

Native American Student Perspectives on Tribally Affiliated Osteopathic Medical School Education



COLLEGE OF
OSTEOPATHIC MEDICINE
at the Cherokee Nation

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INTRODUCTION

Students' sense of belonging is linked to positive academic outcomes¹, including higher grades, increased engagement², self-confidence³, and acceptance⁴. However, little research has been conducted regarding Native American (NA) students' sense of belonging in universities, and no research investigates this in medical school. Documenting NA medical students' sense of belonging, perspectives on culture, relationships, closeness with their tribe, and what it means to them to be medical students in the inaugural class at Oklahoma State University College of Osteopathic Medicine at Cherokee Nation (OSUCOM-CN) provides a landmark opportunity to study these topics.

OBJECTIVE

To evaluate NA medical students' cultural perspectives related to self-identity, cultural engagement, and importance of attending a tribally affiliated medical school as the inaugural class at OSUCOM-CN, the first tribally-affiliated college of medicine in the United States.

METHODS

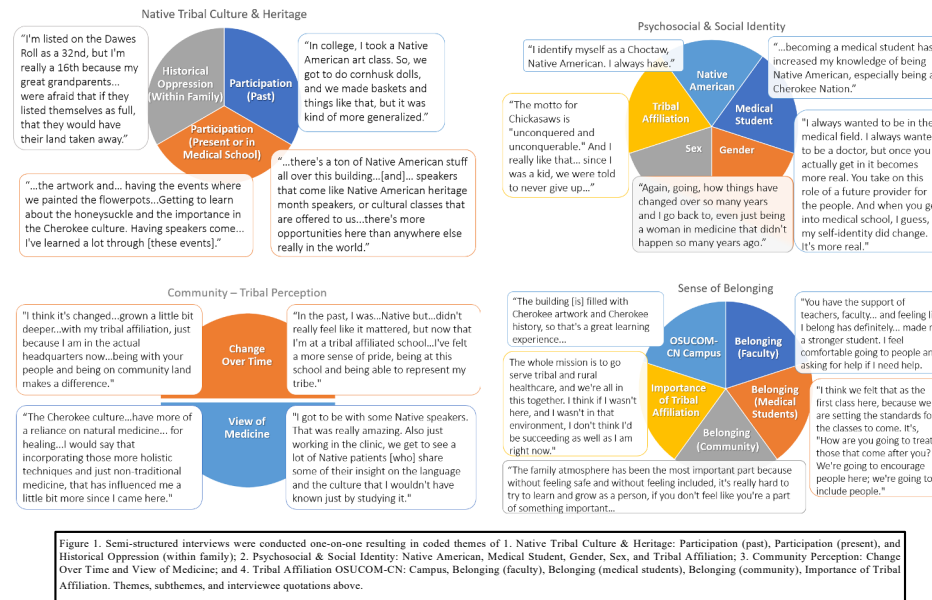
A social constructivist⁵ approach using mixed methods was adopted for qualitative evaluation. Data included a *Sense of Belonging* survey⁶ and semi-structured interviews. Participants were recruited from all medical students in the inaugural class at OSUCOM-CN identifying as tribally enrolled or tribal descendency alone or in combination with other race(s). *Sense of belonging* surveys were collected electronically and hard copy. Interviews were recorded via camcorder for transcription with Rev. Thematic analysis⁷ was conducted using Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework⁸. MAXQDA software was used for data management. MH generated inductive codes with themes identified from coded data. AG and RT reviewed transcripts separately to code data. Discrepancies were resolved with 100% inter-reviewer reliability met.

Table 1. Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework for doing a thematic analysis

Step 1	Become familiar with data
Step 2	Generate initial codes
Step 3	Search for themes
Step 4	Review themes
Step 5	Define themes
Step 6	Write-up

RESULTS

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS



DISCUSSION

In this study, our findings suggest that OSUCOM-CN is facilitating a cultural environment for NA medical students' academic success. Promoting inclusion for students without proof of tribal enrollment or those identifying as multiracial could expand these effects. Strengths of this study include concordance with previous studies supporting the link between sense of belonging and academic success. Limitations include the overall sample size, though it is a majority of the eligible population. Further research is needed to determine the significance of interventions for academic medicine milestones, such as board exam pass rates, graduation, and residency match rates.

Sense of Belonging Survey Participant Responses

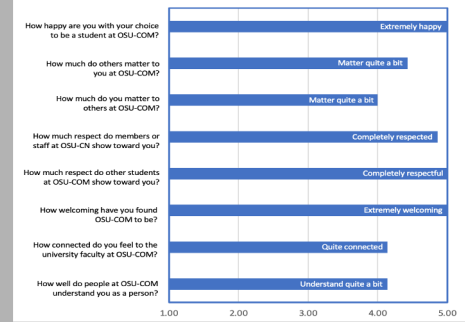


Figure 2. Mean participants responses from the *Sense of Belonging* survey.

CONCLUSION

This is the first study exploring NA medical students' perspectives on sense of belonging in a tribally affiliated medical school. NA medical students in this study reported an increased sense of belonging related to their NA heritage, expressed the importance of bridging past and present cultural involvement, and discussed positive changes in personal and community perception of NA culture and medicine. All participants placed personal and community-level importance on tribal affiliation for their sense of belonging and success in becoming NA osteopathic physicians.

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