AMERICAN INDIAN COLLEGE STUDENTS AS NATIVE NATION BUILDERS: TRIBAL FINANCIAL AID AS A LENS FOR UNDERSTANDING COLLEGE-GOING PARADOXES

By

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DEDICATION

To my elders, who left us with the knowledge of our people.

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ABSTRACT

Powerful norms tend to define the purpose and function of higher education as a means for individual students to improve individual social mobility and to attain occupational status, and oftentimes, we assume this to be the primary intent of any college student (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013; Day & Newberger, 2002). For the purpose of this study, the normative framing of college as primarily an individual benefit is scrutinized to understand how this norm engages American Indian students in the college-going process. Indigenous scholars argue that infusing the concept of Native Nation Building into our understandings of higher education challenges such mainstream cultural norms and fills a space between the individual and mainstream society (Brayboy, Fann, Castagno, and Solyom, 2012).

This qualitative study proposes the Individual-Independent/Political-Collective Paradox Model to understand how American Indian students navigate and make-meaning of collective values and the role of student tribal status on the college-going process. Through the voices of thirty-seven American Indian college students, the findings demonstrate the critical thinking and navigation of varying realities that American Indian students face when entering higher education institution. I present the three main findings of this study. The first finding presents how the participant's college-going process is not linear in both pathways and meaning making. Through a college-going typology, students reveal how the college-going phases have cyclical aspects, where each phase is built upon each other and influence subsequent meaning- and decision-making. The second finding demonstrates how the college-choice process is instrumental in understanding how students frame the purpose of higher education through collective values that are intricately related to students' reference of tribal enrollment. The third finding shows how collective values and tribal enrollment help inform the meaning of financial

aid for students. These meanings reveal that tribal aid is not only relevant to providing access during the college exploration and choice phases, but the aid reinforces students' purpose of higher education and future goals, which both are primarily collective in nature.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Centering My Story

I vividly remember feeling frustrated, confused, and hurt that I was being denied my tribal scholarship. At the young age of twenty, I was preparing to enter my third college in just three years. Technically, it appeared as if I had attended four colleges because my tribal financial aid office counted a summer college transition program as another college attended. To them, I was not making sound decisions jumping from college to college. I felt otherwise because not only did I forgo my summer after high school graduation to get a head start on college life, I had completed 58 units in four semesters while maintaining a 3.75 GPA.

I was told by the tribal financial aid office that since I had 70 units, the additional 12 units coming from the summer program, I needed to be attending a four-year university. I was ten units over the maximum units to be funded while attending a two-year college. Yes, I was a junior-year student attending a two-year college. But I knew what I was doing. I would spend one semester at the two-year college to complete my A.A. and transfer to the four-year college. Regardless, I had violated the tribal financial aid funding by-laws and my $5,000 scholarship would be revoked.

I was distraught. I hung up, probably crying. From that point, I decided if I was going to complete a bachelor's degree I would do it without the financial assistance from my tribe. Prior to this situation, I felt a sense of allegiance to my tribal community because, *"they were there to support me."* Now, I felt disconnected from my tribe. I had been the best student I knew how to be and was following my youthful goal of obtaining a degree in business marketing, a seemingly financially profitable career approach. With my lack of funding options, I decided that I would need to secure full-time employment. I began working in the fine jewelry industry, which

subsequently led me to using my job to inform my understanding of business. All my academic projects focused on the fine jewelry industry. I was learning about the inner workings of the diamond industry and how to promote and sell fine jewelry. I was even promoted when I completed a financial analysis on jewelry repairs within our office.

The knowledge I gained and my career advancement made it worthwhile, but what I lacked was passion. It was not until my senior capstone project that my instructor inquired, "if you are not committed to a career in the jewelry industry, what would like to be doing?" Not a single instructor or advisor had ever asked me that. I guess they all assumed I was committed to fine jewelry. So, for my senior project, I decided to analyze and propose a new marketing plan for the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, the epicenter of Pueblo culture and vitality. This was the first time I had combined by academic interest with my Indigenous culture. For the last semester of college, my passion roared and I was excited to be using my academic knowledge in a way that felt applicable to my life as an Indigenous Navajo and Laguna Pueblo person.

My alienation from my tribe, which was heavily rooted in my denial of financial aid, became only a distant memory. After receiving my degree, I quit my job one month later. I had no job prospects but I knew it was time to leave the jewelry industry and seek another path that resembled my last semester in college. Years later and after 10 years of higher education experience, I find myself in a doctoral program where my colleagues and mentors are telling me to pick a research topic that I am passionate about. I recall how impactful my tribal financial aid experience was and how challenging it was to find a passion in higher education. So I began this project to understand how other Native students of the southwest experience and interpret their meaning of their tribal financial aid. Little did I know it would lead me to a study where student voices ultimately challenges the status quo of higher education. Please enjoy.

Introduction to the Study

Powerful norms tend to define the purpose and function of higher education as a means for individual students to improve individual social mobility and to attain occupational status, and oftentimes, we assume this to be the primary intent of any college student (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013; Bidwell, 1989; Day & Newberger, 2002). In fact, an entire sociological tradition referred to as "status attainment" demonstrates this process in which educational attainment leads to occupational attainment (Deil-Amen & Turley, 2007). Higher education research on student college-going has accepted this primary norm, and while it is well served for students who embrace this mainstream norm, it can be problematic for other students that come from a different frame of reference.

For the purpose of this study, the normative framing of college as primarily an individual benefit is scrutinized to understand how this norm engages American Indian students in the college-going process. I assert that this individualized college-going norm matches well for students whose way of life reflects similar values, but it misaligns with the frame of reference of students that come from different backgrounds that value and emphasize the individual as part of a larger collective. Indigenous scholars argue that infusing the concept of Native Nation Building into our understandings of higher education challenges such mainstream cultural norms and fills a space between the individual and mainstream society (Brayboy, Fann, Castagno, and Solyom, 2012). To demonstrate how this study developed, the remaining portion of this chapter will introduce a (re)framing of higher education, the background of the study, the research problem, the purpose of the study, the academic and tribal significance of the study, and an overview of terms related to this study.

(Re)framing of Higher Education

Indigenous scholars argue that most American Indian students attend higher education with a different agenda when compared to other college students. American Indian students hope to gain independence and economic stability, but just as important are their hopes of becoming a direct contributor to their own sovereign tribal nations (Brayboy, et al., 2012; Fryberg & Markus, 2007; Schooler, 2014). The theory of Native Nation Building in higher education is used to understand this dynamic from an American Indian perspective, and it's main contribution points to a less recognized, yet salient aspect of American Indian students—their political status. Unlike other ethnic groups, American Indian students are also politically unique as members of two sovereign nations, the United States and their respective tribal community/communities. This complex relationship has often been coined as students living in "two worlds" (Cleary & Peacock, 1998; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Klug & Whitfield, 2003) and operating in culturally incongruent environments (American Indian Graduate Center, 2009; Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Grande, 2000). This oppositional rhetoric has been recently challenged because it pits two ideologies against each other (Brayboy, et. al., 2012; Huffman, 2001; Maryboy, Begay, & Nichol, 2006). In the present study, the concept of Indigenous *paradox* is used to explain the coexistence of two different ideologies. As defined by commonly used dictionaries, paradox indicates a contradiction between two entities, but from an Indigenous- and collective-centered approach this term indicates a balancing of opposites. Maryboy, Begay, and Nichol (2006) state, "Often one is faced with a situation which at first glance seems to be contradictory or in the realm of polar opposites. Further inspection may suggest that rather than a polarity, the situation is paradoxical" (p. 2). Through a paradoxical approach that acknowledges the notion of balance in addition to contradiction, the application of

Native Nation Building theory helps re-imagine college-going from an American Indian perspective.

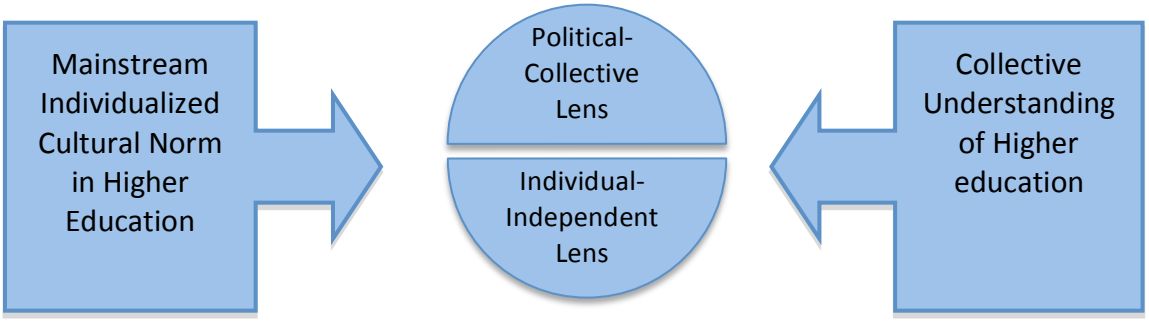
Origins of the Study

A pilot study was conducted with a small sample of American Indian upper-classmen to identify what larger concepts were deemed important to the participants as they navigated the college going process. From this preliminary study, it became apparent that it was important to pay special attention to the relationship between the past, the present, and the future, as students continually expressed a need to reflect upon their pre-college exploration, or their first exposure to college, to help frame and process experiences they had while in college.

Current quantitative and qualitative research on American Indian/Alaskan Native persistence and graduation have found pre-college academic preparation, cultural distinction, and college campus environments as critical to understanding American Indian higher education (Brayboy, 2004; Carney, 1999; Kerbeshian, 1989; Swisher, 1994; Tierney, 1992). However, there is no study that explores American Indian college-choice or how pre-college experiences have relevance to in-college meaning- and decision-making. This gap in the literature along with the preliminary findings from my pilot study informed me to develop an interview protocol that examined the whole college-going process from pre-college exploration to expected college outcomes. The term "college-going" is used throughout the study to demonstrate how students engage in phases that are interconnected and to focus on how students make meaning of their experiences in a way that suggests that the past, present and future has relevance for them. The three phases are labeled as college exploration, college choice and enrollment, college persistence and future college outcomes.

Following the pilot and during the conception of the larger dissertation study, I began by utilizing two lenses, both the mainstream individualized cultural norms of higher education and the more collective understanding of higher education, to dissect how existing literature framed the purpose and function of higher education. The preliminary model pieced together two bodies of knowledge with the intent to understand how the two interrelated (see figure 1).

Figure 1: Preliminary Development of the Individual-Independent and Political-Collective Lenses



This model is comprised of two lenses, with the intent to understand how the intersection of the two is reflected in students' experience of the college-going process. The Individual-Independent lens frames the purpose and function of higher education from an individualized cultural norm. The Political-Collective lens privileges collective factors and incorporates Native Nation Building theory into a higher education setting. It is important to note that while these two bodies of literature existed as separate entities, the individual-independent and political-collective lenses defies the notion that these separate lenses are in contradiction. Instead, I assert that the two lenses are not separate contradictory entities, but are intertwined into a relational balance when engaged during the college-going process.

A total of thirty-seven American Indian college students were interviewed and drawn across two Research I institutions located in two states in the southwest portion of the United States. The sample population sought to reflect the multiple dimensions of diversity found

within the American Indian college student population, such as age, gender, class-standing, college trajectory, urban and rural environments, and tribal and non-tribal community context.

Research Problem

Over the past two decades, research on American Indian student experiences has increased, with most research focusing on factors contributing to student success and retention, such as family involvement, campus support programs, and peer groups (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Heavyrunner & DeCelles, 2002; Shotton, Oosahwee & Cintron, 2010). Additionally, literature reveals the positive role culture and community has for American Indian students in college (Lowe, 2005; Huffman, 2001; Larimore & McClellan, 2005). In regard to financial aid, less research has been conducted regarding American Indian students specifically, despite the plethora of mainstream research showing the multifaceted impacts of financial aid, such as influence on college-choice (Avery & Hoxby, 2004; Baum, McPherson, & Steele, 2008; Perna, 2008), student price perception (Heller, 1997; Leslie & Brinkman, 1987; Perna, 2010) and eventual campus experiences, such as retention (DesJardins & McCall, 2010; Dynarski, 2003). It is surprising there is not more research on American Indian and financial despite slower enrollment trends (NCES, 2013) and lower graduation rates (NCES, 2014) when compared to their peers.

As research continues to explore American Indian student experiences, there is an unquestioned tendency to view the purpose and function of higher education from an individual-independent framework. To continuously explore college-going experiences through this lens, the central role of tribal status is omitted. I suspect the role of tribal status is a key component necessary for generating a more complete understanding of how American Indian students negotiate between the individual-independent and political-collective lens. To understand if and

how this phenomenon is occurring, I explore how American Indian college students make meaning of their tribal financial aid. Of the 565 federally-recognized tribes, over 200 tribes have tribal education departments (TEDNA, 2011). In the southwestern portion of the United States majority of tribal nations have TEDs and offer educational support through post-secondary education, though a greater focus is on early childhood through high school and/or GED (Mackety, Bachler, Barley, & Cicchinelli, 2009). In this study, tribal financial aid is allocated by tribal nations. This source of aid not only facilitates access to college, it also identifies American Indian students' tribal status and the implications of that status on their college-going process. Therefore, the political and collective aspects of college identity are likely to be most salient for American Indian students receiving such aid.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is uncover the intersection of financial aid and college-going through the lived experiences of thirty-seven American Indian college students. The present study acknowledges that financial aid has been shown in prior research to unquestionably impact college-going . In the present study, I therefore elevate "financial aid" or "paying for college" as a suitable lens for understanding the college-going process. Through a financial aid lens, this study focuses on the entire college-going trajectory of American Indian college students and contributes to three specific bodies of research. First, by uncovering the intersections of academics, family, community, and tribal affiliation, this study challenges the dominant cultural assumptions that students' pursuit of a college degree is mainly a reflection of individualistic desires to better themselves and their chances for a better future. Second, it addresses one of the largest literatures in the field of higher education – financial aid and funding – by applying a new and unique lens to this ongoing scholarship. My research approach overlays the very

individualistic views of and policies regarding college-going and financial aid with the more collective framework from which American Indian students and Native Nations may be operating. Third, the present research applies the under-discussed yet valuable concept of *Native Nation Building* to the field of higher education research. Through in-depth interviews, this study seeks to understand how American Indian college student experiences expand the individual-independent framing of higher education and contributes to the idea that not all college-going messages are the same for American Indian college students persisting in higher education.

By examining the process of how American Indian undergraduate college students experience paying for college through a tribal financial aid lens, this study pays particular attention to the college-going messages students report receiving and if and how those messages shaped their college choice, enrollment, student engagement, and expected goals after college. This research challenges how the individual-independent lens limits higher education research and practice. It also aims to understand the paradox between two different college-going ideologies and by doing so, develops a stronger appreciation for the political-status of American Indian college students.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study are as follows:

1. Throughout the college-going process, what actions and outlooks, if any, of American Indian college students reflect elements of American Indian political status and the collective values embodied by American Indian culture?
    a. How do students' reported college-going experiences resemble only the mainstream individualized cultural norm?

2. How do American Indian college students describe the role of tribal financial aid throughout the college-going process?

Academic Significance of the Study

This study has two academic objectives. The first objective is to assess American Indian college-choice and college-going experiences through a combined individual-independent and political-collective lenses. By inserting the political-collective lens, the American Indian identifier is recognized to not only be an ethnic status, but it is also acknowledged to a political status—an emerging and conceptual argument made by experts in the study of American Indian higher education (Austin, 2005; Brayboy, et al., 2012; Gonzalez, 2008; St. Germaine, 2008). To understand how political status intersects with the college-going process, tribal financial aid offers an appropriate lens to highlight the meaning and context of tribal sovereignty and tribal nation in the higher education setting. By introducing this tribal context, new knowledge about American Indian college-going can help higher education researchers, practitioners, and administrators better understand and support American Indian students that choose to attend mainstream universities.

The second objective is to qualitatively investigate how paying for college intersects with American Indian college-going experiences and perspectives. There is extensive research quantitatively exploring the impacts of financial aid, but most research is irrelevant to American Indian students due to statistical insignificance or complete exclusion. The limited studies that do include American Indian students demonstrate that the lack of financial aid is a barrier to accessing and persisting in college (Carney, 1999; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Mendez, Mendoza, & Malcolm, 2011), but there lacks an understanding of why and how financial aid operates in the lives of students to influence their college-going decisions and behaviors. By

revolving the study around students who receive tribal financial aid, I hope to inform researchers and practitioners on how American Indian students formulate their understanding of aid and how financial aid relates to their definition of the purpose and function of higher education. Only by having a more complete understanding of American Indian students can effective policy or programming be developed.

Tribal Significance of the Study

In addition to the academic knowledge produced, this study has significant implications for tribal communities and their members across the United States. This study uses tribal financial aid as a way to center a student's tribal status in the college-going process. This allows us to understand how students make meaning of their tribal status and how they draw from their tribal identities and tribal support to successfully navigate higher education. It brings to light the political nature of American Indian higher education and how tribal nations are critical agents in changing the contentious and normally paternalistic notion of financial aid. Tribal nations can now begin to understand how they can improve their support of college students. This aligns well with Native Nation Building and how tribal financial aid offices are critical in providing those opportunities.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter one establishes an overview of the study for the reader, which includes the research problem and the academic and tribal significance of this study. Chapter two is a critical review of existing literature. This includes the history of American Indian financial aid, research related to the college-going process at these established phases: college exploration, college choice and enrollment, college persistence and future college outcomes. Chapter two also introduces and elaborates the political-collective

and individual-independent lenses l utilized in this study. Chapter three provides a justification for a blended research design between standard academic and Indigenous perspectives. This chapter also describes the participant selection, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter four details the findings from participant interviews and discusses the theoretical contributions of the study. Chapter five presents a summative contribution of the study and considers the implications for both academic and tribal settings.

Research Definitions

American Indian/Native American/Native/Indigenous: Individual that identifies and maintains community connection with origins located in both North and South America. For the purpose of this study, American Indian is referring to tribes located in North America. The terms American Indian, Native American, Native, and Indigenous may be used interchangeably.

Collective/Collectivity: This term embodies descriptions and actions that are associated with individuals using or referencing aspects of aggregation and cooperation, often linked directly to Indigenous values.

College-Going Process: The process encompasses phases students engaged in both pre-college and in-college, and spans from aspiration construction through the construction of post-college plans and expectations. This term is used throughout the study to demonstrate how this process is continuous for students and in order to fully understand how students make meaning of their experiences in which the past, present and future are relational and interconnected. The three phases are labeled as college exploration, college choice and enrollment, college persistence and future college outcomes

Independence/Independent: This term embodies descriptions and actions that are associated with individuals using or referencing aspects of self-autonomy and personal gain.

Individual-Independent Lens: This lens references the mainstream cultural norms of higher education. These norms promote the notion that the purpose and function of higher education serves to benefit individual students through status and occupational attainment.

'Individual-Independent and Political-Collective' Paradox Model: This model combines the individual-independent lens with the political-collective lens to explore how American Indian students balance and negotiate the college-going process.

Native Nation Building: A holistic economic model that privileges Native or Indigenous perspectives to further capacity building within a Native American tribe.

Political-Collective Lens: This lens refers to the collective values found within American Indian perspectives in higher education. These collective values promote the purpose and function of higher education as benefiting tribal nations and their citizens.

Political Status: American Indian students that are enrolled in their respective tribal nations are inherently citizens of both the United States and their tribal nation. This status is a trait that American Indian students negotiate as they enter mainstream institutions. It also acknowledges the treaty rights between the United States and federally-recognized tribal nations, see *sovereignty*.

Reservation: An area of land reserved for Native American bands, tribes, or villages to live on and use.

Self-Determination: Within the Native American context, the actions taken by tribes with the intent to maintain sovereignty at the center point.

Sovereignty: The inherent rights granted to federally-recognized tribal nations within the United States to self-govern. These rights have been established through the U.S Constitution and federal laws (Austin, 2005).

Tribal Community: A locale where common descent, cultural, and political objectives can be found. This area is can be formal or informal space. This term is used in lieu of reservation to demonstrate that this space is not confined to a physical space.

Tribal Enrollment or Tribal Status: This references that the student is an enrolled member of a federally-recognized tribal nation. This process is not automatic and requires the person applying for citizenship to provide documents proving eligibility. Eligibility is self-determined by each tribal nation and the process of providing supporting documents is unique for each tribal nation.

Tribal Financial Aid: Financial aid awarded to college students by tribal nations. It is important to note that each tribal nation establishes its own protocol for administering awards.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW & CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to demonstrate how our understandings of the ways American Indian college students experience the college-going process are incomplete and how prior research led to my formulation of the individual-independent and political-collective lenses. This literature review begins by situating American Indian college students within the larger context of higher education research. The statistical portrayal of American Indian college students alerts the reader to the current state of American Indian higher education and how this qualitative study can inform future research toward a more complete picture of the college-going process. I follow with an introduction to the concept of paradox, which helps the reader frame college-going through the individual-independent and political-collective lenses. I present the prior literature on college-going and financial aid to frame the two lenses. First, the individual-independent section below reveals how research gives little consideration to analyzing how cultural norms of universities shape dominant college-going models and how those research models (mis)align with American Indian college students (Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, and Covarrubias, 2012). The dominant mainstream college-going norm maintains that a student is an *individual* who seeks and is motivated by values related to *independence*, such as status and occupational attainment. Second, the political-collective section below points to literature that offers an alternative to the dominant model. The existing American Indian- and minority-focused college access literature demonstrates the *collective* aspect of this lens, which emphasizes how family, identity, and community intersect with the college-going process (Gonzalez, 2008; Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003; Lundberg, 2007). The use of the word "political" in my 'political-collective' lens represents the idea that, throughout history, financial

aid has always been used as a political tool with regard to American Indians. Throughout the past, colleges and universities utilized various forms of financial aid to enroll Native students in order to assimilate them to the dominant culture. Tribal nations are now using tribal financial aid to engage in the opposite political project, which is to exert sovereignty by encouraging students to pursue college in order to support and preserve tribal needs and interests. To supplement the political aspect, Native Nation Building theory is introduced into this study's conceptual framework as well. The concluding thoughts of this chapter reemphasize the idea of Indigenous paradox and helps reframe the American Indian college student profile at the intersection of dominant college-going models, Native Nation Building theory, and tribal status.

Current State of American Indian Higher Education

In this section, descriptive statistics are organized by college enrollment, expected degree attainment, college graduation rates, and college financial aid to alert the reader to the current state of American Indian higher education. After a presentation of these existing data patterns, this section presents how individual statistics can help inform, but also hinder, the development of a more complete college-going picture for American Indian students.

In the 2011-2012 academic year, American Indian college (undergraduate and graduate) students represented less than 1 percent (0.9 percent) of the college population (NCES, 2013b), and though this representation is the smallest of all ethnic groups[1], the total number of American Indian students enrolled in college has more than doubled in the past 30 years (Devoe, Darling-Churchill, and Synder, 2008; Grinder & Kelly-Reid, 2013). The increased enrollment trend is promising, but when compared to their peers, the American Indian enrollment in the last ten years has significantly slowed down. From 2000 to 2012, total undergraduate Fall enrollment

[1] Other ethnic groups include Black, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian.

increased 13.7 percent for American Indian students, while Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Black enrollment increased at much higher rates, 104.7 percent, 25.7 percent, and 67.4 percent respectively (NCES, 2013). Another data point is that in 2012, 35.2 percent of American Indian undergraduate students reported delaying immediate college enrollment after high school by an average of 2.15 years, a longer deferment when compared to the general population at 1.8 years (NCES, 2015). In terms of academic expectation trends (i.e. highest degree expected), between 2006 and 2012 *more* American Indian college students desired to obtain at least a four-year college degree (NCES, 2015). However, in 2012 *fewer* American Indian students desired a post-bachelorette degree than American Indian students in 2006.

College student enrollment has become more heterogeneous over the past several decades, with minority[2] enrollment increasing from 16.7 percent of college enrollment in 1976 to 38.8 percent in 2011 (NCES, 2013). The change in student demographics has pushed institutions to be more aware of student needs (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998; Reason, 2009), but the American Indian graduation rates highlight the fact that these students are not completing higher education at the same rate as their peers. According to the US Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (2014), the six-year graduation rate[3] for American Indian/Alaskan Native college students entering public 4 year college in 2006 was 38.2 percent, lagging behind their peer groups: the Asian/Pacific Islander graduation rate was 68.2 percent, the white student graduation rate was 62.5 percent, the Black student graduation rate was 39.7 percent, and the Hispanic student graduation rate was 49.5 percent. The 6-year graduation rates for all groups, increased from 1996 to 2006, but the graduation gap between American Indian/Alaskan Native

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[2] Includes Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian, and two or more races
[3] Six-year graduation rate for students attending all 4-year public institutions.

college students and their peers is widening, except between Blacks and American Indian/Alaskan Native, where the change remains the same.

In terms of the American Indian financial aid profile, the National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey (NCES, 2015) provided interesting trends about this student population. Eighty-six percent of American Indian college students received financial aid in 2012, an increase of 7.6 percent since 2004. Nearly half (46.5 percent) of American Indian college students were first-generation, low-income[4] students, an increase of 21% since 2004. Additionally, 63 percent of American Indian undergraduates were classified as financially independent, compared to the general student population at 51 percent.

Between increased college access, the shift to lower college expectations, lower graduation rates, and increased financial aid for American Indian students, the statistical reports challenge two assumptions:

- Assumption #1: Increased college access will lead to increased degree completion and level of completion.
    - Challenge: More American Indian students are accessing college, but they are choosing to delay college and are showing a trend toward lower degree expectations.
- Assumption #2: Increases in financial aid will lead to improved college persistence and graduation rates.
    - Challenge: More American Indian college students are applying and receiving financial aid, but they are not completing at the same rates as their peers.

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[4] First-generation, low-income is defined by TRIO standards. First-generation indicates student does not have a parent with a college degree. Low-income indicates student come from a family with a household income lower than $25,000.

For American Indian college students, the statistics presented give an overview of how individual students (aggregated into racial/ethnic subcategories) are faring, but it fails to make sense of how and why the statistical trends for American Indians are not improving at the same rates as their peers when it comes to college access, graduation, and financial aid findings. This qualitative study takes a step back from the statistics to question assumptions behind how higher education gets framed, and it uses the individual-independent and political-collective lenses to make meaning of how student interpretations can help inform the statistical questions. To help explain how qualitative methods are used to reframe the college-going process, the next section introduces the concept of paradox to make meaning of the dynamic nature of the individual-independent and political-collective lenses.

Reconceptualizing American Indian Higher Education

Existing research reports a common assumption that the intersection of independent and collective lenses causes a "disruption" during the college-going process. This conflict has been coined as students living in "two worlds" (Cleary & Peacock, 1998; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Klug & Whitfield, 2003) and operating in culturally incongruent environments (American Indian Graduate Center, 2009; Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Grande, 2000). This oppositional rhetoric has been recently challenged because it pits two ideologies against each other (Brayboy, et. al., 2012; Huffman, 2001; 2010; Maryboy, Begay, & Nichol, 2006). This dissertation research veers away from using dualistic terminology and focuses on the college-going process as "an explication of how thinking in terms of paradox (rather than polarities) can lead to transformation, both inner and outer" (Maryboy, Begay, Nichol, 2009; p. 1).

From an individual-independent perspective, the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines paradox as "something (such as a situation) that is made up of two opposite things and that

seems impossible but is actually true or possible." Through an individual-independent perspective, the independent and collective lenses operate as segmented experiences in opposition to each other. Visually the two lenses would be placed opposite of each other on a linear plane or possibly on a linear continuum. However, paradox, from a political-collective perspective, describes the lenses as "intrinsically interrelated, similar to an electrical extension cord with negative (male) and positive (female) charges" (Maryboy, et al, 2009, p. 3). From this perspective, the individual and collective lenses operate as a fluid and connected process. Visually, the lenses would be placed on a cyclical continuum. Essentially, the individual-independent paradox equates to contradiction and the political-collective paradox equals balance.

Regarding these multiple perspectives on the definition of paradox, three tenets were continually embraced throughout the dissertation process. First, the two ideologies need to be understood in terms of relationship (Maryboy, et al, 2009; McConville, 2009). Second, the ideologies do not operate within a hierarchy and are understood to be complimentary (Maryboy, et al., 2009). Third, the ideologies operate on a cyclical continuum that reflects an ecological system that continues to evolve (McConville, 2009). It is through these three guiding tenets that the individual-independent and political-collective lenses became a useful to analyzing college-going research. The next section demonstrates how the purpose and function of higher education is comprised of multiple lenses that need to be unpacked to reveal assumptions about higher education.

Unpacking Multiple Lenses in the College-Going

The goal of this section is to demonstrate how existing higher education research consistently frames college-going as an individual and independent process and how that framing marginalizes under-represented groups, like American Indian students. This section begins with

a discussion surrounding cultural norms of universities and their relation to the idea of student success. The section continues by analyzing the unquestioned application of those cultural norms in widely used college choice models and retention models, like Tinto's Student Departure Model. The section also introduces financial aid literature, both American Indian and non-American Indian focused, to demonstrate how the individual-independent lens is limiting and is often presented in opposition to literature supporting the political-collective lens.

The Role of Cultural Norms in the College-Going Process

For the purpose of this study, the college-going process is conceptualized as experiences students have as early as their first idea of what college is to their actual on-campus experiences. My review of the college-going literature uncovers two widely accepted assumptions about higher education and further explains how those assumptions provide the foundation to understanding the individual-independent lens. The first assumption is rooted in how the individual student seeks higher education with an intention to improve individual social mobility and to attain occupational status (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013; Bidwell, 1989; Day & Newberger, 2002). In fact, an entire sociological tradition referred to as "status attainment" demonstrates this process in which educational attainment leads to occupational attainment (Deil-Amen & Turley, 2007). The second assumption is rooted in the larger societal benefits of a college-educated general population to a state or to the United States, such as increased tax contributions, lower employment rates, and improved health conditions (Baum, Ma, Payea, 2013). Both assumptions are deeply rooted in the cultural norms of higher education, are rarely questioned, and are unequivocally placed as the foundation of college-going research and practice.

Applying the individual-independent lens also reveals how research rarely considers how cultural norms of universities shape dominant college-going models and how those research

models have a narrow viewpoint of how individual students navigate the college going process (Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, and Covarrubias, 2012). The college-going norm maintains that a student is an *individual* who seeks *independence* and achieves that independence through college, benefitting from those experiences, such as moving toward adulthood, gaining human capital, or maintaining/improving one's own socioeconomic status.

The individual-independent cultural norm of college-going has inundated practice and research to such a degree that is nearly impossible to find research that does not begin with or embed assumptions that an individual obtaining independence equals student success. The language used throughout but, primarily, at the beginning of most college going literature promotes the "student success" phenomenon. It is not uncommon to see phrases like "promoting student success," "maximize higher education benefits for students," "make choices that make them successful," and "help students attain their educational goals," mentioned after a short discussion about the purpose and function of higher education leading to individual benefits, like increased income and employability. By not critically analyzing the definition of student success, the measurement of student success is relegated to individual-independent values, such as degrees completed, employability, and post-college income (Yorke & Longden, 2004). The next section analyzes how highly utilized college-going theories either omit the American Indian experience or misapply theory due to their heavy reliance upon the individual-independent lens.

Intersection of Highly Respected Theories and American Indian Students

To further an understanding of why the individual-independent lens is limiting American Indian college student research, the first part of this section focuses on the underpinnings of college choice theory. Hossler and Gallagher's college choice model breaks up the process into three stages: predisposition, search, and choice. Predisposition is where college aspirations are

first formed. Search is where students engage in exploring college options. Choice is where students apply to colleges and final selection of a college to attend (Hossler, et. al., 1999). Another choice model is Perna's (2006) integrated college choice model. She encourages an exploration of the context of students' lives and how these micro to macro levels of context influence college choice. While her model is more comprehensive with multiple layers, including habitus, school and community context, higher education context, and social, economic and policy context, it is still premised on the assumption that college is viewed by students as a rational means to achieve individual benefits. Defining college on these individualistic terms limits our understanding of higher education college choice for those who may come from a more collective lens. Furthermore, when incorporating financial aid perspectives in the college choice process, the lack of collective perspectives becomes more absent.

When it comes to American Indian students, college choice is sorely under researched. There is no quantitative or qualitative research exploring the pre-college perceptions and experiences of American Indians. Regarding post-college choice research (i.e. student retention and engagement research), American Indian focused research is more plentiful in this area. However, the main point of contention is the primacy of models that are founded on individual-independent principles. One of the most referenced theory is Tinto's Theory of Student Departure, which posits that in order for students to persist they need to integrate on both a social and academic level at the university (Berger, Ramirez, & Lyons, 2012; Tinto, 1993). Tinto posits that those who are unsuccessful at integration (i.e. are part of the college's environment) depart from the institution (Tinto, 1993). Some researchers argue Tinto's theory is misplaced because it suggests students must assimilate to the culture of the institution or depart (Guiffrida,

2006; Tierney, 1992). When viewing Tinto's model through a political-collective lens, the main criticism shifts to the appropriation and (mis)application of the collective notion known as 'rites of passage.' Tinto draws from the 'rites of passage' frameworks of Arnold van Gennep, in which going to college is a rite of passage commonly enacted within mainstream society. Ironically, from a tribal context, rites of passage are critical stages that promote tribal survival and from an individual tribal member's perspective, rites of passage are more about collectivity and social responsibility to the larger community. van Gennep (1960) actually acknowledges this relationship by stating "neither the individual nor the society stand independent" (p. 3) when articulating the meaning of 'rites of passage.' Yet, Tinto's Theory of Student Departure is deeply rooted in individual-independent principles and to apply van Gennep's 'rites of passage' to an individual-independent version of college going misuses this concept by never acknowledging college-going as a collective process.

Another highly cited theory is Astin's Theory of Involvement, which posits that student interactions on campus must be numerous and also of high quality for persistence to occur (Astin, 1984). Essentially, a student that is involved on campus and has more meaningful relationships at campus is more likely to display motivations and behaviors that promote persistence. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) researched the influence of college experiences on student development, socioeconomic attainment, and personal quality of life. They found that a student's capacity to get the most out of college is dependent upon "individual effort and involvement in the academic, interpersonal, and extracurricular offerings on a campus" (p.62). Both of these engagement models demonstrate how development and engagement on campus is reliant upon the student's individual engagement on campus. There is no discussion of how students formulate their own understanding of the purpose and function of higher education;

rather there is an underlying assumption that students view higher education as a means to independence. If a student enrolls in higher education from an individual-independent framework, these types of models may predict positive experiences. If a student enrolls from a political-collective lens, it is less clear how a student would engage or how it would impact outcomes. Both models also de-emphasize the role of the wider external community on students' college-going experiences generally and on their commitment to persistence and degree attainment specifically.

To date, there is a limited understanding of how the independent and collective intersect as students navigate the college going process. In light of shrinking state subsidies for higher education and the need to minimize costs while maximizing student retention and graduation (Immerwahr and Johnson, 2010), institutions are pressured to measure student success more efficiently and consistently. Unfortunately, this budgetary strain further encourages the use of individual-independent values to measure success. The uncertain trends for American Indian college student access, persistence, and graduation warrant consideration of a new lens for understanding the college-going process. Explicitly stating the limitations of the individual-independent lens through an Indigenous paradox does not create a space of contention. Rather it creates a safe place to understand the intersection of the individual-independent and political-collective. Such opportunities also allow the role of financial aid, a continuous hot topic in higher education, to be deconstructed from the students' perspectives.

Financial Aid Through an Individual-Independent Lens

There currently exists a plethora of mainstream research showing the multifaceted impacts of financial aid, such as influence on college-choice (Avery & Hoxby, 2004; Baum, McPherson, & Steele, 2008; Perna, 2008), student price perception (Heller, 1997; Leslie &

Brinkman, 1987; Perna, 2010) and retention (DesJardins & McCall, 2010; Dynarski, 2003). Undoubtedly, financial aid is an important aspect of the college-going process, but what is less known is how students understand and interpret their financial aid and how it informs their college-going behaviors. We do not know the extent of the limitations of relying on an individual-independent lens to understand financial aid's relevance to students. To understand the how and why of the process, Perna (2010) uses the term "situated context" to explain the process in which student enrollment decisions are influenced by financial aid. The contexts, or layers that range from micro to macro, "reflect[ ] the diversity in the individual circumstances, as well as the ways that individual circumstances serve to define and constrain students' college opportunities" (p. 140). This model analyzes how these multiple layers influence student experiences, such as how the media presents financial aid policy, can influence student perceptions of financial aid and how those perceptions can influence behavior.

This model's significant contribution helps advocate for qualitative research that seeks to deconstruct the financial aid process. However, the model continues to rely on a foundation of individual-independent notions, like human capital, to understanding the purpose and function of higher education. The continued use of the individual-independent lens as a foundation for theoretical models and definition of success poses concerns when considering there are alternative lens, like the political-collective, from which to draw. The following section further defines the political-collective lens and explains how this lens has yet to be formulated to understand the college-going process.

Defining the Political-Collective Lens in the College-Going Process

To date, there is no research that has constructed a lens like the political-collective to understand the college-going process specifically. In this section, I present how collective

viewpoints in literature are conceptualized as a conflict when situated next to the Individual-Independent viewpoints. I then review the literature that informs our understanding of how collective values and the political nature of tribal enrollment intersects with college-going.

Currently, the *collective* and *independent* rhetoric are often discussed in opposition to each other (Tyler, et al, 2008) highlighting how ethnic minority students may experience a cultural disconnect between formalized education and home life. To address such dynamics, conceptual models, like the funds of knowledge (Moll & González, 2004) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), which both advocate for connecting culture- and family-based knowledge with navigating educational systems, empower communities that are generally disenfranchised by the educational system. These models move us in the right direction, demonstrating that the collective, which includes family, culture, and community, is a relevant knowledge base for ethnic minorities to rely on to navigate the educational system. However, from an American Indian perspective, these types of models do not take into consideration the political nature of tribal enrollment.

Similarly, the existing American Indian focused research that distinguishes American Indian collective perspectives from other ethnic groups also focuses on ideas about collectivity but not political framings. In fact, such research generally excludes or misinterprets the important role of tribal status. Tyler and others (2008) state that American Indian students and their families have cultural values that encourage 1) sharing and cooperation, 2) noninterference, 3) harmony with nature, and 4) present-time orientation. Through their own American Indian literature review, these authors, like those noted above, also assert how these values work in opposition to mainstream values of individualism and competition. This dualism pushes back on the individual-independent lens, but fails to explore the political concept of tribal enrollment and

its implications for the intersection of American Indian student cultural values and the college-going process. However, the literature that does focus on both American Indian values and/or tribal status in their evaluation of American Indian students can be delineated into two categories: 1) research based and 2) conceptually based.

The first category is the research-based literature that identifies the American Indian collective (i.e. culture/values, community, and identity) as influencing the college-going process (Baxter, 2009; Donlan and Brown, 2011; Guillory, 2009; Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003; Lee, Donlan, & Brown, 2011; Lundberg, 2007). The use of culturally responsive models (CRMs) has been one attempt that pushes back on the individual-independent lens of education. CRMs extend beyond curriculum and the role of the teacher and incorporate elements "related to curriculum, pedagogy, school policy, student expectations, standards, assessment, teacher knowledge, community involvement, and many more" (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 948). However, these models are primarily documented in elementary and secondary education (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Cleary & Peacock, 1998; Demmert & Towner, 2003). In higher education, CRMs apply similar tenets as in K-12, but are less institutionalized and primarily serve as conceptual college retention frameworks while still using the individual-independent lens as a foundation. For the purpose of this study, CRMs include theories (i.e. Family Education Model, Cultural Wealth, Native Capital, Transculturation) in which cultural knowledge and values are relevant to the higher education setting and those bodies of knowledge are seen as assets, not liabilities, to persisting in higher education (HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002; Huffman, 2001; Yosso, 2005). Since the incorporation of CRMs, our understandings of the factors influencing the experiences of American Indian college students have become more complete. One large contribution has been uncovering the positive effects of relying on tribal

ways and knowledge to navigate college. In two separate studies, Brayboy (2004) and Covarrubias and Windchief (2009) found that culturally accepted mannerisms, like silence, served as a tool for students to navigate college life. Silence from an individual-independent lens could be interpreted as the student being disengaged, but from a collective lens, silence is demonstrating respect to others. As research continues to negotiate between the two lenses, it is important to note that these studies fail to explicitly state how on-going research continues to use the individual-independent lens as a foundation for understanding the purpose and function of higher education and overlooks the opportunity to center the political nature of tribal enrollment within a study.

This leads to the second category, the conceptually-based literature, which encourages the inclusion of tribal status, sovereignty, and tribal enrollment for understanding the college-going process (Austin, 2005; Brayboy, et al., 2012; Gonzalez, 2008; St. Germaine, 2008). There has yet to be a comprehensive research project that positions tribal status at the center of the study, which is the distinguishing feature of the political-collective lens. This lens asserts that the American Indian political tribal enrollment status has just as much relevance as the individual status when considering the purpose and function of higher education. Conceptually, higher education for tribal nations is critical to building a sustainable tribal nation (Champagne, 2003). The existing college-going literature has found that American Indian students do have a desire to give back to their tribal community (Guillory, 2008; Guillory, 2009; Shotton, et al., 2007), but why and how these intentions are formed is under-researched. One way to fill this research gap is to assert tribal enrollment status in college-going to understand how students negotiate their relationship with their tribal nation as they attend mainstream institutions. Perhaps by doing so, researchers can better understand how the political and individual statuses operate in tandem and

bring relative conflict or balance to students' understanding of the function and purpose of higher education.

Financial Aid Through a Political-Collective Lens

Now that I have further formulated the political-collective lens by drawing from existing literature, I will give attention to the role of financial aid through a political-collective lens. To best situate existing literature, the next paragraph will highlight qualitative studies that take into consideration a collective aspect when discussing financial aid. Following that section, I will transition into explaining the political context of American Indian financial aid. It is important to note that there are very few qualitative studies that explore financial aid through a collective lens.

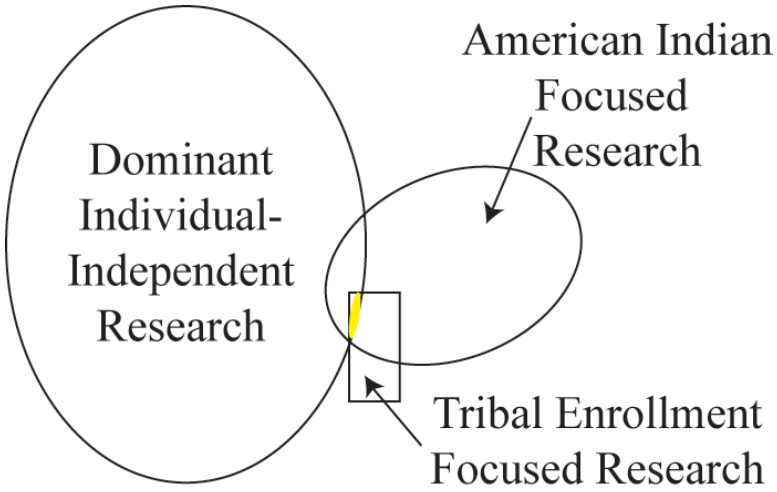
Marks's (2010) study explored how a scholarship program, which included a community service component, for low-income college students, influenced their graduation rates and perceptions of civic engagement. Marks found that through a combination of financial aid and service, participants' identity development strengthened when it came to civic awareness and citizenship. Despite being interested in how involvement in community service and funding influences an identity of citizenship, this study remains heavily influenced by the individual-independent purpose and function of higher education. Another noteworthy study by Guillory (2008) explored persistence factors for American Indian students. He interviewed both students and university personnel to see how perceptions about American Indian persistence compared between the two. In terms of financial aid, university officials saw financial aid as strategy for motivating and igniting student persistence and graduation. In actuality, the students saw the benefits of financial aid, but were more motivated to overcome barriers like financial strain through "family and giving back to tribal community" (p. 14). This study was not focused on financial aid, but it does encourage more research on how and why American Indian students

develop financial aid perceptions. The next section continues to the discussion of political status and specifically points to how financial aid supports the inclusion of political status in the college-going process for American Indian students.

Political Context of American Indian Financial Aid

The previous portion of this literature review discusses American Indian college student research within a framework dominated by the individual-independent lens. The remaining portion of this chapter widens the scope by analyzing current literature at the intersections of financial aid, tribal aid and tribal enrollment status. Figure 2 demonstrates how the existing bodies of literature interrelate.

Figure 2: Intersection of Existing Literature and the Literature Gap



The two larger overlapping ellipses visually represent the small amount of American Indian perspectives found in the dominant individual-independent research. The small square represents the research incorporating tribal enrollment. Despite being more inclusive of tribal enrollment in describing American Indian college student factors, this literature is less empirically based and is primarily based on professional assertions made by American Indian higher education researchers. The yellow shaded overlap is the literature gap that actively seeks

to understand the intersections of dominant theory, American Indian perspectives, and tribal enrollment. I chose to utilize a tribal financial aid lens to understand college-going since it hits on all three research areas: financial aid, American Indian perspectives, and tribal enrollment status. Despite there being no literature exploring student perspectives on tribal financial aid, I find historically American Indian students have a long history with financial aid and the next section situates this history in relevance to today's American Indian student.

Historical Aspects of Financial Aid for American Indian Students

Financing or paying for higher education has been shown to be a challenge for American Indians, limiting access to higher education (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Swanson & Tokar, 1991). In 2008, approximately 85 percent of American Indian college students received some form of financial aid. This includes all grants, both need- and merit-based from federal, state, and private entities, federal and state loans, and federal work-study (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010). The amount of students receiving aid is promising and indicates American Indian college students are seeking various funding options to overcome financial challenges. However, the average amount of aid an American Indian college student received was $10,900, the lowest of all student racial/ethnic groups. Across all student groups, the average amount of aid received was $12,700, meaning that American Indian students receive, on average, $1,800 less in aid (Aud & et al., 2010). Juxtaposing the low amount of aid received with the high recipient percentage dispels the myth that American Indian students go to college for free (Tierney, Salle, & Venegas, 2007), but it also raises some unanswered questions of how American Indian college students make meaning of tribal financial aid.

The tribal financial aid literature may be limited, but the dynamic between financial aid and American Indian college students has been occurring for centuries. As early as the 1700s,

colonial colleges sought to enroll American Indian students through financial aid (Carney, 1999; Reyhner, & Eder, 2004; Szasz, 2003). The motivation behind providing higher education access closely aligns with the assimilation tactics of that time. Some elite universities, like Harvard, Dartmouth, and William and Mary, all had American Indian higher education initiatives. Private donors as far away as England saw higher education as a way to civilize and dismantle American Indian communities, so full aid was provided to American Indian students. The students selected for these opportunities were meritorious in the eyes of the donors and showed promise in embracing the independent values of colonization (Carney, 1999). However, these initiatives were not successful at graduating American Indian students from college. For example, Wienberg (1977) found that Dartmouth enrolled 187 American Indian students from 1769 to 1973, but only graduated twenty-five students.

In the early 1900s, what is called the termination era or federal period, higher education for American Indians began to shift. Higher education, from a Eurocentric viewpoint, was an opportunity to push American Indian communities to adopt "American" independent values, like private land ownership and individual prosperity (Szasz, 2003). Rather than extending opportunities at elite universities, financial aid was geared toward vocational relocation programs (Carney, 1999). Carney (1999) states, "the basic policy during the federal period was assimilationist…the students were being trained for livelihoods found in white society" (p. 49). This included moving young American Indian students off the reservation to metropolitan areas to learn a trade and integrate with the urban society. Throughout the colonial era and the federal era, American Indian youth were extended opportunities to higher education through financial aid, but it was clear the political intentions served the needs of the dominant society and not the tribal nations and their citizens.

The effects of these two eras did not abruptly fade away, but the mid 1900s reform of American Indian policy changed the way tribal nations asserted their voices. Educational policy shifted from federal control to self-determined control by tribes (Reyhner, & Eder, 2004). The federal government was still involved in the funding of programs, but how the funds were allocated slowly shifted. For example, in 1966 the Kennedy Report highlighted the dismal education attainment rates of American Indians. It addressed the educational need within tribal nations and how locally run initiatives would best serve the needs of the community (Carney, 1999). In 1971, Congress passed the Navajo Community College Act; allowing the Navajo people to self-determine their own higher education institution. This act led to the passage of the 1978 Tribally Controlled Community College Act and other tribal nations began to establish their own higher education institutions (Carney, 1999). Self-determined higher education on the Navajo reservation and other tribal nations did not come without challenges, primarily financial challenges. Funds were contingent upon the US political administrative support for tribally self-determined education. At this point, tribal nations were granted the right to determine their own educational systems, but tribal nations did not have the economic capital to offer comprehensive on-reservation higher education initiatives (Brayboy, et.al., 2012). Of the 566 federally-recognized tribal nations, only 36 Tribal College and Universities are in full operation in the United States (AIHEC, 2014). In lieu of developing higher education institutions, some tribes support higher education initiatives by funding their tribal citizens attending off-reservation universities and colleges through tribal financial aid (Tierney, Salle, & Venegas, 2007).

Tribal financial aid assists in higher education access, but how students make meaning of this aid is less known. The dissertation study by Carlyle (2007), which was the only research study solely focusing on tribal financial aid, focused on the barriers tribal members who received

tribal financial aid faced in higher education. The barriers included students experiencing racial conflict with peers or faculty, students feeling overwhelmed academically, and students having to care for a legal dependent. There was no discussion of the tribe's protocol for distributing the aid or how the recipients interpreted the meaning of tribal financial aid. The study's recommendations were in line with other research stating that financial aid should be one of many other components used to increase college access and retention (Gladieux & Swail, 1998). This study, while useful in understanding the experiences of American Indian college students, does not address tribal enrollment status as it intersects with American Indian college-going.

Literature Review Summary

Through this critical literature review, I assert there is an opportunity to reframe the purpose and function of higher education by including the political nature of tribal enrollment status, a trait unique for tribally connected American Indian students. The existing literature that supports the need for both Individual-Independent and political-collective lenses and the next step is to begin to understand how these lenses intersect and the relevance of this intersection on college-going for American Indian students. The next section demonstrates how the conceptual framework is modeled supported by the inclusion of Native Nation Building and the relationship between the Individual-Independent and Political-Collective lenses.

Conceptual Framework

This section describes the conceptual framework used to inform the research by explaining the applicability of Native Nation Building theory and how it contributes to the development of the individual-independent and political-collective lenses.

Native Nation Building

Generally, when discussing nation building, one is referring to sustaining infrastructure and establishing stability to a nation. Nation building, from an international perspective, looks at how a nation embodies a democratic unity of citizenship. Brayboy, et al. (2012) notes that nation building is often rooted in creating a homogenized identity and notions of colonization where non-Western ideas are dismissed. Native Nation Building or Tribal Nation Building is an extension of nation building that takes an anti-colonial approach to capacity building. It addresses the historical injustices and political status of only Northern Native American tribes (Cornell & Kalt, 2010).

Native Nation Building is a comprehensive plan and is more than creating jobs or economic wealth (Cornell & Kalt, 1998). The concept pushes tribal nations to broaden the definition of economic development and seek out "anybody with time or energy or ideas or skills or good will…who's willing to bet those assets on the tribal future" (Cornell & Kalt, 1998, p. 193). This includes many aspects of sovereignty, such as food, language, culture, health, and most central to this study, educational sovereignty (Champagne, 2003; Gonzalez, 2008). To fully understand how sovereignty is engaged in the higher education process one must understand that tribal nations have a desire to remain distinct in their political status. While other marginalized groups within the United States have advocated for equality and access to the opportunities that the current democratic nation has to offer, tribal nations seek to remain distinct and sovereign entities (Brayboy, et al., 2012). The premise behind Native Nation Building is for tribes to become self-sustaining so the right to remain sovereign is preserved.

The present study's use of Native Nation Building theory does not assume that all American Indian students understand, embrace, or are even aware of the concept. Rather, this

study utilizes the Native Nation Building lens to understand how students who receive tribal financial aid experience factors related to individual-independent and political-collective lenses. Since students are in contact with and receive funding from their tribal nations, there is an assumption they have some connection to the tribe. This assumption is important when considering the purpose of the tribal funding, which is established and articulated to students by individual nations. For example, one southwest tribal nation states that it hopes the funding encourages their tribal citizens to return to the tribe to contribute to capacity building of the tribe. Similar expectations can be found across other tribal nations (Austin, 2004). Beyond the tribal nations' motivations, Native Nation Building has the potential to illuminate a different frame to understand how American Indian college students experience college-going.

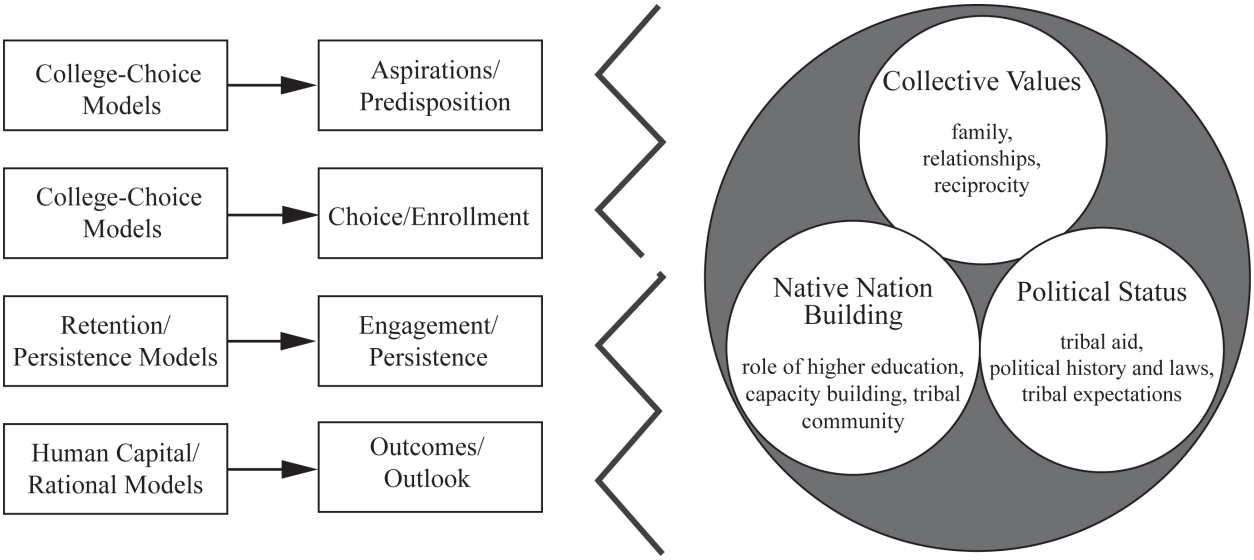
Relationship Between the Individual-Independent and Political-Collective Lenses

Through the literature review above, there is strong evidence that an individual-independent lens dominates research methods in higher education and that the political-collective lens adds a new perspective to the research process, particularly when we consider the role of tribal financial aid in Native Nation Building. What is less known is how the two lenses relate and influence the college-going process for Native students. Figure 3 visually demonstrates how prior research models continue to speak of the independent and collective in dualistic terms. On the left side is the individual-independent lens. This body of research is often structured and operationalized with the individual status placed as the foundation of the understanding the college-going process. On the right side is the political-collective lens. This body of research incorporates American Indian perspectives, where the relationship between the different variables is key to understanding the college-going process. In the middle of the model is the

zigzag line that represents the prior research that describe the two lenses operating in separation of each other and in terms of discontinuity and/or disruption.

Figure 3: Dualistic Version of the College-Going Process

Individual-Independent Lens and Political-Collective Lens

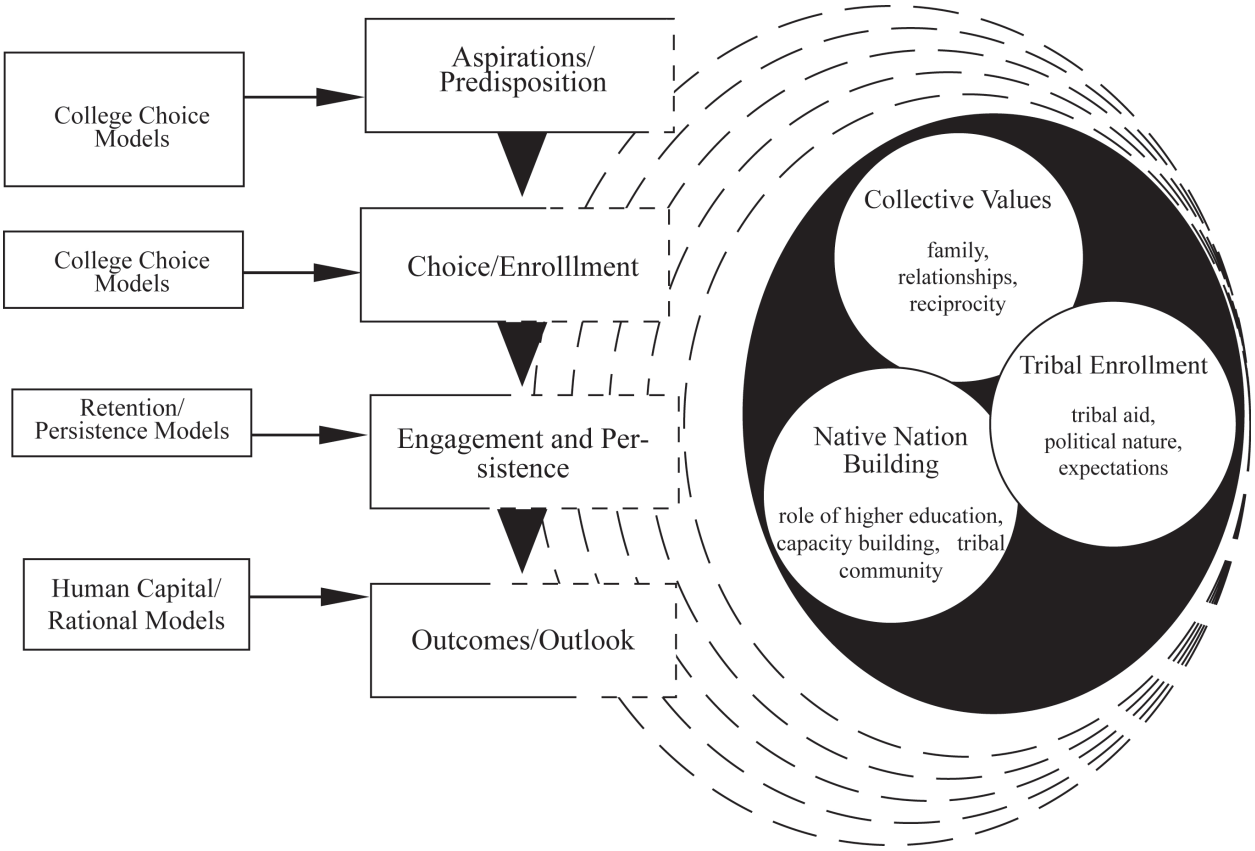


Instead of adopting this dualistic view, the present study actively uses the three tenets of paradox to understand how the two lenses can interact together in some degree of harmony:

- Lenses need to be understood in terms of relationship (Maryboy, et al, 2009; McConville, 2009)
- Lenses do not operate within a hierarchy and are understood to be complimentary (Maryboy, et al., 2009)
- Lenses operate on a cyclical continuum that reflects an ecological system that continues to evolve (McConville, 2009)

In Figure 4, I conceptualize this study to understand how the two lenses interact. In the middle of the figure is the college-going process, from pre-college to in-college. On the left is the individual-independent lens and on the right is the political-collective lens. Using the tenets of Indigenous paradox, I attempt the understand how the political-collective attributes are engaged or not engaged in college-going.

Figure 4: Conceptualizing the College-Going Process Through Individual-Independent and Political-Collective Lenses



The radiating circles from the political-collective lens illustrate how I will investigate if these values are found within the college-going process. The two main points about understanding the relationship between the two lenses and the college-going process are 1) the college-going process is no longer seen only as a "dualistic" dynamic and 2) both the individual and political statuses are not placed on a hierarchy, but on a relational balance. By simultaneously acknowledging the existence of the individual-independent and political-collective lens, the incongruency issue is no longer the epicenter of the college-going experience. Rather, I seek to understand if and how American Indians students negotiate the college-going process between the individual-independent and political-collective.

Summary

This chapter situates the American Indian college student within the larger context of higher education research and also within a tribal financial aid perspective. The mainstream cultural norms that drive the purpose and function of higher education demonstrate a methodological tunnel where American Indian perspectives are nearly invisible. It is troubling when American Indian college students are easily relegated to an asterisk or completely ignored in higher education research (Shotton, Lowe, & Waterman, 2013). Existing qualitative research that is American Indian focused is not valued as part of the conversation and is in the infancy stages of using methods or terms that push back on the individual-independent cultural norms of higher education (Shotton, et al., 2013). Through this literature review, the individual-independent and political-collective lenses establishes a new understanding of differing ideologies and comes to a point where balance and recreation is a valued part of the college-going experience. The following chapter explores the methodology used in this study and how it also contributes to widening the scope used to evaluate the purpose and function of higher education

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodological approach for this study. The chapter begins with an overview of this qualitative study, which includes the rational for infusing Indigenous perspectives and defining the role of the researcher. The research questions guiding the study are subsequently introduced, followed by an overview of the pilot study. The chapter continues by providing a regional and tribal context to gain more perspective on the scope of the study. The next section introduces how participants were selected and how subsequent data was collected and analyzed. The chapter concludes with the validity and limitations of the study.

Study Overview

A qualitative approach was used in this study to understand the complex and holistic experiences of the participants. A qualitative methodology delves deeper than "giving voice to…people marginalized in the society" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 10), it rests in trying to deconstruct a process, like how the receipt of tribal financial aid informs the meaning-making of American Indian college students. '. Qualitative methods uncover the multiple layers of meaning and how those meanings develop over a period of time for students (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Such layers include cultural values and norms, pre-college experiences, and political and tribal status. Only once these layers are better understood can more informed and effective policy and programming be developed for American Indian college students.

The qualitative approach was purposefully designed to acknowledge how "research" is viewed from an Indigenous perspective. Smith (2007) stated that research is:

> A significant site of struggle between the interests and way of knowing of the West and the interests and way of resisting of the Other…It is difficult to discuss research methodology and indigenous peoples together, in the same breath, without having an

> analysis of imperialism, without understanding the complex ways in which the pursuit of knowledge is deeply embedded in the multiple layers of imperial and colonial practices (p. 2).

This perspective set a precedent for this research project and gives insight on how the mainstream cultural norms frames higher education and how the (mis)appropriate methodological application to understanding American Indian students exists today. To broaden the research frame beyond the individual-independent approach, the research design purposefully infused Indigenous perspectives throughout the project.

Indigenous Perspectives

Prior to engaging in a conversation regarding Indigenous perspectives on research, it is important to point out that this study does not claim to be completely decolonized of individual-independent research methods. This is due in part to the researcher incorporating Indigenous ways after the initial study began and when the researcher faced a methodological quandary, where individual-independent research perspectives were insufficient to understanding and describing the lived experiences of the student sample.

From an Indigenous and collective lens, research highlighting American Indian students should not be treated as an input-output process. This process is often reported that way because of the status quo placed by the Westernized standard-independent ideologies (Mihesuah, 1997b). As a consequence, the Indigenous voices of American Indians are missing in the research. A trained historian, Mihesuah (1997a) finds how historical research about American Indians generally excludes the lived experiences of those being researched. She began her journey to redefine American Indian research because of the negative connotation research has within tribal communities (Mihesuah, 2004b). Despite being discouraged by both non-Native and Native

scholars, she continued on this trajectory. She ironically found herself fulfilling the stereotype of being the "Indian activist" to break the cycle that views American Indians as disempowered individuals who cannot control who and what is researched within their communities. Mihesuah states that *Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing about American Indians* (Mihesuah, 1997) was a censored version of the more recent book, *Indigenizing the Academy* (Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004). This newer book compiles articles from well-respected American Indian scholars that address research related issues across all disciplines and many of the points made overlap in concept.

Between these two books and other Indigenous research methodologies, three themes are identified and infused throughout this dissertation. The first theme addresses the challenges American Indian scholars face in the academy (De La Torre, 2004; Deloria, 2004; James, 2004), which is mainly how maintaining the status quo forces American Indian scholars to favor the individualistic nature of the academy. American Indian researchers are seen to loose sight of whom the research is for and how the research impacts American Indian communities (Mihesuah and Wilson, 2004). Deloria (2004) echoes how American Indian researchers have a tendency to lose connection to communities, but also empathizes with the dual and conflicting identities American Indian scholars face in the academy.

The second theme acknowledges research as power. Research can be used to empower Indigenous communities and to begin the healing process of historical trauma (Justice, 2004; Wilson, 2004) and contribute to Native Nation Building (Wilson, 2004). Alfred (2004) draws parallels between the traditional role of a warrior and today's version of scholar. He states that just as warriors protected their communities, today's scholar carries similar responsibilities only in a different arena.

The third theme is privileging Indigenous ways of knowing. This notion is not looking for comparative or equal value to western knowledge, but rather establishes Indigenous knowledge as having its own value and place in the academy (Deloria, 2004). This expands the use of methodologies traditionally used within American Indian communities, like oral history and storytelling (Mihesuah, 2004b). It also favors values held by American Indian communities that often conflict with mainstream society (Alfred, 2004).

From Indigenous research perspectives, the researcher plays an active part in the process (Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004). The researcher is valued as a participant in the process. The following section develops the researcher's role and how it contributes to the research process.

Role of the researcher. My role as a researcher is constantly being negotiated in this research process. Who I am and how I view society, education, and research situates this body of research and is important to share out of respect for the participants of this study, our ancestors, our future generations, and the gatekeepers of the academy. I begin this dialogue by presenting an "individual-independent" positionality, then supplementing my role through a political-collective lens.

Individual-Independent Approach. As an American Indian researcher who has received tribal funding for post-secondary education, I have an insider status. My identity and status provide both a basic knowledge of how tribal funding operates and the potential to build a positive rapport with the American Indian participants. In the short time that I am meeting with the participants, my insider knowledge will allow me to effectively approach the participants in a culturally appropriate manner. I am aware that my insider status may lead the participants to limit their descriptions or experiences based on the assumption that I inherently understand them (Seidman, 2006). To alleviate any gaps in the data, I will employ the techniques mentioned in

the data collection section. Overall, my status will enrich the research process and allow me access to data that an outsider may not achieve.

Political-Collective Approach. Yá'át'ééh. Shi eiyá Christine Nelson yinishyé. Tólání dine'é éí nishlí. Naaneesht'ézhi dine'é bá shíshchíín. Totádi éí shigan. I am a Laguna Pueblo and Navajo woman and this is how I introduce who I am. Within this introduction, I state my name, my maternal and paternal clans, and where I am from. It is customary to share this knowledge to show my relations to others and where I am from. It is important to share my story and how this traditional introduction is a strong influence on who I am as a researcher. Rather than providing a life story, I use the three themes from the Indigenous Methodologies section to frame my positionality.

Challenges American Indian scholars face in the academy. As an American Indian researcher, I began my graduate work after being inspired by a group of American Indian student affairs professionals. Prior to being involved in the Indigenous Peoples Knowledge Community (IPKC) through NASPA, I had never considered continuing beyond an undergraduate degree. My current educational status was already a feat that very few in my family and tribal community have accomplished. After years of collaboration, self-doubt, and self-renewal, it became clear the research in which I chose to engage could challenge the academy's status quo. Thus the journey to developing the lenses rooted in individual-independent and political-collective perspectives. These lenses not only represent what the participants experienced; it represents a collective venture that we, Indigenous scholars, experience at the moment of enlightenment toward formalized graduate education.

Research as power. In my graduate studies, I became acutely aware of my educational experiences from as early as Kindergarten. Literature, such as Paulo Friere's work, that pushes

back on the social structures that reproduce inequity allowed me to critically reflect upon my life. My formalized educational experiences unfortunately resulted in years of self-hatred and cultural insecurities. I do not possess the cultural knowledge as some traditionalists, such as language fluency or traditional ceremonies, but I understand how my family history influenced my perceptions today. Both my grandparents experienced a loss of culture through assimilation tactics through formalized education. Their inability to engage in the transmission of culture to both my parents and me has left me learning my cultural practices and language as an adult. My maternal grandmother, to this day, is known for her educational advocacy through the Bureau of Indian Education and I strive to follow her lead. She may not have passed on the details of ceremonies or language, but she instilled in the importance of community and youth. The research I engaged in is by my choice, and just like my personal cultural identity, it is a balance between mainstream and Indigenous perspectives. The power to choose is not self-involved. It is the relationship between the past, the present and the future that results in energy to make change in my community.

Privileging Indigenous ways of knowing. As an American Indian researcher, my role is to elevate the knowledge of American Indian communities to create and define an Indigenous understanding of paradox. When I engaged in a conversation with the participants I accepted and personally acknowledged that the research process infused concepts of Indigenous methodologies with mainstream methods. This does not mean I ignored the employment of mainstream methods and perspectives. It means I can create a filtering Indigenous lens that allows me to question and explore aspects of research that might be overlooked when solely using mainstream perspectives. From this position, the more specific research methods can be explained.

Research Questions

There were two primary and one secondary question that guided this research.

1. Throughout the college-going process, what actions and outlooks, if any, of American Indian college students reflect elements of American Indian political status and the collective values embodied by American Indian culture?
    a. How do students' reported college-going experiences resemble only the mainstream individualized cultural norm?
2. How do American Indian college students describe and interpret the role of tribal financial aid throughout the college-going process?

Question one centers the political status of American Indian college students in this project. By using this lens, this research privileges this status and elevates how we understand American Indian college student experiences. Conversely, question 1a acknowledged that the American Indian college student experience could not be solely understood through the political-collective lens and that examining the individual-independent lens and the political-collective lens in terms of relational balance was key to gaining more rich descriptions of the students' experiences. Question two directly reflects Indigenous perspectives that ensure the college-going process is viewed in its entirety. To accomplish this, the students were asked to share experiences from pre-college to current persistence and expected post-college outcomes.

Pilot Study

Prior to full commitment to the research questions and methodologies, a pilot student of four students was conducted. The data that resulted from this initial work is not included in the final data analysis, but was instrumental in transforming the approach and understanding of this research process. Prior to identifying research questions, four members from local tribal

communities provided their professional input on the scope of the study. Here I was informed of tribal research protocols, tribal perspectives on this project, and how this research study could benefit tribal nations. The meetings informed my knowledge of tribal financial aid across different tribes and specifically what aspects of the study would be feasible due to tribal research protocols. In addition to non-student tribal members, four participants were interviewed. Two students were graduate students, one was an undergraduate student, and one had graduated one month earlier. All students had received tribal financial aid at one point during their college experiences.

The findings from this pilot study informed the dissertation methodology in three ways. First, the research protocol needed to maintain an essence of neutrality when it came to independent and collective language. In order for students to speak of college-going aspects most salient for them, the language used throughout the interviewing process needed to not favor one over the other. Second, the meaning of "giving back" and "community" needed to be explicated. Previous studies mention there is a desire for American Indian students to give back to their communities, but how students formulated those ideas and what constitutes giving back is less known. Third, the interview protocol did not need to follow a linear process. Even though the interview protocol was developed using a linear process, the interviews were semi-structured to ensure that more time was spent on the points in time that were most meaningful to the student. It was also determined that this research needed to consider how past experiences related to current experiences and expected post-college outcomes.

Research Context

The research context explores the various factors or circumstances that exist within an established frame. In this case, *place* is referenced to understand context. From an Indigenous

perspective place "[is] the relationship of things to each other" (Deloria and Wildcat, 2001, p. 23). Place is not only the physical location where the interaction occurs, but the relationship that develops from the interaction. The institutional and tribal contexts interact with students and help form experiences and develop understandings of those experiences. To maintain a level of focus and feasibility, the number of different tribal nations represented was limited to ten and all tribes were located in the southwest portion of the United States. This limit was employed for two reasons: a) the two site institutions have existing relationships with these tribes and the tribal financial aid funding process has been streamlined, something that may not exist non-local tribes; b) each tribe has their own protocols for tribal aid (Mackety, Bachler, Barley, & Cicchinelli, 2009) and to factor in too many protocols may dilute and distract from exploring student experience.

To also understand place from an institutional and tribal perspective, two steps were taken to establish relationships between places (contexts). First, the researcher sought out tribal financial aid officers to inform them of this study and to acknowledge and answer any questions they had. Second, the researcher spoke with university officials (i.e. student services advisors, financial aid officers, faculty) at the two institutions to gain a professionals' understanding of campus climate surrounding tribal financial aid. These two steps were instrumental on the research design because it aligned with Indigenous research methodologies that seek to redefine *place* as a site of relationship building (NCAI Policy Research Center and MSU Center for Native Health Partnerships, 2012; Smith, 2007).

Institutional Context

The participants of this study were drawn from two southwestern research focused universities. Both institutions showed promising trends to define place in both a physical and

nonphysical space. From a physical perspective, both institutions are located near defined tribal communities and from a historical aspect, are located on lands that were appropriated from the original inhabitants of the land. From a relational perspective, both institutions have designated American Indian student support services, established financial aid protocols serving American Indian students, and recruited higher percentages of American Indian students, staff, and faculty when compared to other mainstream universities.

Tribal Context

A total of ten tribes, all located in the southwestern portion of the United States, were represented in this study. Out of respect for tribal sovereignty and tribal IRBs, it was decided to not identify the tribal nations that were represented in this study. This decision was based on two factors; 1) this body of research acknowledges and privileges the sovereign rights of tribal nations and 2) it is important for outsiders to understand the inherently complicated process to developing a respectful research design involving tribal communities. At the University of Arizona (the researcher's home institution), there are additional steps required when conducting research with American Indian populations[5]. The human subjects protection program's process is double scrutinized by going through an extra review process, where an Indigenous-focused research panel reviews the proposed research from a tribal sovereignty lens. Historically, research has a negative connotation with tribal communities (NCAI Policy Research Center and MSU Center for Native Health Partnerships, 2012; Smith, 2007). In order to protect the rights of tribal nations, an extra internal review board (IRB) screening may be conducted to determine if

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[5] To learn more about the University of Arizona's initiatives to support tribal rights on research visit: http://www.nptao.arizona.edu/

an external tribal IRB process is warranted. For this project, it was deemed unnecessary to initiate tribal IRBs because tribal identification was excluded from research findings and all data collection was limited to campus locale.

The ten tribal nations were categorized into three types to develop a context in which the participants came from. Type I Tribe provided both need and merit-based aid. The aid application process required a basic one to two page application, financial aid needs analysis, enrollment verification and/or class schedules, proof of tribal enrollment, and updated transcripts. Type II Tribe only provided need-based aid. The application process was similar to Type I Tribe. In addition to awarding financial support, these tribes worked closely with students to provide additional economic and emotional support. This also included tribes that housed their financial aid programs with other social support services, such as TANF or WIC. Type III Tribe primarily provided merit-based awards. The application process was most simple of all, with most of the process occurring online. Students had to submit a one to two page application, proof of tribal enrollment, transcripts, and an approximately 300-word essay describing their collegiate goals.

Participants

Thirty-seven full-time undergraduate American Indian participants, who have applied for tribal financial aid and are academically persisting in college, were drawn from two four-year public research universities located in the Southwestern portion of the United States. The initial recruitment sought students who were either first year or fourth year and beyond students. Participants were selected from opposite ends of the college experience continuum to be able to contextualize their experiences as it related to the amount of time in school. As recruitment continued, the participant requirements were expanded to include second and third year students.

As initial data analysis occurred with data collection, it became apparent that students who were in their sophomore and junior years could supplement my understanding of how student progressed through the college-going process. And for that reason, I sought a more diverse sampling of students by the year they were in college.

A purposeful and snowball sampling technique was employed to select participants (Maxwell, 2005). There were two methods for identifying potential participants. First, the researcher collaborated with each institution's American Indian student support centers to help identify American Indian students who applied for financial aid throughout their term as college students. A second strategy was through the use of snowball sampling (Maxwell, 2005). The snowball approach allowed for the sampling to reach a diverse pool of students, such as students who do not utilize student services or who were less engaged with on-campus initiatives. For this study, two approaches for identifying participants was necessary because students' willingness to discuss personal financial aid may be limited. Initially, the goal was to recruit forty students, but after the thirty-fifth interview and discussion with faculty advisors, on-going data analysis revealed a level of saturation. Saturation is recognized when "all the concepts are well defined and explained" (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 145) and in this case, there were reoccurring themes and no new concepts were emerging in the last three interviews.

All thirty-seven participants had applied for tribal financial aid and received amounts ranging from zero to $8,000 per academic year, with a cumulative amount of tribal aid exceeding an average $150,000 per academic year. Participants that received zero dollars were included in the study because their experience provided a valuable perspective on how American Indian college students pay for college and further demonstrated how tribal financial aid for students are not guaranteed funding. The students, who at the time of the study did not receive funding,

represent several different scenarios. One student applied but was denied for unknown reasons by the student. One student applied, was awarded, but due to other large scholarships became overawarded and was no longer eligible for tribal funding. One student had received funding in previous semesters, but had exhausted eligibility. Including the three non-tribal aid recipients students, the whole sample population reflected the multiple dimensions found within the American Indian college student population. These dimensions included students who reside on and off their home reservations, the amount of aid received from tribes, gender, age, and the class standing in school. For example, twenty-six students described growing up on the reservation, but more than half either lived off the reservation at some point or felt their experiences were not limited to a rural, reservation life. On the same note, ten of the eleven students who never lived on the reservation still described a strong connection to their tribal community. A more detailed list of participant dimensions can be found in Appendix A: Participant Dimensions.

Data Collection

Data used in the analysis of this project were derived from two sources. First, one-on-one interviews were the primary source for data (See Appendix B for Interview Protocol). This in-depth process allowed participants to describe the context of their life, retell the experiences from their own lens, and reflect upon the essence of those experiences (Seidman, 2006). The context, details, and reflection provided by the participant illuminated the intersection of tribal financial aid and student experience. Each interview session consisted of semi-structured interview questions and lasted approximately an hour to an hour and a half. Participants were compensated for their time with a twenty-dollar university meal card. Providing students with compensation for their time and participation is critical for a couple of reasons. This method

encourages students from diverse backgrounds to self-select. Methodologically, students who are most likely to participate are those who are doing well academically and are highly involved in college life (usually with much disposable time and income). The compensation allowed participation of students who may be struggling academically and/or financially, many of whom are commuting to college, thereby increasing the diversity of the sample and making it more representative of the broader population of college-going American Indian students.

The interview protocol was designed to reveal the participants' perceptions of tribal financial aid and how they feel it has influenced their college experiences and outlooks. The interview process included follow-up or probing questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Seidman, 2006) so the participants could reveal the context of their experience and for the research process to avoid a "methodological tunnel vision" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 80).

The second source of data was a content analysis of tribal nation financial aid policies and goals. Tribal agencies providing educational funding have established bylaws that include award requirements, procedural information, and intended purposes for awarding financial aid to tribal members. Prior to the interview session, the corresponding tribal nation's financial aid policies and goals were reviewed. Tribal agencies providing educational funding have established bylaws that include award requirements, procedural information, and intended purposes for awarding financial aid to tribal members. This source of data enriched the interviewing process and gave a tribal context for each participant. It also helped reveal if the participant was aware of their tribe's financial aid intentions and if these intentions were relevant to student's college-going experiences.

Data Analysis

The initial process of analyzing the data occurred in tandem with data collection. Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggest that as data is collected it should initially be reviewed not to develop codes or themes but to "feel what [the participants] are experiencing and listen to what they are telling us" (p. 163). Each interview was audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and organized using Nvivo 10 software. Following each interview and throughout the remaining part of the study, the technique known as memoing was used to expand upon the data analysis process and improve validity of the data. A memo is classified as "open data exploration" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 118) because these notes help advance the coding process. The initial review of data, along with memoing, led to generating student profiles utilizing Seidman's (2006) recommendations on profiles. After each profile was situated with their varying personal dimensions, the process of open coding followed and served as a lens when conducting content analysis on the documents attained from the tribal funding agencies. Coding the interviews allowed the data to be organized "into chunks or segments of text before bringing meaning to information" (Rosssman & Raillis, 1998 as cited in Creswell, 2009). The data from this analysis helped triangulate the themes from the participant interviews. Once the tribal documents were analyzed again, the process of axial coding or connecting codes with the two sources of data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) was completed. By using analytical tools, like the concept of time, making comparisons, and looking at use of language, a deeper understanding of the data developed (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). As themes emerged, a fluid typology representing the thirty-seven participants was developed. This typology represented the college-going process, with an understanding that the pre-college and in-college experiences are intricately related. This typology can be found in CHAPTER FOUR.

Validity

Ensuring validity requires the researcher to limit the potential threats that result in misrepresenting the data (Maxwell, 2005). In this study, the researcher implemented three strategies to help ensure that the most authentic point of view is represented in the findings. First, the interviewing protocol and techniques improved the likelihood of having rich and thick descriptive datasets. This "rich" data will provide me with descriptions to more accurately understand the context of the participant's experience (Maxwell, 2005). The second strategy utilized member checking throughout the data collection and analysis process (Creswell, 2009). After each interview I offered students to review their transcription and clarify any points of the interview they felt was needed. I have also updated students of my progress throughout the analysis stage. As one last process, I sent my chapter four to all participants to review and submit any corrections. The third technique recognized the concept of research bias (Maxwell, 2005). No research is ever bias-free, but critically acknowledging identity and personal values that may influence the findings enriched the trustworthiness of findings. For example, in my positionality I state I am both an insider and outsider. My insider status allows me to have a moral and cultural obligation to represent the students' voices in the most accurate way possible.

Limitations

The research findings are meant to provide a snapshot of how American Indian college students at several stages of their college enrollment at two Southwest public universities experience college generally and how they process the receipt of tribal nation funding specifically. This is a qualitative study and is limited to exploring the meaning of financial aid as it intersects with the college-going process, for this cohort of students. Furthermore, it is important to understand that there are 566 federally-recognized tribes in the United States and

each of these tribes operate as a sovereign nation. This study is not meant to homogenize how students interact with or perceive their tribal nation's financial aid process, but is meant to expand the underlying dominant assumptions of higher education and how American Indian students make meaning of their experiences through an independent and/or collective lens. This study is also limited to students who have applied for tribal financial aid. Therefore, perceptions of financial aid may differentiate from students who have not applied for tribal financial aid.

Summary

This chapter explored the merging of two methodologies, the standard and the Indigenous approach, into one study. This qualitative study highlights how the status quo of research continues to replicate incomplete understandings of American Indian students. By highlighting three themes found within Indigenous methodologies, the chapter frames the role of the researcher and how that subsequently informed the creation of the conceptual model used in this study. The chapter also discussed in detail the selection of participants and data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF AMERICAN INDIAN STUDENTS

By using a financial aid lens to explore American Indian student college-going, I am able to generate three findings that illustrate why reframing higher education through a collective lens is important. As noted in Chapter one, the term ”college-going” in this study is inclusive of the phases students experience from pre-college exploration through persistence. This chapter is divided into four sections. The first three sections discuss the findings that emerged from the lived experiences of thirty-seven American Indian students. The first finding presents how the participant’s college-going process is not linear in both pathways and meaning making. The second finding demonstrates how the college-choice process is instrumental in understanding how students frame the purpose of higher education through collective values related to tribal enrollment. The third finding shows how a collective lens on financial aid perceptions inform how American Indian students make meaning of the intersection of college-going and tribal community. The last section discusses how these findings challenge prior college models by reframing college-going into a more cyclical and balancing process that includes both individual and collective values and the role of being tribally enrolled.

Finding #1: American Indian College-Going Process

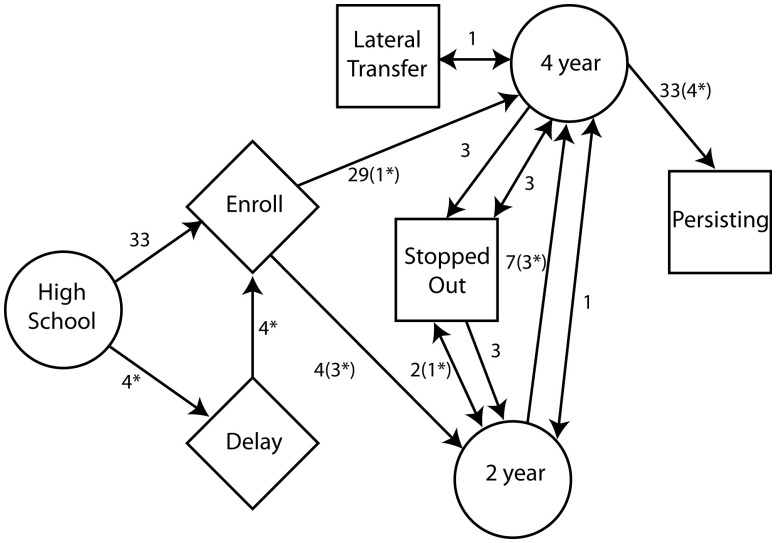
College pathways and college-going for American Indian college students is sorely under-researched and little is known about how American Indian students experience this process holistically. From the student interviews, I find that their college-going pathways are non-linear and the college-going phases are a fluid process. College-going is understood to have cyclical qualities where their initial meaning making has relevance for their later decision making. In this section, I begin by presenting the participants’ college-going pathways and their

subjective perceptions of their own pathways. I then present the students' meaning-making through a college-going typology.

College-Going Pathways and Their Perceptions

Mapping the pathways of the American Indian students (Figure 4) from a large qualitative study like this has never been completed in this manner and reinforces the point that American Indian students are not a monolithic group (Horse, 2009; Huffman, 2008). In fact, among the thirty-seven students interviewed, eleven distinct pathways were identified among these students, all of whom had applied for tribal financial aid.

Figure 5: Participant's College Pathway Diagram



*Indicates which students chose to delay immediate enrollment

Two other noteworthy points that are derived from this diagram are: 1) Ten students have attended a community college at some point during their pathway—either through transferring, reverse transferring, or swirling; 2) Approximately one-third (n=13) of the participants have experienced at least one interruption during their college-going process. Altogether, fifteen of the students have clearly experienced a pathway that does not follow the traditional linear

progression of entering college immediately after high school, enrolling and completing a degree at a four-year institution without interruption.

The non-linearity of these pathways exposes the relevance of understanding their meaning-making about their college-going process as non-linear as well. In their interviews, participants explain how their second (even third in some cases) college-choice and enrollment decisions built upon their initial college-choice decisions and circumstances, in somewhat of a circular (back and forth) fashion, rather than in a linear way. The experience of Charlotte[6] (110), a first-generation college student, illustrates how decision-making about the college-choice process can be understood in this manner:

> I thought I would have enough to pay for college. My scholarships didn't come in all at the same time…So I was telling my mom and dad, I don't know if the scholarship will cover it all. They're like, "okay, you can just come back to here (home)."

She continues by saying that she enrolled at the local two-year college because:

> "I didn't live in the dorms because the dorms [at the university] is $4,000 or something, but there [at the two-year college] I just lived at home and drove to school...I also had [financial aid] refunds from that time…and that was a huge sum of money that got refunded back to me.

Generally when analyzing the diverse college pathways of students, such as reverse transfers like Charlotte, past research has rarely addressed how the student reengages in the college choice and enrollment phase in this way. My findings reveal that *choice* is not always isolated to a single event – it is reoccurring. And for Charlotte, her financial aid knowledge at the university informed her choice to reverse transfer, or enroll at a two-year. Furthermore, when Charlotte chose to transfer from her two-year college back to the university, she engaged in the choice process again.

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[6] All student names are pseudonyms.

Those students in my sample who demonstrate a more traditional college pathway explained in their interviews how college choice reentered later in other college-going phases. Helena (01), a first-generation college student who has not experienced any interruptions in college, embodies how pre-college experiences reenter during college enrollment and helps to inform her college engagement and future goals. She states this about her future plans:

> I want to teach a college prep course. I want to give them resources on scholarships so that I actually help them with the application and then like we let them know about internships and get their resumes started that's what I want to do at the senior level.

She further explains how her goal to help increase college access was influenced by the intersection of her community service during college and recollection of pre-college experiences:

> I went to [volunteer at] two high schools so I saw the differences between that high school and my high school…I don't know, just seeing like how [the local high school] had a college center and then how they have the [university] recruiters going to them and helping them in the college [application process] and then like in high school I never had that…And that's when I thought it was not fair that people are exposed to college more because there's a bigger university here and then [back home] there's the community college. I never saw the people from [the community] college come to the high school and be like we'll help you fill out the applications stuff…I never saw that.

The subjective descriptions of the participants' college-going pathways begin to exhibit how college choice continues to be important beyond their pre-college experiences. Initial college choices reenter or transform at a later time, particularly if there is a change in enrollment. As students described their diverse college pathways and their subjective meanings, I was able to identify how college choice was relevant in an ongoing rather than a one-time way. The next section explains how the meanings of the objective and subjective college pathways informed the development of what I call my student "college-going typology."

College-Going Typology

The typology I generated emerged from the rich descriptions participants offered of their lived experiences. The typology consists of three phases that correspond to what the students

described as most salient to them during their college-going process. It is important to understand that the phases are not linear and static. Rather, students can experience then re-experience any specific phase multiple times during their college-going. In this sense, a "phase" is meant to represent something more flexible and non-linear than a "stage," which is the language used in prior models. The three phases are labeled as college exploration, college choice and enrollment, and in-college. Each of the three phases are then each divided into three categories to describe the essence of their experiences.

Table 1: College-Going Typology

Phases	*Categories Based on Subjective Meaning Making*		
College Exploration	*Early Birds*	*Late Comers*	*Wanderers*
# of students	n = 24	n = 9	n = 4
College Choice & Enrollment	*Determiners*	*Searchers*	*Simplistics*
# of students	n = 13	n = 22	n = 2
In-College	*Reciprocal Thinkers*	*Exploring Thinkers*	*Forward Thinkers*
# of students*	n=28	n=8	n=11
	* Total number for the In-College phase doe not add up to 37 because the categories are not mutually exclusive. The dotted lines between the categories indicate this phase remains fluid as students continue engage in college-going.		

College exploration. College exploration is the first phase in Table 1. This phase consists of experiences that helped the student formulate (or not formulate) their own purpose and function of higher education. This time frame began as early as four years old for one participant to the age of twenty-five for another participant. The experiences that formed the college exploration area deviate from existing college-choice literature because existing models

limit the college exploration to high school years (Bragg, 2011) and my findings show that this exploration can extend well into college on an on-going basis. By focusing on messages that promoted college-going in the college exploration phase, participants were able to describe how they made sense of the messages, where the messages came from, and how the messages aligned to other important aspects of their life, such as family, community, and tribal enrollment. Students were assigned these categories: Early Birds, Late Comers, and Wanderers.

- Early Birds: The Early Bird students recalled early and multiple messages about college. The messages often came from multiple sources, like school, family, peers, and community. This group had an informed understanding of what college entailed. These students learned that higher education was a privilege and that not everyone received the same opportunities. They also had formed a personalized idea of why college was an important perception about the purpose and function of higher education and believed in that perception enough to pursue available opportunities to prepare for college. Twenty-four students of the thirty-seven students displayed characteristics related to this category.
- Late Comers: The Late Comer students recalled experiences about college that were less frequent, but the college-going message about the purpose and function of higher education was received and accepted. Unlike the Early Birds, the Late Comers' college exploration did not begin until late Junior or Senior year. In their descriptions, they described less vivid experiences related to college-going when compared to the Early Birds. Eight students were placed in this category. A student, who delayed enrollment, was initially categorized as a Late Comer, but transitioned to an Early Bird when he decided to enroll in college five years after he graduated high school. See

Transitioning Categories for an explanation of how Marc transitioned from one category to another.

- Wanderers: The Wanderer students recalled fewer experiences on college exposure, and the college-going messages about the purpose and function of higher education were dismissed. The messages were described as "not important," and the student felt the least connected to the notion of attending college. Wanderers often stated they were not college bound or college was not of interest. These students either delayed college enrollment or stopped out shortly after enrolling in college. Two students were classified as Wanderers and an additional two students, who decided to delay enrollment, were initially classified as a Wanderer. During their second college exploration phase, one was classified as Late Comer and the other as an Early Bird.

College choice and enrollment. The second area in Table 1 is college choice and enrollment and it represents the college application process, exploration of and application of financial aid, and eventual enrollment in college. During this phase students explained why it was important to attend college and how that perception intersected with factors important to deciding on what college to apply to and enroll in. Factors included, but were not limited to, academic, financial aid, and location. Like the College Exploration process, some students experienced this process more than once. These students either stopped out or made the decision to transfer to another college. In College Choice and Enrollment, it was important to understand if, and how, the earlier college-going messaging experiences helped frame perceptions and decisions about enrollment. For each time a student enrolled in a college, they were given one of the three labels: Determiners, Searchers, or Simplistics.

- Determiners: The Determiners' college choice and enrollment was an informed process. They had applied to several colleges and made final selections based on variables important to them. These variables include financial aid, degree options, proximity to home, and college reputation. The college-going message resonated with them and if they described experiencing a conflict or confusion during the process, they had the skill set to be critically aware of their choices. Thirteen students were classified as a Determiner. One student of the thirteen stopped out, but when he returned he was classified as a Determiner again.
- Searchers: The Searchers' college choice and enrollment was less informed than the Determiners. This group of students did not actively engage in the application process as the Early Birds and most did not apply to their highest aspirational school. They recalled financial aid as a main reason for their college choice and were often making their final college choice within one to three months of actual enrollment. The college-going message was still a driving force, but unlike the Determiners, they were less assertive if faced with confusion during this phase. If they experienced this situation, it normally led them to making last minute decisions and under matching in relation to college aspirations. Thirteen students experienced the choice and enrollment phase as Searchers. An additional nine students experienced this phase as Searchers and engaged in another enrollment phase but were then classified as Determiners.
- Simplistics: The Simplistics were on the periphery of the college-going process. They recalled their senior year as "goofing off" and figured that if they were to attend college, they would decide after high school. When considering whether to attend

college or what college to attend, their thought process was simplistic. Most did not describe or recall any conflicting or confusing circumstances when it came to choice and enrollment, primarily because they were "going through the motions" or an adult figure took over the process for them. Two students were classified as a Simplistics and transitioned to being Determiners due to stopping out shortly after their initial college enrollment.

In-college experiences. The third phase in Table 1 is in-college experiences included and it represents the descriptions of experiences in college and how they related to the college-going messaging about the purpose and function of higher education. There was also a focus on what experiences influenced their persistence in college. Since the students were currently experiencing this phase, the labels assigned to students classify them as thinkers. Thinkers were actively processing their experiences during the interview process and there existed fluidity between one of the three categories. It was not uncommon to place a student in the middle of each category or hear how a student migrated from one category to another based on an accumulation of experiences. The students' experiences were most rich and for most students, they referenced how their pre-college experiences shape their current decision-making. These categories were finalized toward the end of analysis because it helped me explore how students navigated between independence and collectivism in the college-going process. This phase generated three loosely coupled categories: Reciprocal Thinkers, Forward Thinkers, and Exploring Thinkers.

- Reciprocal Thinkers: The Reciprocal Thinkers have defined and accepted their own college-going messaging and articulated how the messaging influenced their personalized understandings of the purpose and function of higher education. These students have

been active on campus and academically sought services to better their college experience. The distinguishing characteristic of this group was their ability to incorporate collective values and referenced their tribal enrollment as influencing their navigation of college and development of goals. Many described the fact that their in-college experiences and decisions, like being involved in mentoring programs or seeking student employment within the tribal community, were influenced by a collective perspective that was nurtured from an early age. Due to the fluidity of each category a student could be placed in two categories at the same time. Twenty-eight of the thirty-seven were placed in this category. Of the twenty-eight, eighteen were only categorized as Reciprocal Thinkers.

- Forward Thinkers: The Forward Thinkers have persisted through college with the least amount of adversity when compared to their peers. Like the Forward Thinkers, they too are involved on campus and outreach to the university, but their motivations differ from the Reciprocal Thinkers. The Forward Thinkers have relied heavily on the initial college-going message they received during high school make decisions and to develop goals while in college. The message that influenced them came from a more individual and independent frame of reference. Subsequently, students in this group chose to get involved because they saw it as an opportunity to develop their resume and to "not get bored." Eleven of thirty-seven students were categorized as Forward Thinkers, however, only one of the eleven was given the sole category of Forward Thinkers.
- Exploring Thinkers: The Exploring Thinkers have persisted in college, but when compared to their peers, have less concrete opinions on their experiences in college. The college-going messages that influenced their initial views on the purpose and function of

higher education are wavering in their descriptions. Their reasons for choosing a degree and justification of goals were less clear. Some students in this group were unsure if they would continue attending college. Eight students were classified as Exploring Thinkers. Five of the eight were either Freshmen or Sophomores, which is not surprising since accumulation of experience and time to reflect on those experiences generally lead to a stronger affirmation of future goals.

In Figure 5, the college pathways diagram demonstrates eleven different paths. When melding the typology with the objective college pathways, the process results in twenty different subjective pathway experiences. By layering the typology, I am able to honor each student's experience and gain an understanding of how student perceptions and behaviors are relevant to the college-going process. For example, the twenty-two students, who are persisting at their four-year college without any interruptions, share similar objective pathways, but their subjective meaning making of their pathways varied.

Cyclical transition between categories. Some students, particularly students who experienced an interruption or transition in their college pathway, changed their perceptions along the way. Therefore, students, who transitioned from one subjective meaning-making category in Table 1 to another, explained their transitions as having cyclical qualities, where previous meaning-making was reengaged during subsequent enrollment and college engagement decisions. This alone challenges any assumptions that college pathways are linear in terms of both enrollment patterns and subjective meaning-making. For example, in the Late Comer description, Marc (115) was initially classified as a Late Comer in the college exploration phase, but transitioned to an Early Bird when he decided to enroll in college five years after he graduated high school. I made the decision to incorporate transitions to further articulate how

the college-going process is not always linear and how students constantly draw from previous experiences to form new perceptions and decisions. For Marc, he recalled being encouraged to attend college after high school by his college educated mother, but deep down inside he felt she "knew he wasn't ready." After nine years of working, he faced a crossroad in his life regarding his father's ailing health.

> He had a stroke and he was fighting the stroke. We were talking and we were making plans…we were talking about all the cattle and horses and stuff, my dad was like it's probably time now for you to give school a chance. I was like okay.

At that point, Marc had reentered another phase of college exploration. He became more determined to enroll in college, explored his options, saved up money, and enrolled with conviction to complete his degree. At that point he was classified as an Early Bird. I share Marc's transition to further explain how student experiences of college exploration, choice and enrollment are intricately linked together.

These findings advance our understanding of how students' college-going pathways can be extremely fluid. It makes clear how complex this process can be for students and challenges our assumptions about how they make-meaning as they move into and through college. The next section addresses how students' college-choice process is instrumental in understanding how students make meaning of their purpose of college.

Finding #2: Exploring the Purpose and Function of Higher Education

In this section, I show how American Indian students form and make meaning of their purpose and function of higher education. As students proceeded through college-going phases their purpose and function of higher education were generally framed in more collective values. Though less commonly referenced, the individual and independent values were primarily described during college exploration phases and were often tempered by collective values as students engaged in subsequent college-going phases. In addition to the collective being part of

the reason why students chose to go to college, it continued to inform their decisions to persist and for those who experienced an interruption in enrollment, reengaging in college-going was driven by a pursuit of collective-based goals.

Purpose and Function of Higher Education

My findings indicate that American Indian students utilize their tribal political status and collective values to frame how they will engage in the college-going process. All but one participant described a regular use of collective values and their tribal enrollment during college-going. I have selected two student interviews to represent how they engage both their tribal enrollment and collective values during the college-going process. Subsequently, it is through that process that students are making meaning of their previous experiences and gaining ownership over their personalized purpose and function of higher education.

The first student is Richard (09). Richard is classified as a swirler because he has attended three institutions since high school. He engages in the college choice and enrollment process three times. The first enrollment phase occurs directly after high school where he enrolled at a two-year community college, and then he took a five-year break and worked. Richard's second enrollment phase occurs at the same two-year college and then transfers to a four-year university. His typology is quite complex but results in him being classified as a Wanderer when he first explored college to becoming a combination of Forward and Reciprocal Thinker while in college.

By understanding and comparing Richard's initial purpose of college with subsequent purposes, I find that his perceptions of first enrollment are reengaged and are instrumental to how he informs his enrollment and persistence decisions. In particular, he frames his first enrollment decision primarily using independent values to incorporating more collective aspects

during his second and third enrollment decisions. He states his first decision to enroll in college occurred after he graduated high school, "[my parent] told me…'okay you don't have to get a job right now, you can just go to college. You can stay here for free and we will support you.' And I said that is awesome." Richard recalls that he had little to no understanding of what it meant to go to college, but decided the function of college was meant to give him freedom and time until he really knew what he wanted to do. Richard did not complete his first semester in college. After five years of working, he recalls having a more collective perspective on the purpose of college:

> I just started thinking what am I going to. I'm a decently intelligent human being, I could probably do [college]...well why now? I never had a drive when I was younger and I started reflecting on what I had done in the past and I started seeing all these people who helped me, that believed in me, had faith in me, wanted to see me succeed because of the potential I had, and I was like damn, I fucked that up, I just wanted to do right by them give and to be able to provide the same thing for someone else.

Richard explains that he enrolled back into the two-year college he initially attended five years earlier. He further shares that as he attended the two-year college he knew returning back to his hometown would be a positive thing. Now that he is enrolled in at a four-year university his statement expands to incorporate values reflecting his tribal enrollment:

> It was more than just myself. I wanted to be in the position to help people…to get the education I needed to help the community. My intention was to help the community, and part of that was to help the Native community, just 'cuz I wanted to be part of it. I thought it would be good for me to learn where I come from…and if I can help someone, I just want to, I just want to help the community in general...get into a position where I can help the community...

Richard's progression from being an aloof student to being an active member on campus for American Indian education and diversity initiatives in large part was due to wanting to be part of his Native community. The individual-independent value initially engaged him in the college-going process after high school, but it appears he did not engage in a tribal and collective driven perspective until later in his life. Today, his drive to persist in college is fueled by a combination

of both the individual and collective values. Richard's experience is common for a great deal of participants. While it is impossible to gauge if his college pathway would have been changed if he engaged a collective based approach earlier, the next student, Marcy (108) demonstrates a tribal and collective perspective in college-going. For Marcy, the tribal and collective perspectives are described to be engaged early in the college-going process and subsequently shapes how higher education is perceived and how persistence is possible when challenges arise.

Marcy, a second-generation Early Bird who grew up in her tribal community, states that during high school she saw college as a way for her to improve herself as an individual, but also a way for her to contribute to her tribal community.

> …So one of the things my dad always said was you're not just doing it for yourself, you're doing it for everybody [referencing the tribal community]; so it's kind of like having that mindset, it was alright, because I knew that it was one of those to bring back to your community, back to your family. And it's like, you have to understand that in order to excel a little bit further.

The significance of Marcy's testimony is that she was still in high school when she developed an awareness and connection to her tribal status and collective values when forming function of higher education. As a persisting student in college, Marcy is classified as a Reciprocal Thinker because she displays characteristics of being a Native Nation Builder. She also shows how a strong identification with her personalized purpose of higher education helped her persist in college. Marcy has always maintained enrollment at the same four-year college, but she attributes her seven years in college to needing to get a full-time job to help out her family and switching from a science degree to a community-based health degree. She states:

> …So within that I noticed how long school was taking and I noticed retaking classes, dropping classes as well, not doing so well. I knew it wasn't turning out well…I quit my job. So I was like, I have to focus on school, I have to. So instead of working I picked up this [Native community health] internship, because I had more time to focus on what I wanted to do…I think during that time I was still considering dental hygiene…And it kind of tore me away from dental hygiene because I really like that community

> involvement. I like the getting into a program that was hands-on kind of thing and talking to people. It was more community based, so I think that's what really drew me that way.

Marcy's desire to be in a profession that was community driven and her need to contribute to her family prolonged her educational progress. She knew she needed to quit her job and focus back on her own educational situation—which indicates her drawing from an individual and independent values. Interestingly, after making the decision to focus on school, she states that she received more scholarships and that gave her the opportunity to be engaged in the community-based projects that interested her. For Marcy, her persistence in college demonstrates how as early as high school, she drew from a combination of individual and collective values and an awareness of her tribal enrollment to form her purpose of higher education.

The interviews of Richard and Marcy demonstrate how a student frames his or her own purpose of higher education is a fluid process. Though Richard's experiences were primarily rooted individual and independent values and Marcy's was a combination of individual, collective, and tribal enrollment perspectives; both as current persisting college students expressed being a Native Nation Builder in college. The next section presents how the participants centered their tribal enrollment and collectivism through their use of language to describe college-going.

Use of Language

In addition to explaining how students connected to their purpose of higher education, a distinct use of language emerges from student's lived experiences. The use of language asserts their tribal enrollment in the higher education setting and that this form of identification has connections to how the participants make meaning of the college-going process.

For the participants, references to their tribal enrollment became evident as early as the introduction of the student's self. Prior to interviewing students, I emailed the students and asked for the following information, 1) year in college, 2) status of tribal financial aid, and 3) what tribe they received funding from. Beyond those three basic questions, my knowledge of the students' lives was limited. The interview began with an open-ended question, "Can you please share a little bit about yourself?" This open-ended question was key to allow the students to share what was more salient about who they were or what they thought was important for me to know. Despite already knowing their tribal affiliation, participants overwhelmingly stated their tribal affiliation as part of who they were within the first few minutes of the interviews. Betsy (104), a first-generation Early Bird that grew up near, but not in, her tribal community, states who she was and how that guided what she does everyday, "I was born full-blooded Navajo and I should appreciate that and that I should continue doing the things that my ancestors and my grandparents did when they were young." Other students mirrored similar descriptions, even students who did not grow up on the reservation or near their tribal community specified where they grew up, such as, "I grew up in [name of urban town]" and would follow up by saying, "but I am also from [name of tribal community" or "my family is from [name of tribal community]." The affiliation with their tribal community, not just being labeled as an American Indian student, appeared to be an integral part of who they are as a student. Identifying with a collective whole has been a commonly found principle among American Indian communities (Williams, 2012). For participants to consistently identify themselves through their tribal affiliation highlighted the fundamental base in which American Indian college students assert their communal ties and tribal distinction into the higher education setting.

The choice of language became more noticeable as students explained their lived experiences of the college-going process. Language used, such as *together*, *we*, and *our*, were noticeable throughout the participants' rich college-going descriptions. Participants were asked questions directed toward personal experiences, such as "How did you learn about college?" or "How did you apply for financial aid?" Questions of this nature brought out descriptions of who was involved or why college was important and more importantly, how the meaning of those experiences influenced their perception of college-going. During the college-exploration period, it was common for students to respond by describing actions they did on their own. For example Helena, a senior who grew up in her tribal community, was like many of her peers and began her college exploration through college fairs at her high school—an action that was not compulsory and was independent of others. However, when it came to the process of applying for a scholarship, Helena (01) recalled an important interaction between herself, her teacher, and her mother: "He's like fill this out…he's like I already called your mom and said you're not going home until you fill this out, I was like okay and so *we* [emphasis added] filled it out." Another student, Brandon (10), a non-traditional aged student who grew up near his tribal community, shared his perceptions of financial aid, but more notably is how he framed his perception as one he shares with other American Indian students.

> One of the difficulties is financial, another is just being away from home. Another is just, like *we* [emphasis added] talked about with family, sometimes family issues come up and they have to go back. But financial is one of the main things that I kept seeing everywhere…it's not that *we're* poor, I think *we* just value ,as Native Americans, a lot more things than wealth.

Many students like Brandon see themselves as part of the larger American Indian community and believe they have a mutual understanding across this group. The second part of his statement also points to a self-awareness of value differences. He sees how American Indian's value different aspects of life when compared to the larger mainstream culture. Carrie (17), a

Junior who grew up off her reservation, furthers the point about what is valued in American Indian communities and their members when it comes to the purpose and function of higher education. She stated:

> With the Native people there's a responsibility there…And even though I didn't grow up with that background of being on the reservation and having…that kind of older generation to help guide [me]. I still at least have a say in the direction of the survival of *our* [emphasis added] community, ultimately.

The participants' use of collective language and their referencing of their tribal enrollment, set a base understanding that Native Nation Building is part of the college-going process for American Indian students. The students' *use of language* finding not only confirms that American Indian students bring their collective identities to the college-going process, it develops a deeper understanding of how students construct their tribal enrollment in higher education.

Finding #3: Tribal Financial Aid and College-Going

Most framing and research on financial aid discusses providing individual access and the impact on individuals, this finding demonstrates how student perception of financial aid takes on more of the collective lens because they talk about tribal financial aid in a dominant collective tone. Students confirm the meaning of aid on an individual basis, but in fact, most students see aid on different terms. These terms range from aid as providing luxury to providing the basic needs for survival. Fewer students see tribal financial aid as a means to provide luxury and overwhelmingly, students perceive aid as a means to survival. The concept of survival points not to an individual sense of survival, but to the collective survival of family and community. For these students, aid is not just providing daily living; it begins to reinforce their goals that are collective. Furthermore, aid informs student decisions to stay committed to the larger collective and inspires degree decisions that are rooted in collective values.

In this chapter, I first present how student perceptions of money inform their meaning making of financial aid. The second part presents how tribal financial aid intersected with the college-going experiences of the participants to reinforce collective and political values. It is important to note that while tribal financial aid is defined by funds that are allocated to students by tribal administration offices, one student profile shows tribal financial aid can also come from community members and relates to the concept of Native Nation Building and tribal enrollment.

Perception of Money

This study utilized a tribal financial aid lens to build a more complete understanding of how financial aid is perceived from an American Indian perspective. The descriptions of paying for college appeared in three terms: survival, access, and luxury. The first two specifically point to the collective values that drive student college-going. While the third, luxury, highlights the individual values in college-going. I have selected three student perceptions that best highlight the essence of how financial aid money is perceived.

Survival. For a large portion of students, the money aspect of college was a means to survival. And for those students, money was either driving the students purpose of college or helping the student meet the needs of daily living for not just their individual selves, but the collectivity of their family. Michelle (08), a first-generation college student that grew up in her tribal community, expressed this about tribal financial aid:

> …my mom was a single mother and she just had my little sister, and my grandmother, and then my aunts, and they were trying to pool money together but I have always been I can do it on my own. That's why I always had like a job in high school even though I was playing sports…So I have always liked my own independent money and helping out my mom…about $2,000 that's what I get personally [from tribe] and it pays for two months of rent. That's a lot of help but it's like it doesn't come on time, it doesn't come when you need it. There just needs to be more money given...my cost is $10,000, where am I going to go, what am I going to do with that if I can't even go back to reservation and get a sufficient enough paycheck to help pay off these loans that I had to pay to get my degree.

Michelle highlighted two important points about paying for college. First, finances are handled in a collective matter. Her family helped her out, while she also felt an obligation to help out her family. Second, she recognizes that the amount she receives is significant but it is not enough when her expenses heavily outweigh her award. Michelle also expressed a concern that she wants to return to her tribe, but is worried that she will be unable to due to the student loans she has taken out to off set her need. For many students like Michelle, financial aid provided the means to survive, not just her for herself, but her family as well.

Access. Another portion of students described financial aid money as being used primarily to pay for college. Stan (117), a first generation college-student, stated how his mother assisted him in the financial aid process and she was the one who provided his basic needs:

> … my mother is the one that took care of all of that [financial aid]…she got everything ready for me…well my mother… she works… she helps me. I know she paid for my groceries and then partially for my gas on my first year just to come back home on a regular basis…

When Stan lost his tribal financial aid he stated:

> …I felt very devastated and I was like "Oh my gosh it was $2000 of tribal money that I have to pay out of my own pocket so I didn't want that to happen again so I was actually really learning like all the [tribal aid] requirements…right now I saved up enough to get me through the fall semester and we're going to probably take out a loan for the upcoming spring next year.

While Stan's perception of tribal aid primarily focused on college access, it is through college access that he shares how his college-going is strongly rooted in collective values and his tribal enrollment. He shares how he formed his motivation for attending college:

> I think I was 8 or 10 years old. Growing, up, we didn't have electricity and the first time electricity was installed I ran into the electrician, installing it… I guess I was so fascinated by him. And I guess he's the one who said something like, 'Do you like what I do?' and I told him, 'yes' and he said, 'Well you have to go to school and you have to do good in math and then science' and that's what basically helped me get through my years just pursuing those two.

He continues explaining why returning to his tribe post-college is important:

> …well that's pretty much what everybody does…like all my mentors from my internship, that's what they all said, they all work outside the reservation and then they all came back and now they are working with the tribe. They just said it's something you give back so I figured we might as well do the same…When I was a kid, just the electrician installing, that's something that fascinated me to continue and I guess it would be great [to] create some kind of spark for some other kid later down the future…I plan on dealing with solar panels and everything and I know they are having a lot of contracting because they want to create solar energy in [my tribal community] so I really want to get involved with that and then later on probably be working for the tribe as I get older.

Like many students, the aid that Stan received not only provided access, it allowed him to pursue college to possibly reciprocate the "fascinating" feeling of being encouraged to pursue education and to return to his tribe to contribute in his field of study. Clearly, college access for students means drawing upon their tribal enrollment and the collective values.

Luxury. The perception of money as luxury is representative of only a handful of participants and I share because it is through comparative analysis that I am able to understand how students reference both individual and collective values during the college-going process. Perry (02), a second-generation college student who grew up away from his tribal community, is a stark outlier when compared to other participants. His perceptions demonstrate him being mostly disconnected from his tribal community and while he still identifies as a tribal member, his insights provide an interesting point of view of tribal financial aid.

> Yeah my parents pay for pretty much everything, so I'm fortunate to have that…scholarships cover like 40%...60% of the tuition and the living expenses are all covered by my parents and then the spending money is covered by [my tribe]…a thousand dollars [from tribe] is a lot of money…if you have, like, other things covered, a thousand dollars for spending…that's awesome. I saw many movies and go out to restaurants, I can go, you know.

For the students who describe financial aid as a luxury, all have significant financial support from either parents or other financial aid resources. Viewing tribal aid as a luxury points to how American Indian students can view aid through a primary individual lens, but more so how this perception is extremely rare.

Perry, Stan, and Michelle demonstrate how perception of money informs how both individual and collective values and tribal enrollment intersect with college-going. It also highlights how a student's context intersects with the amounts of money received from their tribal nation. For Michelle, $2,000 is not enough money to meet her expenses for college, nor meet the obligation she feels to helping her family. For Stan, $2,000 did not impact his sense of survival as much as Michelle, but it required him become more conscious of aid regulations and to possibly apply for a student loan. For Perry, $1,000 is a significant amount of money, but his survival and college persistence was not contingent upon his tribal financial aid. Qualitatively understanding that the meaning of aid and that similar amounts of aid is not homogenously perceived supports and expands existing financial aid literature.

Prior financial aid research centers student aid as alleviating cost of education while accessing and attending college. For American Indian students, financial aid research is limited, but past studies have shown there is a misconception between financial aid and access. Guillory (2009), in his comparison of student and college administration perceptions of financial aid, finds that administrators framed financial aid as a barrier, but students did not. Rather, their desire to complete a degree overshadows any financial issues. In my study, I find similar connections, where tribal financial aid is not just about providing college access and eliminating financial barriers, it reinforces students' purpose of higher education and subsequent decision-making, all of which are mainly collective and tribally driven. Financial aid is intricately linked to collective values and tribal enrollment and through this intimate relationship that we can understand how pervasive a financial aid is for students who want fulfill their collective and tribally influenced goals after college.

Tribal Financial Aid And College-Going Perceptions and Decisions

The student's lived experiences revealed how their unique relationships with either their tribal educational officials and/or tribal citizens revealed a cyclical and negotiating process of college-going. As anticipated in my review of tribal financial aid public documents, the main purpose of tribal financial aid is to assist their tribal members with costs associated with attending higher education. The expectation that students would return to their tribal nation after graduating was less explicit in the documents, but an overwhelming amount of the participants thought it was expected. As students explained their perception of and experiences with tribal financial aid, the perceptions of tribal financial was mixed with both positive and negative experiences. Through those understandings, I was able to identify four areas related to how tribal financial aid intersected with the college-going experiences of the participants.

Strengthened relationships. Corina (113), a second-generation student who grew up both in and away from her tribal community, explained how her tribal financial aid office was instrumental to helping her stay connected with her tribe while she was in college.

> This past semester [the tribal financial aid director] held a luncheon…he had all the [scholarship recipient] students come…they had like representatives from each department show up there too. So he had us introduce ourselves and what we were doing and just to say hey, these guys are going to school so look out for them in the future if they ever plan on applying to help out…I think that's the main reason, just to come back and help the community. It was a good experience because I know some of them work here with us in our program but it was good to meet new people and see what they do around the community. Like if I was ever interested, I would know who to go to.

Corina continued to explain that through her tribal community connections she was able to obtain summer employment with her tribe and that experience gave her a new perspective on her purpose of college.

> It seems like we have like a community that we want to help but everybody else is like I'm just going to do this for myself and help out people around the world, I guess but with me, it's just like I want to help my personal community because I know most of them.

For Corina and other students who experienced similar interactions, tribal education officials were trying to offer opportunities for students to stay connected, to give them a purpose to persist, and to give them a reminder that other tribal members know they are attending college. Corina's experience embodies positive perceptions that can result from building relationships between funders and recipients of financial aid, but it is important to note that not all tribes offered these types of experiences as Corina described.

Degree choice. For a portion of students, their perceptions of tribal financial aid were linked to college-going decisions. Of this group of students, they described messages that originated from tribal official as partially informing degree choice. Michelle (08), a senior who grew up in her tribal community, offered a great insight on how her experiences with tribal financial aid offices and other tribal departments shaped her perceptions of her tribe and her development of a purpose and function of higher education. She stated:

> [Tribal leaders] always say oh we need doctors...we need nurses, we need physical therapists, and public health people and stuff like that. That's all I hear. So that's why I wanted to get a medical degree and because I was always told like that's where the money is…I started off as pre-physiology major…

Michelle entered college with the intention to major in a science field. However, she explained how this degree choice was not ideal for her:

> [my grades] went downhill. So it wasn't until three semesters ago that I changed my major to Gender and Women Studies that [my grades] actually started going back up again.

As Michelle described her college experiences, she expressed a strong desire to go back to her community and due to the messages she received in high school she chose a degree path that appeared to have the best opportunity to make a good salary and to contribute to tribal capacity building. These messages appear to be more apparent because in my review of tribal financial aid office documents, many tribes have earmarked funds to support students in the STEM fields.

The other component is related to the individual-independent philosophy of obtaining a degree in a field that has monetary benefits. Michelle's change in degree prolonged her college tenure and led to her being on academic probation and losing scholarships, including her tribal financial aid. Michelle's story is not unique when comparing her to other participants. Other participants share similar experiences and it appears that a great portion of students have to reassess and balance their desire to contribute back to their communities.

Aware but displaced. As described through Michelle's experiences, the messages about helping her tribal community through STEM focused fields was ideal and helped her engage in the college-going process. However, there was a subset of students who had no interest in obtaining a degree in the fields the tribe overtly promoted and described feeling displaced about their role as a college educated tribal member. Shawn (106), a first-generation college student who grew up in his tribal community, offers his perspective about how his degree in English does not fit the model idea of giving back and how scholarship money is targeted toward students interested in specific fields.

> I think that's expected and I think that's what most of the students here are doing or expecting to do. And they're trying so hard to fit into the [idea of giving back]--it's almost like this pipeline that are set up by tribal nations to be like you have to do this, you have to become a lawyer so you become our lawyer. You become a doctor so you can work in our hospitals. You have to become an engineer so you can work on our roads. You have to [do] human services so you can become a secretary for our tribal nation. And those are like the only things you can do to be able to be a tribal nation builder to promote community or to be helping out your community…I think that's what's expected, you know, because we're 20, 21, 22. It's not like we're supposed have our life figured out by that point. And they always look at me like I'm really weird because they're like, no, you're supposed to be going back. It's like, well, what are going to do with an English degree, are going to be teacher?…But then, I'm like no, that's no where near my plans. Well, I think [my plans are] more of like an indirect way because I look at it the same way that all the other Native authors are doing it and actually telling stories and just telling their lives and writing down all the stereotypes and really getting it out there and really getting out like globally.

Shawn continues by discussing how funding from the tribes further pushes students to pursue certain degrees.

> I think being more in inclusive of all majors and sort of alleviating some of that pressure of you have to do these things in order to be successful… And [the tribe] promote those things through scholarships and you look at all the scholarships, most of them are for only science majors or math majors. And that's it. There's not any for fine arts majors. Humanities majors. To me they don't see those things as being successful degrees. Things that can contribute to a community.

For Shawn, the tendency for tribes to promote a Native Nation Building culture has made him question his future role in the tribal nation and has confirmed that at this moment he does not see how his degree choice can he directly back to his tribe. Much like Shawn, Perry (02), who was highlighted in the *Perceptions of Money* section, also states how his biochemistry degree choice and desire to work in a scientific lab has no place within his tribal community:

> I know for a fact [the tribe doesn't] have anything like science based but I'm sure if you were like medical school they would probably have something like that…you can go [back] when you had something like marketing or like accounting or something like that because, you know, it's always a need for that kind of stuff…I'm sure they have that more opportunities for those fields.

Through Perry and Shawn's testimony, there is evidence that students are receiving college-going messages from tribal officials. However, if those messages are not aligned with their individual or collective purpose of college, students may express feeling displaced in terms of being direct contributors to their tribal nation.

Tribal community aid. The three previous perceptions from the students were related to interactions with official tribal offices and employees. The role of tribal community is mentioned here because students, particularly those who do not live in their tribal community, recalled how interactions with tribal community were memorable on the process of going to college. Samuel's (12) experience was selected because he demonstrated that when the college-going process intersected with tribal community, the meaning of the financial aid can

fundamentally alter how a student frames the purpose of higher education. Samuel was classified as a second-generation college student who demonstrated how his tribal affiliation in tightly coupled to how he makes meaning of going to college. Samuel self described himself as "quasi-traditional" because he grew up in an urban setting, but was instilled with a strong sense of tribal identity and spoke his tribal language. When formulating his own purpose and function of higher education, Samuel was faced trying to negotiate the purpose of college through both individual and collective values and political status. In Samuel's case, his home perspective was a combination of both individual and collective values and his school perspective was rooted in individual values. Though Samuel's awareness of his tribal affiliation heightening during the college choice and enrollment process, it did not translate to his perceptions of paying for college until later in his life. When Samuel in his first year in college tribal financial aid had this meaning:

> You know like I used to think "Oh shit" like I'm getting money from the tribe, maybe I need to go focus on [that]… but then I saw the kids who were getting money from the tribe and I was like, "They're not going to class…They are not really doing shit with it…You know there's nothing owed"… It's almost like why do I have to give my time… why do I have to pay my dues to the tribe and I wasn't even raised there but these kids who were raised there, they don't value it the same way.

Samuel saw the money "as one less loan he had to take out." Samuel attended college for several semesters and eventually was forced to leave due to a personal incident, academic suspension, and his parents telling him, "We are not paying for this!" He milled around his urban hometown, working at different jobs, until he and his grandmother had a conversation about some money she provided during his first year in college. He recalled the money and conversation:

> Like I remember like I couldn't pay paid for books my freshman year…I didn't tell [my parents] that but I remember like my grandma coming up and I just remember her handing me an envelope full of cash and she was like, like we're all praying for you. [At that time] I didn't know that they had like a song and dance, you know like… so I could

> like pay for things. She didn't tell me that until last summer when she was like you know, like… everybody here is waiting for you to graduate. Everybody here is waiting for you to do good things to…when she said that, again I realized, you know, there's a lot of things that I don't know that I need to be responsible for and understanding like the financing of money just doesn't fall from trees…and my grandparents really opened my eyes to that when they said you know, like people here [back on the reservation] are waiting, you know like people here really understand where you are coming from, you are not from here, you know… but it's almost like their expecting you to come back in that regard.

Samuel knew that offering part of their livestock for his education was not to be dismissed. The financial situation he faced his freshman year had reappeared in his life. His grandmother's commitment to remind him of his tribal affiliation helped facilitate his decision to enroll back into college. The purpose and function of higher education and paying for college for Samuel was now incorporating individual and collective values and his enrollment in a tribal nation. Once Samuel processed how his tribal community intersected with his college-going choices, his desire and commitment to enroll in college appeared to strengthen. Though this funding source for Samuel did not directly come from a tribal education office, it presents evidence of how intimate the process of paying for college is for American Indian students.

Corina, Michelle, Shawn and Samuel's experiences contribute to our understanding of how tribal education departments and the funding they provide intersects with college-going. Currently, there exists only one of study exploring the intersection of tribal education departments (TEDs) and higher education. Marling (2012) solely presents TED employee perceptions of their services and does not explore the student perspective of tribal funding and college-going. My study fills this research gap and presents strong evidence that tribal enrollment status of students matter in college-going. It also provides a much needed foundation to understanding how tribal education departments (TEDs) and tribal community intersect with students' collective meaning-making of college-going.

Findings Summary

This chapter presented the three major findings that emerged from the lived experiences of the thirty-seven participants. Through a tribal financial aid, I illustrated how the participants drew from their individual and collective values and their tribal political status to inform their perceptions and decisions on college-going. The first findings focused on the overall college-going process by reporting objective and subjective college-going pathways. Pathways were understood in terms of phases that were primarily framed through collective values and tribal enrollment. The college-going typology emerged from the subjective perceptions of students exploring, selecting, enrolling, and attending college. Fusing the subjective with the objective college-pathways allowed me to understand to nuances of college-going for America Indian college students. It also directed me to the second finding of how students' purpose and function of higher education is framed by collective values and enrollment in a tribe. Through the purpose of higher education, I was able to understand how college-going was a process less reliant upon linear paths, but rather paths of balancing between individual and collective values. The purpose of higher education for American Indian students balanced between the individual and collective and/or strengthened as they experienced the different phases of the college-going process, with the majority of students relying mainly on collective values. I was also able to understand how students engaged their tribal enrollment perspectives and collective identities through their lived experiences and rich descriptions of the college-going process. The last finding specifically uncovered how the tribal enrollment and collective values informed student financial aid perceptions of money and how tribal financial aid not only provides college access, but is key to reinforcing student goals and decision-making that are often grounded in collectivism and tribal enrollment. This finding also provides a foundation to understanding how

tribal education departments (TEDs) and tribal community intersect with students' collective meaning-making of college-going. In the next section, I discuss how these findings specifically contribute to existing literature and theory.

Paradox and Theoretical Discussion

The findings point to a fundamental contribution that tribal status and Native Nation Building concepts intersect with American Indian college-going experiences. In this section, I present how the findings contribute to existing (American Indian) higher education research and how the theoretical frameworks of Native Nation Building (NNB) and the Individual-Independent/Political-Collective lenses allow us to better conceptualize what it means to be an American Indian student attending mainstream universities. First, I begin the section by framing the findings through an Indigenous paradox paradigm, which reframes how conflict or incongruency in higher education. I also discuss how paradox helps to understand how students perceive tribal financial aid. Second, I discuss how my findings are relevant Native Nation Building in higher education and how the findings help our understanding of what Native Nation Building means to students.

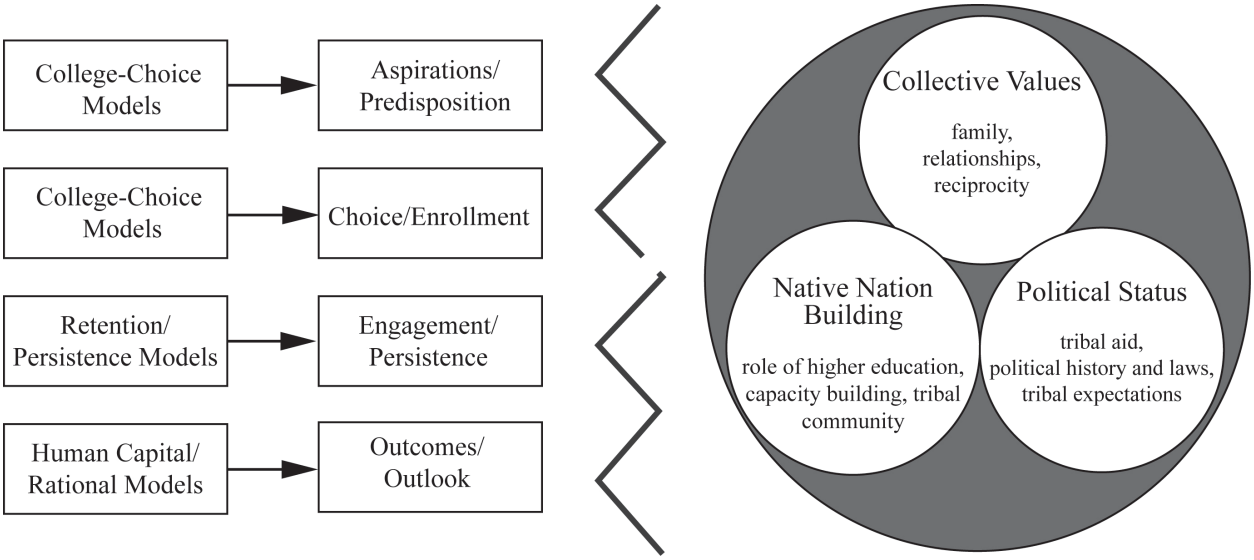
Framing College-Going Through an Indigenous Paradox

As students reflect upon their college-going, they share experiences that show them navigating circumstances where values from both the individual-independent and political-collective lens must be negotiated. Indigenous *paradox* presents a new perspective on how to negotiate the presence of both the individual-independent and political-collective lenses in college-going. The term paradox, from a westernized perspective, indicates a contradiction between two entities, but from an Indigenous- and collective-centered approach this term indicates a balancing of opposites (Maryboy, et al., 2006). By understanding the college-going

process as a paradox, it reframes the common reference of American Indian students living in two-worlds that culturally collide (Cleary & Peacock, 1998; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Klug & Whitfield, 2003). The two-world phenomenon reflects how American Indian culture is incongruent to mainstream culture and how that friction leads to distress on the college-going process. Embracing the balancing work of paradox does not view American Indian students living in two worlds, but rather it understands how American Indian students make their own balance between situations that require both independence and collectivism. Therefore, an Indigenous paradox views students and their college-going experiences as a balancing process.

When I first presented the Individual-Independent and Political-Collective lenses in chapter two (see Figure 6 below for review), the lenses were visually presented them as two separate ideologies and the relationship between the two was described in terms of a conflict.

Figure 6: Individual-Independent and Political College Lenses



When students recall college-going situations, that involve negotiating two value sets, they do not describe the experiences as a negative conflict. Rather, students process different values in terms that reflect Indigenous paradox. Students describe finding a balance for the circumstance they are in. For example, Samuel, the "quasi-traditional" student highlighted earlier in this

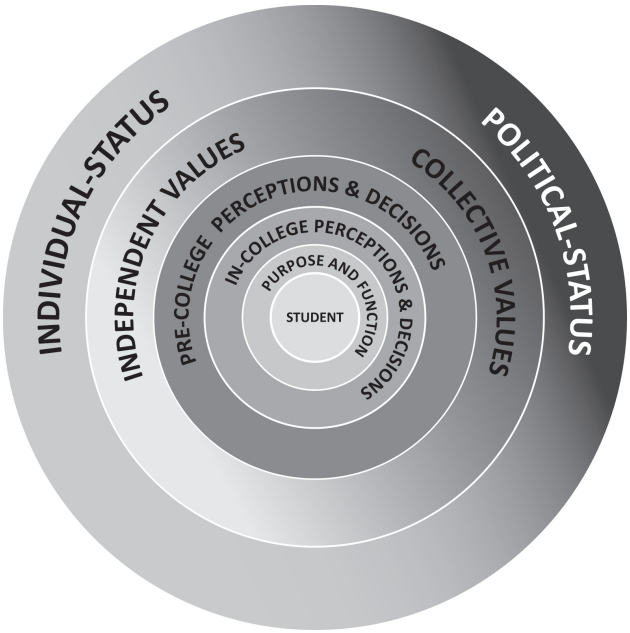
chapter, explains how he negotiates and balances the purpose of college. In his descriptions, he describes receiving two different perspectives on attending college. Part of his family sees the "individual benefits from the education but on [the other] side…the white man gets you more." In the latter part of the comment, his family saw a college education as assimilation to mainstream society and loss of culture. While the former, clearly states there are benefits.

There are two ways to assess Samuel's situation. The first is through a lens that views the differing messages as a conflict. The second is through a paradox lens. The first approach would assume Samuel's situation is a challenge or hardship because he is not receiving consistent messages about continuing his education. However, Samuel does not view his situation as a crisis; rather he takes a paradoxical approach to his situation and negotiates the meaning of the two messages. When asked what those messages mean to him, he states, "I don't care what [college I go to] as long as I raise good kids." When defining what raising good kids meant, he said it was him "being at home" and "providing cultural values." He did not express being in a conflict when making meaning of these statements and actually sees value in both opinions. Ultimately, he embraces a college education as a way to provide financial and culture stability for his future family, which allows him to balance between not only individual-independent and political-collective lenses, but also a viewpoint where college education could threaten his own cultural identity.

I provide Samuel's example because he is representative of how students frame their realities not in terms of conflict, but as a process of negotiation and balance. Through a paradox lens, a challenge, a conflict, or a hardship is reframed. The focus is not necessarily on favorability of messages, but is on how the student perceives and negotiates at the point of the Individual-Independent and Political-Collective intersecting. The paradox avoids seeing one

viewpoint as more favorable and seeks to understand how in the student's college-going is balance achieved. It is through Samuel's and other students' understanding of college-going that the Individual-Independent/Political-Collective lenses were reimagined into the Individual-Independent/Political-Collective (II/PC) Paradox Model (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Individual-Independent/Political Collective (II/PC) Paradox Model



The II/PC Model merges both lenses into a circular continuum. It also consists of concentric circles to demonstrate the multiple layers of a student's college-going experience. I position the student at the epic center of the model and the outer layers related to aspects of the study, such as how the purpose and function of higher education is critical aspect to understanding how students navigate both pre-college and in-college. The pre-college circle encompasses the in-college circle to represent how pre-college experiences should not be disentangled from the in-college phase. The values, which are related to both independence and collectivism, encompass the whole college-going process to demonstrate that students will oscillate between the values to find balance. The cyclical, continuum model does not assert that one value is more important or more salient for American Indian students. Rather, it places two

ideologies that are normally seen as conflicting on a paradoxical balance. Lastly, by conceptualizing the college-going process in this manner American Indian students engaging in higher education are no longer viewed as only fulfilling the individual-independent function of higher education.

Native Nation Building Theory

At the inception of this study, the research most germane was the theoretical push to expand the *American Indian* identifier from a racial category to a political status (Brayboy, et al., 2012). In Brayboy and other's theoretical argument, the Native political status has implications on how students make meaning of their college-going process and directly contributes to students being labeled as Native Nation Builders. In related studies, the intent for American Indian students giving back to their communities after college has also been reported (Guillory, 2009), but there continues to be a study that centers the significance of tribal enrollment and status on college-going. Currently, there only exists conceptual/theoretical papers supporting the use of tribal enrollment and tribal status in understanding college-going and my study is the first to qualitatively research and define tribal status in American Indian college-going. The findings of my study confirm that, on varying levels, tribal enrollment does intersect with college-going. In this section, I discuss how the findings inform how Native Nation Building is relevant to college-going and how Native Nation Building is a central aspect to how Native students are experience college-going, in particular those students who received tribal financial aid. I also connect how Native Nation Building in higher education is best served when understood through an Indigenous paradox lens.

Previous studies that confirm a desire for Native students to contribute back to their tribal nation frame that desire as one of many factors influencing persistence in higher education

(Guillory, 2009; Minthorn, 2012). The giving back phenomenon supports Native Nation Building in higher education, but there continues to be lack of understanding how students came to that point and how the intent to give back frames the purpose of higher education and college-going decisions. Students are aware of the giving-back rhetoric and many highlight that in order to give-back, they must negotiate and balance values rooted in both the individual and collective. With the help of the Indigenous paradox model, we can now frame Native Nation Building in higher education as a balancing and cyclical process. It helps us to understand that Native Nation Building is warranted, but most importantly, students need to process what Native Nation Building means to them. For example, Shawn, a first-generation college student who was highlighted earlier in this chapter, states:

> Me and my friends talk about [giving back to tribes] all the time. I don't know…I see [giving back] as a social expectation on [other students] to do that type of thing. Whereas, whenever they ask me [about going back to the tribe], I always answer I don't know yet.

From this passage, we can gain a sense of how students make meaning of giving back to tribal nations. Students are balancing and negotiating between the individual self and the student's inherent connection to a collective tribal nation, but the key point is how students reflect an Indigenous paradox when incorporating these concepts.

Summary

In this chapter, I present the three main findings of this study. The first finding presents how the participant's college-going process is not linear in both pathways and meaning making. Through a college-going typology, students reveal how the college-going phases have cyclical aspects, where each phase is built upon each other and influence subsequent meaning- and decision-making. The second finding demonstrates how the college-choice process is instrumental in understanding how students frame the purpose of higher education through collective values that are intricately related to students' reference of tribal enrollment. The third

finding shows how collective values and tribal enrollment help inform the meaning of financial aid for students. These meanings reveal that tribal aid is not only relevant to providing access during the college exploration and choice phases, but the aid reinforces students' purpose of higher education and future goals, which both are primarily collective in nature. I conclude this chapter by discussing how I reframe the college-going process into an Indigenous paradox model. The paradox challenges prior models and presents college-going in a cyclical process where students are constantly navigating and balancing the individual and collective values and their role of being an enrollment tribal member. It is through this Indigenous paradox, the dissonance between the individual and collective values, or commonly known as the "two-world" phenomenon, is reframed. Rather the two values intersecting is a relational interaction between two equals that students navigate to persist in college.

CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how the findings of this study inform the higher education culture that supports American Indian college-going. Through the lived experiences of the students, it is my hope that researchers, practitioners, and tribal leaders and administrators can begin to deconstruct two widely held assumptions of higher education, which are the tendency to dissect each "stage" of the college-going process to the point that the small pieces lose sight of the larger picture and viewing students as being primarily motivated by the individual-independent benefits of higher education. I use the Indigenous view of paradox to facilitate the deconstruction of the college-going process. Challenges, conflict, and hardship are reframed as a paradox, which is defined as a balancing phenomenon. By framing the college-going processes in terms of a paradox, we can better understand how students perceive and negotiate the intersecting point of the individual-independent and political-collective lenses during the college-going process. The paradox frame avoids seeing either lens as exclusive and views the college-going process as a balancing process created and navigated by the student. This chapter includes an overview of the study, a review of the findings, implications for practice and policy, implications for tribal nations, suggestions for future research, and my reflection as the researcher of this project.

Overview of the Study

This qualitative study acknowledges financial aid as having high impacts on student college-going and elevates the topic of financial aid as a suitable lens for understanding the college-going process. This study focuses on the lived experiences of American Indian college students from pre-college experiences to in-college experiences. By uncovering the intersections of academics, family, community, and tribal affiliation, this study challenges the dominant

cultural assumption that students' pursuits of a college degree are mainly a reflection of individualistic desires to better themselves and their chances for a better future. Second, it addresses one of the largest literatures in the field of higher education – financial aid and funding – by applying a completely new lens to this ongoing scholarship. The research approach overlays the very individualistic views of and policies regarding college-going and financial aid with the more collective framework from which American Indian students and Native Nations may be operating. Third, this research applies the under-discussed yet valuable concept of *Native Nation Building* to the field of higher education research. Through in-depth interviews, this study seeks to understand how American Indian college student experiences expand the individual-independent framing of higher education and contributes to the idea that relevant college-going messages for American Indian students are generally rooted in collective values and connected to enrollment in a tribal nation. This study also explicates how transition between college-going phases reflect cyclical aspects, where previous phases help inform meaning- and decision-making of American Indian college students persisting through higher education.

Methodology Overview

A qualitative approach was used in this study because it was important to understand the complex and holistic experiences of the participants. A qualitative methodology delves deeper than descriptions; it rests in trying to deconstruct a layer of the college-going process, like the financial aid process, to understand the larger context of college-going messages and how it relates to American Indian college student experiences. This qualitative method uncovered the multiple layers of meaning and how those meanings were developed (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The research questions of this study were:

3. Throughout the college-going process, what actions and outlooks, if any, of American Indian college students reflect elements of American Indian politically tribal enrollment status and the collective values embodied by American Indian culture?
    a. How do students' reported college-going experiences resemble only the mainstream individualized cultural norm?
4. How do American Indian college students describe the role of tribal financial aid throughout the college-going process?

The first research question aimed to understand the paradox between two different college-going ideologies, and by doing so, developed a stronger appreciation for the politically tribal enrollment status of American Indian college students. The second research question sought to uncover how tribal financial aid reveals, or does not reveal, the intersection of politically tribal enrollment status at the point of college-going.

Thirty-seven undergraduate American Indian participants, who have applied for tribal financial aid and are academically persisting in college, were drawn from two public research universities located in the Southwestern portion of the United States. A purposeful sampling was employed to select participants (Maxwell, 2005). The sample reflected the multiple dimensions found within the American Indian college student population. These dimensions included students who reside on and off their home reservations, the amount of aid received from tribes, gender, age, and the class standing in school.

Data used in the analysis of this study was derived from two sources. The first source, which was the primary source for data, consisted of one-on-one interviews with the participants. The second source of data was a content analysis of tribal nation financial aid policies and goals. Tribal agencies providing educational funding have established bylaws that include award

requirements, procedural information, and intended purposes for awarding financial aid to tribal members. After each interview was audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and organized using qualitative software, student profiles were generated utilizing Seidman's (2006) recommendations on profiles. The process of open coding followed and served as a lens when conducting content analysis on the documents attained from the tribal funding agencies. The data from this analysis helped triangulate the themes from the participant interviews. Once these documents were analyzed, the process of axial coding or connecting codes with the two sources of data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) was completed. By using analytical tools, like the concept of time, making comparisons, and looking at use of language, a deeper understanding of the data developed (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). As themes emerged, I was able to draw connections between and across student testimony to parse out how "the purpose and function of higher education" became a suitable concept to understanding the progression of college-going.

Summary of the Findings

There were three main findings that emerged from this study. The first finding revealed how the participant's college-going process was not linear in both pathways and meaning making. This non-linear nature demonstrated how transitions between college-going phases reflect cyclical aspects, where previous phases are highly relevant for students as they inform their meaning- and decision-making. Altogether, fourteen of the thirty-seven students have clearly experienced a pathway that does not follow the traditional linear progression of entering college immediately after high school, enrolling and completing a degree at a four-year institution without interruption. To better understand how different pathways intersect with college-going perceptions, a college-going typology emerged from the students' interviews. Through this typology three phases of the college-going process were identified: college

exploration, college choice and enrollment, and in-college. When melding the typology with the objective college pathways, the process resulted in twenty different subjective pathway experiences. By layering the typology, I was able to honor each student's experience and gain an understanding of how student perceptions and behaviors are relevant to the college-going process. For example, the twenty-two students, who are persisting at their four-year college without any interruptions, share similar objective pathways, but their subjective meaning making of their pathways varied.

The second finding demonstrated the college-choice process can best be understood and supported when we, as educators, understand the student's purpose of higher education beyond the individual-independent lens. This finding supported the idea that there is a strong indication that American Indian students utilize their political-collective perspective to frame how they will engage in the college-going process. The students also revealed how they asserted their tribal status and their collective perspectives in the college-going process by their use of language. Student's explicitly used words like we, us, our, together to reference college-going experiences ranging from applying to college/financial aid to discussion with peers about future goals. This finding looked at the essence of the experience and establishes a base understanding of how American Indian student engage in college-going.

The third finding revealed financial aid perceptions that helped inform how American Indian students make (or do not make) political-collective relevant decisions as they progress from pre-enrollment to persistence. In this finding, students' perceptions of money also informed how they make meaning of financial aid. These different meanings created a more complete profile to understanding how tribal financial aid intersected with college-going. While the perceptions of tribal financial were mixed with both positive and negative experiences,

students confirmed that their meaning of aid money was more than a tool to access college, it was instrumental to bridging the collective and tribal enrollment values to a higher education setting.

All three findings support Brayboy, et al. (2012) argument of American Indian students being Native Nation Builders. Now that we know American Indian students assert their tribal enrollment and connection to the collective, we can now move beyond the individual-independent model to reconceptualize higher education. To accomplish this reframing, the proposed Individual-Independent/Political-Collective (II/PC) Paradox Model views student college-going through an Indigenous paradox. The II/PC Paradox Model frames college-going student experiences as a balancing and negotiating process between individual-independent and political-collective perspectives.

Practice and Policy Implications

Understanding college-going from an Indigenous paradox and through the Individual-Independent and Political-Collective Model has significance for how both policy and practice are modeled for not only American Indian students, but also students who are driven by collective perspectives in life. In this section, there are four implications discussed with the first two focusing on practice and the last two on higher education policy. The first is how college preparation and access needs to be inclusive of the political-collective attributes when helping students (re)frame their purpose of higher education. Additionally, this reframing points to how the cyclical aspects of college-going can help reengage students who have encountered interruptions during their college-going process. The second implication is how an Indigenous paradoxical model can improve student persistence initiatives by acknowledging and incorporating political-collective values when developing curriculum. The third implication

relates to how policymakers need to accept and understand the relevance of tribal sovereignty on American Indian college-going and seek tribal input when developing policy. The fourth implication suggests that financial aid policy (and practice) can be best improved for American Indian students when institutions work with tribal education departments on collecting and reporting student data points.

College Preparation and Access

When I reviewed the best practices for creating a college-going culture, the suggestions operate from a perspective that solely appreciates the Individual-Independent function of higher education (Bosworth, Covertino, & Hurwitz, 2014; McDounough, n.d.). As of now, college-going preparation lacks the inclusion of political-collective factors. I find this disconcerting since majority of the students in this study describe their tribal enrollment status and identification with collective variables as being relevant to their meaning-making and decision-making throughout the college-going process. The inclusion of these factors can be a simple process. It begins by facilitators of college knowledge becoming aware of the Indigenous paradox students experience between the individual-independent and political-collective. This does not mean that everyone has to accept these lenses as his or her own. However, there needs to be an awareness so when college knowledge is shared with students one simple question can be asked, "besides career and financial benefits, what would be other important factors about going to college are important to you." Here American Indian students can begin to process the relevance of their tribal enrollment in college-going. As mentioned in Chapter Four, students who were given the space to process the relevancy of their tribal enrollment, while forming college-going motivations, experienced positive college-choices displayed by characteristics that showed more drive and purpose in completing college. The purpose of having a college-going

culture is to support students in their efforts to complete a post-secondary degree. As of now, we are doing a disservice to Native students if we do not acknowledge the role of tribal enrollment in the process of preparing for college.

Since the findings also suggest that college-going should be seen as having cyclical aspects (i.e. previous experiences reenter to inform future decisions and meaning-making) and there is currently a national push to reenroll adult students who stopped out (Lumina Foundation, 2013), similar conversations about tribal enrollment and college-going are needed for adult students who are seeking to (re)access college. From my study, stop out students show that one deciding factor to return to college is their desire to contribute back to either their tribal community or the Native community as a whole. Mike (13), who is in his late-twenties and grew up away from his tribal community, states this about being a member of his tribe:

> I'd say being [name of his tribe] is an extra motivating factor. I have my family and I have my rez family, my community here and I want them all to be strong and in coming [to college] I can work to strengthen others…

Mike continues to state that when he decided to return to college, he recalled his initial thoughts about college as a recent high school graduate:

> …when I left high school I wanted to do something with my rez but then I just kind of got caught up in being a teenager at that point…and then I was like "Oh well I want money now" so I need to work and work and work…I was making a lot of money and then that's when I told myself, 'if I make money I'll be good' but it wasn't and a lot of it was mental…it could have been the job. I thought, 'get back on track!' I have this idea of working with Natives when I was done in high school so I have the opportunity to go back to school, I'll do that and start focusing on that. So that is my focus is to work with Natives once I'm done.

Building a college-going culture is not just for high school students and as more adult learners return to college, their college-going preparation should include reflection on past educational experiences and centering how their current purpose of college relates to their identity as a tribal member.

Overall, I suggest that in order for college access programs, including high school college preparation programs, adult education programs, and community-based education programs, to promote a relevant college-going environment for American Indian students the discussion of "giving back" and how the student finds that concept relevant to their personal situation is sorely needed. Much like Samuel, who was highlighted at the end of Chapter Four findings, when the discussion of tribal community enters his purview of forming a purpose of higher education a different meaning can emerge. For Samuel, this discussion was facilitated by his grandmother, but in fact anyone who works with students can engage in this conversation.

Persistence and Retention Models

The second implication is connected to how an Indigenous paradoxical model can improve student persistence initiatives by recognizing the fact that many Native students view their collectivity as way to make their college-going experiences more meaningful. Existing persistence and engagement models discuss building community on campus to improve retention (Astin, 1984; Tinto, 1993). Tinto (1993) states a "common feature of effective retention programs…is their emphasis upon the communal nature of institutional life and the importance of educational community, social, and intellectual, in the learning process" (p. 147). There are two oversights to consider when building community on college campuses to improve persistence occurs. First, by building a new community when students arrive on campus, assumes that students do not already have a community that can provide support for college persistence. Second, there is a possibility that the foundational values of the larger " college community" vary from the student's existing value base. Mike (13), who is a business major, is a great example of how a Native student already comes to campus with a community that drives

his persistence and how his values are not acknowledged when there are efforts to building community in the classroom.

> I would say there is a sense of community here [on campus] but in a lot of my business courses… it's like my entrepreneurial… there's about a hundred of us in there and now we are just trying to interact more and work within groups and their focus is much different than mine, we have to come up with a project where we are looking at issues in higher education and I was thinking of a couple of ideas about working with natives…that's what I want to do in the end. Everyone else was like "We need to create an app to consolidate like blackboard, D2L and all these other online eBooks and everything into one area so you don't have to log on to that 20 different websites just information for classes and like that. So that's good. So I'll probably just end up focusing on what I want to do on the side and then working with a group there, their focus is much different than mine.

I share Mike's excerpt because it is through his awareness of differing perspectives that he has developed the skill to negotiate and balance his collective values in a predominantly individually based environment. Mike is a great example of how the II/PC paradox model can help us understand similar experiences from a non-deficit approach. Mike does not frame his "different" viewpoint as a setback; rather he negotiates his academic assignments to meet what he feels is most salient for him and in this case, it is his collective desire to help the Native community.

The II/PC paradox model reveals how Native students navigate college and how programming and academic curriculum can be more inclusive of collective and tribal enrollment concepts. As practitioners and faculty become more aware of how relevant tribal enrollment and collectivity is to our Native students, they will hopefully be more open to modifying curriculum and support programs to help students navigate and negotiate decisions related to college-going. As of now, the collective and political tribal enrollment status students bring to higher education is the "other" and therefore, Native students are seen as struggling when they cannot adapt to the larger cultural norms of mainstream higher education. They do not deserve to be seen as struggling, but as deserving support to learn how to best navigate the individual and collective viewpoints in college-going.

Understanding and Respecting Tribal Sovereignty

The third implication relates to how higher education policy-makers need to understand the relevance of tribal sovereignty in college-going policy development. When discussing higher education policy, the stakeholders are commonly referenced in three arenas, the federal, the state, and the local. There is rarely any mention of tribal constituents in policy-making, despite the fact that thirty-nine states either have federally or state recognized tribe(s) within their state lines (NCSL, 2015). There are some states and higher education institutions that have initiatives to improve the communication with tribal nations, but rhetoric of the majority silences the role of tribal nations. It is evident through this study that student tribal enrollment intersects with college-going and in order for institutions to better support American Indian students, more outreach needs to occur between institutions and tribal nations when higher education policy is developed. Beyond student engagement and support, tribal nations can help institutions meet their goals of higher education, such as increased community engagement and engaging in ethically sound research. More dialogue between institutions and tribal nations needs to occur regardless of how small or large tribal representation may be on campus. Even if a tribe is not physically located in the state of the institution, Native students who arrive on campus deserve the right to know that their institutions acknowledge the role of tribal nations in college-going. Francis-Begay (2013) suggestions, "All postsecondary institutions should consider developing some type of tribal consultation policy to guide universities in working with tribes, bearing in mind that the most important element of policy development pertaining to tribes is developing the policy *with* the tribes, not *for* the tribes." Higher education institutions have a great opportunity to be inclusive of all student voices and experiences by extending invitations to tribal

nations on policy making. This not only improves American Indian student experience, it sets a higher standard of inclusivity and diversity on college campuses across the United States.

Financial Aid Policy

The fourth implication suggests that financial aid policy (and practice) can be best improved for American Indian students when institutions have designated financial aid staff that work with tribal education departments (TEDs). The universities represented in this study both have established relationships with local TEDs. This relationship involves institutions understanding how to work with TED policies while best serving student needs. Both institutions have designated financial aid officer(s) that specialize in American Indian financial aid. Majority of students in this study mention these officers as being the key to helping them access and persist in college. Paul (14), a second-generation student, states this about the financial aid officer he worked with:

> There is one person in particular…kind of the person assigned to dealing with financial aid for Native Americans…so my freshmen year I don't think I did [FAFSA] right so then I just spoke to my brothers and they actually referred me to her.

Students, that mention getting specialized help from financial aid officer, state that these individuals were familiar with their TED policies and appeared to be more understanding to their personal financial situations. This connection seems to be comforting to students and helped them navigate the paying for college process.

While I am encouraging that institutions maintain designated staff that are familiar with tribal financial aid policy, I argue there needs to be more than one staff member that is familiar with these processes. Richard (09) states, "one time [Native advisor] wasn't there and I got bad advice." Richard is like his peers; he avoids speaking with financial aid advisors that are not well informed on tribal issues. More concerning is when students are told their financial aid situation could not be resolved until the designated staff person was available. It is beneficial to

have policy that ensures there is a tribal financial aid expert is on staff, but this policy should not be marginalized to the point that only one person in the office can perform services. More expansive policy must be created so that when a Native student enters the confines of a financial aid office, they are not automatically coined a special case and relegated to the "Native" expert, if and only if that person is available.

Since tribal financial aid policy is not widely known institutional leaders are encouraged to seek out resources provided by national organizations that support American Indian higher education. This entails attending the College Board's Native American Student Advocacy Institute or the National Indian Education Association Annual Convention, where individuals can learn how policy and practice are impacted at the intersection of tribal policy and institutional policy. These gatherings offer great networking opportunities and the ability to learn from other institutions, who are successfully negotiating the tribal policy to best serve their Native students.

Tribal Nations Implications

With the exception of tribal colleges and universities, most tribal members seeking higher education will be required to attend non-tribally located colleges. As Native student continue to struggle to access, persist, and graduate higher education when compared to their peers, the role of tribal education departments (TEDs) becomes more crucial. Through this study, I provide three implications to consider as TEDs move forward to best support their students. Before I continue with the implications of this study for tribal nations, it is important to note that I recognize and respect the sovereign status of each tribe and want to acknowledge that each tribe has to support their students within their own limits of financial and human capital. I also realize that the needs are diverse for tribes across Indian Country and that this study focuses on

experiences of students who come from tribes located in the southwest portion of the United States.

Student Recommendations for Tribal Education Departments

A portion of TEDs just offer financial support, while other TEDs offer additional support such as mid-semester check-ins or meetings to reconnect students to their community. The type of support varies for a number of reasons, such as the number of college students, departmental budgets, and staff availability. Each student recognizes the value of financial aid, but many had suggestions on how TEDs and other tribal officials can better support them. As it may be expected, students feel they need increased financial support. There is no easy way for a tribe to increase funding, but one student suggests that TEDs should get more involved with college preparation workshops so students would know how to competitively apply for scholarships that are separate from the tribal nation. The need for additional moral support is also another recommendation. Bianca, who grew up in her tribal community, states this when asked what recommendations she would have for her TED:

> I don't know, maybe more involvement, more concern instead of just like looking at our transcripts. They don't know the actual things that we go through and the reasons behind we got this grade in this class or something like that. I just would like to see more support I guess. Like there is a lady from the scholarship office that comes to [campus]. That's about it and then all of us are trying to talk to her you know in her little two hour window. I just feel like it could use a little more support and more like correspondence. I want to feel reassured in my scholarship, in case I have questions.

Other students express similar concerns that they feel like their TEDs do not understand what they go through as college students. Another Michelle (08), who also grew up in her tribal community, recalls what she said to her TED when she was denied funding after a personal crisis led to her dropping courses and a low GPA:

> "I applied for your scholarship three times and got denied. Only now, that you see my accomplishments that you are willing to support me?" And it's sort of just like I was going through rough time, why didn't you help me…they are just like you have to have

> these types of credentials just to get this money, but if you are doing bad, you don't deserve it. It's what I just felt and they were like well if you apply again, then we can give you that money. I am like only when I am doing good, I was like where are you when I am doing bad.

She continues on to state that she would like her tribe to hear her story and have compassion when she was going through "one of the most hardest experiences" in her life.

Michelle could not recall if she could have appealed the TEDs decision, but one common student complaint is about being denied funding. Each TED has an appeal process, but most students did not mention or understand the process. Helena (01), one of the most outspoken students of all, suggests that:

> I feel like there should be workshops for tribal funding…I remember one time for [my tribe] I had to write a renewal thing or even a workshop on the whole appeal process. I feel like there should be a workshop to how to help students, to help educate them on how they can apply or like if they have a low GPA or whatever like help them boost their GPA to get it.

TEDs do a great service by providing financial support for students, but as shown in my findings, financial aid permeates all aspects of college-going and any additional support TEDs can offer their students would be beneficial. I suggest that TEDs begin to explore how they can utilize web-based applications to offer workshops that could either be focused on pre-college preparation or tribal financial aid policy and application process.

Asserting Tribal Sovereignty to Advocate for Students

If TEDs are limited on financial resources and feel limited on how they can implement programming. I suggest TEDs begin to assert more tribal sovereignty in the higher education setting. Tribal nations filter large sums of money to off-reservation schools and quite frankly, American Indian college students are the only student group that comes with this type of funding stream. In this study of 37 students, almost $250,000 dollars of financial aid was allocated across two institutions in one academic year. Non-native based institutions accept this money

and this money alleviates some of their responsibility to fully fund Native students. I call for TEDs to present how much funding they are providing institutions along with student testimony to urge a collaborative effort between tribes and institutions to better support students, both financially and personally. I also suggest that TEDs continue to project a collective voice for TEDs across the nation. On a local level, institutions can seek out state or regional organizations like the Arizona Tri-University for Indian Education in Arizona (see www.atuie.com). This group has been extremely successful in presenting a more unified voice on Native higher education issues within the state of Arizona. It also serves as a networking tool for TEDs to learn about best practices and upcoming events that are relevant for their college students. On a national level, there are numerous organizations like the National Indian Education Association (NIEA), the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, (AIHEC) and the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI). All have higher education initiatives and have ability to advocate for Native issues on a national level. For example, NCAI's advocacy was instrumental in directing national attention toward the tribal implementation of Violence Against Women's Act (see www.ncai.org/tribal-vawa) and getting this law passed and enacted. Partnering with the powerhouses for Native advocacy can elevate the importance of asserting tribal sovereignty in the higher education setting. The partnerships that TEDs forge with increase advocacy for their students and further asserts the relevance of tribal enrollment in the college-going process.

Student Perceptions of Native Nation Building

It is important that tribal officials consider all significant outcomes that result from the expectation of a student returning to help their tribal community after college. Some student degree choices were influenced by their desire to return to their tribal community, but found the reason of giving back was not enough to continue with that degree due to personal lack of

interest or being academically underprepared. The motivation to give back to tribal communities is a strength for our students, but students need support to process the best approach to meeting both their collective and individual needs. I encourage TEDs to be mindful of how students need to find balance between the two and that TEDs can help students learn how to negotiate that process.

I suggest that tribal nations use the Native Nation Building (NNB) framework to support all Native students regardless of degree. The reality is that any college degree attainment for American Indian/Alaska Natives is a move in a positive direction. In 2010, 13% of American Indian/Alaska Natives over the age of 25 had a bachelor's degree or higher (Ogunwole, Drewery, Rios-Vargas, 2012). The fact is we need more Native students with college degrees. NNB supports the idea that all degrees are needed because it argues for a holistic approach to capacity building. This means that when it comes to tribal capacity building, the creative writers that address issues of social justice and identity in their writings are just as important as the engineers that design and build roads. As of now, students of this study are not receiving that message. Recalling what Shawn (106) stated in Chapter Four:

> It's like, well, what are going to do with an English degree, are going to be teacher?…But then, I'm like no, that's no where near my plans. Well, I think [my plans are] more of like an indirect way because I look at it the same way that all the other Native authors are doing it and actually telling stories and just telling their lives and writing down all the stereotypes and really getting it out there and really getting out like globally.

Shawn is Native Nation Builder for his tribal community and the larger Native community, contrary to what he is portraying. Like many students, he has created a narrowed idea of what giving back means. Tribal leaders and TEDs have an opportunity to reimagine, repackage, and remarket what "giving back" means. Students have the desire and interest to be part of that cyclical process; it is now time for tribal nations to embrace and support any Native student pursing a higher education degree.

Future Research Recommendations

This is the first study to use student tribal enrollment status to understand college-going. For years American Indian higher education advocates have pushed for inclusion of the political-nature of the American Indian identifier. Stating that this alone creates a unique dynamic for American Indian students. I believe this study has confirmed this assertion. From this study more work needs to continue. I have five suggestions for future research.

First, this study focuses on students currently persisting in college and their future intentions after they leave college. I suggest that future research projects investigate career outcomes of American Indian students. For example, did students who expressed desires to contribute back to their tribal nations actually become Native Nation Builders. This would uncover process students experience as they enter the workforce. It would help tribes understand what facilitates a Native college graduate to return to their tribe. As of now, current research does not know if intent to return translates to actual contribution back to tribes.

Second, this study incorporates only tribal nations located in the southwestern portion of the United States. Other regions and the tribes located within those regions may have different circumstances than the Southwest. Differences could be (non)reservation based tribes, tribes with(out) access to tribally controlled universities and colleges, tribes located in (non)urban locations, or tribes that are vary in economic stability. By exploring college-going across different regions, we can gain a better understanding of the relevance of tribal enrollment status and related sovereignty issues on college-going.

Third, a comparative study across other ethnic groups would help further distinguish the difference between values of collectivity and factors related to tribal enrollment. There are other student groups that show tendency for collectivity in college-going (Fryberg & Markus, 2007;

Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012) and by replicating this study with students from collective backgrounds we can gain a better sense of not only American Indian college-going, but college-going for the larger student population. Such research could also further highlight the urgent need to reframe the purpose and function of higher education from an individual perspective to a combined individual and collective.

Fourth, I encourage tribal nations to conduct their own inquiry on student outcomes and experiences. Such inquiries could provide valuable insight on American Indian college-going from a tribal perspective. If tribes are smaller or have fewer resources to dedicate to research, then I suggest conducting a collaborative inquiry across tribes. Through a collective effort, tribes can then communicate their findings to institutions of higher education. These findings can demonstrate how much money tribal financial aid is filtered into colleges and universities and student outcomes at those institutions. This will begin to hold institutions accountable for the tribal financial aid money they accept and for the students that enroll in their colleges. By presenting empirical evidence to institutions, tribes can then fully advocate for their tribal citizens.

Looking Back to Look Forward

I am fortunate. I am a product of colonization.

How can one be fortunate and be a product of colonization? I am. It has been through my graduate education did I finally gain a space to process my life as an Indigenous person coming from a colonized past. Through great mentorship and teaching, I realize the colonization of Indigenous people is in my blood, but along with all the pain came the resistance and strength. Just as I work hard and pray for future generations, my ancestors did the exact same thing for

me. So as I engage in the doctoral process, I want to employ a process that respects my elders, but gives voice to the students who have so much to say and give.

I am enrolled in a tribe that offers tribal financial aid and for about half of my undergraduate career I received funding. After reading copious amounts of literature about financial aid and its implications on college-going, I realized the American Indian perspectives on financial aid was limited—despite being touted as significant factor influencing higher education experiences. I ventured into this project hoping to find rich descriptions about the application process and the hours spent searching for scholarships, but instead I heard how students were speaking a different tone about financial aid. Yes, financial aid was important, but it was connected to something larger than just money. It was instrumental to giving me insight on how students allocated time and space to process what college meant to them.

Through this financial aid lens, I have reflected upon my experience and how I lost my tribal financial aid award after two years into my undergraduate education. It has allowed me to look back on the history of financial aid for American Indian students and to make peace with the negative educational experiences my ancestors faced. I am able to look back in order to look forward. The forward progress I make on this dissertation has been for the participants, my family, and future American Indian scholars. As I conclude this chapter, I offer my implications and recommendations with gratitude and as a thank you to all those who have supported me. I am confident my experiences and those of the participants will only strengthen the push to improve access and completion of higher education for Indigenous populations.

Conclusion

This study began with the intent to understand how collective values and student tribal enrollment intersected with college-going, which was coined as the political-collective lens. The

individual-independent lens was also formed to represent the mainstream cultural norms that tend to define the purpose and function of higher education as a means for individual students to improve individual social mobility and to attain occupational status (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013; Bidwell, 1989; Day & Newberger, 2002). Prior research has coined the interaction between the collective and individual as American Indian students operating in two-worlds (Cleary & Peacock, 1998; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Klug & Whitfield, 2003). The two-world concept identified differences between the values but often framed the two as operating in opposition to each other. I believed it has been this framing that perpetuates America Indian college-going from a deficit approach. It was through the voices of student experience that this assumption was dismantled and college-going was reframed through Indigenous paradox.

The Indigenous college-going paradox model reflects how the students did not see themselves as operating in two-worlds, but as navigators who balanced the two values throughout their college-going experiences. Indigenous paradox does not hold one lens above others and the different viewpoints are equals—where interaction between the two seeks to find balance. At the time of the study, all students were persisting at four-year universities and throughout their lifetimes have acquired skills and support that allowed them to balance between the collective and individual values. In addition to understanding the Indigenous paradox of college-going, the students introduced how the purpose and function of higher education should be expanded beyond individual benefit to become more inclusive of the role of student tribal enrollment status and collective values.

We, as advocates for Native education can learn so much from our students. Throughout this whole process they amazed me with their insight and knowledge. I conclude this dissertation with a quote from Nancy (114) as she epitomizes the importance of seeing the

college-going process as an Indigenous paradox experienced as a Native person who is not fracturing one's self, but rather, engaged in balancing valued parts of one's self:

> *You know that two-worlds concept? I think, there is definitely truth to that two-worlds concept, even though…that sounds kind of insane trying to live in two worlds, like you don't know if you're here or there but really, like you don't navigate between any kind of places…you maintain a solid self in both places, so you don't ever get confused... Because once you stop telling yourself, 'these things are two worlds'…once you find that solid self, you can really see the balance between the two, and so a lot of the experiences that I had while I was in high school and at college was that, as a Native person.*

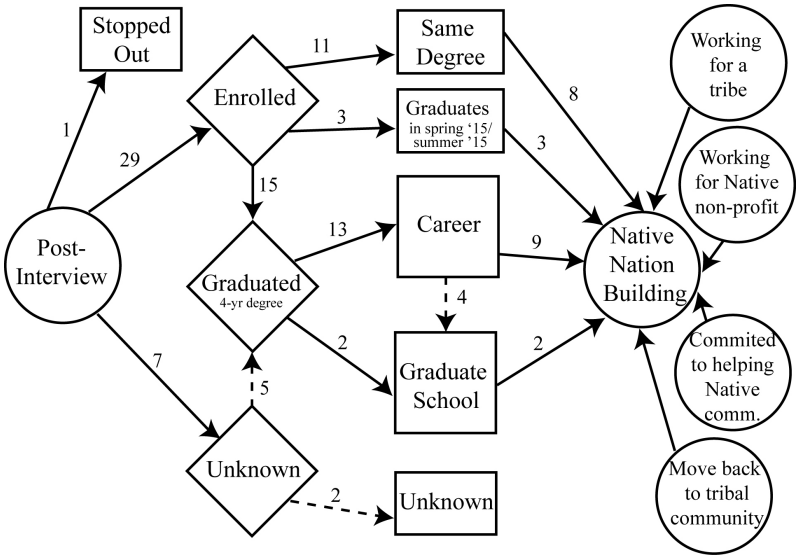
EPILOGUE

The initial data collection occurred in the spring semester of 2013. While I never envisioned the data analysis and writing would extend two years, I saw this as an opportunity to give a short update of the students who participated in this study. This dissertation study began with the intent to contribute to American Indian college-going literature, with an emphasis on financial aid. The journeys and experiences of the participants should be recognized as continually developing and this update provides a larger perspective of why I advocate for American Indian students. This section is divided into two sections. The first section discusses how I approached my follow up requests and the type of responses I received. The second section gives a brief break down of students' college pathways after I interviewed them and an argument to continue this line of research in the future.

After the conclusion of all interviews, I mentioned to students that I would follow up with them for future updates. I first attempted to contact students through the emails they provided me when we had our first conversation. A number of them were undeliverable, primarily because the student was no longer attending the university. For the students who did not reply, I contacted them through social media in a non-invasive and private manner. In my communication with them, I asked them to answer three questions in three to four sentences. The questions were: When will (did) you graduate? What degree will (did) you graduate with? What are your plans following graduation? Of the thirty-seven students, thirty responded. Half of them exceeded the three to four sentences and provided interesting updates that could prove to be useful for future implications.

From the students' responses, I generated a post-interview college pathway model (see Figure 1). The purpose of the model was to portray a snapshot of where the students are in their educational path and if Native Nation Building was a salient part in the students' next steps.

Figure 8: Post-Interview College Pathway Model



From the pathway model, students represented at least six different paths. This is an estimation since my update inquiry with students was limited to three questions and students may have had noteworthy experiences, like stop-outs or intentions to attend graduate school, without mentioning it. I did not specifically lead students into either direction because as mentioned previously, I wanted to see if students made references Native Nation Building. There were definite references to Native Nation Building for some students, but what was more interesting is the further a student was in their career, the less likely they were to mention concepts of Native Nation Building. Granted the information provided is limited, but these trends are noteworthy. It highlights the importance of conducting longitudinal studies and for me to conduct a follow-up study in the future.

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT DIMENSIONS

	M/F	Age	Year	Experienced Interruption	First Generation	Home Residence (on or off reservation)	Community Exposure	≈ Level of Aid	Degree Type
01	F	22	4	No	Yes	On	Rural	$7,000	Liberal Arts
02	M	22	4	No	No	Off	Urban	$2,000	Professional
03	F	18	1	No	Yes	On	Both	$8,000	Liberal Arts
04	F	22	4	Yes	No	On	Both	$8,000	Liberal Arts
05	F	22	4	Yes	Yes	On	Rural	$4,000	Liberal Arts
06	F	18	1	No	Yes	On	Rural	$4,000	STEM
07	F	22	4	No	Yes	On	Both	$8,000	Health
08	F	24	4	Yes	No	On	Both	$4,000	Liberal Arts
09	M	27	3	Yes	Yes	Off	Urban	$4,000	Liberal Arts
10	M	33	4	Yes	Yes	On	Both	$4,000	STEM
11	F	18	1	No	Yes	On	Rural	$0	Health
12	M	25	4	Yes	No	Off	Rural	$7,000	Liberal Arts
13	M	29	4	Yes	Yes	On	Both	$8,000	Professional
14	M	22	3	No	No	On	Rural	$4,000	STEM
15	M	23	4	No	Yes	On	Rural	$4,000	Liberal Arts
16	F	18	1	No	Yes	Off	Both	$0	Liberal Arts
17	F	21	3	No	No	Off	Both	$4,000	Liberal Arts
18	F	33	4	Yes	Yes	On	Rural	$8,000	Liberal Arts
19	M	21	3	No	Yes	On	Rural	$4,000	Liberal Arts
20	M	18	1	No	Yes	On	Rural	$7,000	Liberal Arts
101	F	20	2	No	No	Off	Both	$4,000	Health
102	F	22	3	No	Yes	Off	Rural	$7,000	Health

103	M	24	4	Yes	No	Off	Both	$4,000	Liberal Arts
104	F	22	4	Yes	Yes	Off	Both	$4,000	STEM
105	F	34	3	Yes	Yes	On	Both	$4,000	Liberal Arts
106	M	22	4	No	Yes	On	Both	$4,000	Liberal Arts
107	F	20	3	No	No	Off	Both	$6,000	Liberal Arts
108	F	25	4	No	No	On	Both	$4,000	Health
109	F	20	2	No	No	On	Rural	$4,000	STEM
110	F	22	3	Yes	Yes	On	Rural	$4,000	Liberal Arts
111	F	19	2	No	Yes	Off	Both	$0	STEM
112	F	20	2	No	Yes	On	Both	$600	Health
113	F	22	4	No	No	On	Both	$3,000	Health
114	F	21	3	Yes	No	On	Rural	$5,000	Liberal Arts
115	M	32	3	Yes	No	On	Both	$4,000	Liberal Arts
116	M	33	3	Yes	No	On	Both	$1,000	Health
117	M	24	4	No	Yes	On	Rural	$4,000	STEM
	F=23	$\overline{x}$ = 23		No=22	Y=22	Off=11		$\overline{x}$=$4.3	
	M=14			Yes=15	No=15	On=26			

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

(Questions that are in **bold** will be the lead question with the non-bolded questions being asked as probing questions, if necessary)

Background

1) **Tell me about your background and where you come from, your family.**
2) **What is your community?**
    a. Did you grow up on the reservation?
    b. How would you describe your community?
    c. Describe your involvement in the Native community.
3) **What role did education play in your life, your family, and your community?**
    a. How did that aspire you to attend college?

College aspirations

1) **Could you tell me when you started thinking about going to college?**
2) **Why did you want to attend college?**
    a. What role did family have? Tribe? Community?
        i. Clarify how student defines family and community.
    b. How would you describe the importance of personal success?
3) **What schools did you want to attend and why?**
    a. What factors did you consider? What role did your family have? Tribe? Community?
4) **What did you know about financial aid at this point? Tribal aid?**

Applying to and choosing a college

1) **What colleges did you apply to?**
    a. After you were accepted to college(s), what influenced your choice to attend [Name of college]?
    b. How did your choice to attend [Name of college] fit within your initial reasons for going to college?
    c. Describe motivations and potential trade-offs you had to make.
2) **In what way did "paying for college" influence your decision to go to this college?**
    a. How did cost influence your choice?
3) **At this point, were you familiar with tribal aid? If so, what did you know about it?**
    a. Knowing that your tribe offered aid, why do you think they do that?

Financial Aid Process

1) **When did you start taking the steps needed to pay for college?**
    a. How did you start that process?
    b. At what point did you start applying for tribal financial aid?
2) **How are you paying for college right now?**
    a. What aid are you receiving right now?
3) **Do you feel you have enough funds to pay for college?**
    a. How much assistance does your tribe provide?
    b. What does your tribal aid go toward? Tuition, cost of living, supplies, family support?

Tribal Funding

1) **When did you receive notification that you were getting [name of tribal award]?**
    a. How did it make you feel?

   b. Did you experience any challenges maintaining your award? If so, please describe.
2) **Why do you suppose your tribal nation offers financial aid?**
   a. How often do you correspond with your tribal funding agency? Describe your relationship with your tribal funding agency?

Current Experiences

1) **How does your current funding impact your everyday college life? Time studying, working, activities?**
   a. Would this change if you did not receive tribal aid?
   b. Why do you choose to partake in these activities? Depending on answer have the participant expand upon the collective vs individual aspect.
2) **What is your planned major?**
   a. Why did you choose this major? Depending on answer have the participant expand upon the collective vs individual aspect.
      i. How confident you will continue this degree?

Outlook and Expectations

1) **Do you expect to return to college and graduate?**
   a. What factors helped you make that decision?
   b. Did tribal aid have any influence? If so, how?
2) **What are your career goals after college?**
   a. Depending on answer have the participant describe their ideal lifestyle after college and compare that with their ideas of what career they are planning.
   b. Has the tribal funding influenced your career goals?
3) **In what way has your perception of your tribal community changed since you started college?**
   a. How do you feel the money for school influenced that perception?
4) **In addition to funds from the tribe, what other support have you received from your tribe?**
   a. Is there anything you would like to see?
5) **Have you shared your experiences with tribal funding with other Natives?**
   a. If so, how?
   b. Describe any experiences you have heard from other Native students.
6) **Are there any aspects of tribal funding that I did not address that you would like to share with me?**

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