until they got as much support as they felt they could” (p46). Some students even suggested that the amount of financial aid was awarded based on who you knew in the tribal office (Winrow). In conclusion, Winrow’s study found that the students were “motivated and in most cases fought for the funding they felt was deserved, however it is likely that many other Native American students give up when faced with this challenge” (p.93).

### *Racism*

Unfortunately, according to Jones (2005), “New college students do not come to campus with a clean slate. Long before these students became college students, they were actively and passively taught attitudes and behaviors related to racial, gender, and cultural differences” (p142). In a survey administered by Wells (1997), of 30 colleges the average score on a 1-10 scale was 5.1, indicating that Native American students on their campus faced moderate racial and cultural discrimination. According to Jackson et al. (2003), Native American students are “minorities among minorities” and therefore may be presented with more challenges than other minority groups. This means that because Native Americans are the smallest minority group, less is known and understood about their culture. Racism, both passive and active, are reasons that students experience challenges in their first year of college.

In a study done by Jackson et al. (2003), passive racism involved being either ignored or singled out as a spokesperson for their culture. Active racism typically happened in the classroom in the form of discussions about history and cultural issues (Jackson, et al). Jones (2005) indicated that racism can take the form of “irritating and naïve questions about cultural differences and negative classroom environments to

outright acts of hate that broadcast the message that they (the Native student) and their concerns are not welcome” (p144). In Winrow’s (2001) study he found that students felt they had to work and fight harder because of a “lack of understating and respect for Native American culture” (p51). Students in Minner’s (1995) study indicated that they were lonely and felt left out. One student stated “One of my classes broke into groups for a project. I was alone. I was the only Indian in the class. The teacher finally put me into a group, but I know that nobody really wanted me” (Minner, p3). Other students expressed their irritation of being lectured to about Native Americans by professors who taught negative or biased information (Jackson et al.).

Another form of racism that Native American students face on a college campus, according to the literature, is the Indian mascot that some universities use. According to Garrod and Larimore (1997), “Many Native Americans are unable to fathom why non-Native people fail to equate the use of Native Americans as mascots with unacceptable bigotry aimed at blacks, Jews, and women” (p9). Several students who attended Dartmouth College indicated that the use of the unofficial Indian mascot was a general barrier to overcome (Garrod & Larimore). One student stated that:

Students who wore Indian-symbol hats, jackets or T-shirts, and who used the “wah-hoo-wah” and “scalp-em” cheers at football games were perceived to be rebels defying “the administration” and trying to keep a Dartmouth tradition alive, regardless of the fact that the symbol and cheers were offensive to Native Americans. It was an example of institutional racism at its worst (Garrod & Larimore, p73).



When trying to express how they felt about the symbol, another student said, “How can you talk about a feeling that resembles a foot in the center of your stomach, a punch to your middle that makes it hard to breathe?” (p85-86).

### *Identity Development*

According to Horse (2001), “Among Indians, identity development begins with the family, extended family, kinship, or clan affiliations. Then it extends to the tribal group, and then to identification with the general Indian population. At the individual level, self-identity as an Indian is important” (p94). Therefore, identity development of Native American students directly affects their experiences while in college.

Huffman (2001) has identified four “cultural masks” that Native American college students develop. He states that a cultural mask is “the process by which a person comes to construct a personal ethnic identity. Moreover, a cultural mask also includes the manner in which an individual uses and ultimately projects that ethnic identity” (p7). These masks are assimilated students, marginal students, estranged students, and transculturated students. Assimilated students identified with the mainstream culture and had few difficulties in college while marginal students had some assimilation orientation and “they desired some identification and affiliation with more traditional American Indian culture” (Huffman, p9). Huffman described estranged students as those who had a strong Native American identity and displayed an aggressive and negative view towards assimilation while transcultured students had a strong native identity and did not want to be assimilated. Huffman found, “However, unlike estranged students these students used their ethnic identity as a firm social-psychological anchor and derived strength and confidence” (p9).

Estranged students go through four stages: initial alienation, disillusionment, emotional rejection, and disengagement (Huffman, 2001). In the initial stage, students see themselves as outsiders to the institution and see the institution as rigid, formalized, and unfamiliar (Huffman). Huffman states that because of this unfamiliar feeling and new experiences, the student is overwhelmed and has little to no contact with non-Indian students and also becomes suspicious of the college. This suspicion comes from the belief that the college is an “agent of assimilation” (Huffman, p12). The second phase of disillusionment is a direct result of the feeling of alienation (Huffman). One student in Huffman’s study claimed it was a culture shock to come to this new environment. Because of the Western way of thinking and feeling, students do not want to have any part of the institution (Huffman). The third phase, emotional rejection, is a result of feeling that there is no value for the institution that does not want or value them and their culture (Huffman). This view again reflects the fact that the student feels the institution is trying to assimilate them. The fourth and final phase of the estranged student is disengagement. It is at this point that the student withdraws from the institution (Huffman).

Transcultured students also face difficulties, but for some reason they manage to persist and typically succeed in college. The four phases of transcultured students include initial alienation, self-discovery, realignment, and participation (Huffman, 2001). In the first phase, initial alienation, students feel isolated and lonely (Huffman). According to Huffman, “Many of these students perceived that much was at stake (loss of cultural identity) with little reward in return (an educational experience that did not recognize or value them)” (p18). However, Huffman found that the difference between

transcultured students and estranged students is that transcultured students stayed on campus longer allowing them to move into the second phase, self-discovery. Native students in this second phase realize that the institution is not trying to assimilate them and that they can interact with different types of people and still retain their cultural identity (Huffman). A sense of empowerment comes from the fact that they have succeeded because they are Native American (Huffman). Several students in Huffman's study indicated that because they were Indian or Native, they found that it was the source of their strength to be successful. The third phase, realignment, involved the students making adjustments to their social, academic, and personal lives (Huffman). In essence, the student was learning how to relate to both cultures; the Native and the non-Native (Huffman). As mentioned before, Native Americans tend to live between two cultures and it is at this point that students learn to manage them both. The fourth and final stage of transcultured students involves participation in both native and non-native events and interactions (Huffman). Because they were strong in their identity they did not worry about interactions that involved non-Native people.

What are the main differences between these two types of students? According to Huffman (2001), because the estranged student withdraws from the institution, they resist being assimilated and they protect their Native identity. On the other hand, the transculturated student uses their Native identity to their advantage within the institution (Huffman). The student overcomes difficulties because they were Native American and chose to explore and self-discover themselves (Huffman). As a result they were able to bridge the gap and participate in non-Native interactions without being assimilated (Huffman).

Huffman (2001) suggests that to develop strong ethnic self-identity, institutions need to celebrate Native culture through art, displays, lectures, and recognizing the success of Native alumni. He goes on to state that institutions can also develop appropriate training for those who counsel and advise Native students so that meaningful relationships develop.

### *First Year Experience Programs*

Literature suggests that similar to other minority populations, the first year of college for a Native American student is very critical. According to Tierney (1995), “American Indian youth are one of the least likely ethnic or racial groups to enter a postsecondary institution or graduate from one” (p4). As stated in the introduction, Tierney says that three in twenty students will receive a four year degree. Whiteman (1978) explained the reason for these numbers by saying:

Too often a Native American student reaches a university campus knowing absolutely no one. He is immediately thrust into a non-Indian atmosphere of unknowns. He is expected to register in courses and work out a class schedule. But too many times he does not know what to do, where to go, or who to see (p109-110).

For this reason it is extremely important for Native students to have a strong foundation of knowledge about the institution in their first year of higher education. There are several ways to do this including orientation, role models, and out of class experiences.

### *Orientation*

According to the literature, orientation programs that provide direct and targeted information for Native students could help in overall retention. Creating a setting where

the Native student can connect with the university in a positive manner could help to keep the student at the institution. Watson (2002) indicates that “Probably the most significant element influencing the performance level of many students is their inability to connect to an institutional agent” (p78). Hrabowski (2005) says that “the most important factor affecting minority first-year students are those that adversely influence their academic confidence and ability to connect to the institution” (p133). He goes on to say that the best orientation/intervention programs are those that help the student to understand how the relationship “between the social and academic challenges they will face as a result of interacting with students and faculty of other races” (p133). By creating a Native student orientation program, new students can connect with current students and talk about experiences. Several researchers suggest that this connection helps to retain the student and assist in the transition to this new environment (Hrabowski, 2005; Whiteman, 1978). In addition, Jones (2005) suggests that a “common theme” be created for all first year students that promotes and builds an “inclusive campus climate” (p152).

#### *Role Models and Mentors*

According to literature, role models and faculty mentors play an important part of the first year experience for minority students. Some researchers claim that faculty are an extension of the institution and can even be considered the institution itself (Watson, et al. 2002). Watson et al. stated that, “Students want faculty members who will understand their cultural uniqueness. More importantly, students want to connect with a faculty member who can empathize with the pressures minority students face on predominantly White campus” (p77). Unfortunately, literature suggests that there are few Native role

models. According to McDonald (1978), “the Indian child does not have role models available, and thus does not consider professional training as an occupation. The Indian child does not have to question, as white children do, the possibilities that might be available to him in a professional area” (p80). Therefore, mentors play an important role when the Native child attends college.

According to study done by Cole and Denzine (2002) they found that Native student persistence rates were linked to the amount of faculty support. Several studies have found that Native students will seek out both Native and non-Native people as sources of support and guidance (Winrow, 2001, Jackson et al., 2003). Even though Native support groups and faculty members were very important Winrow found that students said the ethnicity of the person was not as important as how they were treated by that person. He goes on to say “What stood out about these non-native role models and mentors was that while they were not Native American themselves, they clearly demonstrated openness, acceptance, and understanding towards their Native American students and advisees” (p96).

#### *Out of Class Experiences*

Out of the class experiences are also very important factors, ensuring that Native student have positive experiences through-out their college careers, but especially in the first year. Because students are away from their communities and family for the first time, these experiences can help to create a family away from home. Also, out of the class experiences help students to develop social skills for dealing with the real world (Watson et al., 2002). According to Astin (1984) students who are involved in extracurricular activities are less likely to drop out than those students who are not

involved. Winrow (2001) found that having peers with experience in college helped newer students learn and feel less isolated. According to Kuh (1991) “Students involved in out-of-the class activities are more positive about their college experiences, are more satisfied with their social life, living environments, academic majors, and contacts with faculty” (p8). As was found with estranged and transcultured students, those who stayed on campus and became involved tended to persist and ultimately graduate (Huffman, 2001). Literature suggests that forming and creating a place for community and a sense of “family” to develop could greatly enhance Native students’ need for a community. Tinto (1993) said that, “on most racially and ethnically diverse campuses, local ethnic/race communities may provide much needed havens or safe places that, for some students, may be essential for continued persistence. In this way, ethnic communities on campus can provide a stabilizing anchor in what might otherwise be a large, foreign campus environment” (p124).

#### *Summary of the Literature*

The higher educational system set up by the first Europeans to this country has directly affected how Native Americans experience higher education today. Because of the fear of assimilation, Native family members and communities can prove to be a major cause of failure for Native college students. Cultural differences and values are still as much of an issue today as they were for the first native college students in colonial times. The modern institution of higher education has a Western thought and philosophy, which challenges the values that Native Americans students still hold dear. Lack of financial means, passive and active racism, and trying to find their identity all contribute to the barriers and challenges that Native American students face in higher education on a day

to day basis. The literature seems to suggest that to help Native students succeed in the college environment it is important for them to connect with the institution and faculty members through effective, culturally-appropriate orientation and first year experience programs.



### **Chapter III: Methodology**

#### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to find out, from current Native American students, what their experiences were as first time college students on the Oregon State University (OSU) campus. By studying these students' experiences, both positive and negative, the university can better anticipate, plan programs, and develop support services to ensure the success of Native American students in their first year of college. The three research questions for this study are:

- What are the first year experiences of Native American/Alaskan Native students at Oregon State Universities?
- What barriers/challenges do Native American/Alaskan Native students face during their first year on campus?
- What has contributed to their success and satisfaction or dissatisfaction during their first year of study on the Oregon State Universities campus?

#### *Target Population*

As the purpose of this research is to learn more about the experiences of first year undergraduate Native American students at Oregon State University participants included in this study were all Native American or Alaskan Native students who had been on the OSU campus for at least one year. These students were asked to reflect on their experiences during their first year on the OSU campus and to share how these experiences contributed to their persistence in college. Participants included students from all undergraduate levels, excluding first year students, so as to gain a rich and diverse perspective regarding their experiences.

### *Protection of Participants*

The researcher of this study completed Oregon State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) certification of education in June of 2004. This study was submitted to the Oregon State University IRB and approved on November 14, 2005. All participants who filled out the online survey were completely anonymous and read a statement regarding the purpose of this study and their role in it (Appendix B). Those students who participated in a personal interview reviewed and signed the Informed Consent Document (Appendix A) before the interviews started. The anonymity of participants and accurate data collection and information has been of the highest priority for this study. As indicated in the Informed Consent Document, participants were free to leave or terminate their participation in the study at any time.

### *Methods of Data Collection*

Both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection were used to gather information from the students who participated in this study. Quantitative information was obtained through an online survey and qualitative information was obtained from both the same online survey in addition to individual interviews. Using both a survey and interview data (mixed method) provided a rich and comprehensive study of Native American student's first year experiences on the OSU campus in relation to the study's research questions.

### *Data Collection Procedures*

The process of collecting quantitative information and identifying research participants for individual interviews was done through an on-line Native American Student Survey (Appendix B). The survey was emailed several times to the Native

American student listserv operated by the OSU Indian Education Office. This listserv reaches approximately 188 undergraduate students. Repeated emails were necessary to gain more responses to the survey and ultimately to have more students indicate an interest in participating in the personal interview segment of the data collection process.

The survey was created using an online data collection tool through Oregon State Universities College of Business called Business Solutions Group (BSG). This tool is free for use by OSU faculty, staff, and students. The BSG collected and organized the quantitative closed-ended questions automatically. Open-ended questions of the survey were coded according to like categories.

After students completed the online survey, those who indicated they would be willing to participate in an individual interview were contacted. Participants indicated their interest in participating in an individual interview on the survey by answering yes or no and including their contact information on the survey. Email attempts soliciting interviews ultimately resulted in three willing and able interview participants. These participants were told that the individual interviews would last approximately 60-90 minutes in length. All interviews were conducted in the OSU Valley Library in private study rooms.

### *Data Analysis*

For the survey, closed-ended quantitative data collected by the BSG was tabulated automatically by the survey system. Open-ended, qualitative data was coded into like categories. Personal interviews comprised the qualitative data. Audio recordings of each interview were conducted with the consent of the students and then transcribed. Each student who participated in an interview was given the opportunity to review their

transcribed interviews for accuracy (member checking). Once all interviewing was completed, responses were checked for the emergence of themes.

### *Limitations of the Study*

There were several limitations to this study. First, this study only involved students who were in attendance at Oregon State University at the time they either completed the survey or participated in a personal interview. However, several attempts were made to interview a student who dropped out of school for winter 2006, but due to schedule conflicts and financial constraints of the student, a time to sit down and talk was never scheduled.

Second, the population of Native American/Alaskan Native students on the Oregon State University campus is small which made it difficult to gain responses to the online survey and participants for personal interviews.

Third, the first year experiences of Native American students at other four year, public or private, predominately white institutions were not examined and therefore most likely vary and/or differ from that of the OSU Native student population. Therefore this study should not be used to generalize the first year experiences of all Native American students at four year, public or private, predominately white institutions.

Fourth, this study only focused on student experiences in the first year of college on the Oregon State University campus. It did not study experiences of subsequent years at OSU or the first year experiences of transfer students before they came to OSU. However, some insight into what transfer students experienced was gained as a result of personal interviews and was applied in relation to their first year experiences at OSU.

Fifth, students who are still in attendance at OSU were targeted for this study and therefore students who left Oregon State University after or during their first year of college were not a part of this study.

### *The Researcher*

As the researcher it is important to disclose my personal biases and the reasons for my interest in this study. My ancestry includes many ethnicities including 1/32 southern Cherokee, but this has never been an identity with which I was familiar as I was growing up. As my father once said, “If you got a nose bleed, you’d be out of the tribe.” As a result of being part of a military family, being known as an “Army Brat” and subsequently moving around the country, I have lived in various locations which have had larger concentrated populations of Native American peoples. These include central Oklahoma, northern Idaho, and central and western Montana. It came to my attention that Native peoples were viewed and treated differently based on the area in which I was living at the time. Native people living in Oklahoma seemed very proud of their culture and ancestry. They also seemed more accepted by non-Native people living around them. On the other hand, Native people living in Montana did not seem to be proud of their culture or ancestry and the non-Native people living around them seemed to stereotype and treat them with little respect. This included some of my own extended family from central Montana and I therefore remember growing up hearing negative and racist stereotypical comments from family members directed towards Native Americans. In addition, my paternal great-grandmother did not approve of my grandfather marrying my grandmother because she was “Indian.” Therefore my paternal grandparents married in secret and were not found out for almost a year.

During my undergraduate experiences in college I became more interested in Native American culture and started taking Native American Studies classes. One class, taught by Henrietta Mann, influenced and inspired me, and I believe prompted me to take an active interest in issues faced by Native American people. After college I moved into a career in college/university admissions and became very passionate about helping students who did not understand the college process. When I started working at Oregon State University I also became the liaison to the Indian Education Office from the Office of Admissions, and worked closely with the coordinator. Through conversations with her, my involvement in my graduate program, and my position as an admissions advisor, I have chosen the issue of Native Americans in higher education as one in which I would like to make a positive difference.

I believe that not enough is done to target Native American college students in their first year of college. I also believe that this is a critical time for these students as they face culture shock coming to the institution and many times leave the institution to return home because the family and their community do not understand how to support the student. Therefore, it is my opinion that it is important to develop appropriate programming and support services specifically for Native American students. My hope is that through their experiences Oregon State University can develop programs and services to better serve or continue to serve Native American students in their first year of college.

## Chapter IV: Results

As stated in the methodology, both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection were used to gather information from the research subjects for the purpose of answering the research questions. This chapter will summarize the results from both the on-line survey and individual interviews. First, the results of the survey will be presented followed by information obtained from three personal interviews with current OSU Native students. Of the 188 undergraduate students from the OSU Indian Education listserv who were asked to participate, 22 responded yielding an 11% response rate.

### *Survey Results*

The first several questions of the Native American student survey asked the respondents questions that related to demographic information such as gender and year in school, age, academic majors and minors, self identification and tribal affiliation(s).

### *Demographic Information*

Of the 22 students that responded to the survey, five were sophomores, nine were juniors, and eight were seniors (see Table 4.1). There was one graduate student who filled out the on line survey, but the student indicated that they did not attend Oregon State University as an undergraduate and therefore their responses are not included in this study.

Table 4.1. Respondents by Class and Gender

	<b>Sophomore</b>	<b>Junior</b>	<b>Senior</b>	<b>Total</b>
Male	1	2	3	6
Female	4	7	5	16
Total	5	9	8	22

Ages of respondents ranged from nineteen to, as one responded stated, “nontraditional.” Overall they fell within the following categories: 19 of the students reported being between the ages of 19 and 30 and 2 students reported being between the ages of 41 and 50. As stated earlier, one student reported their age as “nontraditional” and therefore their age is not reflected in these numbers. The average or mean age of the students in this study is 24 years old. The survey respondents indicated that their hometowns were spread across the United States. Twelve students indicated being from the state of Oregon, three from the state of Alaska, two each from Oklahoma and California, and one student each from Texas, Utah, and North Dakota.

#### *Academics*

Academically these students are studying a wide variety of majors, minors, and double majors at Oregon State University. These have been categorized according to the academic colleges of OSU, which are depicted in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2. Respondents Majors, Minors, & Double Majors by College

<b>College</b>	<b>Major</b>	<b>Minor</b>	<b>Double Major</b>	<b>Total</b>
Liberal Arts	9	4	2	15
Forestry	1	1	0	2
Science	4	1	0	5
Health & Human Services	3	0	0	3
Engineering	2	0	1	3
Business	2	0	1	3
Education	0	0	1	1
Interdisciplinary	1	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>33</b>



### *Tribal Identity*

When asked on the survey how they identified themselves, 20 students indicated Native American, one indicated Alaskan Native, and one student did not answer. Additionally, when asked what tribe(s) or band(s) they were a member of, there were a variety of responses. Three students are members of the Cherokee Nation, three are members of the Choctaw Nation, and two students are members of the Cow Creek Band of the Umpqua Tribe. One student each indicated that they are a member of the following tribes/bands: Tsimpeshean, Nez Perce and Umatilla, Ho-Chunk and Ojibwa, Chickasaw Nation, Dillingham Native Village Council, Columbia River Plateau Tribes of Northeastern Oregon, Navajo Nation, Cheyenne River Sioux, Osage, Cowlitz Tribe, Klamath Tribe, Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, and the three affiliated tribes of the Mandan, Hidtsa, & Arikara.

### *Higher Education Experience*

When asked about their higher education experiences before enrolling and attending Oregon State University, respondents had a variety of responses. Questions asked if the student had transferred from another college/university and, if so, from where; if they took time off between another college/university and enrolling at OSU; and if they took time off between high school and enrolling at OSU. When asked if they had transferred to Oregon State University from another college/university, community college, or tribal college, 10 students answered yes, including three who attended more than one institution, and 12 students answered no. Of those students who answered yes, nine had attended a community college, two had attended a public 4-year institution, and two had attended a private four year college, before transferring to OSU.

When asked if they have taken any time off between transferring from their previous institution(s) and OSU, three students answered yes. One student took two years off, another took one term off, and the third student took one year off because OSU would not accept her until she took an English course, which she did and then waited until the following year to enroll at OSU. Four students took off between their high school graduation and enrolling at OSU. Two students took one year off, one student took five years off, and one student took 20 years off. Two students answered this question by stating that they have had to take time off from OSU while they have been enrolled at OSU. One student indicated that they have been working and going back to school for years and another withdrew from in the OSU spring of 2005 because of a family emergency. It is unclear if these events happened during these students' first year at Oregon State University or subsequent years.

Additionally, students were asked why they chose to attend OSU and whether they were happy with their decision. Given a list of options, when asked why the student chose to attend Oregon State University the responses varied (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3. Respondents Reasons for Attending Oregon State University by Gender

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Location	3	11	14
Major	3	9	12
Financial Reasons	2	6	8
Family	1	6	7
Other	1	1	2

Of the two students who indicated "other" one student stated online availability and the other student said they wanted to try something different and OSU has a lot to offer them.

Overall, when asked if they were happy with their decision to attend OSU, 16 students answered yes, five answered both yes and no, and one student, from the researchers' standpoint, was unsure. Of those who said yes some of their comments were:

- Very pleasant experience
- It's an excellent University
- Because I have gained so much knowledge-academically, personally, and socially-from my experience here. It has shaped who I am today.
- It's something new and different but not drastically far from home
- It is beautiful campus, and the education is acceptable.
- Absolutely, I am so pleased for the quality of education I am enjoying and felt this university has a lot to offer traditional as well as not-traditional students.
- I like the location and the people I have met living here
- Because it is a friendly place
- I like how close the school is to my home and I appreciate the various opportunities available due to the large size of OSU

An important note to consider is that three of the students who answered yes mentioned closeness to home and/or family in their responses regarding their happiness attending OSU. The five students who answered both yes and no commented:

- Yes, but I hate the weather and lack of diversity
- Yes and No. I love the community but the classes aren't worth the horrendous amount of money I pay to be here. I'm thinking about taking the rest of the year off.

- Yes and No. There has been a ton of issues dealing with the administration issues, especially Financial Aid. They seem to not believe that we are low income in my family and that we really don't make much money.
- For the majority yes, the weather is hard for me to adjust to. I come from much warmer climates.
- I am glad because the financial strain is far less and I am able to pursue Marine Biology here but I feel out of place because this school is so much bigger than any school I have ever attended.

The one student simply stated "I don't like the large campus..." Based on answers to other questions on their survey, I was unable to determine if the answer was a yes or a no.

#### *Reasons for Attending College*

When asked why they decided to pursue a higher education degree, the students had a variety of responses which are categorized as follows: obtain a career/want a career, family/tribe/respect, money, enjoy learning, and other. Of the seven students who want a career or want to obtain a career several stated that one needs a degree to go anywhere in life and get a good job. In addition one student said that they must have a degree to work in their career choice of education. Six students responded by saying that they were earning a degree to help their family and/or tribe in the future. Three of these students indicated that they would be the first in their family to graduate with a college degree and one student said that, because of her husband's death, she had decided to pursue a degree in a health related field. The three students who answered that money was a motivator to getting a college degree all said so in relation to their family, future, or respect and, therefore, money was not the primary motivating factor. The enjoyment of

learning, as was discussed in the literature review, was the reason for pursuing a degree in higher education for four students. They stated they were interested in the topics they were studying, wanted to be a well rounded person, wanted to further their knowledge in an area, and just enjoyed learning. The students who fell into the category of other did not fit into any of the other categories listed above. These students indicated that they decided to pursue a higher education degree because their major at OSU is one of the best in the nation, it has been their life long dream to get a college education, they desired more, teachers and others told them to do it, and/or they went to a college prep high school so college was always the next step and never a question.

#### *Challenges and Support*

When asked on the survey what kinds of challenges they have faced during their first year on the OSU campus, what support services they used during their first year, what Native and non-Native student organizations they were involved with, and did they find these student groups helpful the students indicated similar responses. When asked, from a list of options, what have been challenges for the student in their first year on the OSU campus the result varied (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4. Respondents Challenges in Their First Year at Oregon State University

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Miss Family	1	10	11
Family Pressure to Succeed in College	3	5	8
Family Pressure to Come Home	1	3	4
Class/Educational Work	4	8	12
Distance from Home	1	4	5
Financial Costs	4	9	13
Social Interactions	3	4	7
Job in Addition to College	2	6	8
Cultural Misunderstandings	2	3	5
Time Management	4	10	14
Other	2	1	3

When asked, from a list of options, what support services did they use during their first year on the OSU campus the results also varied (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.5. Support Services Used by Respondents in Their First Year at Oregon State University

<b>Support Services</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Tutoring	1	3	4
Math Lab	2	6	8
Writing Lab	3	5	8
EOP Office	2	5	7
Indian Education Office	1	4	5
University Counseling & Psychological Services	1	2	3
Academic Advisor	2	8	10
Residential Advisor	0	0	0
Professor/Instructor	1	4	5
Other	0	1	1
No Response	2	2	4

The one student who indicated “other” said “Native American” which I am unclear of what this refers to in regards of support services. Four students did not answer this question.

Oregon State University offers a number of Native American/Alaskan Native student groups and organizations for both Native and non-Native students to become involved. On the survey, students were asked if they were involved with any of these groups during their first year of college on the OSU campus (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.6. Respondents Native American/Alaskan Native Student Group Involvement During the First Year at Oregon State University

<b>Native Student Groups</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Native American Longhouse	1	5	6
American Indian Science & Engineering Society	2	4	6
Native American Student Association	1	6	7
Native Americans in Marine & Space Sciences	1	3	4
National Native American Honor Society	1	0	1
Other	0	1	1
No Response	4	7	11

The one “other” response was a no, indicating that this student was not involved with any of these student groups and/or organizations. Additionally, 11 of the respondents did not answer this question. When asked if they had been involved with non-Native student groups and/or organizations during their first year on the OSU campus, 8 students responded yes and listed the following groups and organizations: the OSU College Democrats, Range Club, Fish & Wildlife Club, Natural Resources Club, Geosciences Club, Forestry Club, Rifle Club, Equestrian Club, Dressage Team, MANNRS, the Tennis

Club, Pi Kappa Phi, National Eagle Scout Association; ASOSU, Cheerleading, University Student Scholars Association (USSA), Phi Eta Sigma, Alpha Lambda Delta, the Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance, and KBVR. Twelve of the respondents did not answer this question.

When asked if these opportunities, both Native and non-Native, were helpful and/or beneficial 12 students indicated yes, two indicated no, and eight did not respond to the question. Of the students who indicated yes, their comments included:

- Yes the Longhouse gave me a home away from home
- Yes because it gave me a network of friends and peers that helped me through my struggles and made my transition to college a bit easier. (involved with the Longhouse)
- Yes, great way to meet people when transferring (involved with the Longhouse, NASA, and Tennis Club)
- Great for networking because we all had something in common besides our OSU studies (involved with several native and non-native groups)
- Yes, by being a member of a team, it made being a freshman a lot easier, I already had a group of friends even before I started school. (involved with ASOSU and Cheerleading)
- I enjoy USSA since it gives me an opportunity to be involved in community service
- Yes, EOP provided many helpful resources like tutoring and math classes
- I've really gotten to know the people at the Native American Longhouse and that's really nice. When I come to campus I see very few people that I know, but



at the Longhouse I always know most of the people there are that's a real comfort to me. Most other groups and clubs aren't that tight-knit.

- Yes, the Longhouse provided a place to meet friends and other Natives, and also a wage. The other clubs also provided me a place to meet people and relate my major to Native beliefs and culture.

### *Interactions*

The final questions of the survey asked the students about their interactions and experience with others during their first year on the OSU campus. This includes their feelings regarding if OSU is supportive of them and their culture; if the OSU campus, community, and climate is supportive of them and their culture if they have had to educate others about their culture; and if they have experienced discrimination. When asked if they felt OSU was supportive of them and their culture there were a variety of responses, opinions, and comments. Seven students indicated yes and offered the following comments:

- They have more than adequate resources and opportunities to interact with people of your culture or other Native cultures.
- OSU supports all ethnic groups
- Things like the Longhouse are places you find comforting and it feels like OSU respects your identity and beliefs.
- I do because I have never had access to a Native group on any campus before OSU. Part of that is because the places I have been were very very small and there just weren't enough Native people to get that kind of group together. I also

feel that OSU tries to have a certain amount of diversity on campus and so they recruit diverse students and continue to support them while they are here.

There were also seven students who said both yes and no and had the following to say:

- I don't think that enough focus is given to recruit Native students
- In some ways it is supportive. Mostly, my culture I keep with me.
- OSU Staff and Faculty-Yes. Students and peers-sometimes. I had to attend my older sister's funeral/ceremony and my instructors were accommodating to my due assignments – my peers made comments about having to miss class, (they felt it was unnecessary to go.)
- They say they're supportive but it really left up to the cultural centers to reach out to students and for whatever reason they didn't seem to be frequented and didn't have the resources to reach out. I felt OSU wasn't supportive from the minute I arrived because of the lack of diversity on campus.
- Yes, they are supportive, but could do a better job. Native students make up less than 1% of the OSU population and there could be better systems with recruitment and retention, it's not too hard to get the students here, but to get them to stay at OSU is another story, I think they get intimidated by the size of the campus and the lack of diversity at first.

One student who answered somewhat, two indicated no, and one student answered that OSU was “tolerant” of their culture. The latter student went on to say “No one cares either way, but at least I don't think OSU puts any culture above another. However, OSU highly supports higher class families compared to lower class ones.” Additionally, there were three students whose answers did not really fit into a definite yes or no. One student

stated they did not have any “dealings with OSU in regards to my culture. There obviously is a Native Association, past that, I don’t see any real support.” Another student spoke of an article in the student newspaper when they first arrived on campus, which was directed at African Americans and caused negative feeling in the community. This student also stated that they could not believe that the paper would let someone print those “idiotic” thoughts. The third student indicated that they felt pressure to “abolish” the pow-wow. They stated that because they do not have “thousands of people come to it that they want to cut it.” It is assumed that “they” refers to the OSU administration. One student did not answer this question.

### *Campus Climate*

When asked if the students felt that the OSU campus, community, and climate was supportive of them and their culture five answered yes, six no, four sometimes/somewhat, one yes and no, two were neither yes or no, and four did not answer the question. Of those who said yes, they followed their response with comments such as:

- Everyone is kind of afraid to coming into the Longhouse but once they get over their shyness they want to learn more. It’s amazing how curious people are about real natives.
- OSU is a melting pot, people of all ethnic backgrounds are treated equally here.
- There is a Native American Longhouse and activities that support our culture.

Of those students who said no, they had the following comments:

- Not really lack of diversity, without diversity it’s hard for others to understand you

- Because there is a lack of other cultures and the cultural centers that do exist are under funded and lacking in publicity.
- ...I often thought the Native American Longhouse was for Native students to work and learn about other cultures on our campus, the way it is run is totally opposite, they hired no one who is Native American. We Native Americans talk about this all the time, and we feel not welcome there.

Those students who indicated somewhat felt that religious groups don't understand their beliefs and don't want to hear them and that the pow-wow is not as well funded as in the past. The two students who were neutral had the following to say:

- I believe that OSU may be very supportive of my culture, if my culture had a larger voice. The only way I hear about community events dealing with the Natives is through classes and other Natives whenever I actually see one.
- I don't really know how they would really offer support to "Aleuts" or Alaska Natives. The campus promotes diversity all the time, but not really the diversity within a group lumped together under 'Natives' or 'Indians'.

When asked if the students have had to educate their fellow students and/or faculty about their culture, seven students indicated yes, eight indicated no, one indicated yes and no, four indicated sometimes, and two did not answer the question. Those students who indicated yes had some of the following comments:

- Everyone thought it was Indians who started the scalping practice
- I am light-skinned Native, and I have run across many people questioning whether it is possible to be a Native and not have the stereotypical look.

- Many people do not understand how family oriented we are, or that we are peoples that need constant interaction with our people to feel adequate.
- My skin tones don't automatically show people my culture so they assume that I'm a white girl from OR. But I'm not; I'm Native and grew up in the ghetto surrounded with other Natives and African Americans. So yes if I want some one to understand my culture I have to explain it to them.

Those students who indicated sometimes had these comments:

- I feel that when someone actually talks to me, they feel that since I am Native that I know all the answers to our past and that I can speak for all Natives worldwide. I don't like that much, but overall it's been pretty good.
- On various occasions I have explained my culture and I feel like many people are oblivious to Native American issues, although I cannot say that I am completely knowledgeable about issues as well.

Of those students who said no they offered some of the following comments"

- That wouldn't be proper of me. I'm not here to clear up any misconceptions about myself or my elders. I'm here to pursue a degree in higher learning. I don't feel as if I need any special treatment from either students or faculty.
- I don't feel like I have to educate people about my culture, if they want to learn, there are plenty of ways. I don't feel like I have to go around promoting where I come from.

The one student who indicated yes and no stated, "...since everywhere you go you have to educate people on your culture. This education is needed consider they don't know that certain words are racist."

When asked if the student had experienced discrimination and/or racism during their first year on the OSU campus five students answered yes, 14 answered no, and three students declined to answer. The question was then asked, of those students who answered yes, to please share their experiences. Here are their responses:

- I've been treated as less intelligent than others when in a small group. I've never thought of myself as slower than others until my ideas were passed over.
- No thank you
- I would rather not get into it...I just swept it under the rug, because the person does not realize she is doing it...
- Somebody in a jeep called me 'chief' once while driving by. I suppose that counts...
- I've experienced discrimination from other students because I'm not a rich white girl. Well, I appear to most whites but the discrimination I've experienced has been economic but I've witnessed racial discrimination since I've been here.

The final question on the survey asked the student if they would be willing to participate in a personal interview with me, the researcher. Seven students answered yes and fifteen answered no.

#### *Personal Interview Results*

Of the seven students who indicated that they would be willing to participate in a personal interview, three ultimately participated. Between the time when the first email was sent out to the Native American list serve and when I sent my first email to schedule an appointment, one of the students had withdrawn from OSU for the winter term 2006. This student still indicated an interest in participating in an interview and over the course

of several weeks we tried to arrange a time to meet. However, because of distance and financial resources we were unable to schedule a meeting. In addition, one student stated that they did not have time and could no longer participate in a personal interview and another student never responded to my emails. After two more emails to the Native American list serve and help from OSU faculty members, three students were able to sit down and participate in a personal interview with me. For the purpose of confidentiality the students interviewed in this study will be referred to as Student A, Student B, and Student C.

Student A is a 24 year old male senior at Oregon State University majoring in Psychology. He is from the state of Oregon and is a member of the Nez Perce Tribe and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. Before coming to OSU, Student A studied at Chemeketa Community College in Salem, Oregon. Student A will be the first member of his family to earn a college degree. Student A attended the summer orientation program known as START before he started classes at OSU.

Student B is a 20 year old female junior at OSU majoring in Marine Biology and minoring in Visual Art. She is also from the state of Oregon and is a member of the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians. After graduating from a college prep high school in southern Oregon, Student B attended Bowdoin College before transferring to OSU. To save money and still study Marine Biology, student B decided to attend OSU. Student B attended the START orientation program prior to starting school at OSU.

Student C is a 19 year old female sophomore at OSU majoring in Ethnic Studies and Business Administration. As with the other two students interviewed, student C is also from the state of Oregon. She is a member of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz

Indians and is receiving financial assistance from her tribe. Student C did not attend any other colleges or universities before OSU and is in her second year of study on the main campus. As with student A and student B, student C attended the START summer orientation program before the start of her freshman year.

During the interview a series of questions were asked of each student. In addition, a series of different questions were asked based on the student's response to the survey questions. These were asked to gain clarification and more information. The responses from these interviews are what will now be presented.

The first question that was asked of each student was to describe the feelings they experienced during their first year on the OSU campus, beginning with the moment they stepped onto the campus. The words they used included intimidated, strange, fear, and nervous. All three referred to the largeness and size of OSU. The school, OSU, was either bigger than their town, high school class, or previous college. Also all three students stated that it was hard at first but they felt better as time went on or in the case of Student A they just stuck with it and now they are "comfortable with it." Student B, although a transfer student, decided to live in the residence halls her first year at OSU and had this to say in regards to her first year experience:

I had decided to live in the dorms my first year down here, even though I'd already spent a year in the dorms because I thought it would be easier to meet people. And I don't know it was definitely kind of hard to get used to at first. My classes were all huge and I kind of felt lost in the crowd. By the end of the year I kind of got into it a little better. I made a few friends not as many I'd hoped and I think part of that is because I missed the orientation stuff for living in the dorms



so I feel like that is a big way to meet people and because it wasn't my freshman year, I wasn't involved in a lot of freshman transition stuff.

The next question asked the students how their experiences during their first year on the OSU campus contributed to their quality of life in that first year. In other words, were they satisfied or dissatisfied with their experiences during their first year on the OSU campus. Two of the students were dissatisfied and one was satisfied. Of the two students who were dissatisfied they indicated:

Student A:

Kind of dissatisfaction. I heard a lot of good things about (the Indian Education Office Coordinator<sub>[CN1]</sub>)...I was told to come and talk with her. I tried seeing her two or three times, couldn't see her. I called her about five or six times, left messages all times. She never got back to me once.

Student B:

I think one of the things that's really evident of that is how often I went home during my first term at OSU and I went home a lot... largely that was just because I didn't have anything that I really wanted to do here on campus. I didn't really have people I wanted to go hang out with. I got along fine with my roommate, but we really didn't hang out, we just sort of talked when we were in our room together and that was about it. So, I don't know, I was pretty unhappy at first. It took me a long time to finally get comfortable and meet people and start staying.

For student B, it wasn't until she moved in with a new roommate winter term of her first year, someone she had met at START orientation during the summer before, when she

finally started staying at OSU more on the weekends. Her new roommate introduced her to all her friends and as Student B says “and so suddenly I had all these friends, so that made it a lot more fun and interesting to be on campus on the weekends.” For Student C, she had an older brother who had been to OSU and helped her with study tips and finding classes. She felt that her first year made her more responsible and less of a procrastinator. In addition to college, she was working part time at a job that was at a distance from campus.

When asked who these students turned to for support during their first year on the OSU campus there was a variety of responses including family members, friends, and former advisors. In addition to her older brother, Student C also mentioned that she had financial support from her tribe and parents. She said “...I definitely wouldn't be here if it wasn't for my tribe.” Student A mentioned his former advisor at his community college and his wife:

...so the first year that I was here, I'd only, real thing I had to go off of is I did have an older counselor from my TRIO program back in Chemeketa, and she kind of helped me out, get things settled in, some of the classes, because I couldn't get any help over here. But other than that though, I mean it wasn't too bad, I mean it wasn't terrible or anything.

When asked if there was anyone at OSU that he turned to for support student A stated the following:

Um, at OSU no, not necessarily because I didn't know too many people. I was an out of townner. I came here... My girlfriend, or now my wife, I went to her but she isn't going to OSU though either, but she helped out a lot too, to try to get me

to do my homework and stuff like that

Student B stated that during her first year at her former college, she turned to a friend for support and he encouraged her and reminded her that not everyone has access to what she had access to.

The responses to the next question, which asked who served as a role model/mentor during the first year of college at OSU, were similar to the previous question. Student A mentioned his wife, but also spoke of his lack of involvement on campus and how this may be the reason he did not find a role model/mentor at OSU. He said,

After the first two terms I stopped talking to the counselor up at TRIO, because I thought I was pretty well adjusting to the classes that I was taking. Here at OSU unfortunately I didn't socialize enough, and I think that was my biggest problem.

I should have went to the Longhouse and I should have went and partook in a lot of the school activities, but I didn't because I've always lived off campus. I never lived on campus before, so it was just kind of time consuming to come back here.

Student B joined the AISES student group and found the president of the group helpful and turned to her for questions about campus procedures and general guidance. Student C again, spoke of her brother. She said "He made me feel like I do it too, if he could it then I could do it." Student C also mentioned that in her second year at OSU she has found help from her academic advisor, who is also her job supervisor and a professor in her academic department.

When asked what their experiences have been with fellow students, staff, and faculty during their first year on the OSU campus, the responses were varied.

Student A:

The one major thing that I get from a lot of people is when they find out that I am Native American they think I know about all Native Americans. And then sometimes you get the people that think they know about Native Americans, but are either misinformed or miss-educated about it.

Student C:

Well I met a lot of really nice kids. I actually met some other Native Americans, so that was kind of nice. We had a little bit in common, so we could talk about our history and our culture and stuff. Everybody that I've met that isn't of the same background has been very respectful, and wants to know, and wants to learn about what I do, and what my tribe does, and where we came from, and stuff like that.

In addition, when asked if Student C has ever had to speak for the entire Native American community in a class by a teacher she said no. She did say that she has had to “bite” her tongue when in a Native American class there has been people talking that “really don’t know what they’re talking about.” Student B had an interesting response to this question. She said that because she did not look native when she told people she was, they laughed. She went on to say,

Because I don't really look Native I mean, there are some like facial features, but I'm not really. I'm not dark. I don't have black hair. I have blue eyes. So a lot of people kind of snicker at that... That's pretty much the only interactions I really had, but I don't know. I feel like originally at the Longhouse, there's kind of a divide between people who are obviously native and people who are not so

obviously native. And I think that's just something when you first start meeting this people. I don't know it's kind of weird. But now that I've been there for so long, I don't really have that problem any more.

When asked if she felt she had to explain herself to people who laugh or snicker and said she didn't look native, she said,

Yeah, and I actually talked about it a little bit with other students at the NAL who look more white than they do Native. Because there's a lot of people who still consider themselves at least somewhat Native, even if they only have like an eighth or sixteenth of that heritage in them. And so I talked to a lot of people and they said that they didn't really want to get involved at first because they weren't sure how it would be received. So it was hard to get over, but I stuck with it and it was really good because there were already some people involved and yeah, that made it a little more welcoming and they can help you out and guide you along.

The students mentioned a variety of reasons that led to their success their first year of college on the OSU campus. Student A mentioned a lot of studying, lack of resources for distractions (i.e. video games and television), and his wife. In addition he said that his mother and the fact that he would be the first person in his family group to have a degree “really got me to keep on trucking.” Student B mentioned friends, her academic advisor, and student groups. She said that the student groups “kept me like involved in what's going on on campus, instead of just coming here and going to classes, and then going home. And I think that's a big part of any student's success in college.” Student C mentioned her family and that fact that they helped and pushed her to come

back for her second year.

Each student that participated in a personal interview indicated on the on line survey that they experienced several different challenges to their education during their first year of college. These included missing family, family pressures, class/educational work, financial costs, social interactions/cultural misunderstandings, time management, and having a job while going to college. When asked to explain and give examples of each of the challenges they encountered, they offered the following responses for each challenge.

### Miss Family

Student C:

Of course I missed my parents; it was my first time ever being away from home. But it was a lot easier being so close because I could go home on the weekends and they could come out and see me.

### Family Pressures

Student A:

Again, I would be the first person in my family, and relatives and extended family as well, that would get a degree from a 4-year institution. So I get a lot of comments that you need to make sure to get your degree and what not, and that's good. But that also makes you feel like you're on a pedestal, that you have to live up to people's expectations. And that can be kind of off putting when you are trying to do work and squeeze all this other stuff in.

Student C:

My family actually didn't like pressure me. I just felt like I would be

disappointing them, because both my brothers went here, you know, if I didn't go to school and I didn't do this.

### Class/Educational Work

Student A:

you get a lot of workload and what not when you're a full time student... sometimes the work seems a little, like right now I'm taking Statistics 352, and that just kind of seems overwhelming, I'm not used to that type of work. I'm not used to doing it that fast compared to what I was doing in high school.

### Financial Costs

Student A:

...you've got rent, you've got books, half my stuff for going to school is loans. Most of the money, beforehand my wife wasn't able to go to college, because she's not 24, so she's not independent. So yeah. And her parents were making just enough to where she had to pay too much to go. But they weren't making enough to help her out in the first place, so she couldn't go. So we had like a lot of bills, so we had to pay those off. I'm still trying to pay some of those off. Neither of our parents can help us, either one, because they are not able to. So that's where the financial comes in, is we have to put our money where we can put it, really carefully.

Student C:

But I did that because I was having financial problems (working at the casino in Lincoln City, OR). But like I said before, my tribe helped me out so much. But you know when you have to pay all the bills, you kind of have to have a job.

Social Interactions/Cultural Misunderstandings

Student A:

Again, I'm pretty antisocial; I don't really talk to too many people. I'm actually pretty shocked I came here to do this, but I figured if this might help other Natives or other minorities to come to the school, I think that might be worth it. It's not that I don't like people; I'd just rather go to school, listen to the lecture, get my notes, go home, do the homework, come back, turn it in. That's pretty much the way it is right now, I just want to get my degree. Because of that, normally I stay home, I don't do much but the social interactions I do have again are filled with oh, you're Native American, you must know everything about this. Let me ask you about this tribe... Or just a lot of things I don't really want to talk about with people, I'd rather talk about other issues that to me are more important right now. Cultural misunderstandings, that's what that would go under that too, cultural misunderstandings.

Student B:

Yeah, with the social interactions just kind of the general, I don't know, I guess it would be people not opening up to me right away at the Longhouse. But also just I had a lot of trouble meeting people within my classes and I don't know what that's due to, maybe that's me. But I think that's kind of strange, especially since I'm finding it easier to make friends in my art classes and my science classes. And that may just have something to do with the amount of people in the class and types of people in different classes.

Time Management/Having a Job While Going to College



Student A:

Finding the time to make sure I can do my homework that I end up having... And I hate taking buses, so normally walks. So that's why I walk and what not, both ways. Right now I have more time. When I filled this out, (the online Survey) I didn't have much time because I was doing classes every single day. This term, I only have Monday, Wednesday, Friday. Tuesday and Thursday I get off, so it's better now than it was then.

Student B:

I'm a double major; I end up kind of trying to fit as many classes into a term as possible. Especially last spring, I was taking 19 credits.... And two of them were lab classes and one of them was a research class. I spent like 9 hours in the lab a week, which is kind of ridiculous. So, I don't know, it's gotten a little easier but I don't know. I feel like sometimes I don't want to come to campus and do this stuff that I need to do. I'd rather just sit at home. But it's kind of a challenge to keep myself motivated sometimes.

Student C:

There is never enough hours in the day to finish it all, and you have so many classes, and so much homework from each class. When I was trying to work, I was actually working in Lincoln City at the casino. And so I was working there 4 days a week and I was taking 14 credits out here. So that was kind of crazy for me.

After each student answered a set of predetermined questions they were then asked several more questions to clarify and gain more information regarding their

answers to the online survey. These interview questions dealt with self identity and other responses that needed further explanation.

Student A was the only student to not self identify on the survey. When asked why and if he did self identify, he responded by saying,

Self identity I think is a really hard question. Mostly because I can say I am Native American, but I'm not on the reservation, or I don't partake in a lot of the Native American activities that go on. But I can't otherwise say that I'm not that too, because that's what a lot of the people perceive me as. And, I don't know how to explain it, it's like I see myself as a Native American by blood. But I don't do a lot of the cultural things because I am not near Native American cultural things, with the exception of the Longhouse, which doesn't do it as often as say the reservation does. So that was the reason why I didn't mark that down, because I wasn't sure how to answer it in the first place.

In addition, Student A, on the survey felt that OSU is highly supportive of higher class families compared to lower class families. When asked to explain this comment, Student A responded by stating,

I think I would probably have to say the bureaucracy as a whole, as an educational institution, I mean. For things like financial aid, if I mess up on my classes because of any of these things that I may have, compared to someone else that I hear often, you know, my father's paying for this, my father's paying for that. If I mess up I'm screwed, I lose my financial aid, I have to get a job, I have to start making payments on my loans. If I can't get back into school in time to get a deferment, which means I've got to wait until all that's paid off to come back and

what not... And to me, it just seems like all, the whole system favors that. And with the way, and unfortunately I don't think it's exactly the school itself, but more the government. Grants... you've got things like work study being taken out, yeah. So a lot of the funds, uh, increase in loan interest. And then of course you've got OSU's, they're going to raise the tuition by 80%, that's supposed to start this summer. So, all of that is a huge financial burden on someone who doesn't have the finances to be going to school in the first place. So that's mostly what I was talking about.

Student B indicated on her survey that she wished the community at OSU would take more of an interest in finding out about the diverse opportunities that they have available to them. When asked to explain this response she said,

Well, what I meant by finding out about diverse opportunities is really I feel like most students who don't have a background in some minority, that they're not really comfortable just walking into the Black Cultural Center, the Asian Pacific Cultural Center, and just going to a lot of their events. And I wish that things would be a little more open and I don't know exactly how you go about doing that...It's just I know that NAL has so many different events and they're not just oriented to Native students. And I feel like a lot of times that their events kind of go unnoticed by the general campus population. So it may just be that we need to kind of get more information about what goes on there out to people and maybe that would be something to do with START orientations or with just the freshman class.

Student B also responded “not really” when asked on the survey if she has ever had to educate her fellow students, staff, and faculty at OSU. She responded in the interview by stating the following,

For the most part, I don't really feel like I have much to explain about my culture. Sometimes, people are like you know, what do you, what makes you Native? And I don't know that I really have an answer to that, it's just kind of some things that I was born into and I'm glad to continue to be a part of. But I haven't always had Native culture because my parents were divorced and I live with my mom who is not where I get the Native blood from. So when I visit my dad, I kind of, I get immersed in that a little more but it's not something I always think about. So I feel like more that I've been educated being here and being involved with Native groups and kind of seeing what other Native students lives are like, you know, what they grew up with. And, I don't know, it's really interesting to me to see all these people from the Grand Ronde reservation area down here, because that's a lifestyle I don't know anything about.

When asked if being on the OSU campus and being involved in the different Native student groups has made her want to learn more about her own heritage, Student B said yes.

Student C indicated on her survey that one of the reasons she chose OSU was because of family. When asked to explain this, she stated that because both of her brothers came to OSU and because it is close to home, only an hour and a half away, she felt it would be easier than going to another state and having no one. Student C also indicated on her survey that she used the math and writing labs during her first year on

the OSU campus. When asked if she found these programs helpful, she responded with a yes. When asked how she found out about them she said,

I found out about both of them from my writing class and my math class. And I thought they were both helpful. You could go in pretty much when it was convenient for you between those hours and they would help you, give you suggestions. And it wasn't like they were telling you what to do but you kind of had an idea of how you could improve your writing or your math. They helped explain everything.

Student C did not respond on the survey when asked if she had been involved with any student groups, either native or non-native. When asked if she was aware or not of such groups she responded by saying,

I was aware. I was just having such a hard time with work and everything; I just didn't have enough time. I thought that committing to that would put my school work further behind.

In addition she did say that she has been more involved with groups and organizations such as the Native American Collaborative Institute and the Longhouse in her second year on campus.

### *Summary of the Results*

By using a mixed method research approach in this study, the online survey and personal interviews, the results yielded significant information on the first year experiences of Native American/Alaskan Native undergraduate students at Oregon State University. The students who participated in the online survey, the personal interview, or both disclosed personal information and experiences that revealed the kind of challenges

they have faced and how those challenges have affected their quality of life, and satisfaction or dissatisfaction during their first year at OSU. The next chapter will serve to provide an analysis of these results relative to the study's research questions.

## Chapter V: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore, from current Native American and Alaskan Native students, personal experiences as first year college students at Oregon State University. The critical research questions of the study include:

- What are the first year experiences of Native American/Alaskan Native students at Oregon State University?
- What barriers/challenges do Native American/Alaskan Native students face during their first year on campus?
- What has contributed to their success and satisfaction or dissatisfaction during their first year of study on the Oregon State Universities campus?

Based on the experiences of the survey respondents and the students who participated in the personal interviews, there are several key areas where students faced challenges and successes during their first year on the OSU campus. These included time management, financial costs, class/educational work, and missing family. Two of these factors were presented in the literature review under the headings of Family Influences and Financial Factors. In addition to the identification of the experiences that native students faced during their first year on campus and how their experiences contributed to their persistence, this chapter will discuss how Oregon State University and more importantly, Student Affairs professionals can create and facilitate positive, effective, and culturally relevant first year programming for their Native American and Alaskan Native student population.

The following themes emerged as the significant barriers and challenges, as well as opportunities and successes during native students' first year on the OSU campus.

### *Time Management*

In the online survey, 14 students indicated that time management was a challenge for them during their first year of college on the Oregon State University campus. Additionally, all three students who participated in a personal interview stated that time management was a challenge for them. Trying to juggle responsibilities such as family, school, work, finances, and involvement in student groups can create a great deal of stress for Native American students during their first year of college. Many native students are first generation college students and therefore may not have someone in their life explaining to them how college is going to work. However, there are ways that colleges and universities can help students learn to be more effective at managing their time.

Summer Bridge programs and campus visitations can help native students prepare for what lies ahead in their college career and what they will experience. According to Wells, summer bridge programs can be effective for acclimating minority students to “college-level coursework and the campus atmosphere before they begin college” (1997, p36). Additionally, in an article by Kuh & Umbach, they talk about a bridge program created by Ursinus College where the college brings minority students to campus three weeks before the start of the semester to help them become familiar with campus and “bridge the gap between high school and college” (2005, p19). In his interview, Student A remembered and talked about coming to the OSU campus in high school with either a high school or TRIO program and finding out about the Longhouse and other Native American programs on campus.



At some point during these programs and college visitations it would be an appropriate time to discuss with students how their day to day life will be different in college. Informing native students of the time commitment that college requires will hopefully prepare them more for their first year on a college campus like Oregon State University. Hrabowski states that “Institutions with the strongest first-year intervention programs for first-year students understand the importance of not waiting until students reach college to begin addressing the importance of building academic skills” (2005, p128).

Another appropriate time to discuss these changes is during summer orientation programs. Student A said, when he attend a START orientation program for OSU, “that actually probably helped me out quite a bit, and getting oriented to the college and where the buildings are, the classes I need to take and what not..” His response only speaks to the logistics of college and not the practical aspects such as how to manage the classes you take with all the other responsibilities that a student, and more importantly, a native student will need to be concerned about.

Student C, in her personal interview, offered a wonderful suggestion that would help new, first time native students to the OSU campus. She suggested that upper classmen or graduate students serve as mentors to newer native students on campus. This type of program could serve multiple purposes, one being that a student who has been in college a few years could advise the new student on how to manage all the responsibilities they will have their first year of college. According to Jackson, Smith, & Hill, “Structured mentoring programs that connect advanced Native American students with beginning students may be another mean of addressing the potential isolation of

Native American students on campuses” (2003, p562). The ultimate goal of a program like this would be to help the student become engaged on campuses while learning to effectively manage their time in relation to class, student groups, and potentially a job without becoming over taxed.

### *Financial Costs*

According to Wells, “...the major barriers to higher education for Native Americans are economic difficulties (coupled with reduced federal aid to college students)...” (1989, p2). Of the students in this study 13 out of 22 reported that financial costs were a challenge for them in their first year of college. Additionally, two of the students interviewed talked about their challenges with a lack of financial resources. Student C talked about how her first year she had to drive from Corvallis to Lincoln City four times a week to work at her tribe’s casino. She stated that not only was this a financial burden, it was a time management burden as well. Her second year at OSU she did not work at the casino because she received financial assistance from her tribe. Student A expressed his frustration with others who assumed he is getting funding from his tribe and “all this money for being Native” (i.e. from the federal government). He said that he doesn’t get any funding from his tribe and has been using school loans to pay for college. In addition, Student A qualified for work study, but because OSU ran out of work study money, he was unable to use it or obtain a work study position. In a similar study done Berrington found the same results with her respondents stating that “Participants supported that locating financial assistance and scholarship money has been very difficult. Students have had to rely on loans and working” (2003, p61).

One way in which institutions could help their Native American and Alaskan Native students is to employ a recommendation from Reyhner and Dodd. They suggest that there be a financial aid liaison, for native students, who “is familiar with tribal BIA and scholarships programs” (1995, ¶38).

#### *Class/Educational Work*

In this study 12 out of 22 students indicated that class and/or educational work has been a challenge for them during their first year of college on the Oregon State University campus. Two of the students interviewed also mentioned that class, and the work that comes from class, have been difficult. As with time management, preparation and expectations need to be clearly outlined to new students before or as soon as they arrive on campus. More importantly, faculty and academic advisors need to be strong influences in the students’ first year; encouraging and providing support to the student. These relationships could mean the difference between whether a student succeeds or not.

According to Watson, Terrell, Wright, et al., “The importance of establishing relationships with individuals on the collegiate campus is important for all students, but this issue becomes a matter of utmost importance for the minority student” (2002, p102). In this study, 15 students responded that they have found support from academic advisors or professors. In addition, student C mentioned two different faculty members who have helped her during her second year at OSU. Would there have been a difference if she would have found these faculty members earlier in her college career? Student A expressed his frustrations and dissatisfaction during his first year on the OSU campus as a result of trying to contact a faculty member for help and guidance and receiving no response. Because of this, Student A contacted his academic advisor from his previous

institution, and consequently, did not connect with any faculty or advisors on the OSU campus during his first year.

The experiences of these students and other students in similar studies show that faculty and advisors play an important role in the success of students during the first year. Berrington found that:

All of the participants agreed that specific faculty members have played a critical role in their success. All of the participants shared positive experiences about at least one significant faculty member who was supportive and caring, who nurtured and mentored them, encouraged them and believed in them (2003, p97).

A similar study conducted by Reyhner and Dodd reported that, "...teachers were the strongest influences in the students' educational experiences and that students appreciate teachers who compliment students for doing well, provide evidence of respect for students and who are caring persons" (1995, ¶7). Reyhner and Dodd also found, from students who had dropped out, both Native and non-Native, "perceived their teachers as uncaring." They go on to say, "This lack of caring at both the high school and college level often results from the large number of students that teachers have to deal with on a day to day basis" (¶10). This is a very real danger for institutions such as OSU where their total enrollment for fall of 2005 (at the time of the first survey email) was approximately 19,200 students. Additionally, large intuitions like OSU often have first year student classes of 150 students or more. When faculty and advisors take the time to engage a Native student, it can make all the difference. Jackson, Smith, and Hill found that when a faculty member "personally engaged the student" the student perceived that faculty member as caring about them. This produced two results, "This perception of

care from faculty/staff gave them (the student) confidence that they has (a) a place to go to ask questions about the college or university and (b) an important personal connection to the college or university” (2003, p553). It would seem that by just increasing the amount of on-on-one time that faculty and advisors spend with a Native student could greatly increase their satisfaction and performance within the university during their first year of college.

### *Missing Family*

Missing family was the fourth challenge identified by students in this study on their first year on the OSU campus. 11 out of 22 students indicated this factor as significant. Of the three students interviewed only the youngest, a true sophomore, indicated that this was a challenge. It would seem as time goes on the Native student either moves past this feeling or finds ways to replace it. One way in which Native students have found to replace their feelings of missing and being away from their families is to become involved with out of class experiences such as the Longhouse and other Native and non-Native student programs. In this study 13 students out of 22 were involved with one or more Native and/or non-Native student group or organization. In addition, all but one (12 of 13 students) of these students said that these programs were helpful to them. Several students reported that programs such as the Native American Longhouse were great places to meet people and network with friends, a home away from home, and provided them a place where students had something in common. Student C said that she felt that the Longhouse was a comfort to her and “Most other groups and clubs aren’t that tight-knit.” It appears that the OSU Native American Longhouse is providing a place where Native students can form a family unit.

In a similar study, Jackson, Smith, and Hill (2003) found that “Students talked about the positive effects of Native American clubs, multicultural offices and other groups organized to provide social support to Native American students” (2003, p554). In this study, some students suggested that involvement in these groups be mandatory. Watson, Terrell, Wright, et al. (2002) have stated that these connections are vitally important for minority students:

Especially for the minority student, out-of-classroom engagements, primarily social in nature, constitute perhaps the most important component in their collegiate experiences. According to Hughes (1987), socially oriented climates are crucial for learning and growth for many minority students on majority campuses...(p102)

As was stated earlier in the literature review, Kuh (1991) explained that students who are involved with groups and organizations out of the classroom generally have a much more positive feeling about other aspects of college such as academics and faculty interactions. This would also appear to be true with this study. Of those students who reported being involved with at least one social group, they were much more positive in describing their overall campus experience during their first year of college at OSU. Those who were not involved did not have much to say or if they did, the responses were generally negative.

#### *Summary of the Discussion*

As a result of both the online survey and individual interviews with Native American/Alaskan Native students at Oregon State University, a number of barriers and/or challenges were identified including time management, financial costs,

class/educational work, and family issues. These challenges also contributed to some students' dissatisfaction during their first year. However, a number of resources were also identified that contributed to native students success and satisfaction during their first year. These included meaningful relationships with faculty and/or advisors, having financial resources from tribal governments, the ability to be involved in student groups, and having a Longhouse where students can come together. In the final chapter, recommendations for both practice and further research will be discussed as well as concluding remarks.

## **Chapter VI: Recommendations & Conclusion**

### *Recommendations for Practice*

Based upon the themes that emerged from the online survey and interviews with students, the following are recommendations for how institutions like Oregon State University can better serve its Native American and Alaskan Native populations especially during their first year at the institution.

- Continue to support Native American/Alaskan Native student organizations such as the Native American Longhouse and other student groups.
- Promote and highly encourage involvement in Native and non-Native student groups and organizations during the students first year of college.
- Create liaisons for Native students in key university offices such as financial aid, registrars, business affairs, and admissions. Staff should be trained in understanding and being sensitive to cultural norms and government and state rules/procedures.
- Develop a mentor program that allows upper division and graduate students, faculty, and staff to help and support incoming, new, Native students both freshman and transfers.
- Develop a summer bridge programs that brings new freshman and transfer Native students to OSU for several weeks before classes begin. Curriculum should include study skills, time management, financial resources, expectations of faculty, and support/social services available.
- Develop a Native American Studies Department and offer a Native American Studies degree to better educate the community regarding Native American



culture and issues. Offer more Native American/Alaskan Native courses and incorporate them into the baccalaureate core or general education requirements.

- Incorporate faculty and institution expectations of students into orientation programs.
- Create orientation programs and first year academic learning communities that are centered on Native American traditions, heritage, and culture. Highlight those tribal communities within the region with guest speakers such as tribal elders and tribal leaders. Have the location of the seminar class in the Native American Longhouse or other culture-specific location.
- Explore the idea of having themed floor(s) in the residence halls that is centered on Natives of North America. These floors could be open to both Native and non-Native student who are interested.

#### *Recommendations for Further Research*

Based on the information gathered from this study, while acknowledging the limitations of this study, the following are recommendations that should be considered for further research:

- The students who took part in this research were all current OSU undergraduate students. It is recommended that future research concentrate on students who have left OSU after their first year of college.
- The experiences of the students in this study only focused on those in their first year on the OSU campus. A comparison of native student's first and second year experiences could be done in further research.

- This study defined first year experiences to include both new freshman and new transfer students to the OSU campus. Future research should focus on one or the other and possibly compare and/or contrast the experiences of each group.
- It was found in this study that students valued the out-of-class experiences in which they were able to participate. It is recommend that further study be done to determine if institutions are offering enough and/or the appropriate social/out-of-class opportunities and how they can be improved or enhanced.
- This study was done at a large, public, predominantly white institution. Similar studies could be done at small, private, small public, community colleges, and tribal colleges to further enhance the knowledge regarding native student experiences in higher education.
- Students' backgrounds and other pre-college personal and environmental variables did not play a role in this study. It is recommended that future research include and examine the environments of where and how students grow up. For example, did the student live on a reservation, in a city, or in a rural area of the country?
- This study only examined the first year experiences of Native American/Alaskan Native students from the students' perspective. It is recommended that further research include the perspective of Native and non-Native faculty members.

### *Conclusion*

Native American and Alaskan Native students can be, and are, successful college students during their first year on a college campus. It is evident that the experiences they have during their first year do, sometimes, create challenges. However, the students

in this study have persisted to their second, third, and fourth years of college demonstrating that they have overcome these challenges. The history of education for Native Americans is a tainted one filled with deception, mistrust, and assimilation. The modern higher education institution can help to make amends for this past.

The students in this study have found success and satisfaction through many different types of support systems including family, each other, faculty members, tribes, and student groups. Because of these opportunities and support networks the students in this study have discovered a yearning to learn more about themselves, help their tribes and communities, and do something that, in many cases, no one else in their family has done. Hopefully, through the knowledge and experiences shared by students in this study, higher education systems can better support and provide appropriate opportunities for Native American and Alaskan Native students during their first year in college, ultimately leading to persistence and continued academic and personal success.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A

### INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Project Title: **The First Year Experience and Persistence of Native American Students at a Predominantly White Four Year Institution**  
 Principal Investigator: **Dr. Rich Shintaku, OSU College of Education**  
 Co-Investigator(s): **Jennifer J. Reeves, OSU Graduate Student**

#### **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?**

You are being invited to take part in a research study designed to better understand the first year experiences of Native American Students on the Oregon State University campus. This study seeks to document what the first year experiences of Native American Students are and how these experiences affected their quality of life and persistence at OSU. Information regarding your experiences during your first year of college on the OSU campus will be used to better serve other Native American students at OSU and similar institutions. The results of this research will be published as a master's thesis and may be used for publication and presentations. The results may also be used to initiate further study at this and other similar institutions. We are studying this because there is little information regarding how Native Americans students experience college in their first year of study.

#### **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS FORM?**

This consent form gives you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask any questions about the research, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else that is not clear. When all of your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in this study or not.

#### **WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?**

You are being invited to take part in this study because you have completed your first year of college at Oregon State University. In addition, you are being invited to take part in this study because you have filled out the First Year Experience Survey and indicated that you would be interested in providing more information to the researcher and the study by participating in face-to-face interviews with the researcher.

#### **WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THIS STUDY AND HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?**

If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to take part in one tape-recorded interview session in a classroom in the Valley Library on the Oregon State University campus. The interview will take approximately 60 to 90 minutes. You will be asked a series of questions regarding your experiences as a first time student on the Oregon State University campus.

If you agree to take part in this study, your involvement will last for approximately 60 to 90 minutes in length for the interview. There is the possibility that a second interview will be

<b>OSU IRB Approval Date: <u>11-14-05</u></b> <b>Approval Expiration Date: <u>11-13-06</u></b>
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necessary for clarification purposes only. It is anticipated that the second interview, if needed, will last approximately 30 to 60 minutes.

### **WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THIS STUDY?**

The possible risks and/or discomforts associated with the procedures described in this study include a sense of emotional discomfort as a result of sharing your experiences. However, you may decline to answer any questions and end the personal interview session at any time.

### **WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?**

We do not know if you will benefit from being in this study. However, we hope that, in the future, other people or institutions of higher education might benefit from this study because they will be able to provide appropriate and accurate support to Native American Students in their first year of college.

### **WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING?**

You will not be paid for being in this research study. If you wish, the researcher will provide you with a copy of the final thesis.

### **WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION I GIVE?**

The information you provide during this research study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. One aspect of this study involves making audio recordings of you. To help protect your confidentiality, we will use identification code numbers only on data forms, audio tapes, and transcripts. In addition computer files will be password-protected. If we write a report or article about this study or share the study data set with others, we will do so in such a way that you cannot be directly identified.

The only two people who will have ongoing access to the original source of the information will be the researcher, Jennifer Reeves, and the principal investigator, Dr. Rich Shintaku. The professional transcriptionist will have access to the audiotapes only during the transcription process. You will receive a copy of the transcript from your interview(s). All copies of the audio tapes will be destroyed at the end of this study. The paper and digital copies of the transcripts will be kept and stored in a lock box for a minimum of three years after the conclusion of the research study.

If the results of this project are published your identity will not be made public.

**Audio Taping:** Audio recordings of the personal interview sessions will be made only to allow for accurate comments. A professional transcriptionist will transcribe the audio tapes but will not know the names of the participants on the tapes.

\_\_\_\_\_ Participants Initials

### **DO I HAVE A CHOICE TO BE IN THE STUDY?**

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering. If you decide not to take part in this study, your decision will have no effect on the quality of care, services, etc., you receive.

You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study. You are free to skip any questions that you would prefer not to answer. If you choose to withdraw from this project before it ends, the researchers may keep information collected about you and this information may be included in study reports.

### **WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?**

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact: Dr. Rich Shintaku at (541) 737-9324 or [rich.shintaku@oregonstate.edu](mailto:rich.shintaku@oregonstate.edu) or Jennifer Reeves at (541) 760-3034 or [jennifer.reeves@oregonstate.edu](mailto:jennifer.reeves@oregonstate.edu).

If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Protections Administrator, at (541) 737-3437 or by email at [IRB@oregonstate.edu](mailto:IRB@oregonstate.edu).

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Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Participant's Name (printed):

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(Signature of Participant)

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(Date)

**OSU IRB Approval Date: 11-14-05  
Approval Expiration Date: 11-13-06**

## Appendix B

### Online Survey Questions

Hello and Greetings!

My name is Jennifer Reeves and I am a part time graduate student in College Students Services Administration and a full time Admissions Advisor in the Office of Admissions for Oregon State University. I am currently writing my thesis study on the experiences of Native American students in their first year of college at Oregon State University. The purpose of this study is to document Native student's experiences in their first year of college on OSU's campus and how these experiences contributed to their quality of life and persistence. If you are a sophomore, Junior, or Senior, I invite you to please fill out the following survey. If you are a freshman or graduate student, I ask you to please **NOT** fill out the following survey.

I am also looking for 3 to 4 people to participate in individual interview to learn more about their first year experiences. If you are interested, please indicate so at the end of this survey and I will contact you. Your identity for this survey will be kept confidential and the information you provide will be used for the purpose of this study only. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me, the student researcher, at 737-9218 or [Jennifer.Reeves@oregonstate.edu](mailto:Jennifer.Reeves@oregonstate.edu), or my advisor, the principal investigator, Dr. Rich Shintaku at 737-9324 or [Rich.Shintaku@oregonstate.edu](mailto:Rich.Shintaku@oregonstate.edu). I appreciate your time and willingness to participate in this study.

Thank you!

Jennifer Reeves

1. Year in School:
2. Male or Female:
3. Age:
4. Home town and State:
5. Major at OSU:
6. How do you self identity (Native American, American Indian, Alaska Native, Other)?
7. What tribe(s)/band(s) are you a member of?
8. Did you transfer to OSU from another college/university, community college, or tribal college?
9. If so, where did you transfer from? Please list all previous schools.
10. Did you take any time off (other then the summer break) from higher education before you transferred to OSU? If so, how long?
11. Did you take any time off (other then the summer break) between your high school graduation and freshman year at OSU? If so, how long?
12. Why did you pick OSU for your higher education studies?
13. Are you happy with your decision to come to OSU? Why or Why not?
14. Why did you decide to peruse a higher education degree?
15. What have been challenges for you in your first year on the OSU campus? (These could be family, social, educational challenges, etc.).

16. Did you use any of the following support services during your first year on campus (Please mark all that apply): tutoring, math lab, writing lab, EOP Office, Indian Education Office, Other?
17. Were you involved any of the following native student groups at OSU during your first year on campus (Please mark all that apply: Native American Long House, AISES (American Indian Science and Engineering Society, NASA (Native American Student Association), NAMS (Native Americans in Marine Science), NNAHS (National Native American Honor Society), Other.
18. What, if any, non-native student groups are you involved with? Please list all.
19. Did you find these opportunities (native and non-native student groups and support services) helpful and beneficial? Please explain?
20. What kinds of negative events caused you dissatisfaction?
21. Do you feel that the OSU community is supportive of you and your culture? Please give examples if possible.
22. Do you feel that you have had to educate your fellow students and faculty about your culture at OSU?
23. Have you experienced racism during your first year on the OSU campus?
24. Would you be willing to participate in a face-to-face interview with the researcher?

## Appendix C

### Personal Interview Questions

1. Could you please describe the feelings you experienced during your first year at OSU. Please start from when you first stepped on campus until the end of classes the following spring.
2. How did your experiences, during your first year of college at OSU, affect your quality of life?\* Please explain giving specific examples.
3. Who did you turn to for support to help you through your first year of college? Please describe the role that each person played and in what way they supported you.
4. Why did you turn to the people you did for support?
5. Who, if any, served as a role model(s) and/or mentor(s) to you during your first year of college at OSU? Why?
6. What were your experiences interacting with fellow students, staff, and faculty during your first year of college at OSU? How did they react when they learned what culture you are from?
7. What do you feel lead to your success as a student in your first year of college at OSU?
8. Did you attend a START orientation program prior to the start of your classes your first year at OSU?
9. What suggestions would you offer OSU administrators to help ease the transition of first year Native American students?

\*Quality of life refers to your satisfaction or dissatisfaction with your experiences during the first year of college on the Oregon State University campus



## Appendix D

### Additional Interview Questions for Each Student

#### Additional Questions asked of Student A

1. What is your current student status (i.e. Junior or Senior)?
2. How do you self-identify?
3. You indicated that you took one year off between high school and your first year at OSU, but that you did not take any time off between Chemeketa CC and your transfer to OSU. Could you please clarify?
4. You indicated on the survey that you have experienced challenges with family pressures to succeed, class and/or educational work, financial costs, social interactions, cultural misunderstandings, and time management. Could you give an example of each?
5. You indicated on the survey that you believe that OSU highly supports higher class families compared to lower class ones. Could you explain or give an example of why you feel this.

#### Additional Questions asked of Student B

1. Where did you attend High School?
2. You indicated on the survey that you have experienced challenges with social interactions and time management. Could you give an example of each?
3. You indicated on the survey that you wish the community here on campus would take a little more interest in finding out about all the diverse opportunities they have at OSU.
4. What kind of suggestions would you offer to the OSU administration to help the campus community do this?
5. When asked on the survey if you have had to educate your fellow students and/or faculty about your culture here at OSU you answered not really. Could you explain this answer?

#### Additional Questions asked of Student C

1. You indicated on the survey that one of the reasons you choose OSU is because of family. Could you explain why family was one of these reasons?
2. You indicated on the survey that you have experienced challenges with missing family, family pressures to succeed, class and/or educational work, financial costs, having a job in addition to college, and time management. Could you give an example of each?
3. Did you find the math and writing labs helpful? Why or why not.
4. According to your survey responses, you were not involved with any student groups or activities your first year here at OSU. Can you tell me why and if you aware of such organizations. If you were not aware, how do you think we can get the word out to first year students?