Native Higher Education in the United States and Canada

A Report for the Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islanders

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SUMMARY: This report focuses on higher educational programs for Indigenous peoples of the continental United States and Canada. Along with examining the strong critique that has arisen to counter the long history of failure in Native higher education, the report discusses the alternatives that have emerged over the past four decades. The report, further, focuses on the need for aligning the strengths of successful programs in addressing continuing student needs even as innovative approaches emerge.

Introduction

Education for Native peoples has been a central concern of US and Canadian federal policy for over two hundred years, but *higher education* has only become a focus within educational policy over the past four decades. The purpose of this report is to summarize the broad outlines of contemporary academic research and discourse on Native higher educational policy, with specific attention to the interplay between academically focused programs like Native studies, student support programs on mainstream campuses, and the Aboriginally-controlled colleges and universities movement.

Each of these three broad categories plays an important role in the landscape of contemporary Native higher education in the US and Canada. The growing number of aboriginally-controlled higher education institutions (over 35 in the US and several in Canada, including First Nations University) have provided unprecedented Indigenous control over higher educational programs, provided access to college-level training in dozens of communities that previously were isolated from such institutions, and demonstrably increased the numbers of Indigenous students enrolled in college (especially those from the most economically deprived social strata).

Student service programs have provided a continental network of centers and initiatives that recruit Native students to non-Indigenous institutions and offer those students mentoring, social networks, financial aid counseling, and other opportunities to persist on campuses that have previously been more remarkable for Native student failure than success. Native studies (also called, variously, Native

American studies, First Nation studies, Indigenous studies, American Indian studies, Hawaiian studies, and Aboriginal studies) is the most prevalent and highly developed academically-focused phenomenon on those same campuses, and has become in many institutions an academic home for Indigenous students.[1] More than an academic home, Native studies and other academically-focused Native programs are important exactly because they are academic programs in academic institutions; that is, these programs participate in the central work of higher educational institutions (i.e., degree granting, research).

Written as it is by someone whose career has been spent in Native studies, this report features a bias toward the importance of academic programs. The more important point here, though, is that all Native higher education programs, whether located in Native communities or on major college campus, need to have a primary focus on the academic purposes of higher education since academic achievement is the primary purpose of higher education. The fact that this primary focus is not always present, even in some Native academic units, deserves much more focus than it has in the literature. Though the hope is that this report's description of the state of Native higher education in the US and Canada will be informative to even those who might prefer a focus on other issues. The underlying purpose is that this argument will be helpful to those considering similar issues in other Indigenous contexts.

[1] Native Hawaiian programs are not the focus of this report, which has as its focus North America north of Mexico. Hemispheric issues and issues of education in the US in Hawaii, Guam, and other US territories have a complex history that is worth considering in a broad approach to Indigenous education.

The report proceeds as follows. First will come a brief history of continental US and Canadian Native higher education. Next will be a look at the contemporary higher educational landscape, providing a general assessment of the current literature and some specific examples of programs and institutions. The next section includes a summary of the criticisms of Native higher educational programs, proffered alternatives to the *status quo*, analysis of the research, general consideration of the major salient points that arise in the research, and a summary of recommendations recent researchers have made. Finally will follow a small set of critical questions that derive from this analysis.

Context and History

Canada and the United States have significantly different relationships to Indigenous populations within their borders. Both nations, though, are similar in having low numbers of Indigenous peoples among those who have benefited from higher educational programs.[2]

Canada's most recent national census counted 31.6 million people, including 1.2 million Aboriginal people (3.75%). Among those 1.2 million Aboriginal people are First Nations (698,000), Metis (390,000), and Inuit (50,000) people.[3] Though Aboriginal people make up nearly four per cent of Canada's population (larger than

[2] The history of Indigenous higher education has been covered well in both McClellan, Fox, and Lowe, and also Woodcock and Alawiye.

[3] http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/dp-pd/tbt/Rp-eng.cfm?LANG=E&APATH=3&DETAIL=0&DIM=0&FL=A&FREE=0&GC=0&GID=837928&GK=0&GRP=1&PID=89122&PRID=0&PTYPE=88971,97154&S=0&SHOWALL=0&SUB=0&Temporal=2006&THEME=73&VID=0&VNAMEE=&VNAMEF=

any minority group in the nation), Aboriginal people make up only one per cent of all college and university students (Morrissette and Gadbois 2006).

This low number derives, no doubt, from the fact that Aboriginal people have the highest high school dropout rate of any group in Canada (Morrissette and Gadbois., 2066). Yet, even for those who enrolled in college and university as of 1996, only 20 per cent completed a degree, and Aboriginal people as of that same year were 50 per cent less likely than non-Aboriginal people to complete postsecondary programs (Ball 2004, 457). As of 2004, four per cent of Aboriginal people had earned a university degree, compared to 15.4% of all Canadians (Morrissette and Gadbois 2006).

In the US, American Indians and Alaska Natives made up slightly less than one per cent of the population in the census the US completed in 2010, while Native Hawaiians made up 0.2%. Of the 309 million people counted in that census, 2.9 million were counted as American Indian or Alaska Native, and 540,000 were counted as Native Hawaiian. Latinas/os or Hispanics (16.3%), African Americans (12.6%), and Asian Americans (4.8%) all make up much larger segments of the US population than Native Americans or Alaska Natives.[4]

Though the numbers have improved over the past 80 years, Native people in the US continue to be underrepresented in higher educational attainment. In 1932, 385 Natives were enrolled in US colleges, and records existed of 52 graduates (Wright 1987, 29). That figure had increased to 7,000 enrolled by 1965, and in 1972

[4] http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-02.pdf

the US Bureau of Indian Affairs awarded 12,748 grants to Native college students (Wright 1987, 29).

2004 is the most recent year for which statistics on higher educational attainment are available. As of then, Natives had the second-lowest high school graduation rate (51%), with African Americans barely behind them (50%). Natives had the lowest college enrollment for 18-24 year-olds (18%) compared to all groups (38%). Natives also earned bachelor's degrees at a lower rate than any other group within both four years (19%--34% for all groups) and six years (37%--56% for all groups) of high school graduation (Tierney, Venegas, Sallee 2007 16).

Retention has been a major focus of research in US Native higher education, and the findings are revealing. Most telling, in 1997 the attrition rate among Native college students was estimated to be 75-93 per cent (Larimore and McClellan 2005, 17). In 2004, one study found that among first-generation college students, only 11% of Native students earned a bachelor's degree compared to an overall rate of 25% (Schmidt and Akande 2011, 41).

An important difference between the US and Canada is the tribally-controlled college and university movement that began in the late 1960s. These institutions have a major nonprofit institution, the American Indian College Fund, that supports them. From very small enrollments at their beginnings, the tribal colleges emerged in the 1980s as a major force in US Native higher education, enrolling more than 2,500 students in 1982 and, eventually, more than 30,000 in 2003 (Pavel, Engelbrot, and Banks 2001, 57). Between 1997 and 2003, tribal college enrollment rose (32%)

at twice the overall rate (16%) of US national Native enrollment (Pavel, Engelbrot, and Banks 2001, 57).

More impressively, tribal colleges can boast a rate of 86% persistence-to-degree among their students. That rate is even more impressive given the fact that many of the communities in which these colleges have been established have an unemployment rate of 80% and rates of substance abuse, suicide, and other socio-economic problems that are much higher than national rates. Even more impressive is the fact that tribal college students who transfer to non-tribal colleges earn degrees at a rate four times higher than Native students who have not attended tribal colleges.

Given the success of these colleges, it is worth considering Schmidt's description of the average tribal college student as "a twenty-seven-year-old single mother of three, [who] is often a first-generation student, making leaving home untenable and familial support necessary for success. Ninety-one percent of the American Indian College Fund's scholarship recipients are 'non-traditional' students—they have dependents, are older than twenty-four years of age, and work full time—or have a combination of these characteristics" (Schmidt and Akande 2011, 42).

Tribal colleges and universities in the US, and Indigenous-run autonomous institutions and programs in Canada share some common focuses. One researcher, for instance, sees across a broad sweep of these institutions' commitment to adult/continuing education, general education that can transfer to more

comprehensive colleges, vocational education, service to a home community, and preservation and transmission of tribal culture (Wright 1987).

These commitments are often summed up in institutional mission statements, which most often highlight sovereignty, community and, to a lesser extent, education (Abelman 2011, 515). The fact that education/academics often has lesser emphasis seems to reflect not so much a lack of understanding of the centrality of an academic mission to higher education as it reflects the multiplicity of stakeholders in these programs; that is, the many needs of Indigenous communities end up demanding the attention of any program that seeks to bring about positive change. This "high level of commitment to culture and community," which can be challenging to maintain across programs, can also guide and sustain new institutions as they grow (Pavel, Englebrot, and Banks 2001 57). Further, nearly all of these Indigenous-controlled programs and institutions engage in partnerships with larger institutions, and strong commitments to communal and cultural well-being can temper and sharpen those partnerships (Ball 2004).

Literature Review

Educational research has been a linchpin of the Indigenous academic enterprise for more than a century, but higher education has rarely been a focus within that enterprise. Thus, while primary and secondary education have resulted in a broad research literature upon which to base new studies, higher educational research remains relatively underdeveloped. Calling the methodological result of this situation "limited" in its usefulness, two of the most astute researchers in the field say that "The literature on Native American student retention reveals a

complex situation that involves the elaborate interplay of individual characteristics and actions on the one hand and institutional factors on the other" (Larimore and McClellan 2005, 24).

Of the literature that does exist on Indigenous higher education in the US and Canada, much remains at a descriptive level, at best, or is primarily autobiographical, at worst. The descriptive literature can be quite helpful, as in one case in which collaborators neatly frame recent programs under rubrics of: add-on (programs that do not transform institutions so much as they create spaces within existing institutions for Indigenous programming); partnership (programs that involve sharing of resources between Indigenous communities and mainstream institutions); and, First Nations control (programs that Indigenous communities create for themselves) (Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen 2000). While a straightforward set of rubrics, these three adequately describe nearly everything that has emerged in the US and Canada over the past several decades.

While the Native higher educational literature may be methodologically limited, it does provide sustained, often incisive, critical perspectives on the clash of values between Indigenous experiences and white educational ideologies. This criticism is sometimes harsh, but it is worth considering because of the consistency in many of the criticisms across time and a range of situations. "It is increasingly recognized," one researcher writes, "that for many Indigenous students there is neither intrinsic nor extrinsic motivation to learn the overwhelmingly white, middle-class content or to engage in the types of learning activities found in mainstream postsecondary programs" (Ball 2004, 457-458).

While some may be tempted to read Indigenous critique of higher education as deriving from a mode of complaint, the basis is quite strong, especially when taken as a whole. At its heart, the critique focuses on a long history during which non-Indigenous values have held sway in educational policy. "The broad and entrenched assumption of most postsecondary curricula," according to one group of authors,

> is that Eurocentric knowledge represents the neutral and necessary story for "all" of us. This discourse of neutrality combines with the universities' serial obstruction or evasion of Aboriginal knowledge and its producers so as to shelter and sanitize a destructively colonial and Eurocentric legacy. Both Eurocentric discourse and anti-Aboriginal resistance attempt to impose cognitive assimilation on Aboriginal students while denying the reform required to achieve a respectful and productive liberation for Aboriginal peoples from the educational apparatuses of colonialism (Battiste, Bell, and Findlay 2002, 83).

The important function of critique, then, is to subject higher educational programs to thoroughgoing examination.

Ball provides one example in arguing, "…the jargon of the day promotes the ideal of 'best practices' as if there might be models of training or services that can be transported to varying contexts with the expectation of 'best' outcomes regardless of the state of readiness, resources, values, or goals of people in each new setting" (Ball 2004, 458-459). All such assumptions deserve careful scrutiny, a broad range of researchers argue, because only such a strategy can both unseat settled wisdom

and provide space for consideration of alternatives. “We must begin,” one Aboriginal educator writes, “by disestablishing many of our existing practices based on theories of the society that has dominated us for so many years. Then we must look within ourselves, within our communities and our nations to determine which values are important to us, the content of what should be learned, and how it should be learned. This new direction mist relate to theories firmly based on the traditions of our people” (Kirkness, 11).

This last critique, it’s worth pointing out, comes from someone who goes on to implore others in Aboriginal higher education to raise standards, demand more of each other, and not focus on extraneous issues—in the title of her article, to “cut the shackles, cut the crap, and cut the mustard” (Kirkness 1998). “To move on,” she elaborates, “we must cut the crap and stop fooling ourselves” (Kirkness 1998, 12). This argument derives not from the view behind ideological fetters so much as it does from consideration of the long history of failure that has plagued Native education, especially at the college and university level. In light of that failure, a comment like this one makes an important point: “Institutions that serve Native American students cannot continue to operate using traditional approaches to student retention, if they want to truly serve and help our country’s Indigenous peoples” (Guillory and Wolverton 2008, 84). This focus on the success of higher education students as an important part of positive change in Native communities, sets an important tone for much of the best work on Indigenous higher education. Anger is endemic to academic discourse on higher education, and the overabundance of autobiographical approaches to research is tempered, perhaps,

by the fact that so many researchers find themselves seeking an understanding of their own experiences in colleges and universities. One set of researchers refer to that experience as "cognitive imperialism, a form of mind control, manipulation, and propaganda that serves elites in the nation" (Battiste, Bell, and Findlay 2002, 83). This is harsh language, but it reflects a frustration and need to find adequate language for representing the chronic problems this field of research addresses.

Beyond frustration with a history of failure, current research points to two things that Canadian and US educational policy have suppressed in favor of non-Indigenous approaches—pedagogy based in Indigenous forms of knowledge and policy determined by Indigenous learners and their communities. This is the lingering impact of colonialism, according to a broad range of researchers, and the lasting effect is to "diminish the value and potential relevance of Indigenous knowledge in education, and hence to forestall economic prosperity and social justice in Canada by failing to provide effective and sustainable mechanisms for the alleviation of poverty" (Battiste Bell, and Findlay 2002, 83-84).

This is no small claim, of course, but the strongest rationale for it is both chronic failure of reigning approaches and demonstrable success of programs that focus on culture and community. And, while Indigenous critique remains crucial to contemporary research, the articulation of Indigenous alternatives plays a similarly important role. Kirkness sums up the symbiosis between the two by arguing "The greatest challenge is to be radical,…to ask the families what they want for their children….Cut the shackles. Freedom is our only recourse" (Kirkness 1998, 12).

Community/Culture

The invocation of Indigenous culture and knowledge has been a prominent feature of academic discourse on Native education, and the positive impact of Native language, oral tradition, and exposure to Native elders is mostly a foregone conclusion among those seeking to create positive changes in Native education. The development of theoretical and methodological frameworks through which Indigenous knowledge can be promulgated within the academy is an ongoing and energetic concern.

However, for all the focus on Indigenous knowledge and methods in the critiques of Native educational policy, the programmatic literature focuses as much or more on more practical concerns. Kirkness, for instance, echoes a common refrain in saying, "We must believe that the answers are within us" (Kirkness 1998, 12). At the same time, she also argues that, "People in some of our communities…have taken 'local control' literally to mean doing everything themselves for their respective schools. They develop programs, methods, and materials, but do not willingly share these with other schools, nor are they prepared to use materials designed by other First Nations schools. This results in duplication, and the value of sharing is lost" (Kirkness 1998, 12). This sort of bottom-line concern for student well-being and baseline educational attainment typifies the best and smartest research in Native higher education.

One example is the Family Education Model (HeavyRunner and Celles 2002), which seeks to understand Native students in the matrix of an overall family structure that is highly determinative of their higher educational prospects. "This

intervention-based model," as two researchers write, "suggests that replicating the extended family structure within the college structure enhances an American Indian student's sense of belonging and consequently leads to higher retention rates. … The family specialist is a unique model feature. This individual serves as family counselor, educator, advisor, advocate, team member, and event planner (e.g., cultural ceremonies and feasts)" (Guillory and Wolverton 2008, 61). The Family Education Model has, in fact, proven to work especially well at tribal colleges and universities (Martin 2005, 82).

While cultural factors account for some of this success, others have pointed out that the needs of Native students cannot be subsumed under the category of culture. "Some factors viewed as critical to Native American student retention (for example, lack of academic preparation or loneliness)," one article notes, "should be understood as common to students from all backgrounds, whereas other factors (for example, the need to return home for ceremonies or the potential conflict between Western science and traditional ways of knowing) are unique to students who are Native American" (Larimore and McClellan 2005, 20). Kirkness argues that Indigenous educational programs "will be based on a marriage of the past and the present" (Kirkness 1998, 15), and part of such a marriage requires a recognition that the students in those programs come from a variety of backgrounds and have a variety of needs, aspirations, talents, and challenges.

Given that variety, especially coupled with the lack of knowledge many – faculty and staff bring to Indigenous higher education, a consistent message from the literature is that students need their teachers and advocates to focus on their

most straightforward tasks as educators rather than attempting to become instant experts on Native students, their needs, and their lives. “The most valuable skill faculty can pass on to native students,” one researcher argues, “is the skill and discipline necessary to learn the subject” (Telidetzki 1998, 58). That same article quotes Sam Deloria, long-time director of a successful prelaw summer program, as saying, “The more Indians can see the non-Indian educational process as a technical process where they learn skills, the less they are going to be worried about the strange values that are attached to the technical process, and the more they are going to emerge as whole human beings—Indian human beings—when they get out” (Telidetzki 1998, 52).

Analysis

Needless to say, the complications that have attended the development of Native higher education programs in the US and Canada have likewise complicated the research that has followed in the wake of those programs. The strong critique that has been the foundation of academic discourse reflects the troubled history of failure in Indigenous education and the frustrated aspirations of Indigenous leaders, parents, scholars, and students and those who are dedicated to bringing about positive change in the Indigenous world. Even as that critique focuses on the need for the promotion of Indigenous knowledge, centering programs on the needs of Native students demonstrates that need for educators to seek solutions that reflect the variety of those students’ needs.

Before turning to some of the key recommendations and critical issues that arise in the literature, an important topic remains, which is the need for higher educational programs to have an outlook that draws on the strength of current efforts while also orienting significant effort toward innovation. In many ways, this point takes off from the history of misplaced priorities and lack of trust in Indigenous capabilities. As one recent article argues, "In reality, Native Americans are the experts at being Native American, and thus it is imperative that their voices be heard when creating policy that can directly or indirectly affect their educational lives" (Guillory and Wolverton 2008, 63).

Yet, simply ceding control of educational programs has not proven to be enough in either the US or Canada. Speaking of a watershed 1972 Canadian national report on education, one scholar has noted, "The two main principles of the policy were parental responsibility and local control. … Sadly, the policy of *Indian Control of Indian Education* has not unfolded as was expected. Two factors have been in play that have negatively affected the process. One was the manipulation of Indian Affairs to have us simply administer the schools as they had in the past. The second was our own peoples' insecurity in taking control and failing to design an education that would be based on our culture, our way of life, and most important our world view" (Kirkness 1998, 11).

In many ways, this sort of analysis points toward the need for patience from those who chart the progress of Indigenous educational programs. Yet, many scholars advocate a more proactive approach. As one article argues, "…what is needed is an institutional instigator or catalyst to cultivate a more coordinated and

comprehensive approach to retaining Native American students" (Larimore and McClellan 2005, 25). Yet another states, "The alignment of strengths is an important step to sustain initiatives, and the accumulated strengths in alignment will correspond to likelihood of success. Team building and partnerships are no longer choices. The poor economic condition of reservations and rural America already makes it difficult to develop the infrastructure necessary to be part of the global economy. Collaboration is necessary to share resources to address common problems" (Pavel, Englebrot, and Banks 2001, 68).

Such a focus on aligning existing strengths and being collaborative follows the lead of Native students who have managed to succeed on campuses in spite of the odds against them. Such "students who are able to draw strength from their cultural identity while adapting to the demands of campus life are more likely to succeed in their academic pursuits than are either culturally assimilated students or those unable to establish a level of comfort within their campus environment" (Larimore and McClellan 2005, 21).

Indeed, these students have been central to the success and development of a broad range of programs that demonstrate the continued promise of higher education in the Indigenous world. Gonzaga University, for instance, has developed a successful Indigenous MBA program (Stewart and Pepper 2011). Others have managed to tackle the difficult problems associated with mathematics achievement among Indigenous college students (House 2001). Librarians at the First Nations University in Canada have created new ways of understanding the ways Indigenous students use digital resources (Luther and Lerat 2009). Health professions,

especially nursing, have long been central to Native higher education, but recent programs focusing on dentistry (Mangan 2010) and nutrition (Combs, Sorum, and Baird 2010) demonstrate the growth that is available in fields that have previously been relatively unrepresented within the Native world.

Amidst these innovative programs, it is important to consider as well the importance that issues that have long been noted in the research continue to play. Chief among these is gender. Indigenous women, in spite of facing challenges that male students typically do not, continue to be overrepresented among Indigenous students in higher education (White Shield 2009, Napier 1995). In fact, "gender is likely to be a stronger predictor of success for students at TCUs [tribal colleges and universities] than at other institutions because women compose a higher proportion of TCU student populations. Often this population is the least served by higher education; yet, it is the most eager to receive a degree. (Ortiz 2003, 43)

For such students, including both men and women, even the most innovative curriculum may not be as important as assistance with basic needs. As one article points out, the "need for adequate daycare and sufficient financial assistance to meet the mounting costs for single mothers and students with families" is central to Native student persistence (Guillory and Wolverton 2008, 82).

Another basic need for many students, it is worth mentioning, are Native faculty mentors. The experience of one campus's Native studies program is typical, where a "…critical mass of faculty, both Native and non-Native, [worked] to bring the program into being. … The presence of a dedicated group of faculty…drove the development of this program" (Krouse 2001). This aligns with another analysis,

which points out that “A considerable amount of research has documented the value of formal and informal faculty contact on learning and other educational outcomes” (Larimore and McClellan 2005, 23).

Indeed, this is perhaps one of the most important things to note about Native American/First Nations/Aboriginal studies programs—they provide a place on college campuses for faculty, staff, and students to work together in the central work of higher education, which is academics. Native and non-Native faculty, staff, and students typically end up working together in such programs to create meaningful and academically rigorous courses and research. Some of the oldest, best Universities have active Native studies programs, including Dartmouth, University of Toronto, University of North Carolna, Berkeley, and UCLA. Some programs, such as the one at Cornell, seek to combine academics and student support, while others, including the program the University of Oklahoma, draw bright lines between academic programs and student support (Champaign and Stauss 2002).

A final point regarding the necessary outlook toward innovation is the need amidst these several factors for more and better research to accompany higher educational programs. Larimore and McClellan have done the most incisive work in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of recent research, and they make the following statement about current research methodologies: “The current state of the available research points out the critical need for additional study. Further, given the urgent need to improve the participation, persistence, and graduation of Native American college students, additional resources should be directed to this area of inquiry. As a matter of shared interest to tribal and other governmental agencies,

foundations, individual campuses, and state educational systems, this area would benefit from a coordinated and comprehensive research effort aimed at improving campus practices and programs" (Larimore and McClellan 2005, 24). This sober, well-founded assessment should be central to further work in the US and Canadian contexts.

All of this points toward the need for those concerned with improving the success of Native college and university students to understand their challenges as being multiple and various. Indeed, it is the interplay between these factors that deserves the ongoing attention of those setting agendas in Native higher education. In the end, though, the single focus of any agenda should be those whose success will ultimately measure effectiveness. As one analysis puts it, "Though the potential for misunderstanding and distrust might be significant at the outset, there is no better way to improve the effectiveness of campus support services than through open and constructive dialogue between practitioners who share a commitment to students" (Larimore and McClellan 2005, 26).

Recommendations

Having looked at the current state of Indigenous higher education in the US and Canada, what follows is a summary of the most significant recommendations that have arisen in recent analyses. Some broad points will follow that summary, then a brief conclusion.

Lowe

•Help students feel they are part of the university family.

•Recognize that students must have some place on campus where they feel they belong.

•Focus on the importance of schoolwork and classes.

•Conduct more research.

(Lowe 2008, 37-39)

Larimore and McClellan

•Advance the work underway on alternative constructs and conceptual frameworks.

•Develop research projects that allow for comparative analysis across several institutions in addition to analysis within particular institutions.

•Add to the existing, albeit sparse, body of qualitative work on the experiences of Native American students in postsecondary education.

•Develop a culturally based model of identity development for Native American people.

•Explore the experiences, perspectives, and needs of Native American faculty and staff in postsecondary institutions, particularly with respect to their interactions with students who are Native American.

•Examine the factors that have influenced the creation and development of support programs for Native American students.

(Larimore and McClellan 2005, 27)

Martin

•Develop more and stronger K-16 partnerships

•Make sure programs are family friendly

•Incorporate American Indian culture into courses, programs, and the architecture and landscape of the campus.

(Martin 2005, 84-85)

Critical Issues

• A consistent finding among researchers in Indigenous higher education is that Indigenous people themselves have a critical role to play at every stage of the process, including as faculty, staff, researchers, and administrators.

• Whatever and however governments decide to intervene in Indigenous higher education, a critical component of that engagement is sustained research that tests the bases of programs. After over forty years of sustained effort to create programs and structures for Native persistence on campuses in the US and Canada, the literature that theorizes that effort is dishearteningly thin and unhelpful. Anecdotal, autobiographical research continues to form the basis of too much available scholarship. Too much time has been spent on the insistence that Indigenous educational research hew closely to established scholarly paradigms rather than on developing theoretical models that can rise and fall on their own merits. Thus, while considerable insight is available from the scholarly literature on Native higher education, one cannot help but wonder how much more might have been done than has been if funders, academic advisers, and other gatekeepers had earlier embraced

the critical impulse of Indigenous researchers and the methods they have brought to bear upon higher educational issues.

• The question of how and where Indigenous people "fit" within higher educational institutions is appropriate, as long as the question is preceded by a commitment to the idea that Indigenous people belong in every institution learning across every field and contributing to all types of programs. That is, institutions should set up Native programs that reflect their strengths rather than seeking to do things they do not do well. This is especially pointed at the most elite institutions. Indigenous presence and success in those institutions is a crucial sign of broad success.

Conclusion

The purpose of this report has been to provide an account of current research on Native higher educational programs in the US and Canada. The account has focused on the critical stance that has developed toward the historical failure of Native higher educational programs, the importance of understanding the variety of Native experiences that higher educational programs seek to include, and the importance of drawing on existing strengths in the development of new and innovative programs. Along with providing broad recommendations, the report also focuses on the need for better and more research on the continuing impact of higher education in Indigenous communities.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

I am a member/citizen of the Osage Nation, one of over 500 tribal nations the United States recognizes as having sovereignty over their own political, social, economic, and cultural destiny. The Osages number approximately 17,000 living in nearly every state in the US and in many other countries. Our ancestors worked closely with French, Spanish, and English traders from the late 1600s until the early 1800s, when the US began negotiating a series of unfavorable treaties that pushed the Osages west from the Mississippi River to what is now western Missouri, then to the southern part of Kansas, then, finally, to a 1.1 million acre reservation in what became the state of Oklahoma. That reservation, it turns out, sits on top of one of the largest oilfields in North America, and wealth from leasing grazing land and from oil exploration in the early twentieth century brought unprecedented wealth to the Osages until the Great Depression, and it continues to be a major economic resource for individual members of the nation. That wealth made higher education an attainable goal for Osages as early as the beginning of the twentieth century, but in spite of having the highest proportion of college graduates among US-based tribal nations, the Osage Reservation is not home to a single college, university, or even satellite campus. And poverty remains rampant.

Since earning my Ph.D. in 1992, I have held academic appointments at Stanford University, Cornell University, the University of Oklahoma, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where I am currently director of American Indian Studies, an academic program with six faculty, an undergraduate minor, and a graduate minor. My previous three positions were on campuses with

significant Native populations, ranging from 200 (125 undergraduates) at Stanford to 150 (100 undergraduates) at Cornell to 1,600 (1,400 undergraduates) at Oklahoma. Illinois has a neglible Native student population, but a long, negative history with Native people because of the University's sports mascot (retired in 2007) that has prompted the creation of both academic and student services units. When I first arrived at Illinois, I was director of both the academic program and the student services program (the two became separate budget units the following year).

Further, I have visited nearly every major Native program and many minor Native programs across Canada and the US over the past two decades. Last year, I served as chair of an external review team for the Dartmouth College Native American Studies Department, one of the most prominent programs in the US. Finally, I have served on and chaired multiple search committees for student services program directors. Thus, though my area of research is not primarily higher education and my professional focus has been academic, I bring to this report extensive experience in a variety of Native higher educational programs.

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