

INDIGENIZING LEADERSHIP CONCEPTS THROUGH  
PERSPECTIVES OF NATIVE AMERICAN  
COLLEGE STUDENTS

By

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **Introduction**

Higher education in the United States has become increasingly diverse in recent decades. Greater numbers of minority students are attending higher education institutions; however, enrollment among the Native American student population has remained steady, ranging only from 0.7% to 1.0% of total enrollments between 1976 and 2007 (NCES,2009). In 2007, there were 25,063 Native American students in the higher education system (NCES, 2010). For Native American students, student support and development programs are essential, particularly at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). A vital aspect of these programs is the inclusion of culturally sensitive leadership perspectives and leadership development. This research study will explore this topic. The following chapter will address the research problem, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, an overview of the methodology, delimitations, and definition of terms and assumptions inherent within the study.

### **Background of the Study**

There is a sparse amount of literature with regard to Native American perspectives of leadership. Native American multi-generational or Native college student perspectives of leadership are actually non-existent in the literature. I recognized the need for an initial pilot study which I conducted during completion of coursework in the doctoral program. The study examined multiple generational perspectives of leadership, including those of tribal elders, current tribal leaders, and tribal college students.

Interviews were conducted using snowball sampling, with interviewees referred by key individuals within the tribal communities. Each tribal nation was approached by respecting not only appropriate tribal protocol, but also fulfilling all tribal research criteria or processes that must be met prior to seeking the permission of individuals. Ultimately, three tribal nations were included in the pilot study. After gaining requisite approvals, interviews were done at a place of convenience and comfort for each interviewee. Notes were taken during the first five interviews and were supplemented by field notes and memos. To gain greater insights and ensure accuracy, the final three interviews were tape recorded and again supplemented with field notes and memos.

Initial findings from this study emphasized the value of education and the support and need for college student leaders to return to their communities. Across the three generations, high value was placed on education and its importance in providing ample opportunities for individuals (Williams, 2009). The support for Native American college students was prevalent over the generations and across all three tribal nations represented. Tribal college students, elders, and tribal leaders all expressed a strong desire for college students to return home to contribute their education and college experiences to their community. The impact of leadership development of college students likewise was addressed as were current and historic perspectives of leadership and how participants were connected to the tribe and community. Of particular importance was the finding that depth of cultural knowledge, connections to the tribe, and perspectives of traditional leadership varied according to the generation of the participants. For example, tribal elders had a more extensive knowledge of traditional leadership and the connections to the tribe through lineage and ancestry, whereas the

knowledge shared by tribal college students tended to be brief and less historically connected.

Another finding from the study related to the role and responsibility given to the institution and the tribal nation. The study found that the higher education institution and the tribal nation have a mutual role in supporting the tribal college student's success and role in leadership development. It was imperative for both entities to work in alignment with the student's higher education goal, leadership development, career aspirations and ability to connect outside of the institution. Leadership development from a Native American or tribal perspective thus includes the traditional Native role of leadership and allowing the student to apply learned leadership skills within the respective tribal community after graduation (Williams, 2009).

The initial study, consequently, informed this research study by providing insights to multi-generational perspectives of leadership and leadership development, as well as the roles that higher education institutions and tribal nations have in developing future leaders. The initial study also highlighted the emphasis that each generation expressed in the role that education, in particular, higher education, has in a tribal member's life. Therefore, this dissertation focused on the perspectives of current Native American college student leaders on leadership, the roles of the institution and tribe, and the impact that leadership experience has on Native college student leaders.

### **Problem Statement**

Although the numbers of Native American students enrolled in higher education have not substantially increased in recent decades, there is a continual need for higher education institutions to be inclusive of the culture that Native American students bring

with them to campus. Multiple studies have focused on Native American students (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Pavel & Padilla, 1993; Wright, 1985) and have demonstrated that family and peer support networks, community, cultural programs, cultural centers, and mentorship greatly impact Native student success in higher education. The factors that attribute to Native student success are thus closely tied to the tribal and cultural values that each Native student brings with them to campus (Lowe, 2005). Although students' cultural experiences and tribal backgrounds are unique, common values include a sense of responsibility to the community, respect, reciprocity (or giving back their education to their respective community) and relationships to others (Belgarde, 1992; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Huffman, 2001; Larimore & McClellan, 2005; Lin, LaCounte, & Eder, 1988). Native students take these cultural and tribal values with them to campus.

For this reason, it is important that PWIs with Native student populations evaluate the services that are offered to Native students with regard to student support and leadership development. Research demonstrates that college is a critical time in the development of students' lives (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). In addition, the campus climate of higher education institutions informs students of the values of the institution and the level of commitment to diversity within the student population (Tierney, 1999; Tierney & Jun, 1999). Student services and programs should thus be reflective of the unique student populations of each institution.

This is not always the case, however, within PWIs. Institutions with a high Native American student population do not always incorporate relevant programs and opportunities for Native student engagement and empowerment through leadership

development. Although leadership development programs and opportunities within higher education institutions continue to grow, incorporating a diverse student perspective is imperative (Munin & Dugan, 2011; Ostick & Wall, 2011). The Native American college student leadership development perspective is absent from the literature. No documented studies have specifically incorporated a Native American student perspective of either leadership or leadership development. This study sought to address the need for documenting that perspective.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The presence of Native American students in higher education necessitates the need for advocacy and promotion of Native student perspectives in the services and programs offered at PWIs. Included in this is the need for PWIs, researchers, and practitioners to better understand not only the views of Native students, but also how cultural values impact Native student perspectives of leadership and leadership development, particularly given that this population is uniquely shaped by their tribal values, families and home communities. The purpose of this study was to explore the meanings and perspectives of leadership and leadership development among current Native American college students who are student leaders in Native American student organizations at five PWIs in the United States.

### **Research Questions**

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the perspectives of leadership of current Native American college student leaders?

2. How does the role of student leadership in a Native American student organization impact leadership perspectives?
3. How does the role of student leadership in a Native American student organization impact student leadership development?
4. What meanings for post graduation do Native American college student leaders attach to their experiences and leadership development?

### **Professional Significance of the Study**

Native American students in higher education come from diverse tribal backgrounds and experiences, and employ various levels of involvement on campus. This study sought to better understand the perspectives of leadership and leadership development among Native American college students who serve as leaders in Native American student organizations from five different regions in the United States, with each region representing specific tribal cultures, values, and history. This study also examines the intentions of Native American students regarding the post graduation contribution of their leadership experiences within their home community or a Native American community. Findings from this study may contribute to the literature by adding the perspective of a group of students who have often been left out of current college student leadership development theories, models and programs. These perspectives may contribute to a better understanding of the impact that Native college student involvement has on Native college student success, development, and career goals. The knowledge gained from the study may help current leadership development and program administrators to better understand Native American college students' perspectives.

## **Overview of Methodology**

To ensure that the voices of the participants—current Native American college students—are shared, this study utilized qualitative methodology. Focus groups were conducted among current Native American student leaders at five PWIs that are four-year institutions. Each PWI was located in a distinct geographic region of the United States that represented diverse tribal nations from which students leaders originated. In addition, one-on-one interviews were conducted with a Native American student leader at each institution to provide a narrative of his or her experience as a campus leader and his or her perspectives regarding leadership and leadership development. Participants were chosen using purposive sampling through identification by Native American student affairs professionals at the five PWIs. Native American student affairs professionals are individuals who are Native American themselves and work within the Native American student support programs, centers or studies departments on the PWI campus. At four PWIs four participants were selected at each institution, and at one PWI five participants were selected, representing a total of 21 participants.

I used the phenomenological data analysis approach, which provides a basis for researchers to explore meaning making in human experiences (Polkinghorne, 1989). I took into account the “epoch” (or gaining awareness of one’s own experience and removing oneself from judgment) of the participants’ meaning making (Patton, 2002). The second step of the phenomenological data analysis process was for me to bracket out, allowing the topic or responses of the participants to be seen in their own terms. These responses were examined per individual institution and then overall to determine if there were any relationships between regions or meaning made across the regions represented.

They were then put into meaningful clusters. From the clusters, emergent themes were identified to gain the meanings of the various Native American college students' perspectives on leadership and leadership development.

### **Limitations**

This study is delimited to current Native American college students who are identified as leaders in their respective Native student organizations on campus. All participants were identified by Native American student affairs professionals who also identify as being Native American, insuring that only Native American college students were included. The focus of this study was limited to leadership and leadership development perspectives of current Native American college student leaders; the views of former students were not included in the study.

Additional limitations include the potential bias and insider perspective of the researcher. This could create researcher bias within both the data collection and data analysis processes. The researcher could also be seen as having an insider's perspective due to my background and experiences, as well as the association with the students' campus advisors. To counter the potential researcher bias and insider perspective, during the initial consent process the students were informed of the research, the researcher's role, voluntary participation, and the confidentiality of the narratives provided. In addition, reliability measures were incorporated in the data analysis process through the use of peer reviewers and external auditors (Creswell, 2009).

### **Definition of Terms**

*Cultural (tribal) values:* Cultural values are those values that an individual possesses that are reflective of their community, cultural identity, and ways of being.



The cultural values of an individual who identifies as Native American may also incorporate his or her tribal nation, language, cultural ceremonies, and ways of living.

*Home communities:* The type of home environment that students grew up or resided in for the majority of their lives is the home community of the students. This could be rural, urban, tribal community, or reservation.

*Leadership:* For this study leadership is defined as the process of influencing others toward an action for the betterment of the community, an organization, or to reach a goal.

*Leadership development:* This term is defined as the process by which programming and activities foster the growth of leadership for an individual or group of individuals, particularly college students within a PWI.

*Native American/American Indian/Indigenous:* A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America) and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). This is the formal definition of Native Americans/American Indians; it is important to note that the tribal nations of the United States which are federally, state, and non-recognized, and have Indigenous connections to the land and currently or formerly have language, culture, and history, are also identified as Native American/American Indian. The terms Native American, American Indian and Indigenous may be used interchangeably.

*Predominantly White Institution (PWI):* A PWI is a higher education institution in which the majority of the student racial/ethnic demographics is composed of Caucasian or white American students. This can be an institution that has a diverse student

population but still possesses a campus climate or institutional culture that is reflective of Western and white American values.

*Reservation:* This is an area of land in which a federally recognized tribe has been relocated and that has been reserved for their use. A reservation is designated or allocated through the use of treaty, Congressional legislation, or an executive order (American Indian Communities of Minnesota, 2006).

*Rural:* This is an area sparse with residents and the tribal community or tribal headquarters are a distance away from the residence of the student. The family may live in isolation and/or have limited access to tribal resources. This is not a reservation area.

*Tribal communities:* A tribal community is where a Native American tribe or group of tribal members live or have relocated. This is usually a designated geographic location where a number of tribal members live and/or the tribal headquarters are housed. Again, this is not identified as a reservation area.

*Urban:* This is a residence area where individuals of American Indian or Alaska Native ancestry may or may not have direct and/or active ties with a particular tribe but who identify with and are at least minimally active in the local Native community (National Urban Indian Family Coalition, [NUIFC], 2010).

### **Assumptions Inherent Within the Study**

For the purpose of this study the following assumptions are important:

1. The tribal and Native American cultural values and beliefs of each student are an important part of Native students' lives for guiding decisions and support.

2. The tribal and Native American cultural values and beliefs of the student contribute positively to Native students' higher education success and potential involvement at the institution.
3. Tribal cultures of Native American students are distinctly different than the PWI campus climate and the culture of the institution.
4. The concepts of *leadership* and *leadership development* are not unique to Native Americans, but the definitions of *leadership* and *leadership development* within Native American student organizations and communities are unique to their cultural values and beliefs.
5. The researcher's cultural identification as a Native American and the accompanying ties to the Native community facilitated unique connections to the participants, potentially enabling them to provide in-depth responses and feedback.

### **Summary**

This chapter established the foundation for the research study. It conveyed the background of the study, provided the problem statement and the statement of purpose, addressed the research questions and the professional significance of the study, and presented an overview of the methodology, the limitations, and definitions of key terms. The following chapter examines the literature relevant to the research study.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Review of the Literature**

The following review of the literature seeks to provide both a background and a context to factors that impact Native student leadership development. The chapter begins with an overview of Native American students in higher education, including factors and influences that impact student success. The chapter then turns to the literature devoted to student leadership development in higher education, after which Native perspectives of leadership, including cultural values and the roles of family and community, are addressed. Finally, I provide an overview of the Native American tribes in the regions where the research study was conducted.

#### **Native American Students in Higher Education**

Native students are becoming more visible in higher education and receiving more bachelor's and graduate degrees than ever before (DeVoe and Darling-Churchhill, 2008). In 1998, 7,903 Native American students received a bachelor's degree, and by 2008 the number rose to 11,509 (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). With increased visibility and degree attainment of Native American students, their need for student services accordingly increases, as does the need for incorporating Native voices and perspectives. The following paragraphs examine these considerations.

**Values and Cultural Norms of Native American Students.** Recent studies have identified factors that impact the success of Native American students in higher education. These findings have allowed mainstream institutions and practitioners to

understand the unique values and cultures that Native American students bring with them to campus (Belgarde, 1992; Larimore & McClellan, 2005; Lin, LaCounte, & Eder, 1988). Conversely, at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) the culture of the institution is often reflective of the dominant population (Tierney, 1992). The differences between the values and cultural norms of Native students and those exhibited at PWIs contribute to some of the difficulties within the academy for Native students attending PWIs (Miheuah & Wilson, 2004; Locust, 1988). Native American culture and values sharply contrast with those of the mainstream culture; in Native culture there is an emphasis on the group more than on the individual. Many of the Native students attending PWIs are raised in homes where the values of sharing, generosity, and cooperation are taught (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997). Consequently, the definitions for success and achievement differ for Native Americans who are not raised with the individualistic perspective of mainstream culture. This automatically creates a cultural conflict between the student and the institution (Lin et al., 1988; Pottinger, 1989; Scott, 1986) and impacts a successful student transition during the first years of attendance when students must learn to navigate the institution and understand its cultural values (Swisher & Deyhle, 1989; Wright & Tierney, 1991).

Another factor that may impact the success of Native American students in higher education at PWIs is the under-representation of Native American students in retention theories and student development models (Tierney, 1992). The dominant current theories and models are grounded in research based on Western cultural values and neither includes students who are representative of Native perspectives nor address the specific and unique needs of Native American students (Huffman, 2003). A limited number of

theoretical frameworks on retention issues faced by Native students are beginning to emerge (Heavyrunner & DeCelles, 2002; Heavyrunner & Morris, 1997) and may inform practices for working with Native students to ensure their success. These retention models are reflective of Native cultural values in which family and support systems such as peer, faculty, staff and community are tied to the success of Native students (Pavel & Padilla, 1993). Including the academic, social, cultural, and psychological needs of Native students in the support networks and services provided facilitates the transition of Native students from high school or tribal colleges to PWIs (Wright, 1985). For many Native students, the motivation to complete an academic degree is based on and reflects the cultural values of the sharing of knowledge, collaboration, and giving back to the community (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008).

The role and impact that Native and non-Native faculty and staff have on the academic and social integration for Native students is likely underestimated (Belgarde, 1992; Falk & Aitken, 1984; Wright, 1985; Tippeconnic & McKinney, 2003; Fox, 2005). For Native students, a perceived lack of support from non-Native American faculty and staff with regard to opportunities for interaction and mentorship is shown to impact Native American student success (Miheuah & Wilson, 2004; Pavel & Padilla, 1993). This highlights the need for non-Native faculty and staff to become familiar with the issues and concerns of Native students (Hornett, 1989). Such efforts can greatly increase the success and confidence of Native students, while building a stronger connection to the institution itself (Jackson, Smith & Hill, 2003).

At a minimum, differing cultural and societal values, norms, and identities between Native American and non-Native American students may impede Native

American student success in higher education. Native American culture is particularly and deeply connected to human relationships and to a meaningful relationship to place (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001). Consequently, building relationships with other students, staff, and faculty, as well as with the campus itself, is essential for Native American students to feel accepted, welcomed, and likely to engage. When the institution demonstrates a commitment to being supportive and honoring Native students' cultural values as strengths, the relationship to the institution is deeply connected and aligned with Native student tribal and cultural values (Huffman, 2001).

**Academic Persistence.** Multiple studies have examined factors that contribute to the success and academic persistence of Native American students in higher education. Identified factors include confidence and self-perception as possible predictors of academic persistence among Native American students (Brown & Kurpius, 1997). Jackson, Smith & Hill (2003) find that confidence and self-efficacy are related to academic persistence. Other studies find that self-efficacy is critical for helping students to overcome obstacles (Coffman & Gilligan, 2002; Kalsner, 1992). Consequently, as Native students transition from high school to college, nurturing confidence and self-perception is important. Studies identify additional factors that are important for Native student academic persistence, including precollege academic preparation, family support, faculty involvement and support, institutional commitment to students and community, financial support, and institutional and individual support for students to stay connected to home communities while at college (Astin, 1982; Barnhardt, 1994; Brown, 1995; Falk & Aitken, 1984). Generally, if Native students aspire to attend college and are supported

and prepared for it while in high school, they are more likely to persist academically (Benjamin, Chambers & Reiterman, 1993).

As previously mentioned, Native and non-Native faculty play a critical role in Native student academic persistence, particularly when they seek to understand the concerns and issues that Native students face and demonstrate their support for and connection with Native students (Brown & Kurpius, 1997). Studies consistently indicate that positive interactions between faculty members and Native American students are critical for fostering persistence and academic achievement (Jackson, Smith & Hill, 2003). Positive faculty and staff interaction, coupled with demonstration of institutional commitment to supporting Native American students through services and providing an inclusive campus climate, also increase academic persistence (Garrod & Larimore, 1997). Similarly, an inclusive campus climate is conducive for institutions to assist incoming and returning college students with information regarding financial resources, scholarships, and financial management (Dodd, Garcia, Meccage & Nelson, 1995; Falk & Aitken, 1984; Reyhner & Dodd, 1995; Almeida, 1999).

Families and support networks also are critical. Many students draw their strength and motivation to persist from families; this includes the desire to make life better for their families and even the goal to not let their families down (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008). The home or tribal community of Native college students helps them persist because they receive emotional, spiritual, and financial support that encourages them to achieve their higher education goals (Bowkers, 1992; Heavy Runner & DeCelles, 2002). As PWIs acknowledge the important roles that family, community, and support networks play with regard to academic persistence, they enhance the likelihood that



Native students will maintain cultural ties to their community and benefit from a social support system while away (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008).

**Native Student Empowerment.** Empowerment and voice are also necessary for Native students to succeed in higher education (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). Mihesuah and Wilson (2004) state that empowerment represents the promotion within mainstream higher education of an inclusive environment by both acknowledging underrepresented student populations and familiarizing the academy with the role that family plays in Native students' lives. Achievement and equal footing in PWIs can be ensured as support networks on campus are built and mentorship by Native American faculty and staff are provided (Angspatt, 2001; Dodd, Garcia, Meccage, & Nelson, 1995; Garcia, 2000).

Part of the empowerment and finding of voice for Native students is the promotion of an inclusive environment at PWIs, including non-Native faculty and staff and non-Native peers in classes whose attitudes are accepting and inclusive of underrepresented students (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Hornett, 1989). The perception that faculty care about and encourage Native students to become engaged in the classroom and in their own higher education journey is a catalyst for empowering Native students to find their voice and impact the university community (Belgarde, 1992; Brown & Robinson Kurpius, 1997; Carney, 1999; Cibik & Chambers, 1991; Jackson, et al., 2003). Institutional commitment—demonstrated by administrators and faculty who acknowledge, honor, and preserve Native students' cultural values—inspires students to be engaged in the university and ultimately attain their higher education degree (Belgarde, 1992; Pavel & Padilla, 1993; Tierney, 1991; Wright, 1985).

Similarly, emphasizing Native student services, Native cultural centers on campus, and active involvement in Native student organizations on campus enhances academic persistence (Beaty & Beaty, 1986; Osborne & Cranney, 1985). Native student services and cultural centers create a safe space for Native students to become a part of the university and to be themselves on campus. Native American cultural centers allow the university both to demonstrate its commitment to the Native students on campus and build relationships with local tribes in the community (Shotton, Oosahwee & Cintron, 2010). While cultural centers and student support services enable Native students to feel a part of the campus community, they honor students' tribal identity and help prevent feelings of isolation and homesickness when students are not able to go back home (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008).

As mainstream higher education institutions increasingly recognize the needs of various student populations, the inclusion of the voice and needs of Native American students is essential. Incorporating broad definitions of families, empowering students, facilitating relationships between students and their home communities, building Native retention theories and student development models, recognizing the culture and values that each student brings to campus, are all important factors associated with enhancing Native student success in higher education (Jackson & Smith, 2001; Jenkins, 1999; Tippeconnic Fox, Lowe, & McClellan, 2005).

### **College Student Leadership Development**

The literature devoted to college student leadership development—typically used for the development and implementation of programs and services—draws from extant leadership literature. Although there is a vast amount of literature surrounding leadership

and leadership development none have intentionally included the Native American student perspective or impacts of leadership on this student population. The following overview of college student leadership provides an overview of the general literature surrounding college student leadership development. Foremost among these corpora is the servant leadership approach developed by Greenleaf (1970) to bridge industrial and postindustrial paradigms. Although frequently viewed as leader-centric, the approach advances a values-based concept of shared processes and outcomes that is beneficial in college student leader development. Another strand, modeled after the work of Burns (1978), is the leadership challenge developed by Kouzes and Posner (2007). Examining leadership behaviors from the perspective of transformational leadership, Kouzes and Posner recommended five practices as recommended for leaders: model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. As a result of their findings, the Leadership Practices Inventory, an assessment tool to measure the five exemplary behaviors, was developed.

The relational leadership model, a leadership development model proffered specifically for college students by Komives, Longenecker, Owen, Mainella, and Osteen (2006), emphasizes reciprocal relationships. The model consists of five key components, including purposefulness, inclusiveness, empowerment, ethical practices and process orientation. Developed solely to help students expand their leadership capacity and effectively engage others, the model presents leadership as a process and is one of the few models that include ethics as a necessary part of the leadership development process.

The social change model of leadership development is noted as the most applied leadership theory in college student leadership development (Kezar, Carducci, &

Contreras-McGavin, 2006; Owen, 2008). Developed and created by Astin and Astin (1996), the model emphasizes two core principles: (1) leadership is tied to social responsibility and creating change for the common good, and (2) leadership is founded on both increasing individuals' self-knowledge and being able to work collaboratively with others (Higher Education Research Institute (HERI), 1996). These two principles help students grow across seven critical values: consciousness of self, congruence, commitment, collaboration, common purpose, controversy with civility, and citizenship, with all of these combining to manifest an eighth value which is change for the common good. The eight total values interact and overlap across three domains: the individual, the group, and society (HERI, 1996).

A recent leadership development model developed by Komives et al. (2006) is based on five emerging categories that influence the development of a leadership identity: broadening view of leadership, developing self, group influences, developmental influences, and the changing view of self with others. Within each category there are stages that compare the growth in leadership identity in a linear manner. The six stages are: awareness, exploration/engagement, leader identified, leadership differentiated, generativity, and integration/synthesis. The first stage of awareness is when students acknowledge or recognize that leadership is occurring. The second stage is when students first experience interaction with other students and the opportunities associated with their interests that may exist. In the third stage, leadership is associated with a position in that whoever holds the position is the leader. During the fourth stage, leadership is differentiated and students begin to see that leaders are not only those in leadership positions but also those students within the group who exhibit leadership

skills. In the fifth stage, students look beyond themselves and gain a commitment to and passion for their communities. This leadership identity model for college students informs the perception of the formation of self and how life and the college experience ultimately impact leadership development (Komives et al., 2006).

### **Native Perspectives on Leadership**

The preceding overview of college student leadership development literature is provided as context to the general impact of leadership on college students; it does not sufficiently incorporate Native college student leaders' perspectives of leadership. For a study such as this, it is important to consider Native American perspectives on the construct of leadership. According to Wasilewski and Harris (1992), core cultural values—found through encounters with tribal leaders—contribute to these perspectives. The paragraphs that follow reflect the factors found in the literature to contribute to Native Americans and their identity in general, and specifically to the development of Native American leadership. Consequently, the findings that follow are important because they integrate the history of Native Americans and issues surrounding identity (Wasilewski & Harris, 1992). The perspectives of the parents and families of Native students are also included, in keeping with the research findings offered by Austin (2005). The literature indicates that multiple factors contribute to Native perspectives on leadership, including historical trauma, cultural identity, community engagement and social responsibility, and leadership development values.

**Historical Trauma.** For Native Americans, the term historical trauma is not new. The term highlights all facets of the current status of Native Americans in the United States, including the effects of federal policy, genocide, and assimilation efforts

imposed upon the population (Bigfoot, 2007). Historical trauma also includes the impacts of contact between the Indigenous populations of the United States and European settlers. Bird (1998) suggests that the hardest work for Native American populations is to go back and understand the impacts of colonization. Separating what is learned in textbooks or what is seen in the media from reality is difficult; Native peoples see the impacts of colonization on their families at a very intimate level, but this is not shown on the pages of textbooks or presented in the media (Mihsuah, 2004).

Historical trauma is also seen in the evolution of Native American leadership roles within tribal communities and families. For many families, the result of the boarding school experience is a break down in the family structure, with more single mothers and single parent households than before federal policy and assimilation efforts (Fox, Tippeconnic, Lowe & McClellan, 2005). This breakdown in family structure contributes to the loss of leadership roles that men, depending on the tribe and region, traditionally held in the family (Weaver, 2001). This breakdown produces the leadership of more and more families and communities by women. Straus and Valentino (2003), for example, examine the evolving American Indian community and the creation of the American Indian Community Center in Chicago, finding a significant gender influence on leadership with an unequal but growing representation of gender in official positions. The cumulative picture portrayed in the literature is that understanding Native perspectives of leadership necessitates recognition of the role and impacts of historical trauma (Duran, E., Duran, B., Brave Heart, M. Y. H., & Yellow Horse-Davis, S., 1998).

**Cultural Identity.** Recognizing how historical trauma affects Native American populations involves consideration of external factors associated with identity and the

impacts that historical events had on the cultural identity of Native American individuals and their communities (Nagel, 1997). Weaver (2001) discusses the effects that history, federal policy, and sovereignty had on Native American communities and indicates that an integration of all of these factors impacts the cultural identity of many Native Americans. The cultural identity of Native individuals—and thus their perspectives on leadership—is shaped not only by historical events, but also by the community in which the individual lives. In addition, non-native perceptions of Native peoples and their communities influence identity throughout an Indigenous person’s life (Weaver, 2001). Cultural identity is also impacted by the racial formation of Native Americans through factors associated with historical trauma. The imposition of racial formation by the federal government through the process of “blood quantum” means that each federally recognized tribe determines who is a tribal member—with accompanying rights—based on the terms of treaties or agreements forced on the tribe (Garrouette, 2001). Native cultural identity, however, is more than the “blood quantum” of a person and encompasses the language, connection to genealogy and ancestors, the worldviews and philosophy practiced on a daily basis, one’s self-concept and one’s tribal enrollment (Horse, 2005).

**Community Engagement and Social Responsibility.** The community engagement and social responsibility component of Native American leadership is an integral part of the Native American community and, therefore, important to the individual Native student (Johnson, Benham & Van Alstine, 2003). Portman and Garrett (2005) affirm that a foundational value of leadership for Native Americans is the holding of a shared vision and responsibility. Wise-Erickson (2003) examine the congruency

between team based leadership and the values of Native American leadership within tribal communities, and finds congruence between the values and the need to create a community-based leadership model that integrates the roles, values, and holistic nature of the American Indian communities and concepts of leadership. Consequently, exploring how to create a sense of understanding between Native and Non-native populations, with regard to community engagement and social responsibility, is essential. According to Johnson, Smith & Hill (2003), for Native Americans the key themes related to leadership are: the need to recognize the differences between Natives and Non-natives, cross-communication skills, the practical use of education for the Native community, a positive attitude and commitment to the education of Native Americans, creativity and vision, patience and tolerance, self-confidence, and pride in being American Indian. These findings demonstrate the strong connection between leadership and the community, and the shared, mutual values of the individual, the tribe, and Native community.

**Leadership Development Values.** The literature indicates that the values associated with Native American leadership and the process of Native leadership development are based on the values encompassed by the individual, the tribal or home community, and the desire to impact the environment where the leadership is needed. For example, the leadership model developed by Johnson (1997) reflects Native ways of practicing leadership by tribal college leaders. Five themes for living and leading are revealed: a commitment to serving the community, claiming one's voice to take risks and actions for the community, demonstrating and modeling that education is necessary for cultural survival and self-determination, understanding and bridging relationships with diverse groups of people, and continually nurturing the spirit and maintaining a sense of



balance in life. Similarly, Harris and Wasilewski (1992) find that the core cultural values demonstrated by tribal leaders are being a good relative, inclusive sharing, contributing to the common good, and non-coercive leadership. Grahn, Swenson, and O'Leary (2001) compare the leadership values of American Ojibway Indians living on and off the reservation with those of Anglo Americans from various backgrounds. They find that the leadership values most prized within American Indian populations are knowledge of treaties and laws affecting people, commitment to honesty in work and personal relationships, leader understanding of the people's desires, and making decisions for the greater good of the community. Conversely, the leadership qualities most important to the Anglo American population are the ability to communicate in a small group, the ability to make large group and formal presentations, the leader's commitment to honesty in working and personal relationships, and understanding the strengths and weaknesses of team members. Although similarities are apparent, the leadership values prized by the Native population focus on the community while those prized by the Anglo American population emphasize the individual.

### **Background and Context of Regions**

The remaining pages of this chapter provide an overview of the historical context of the regions within the United States where the research study was conducted. Included in the overview are considerations such as tribal representation, language, culture, and ways of being. The emphasis is on the periods prior to and during the early years of contact with European settlers. Also included is a consideration of the historic and contemporary practices of leadership. The intent is to provide context for the comparison of ancestral and contemporary voices of leadership. The background thus acknowledges

the people and places in which the research was conducted, emphasizing as important the Indigenous peoples (or what have become Indigenous peoples of the regions), the connections that tribal nations have to the land and ways of being, and the impacts of contact with European settlers (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001). I anticipated that the tribal cultures and history of the respective regions would impact the views on leadership perspectives, as well as the leadership styles, of the Native American students I interviewed individually or in a focus group.

### **Northwest-Plateau**

*Overview.* The Plateau region encompasses the land between the Columbia and Fraser rivers, a region of approximately 240,000 square miles. The Plateau Indian territory covers eastern Washington, eastern Oregon, northern California, northern Idaho, western Montana, and interior portions of British Columbia (Pritzker, 2000). The language dialects most often spoken—the Sahaptian or Interior Salishan languages and the Wasco-Wishram—may be grouped as Penutian languages. The tribal nations represented in this area are Cayuse, Coeur d’ Alene, Colville, Flathead, Klamath, Klikitat, Kootenai, Nez Perce, Okanagon, Umatilla, Warm Springs, and Yakama. The foods commonly eaten were inland fish (especially salmon), meats such as elk, deer, bear, mountain sheep, squirrel, and other plant foods such as camas, kouse roots, bitterroot, and berries. The villages or bands of the tribes were found in the wintertime close to the waterways. They were semi-nomadic and followed the game and seasons of food; they lived and moved together with the movement of seasons. The bands were often named according to the river or body of water near where they settled. The houses were semi-subterranean, circular wood structures using tule mat, bark, sages and grass. There were

also tipi communal long houses. The arts or skills valued within the region were basket weaving and bone carving. There were communal gathering places at The Dalles and Celilo Falls where Plateau tribal villages or peoples could come and trade goods, food, and other items. The religions practiced within the Plateau communities were the Washat, Shaker, Native American Church, and Christian denominational churches that had missions in the region (Pritzer, 2000).

*Leadership.* Although the leadership historically exercised within the various tribal nations differed according to the tribe, it is important to note gender roles. The roles of women were to gather plants, process and prepare foods, and take care of young children while the men fished, hunted, and exercised a strong voice in politics, particularly with regard to diplomacy and military affairs. Plateau societies were generally egalitarian and villages within the tribes were autonomous. Village chiefs typically exercised authority through persuasion rather than through the making of rules or the enforcement of decisions. There were opportunities for men and women to serve as chiefs of bands. Within many of the bands there was specialized leadership in that salmon or war chiefs exercised leadership in special situations (Pritzker, 2000).

However, leadership changed in the years after contact and the movement of Plateau tribes onto reservations where federal policies were enforced. The Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) of 1934 encouraged all tribes within the United States to install governments and constitutions reflective of federal norms and infrastructures, even though they conflicted with original leadership perspectives and practices. Some tribal nations within the Plateau area still have traditional chiefs, but tribal members tend to identify with their original band or village. The official tribal government leader of many of the Plateau

tribes is the Chief or Chairman of the tribe. Tribal council officers are elected by tribal members who make decisions for the tribal nation regarding policy, economic development and business, and the greater good of the tribal community (Pritzker, 2000).

## **Southwest**

*Overview.* The Southwest region is surrounded by three major river basins: the Rio Grande, the Colorado, and the San Juan. The states included within this region are Arizona, New Mexico, southwest Colorado, southern Utah, and Nevada. The landscapes and environments within the region include canyons, mesas, deserts, rock formations, caves, forests, and mountains. Due to the diversity of landscapes, climates, soil, and plant and animal life, the tribal nations within the region were required to adapt and evolve in response to the local environments. Mesoamerican civilizations heavily influenced the phases of development of the region's groups of people; these included the Anasazi, the Mogollon people, the Hohokam people, the Hakataya, and the Southern Athapaskans. These groups evolved into the contemporary Southwestern tribal nations known as the Pueblo, Gila and Salt River tribes, Havasupai, Mojave, Navajos, and Apaches (Pritzker, 2000). No common dialect is shared among these tribes due to the significant diversity of the region's early groups. The shared practices of the tribal nations within the region, however, are farming and the use of ceramics. Many of the original Southwest peoples lived in dwelling areas or pit houses that evolved into adobe houses and Hogans (Navajo). Foods commonly eaten were deer, mountain sheep, and small mammals; commonly eaten plant foods were cacti, mescal, screwbeans, mesquite, and grasses. Noteworthy art forms of the Southwest peoples included ceramics, the weaving of rugs, and jewelry making which ranged from silversmithing to the

incorporation of turquoise and other common stones found in the region. The religions practiced within the region were diverse, ranging from annual to seasonal ceremonies restricted to the tribal nation. Many of the religious beliefs represented interconnections between the peoples and the land where they resided, with the sites incorporated as holy places. There currently is pride within the tribal nations because they have retained much of their land, religion, language, culture, and ways of living (Pritzer, 2000).

***Leadership.*** Leadership within the Southwest region varies from tribal nation to tribal nation. The Pueblo people have a religious leader, the cacique, for each individual Pueblo who is responsible to watch the sun and determine the times for ceremonies. They formerly had a war captain. Both leaders were chosen by the people and served for life. During the time of contact there also existed an imposed group of leaders chosen by Spanish authorities. These leaders dealt with external matters and included a governor, lieutenant governor, and a council. For all Pueblos there currently is an All Indian Pueblo Council that was initially established in 1598 and re-established in the twentieth century (Pritzker, 2000).

Although the Apache were composed of different bands or groups of people, within each group leaders emerged due to their persuasive ability, bravery, or ceremonial knowledge. Decisions among the Apache were made by consensus, an approach that minimized friction. Contemporary Apache communities often include tribal business committees that function as a tribal council; leaders are elected by tribal members under the government infrastructure recommended in the IRA of 1934.

Navajo were organized in bands that were led by a headman who was appointed for life to serve as the clan leader. The leaders of the various bands met formally every

two years. Decisions were made by consensus. The current government is in alignment with the recommended changes of the IRA and reflects titles modified from chair and vice-chair to those used within the government of the United States, namely president and vice president (Pritzer, 2000).

### **Midwest-Oklahoma**

*Overview.* Although the Midwest region embraces a wide range of tribal nations in the middle of the United States, for the purpose of this research study the focus is on the historical context of tribal nations now residing in the state of Oklahoma. Oklahoma, which means “red people” in the Choctaw language, has been home to Indigenous populations for over 30,000 years (Clark, 2009). Flint blades made from mammoth bones and found in the southwest part of Oklahoma document the presence of Indigenous populations of the Paleo-Indians. Over time, tribes migrated to Oklahoma by following the bison; these included the Caddo, Wichita, Osage, Comanche, Kiowa, Plains Apache, Cheyenne, and Arapaho. In 1830 the Indian Removal Act forced the relocation of the Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Seminole into what became Indian Territory and is now the state of Oklahoma, increasing the number of tribal peoples within the land area and creating readjustment, conflict, and loss of homelands, cultures, environments, and ways of living.

There currently are thirty-nine federally recognized tribes in Oklahoma. The three tribes with the largest tribal enrollments are the Cherokee, Choctaw, and Chickasaw. The Cherokee nation was relocated to the northeastern part of Oklahoma, near the modern city of Tahlequah in Cherokee county. The Cherokees originally resided in villages with plazas and earth mounds with temples. Common foods that the women

tended in the fields were corn, beans, squash, and melons. Men hunted for deer, bear, turkey, and other game animals. Since statehood there are twenty-two ceremonial grounds that have remained known as Nighthawk Keetoowah's and Redbird Smith movement representing the Four Mothers Society (Clark, 2009).

A part of the Choctaw tribe was relocated to the southeastern part of Oklahoma in the Durant area of what is now Bryan County. The Choctaws lived in sedentary villages by streams or local waterways. Choctaw women tended the livestock and corn, melons, pumpkins, and sunflowers; they later helped cultivate the vegetables brought by the French. The men were hunters and the warriors of the tribe and the community. The Choctaw culture is matrilineal in kinship. The ceremonies practiced by the Choctaws included seasonal and the annual Green Corn ceremony acknowledging the sun and fire. There were also community wide dances offered to protect warriors, as well as ball games followed by feasting.

The Chickasaw were relocated to the south-central part of Oklahoma near Ada in Pontotoc County. They resided in towns in matrilineal groups. There were also summer, or open-sided arbors, and winter dwellings known as wattle-and-daub structures (Clark, 2009). Each town had a council house, ceremonial plaza, and a ball ground. Women tended corn, beans, squash and gathered berries and nuts while men hunted deer and fished. The ceremonies of the Chickasaw people incorporated the sun and each town had a sacred fire. There were also Pashofa dances for healing ceremonies and the annual Green Corn Ceremonies in the plaza. The men and women of the Chickasaw played stickball as an athletic contest. The common language dialect shared between the Choctaw and the Chickasaw is of the Western Muskogean (Clark, 2009).

**Leadership.** Leadership within this region was as diverse as the number of tribal nations represented in the state, ranging from the leadership of chiefs to that of warrior societies. The historical leadership of the Cherokee was exhibited through the seven clans that existed. As a matrilineal society, the Cherokees elected women's council leaders who could intervene in men's affairs as needed. The leader of the women's council was the Beloved Woman or Ghigau (Clark, 2009). Each town also had a council of elder men who adjudicated civil affairs. In addition, Cherokees had a dual division society of white (peace) and red (war). The head of the white division was the peace chief or high priest and the head of the red division was the war chief. Current leaders of the Cherokee nation are elected by tribal members and include the principal chief, the deputy chief, and a fifteen-member council with a council speaker that is elected every four years.

Like the Cherokees and the Chickasaw, Choctaws were a matrilineal society. They were led by a kinship group called an iksa and by elders who regulated civil and religious affairs. They were also led by a twelve-member council with a Chief who served tribal members and the community. Chickasaw villages had a loose confederation with the national council. The tribe was divided into two groups, the Impsaktcas, who provided the principal chief, and the Intcukwalipas (Clark, 2009). Within the contemporary Chickasaw nation there is a governor, lieutenant governor, a thirteen-member tribal legislature, and a judiciary. Elections are held every four years for officers and every three years for legislative members.



## **Northeast**

*Overview.* Many Indigenous peoples originated in the Northeast as part of the Iroquois, a tribe or nations of peoples located in the northern and western part of New York State. Originally there were “Five Nations:” the Cayuga, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, and Seneca. In the 1700s the Tuscarora from North Carolina joined the other Iroquois to form the “Six Nations.” Each nation occupied an oblong strip of the land. Although each of the Six Nations has its own language, the language family of the Six Nations is distinctly Iroquoian (Oswalt, 2009). The Cherokee language belongs to this family as well. In the 1600s, the Iroquois occupied ten major towns. They lived in longhouses made of bark in which matrilineal families resided in as many as twenty apartments. There were also temporary teepee-like dwellings. Underground village structures held dry meat and maize. There were three sacred plants, known as the Three Sisters, within the Iroquois diet: maize, beans, and squash. Women cultivated the plants, which included wild plant foods, fifty additional plants, and thirty different types of fruit. Men hunted deer and birds and fished near the village. The Iroquois believed in the Great Chief who created everything. They also believed in the Evil Twin who used his energies to create pestilence and problems for the community. Religious specialists, the Keepers of the Faith, were chosen by male and female elders. Both sexes were represented equally among the Keepers of the Faith and held equal rank. Both sexes conducted the main religious ceremonies, including six major sequential religious ceremonies, the Maple, Planting, Strawberry, Green Maize, Harvest and New Year’s (Midwinter) ceremonies (Oswalt, 2009).

***Leadership.*** The Iroquois are known for the Iroquois League or League of the Longhouse, the purpose of which was to achieve peace. Preceding the Iroquois League were the Grand Council and the Great League of Peace. The Grand Council was composed of fifty leaders, sachems, who were selected by females to represent the leading matrilineages within the matriclans of the then Five Nations (Oswalt, 2009). The men were chosen for the Grand Council based on specific qualities such as seeking goodwill, peace, and harmony. The Grand Council and Great League of Peace formed the Iroquois League, from which the Iroquois Confederacy eventually emerged. Each nation had villages that were governed by a headman and a council of elders (clan chiefs, elders, and wise men). There also were nonhereditary chiefs who may have had voting power. All leadership decisions were made by consensus. A council of hereditary chiefs (who are selected by clan mothers) still exists within some nations, although band councils are utilized by others.

### **Southeast-Cherokee**

***Overview.*** Various tribal nations and Indigenous peoples resided in what is now the Southeastern region of the United States. For thousands of years, the Eastern Band of Cherokee lived in this region. They originally called themselves the principal people and were clustered in what is now western North Carolina. Although the language of the Cherokee belongs to the Iroquoian family, as previously mentioned, four regional groups were separated by rugged terrain that created isolation and varying dialects of the language (Oswalt, 2009). To be close to game and fish, and for religious reasons, the Cherokee lived in scattered settlements near streams and rivers. There were summer and winter houses, as well as a council house that was used for religious, social, and political

reasons. Women made the artifacts that were used for cooking, storing food, and household goods; they also planted and harvested the crops of maize, bean, gourd, and squash seeds. Men hunted white-tailed deer, black bears, bison, and wild turkey. The beliefs of the Cherokee centered on the power of blood. Women were isolated during their periods and there were restrictions on pregnancy and childbirth because of the extraordinary power that came with these times. Also of great importance was the Green Corn Ceremony, which focused on the maize harvest and represented the rebirth of the Cherokee for the coming year.

***Leadership.*** Large and small villages formed a community or band. When bands grew too large, they either separated or organized a new unit. In the 1700s, some sixty settlements were represented by thirty-five bands (Oswalt, 2009). Each band was politically autonomous. Within the bands there was a council of elders that was composed of male and female representatives, heads of clans, and representatives of two organizations known as the Whites and the Reds. The Whites represented peace; their members were mild-mannered, passive, and reached decisions by consensus. The Reds represented war; their members were young, active males who had married into the village. At the council house there also were Beloved Men (who were the elderly men) and an inner council of seven Beloved Men from each clan. Decisions were made by consensus. A council served one large settlement or a cluster of small settlements. Current leadership is modeled after the government of the United States, with executive, judicial, and legislative branches. Some executive and all legislative leaders are elected by the members of the Eastern band of Cherokee (Oswalt, 2009).

## **Summary**

This chapter began with an overview of Native American students in higher education and the factors that influence their success. The chapter then examined the literature of college student leadership development. Native perspectives regarding leadership were explored. The chapter concluded with the background and contexts of the Native peoples from the five regions of the United States where this study was conducted. In the following chapter, the methodology of the research study is presented.

## CHAPTER III

### Methodology

This inquiry on Native American leadership was completed using a qualitative research lens to seek the voice and perspective of the participants. Qualitative research is a research method that seeks to include the stories and words of participants to add to the knowledge of a specific topic or area of knowledge to be explored (Creswell, 2009). A part of this knowledge inquiry method is including the voices of those who are closely tied to the subject or area of interest. The following chapter addresses the specifics of the qualitative methodology utilized in this study, including the general research perspective, the role of the researcher, the research context, the research participants, data collection, data analysis, and the theoretical framework.

#### General Perspective

Qualitative research is a research method that explores a way of understanding the meaning that individuals or groups attribute to a specific subject or social issue (Creswell, 2007). The process explores emerging questions and procedures that are within the setting of the participant or an agreed upon location by the participant, referred to as the “natural setting” (Patton, 2002). With the participants in their natural setting, the researcher seeks to learn the *members’ meaning* of the specific area of interest or any other *member’s meanings* that may arise. *Members’ meaning* is capturing what participants say and do and includes examining the words or phrases used to describe situations and interactions (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). The researcher is “the key

instrument” for exploring the *members’ meanings* in the research setting. In this qualitative research inquiry I met participants in their natural settings and serves as the key instrument by conducting focus groups and one-on-one (or individual) interviews. The inductive analysis process was a phenomenological data analysis process in which emerging meanings from participants were explored. Phenomenological analysis “helps grasp the meaning, structure and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a person or group of people” (Patton, 2002, p. 482). In essence, the Native American cultures and communities provided the context for understanding the students’ perspectives of leadership.

To increase credibility the qualitative research process may include member checking by soliciting feedback from participants regarding findings and interpretations of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study I asked participants to member check the transcriptions of the focus groups and the one-on-one interviews. Another way of increasing the credibility of the study is to use external peer review or to provide an external check of the qualitative research process (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study a colleague experienced in qualitative research helped me to conduct the external peer review of the codes, data analysis, and findings.

Qualitative methodology was the most appropriate approach for this research because the study sought to explore the meaning making of current Native student leaders, including where they find meaning in leadership and leadership development within their institutions and home communities. Hoffman, Jackson & Smith (2005) suggest that the qualitative research approach is appropriate for understanding the lived experiences of Native American students, providing the voice and perspective of the

student population in a time when current literature focusing on Native students is sparse. Incorporating qualitative research methods in conjunction with the Indigenous research paradigm—described later in this chapter—provides an opportunity for the authentic voice of Native students to be heard.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Patton argues that researchers must identify their positionality and how it may impact or contribute to the research. Providing the position of the researcher enables others to understand where the researcher stands in relation to the topic, assess the depth of the researcher, and how these considerations may impact the study (Patton, 2002). In the following paragraphs I provide the connections that I have to the topic area and how my professional experience plays a role in my position as researcher.

I am enrolled in the Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma and I also am of Apache, Nez Perce, Umatilla, and Assiniboine descent. My dad is from the northeast part of Oregon called Mission, Oregon, which is close to Pendleton, Oregon where he grew up on the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. I was born in Pendleton, Oregon but moved to Oklahoma when I was six months old. We were growing up my dad made sure through annual visits to Oregon that my older brother and I knew our family, culture, and history. I grew up in the Southwest part of Oklahoma where many Kiowa, Comanche and Apache tribal people live. I was fortunate to grow up knowing that family and community played important roles in our lives. Included in the awareness of that importance was the acknowledgement of the connections each person has to one another.

A researcher may hold multiple positions that both contribute to an understanding of the self and to how that understanding is connected to research (Creswell, 2009). I accordingly acknowledge that my experiences contribute to who I am and to what guides my research. My experience as an undergraduate student ranged from being on academic probation after my freshman year to making the decision to stay in college and raising my GPA while also creating support organizations for other Native American undergraduate students. As an undergraduate student I became a student leader on campus who not only joined the Native American organization and became an officer for three years but also helped establish a Native American sorority and a Native American retention program to serve undergraduate students. In addition to being an undergraduate student leader I had to find a sense of balance while working and serving the role of aunt, big sister, little sister, daughter, granddaughter, cousin, and student. Near the completion of my bachelor's degree I decided to remain at my undergraduate university and pursue graduate education, where I remained involved with the sorority and connected to professors who helped me to become a graduate research assistant.

As life moved forward I gained a position at the Comanche Nation College, a tribal college in Oklahoma. I was able to find a Native American male mentor who helped encourage me to both apply for my current position working with Native American students and to enroll in a doctoral program. As a doctoral student I acknowledge the need for support networks for Native American students so that our common journey can encourage and inspire each other to achieve. I have been able to gain multiple support networks in my program as well as help develop a Native American



graduate student interest group at Oklahoma State University (OSU) to support masters and doctoral students in their graduate student journey.

In addition to these experiences I also was part of the Americans for Indian Opportunity (AIO) Ambassadors program to develop leadership from a Native American perspective that is inclusive of the cultural values that lead and guide us. A part of this program was to create a community initiative. The initiative that I pursued was to facilitate the development of the Oklahoma Native American Students in Higher Education (ONASHE) conference which was designed to facilitate leadership development from a tribal perspective. The creation of the conference and its support network for students now helps grow and encourage college students to continue their education and develop as leaders within their respective colleges. Through this community initiative I was able to gain invaluable experiences connecting to national and international Indigenous communities, exploring examples of leadership and community development. As a result of these experiences and my work with the local community I was subsequently nominated and awarded the Native American 40 under 40 through the National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development (NCAIED). This was the first time the recognition was bestowed upon young Native Americans in the United States. Finding a network of young adult Native American leaders and professionals inspired my continued work in the community and with the students I interact with on a daily basis.

When I worked as a Native American student affairs professional at the Comanche Nation College, which was close to my home and tribal community, I found a center balance working with students in the Native American student organization. Since

I moved to my current position working with younger Native American students who are still developing their leadership skills, it has been important to me to help them find a sense of community within their organization, the campus, and local community. This community has been extended not only to the local community but also to Native American students statewide, as many have become involved with ONASHE. Developing student leaders to fulfill the mission of their organization and to be an advocate for other Native American students, faculty, and staff are important and consistent roles that I play in the lives of students. This situation, built on my undergraduate, graduate and personal leadership experiences, and coupled with my observation that leadership in American higher education is taught from a Western perspective without the inclusion of multiple cultural perspectives, especially Native American cultural values, led me to this dissertation and the desire to explore Native American student perspectives of leadership.

### **The Research Context**

**A National Study.** The purpose of this study was to explore the meanings and perspectives of leadership and leadership development among current Native American college students who are student leaders in Native American student organizations at five PWIs in the United States. The study accordingly embraced five regions of the United States where a high Native American student population exists. Using at each institution the relational component of the Indigenous research paradigm, I was able to gain access to the community through relationships built with Native American student affairs' professionals at the respective campuses. I conducted focus groups of Native American student leaders in Native American organizations on these campuses. I also conducted

one in depth interview with a recommended Native student leader from the Native American student affairs professional at each campus. To provide additional context and information regarding not only where the Native students came from but also the environments of the institutions, the following paragraphs are an overview of each campus environment and the resources that exist for Native American students. I regard this as critical for understanding the place in which Native students build community.

*Northwest: The University of Idaho.* The University of Idaho is a public land-grant institution and a principal graduate education and research university established in 1889. The student population of 12,000 includes first-generation college students and ethnically diverse students who can select from 130 degree options in the various colleges (University of Idaho, 2011). The university also is charged with the statewide mission for medical education. The University of Idaho is located in a small town with a population of 21,700, including the student population. The setting in which the university is located features hilly and grassy areas, called the Palouse by local tribes and community members. The university is also located within ceded treaty territory land.

The Native American population is accessible with the closest reservation less than forty-five minutes away. The tribal nations represented at and close to the university are Coeur d'Alene, Colville, Kalispell, Kootenai, Nez Perce, Shoshone-Bannock, Shoshone-Paiute, Spokane, Umatilla and Yakama Nations. There are 137 Native American students attending the university with representation in the undergraduate, graduate, and recently formed law programs. The resources for Native American students include close access to their home communities as well as a Native American student center on campus. There are a number of Native American student organizations

offered to the Native students, such as a Native American general organization, a Native science and engineering organization, a Native business organization, the Native American Peer Mentor Program, and the All Nations Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation Program. There also is a tribal liaison who works closely with the Native American student center and with the local tribes coordinating the Native American advisory board and assuring that reciprocal relationships are formed between tribal nations and the university. The American Indian studies program offers a minor, and bachelors and masters degrees.

*Southwest: The University of New Mexico.* The University of New Mexico is a public four-year university founded in 1889. The university is located in a city of more than 700,000 people and occupies 600 acres. There are approximately 26,000 students on the main campus with about 6,000 additional students attending branch campuses (University of New Mexico, 2011). There is a distinctive campus environment with a local tribal architectural theme, with buildings representing nearby Indian villages. The campus is surrounded by mesas to the west past the banks of a historic river, and mountains to the east.

The Native American population is represented by various tribal nations such as the Isleta, Sandia, Santa Ana, Acoma and Laguna Pueblos. There are 1,685 Native American students who attend this institution in undergraduate, graduate, and law programs. There is a Native American Studies Program that offers a minor and a bachelor's degree. There are numerous resources that students can use, such as the Native American Student Services Office, which was established during the 1980-1981 academic year. This office provides cultural and academic programming for American

Indian students in an effort to ensure their academic achievement and assists in the development of personal, cultural, and social success. The office also serves as a liaison for Native students attending local high schools and schools located on or near tribal reservations, tribal and community colleges, tribal governments, and tribal higher education programs and organizations that directly impact the recruitment and retention of American Indian students. The director of the center also serves as a special assistant to the president on American Indian affairs. There are numerous Native American student organizations including a general Native student organization, a Native business organization, a Native fraternity and sorority, a Native science and engineering society, a Native law student association, and a Native health and promotion organization.

*Midwest: The University of Oklahoma.* The University of Oklahoma is a public four-year research university created in 1890; it is a doctoral degree-granting research university serving the educational, cultural, economic and health-care needs of the state, region and nation. The main campus serves as home to all of the university's academic programs, with the exception of the health-related fields. The University of Oklahoma enrolls more than 30,000 students and has 21 colleges offering 163 majors at the baccalaureate level, 166 majors at the master's level, 81 majors at the doctoral level, 27 majors at the doctoral professional level, and 26 graduate certificates (University of Oklahoma, 2011). The university is located in a city with a population of 111,357 people. The geographic setting of the university is metropolitan and flat.

The campus is located close to urban Native American communities and the Absentee Shawnee and Citizen Potawatomi nations, with others less than an hour away. In all, there are 39 federally recognized tribal nations in the state. There are

approximately 1,552 Native American students who attend this campus. The university has a Native American Studies Program that offers a minor and bachelor's, master's, and doctoral programs. Numerous tribal languages representative of the Native American student population are offered at the University of Oklahoma. A Native American Student Life Office provides the needed support and assistance to help Native American students achieve their educational and personal goals. This office is the designated liaison office for students, university departments, alumni, and tribes/nations throughout the country. There are numerous programs and support services offered for Native American students as well as a multi-cultural student center. Native American student organizations include a general Native student organization, a Native American science organization, a Native American women and art organization, and a Native American fraternity and sorority.

***Northeast: Cornell University.*** Cornell University was founded in 1865. The main campus is among the beautiful scenery of the small city that is in the central part of the state and is within easy driving distance of major cities in surrounding states. The university offers a rich mix of academic programs, with a university enrollment of 22,254 that offers undergraduate, graduate, and law programs (Cornell University, 2011).

The local Native American community is the Haudenosaunee, known as the original Iroquois League. The Iroquois League was often called the Five Nations, composed of the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca nations. After the Tuscarora nation joined the League, the Iroquois became known as the Six Nations. The Native American student population comprises 0.03 percent (or 61 students) of the student population. There is an American Indian Studies Program that offers a minor for

interested students. The university recently established a scholarship program for admitted first-year and transfer full-time students who are current citizens of one of the six Haudenosaunee nations. Students also have access to the Native American house called Akwe:kon. There is also a Native student program to help with the transition to college, offering weekly workshops on academic success and academic counseling. In this program are cultural activities and events to honor the students' culture. There is also a general Native American student organization on campus.

*Southeast: North Carolina State University.* North Carolina State University is a land-grant institution founded in 1887. The mission is to provide teaching, research, and extension services to the people of North Carolina. The university has more than 31,000 students, 8,000 faculty and staff, and more than 700 buildings. The university is built on a historic campus and is located in one of the largest cities in the state, with a population of approximately 400,000 people (North Carolina State University, 2011). The university offers undergraduate, graduate, and veterinary medicine degrees.

The Native American tribes close to the university and representative of the student population are Eastern Cherokee, Lumbee, Meherrin, Haliwa-Saponi, Waccamaw-Siouan, and Coharie. There are approximately 131 Native American students enrolled at the university. A Native American studies minor is offered. The support resources on campus for Native American students are through the Office of Multicultural Affairs which employs a Native American affairs student services employee. Numerous programs are provided to students, including a peer mentor program, a Native American symposium, an academic success assistance program, a freshman honors convocation, the guaranteed 4.0 boot camp, and a student success series

in which all Native American students are encouraged to participate. There also are cultural programs offered to students through Native American heritage month activities and cultural events. Native students can participate in numerous student organizations that include a general Native American student organization, a Native American student mentor association, a Native American science and engineering organization, and a Native American sorority and fraternity.

### **Research Participants**

The research participants were undergraduate Native American students attending the previously described Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) within five regional areas in the United States. Participants represented one or more tribal nations from each respective region. The selected participants were recommended through purposive sampling by Native American or Multicultural Student Affairs offices at each campus. Purposive sampling was observed through the intentional selection of sites and participants (Creswell, 2009). The participants were actively involved on campus in the Native American student organization as leaders on their campuses. I deemed it important that the participants had leadership experience in the Native American organizations on campus; this enabled them to provide their perspectives of how these roles impacted their leadership development and how, or if, they impacted their perceptions of Native American student leadership, pivotal points of inquiry for this research study.



## **Data Collection**

I conducted each focus group using a semi-structured protocol that initially asked participants to introduce themselves and state their tribes, major, and type of home community. Questions followed that centered on leadership, Native leadership, how participants became involved in leadership in the organization, how involvement helped change or contribute to their leadership, and their potential plans to apply their leadership skills back in their home community. Audio taping ensured that the voice and words of each participant were recorded and correctly transcribed. Field notes were written at the conclusion of each focus group. Field notes helped me to include the layout of the environment, facial and body movement, and any other observations made during each focus group (Emerson, Fretz, & Shawl, 1995).

I also conducted individual interviews, using a semi-structured protocol, and tape recorded each interview. Interview participants were asked to elaborate on their experiences in the focus group and on additional thoughts that arose either from that interaction or reflection on their personal experiences. Field notes were used to describe student environment, reactions, and facial and body movements. Audios from the recordings were transcribed within one week of the interactions with focus group and interview participants. The one-week deadline for focus group and interview transcription facilitated subsequent timely member checking.

## **Data Analysis**

The phenomenological data analysis approach was employed for data analysis. This approach facilitates the exploration of meaning making in human experiences (Polkinghorne, 1989). The founder of phenomenology, Husserl, is known for descriptive

analysis and intentionality of consciousness from which humans draw meaning (Moran, 2005). As such, the phenomenological analysis approach seeks to gain meaning from lived experiences of a phenomenon of a person or group of people (Patton, 2002). The first step for the researcher accordingly is the “epoch” or gaining awareness of one’s own experience or bias and removing oneself from judgment of the participants’ meaning making (Patton, 2002). The next step of the phenomenological data analysis process is for the researcher to “bracket out” so that the data is in its purist form, enabling it to be deconstructed (Husserl, 1962). In bracketing the subject or responses of participants are seen in their own terms. As the data are bracketed all responses are treated equally and put into meaningful clusters. Repetitive and overlapping data are eliminated. As this is done the invariant themes are identified and revisited, developing expanded versions of themes (Patton, 2002). From the invariant themes and phenomenological data analysis process, a description of the findings can then emerge. I observed these steps for this research study because I sought to gain the meaning of the Native American student leaders’ perspectives on leadership, leadership development, observations of leadership in their home community, and their intentions for using their leadership experiences in the future.

### **Conceptual Framework**

**Indigenous Research Paradigm and Relationality.** The Indigenous knowledge and research paradigm is grounded in the belief that when Indigenous (Native American) researchers are part of the research process the element of the non-Native researcher as outsider is removed, allowing inherent Native knowledge, values, and lived experiences to strengthen the research and to be seen through Indigenous eyes. Part of the

supposition is that the research is not being conducted *on* people or participants but *with* participants (Wilson, 2008). The components of an Indigenous research paradigm are conceptualized as a circle; each piece is interconnected and does not have more importance than the other. The pieces are comprised of ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology. [See Figure 3.1] The following paragraphs describe how each of these contributes to the conceptual framework employed for this research study and how relationality is tied to the framework.

***Ontology.*** Ontology in the Western perspective is the theory or nature of existence or reality and asking what is real (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The focus is on a single reality. Conversely, an Indigenous ontology acknowledges that there may be multiple realities and that reality is in the relationship that one has with the truth (Wilson, 2008). Reality is a relationship or set of relationships and there is no one definite reality but different sets of relationships. Reality is not an object but rather the set of relationships that make up our reality. Relationships for Indigenous researchers and those with whom they research encompass their reality with the environment, animals, plants, and Earth. Knowledge is shared through these multiple sets of relationships.

***Epistemology.*** Epistemology in the Western definition is the study of the nature of thinking or knowing and involves how one has come to know what one knows (Crotty, 1998). This includes entire systems of thought and styles of cognitive functioning that are all built from ontologies. The choices of what is “real” depend on how one’s thinking works and how one knows the world around him/her (Wilson, 2008). Indigenous epistemology is equivalent to an Indigenous ontology; as stated earlier, reality is not an object but a set of relationships. The concept of Indigenous knowledge is relational. The

knowledge that is generated, in how we know what we know, is shared with all creation and thus becomes relational knowledge. Indigenous epistemology is a system of knowledge built on relationships between things, rather than on the things themselves (Wilson, 2008). Thus Indigenous epistemology is Indigenous peoples or tribal culture, language, histories, spirituality, and how we are connected to the Earth and its being. How each is connected to each other, in relation to each other, forms the Indigenous epistemology.

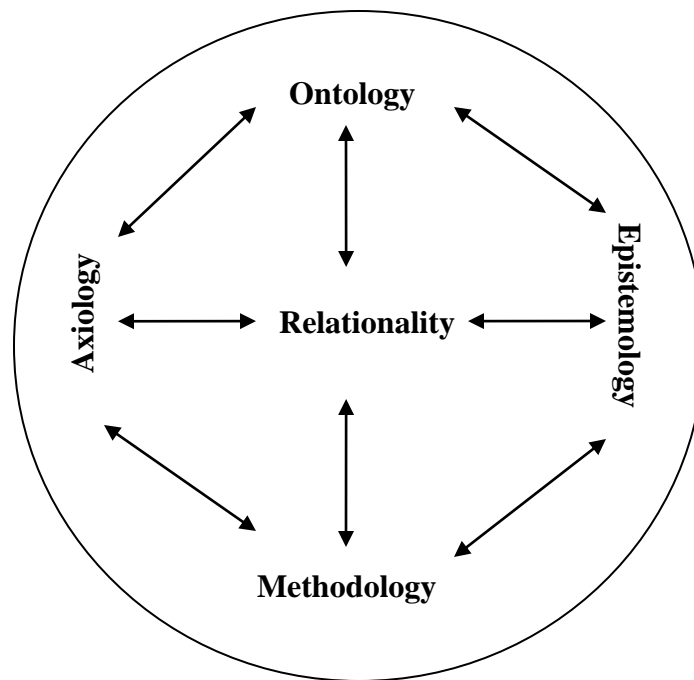
***Axiology.*** The Western definition of axiology states that it is the ethics or morals that guide the search for knowledge and that determine what knowledge is worthy of being explored (Wilson, 2008). Axiology asks “what reality is worthy to be explored” and “what is ethical to do in order to gain this new knowledge or understanding.” The connections between the Indigenous ontology and epistemology are equally connected to an Indigenous axiology and methodology as they all lie within a circle representing an Indigenous research paradigm. The Indigenous axiology is built on relational accountability. The values that guide the Indigenous researcher are the responsibilities in fulfilling the role and obligations in the research relationship and being accountable to his/her relations. The Indigenous researcher is a part of the research and inseparable from the subject of the research (Wilson, 2008). As a part of the research and responsible for the research and the relationships that are built, the outcomes of the research are based on reciprocity; any knowledge shared from the process of research means that findings or usefulness found must be given back to the community from which they came.

***Methodology.*** The Western perspective of methodology is a reference to how knowledge is gained or the science of discovery (Patton, 2002). Methodology is asking

how one discovers more about reality (Wilson, 2008). The Indigenous methodology is a process of relational accountability. The three R's (respect, reciprocity, and responsibility) must be key to a healthy relationship and included in Indigenous methodology (Weber-Pillwax, 2001). As an Indigenous researcher, it is important that the methodological approach encompasses these three values that are found in every Indigenous community. This means asking questions such as: Who is the researcher working with? What relationships are important to build and maintain? How will this new knowledge benefit the community? How can I give this knowledge back to the community from which it came or benefit that community? By addressing these questions, the Indigenous methodology of maintaining relational accountability is upheld between the researcher, the community, and the knowledge that is generated and shared.

***Relationality.*** Indigenous peoples, including Indigenous researchers, have multiple relational ways of being; this is what it means to be Indigenous (Wilson, 2008). Indigenous people have relationships with multiple communities including family, friends, tribal communities, professional circles, other Indigenous/tribal communities, ancestors, animals, and land. The way that Indigenous people identify themselves is within these various communities. As an Indigenous researcher, understanding the importance of having respect by acknowledging and maintaining these relationships is necessary. It is as an Indigenous researcher that these relationships are connected to the subject or knowledge being sought and to the already formed relationships that knowledge is acquired.

**Figure 3.1 – Indigenous Research Paradigm (Wilson, 2008)**



### **Summary**

This chapter described the qualitative nature of the study and addressed why a qualitative approach was advantageous for the research study involving the specific population of Native American student leaders. The role of the researcher likewise was addressed, acknowledging lived experiences and connections to the community. Providing context regarding the participants (who they are, the types of institutional climates, and Native student support environments) was deemed important for considering the students' relationships to the community. The chapter also discussed the research participants, data collection and data analysis procedures, and the conceptual framework.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **Places of Native Student Leadership**

The climate of a university, the place where college students develop into who they will become as an adult, is important to observe. The message that is sent through the attitudes and policies of a university impacts students regardless of their background and where their place is in the scheme of the campus (Cuyjet, 2011). For Native American students especially, it is very important that they see within the environment and the place an acknowledgement and honoring of who they are in their Native culture and values, as well as recognition that a community and a support system exists that is similar to the familial support network at their home community (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008). For this reason, I provide in this chapter a description of the place and environment of each institution that I visited; the goal is to better understand where the Native student leaders and their organizations find their support and community on their respective campuses. This context is visualized through the experiences that I had during the research process at each institution and the setting in which dialogue and interactions took place. I will note at the outset of this chapter that a safe place—whether the Native American center, a house, or the Native American Studies office—provided a haven for Native students to be themselves culturally and enabled others to relate to them and their experiences.

## **Midwest: University of Oklahoma**

Upon my arrival at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, Oklahoma I parked across the street from Ellison Hall, at the university's health center. It was a sunny day in October and I could sense that the campus was busier than usual for a Friday morning. I was scheduled to interview students the Friday morning before homecoming. As I got out of my car and walked across the street I remembered it was OU's homecoming weekend. The Native American Studies (NAS) department at the University of Oklahoma is located in Ellison Hall, which was built in the late 1920s and was the first OU infirmary on campus. Ellison Hall is a three-story red brick building that was remodeled within the last five years and houses the various departments within the College of Arts and Sciences. The OU NAS department is located on the second floor, as are the director's office and the offices for the administrative staff and faculty. A set of couches serve as a small lounge area for guests and students. Immediately facing toward the hallway is a conference room where many departmental meetings are held. I conducted the focus group and the one-on-one interviews in this room.

When I arrived in the building the first person I saw was Good, one of the students scheduled to participate in the focus group. I asked him if he knew where the NAS conference room was and I pointed upstairs; he said that he did and proceeded to head up that way. I joined him shortly. At the top of the stairs, I saw the familiar scene, the couches greeting me as I came up the stairs to the NAS conference room. As I walked in I began to get reacquainted and updated on what Good was up to and not too much longer Lillian came in, one of my sorority sisters who seemed to be in a rush but greeted me with a hug. Not too long after that Leonard came in; I had never met him



before but he shook my hand and made his way across from me to sit down. After Lillian came back we waited ten minutes for Walter to come and realized he might not be able to participate. So I asked if it was okay to begin the focus group, which we did.

At first the answers began in a counter clockwise pattern but as the questions progressed and required a little more thought the pattern shifted to whoever felt comfortable first and was ready to answer. Students seemed to nod in agreement with each other and to support one another's answers. After the focus group was over we opened the conference room door and that is when we saw Walter who was waiting for us and began to explain what happened. After I confirmed his willingness to participate in the one-on-one interview he came into the NAS conference room and we began talking and then started the interview. He seemed pretty comfortable with me one-on-one because he had met and known me before. I also noticed he seemed a little distracted with his phone as it went off a couple of times during the interview. Walter was very busy since it was homecoming weekend but nonetheless made time to meet with me and provide insight into his perspectives of Indigenous leadership concepts and how his involvement in the Native student organization impacted him.

The OU NAS department is one of the campus support resources for students who pursue a bachelor's degree or a minor; it often provides the alternative or supplemental support that students receive on the OU campus. It is a place where students feel that their culture is valued and honored and where they can come to talk about their home community issues or general Native American issues. The department is a safe place for Native students to be themselves.

## **Southwest: University of New Mexico**

The southwest region was the second site that I visited. I arrived in Albuquerque, New Mexico a day early to make sure I would make it on time to the university. The hotel gave me directions to the University of New Mexico. As I neared campus I could tell that I was approaching the university not only because signs began to appear but also there were more concentrated eating places where students and guests might go. After finding visitor parking I walked to the Welcome Center which was the next building over and they showed me how to get to Mesa Vista Hall with a campus map. As I walked I realized how windy it was; there were leaves and other debris blowing around on the sidewalks and streets of campus. Because I was still 45 minutes early I went to the bookstore and after hanging out for 15 minutes I headed toward Mesa Vista Hall. I passed a statue that represented the Hispanic culture, kept walking and saw the student union building with tables for students to eat outside. As I continued to walk around the campus I noticed minimal student traffic, which made it seem bare. Soon I saw the building I was to go to across from the student union.

Before I walked up to the building the scent of fry bread hit my nostrils. Then I saw one of the Native student organizations having an Indian taco sale fundraiser. I walked into the building and looked for the American Indian Student Services office. When I first walked in I could tell that there was much activity going on in the building. I saw the American Indian Student Services office and headed that direction. Before I stepped in I noticed a bulletin board advertising student activities and flyers representing diverse student organizations. When I walked into the American Indian Student Services office right away I noticed how balmy it was. I went to the front desk and said that I was

there to use the conference room. I noticed the reception area was marked off with a partition board and a couple of computers set up for student workers. They immediately said that they needed to clear out the conference area, so I sat on one of the chairs in the waiting area. While sitting there I noticed two students eating their Indian tacos, and another room to my right that had computers for students to use. There were students walking in and out to print documents. I waited 10 minutes because they were trying to clear the room and make sure they gave the staff an opportunity to retrieve items from the conference room.

Once the conference room was ready one of the student workers said that I could go back there and follow her. As I walked to the conference room I noticed there were couches and tables set up for students to sit and hang out. There were two students sitting at one of the couches either studying or looking over some books. Just from my initial time within the center I felt welcomed and could sense that the students felt at home in this space. When I walked into the conference room area I could tell immediately that it was used for more than conference room space. There was a staff/student kitchen area with a refrigerator, microwave, and toaster as well as a copy area and a place to store supplies. The room definitely had the making of a student services area, storing items from student programs and events. The table had one chair set on one side with four chairs on the other side. As I sat down I started to get things situated but it was not a couple of minutes before Phillip arrived and I introduced myself and began talking with him. Within a couple of minutes Cloud Hehaka Sapa and Art arrived. Sydney, who also worked there, came in to ask how it was going to be set up. She thought the procedure was staggered one-on-one interviews so I explained the focus

group to her. She agreed to the procedure and asked me to just give her a couple of minutes to get the front office covered. One of the other students asked if it was okay if he had to leave a little early. When Sydney returned she said that she might have to leave at some point during the interview, but was not sure.

After the participants completed the forms and pre-focus group survey I gave them each a copy of the focus group questions. I told them there was no particular order and that if they chose not to answer a question they did not have to do so. We then began the focus group. When we started the focus group the order went from right to left based on student responses. Once we got to the fourth question the second student responder asked for us to come back to him; after all other participants responded he answered the question. During the focus group many students built on what others said and nodded their heads in agreement time to time. At the second to the last question one of the students had to leave early. The rest of the focus group was completed and I thanked each of the students for participating and taking time out of their schedules. I then saw a colleague who came in and gave me a hug. We chatted for a couple of minutes before I said that Phillip and I were going to do the one-on-one interview. Once Phillip and I sat down (we were sitting across from each other), I went over the informed consent form and he signed it. I decided to begin with the demographic questions first, skipped to the questions that were not previously asked, and then solicited his final comments. After his final comments I thanked him for participating and shook his hand.

My observations at the University of New Mexico centered on what seemed to be a strong Native student community. Everyone who came into the office not only seemed to know each other but also appeared comfortable doing what they needed to do. The

interview area was definitely a different from the previous site in that it was designated as the Native student support place on campus and I could tell that it served that purpose well. Just from my short visit it was apparent that all students who walked in the door felt comfortable to be themselves and had a familial or kinship that they shared. It seemed to be the place where the Native student community gathered, the safe space on campus.

### **Northwest: University of Idaho**

After arriving in Spokane, Washington I drove an hour and a half to Moscow, Idaho. I went to lunch with two colleagues and a Nez Perce student who arrived a week earlier from Australia and had studied abroad. After lunch we drove to campus. I rode with one of my colleagues, who serves as the Director of the Native American Center, and the Nez Perce student. We parked and walked up to the top of the hill to the Native American Student Center. By the time we reached the top of the hill I was breathing harder and could feel it in my legs. The temperature was still cold and snow flurries were falling.

As we walked up to the Native American Center I remembered the building from when I was there before, just a couple of years ago. The Center is a one story, square building with cream colored bricks. When I walked into the Center it felt warm and cozy and I immediately started looking around, noticing the nice plush leather couches to my left. I could see that there were four defined spaces for students, including the living area, a dining/meeting area, a kitchen, and computer lab spaces. In front of me was a table that looked like a big dinner table with eight chairs surrounding it, with the kitchen area nearby. I placed my jacket on one of the chairs and carried my bag as I received a

tour of the kitchen and the computer lab space. The Director showed me his assistant's office and his office, and we talked for a few minutes catching up on what was going on at our respective campuses. We realized that it was close to the interview time so we went to the lounge area.

I began talking to the students in the lounge area, asking them where they were from, their major, and what year they were in college. My colleague then came in and we all talked for fifteen to twenty minutes. He was also trying to get in touch with Kateri, whom he had a hard time contacting. He was also texting Ben, a single father who had to pick up his children, park, and then walk to the Native American student center. We waited another ten to fifteen minutes and I asked the student participants if they wanted to start going over consent forms and take the pre-focus interview. Once they sat down, I introduced myself, what I was doing, and then started going over the informed consent forms. After they all agreed to sign Ben arrived with his three children. Two children stayed at the computer by the table and the other one was by Ben's feet playing with her papers and coloring. I went over the informed consent with him and he agreed and signed. I then gave each participant the pre-focus group interview survey. After each person completed the survey I asked them if it was okay to start audio taping and they agreed.

When I began asking the four students the initial demographic questions I noticed that Wilma answered first. When the more difficult questions were asked, which required more time, there were pauses but it was still Wilma who answered first. The other three students were quiet and it was hard to get answers from them as the focus group progressed. During this process I thought I heard my tape recorder make a noise;

when I checked it during the eighth question I saw that it was full and no longer recording. I fumbled around for a minutes trying to figure out what happened but eventually told the students that I would just take notes from that point forward, which I did for the last four questions. During these questions it became more difficult to get a response from Russell. I could sense he felt that he either could not answer during the focus group or that he did not have enough time to think. I told him that I would send what I had to him by email and that he could add to it whatever he wanted.

After we finished the focus group I recorded their responses on paper and thanked them for meeting with me. Near the end of the focus group Kateri came and I asked her if she was still interested in being interviewed. She agreed and so she sat down. The other three students left almost immediately but Ben stayed. Kateri talked with us for ten to fifteen minutes about what was going on with her family, and then Ben said that he had to go. He left and Kateri and I talked more about life and school. I then asked if she was ready to begin, explained to her what I was doing, and asked her to sign the informed consent. After she signed the form I began the audio tape and we went through the interview smoothly.

One thing I noticed about Kateri is that even though she was going through a hard time that week she still had a positive attitude and laughed. When we finished she gave me a hug and thanked me for interviewing her and coming so far. Her positive attitude and how she expressed herself in the interview impressed me.

I also observed that the Native American student center was definitely the safe place on campus for many of the Native American students. It seemed to be the hub of Native student activity, including the Native student organization. The Native student

organization and the Native student center seemed to be woven together, which was a different way of building the Native community on campus than what I observed at the previous sites I visited. However, blending the two together made the students feel supported and safe to be themselves. The blend clearly worked for the Native students at the University of Idaho.

### **Northeast: Cornell University**

I arrived in Ithaca, New York on Monday morning and went to the baggage claim and transportation area of the small airport. Ground transportation was outside so I went to see if the Redrunner—the Cornell University courier service which was prearranged—was outside waiting on me. The weather was rainy and the temperature was a little cold. The Redrunner minivan was ready and we started heading to the Cornell campus. The scenery was beautiful and I noticed the fall colors and the rolling hills.

When we arrived on campus it was not long before we entered the residential part of campus and there was the beautiful purple with a Wampum belt design surrounding the building of the Akwe:kon house I saw in the picture of the handout I received two weeks earlier. It was just as beautiful in person as it was in the picture. Akwe:kon is the Native American house that Cornell University built in 1991 for Cornell Native American students to live in and for other students to learn about Native culture.

Akwe:kon is in the Mohawk language and means “all of us”

([www.campuslife.cornell.edu/campuslife/housing/undergraduate/akwekon](http://www.campuslife.cornell.edu/campuslife/housing/undergraduate/akwekon), 2011). I

walked around the house to the front where I saw someone in their office. I rang the doorbell and immediately a young Native woman greeted me. The room for my lodging was not yet ready so after receiving directions I walked to the American Indian Program



(AIP) building [it was still daytime and the interview was scheduled for the evening when it would be dark].

As I ventured out I noticed how hilly and beautiful the campus was. When I neared central campus I saw a bridge that went over a beautiful river with a gorge and a waterfall; students walk across the bridge to the central campus from the campus residential area. I found Caldwell Hall where the AIP office was located and where the focus group was to take place. The building was an older four story maroon brick building with a dark brown roof and awning. I did not see an elevator so I walked up the stairs to the fourth floor where the offices were and I immediately saw someone I met a few weeks earlier in Oklahoma. She was busy so I found the multipurpose room where I would later interview students. I met one of the AIP staff who I interacted with during the scheduling process and we decided to go to lunch. We went to the trillium where a food court is located for Cornell students. When we walked in I noticed how large it was and the availability of different varieties of food that were locally grown. We found a place to eat amidst the students who crowded around the tables that were spread out on two floors. After we ate lunch I walked around campus and headed back to the Akwe:kon house to get settled in, before returning to central campus for the focus group.

When I walked to the focus group it was a little rainy outside. As I entered Caldwell Hall the AIP staff person I met earlier greeted me and said she left the door unlocked because she was not sure if one of the students had access to the building. She took me upstairs to introduce me to the students who were already present. She also took me to the graduate student office area and introduced me to Clark and Vera who were there talking. As we talked Charlie came in and I was introduced to her. The AIP staff

person told me that she had to leave but the area we would use for the focus group was open. I told the students that I was going to go in to set up and they could come on in when they were ready. I walked in, sat my items on the floor by the dark brown leather chairs in the room, and pulled out my interview documents and audio recorder. I sat the recorder on the gray, metal table that had chairs around it. When Charlie came in I asked if she had a preference for the location of the focus group, either the leather chairs or the table with chairs. She said that either would work but that the table might be better. We sat at the table and when Clark and Vera came in I asked them if the table would be okay. Nathan then came in and was completely wet from the rain; the other students kind of giggled at him and asked if it was raining. He sat down and I asked if everyone was ready to begin the focus group, and they agreed.

After introducing myself I explained the informed consent form, which they signed, and I gave them the pre-focus group survey. When they completed the survey I asked if they were ready for the focus group to begin and they said yes so I turned on the audio recorder and began. The focus group went smoothly and they seemed to open up early in the process. I noticed though that I was somewhat nervous at first—perhaps because I was interviewing students at Cornell, a prestigious university—but I loosen up as well as the focus group progressed. After we completed the focus group the students hung around and we talked some more. I did not know if they just wanted to hang out or if they were waiting for me to get up and leave, so I eventually asked Nathan if he was still willing to participate in the interview and he said yes, after which the other students left.

I then moved to sit facing Nathan. I went over the informed consent form and asked if he was ready to start. I also showed him the questions that I planned to ask so he would be prepared. The one-on-one interview went smoothly. When we were done I asked if he was going back to the Akwe:kon; he said yes and walked me back in the rain, using a shortcut known by the students. During the walk we talked about his experience and why he thought it was important for students to take NAS or AIP courses.

One of the key observations about my experience at Cornell was that the university was so committed to Native students that they built a Native American house that represented the local tribal culture. The intent was to both honor Native students and to create a strong community for the Native students at Cornell. I also noticed that the university was very affluent and beautiful, which could be intimidating to Native students who come from a tribal community or a less privileged environment. Cornell was founded 1865 as a private, land-grant university and I could sense the prestige of the campus, from the old historic buildings to the availability of a wide variety of locally grown foods. In addition, the support services provided through AIP and the Akwe:kon clearly produce a safe space for the Native students of Cornell University. Especially for those students who are far from home, either physically or spiritually, the strength derived from such a place is very important.

### **Southeast: North Carolina State University**

I arrived in Raleigh, North Carolina on Tuesday night, going straight from Ithaca, New York. Wednesday morning a colleague picked me up at the hotel and we went to lunch. The weather outside was humid and warm. We drove by campus and decided to go to the farmer's market restaurant at North Carolina State University (NC State), where

I was exposed to southern food. All of the food at the restaurant was made from local products. We both ate fried chicken, okra, biscuits with molasses as a spread, and mashed potatoes, and drank sweet tea. After lunch a recent Oklahoma State University graduate who was a graduate student at NC State, and with whom I made previous arrangements, gave me a tour of campus. I met the student at my colleague's office, who informed me that the focus group would take place at a satellite office for NASA (Native American Student Association). We walked across campus to the NASA office, where I left my bag with laptop, recorder, and documents in a locked room. The student then showed me the library, the student union, the gym, his classroom buildings, and the landscape. I could see that the campus was large, spread out, and buildings varied significantly in the age. Efforts to remodel the campus could be seen in the library, where one area featured modern, abstract furniture and sectioned off study areas ranged from traditional to contemporary. At the end of the tour we walked back to the NASA office and talked for a few minutes about different things.

After the former student left and I was preparing for the focus group one of the participants, Scott, arrived early. We greeted each other, shook hands, and began talking about his major and future plans for graduate school. Chad soon walked in and sat at the end of the table in the office. I shook his hand, introduced myself, and asked him what year he was and where he was from. We talked about the lessons I learned in southern food, including collard green sandwiches, using molasses on biscuits, and the process used for making them. They both told me more about the food they ate and how they prepared pigs. Within five minutes Big Country walked in, followed by Scott, and sat

down, and I asked the guys if it was okay to start going over the forms with them. Joy arrived while we were going through the informed consent form, which they all signed.

I asked them if they were ready to start and they said yes so I began the focus group. The focus group went smoothly. Initially, responses moved from left to right but as we progressed the order changed and students responded as they were ready. After the focus group concluded I asked Joy if she was still willing to participate in the interview and she agreed. After the other participants left I gave her the pre-focus group survey and the individual interview informed consent, highlighting the questions that were not previously asked and some of the demographic questions. When we finished I shook her hand and she left. I packed up my bags and closed the windows [I opened them earlier because it was unusually hot that day in North Carolina, with temperatures in the upper 70s], making sure that the lights were off and the doors were locked.

My observations at this site focused on the important role that the Office of Multicultural Affairs plays in the support of Native students; this was particularly true with regard to the Coordinator of Native American Affairs, whose support is instrumental for Native students. I was also struck by how the Native students support each other through their higher education journey. Although they came from different tribes in North Carolina, and many were from out of state, they were involved in NC State's Native student organizations not only because they supported each other but also because they understood the importance of Native students being visible on campus. Scott talked about this during the focus group, saying:

Yeah being in a leadership position and being a Native American on this campus also helps recognize us as one. Like all the students here you know some ain't

never met a Native American or heard of one. So us in leadership position and standing out in the crowd helps, you know, everyone else recognize us as on campus, you know, so that's another good thing about it.

Garrod & Larimore (1997) found that this interweaving of relationships and peer support increased persistence for Native American students. The Native presence was visible on campus, although I must note that I arrived in November which is Native American heritage month when many Native student cultural events and programs take place. I saw though the importance, to the students and my colleague, of being active, involved and recognized on the North Carolina State University campus. This certainly was true at the other four campuses as well.

### **Summary**

This chapter described the various regions and universities where this dissertation was conducted. The intent was to provide a description of the places where Native students live and navigate on a daily basis while they are away from home. The descriptions included an overview of my contacts with the participants and other individuals, the flow of the focus groups and interviews, my observations about the settings, and the activities that occurred immediately following the focus groups and interviews. In general, each institution seemingly demonstrated a high regard for Native students as evidenced in their commitments to Native American student centers, houses, student affairs professionals, and/or a Native American Studies program on campus.

I believe that it is important for individuals who may not have a prior working experience with Native students to recognize the critical role that place holds for Native American students. These places, the campuses, Native students call home and become a

part of while pursuing their education. Acknowledging, honoring, and valuing the culture that students bring with them to campus, while providing a safe place as a piece of the students' home community, are important.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **The Native Students**

This chapter is an overview of the Native student participants, highlighting relevant data regarding who the participants are. I provide in this chapter background information about the students because I consider it essential for understanding the students' experiences and how they view leadership and leadership development. The chapter begins by examining family influences and pre-college leadership experiences. These initial sections reflect the confidential nature of the pre-focus group survey in which responses could not be linked to participant identities. The chapter is subsequently organized according to the respective universities. The data subsumed under these subheadings include overviews of the students' tribal affiliations, academic majors, the number of years in college, the number of years of participation in Native student organizations, and the types of community from which they come. Tribal affiliation underscores who the students are within their traditional tribal communities and reflects one of the first questions asked about their clan, band, or grandparents (and family); tribal affiliation demonstrates how the students are connected to the community and as an individual (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001). The academic major, the number of years in college, and the number of years of participation in Native student organizations facilitate an understanding of participants' academic backgrounds and their perspectives of, and ways in which, leadership is exercised within the Native student organizations. Finally, the type of home communities where the participants grew up is included because



environment and the tribal culture connections influence identity development. Chapter One defines *home community* as “the type of home environment that students grew up or resided in for the majority of their lives.” Together, these considerations provide an overview of the Native student participants.

### **Family Influence**

To understand the influence that families have on students’ choices to become involved in Native student organizations (NSO) as leaders, I asked the students if their families were known in their home communities as leaders, including as vocational leaders, and, if so, in what capacity. I posed these questions in a pre-focus group survey given to every student who participated in the focus groups [See Appendix A for Pre-Focus Group Survey]. The overall answers were split in half, with nine students stating that their families were known for something associated with leadership in their respective communities and ten stating that their families were not. Among those indicating that their families were known as leaders, the specific areas of leadership included education, higher education, tribal nation offices, a constitutional review committee, and other committees within the tribal government. In addition, families were known as tribal leaders with service ranging from one participant’s mother who was the first council woman in the tribe, to clan mother or senators within the tribes. One student’s dad was known for his involvement with AIM (American Indian Movement). For these Native students, it appears that not only do their family influences provide them with the confidence that comes from seeing their families work within their respective communities, but that their family influences also give them prior knowledge of how

leadership or community involvement can impact others. I will address this further in a subsequent chapter.

### **Pre-college Leadership Experience**

The Pre-Focus Group Survey also asked participants about their leadership experiences before they went to college. I included this consideration to explore whether prior leadership experiences influenced the students to participate in leadership positions—especially within Native student organizations—during college. In addition, I asked students about the organizations they were involved in and the leadership positions they held.

Of the 19 students who took the Pre-Focus Group Survey, 15 said that they had leadership experience before going to college. They were involved in diverse types of organizations and extracurricular activities before college. Most were part of a Native American club or organization at their local high school, such as the Native American club, the Native American Student Association (NASA), a high school American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) chapter, or statewide organizations like the North Carolina Native American Youth Organization. Some were involved in national organizations with local chapters within the tribal community, such as UNITY (United National Indian Tribal Youth). Others reported involvement within the tribal community in tribal initiatives against tobacco and drugs. Many reported participation in non-Native organizations such as the National Honor Society, Decca, the FCCLA (Family, Career and Community Leaders of America), choir, a math or science club, or a drama or speech club. One student reported that he had military experience as a Marine before he went to

college and finished his undergraduate degree while still in the Marines, then subsequently attending law school.

The responses regarding the types of leadership positions held were equally diverse, and brought to light areas of involvement that were not mentioned in the list of organizations. The positions included: president and co-creator of a Native club in high school, secretary in AISES, student body president, captains on high school sports teams (including track, football, basketball, and lacrosse), involvement in Junior ROTC, professional careers before or while in college, management in gaming, platoon leader, and tribal princess. These leadership experiences influenced their decisions to become involved on their respective college campuses, which led to their service in leadership positions. The Native students' involvement in organizations and prior leadership experience demonstrate the general cultural values that are embedded within many tribal communities with regard to responsibility, relationships, and forming connections to the community (Johnson, Benham & VanAlstine, 2003).

### **The Universities**

**The University of Oklahoma.** At the University of Oklahoma (OU) four students participated in the research study. [The description of the place was provided in the previous chapter, including the location of the focus group and interview and the connection that the site held to the Native American Studies program on campus.] The first participant is Good who is a member of the Seneca Cayuga tribe and also of Wyandotte and Papako descent. He is a Native American Studies major with a minor in History and in his second year at OU. Good describes the type of community he came from in the following manner: "Ours was a tribal, rural community within the country but

everybody who lived out there lived on original allotment lands, so that's where we lived in northeast Oklahoma." The second participant is Lillian who is an enrolled Osage member but also of Seminole and Creek descent. She is a graduate student in Adult and Higher Education and in her fifth year at the university. This includes her time at OU as an undergraduate. When Lillian described her home community she said, "I come from a small, urban community (kind of laughs) that's not like quite a city but it's bigger than most towns in Oklahoma." The third participant is Leonard who is an enrolled member of the Muscogee Creek but is also Kiowa, Wichita, and Pawnee. He is double majoring in Native American Studies and Political Science and in is his third year at OU. Leonard is from Norman; he described it as an urban community. The fourth participant at OU is Walter (he did not participate in the focus group but was interviewed one-on-one). He is a member of the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians. Walter is majoring in Native American Studies with an emphasis in cultural and language revitalization and in is his third year at OU. He describes his community as, "tribal rural I guess; I come from a small really small town and Indian community in Northeast Oklahoma so I guess tribal rural would be the answer."

**University of New Mexico.** Four students participated in the research study at the University of New Mexico (UNM). The first participant is Art who is Laguna Pueblo. He is a mechanical engineering major and in his third year at UNM. The type of community that Art is from is urban. The second participant is Cloud Hehaka Sapa who is Oglala Lakota and Chicano. His major is Native American Studies with a focus in leadership and building Native nations. He is in his seventh year inconsecutively and is from an urban community. The third participant is Phillip who describes his tribal

background as, “Washoe and I’m also Anishina from California.” He has a major in Native American Studies with an emphasis on education and language and is in his fourth year at UNM. Phillip’s home community is “rural reservation; we’re like a small reservation then literally like 200 or 300 yards away from a small suburb of Gardenville, Nevada.” The fourth participant from UNM is Sydney who is Navajo and a current staff member in the Native student services center. She is in the Masters in Public Administration program concentrating in human resources. Her description of how many years she has been at UNM is, “I actually got my undergrad here and then coming back I’ve been working here for eight years and then the last two years I’ve been in a master’s program.” She grew up in an urban community.

**University of Idaho.** At the University of Idaho (UI) there were five participants, of whom four were focus group participants and one was an interview participant. The first participant at UI is Wilma who is a Blackfeet enrolled tribal member. Her major is actuarial science with a finance option; she is in her first year at the university. She is a transfer student. Wilma describes the community that she came from in the following way, “I grew up on the Nez Perce reservation and on the Blackfeet reservation; this is my first time not living on, living off of my reservations.” The second participant is Winona who is Shoshone Bannock. Her major is anthropology and she is a freshman in her first year. The community she came from is reservation. The third participant is Ben who is Okanagan (but talked about the tribal background of his children as, “My kids are Blackfeet, they’re part Blackfeet.”). His major is child development with a drug and alcohol addictions minor, and he is in his fifth year at the university. He is from a reservation. The fourth participant is Russell who is Navajo. He is an electrical

engineering major in his third year at the university. The type of community that Russell came from is a reservation. Kateri, the fifth participant, is the interview participant. She describes her tribes, home community, and majors as:

I am Nimiipu, Nez Perce and I live in Camiyay, Idaho up around the reservation. My major is anthropology and I have four minors yeah, American Indian Studies, of course, fisheries, natural resources, and art. Yeah, so I got a big plate.

In response to how long she had been at the university she said:

I'm a sophomore but I've also been here too because my mom came here. She didn't graduate here but she took some classes here for natural resources. So I kind of been here for different period of time, maybe four years that's the way I think of it.

**Cornell University.** There were four participants at Cornell University. The first participant is Clark who is a member of the Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma. He is a law student in his third year of law school. Clark describes the home community he grew up in as:

I would say all of the above, moved around a lot, started out on a reservation, in a rural area, and then lived sort of on and off for almost the whole time I was growing up and then I moved to a big city when I was in high school.

The second participant is Vera who is Hopi. She describes her major as, "I'm doing a PhD. in the history of art and visual culture and an American Indian Studies minor." She is in her third year at Cornell. Vera's home community is urban with a large Indian population. The third participant is Charlie who is Tuscarora. Her major is development sociology with a minor in American Indian Studies. She is in her "fourth semester but

third year” at Cornell. The type of community Charlie grew up in is reservation. The fourth participant from Cornell is Nathan who is Oneida Wisconsin. He is currently “finishing up applied and engineering physics.” Nathan describes how long he has been at the university as, “What since summer 07? Like four years and then an extra semester and that’s it.” He also describes his home community as, “I grew up in a sort of medium sized city about an hour and a half, two hours from the reservation.”

**North Carolina State University.** At North Carolina State University there were four participants. The first participant is Scott who is Lumbee. His major is technology design and engineering education, and he is in his third year at the university. Scott describes his home community as rural. The second participant is Chad who also is Lumbee. His major is Psychology and he is in his fourth year. Chad’s home community is rural. The third participant is Big Country who is Lumbee as well. His major is graphic communications and he is in his fourth year. Big Country describes his home community as rural. The fourth participant is Joy who is Haliwa Saponi. Her major is environmental technology and management; she is in her third year. Joy describes her home community as, “I would say tribal; I guess it’s very rural as well but everyone in the community, in my community, was all tribal members.”

## **Summary**

In broad terms, this chapter underscored how questions within the research study were inter-connected and how answers to these questions can provide insight into how the participants view themselves. Each aspect—whether family influence, prior leadership experiences, home community, etc.—contributed not only to students’ life experiences and influenced the ideals, values, and culture that they took with them to

their respective campuses but also their decisions to become involved on campus in Native student organizations and eventually to take on leadership roles. These aspects, along with those associated with university attendance (e.g., major, years of attendance, etc.), ultimately ensure that the voices of Native students are heard. Subsequent chapters will highlight how these backgrounds, cultural connections to the home community, and influences to become involved on campus are associated with leadership and why Native student organizations or Native American student centers, or the support services they provide, grant the social and cultural support system that is necessary for students while they are away from home (Shotton, Yellowfish & Cintron, 2010).



## **CHAPTER VI**

### **The Native Student Leadership Experience**

As a current Native student affairs professional and former Native student leader, I began to understand the importance of the Native student leadership experience through this qualitative research study. I posed questions to current Native student leaders on: (1) the impact of Native student leadership, (2) the strengths and barriers that students saw, (3) how they would describe their Native student leadership experience, (4) their observations of leadership, and (5) how or if they would give back that experience to their home or other communities following graduation. What evolves from the analysis of the Native students' responses and voices is an enhanced understanding of the impact of the Native student leadership experience.

Chapter VI is divided into five major sections corresponding with the aforementioned five questions. Section one will describe the Native student leadership experience. The student voices will describe their overall experiences in three categories: being rewarding, support, and participation. Section two encompasses the benefits and barriers of the leadership experience. The benefits include: communicating and networking, building a community on campus, representing Native students on campus, and being a role model. In contrast, the barriers to the Native student leadership experience are: transitioning into leadership, miscommunication, membership, and time required to be in a leadership position. Section three continues with the impacts of the leadership experience. Two subsections further discuss the motivation to pursue a degree

and the impact on the definition of leadership. Section four highlights the general observations of the leadership experience and is divided into two subsections: Native student leader observations and observations of leadership in general. Section five covers the Native student leaders' intentions to give back their leadership experience to mentor younger Native students, recruit and increase Native visibility in their respective profession, and build leadership and general skills to give back to the community and profession. Chapter VI is the heart of this dissertation and research in that it encapsulates the Native student leaders' experiences on their campuses and how their leadership in the organization impacts them now and in the future. I use pseudonyms for each of the student participants that were either selected by the students themselves or that I assigned.

### **Native Student Description of the Leadership Experiences**

To better understand the Native student leadership experiences I asked students to describe their encounter in the Native student organization by using only three words. Additionally, I asked them to elaborate on why they chose the specific three words. This section discusses, in depth, the responses from the Native student leaders on their experiences. The experiences or words that were used fell into the following three categories: being rewarding, support, and participation. Although a majority of the students' responses were positive, there were a couple of responses that described some of the difficulty they encountered in their time in the organization. These difficulties will be discussed at the end of this section.

**Rewarding.** "Rewarding" is the first category that emerges from the discussion with the Native student leaders on how they would describe their leadership experience in

the Native student organization (NSO). This term encompasses the sentiments of the words used by the student leaders about their leadership experiences. Other descriptive terms include: *beneficial, fun, balance, endurance, wiser, and well-rounded*. Walter describes his leadership experience as being fun and rewarding because he saw the younger students grow and knew that there would be a positive impact in the community and Indian country:

It's fun to be around the conversation, the things we do, and the conversations we have. That's what I'm going to remember for a long time just the fun we've had. Then rewarding, I'm at a point in my college life now when I see these freshman coming in and I'm like I was that two years ago. I was really that bold, naïve, but as I see them grow and their mindset change to 'okay, I'm no longer in high school; I'm in college, I get my work done.' You know? It's rewarding to see that those Indian kids are doing that, that they're actually making a difference not only in themselves but you'll know when they leave they'll make a difference in the greater society. Now that's rewarding for me—to know that maybe I'm not making a difference here, but I know that the organization that I'm helping with they're making some difference here, and that one day we'll see all those students doing bigger and better things for Indian country.

For Walter, being able to see the new students maturing and witnessing others accomplish their goals is priceless. Lillian discusses how rewarding it is to see everything come together, new members discover their path on campus, and the outcomes of the organization:

It's also rewarding when it does come together and you see the product of your hard work. You see the growth of the members, especially the new members when they step up and they take on leadership positions. They make their own way by doing their own events, in finding the things they need on campus without your help. So it's kind of rewarding that way.

Once the new members are able to find their path on campus and continue to stay involved in the NSO, the current and former Native student leaders give advice through their experiences. One example is Leonard, who talks about balance:

Then balance we all have to know we are here for our education, but if we usually focus extremely on our education that can be detrimental to us. As for other skills in our lives, if they get involved they'll have a communication to vent, to have an outlet of something for their creative energy. Access to energy that they need if they involved themselves too much that will be detrimental to their education. It's really about telling Native students about the balance, be involved, hey work towards your education so that when they have that balance they'll achieve a level of understanding about themselves, their educational goals, and their role as a young tribal person.

As the new student members are able to connect with the necessary resources and engage in the campus Native community, they must maintain a balance in their involvement to have a positive impact. In conjunction with achieving a balance in college, it is essential for Native student leaders to understand that endurance and strength are important.

Kateri states:

My leadership experience I would say endurance because at points there would be times where it would just be me and a hand full of people. We would have to do this and do that. It was just us constantly and sometimes that gets hard but you know, you endure it and you get through it. It's all beneficial in the end. Sounds all cheesy but happiness like seeing other people and what their reaction is to [what] we're doing and seeing how happy they are. It just makes your day. You're like 'I was a part of this.' This makes me feel really good now, and it helps everybody out really.

Along with endurance, for Brandon his experience is also about what they can give to others through their position and the work that the NSO does:

I'll agree with everyone else that it's definitely educational. [I] learned a lot in my time with the Native American student organizations. Also very rewarding, meet all kinds of interesting people, just gain a lot of support. And I guess I'll end with fun because sometimes when you can't get all the educational events to work out it's usually not too hard to get a fun event to work out.

A part of that learning means that they become wiser and maintain loyalty to their position and to what they do in the NSO. As a result of gaining wisdom and loyalty to the organization they become better-rounded as a person, as Joy states:

I think this could be one word well-rounded because I guess you get to experience a little bit of everything. You're a leader of a small community so you have to do a little bit of everything. So you know what it's like to be a secretary or you'll have a chance to serve as secretary or as a treasurer. I think well-rounded because I could serve in any capacity on an executive board and feel comfortable with it.

By being willing to do the work with anyone they become well-rounded as persons and as leaders. Being a Native student leader is demanding, as Jim states:

I think another one would be demanding, not only with the duties and tasks that are required for that position but even just as a member. It demands so many other things out of you like I was saying the loyalty, the pride, and you know being able to handle so many different things. Then related to being well-rounded it makes you be well-rounded.

Through all they are asked to do as a Native student leader in a NSO the experience becomes "beneficial, because it does benefit you from being able to take a leadership position [be]cause you gain that experience and values as a leader," as Scott says. The Native student leaders overwhelmingly say that they find their leadership experience in the Native student organization to be rewarding.

**Support.** The next category arising from the discussion about a word that describes the Native student leadership experiences is support, meaning the support that is given to them as individuals through the NSO. Wilma talks about her experience in the NSO and her participation in the Native student center:

Caring, this is a place where they are genuinely concerned with what's going on academically, personally, and helpful. Some people who are willing to help have what they need to get it done; you don't ever feel alone.

As a Native student on campus, especially a Native student leader, knowing that there are people on campus who care for them and would do anything for them makes a positive impact. The caring that is shared with the students is reciprocated to the younger Native students, as Walter discusses:

I would do anything clearly for any Indian student here. As we were talking about last night at 11:30 at night they come to my door and said I need to interview. Trust me at my house we have a policy if it's unlocked walk in. I mean their all my family, I would do anything for them and I hope they'd do anything for me.

When Native student leaders see the support they receive from the Native student affairs professionals and the university, they in turn give back to others, especially to younger Native students on campus. Leonard talks about the importance of giving support to others:

Then support, it's always been my position and actually [I] want to support other students have an outlet for them to come talk to if they need help. I'm a teaching assistant for one of their freshman programs here. So that is what I do for freshman. I get them used to the university lifestyle, the university aspect and let them know all the support systems. I tell them if they need support they can go here, there or that I'm here too. I tell all the incoming freshman, and new students, Native students, that I'm here if you need help, 'you know', accessing these communities' resources, these universities resources or if you just need somebody to talk to about 'you know' tribal issues, concerns, or something on your mind. Just to have that support system so that if they need that in a time of crisis or in a time of need that they can turn towards that and look to that so they won't have anything that will negatively impact their education or their lives.

For Leonard and others the support they give Native students and each other in the NSO and in their educational journey is an impactful part of their leadership. Kateri talks about the importance of seeing the strengths each member brings to the NSO and centers as providing support to each other:

I saw all these strengths coming together and being able to work together it just all made it really great in the end. This was with anything: the powwows, our activities or events, or even just right here helping out. Like Roy is really good at math, you know, so he has his ability at math helped out a lot of other people. I know it helped out with me [be]cause he was like 'oh, you did it like this' and I'm just like, 'oh yeah, you make it sounds so easy.' He's like, 'yeah, I'll break it down for you,' just seeing that in itself is just like, 'oh wow, like I see your strengths.' I think that was really a good thing and even my strengths too, um, I guess like last year, I think that was the most time that I stepped out of my boundaries in my whole life.

As Native student leaders get involved on campus they build a Native community, which is essential for many Native students on campus. In building a community they begin to see each other's strengths and recognize the value that each member brings to the community. All of this builds friendships. Cloud Hehaka Sapa speaks about having a friendship at every stage:

Friendship because I believe that, you know, that we, on every level, people can be friends. You know what I mean? Whether it's on the smallest little things or, you know, if it's that they're exact opposites when people are friends or friendly to one another I think that, you know, um, it's easier to work together. I try to maintain a friendship with the people I work with like in Kiva club you know us, we go out and do things you know besides Kiva club. We have barbeques at each others houses, and like I'm having a Halloween party and bringing people over.

Being able to build friendships increases the community at the university for Native students and helps them to contribute to the broader community, as Phillip says:

One thing that is pretty big is community and that's, uh, it's pan Kiva club so it's beyond that we're starting a Dine, NASRIG and all these other Native student organizations. Outside clubs like the Native American Community Academy has come to us for help just with their students so it's, it's about building relationships beyond our own leadership group and program and actually trying to make change within the community the best that we can.

When a strong Native community is built it not only helps the Native student leaders and current Native students but also helps the students learn how to work across different personalities and tribes. Good uses this example:

Being used to working with however many people you are dealing with different personalities and attitudes you have to be understanding, you know, listening to what they have because you may not have all the answers. They may have good ideas so and that shows a good one. And then collaboration would be another one is how we can work together with everyone's examples. Collaboration starts here and can carry for the rest of your life and is working well together and realizing that everyone is their own individual.

Native student leaders learn to collaborate and build a community while allowing others to be their own individual. The important role of building support for the Native students provides an opportunity to “trust one another to be able to grow,” as Winona states.

**Participation.** The last category emerging from the voices of Native student leaders is the role that participation plays in their leadership experience in the NSO. Participation impacts them in different ways, but the most evident value relates to the skills gained from the experience. Lillian talks about the role and impact that being involved had on her:

Being a leader in the student organization has made me have to think about what I’m going to say, how I’m going to say it, and who I’m going to say it to. That’s been one key thing that keeps harming not only within your organization but within the other organizations on campus [be]cause you’re going to be working with more than just your people in your organization.

When Native student leaders serve in leadership positions they not only gain leadership experience but they also working with a group to build a stronger community. For many of the Native student leaders there is a passion for their own tribal communities that influences their participation in the NSO:

Passion — that’s the underlying key in our club is that, you know, we’re all in that organization because we have a passion for our people, we have an understanding of what happened and [an] understanding there’s a need for action. Fun in that you know all of these things, they don’t have to be so serious, and you don’t have to get violent or anything like that. It can be organizing fun things like we’re going to try to do a 5K this year, so it’s like you know we’re passionate about our community and want them to live healthier and better lives. What can we do about that? You know, so let’s organize a 5K. It’s promoting health and it’s, ‘you know’, it’s a fun thing to do for the community.

Through the Native student leaders’ involvement in the university Native community they give back to the local Native community of the university, as Cloud Hehaka Sapa



states. When Native students see the connections that the NSO has to the Native community it leads to action, as Phillip says:

Which really leads into my next one which is action and that's just doing something like no matter what it is or whether we've had talking circles and this year we've had a little bit of a march. We've done parades in the Navajo nation fair. That was pretty fun, but it's just taking action, getting out there and doing something, and then change. It's both adapting to change and making change and trying to voice your opinions when they're not heard but helping out people whose voices are um kind of misinterpreted and supporting them with your numbers and your voice.

Participation is about helping to create positive change for the community and ensuring that the voices of those who cannot speak up, for whatever reason, are heard. As Sydney states, participation is about change and enduring:

I mean look at how long we've been trying to change systems and how long we're trying to change the stereotypes and misperceptions of Native communities. It's going to take a long time, and I think that with the energy that students have, even the little bits and pieces that you have right now, it's a victory for everybody. I think that's the thing that again going back to remembering what people have done is to remind you it's not a fight that's going to ever end. It's going to continue, and that's what keeps us going and it keeps us living, enduring, enduring Navajo. It's kind of funny, but we're still here, we're still around so it takes people, like the people sitting at the table to kind of fit their niche and figure how their going to bring people to not at the level that their at, because there are certain people who are like, "you're getting a higher education. I don't feel comfortable with that," but thinking, letting them know that there's other things out there, experience that. If you have the opportunity to travel outside of the United States take that opportunity because you learn so much about other people, communities, and how much you share with them as well.

Change that must be made necessitates being unwavering, as Wilma states, "Determined, by this I mean a lot of things being put together by a few people, not willing to fail."

Sometimes only a few people are determined to help make a positive change, but for the Native student leaders there is hope that in some way they make a difference:

I do hope that I'm making a difference that could be built upon because we, we're going through this like lag. Hopefully, being a little more productive this year, I haven't gone all out for sure but it sets an example for someone else.

When Native student leaders become a part of the movement for positive change they increase their desire and motivation to continue in their education and share their experiences with new Native students:

Involvement helped me to strengthen my foundation, to strengthen my desire and determination for school, and I just want to show other Native students and students in general that if they're involved it will help them further their aspect, their goals and to help them develop skills, leadership, and communication skills that they will need later in life. There are so many advantages of being involved you get to connect with other students for Natives and other tribal students from different tribes and just to get overall feeling of its just not your tribe but as a people and coming together as that.

These Native student leaders see how their participation impacts others and they realize that “participation and being more involved in the little things can make a big difference,” as Winona states. They describe their leadership experiences as representing being rewarding, support, and participation. These descriptive terms best express the Native student leadership experience, as shared through the Native student leaders’ voices.

### **Benefits and Barriers to the Leadership Experience**

This section examines the themes that emerge from the Native students’ voices when asked the question: “What are the strengths or barriers you have seen in your leadership position in the Native American student organization?” Hearing the Native students’ perspectives of what they view as benefits and barriers is essential. As current Native student leaders they are in divergent regions of the country and on different campuses with varied campus cultures. The commonalities between their responses demonstrate, however, that they have similar experiences.

**Benefits of the Leadership Experience.** The Native student leaders talk about the benefits they see in both their leadership position and the organization itself. The themes that emerge from the Native students' voices are: communication and networking, building a community on campus, representing Native students on campus, and being a role model. In the following sections I discuss these themes in greater depth, incorporating some of the Native student leaders' narratives.

***Communication and Networking.*** One of the first themes the Native student leaders discuss as a benefit is the communication that takes place as an individual leader and within the organization, and the networking they have with other students on campus. As Kateri states, her strength is her ability to talk to people:

My ability to talk to people. I'm not afraid to talk to anyone. I feel like if I should be afraid it would be like I don't know someone like a judge or something, like or a policeman. I don't know why they all get me all scared or something just like I don't even know what to do. I haven't done anything illegal but still just like their authority. But like, you know, talking with people. I think that's a really good aspect that I have.

For Kateri, the ability to speak to others, regardless of who they are, strengthens her organization and her current position as the president of the Native student group. For some of the Native students speaking in front of people is a barrier they must try to overcome. Along with learning how to communicate as an individual and within the organization they must find balance and adjust to different environments. As Sydney says, "You learn from so many people that you come into contact with and you learn how to adjust yourself again—it's with that whole balancing effect mentality." When this happens a positive line of communication is achieved and the organization is able to fulfill its mission to serve students. Leonard talks about his experience:

One of the organizations I'm involved in now we have a good line of communication that we are able to speak clearly and fluently to each other so that we can provide our best work for the students that we support.

Each leader and member must be able to communicate effectively, especially when the students endeavor to fulfill the mission of the organization and to be productive in their service to other students and the community. Ensuring that the mission of the NSO is fulfilled allows the Native student leaders to gain the necessary skills that will enable them to communicate effectively now and in the future. One of these skills is respect for time. Scott talks about gaining an appreciation for time and how it impacts others:

I guess time management would be one of them because of, you know, meetings starting on time. If one person's late that's part of, you know, that delays it and it don't start on time. I guess one of the strengths was it helped me build my time management better.

These skills not only strengthen the Native student leader and the organization but they also facilitate meeting other students within the Native community and across campus. Chad states this as he observes, "I see a strength of the leadership position of an organization being, um, the opportunities that are allowed, um, you have a lot of networking opportunities."

***Building a Community on Campus.*** Another theme arising from the Native student leaders' voices is the strength they see in building a community on campus. This is relevant to Indigenous leadership. Many of the Native student leaders identify Indigenous leadership as a descriptor of community. Community is a part of the Native culture and these values are embedded in the students whether they grew up in a tribal, tribal rural, or urban environment. As the literature previously stated, for Native students it is important to find a safe place on campus where they feel it is possible to be themselves (Shotton, Oosahwee & Cintron, 2010). Many of the Native student leaders

say that a strength they see in their leadership position are the people in the organization and their ability to work together. This is not about a specific individual. Rather, it is about the members and the students who make up the organization; it is the community.

As Art states,

I think the strengths is probably the people who you get to work with, ‘you know’. I have the opportunity to work with a lot of really motivated students which is really fun because they’ve always got a lot of great ideas all the time. It’s just a matter of taking that idea and making it a reality. So, I think the strength is in the people you work with.

Wilma adds, “The strength is that we all work together to get things done.”

Building a community is seen as important at each campus included in this research study. Some of the Native student leaders speak about how members and friends support them while they endeavor to build community. For example, Walter states:

I mean the strengths are I have a lot of my friends who are supporting me and behind me and they’re willing to do anything that I ask. They are willing to come, willing to if I say, ‘Look we’ve been asked to this. Alright well, let’s go.’

Phillip declares:

The strengths are the numbers. When there’s people just showing up and they’re ready and willing to do work then, I mean, that makes everything so much easier. It’s really like there isn’t any leadership—it’s just the group dynamic—works perfectly.

Regardless of the number of participants, however, what matters is working together and building a community. For Native students on campus, this is at the heart of all efforts.

One student states:

We’re all kind of a cohesive. We’re all sort of not dedicated is too strong of a word to use, but we have that interest in the group that people stick around despite whether it’s flourishing or not, I guess.

There is strength when Native students believe in the organization and the community that is being built. Big Country says:

I've seen since I've been in NASA is like the ability for everyone to stick together even though we have low numbers. I said we don't have a lot of numbers; we still attend a lot of events. And when you see one of us you at least see two or three of us so we pretty much stick together.

Charlie offers "interest can create an inclusive environment and that can create really positive moments of collaboration."

*Representing Native Students on Campus.* Another theme relates to being the *face* of Native students on campus. Chad states:

You pretty much are a face for your organization. If you have to go to other meetings so you represent, in a lot of cases, you represent the Native population on the campus when you're on a campus.

The Native student leaders realize that they have a significant responsibility representing Natives students on campus. Joy offers:

One of the big strengths for me is being the face of a student body. Like you have a really big responsibility when people look at you and they say, 'Oh, everyone else is like you.' It's a strength because you have to, I guess, fill those big shoes and do good later.

This felt responsibility highlights the importance for administrators and others to understand the diversity that exists within the Native student population. At universities with a high Native student population as many as thirty tribes may be represented.

For some Native student leaders, representing Native students includes increasing the number of Native graduates. Big Country reflects:

We break through the stats [sic] of Natives dropping out of colleges by us being in NASA and sticking together. We're raising that number each year every time we have somebody that graduates and go on to a degree or another degrees or a job. So definitely a barrier breaking the average statistics [be]cause that has raised since I have been here at state.

Increasing the number of Native graduates is an accomplishment for the Native student leaders and the departments that support Native students. The Native student leaders understand their role and how they serve as a voice representing other Native students within the university. Ultimately, this impacts the whole university community.

***Being a Role Model.*** The final theme emerging from the voices of the Native student leaders on the benefits they see in their leadership positions is that of being a role model for younger students. As Good states, “The strength is being a role model, you know, trying to lead by example.” Lillian adds, “A strength of being a leader, like you said, is being a role model but also being able to teach the younger students, the incoming students how to be a leader.” As the Native student leaders gain experience in their respective NSO they see their responsibility as helping other students to achieve similar experiences and build the skills necessary for becoming leaders themselves. This ensures the continuity of the organization. As Leonard states:

Definitely the role model aspect, we definitely want to look our best for incoming and new students from Native American communities. So that they’ll have a model to look up to and base their leadership characteristics on.

The Native student leaders see numerous strengths received in their leadership positions, including gaining communication and networking skills, building a Native community on campus, representing the Native students on campus, and being a role model for new and incoming students. My hope is that their voices will help others to see what can be done to support Native student leaders and organizations, and ensure that these strengths are fully available to all students.

**Barriers to the Leadership Experience.** In addition to strengths derived from the leadership experience, the Native student leaders also see that there are barriers to the

leadership experience. They provide candid feedback regarding what they see as impediments in the Native student organizations. The emergent themes are: transitioning into leadership, miscommunication, membership, and time. The following sections explore these themes through the voices of the Native students.

*Transitioning into Leadership.* The first theme arising with regard to barriers is the transition into leadership. Native student leaders indicate that when they assume leadership positions they often find it hard to know what was done in the past, to have the courage to speak in front of people, to delegate responsibilities to others, and to make sure that they are not isolating themselves from others.

Native student leaders, especially those elected to the presidency of the organization, want to understand the history of the organization. Walter states:

I'm really not sure what we've done in the past. I'm not sure what, um, organizational wise what we've done. I don't know if I'm up to par if I'm below par if, if there's something I'm missing for the students or if there's something that I'm not doing right for the students.

If no documented history exists of what the Native student organization did in the past then there is little with which to compare current actions and initiatives. Similarly, maintaining certain traditions or events may be difficult.

Another barrier associated with transitioning into leadership is talking in front of people. Cloud Hehaka Sapa states:

Barriers that I've had to overcome are talking in front of people. Especially when you have large groups of people it's a bit daunting but it's really helped me overcome that fear and really work on that. There's that barrier of getting over (speaking in front of people) that you know you build your strength from practicing, speaking in front of people

Phillip adds:



One of the biggest barriers has just been putting my opinion out there and trying to just put myself out there. Mixed in with what I believe and what I think about certain things and topics and the direction we should go or are going.

Stating their opinions and offering their voices can be overwhelming for incoming Native student leaders, knowing that so doing can influence the direction of the NSO and the decisions that are made within the student organization.

For those in a Native student leadership position another barrier to transitioning into leadership is associated with delegating. Lillian states:

That's one of the things that I struggled with before was delegation to my other officers. I'm learning how to let some of that go and so that they can build their leadership skills so that whenever I move on they're able to stand and do the things that I do.

Delegating provides opportunities for new members to gain leadership skills, which in turn facilitates the ongoing transition into leadership in subsequent years. However, the students indicate that they must learn to delegate as they transition into leadership.

In addition, because numerous responsibilities and duties are associated with leadership in a Native student organization, Native student leaders often find that they are inundated with activities and responsibilities. As a result, they indicate that becoming isolated from others can easily occur. Joy offers:

A barrier I would say maybe is that if you only let yourself lead the Native community you can tend [to] isolate yourself, so that might be a barrier.

Navigating the roles and responsibilities they assume as new or incoming Native student leaders is important. Failure to do so successfully may result in isolation from the community.

***Miscommunication.*** The second barrier, commented on by most of the participating Native student leaders, is miscommunication within their organizations.

Miscommunication may result from multiple factors, including: inaction, low numbers of participants within the groups, an inability to communicate with tribal leaders, or even the fact that various personalities—as well as students from divergent tribal backgrounds and life experiences—exist within the organization. The Native student leaders often are the persons in the organization who must ensure that decisions are accomplished.

Although group effort in leadership is deemed very important, the students acknowledge the challenges that exist, as Sydney points out:

Just put the talk into action. I think people can talk, and talk about certain things, and if it never gets done you start to lose a lot of the focus. You start to lose a lot of the mission, a lot of the momentum of what your organization is about and what it wants to do.

Leonard states:

Then on the other side of communication can get all jumbled up sometimes so that some lines are cut, some lines are drawn. It might become confusing but that's just something that you have to work through.

Working through potential miscommunication, however, is necessary for Native student leaders and members to serve together and build healthy organizations.

Phillip indicates that dealing with group dynamics in smaller organizations may be more difficult than in larger organizations. He states, “The same time numbers are a weakness too [be]cause a lot of times there are miscommunication or conflicts.” Clark also addresses this issue:

The problem is universal with balancing these personalities and a small group especially in a stressful situation which you know is any environment. Whether it is undergraduate or, you know, academic or professional the stress magnifies what would ordinarily be something that people would just let go and then what do you got, you got a small group of people who've offended each other in a stressful situation. That is not going to go away. So then you go into a problem of organizing these people in a way that they can still get things done.

Sometimes miscommunication is not within the student organization but is associated with communicating with tribal leaders. This is particularly true if students do not speak the tribal language. Sydney states:

You know you can't talk to a tribal leader until you go through the processes or you can't talk to them unless you know your own Native language. That's a barrier for me personally. I don't know my Native language, but I know who to talk to in order to get that done. So that's one of [the] barriers personally for me as well.

The inability to speak the tribal language may exist for multiple reasons, including among many others: where the tribal member grew up, if the student was adopted, or simply the possibility that their family did not teach them the culture or the language. Regardless of the reason though, this appears to be a barrier for Native student leaders.

Finally, Clark merges several considerations in his sage counsel:

You know, [you] got to make it yours. To get these people to work together is the challenge. I think that for me that's been the most I've learned here as a student leader is balancing these personalities and realizing that you're probably not going to be able to get as much done as you like if everybody was going to work together. You got to figure out what you can get done and consider that a success.

**Membership.** Another barrier is associated with membership, either in terms of few members or low participation. Wilma expresses, "We need more participation from others to help make things better." The Native student leaders who participated in this study understand the benefits that other Native students receive when they are involved in the NSO. Some leaders indicate that the lack of participation is likely due either to the strenuous role that academics play or to the number of Native students on campus, as Nathan states:

Our biggest problem, I'd say, in my time was always just maintaining membership because, you know, the Native population at Cornell isn't particularly large. Then only a small percentage of them actually will participate

in any events you try to organize. So trying to organize events and accomplish things with a few people and trying to get more people involved is always sort of the biggest issue for me.

Charlie offers though, “Membership is always an issue on a campus like Cornell, but at my other institution it was also an issue.” Walter offers “Membership too, you know, we have a core membership but there so much that, that core membership can do, you know, time because we’re all in school.” Chad speaks about relying on members:

It kind of goes along with the same thing you have to rely on people to do some stuff for you. So sometimes that can be a strength, and it can also be a barrier a lot of times, when it is barrier and having to rely on people if folks aren’t reliable. They’re also in other leadership positions and it can affect you on the other hand.

**Time.** The fourth theme emerging as a barrier is time. Vera declares, “The problem is the time commitment it takes to put into things.” Cloud Hehaka Sapa says, “It is hard to organize a lot people to do certain stuff at certain times, especially to get everybody on a schedule that works for everybody.” The Native student leaders must balance their own academics and work schedules with being in charge of a NSO that seeks to serve Native students and the broader community. As Good reveals, this can be overwhelming:

The barrier would be being so busy and trying to keep your studies up. Then life and being non-traditional, I have a full-time job and a family so that it all kind of builds in.

Finding the appropriate balance necessitates time management skills. For some leaders, as Kateri states, this may be a barrier:

Sometimes I’m like, I’m bad at scheduling. I’m trying to get that fixed. I have my calendar and it’s all filled with all of these things but like I still find myself forgetting: ‘oh, it’s on this day?’ You know, or something, so I think I need to work on that more.

In the preceding paragraphs the Native student leaders candidly speak about the strengths and barriers they see to leadership in their respective NSO. As much as possible their words are used to highlight their voices. We turn now to what they see as the impacts of their leadership.

### **Impact of Native Student Leadership**

In order to understand the impact of Native leadership I considered it necessary to ask the participants if being in a Native student leadership position motivated them to continue pursuing their degree. Also important to ask is whether their definitions of leadership are impacted by their position and involvement within the NSO. My hope is that through the voices of these Native student leaders a better understanding will emerge of the impact that Native student leadership has on current Native student leaders. This section is divided into two further sub-sections: motivation to pursue a degree and the impact on the definition of leadership.

**Motivation to Pursue a Degree.** One of the focus group questions posed to the Native student leaders is whether participating in a NSO impacts their motivation to continue pursuing a degree. Analysis of the student responses reveals different ways the NSO contributes to their motivation. The findings are that the NSO contributes by: increasing their involvement on campus, providing opportunities and benefits, increasing awareness of issues affecting Native people, contributing to their quality of life, providing support, and impacting their motivation to continue pursuing a degree. In the following sections each of these different contributions are examined.

**Increased Involvement.** One of the emergent themes from the question of how participation in a NSO contributes to the motivation relates to the increase in involvement

on campus. Good, who is at the beginning of his second year, states in reference to the NSO, “I’m relatively a new comer for student organizations but I do see the importance of them very much.” Although Good is a working dad he sees the importance of the NSO and chooses to participate. Lillian talks about how her involvement helped her:

Getting involved made me want to stay on campus more. So I think that’s probably the impact it had and studying with the sisters at the sorority as well. I think it’s had an impact that way too. I study a lot more since joining the sorority.

Through her NSO involvement she is able to become more involved on campus and increase her study skills. Sydney, who is employed at the university while working on her master’s degree, talks about how the NSO helps “build that bridge for students to become involved.” Because she is involved and serves as a student leader in graduate organizations, other Native students can relate to her. In turn, that helps her to encourage them to be involved on campus. The Native student leaders’ participation in a Native student organization influences them in multiple ways, including: becoming more involved, seeing the importance of the NSO, staying on campus more frequently, connecting with peers to hold more study groups, and helping other Native students become involved on campus.

***Opportunities and Benefits.*** Another theme is that involvement provides opportunities and is beneficial to the Native student leaders. Chad simply states, “Yeah, it gave me a lot of opportunities,” and Leonard says, “I find it really beneficial.”

Regarding opportunities, Chad further offers that involvement is a motivation due to his major:

It did impact my motivation because my major is usually a degree that requires leadership or advising in some aspect. So by me being a part of the organization and being a president and vice president of our organization I acquired those skills that are necessary for leadership.

Chad plans to attend graduate school and knows that he will need certain skills to be successful, including leadership skills, planning skills, and organization skills; he sees all of these as a benefit of his involvement in the NSO. Nathan concurs and states that involvement “forced me to become more organized.”

Involvement also provides participating Native students opportunities to learn about other majors that are related to Native issues, as Cloud Hehaka Sapa from the University of New Mexico states:

When I started getting involved in other Native student organizations and ones that focused kind of more on Native issues I was introduced to the Native American Studies department. It was through my involvement with those organizations that really pushed me towards that. So it in one sense made me stop doing one degree and in the other sense it made me want to start another.

Participating in a Native student organization provides an opportunity for Cloud Hehaka Sapa to learn more about the major that best fits him. Phillip agrees by stating that participation helps “open opportunities for other, other areas that I’m kind of interested in now.” The Native student leaders also gain invaluable skills through their participation and leadership and are able to find other areas of interest that influence them while in college. Sydney states:

How much power, I guess you could say, and input students as a group have to impact the university in policies. Even though there are little small pieces here and there that they realize they may just get in the end, there’s a lot of stuff that they affect and it’s a rippling effect.

For Native students who participate on campus in a NSO there are many opportunities, not the least of which is discovering the amount of influence they have to impact campus decisions. This is a discovery that they can apply after they graduate within their communities and careers.

*Awareness of Issues Affecting Native People.* Another theme is connected to the increased awareness that takes place through their involvement. Phillip offers, “It just kind of help reaffirm that there’s a lot of issues in Indigenous communities all over that need support and they need people to kind of step up and do it.” Charlie adds that involvement “definitely influenced some of the questions that I have about Indigenous communities generally and peoples and so it was more of an influence rather than a motivation.” Native student leaders who participate in a NSO not only become more aware of what happens on campus within the Native community but also learn about the issues that their home communities face.

*Quality of Life.* Participation in a NSO is also related to student quality of life while on campus. Clark states, “A quality of life is a big thing but showing up in my first year and seeing the people who sort of balance this.” His comment is in reference to how his connection to the Native law student association and other programs helped him by providing a balance during in his first year of law school at Cornell. Vera adds: “I think it’s more of a quality of life. It adds to the quality of life being a student, having some sort of cohort. It’s sort of different; it’s more social than related to my degree.” Clark and Vera recognize that participation provides both a life balance and the social support they might not otherwise receive on their campuses. For some of the Native student leaders, involvement not only adds quality of life but also provides a greater purpose while on campus. Nathan states, “Time, I mean it definitely, sort of, helped give me more purpose while I’m here.” Although the Native student leaders may not specifically use the word *motivation*, their words reveal that participation contributes to quality of



life, added purpose, and even encouragement to persist and work toward their respective degrees.

**Support.** Another theme associated with participation in a Native student organization is the concept of support. Wilma from the University of Idaho states, “Before there wasn’t a Native student center here and now this is here to support me.” This affirmation resonates throughout the Native student leaders at the University of Idaho. Ben adds, “It has helped me in knowing there is help and support here. There wasn’t a Native student center here before.” Similarly, Scott talks about how being around other Native students facilitates becoming a family, by saying, “Motivation, yes, because we had like people that we could relate with, you know, that we could talk [to] if we needed something, help with anything, and they were just there like family members.” For Native students, serving in a Native student leadership position, participating in a NSO, or simply enjoying a Native student center on campus, provides additional support which increases the motivation to pursue a degree, to which we now turn.

**Motivation to Continue Pursuing.** Increased motivation to persist is evident in the multiple voices of the current Native student leaders. Scott, in reference to participation, states, “It helps me as in motivation, in staying in school, just not pursuing a certain degree but, you know, pursuing a degree to get here.” Leonard adds:

I’m involved with our larger American Indian student group to be more sociable to get to know other students from tribes across the state, across the country. Then for more intellectual wise I’m in council of fire so we look into current issues in Indian country and talk about them. That’s how I balance that and it helps keep me motivated towards my overall major goals.

In this regard Leonard's involvement in the NSO encourages his overall goals of pursuing a degree. Another example of the impact of Native student participation in a NSO is found in the words of Big Country:

It's more of a motivation because I met a lot of people in the program and out of the program, but all of it came through NASA. So it's a lot of motivation and also a lot of networking for me so it's helped me in a lot of different ways, but all together it motivated me.

Walter adds, "In that way it's kind of motivated me to get my degree, get out, and go home." In addition, seeing other students who were previously involved encourages the Native student to achieve their own degree, as Art states:

To see what people do after they obtain a bachelors of science, you know, engineering or other science degrees. So it's pretty hard to complete my program. Seeing people who have already finished and what they're doing, that gave me a lot of motivation.

Similarly, the students who participate and become student leaders feel a responsibility to go out and help encourage Native youth to go to college and pursue a degree. Joy emphasizes this in her words:

Participating in a Native American student organization did motivate me to continue, because we're such a small group. All of us are leaders so it motivated me to want to pursue my degree and go off and influence other generations after me to pursue it as well.

Sydney, who is finishing her master's degree, also feels a responsibility to try to influence current Native students to pursue graduate studies.

The Native student leaders' participation in a NSO definitely contributes to their motivation to pursue a degree, whether that is by increasing their involvement, providing additional benefits and opportunities, increasing their awareness of Native issues, increasing the quality of life, or providing support. Seeing other students achieve a

degree helps them to understand that they can do the same, and that they in turn can influence other Native students to go to college.

**Impact on Definition of Leadership.** Another way to understand the Native student leadership experience is to ask the Native student leaders if their participation in a NSO impacted their definitions or views of leadership. These current Native student leaders range in the number of years they have been involved as a leader, the amount of time in college, and their prior life experiences that contributed to their leadership perspectives. This question helps explain if their current participation impacts their definitions of leadership. The themes that arise from the narratives of the Native student leaders are that they gain leadership and skills, their leadership definition is redefined and reiterated, leadership is a group effort, and having a leadership experience influences them. These themes are described in greater detail in the sections to follow.

***Gaining Skills through Leadership.*** One of the themes that emerges is that participation in a NSO helps students to gain leadership and other skills. Walter states that although he had prior leadership experience, he increased his leadership skills by being a Native student leader:

I've learned a lot from being a leader on campus. A lot of the stuff I've also brought in with me when I sat on our youth council for my tribe and before I was, when I was still in high school.

This statement demonstrates the impact not only of prior leadership experiences in high school, the military, or prior work, but also that the Native student leadership experience provides an opportunity to learn and gain more skills as a leader.

Some of the skills the Native student leaders gain include learning “what it takes to organize people, get them around an idea or project,” as Vera says. Through his work

experiences Chad is able to learn how “to delegate your tasks and jobs and have other people to do some parts.” Vera adds that participation in the NSO facilitates learning to “appreciate each other’s diversity a lot more because there’s so few of us.”

The impact of gaining skills through the Native student leadership experience helps the students understand that it is also important to be taught, as Chad states, “Being a student leader doesn’t mean that you always are the leader, you have to also learn.” This affirms for the Native students that their leadership experience is about learning from others in the process of leading or being a part of the NSO. As Scott says about his leadership experience, “It helped you build yourself as a better leader.” When Native students are in leadership positions in a NSO they learn from and gain invaluable skills that will help them help others. Leonard explains that, “It really help motivate me to strengthen my leadership skills and characteristics so that I can speak for them and give them opportunities and things that they might need.”

***Leadership Definition Reiterated and Redefined.*** Another theme that emerges from the Native student narratives is that their leadership definition is redefined and reiterated through their Native student leadership experiences. For some of the Native student leaders it is their experiences that provide the context for being a leader themselves, as Phillip states, “I wouldn’t consider myself a leader, I would just say maybe, maybe making connections.” Phillip’s comment highlights an Indigenous understanding of leadership, in that his contribution to the organization is “making connections.” The definition of leadership in a Western perspective, as one person leading, is often hard for Native students to relate to; in a Western perspective leadership is individualistic, whereas leadership in an Indigenous perspective is communal (Johnson,

Benham and Van Alstine, 2003). Kateri states that prior to attending the university she thought, “Leadership is someone standing up for what they believe in or what they feel.” Her leadership involvement, “defined it way more.” Big Country says that his leadership experience “just reiterated it, and I guess made it more stronger.” Chad provides greater detail about how his Native student leadership experience contributes to redefining leadership for him:

I would say it redefined my definition of leadership and just strengthened it more because [I] like being in NASA. I looked at the kind of people that was in it and it made me go into it two years later or a year later becoming NASA president. It also led me to other various roles where I was a leader. So it redefined it and, like Scott said, reiterated it and made it stronger for me.

According to Scott, his student leadership experience reiterates his prior definition of leadership:

As far as definitions or views of leadership it did help reiterate the definition of leadership. Like if you had a position, I mean you take the position, you had roles and responsibilities.

Through their student leadership positions Native students may find that they redefine their concept of leadership. This may be due merely to the presence of diverse students within the organization. Clark discusses how his definition of leadership evolved by stating, “It doesn’t have to be a fluid thing but when you’re dealing with students who are very high caliber individuals I think the expectations have to be adjusted for the people you’re dealing with.” Similarly, adjusting to the environment and realizing that Native students are still students, many with families and jobs, seems necessary. Art addresses this by declaring that Native student leaders must be “very brief because people are really busy.” Nathan, in his first student leadership experience without a prior definition for

leadership, offers, “I’d say that’s it did define it all for me.” In sum, Native student leadership experiences both reiterate and redefine student definitions of leadership.

*Leadership as a Group Effort.* A related emergent theme is leadership as a group effort. Phillip suggests that his involvement impacts his view of leadership, “I just want to say like regarding our student organization my real view of leadership has changed; it’s just group dynamics of leadership and not so much being individual.” As the voices of Native student leaders emerge, so do their perspectives of leadership as a group effort. For some, “the size of the group really changed the way I look at it,” as Cloud Hehaka Sapa begins; he continues, “different forms of like leadership whether it’s in a small group or a large group.” The type of leadership that is exercised is determined by the size of the group. Regardless of the group size, however, the Native student leaders echo the words of Scott that in their role as a leader their duty is to “get a group consensus so it’s, it’s not really so much about us being leaders as us just taking the first step and getting stuff started.” Again, for some of the Native student leaders it is difficult to designate themselves as a leader; rather, it is their efforts to make connections and help the members of the organization come to a group consensus that qualifies them as a leader. Scott adds that there may be “sometimes conflicting internally but at the same time it’s rewarding to see that, you know, we can accomplish so much by working together.” He continues, “Organization [be]cause it take[s], it just don’t take one person to run an organization, it takes more than one, and it helps, you know, collaborate all together as one.” Ultimately, leadership for these Native student leaders, “isn’t just you, it’s everybody around you as well,” as Kateri emphasizes. Leadership as a group effort is not

about the individual; it is about everyone involved in the organization and working within the community.

*Influences of Leadership.* Another theme, somewhat divergent in scope, relates to the influences of leadership on the Native students. Good declares about his leadership experience that:

It is very motivational because you don't want to let nobody down. Being Native already we've already got that, you know, we've got something to prove it seems like when we go to college so, and you get to see everyone that's in the same boat you are.

He feels pressure to prove himself in the university setting. Lillian's experiences influence her thoughts on who belongs in leadership positions, as she says, "After taking leadership role in both organizations I realized everybody does have that leadership capability; it's whether or not they want to express it." Leonard adds:

I definitely have seen other Native students from across the state and different rural, urban, or tribal communities and that really help[ed] to inspire me to know that there are still American Indian students who have that goal, that ambition and drive to be that.

Phillip, emphasizing the need to rely on prior experiences and teachings, offers:

Leaders not being chosen but just kind of growing up and learning aspects of community and aspects that are beneficial to the community and just kind of being accepted as a leader just through the way that they act and carry themselves.

Similarly, Sydney talks about going back to her traditional ways of looking at leadership:

The true aspect of becoming an Indigenous leader in that you always have to remember where you come from. In our traditions it's always been that way in that you always consider what you came from.

For these Native student leaders, leadership is always about community, reflection, and acknowledging their prior teachings and experiences while learning and adapting to the environment in which they find themselves at the university. Cloud Hehaka Sapa speaks

about the values he was taught, “Always try to take into consideration, you know, some of the values that some of my family talks about like humility.” He adds that the “Idea of leadership has been impacted both by my degree and by my experience.” The combination of prior teachings, experiences, and the impacts of their educational journey affects their definition of leadership; at the same time it helps them to acknowledge how they can help invest what they have gained into future generations. Good states, “I see young people and I think, ‘Wow you!’ I think it, it makes me feel good, you know, so I’m very in awe.” Joy offers, “All the skills I learned in high school can now be applied to college and effect more people and I guess serve a greater cause.” Native student leaders gain more than a reiteration or a redefinition of leadership; they are greatly impacted by their leadership experiences. This allows them to be open to new ideas, to reflect continually on their experiences, and to consider how they may best serve the communities of which they are a part.

### **Additional Observations Regarding Indigenous Leadership**

Additional observations of the Native student leaders are shared in this section. The observations are derived from the students’ leadership experiences in general and their student leadership experiences. The observations are in response to the last question posed in the focus groups and the interviews regarding final comments on Indigenous leadership.

**Observations on the Native Student Leadership Experience.** I begin by sharing Lillian’s comments about her struggles this year with communication between the different Native student organizations on campus. She states:

I think that communication thing. Once we get to a point of learning how to communicate with one another it will be okay. We’re also, like Leonard said,



we're dealing with different personalities and everybody has their own goals and events for their organization that they want to accomplish. It's just important for all organizations, especially Native American organizations, to work together and build a trust relationship with one another, and that's what we're trying to do on this campus. It's slowly progressing. It has been started, and I think that once we really learn how to communicate with one another it will be okay but that's probably the major barrier that I'm finding in my experience this semester.

Good communication can be difficult to achieve in a NSO because many of the Native student leaders are not used to saying what they think due to the cultural norms in their home communities and the expectation to respect the opinions of other people. This is especially true with elders, as Sydney observes:

It's been interesting to learn the different perspectives because usually I'm not the first person to say anything because you really want to kind of see how other people think. I think that happens a lot with Native students. [It] is like you want to hear what other people have to say because it is respectful and because you learn what they're saying. It's comfort in numbers when somebody else feels the same way, you're like, 'Oh okay, I'm not going crazy,' or 'I'm not thinking wrong.' It's comforting to hear what other people kind of share.

Sometimes communicating can be just about listening to each other speak on different topics or issues so that everyone really hears what others think, and sees how similar they might be. This is when learning different perspectives comes into play—understanding the diversity that exists not just in tribal or Native student communities but across communities, as Sydney continues:

It's learning different perspectives, and I thought diversity was all about, you know, students of color, faculty of color, and people of color. Diversity also means students with disabilities, you know, people from other countries, so my little world I thought it was just kind of this little piece of our world and everything, but it's so much broader than that. When they bring in their own perspectives and stuff it just really, you know, I never really thought it was that way, and I guess my problem isn't really a problem so it's something I need to work on. It's just been very, very interesting in like I said just getting out there and getting involved in what little way that I can encourage that as a leader. I would like to bring, you know, have that experience open up to a lot of students whether it be graduate students or undergraduate students.

For Native students who have been isolated within their own communities it can be a culture shock to come to a larger campus community where the idea of diversity is expanded from tribal to a broader spectrum. Working with other students from diverse backgrounds and unique experiences enables Native student leaders to improve their leadership styles. In prior sections many of the Native student leaders emphasized the important role that community plays and the group dynamics associated with leadership. Phillip deems it important to reemphasize these:

[What ]I really like is the group dynamic of leadership. I thought it was just important to reiterate it. Even though we do the leadership group meeting every Monday, the final decisions are still to the group and it almost takes us out of it a little bit. It's kind of like I don't have to make the decisions, I'm just here to support them and help lead them in anyway I can.

For Native students the type of leadership that is exercised often represents a group dynamic of leadership. This is evident throughout the discussion on Indigenous leadership and the important characteristics and values needed for Native student leaders within the university setting. The voices of the students indicate that it is the group of Native student leaders in the Native student organizations that work together to plan events and fulfill the mission of the organization.

The Native students emphasize the need for visibility on their respective campuses. Winona talks about the importance of being able to “inform personnel and others into being informed about what goes on here [to the Native American student center].” As Wilma explains, “Making [the] Native center more visible to campus. Some faculty don't know, making it more visible to campus might help reduce the ignorance, help educate. I met someone who thought that Native Americans died off.” One of the resolutions from Ben is to “educate the educated people. They act so educated

but it [introductory course on understanding Native culture] needs to be made mandatory their first year here. Also, there needs to be more help for students with families.”

This feedback is emphasized at the University of Idaho, although it is not the only campus where visibility is important and where support for Native students is lacking.

Nathan states:

It’s definitely a challenge that I don’t think there’s any faculty or staff support, at least here, to help the students work out those kinds of things. Again, small things can go seriously wrong, and I think that can be an impact on a students’ participation in leadership.

Charlie notes that one way to increase the confidence of incoming and current Native student leaders, while solidifying their knowledge, is to take courses on Native American studies:

I’ve seen a positive impact on students who, depending on how they, you know, self-identify, have taken courses within like a Native, if they’ve taken courses either through the American Indian Program or it was through the American studies program over at my other institution. I’ve seen positive changes in how they are more willing to interact with Native organizations once they kind of have some just knowledge. Then others are expanding knowledge on various topics within Native studies disciplines. I’ve seen some students kind of making a transition from, you know, not really knowing where they fit to being a leader on campus after taking a few courses and really asserting themselves into the group.

Increasing the confidence and knowledge of Native students in leadership positions also helps the Native student leaders with what they are often called on to do, namely, educate the general campus when it comes to Native cultures and the misconceptions about Native Americans. As Chad explains, for the Native student leaders it is rewarding to be a part of that effort:

It’s been rewarding to be able to educate people about Native culture, Native students, Native organizations [be]cause, like Scott said, there are a lot of people who’ve never met Native Americans or they didn’t even know there were Native Americans on campus. So being able to be the voice of Native American people not only on campus but as a whole and being able to educate people through

educational or service programs through our organizations has been real beneficial.

In their leadership positions Native student leaders are often the face of Native students on campus, as Scott states:

Being in a leadership position and being a Native American on this campus also helps recognize us as one. Like all the students here, you know, some have never met a Native American or heard of one so us in leadership position and standing out in the crowd helps everyone else recognize us as on campus. So that's another good thing about it.

Native student leaders, as the face of Native students on campus, dispel the myths regarding Native Americans and bring awareness that Native Americans do exist.

Increasing campus awareness of Native Americans on campus, and in general, benefits the NSO and the Native community as a whole. Native student leaders explain the value for Native students involved in leadership positions. Big Country provides the following testimonial:

I think well being in a leadership position. I've seen people that's came and failed, came and succeeded. Some of the ones that didn't succeed were the people that weren't involved, like they weren't involved at all, so they fell to the wayside the ones that were they stuck around. So I guess being in, not even in a leadership position, just being affiliated with the NASA program helps to sustain where you're at. Like I had a friend this year tell me that if they hadn't of met us they probably wouldn't made it in school, they would've already dropped out, and I've had people tell me that before. It's challenging for some but being in a position to help people it, it feels good.

Joy talks about the effect of being a leader in the Native student organization:

Just being a Native American student leader on campus, especially this campus, I feel like really [her emphasis is on "really"] affects you. It affects the people you hang out with. It affects programs. So I would say having a positive Native American student association that's pushing students to do their best, helping them to finding tutoring, having healthy Greek life sororities and fraternities helps a lot. Being Native American on this campus and being active affects your life a lot, and I think it will affect your life, you know, for the rest of your life. It's your college experience mainly.

She continues, though, that there is a lack of Native students who choose to get involved in the NSO and especially in leadership positions:

I noticed this that whoever the leaders are because our Native community is so small, that when you go to an AISES meeting it's joined with NASA. Everyone is either in one of the two fraternities or two Native sororities so everything tends to overlap a lot and the leaders, like I'm the president of AISES and I'm the president of my sorority.

She concludes by suggesting:

Maybe we need to do something as like a student body to encourage other students. Because it's very beneficial and that looks great on your transcript. I just wish more people would step up to the plate when it comes to big leadership positions.

Clark carries this further and states that nurturing leadership development requires the following:

I think an effective part of leadership development is first understanding what goes into being a good trooper. So I think that usually, you know, the way these things work—you start at the bottom, you go up, you don't start out being the boss. So I think that when you gain an appreciation of what it takes to, to I guess facilitate good leadership from the bottom, once you're there, you know, you can give better direction.

Leonard observes:

I've really saw and I like to see in our Native organization here on campus and then things that I've been involved with. I've met a lot of other Native American students who are motivated and their leadership skills and aspects to go back and help their people. They want to be a role model to other Native students, up and coming generations, and even to older students and people to know they are still a strong Native person from whatever tribe they are. And seeing that motivation in other students and interns that I've come across, it just helped to really motivate me that I see that, wow, there's other Native students like me that want to take charge and make a change they want to help their people in any way they can and to help their people know that they can help themselves. That is just two of the main aspects that I've really saw in all the Native involvement that I've been in and that's just really inspiring to me to see other kids be at that level and to want to help.

Seeing what other Native students do within their communities and campuses not only inspires and encourages Native student leaders but also increases the support network that they share.

**Observations on Leadership in General.** This section emphasizes the Native student leaders' general observations on leadership. These observations reflect the fact that some of the Native student leaders are, or were, leaders beyond the university. Their observations address multiple considerations.

Indigenous leaders sometimes must balance their own stance on an issue with what is best for the community. Cloud Hehaka Sapa speaks about this:

Just a short story—I guess we were talking about education the other day and my kind of belief is that Indian education isn't just for Indian people, but there's a lot of people who disagree with that. So then it kind of comes to an internal conflict of well do I stick to my guns on this because I truly believe this or, you know, is it because the rest of the community doesn't want to do this then I should say okay. Then they don't want to do it, you know, maybe I should just step back. So that's the challenging part of it. The conflicting part is the conflict within the community itself.

This internal conflict is something that a Native student leader has to figure out, finding a balance as a leader and as a person within the community they serve.

Phillip addresses the gap of women in Indigenous leadership positions:

Just women leadership in Indigenous communities is really needed. Especially breaking the norms of colonization and of paternalistic society when, I mean, a lot of Indigenous communities believe in Mother Earth and coming from the womb and the sacredness of a woman. And just woman leaders in general are needed wherever they can be. It's so empowering to have a separate voice and even not necessarily a separate opinion but just, uh, an altered opinion, something a little bit different coming from a different perspective.

Phillip's observation reflects his leadership positions in the Native student organization on campus and his tribal community.

The Native student leaders also offer advice to other Indigenous leaders. Good states:

The key is to try to give everything its own due and not to be overwhelmed because everybody has something. Everybody has a sick mom, or even worse you know. My mom used to always say it and she probably took it from somebody else, 'Until you walk a mile in their moccasins you don't know what they're dealing with.' So the key is to be yourself, be true to yourself, be true to your people and, and be understanding, you know, manage that time with everybody, and your whole situation.

Walter talks about encouraging Native youth to work toward their goals and dreams, and to aspire to be leaders in their communities:

I tell them, 'You know, I have faith in you because I have people who had faith in me that I was going to be here and so we have to have faith in each other.' Maybe *faith* [i]s the wrong word to use but support and encouragement in each other. It's becoming to where we're getting a smaller and smaller minority here and we're going to have to lean on each other regardless of if you're Kiowa, Creek, Comanche, Caddo, Cherokee, and Keetowah. Uh, you name it, regardless what your tribe—we're Indian people. If we're going to want to survive we're going to have to go off and do better things and its going to require leadership to do it. If we all get up and we all go and say, 'We're all leaders in the Indian community.' We're going to be able to get things done and get things changed and go where we need to go so that's what I tell all of them. I said, 'You know, if someone says, you know, I'm not leadership material,' 'No, you are-- you just haven't found that right balance yet. You haven't found the right balance of the people that you need by you to be an effective leader.'

Kateri offers advice based on her experiences as a leader in a Native student organization:

I think like a lot of young Native youth need to realize that people are always going to bring you down no matter what. It's how you take what their saying. If you're taking it in, of course it's going to affect you. You're just going to feel like crap all the time. But if you don't use that and you think goodness that you know in your heart that you're a good person, you need to just keep that.

Some of the final observations are based on seeing other people become leaders in their NSO or tribal community. Walter states:

I think anyone can be a leader. Anyone can do it, you just have to have the right people around you. If you're not the most organized person you'll have to have someone there next to you that are organized. I mean a lot of people say, 'I'm not

leadership; I'm not cut out to do that; I'm not going to do that,' but, you know, 'yeah, you are.'

The important reality is that leadership is built on the skills of the group working together to serve in the way called for by the situation. Kateri adds:

Leadership, I think everyone has leadership. It's just that, you know, it's their willingness to like comprehend it. You know be able to use that, their skills because anyone can be a leader, it's just you got to have that mindset that your ability is going to be used for good and you can do it no matter what people think.

The preceding comments reflect the wisdom of the Native student leaders...wisdom that is learned through their leadership experiences on campus and in the communities.

### **Giving Back the Leadership Experience**

The final section of this chapter examines how the Native student leaders plan to use the leadership experiences they derive from the NSO after they graduate. The emergent themes are : mentor younger Native students to pursue a higher education degree and get involved, recruit Native students' visibility in specific career fields where there is a gap, and build their leadership skills in their profession. The Native students' voices are heard throughout the narratives that are provided in the following sub-sections.

**Mentoring Younger and Incoming Students.** The first theme that emerged is the Native student leaders' interest in mentoring younger and incoming students to be leaders and to pursue their degrees. Lillian talks about her interest in mentoring Native students:

The mentoring aspect of it, being able to be there to listen to students, to be able to help them find their way to build their own leadership skills, and make sure that I want to help them find their voice. I think a lot of Native students come in and they don't know how to ask for help. I think that after your junior year, if you're still here, you found it and you know who to go to but it's freshman and sophomore that you tend to lose. I want them to help them find their voice and



help them to see that it's okay to ask for help, you know, that's what people are here for is to ask for help, finding their way into college and everything.

Leonard talks about his interest in motivating Native college students to persist and finish their degree:

I tell you after I graduate and start moving towards accomplishing my career goals I would like to provide a motivational aspect to Native American students and Native American organizations that will help them to get motivated and to stay in college. To actually apply to college to show them that they can work towards their education they can get a degree. They just have to understand that it's work and it's hard work and you're not going to like it but if you do it, it will be so beneficial down the way. You have characteristics and skills that will let you do that, you just have to recognize those and bring those out. So I would like to do that on a motivational aspect down the way.

Sydney talks about the importance of being an example for current college students:

I do want to set an example and be able to say, 'Yeah, it's hard to work for your master's degree. Yes, it's hard to get your PhD, but you know what—you did it. No matter how long it takes—do it. Don't waste your time, just get it done.' And it took me a long time to get my undergrad degree and I've zoomed through my master's degree because I have to work full time, then study, and then work with family. Once you develop a schedule like that boom, boom, boom. It's a lot easier, so however long it takes you do it, even if you have to get your master's degree and everything.

These Native student leaders understand the important role that mentoring plays for Native college students and how encouraging current students can impact them to become involved and, most importantly, to finish their degree programs.

### **Recruit and Help Increase Native Visibility in Their Respective Professions.**

The next theme regarding how Native students plan to give back is their interest to recruit and increase Native visibility in their respective professions. Art states:

I've found that a lot of places actually have a Native American outreach. Like small communities in which the Native Americans who work there, you know, they talk about specific events they can have but also they do active recruiting. So I think that some of the leadership skills I've gained here I can go apply and perhaps when I'm a professional engineer and, you know, I want to recruit more Natives into the engineering field then I can just take the initiative and just ask for

money from, you know, whoever I'm working for to go to like the AISES national conference or to come back to UNM and talk to the current students, AISES membership. So I think that I can really use what I gained here wherever I go next to, you know, give back a little bit or to maybe help pull up those engineers who are trying hard.

These Native student leaders are very conscientious about giving back, not only to their own communities but also to the university, by helping future Native students. Big Country says it this way:

One of the biggest ones I think would be graduates, like American Indian graduates. So I'll be a part of that program. I'll speak up and give back to the school and to the communities that I came from.

Through their success of being one of the few tribal members to graduate with a bachelor's degree each of the Native student leaders will be able to give back. Each of them takes responsibility to do what they can to give back. In addition, as Sydney addresses, it is important for them to build connections while they are in school:

You are, you're building those connections, whether it's, it's going to be offering you a job or whether you can go to that person. Well, I wouldn't ask for that person to be a reference but I could definitely ask them to write me a recommendation letter, you know, we are always telling students that. That's another thing that I've learned through my whole processes here, you know, you never know who could be in your field or in your cheerleading squad or whatever to motivate you, so definitely think about that while you're going through your programs and I'm constantly gathering all of that.

The Native student leaders are cognizant of both the connections they can build and the connections they can be for future Native students.

**Build Leadership and General Skills to Give Back to Community and Profession.** The Native student leaders realize that their leadership experiences produced numerous skills and opportunities. Consequently, they want to give back, as Winona says, "I plan on sharing my experiences I have gained with others." One of the skills that Cloud Hehaka Sapa speaks about is the ability to organize people:

I think what I can take away from my leadership experience here is no matter where I go is my ability to get people organized and work on projects and actually get things done. I can apply this, you know, [no] matter what I go to. I can make a team of people and I can get things done, and I think that's going to help me in the long run no matter what I do so.

Phillip states this succinctly when he observes, "it's just taking that next step from talking to action." Joy adds, "In my career that I'm going into I want to be dealing with people, so I think my leadership experience has help[ed] me gain people skills." Working with other Native students in an organizational setting helps the Native student leaders as they prepare to enter their career and profession. Many of the Native student organizations, for example, organize Native cultural events that require accounting and fundraising.

Kateri speaks about this:

I got and like, you know, accounting and everything I had to get all of this accounting stuff. I think that's really good for anybody. You know, doing taxes or whatever, so I think that leadership experience after I graduate will really be beneficial.

Charlie talks about an additional benefit as exposure to other Native students, their ideals and the way they identify culturally:

I think that leadership experience on campus has really helped me with exposing me to other Native students. This exposure has helped me learn how they self-identify with their Indigeneity, and that was something that even with my experience, leadership experiences at home I didn't really have because I lived on a reservation and so everyone's kind of the same. I've been able to really learn how and why people identify in different ways, and so I think that will help me after graduation.

Phillip offers, "I mean just the interactions and the way you carry yourself is one of those things that always sticks with you." Learning to assert one's voice is another benefit.

Big Country speaks about this, "I've already seen things that I've done while in college is going to give me a stronger voice, and I plan on using that voice in every aspect that I can."

Vera addresses how her involvement as a graduate student will be of benefit if she becomes a professor:

I anticipate, based on what happened before, if I go into academia then my participation as a student leader would help me to understand what it's like to be doing this as a grad student for my own grad students. So that's sort of what I expect that experience to give me an understanding of.

She adds:

It's a big part of, you know, graduating with a degree that can give you some sort of latitude. It can let you be an activist. It can let you have a philanthropic footprint in the town in which you work. I think that gaining some knowledge of what's going on with other people outside your own reservation, outside of your own comfort zone, I think that's going to be helpful. It makes you a more effective leader in the future. So sure, understanding, cognizance of what other people are going through, and it's the willingness to, well the knowledge of what it means to focus all those differences, sure.

Working in the Native community on campus facilitates knowledge acquisition of how to connect with other people and the community. As Chad declares, they understand that the skills they gain will benefit them later:

I will be graduating soon and I will attend graduate school. I know that a lot of the requirements of graduate school is a lot of independency. You have to be an independent thinker, researcher, and student. So also being a leader of an organization there is some aspects that you have to be independent on. So I'll be able to transfer those into other chapters in life.

Many of the Native student leaders plan to give back to their tribal communities or a Native community. For Walter, this is his main goal after graduation:

I've yet to decide but either way those leadership skills that I've learned will help me. They'll take me to, ideally, I want to work in cultural language revitalization. And so I think the leadership experience that I have here will help me implement those things, ideas, and implement methods and methodologies to help perpetuate our culture. Keetoowah culture helps us perpetuate it so it won't die out and I think it will take those leadership skills that I've learned to, to implement those plans.

Good's goal is to become a tribal leader, and his experience in the Native student organization will contribute to achieving the goal:

I definitely want to be a tribal leader. I want to be chief someday. I want to use that experience in how to think for the people and not just for one particular faction or family, just think for everyone, and I that's a positive that I have seen here. Like it seems like everybody's, it's like one big family, and everybody looks out for everybody, I think that's awesome.

For Good and other Native student leaders, being a leader while on campus enables both current and future service.

### **Summary**

Through the coding and analysis of the transcripts the shared meanings and experiences of the Native student leaders, across five regions of the country, became apparent. The Native student leaders' voices were emphasized in this chapter to bring to light their experiences and perspectives. This chapter reveals that the Native student leadership experience is complex and, as the leaders themselves discussed, impacts them in both positive and negative ways. Ultimately, this chapter underscores that the Native student leaders are reflective, thoughtful, and desire not only to improve their Native student organizations but also their respective professions and tribal communities.

## **CHAPTER VII**

### **Indigenous Leadership Concepts and Perspectives**

In order to better understand the Native American students' concepts and perspectives on leadership, I asked current Native college student leaders their opinions and listened to their voices. There currently is no literature on Native American student leadership development. The qualitative nature of this study is one way of ensuring that the Native student voice is heard and that there might be continued studies to better understand the impact that Native cultures have on perspectives and the concepts of leadership.

This chapter will emphasize what emerged from the students' voices with regard to Indigenous leadership concepts and perspectives. The chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section discusses the characteristics and values that are important for Native student leaders to possess in a university setting. Section two discusses the characteristics and values important in a tribal setting. Prior to the interviews with the Native student leaders I initially thought that it was important to separate the two settings to determine whether or not there is a difference in the characteristics and values for Native student leaders. After the analysis of data, however, I found that there is not a significant difference in the characteristics and values; instead, they are modified within the two environments. The last main section of the chapter discusses the terms the Native student leaders use when describing Indigenous leadership.

As an Indigenous researcher I see the need for researchers and practitioners to better understand how current Native student leaders perceive important characteristics and values in the university and tribal settings, as well as the terms that the students use when they describe Indigenous leadership. Currently, no literature or research intentionally incorporates the Native student leader voice regarding their perceptions of Indigenous leadership. This chapter analyzes the voices of current Native student leaders.

### **Characteristics and Values for Native Student Leaders in a University Setting**

During the individual interviews with Native student leaders I posed the following question: “What are the important values and characteristics that Native student leaders should have to be effective in their university today?” I believe that this question is important because it facilitates discovery of the perspectives of current Native student leaders who work within their own university system and who hear from other Native student leaders at other institutions. During the individual interviews student leaders emphasized the following values and characteristics: committed, proactive, open minded, respectful, and humble.

**Committed.** One of the important values and characteristics in the university setting that arises from the one-on-one interviews with the Native student leaders is the need to be committed. This takes on many different forms within the university setting, due to the impact of being away from home, going to college, and being in a leadership position. Walter states:

Commitment—commitment to what you’re doing. You have to be able to commit to the study time, because I know the organization and things are all fun and they’re needed here. We have to remember why we are here, why we came to the

university. You definitely have to have commitment; you definitely have to have strength. It's tough being here.

Walter was speaking about his experience when he first came to the university and had to adjust to the environment. As soon as he came to the university he became involved with the Native student organizations at the University of Oklahoma, and recently took on a leadership role. This comment also speaks to his experience in the leadership role for the last two years and his commitment to being involved within the Native American community.

Other students offer similar statements about the important values and characteristics that embody the commitment that is needed for Native student leaders within their respective institutions. To describe their commitment they use words and phrases such as: determined, fearless, and keep going to pursue degrees to help the community. Joy states that being determined is necessary because, "Determined because it's really hard to be a student leader in a Native community at this university because you are burdened with all the responsibilities." Phillip declares, "Just developing your stance as a leader by taking action and then kind of not being afraid you somewhat have to be fearless in what you do, you know." Joy adds:

You still get the majority, you have to go to all of the different student meetings, you get to meet the chancellor, and you have to go represent the university whenever you go to a conference. You're always viewed as the face of the university.

**Proactive (Taking Action).** Another important characteristic and value that arises is the need to be proactive or take action. Native student leaders must have a solution, or work toward one, if they see an issue on their campus. Phillip emphasizes:

You might see something as an issue but it's not necessarily perceived as an issue by others, but a lot of times if you have a problem someone else have experienced



that. So I mean there are voices that are being represented, re-represented. Just developing your stance as a leader by taking action and then not being afraid; you somewhat have to be fearless in what you do, you know.

Phillip is talking about finding a way to make sure that a solution is created or that the voices of the individuals who the leaders speak for—in this case the members of the NSO—are represented. Kateri addresses another way to be proactive:

I think that's another thing that they need to do, utilizing the resources around them. Not just through the Native American centers but also, you know, the tutoring center. If you need help with that or if you need to go out to the counseling center because I know for me, like, I talk to Steve, but I feel like sometimes I need to talk about different things as well. I even use this counseling center just once in a great while but I think they need to realize that there are other things around them, other resources and going out to like other people just not being shy.

What I hear from the students' voices is that it is important to be the example, to be proactive, and to use the resources on campus to help themselves and others to be successful. This embodies understanding the problem, addressing it, taking action to ensure that when issues arise they do not occur again, and enabling the voices of the members to be heard on campus.

**Open Minded.** Another important value and characteristic for Native student leaders to possess in a university setting is to be open minded. Kateri asserts this by saying, "I think it's like they should also be, like, willing to talk to people, you know." Nathan states, "You have to have sort of a very open mind because there will be students of all different backgrounds with very different ideas of what it is to be Native American, and so I think it's very important to have an open mind." This is reiterated by Joy, a student from a different campus, who emphasizes:

I think you need to be open minded because you have to break through stereotypes, even faculty — they don't know that much about Native students. So

you have to be open minded and willing to educate people. You can't get mad if someone doesn't know something you have to be open minded—educate them.

Being open minded enables Native student leaders to acknowledge and recognize their own beliefs and opinions, while staying open to understanding those of other people. The experiences of the current Native student leaders affirm the value of an open mind when navigating between various communities, including the Native community on campus.

**Respectful.** Being respectful also is important for Native student leaders. The Native students designate respect as its own value because it is mentioned multiple times in the one-on-one student interviews. Respect coincides with being open minded because Native student leaders encounter students from diverse tribal backgrounds and must be open minded and respectful of other people's perspectives and beliefs. Phillip states:

There's going to be people who have opinions about you and they can disagree with you, or disagree with the way you present yourself. You can learn from those, you can build upon it, and not necessarily change your ideals but grow from them.

Joy emphasizes the importance of respect, “[being] respectful—that is one big thing that I was taught just in my Native community; always respect people if you don't agree with them.” Related to being respectful is the ability to compromise, as Nathan offers, “Trying to work out compromises between everyone, I think, is a very important characteristic to be able to work through compromises.”

These brief quotations reveal the understanding that the Native student leaders have of internal conflicts that occur within the NSO and the respect that is necessary to show toward other student groups in the general campus community. Again, this coincides with the need to be open minded for Native student leaders within the university setting. Within Native communities, respect is highly valued with regard to

honoring one's opinion of something, as well as honoring those who are older, wiser, and outside of the community. Incorporating this value within the university setting demonstrates that Native students, regardless of tribal background, take this value with them to their campus community.

**Humble.** Another important value and characteristic for Native student leaders to have in a university setting is the need to be humble. The dictionary defines *humble* as, "not proud or haughty; not arrogant or assertive" (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>, 2011). For Native students being humble is not just about oneself, but also about the community and remembering from where they come. Walter explains:

You have to have a community value because you can't do it by yourself. You have to support other people and in return hope that they'll support you. That's really what my community is built on, we help people, and in return we hope that one day when we are in a bind they'll help us. So, that the sense of community, that sense of a little family.

In this narrative Walter discusses the importance of having a community value that coincides with being humble. His comments suggest that Native student leaders are not in leadership positions for themselves, but for the Native student community and for supporting other people. Kateri describes this simply, "I think the values are to, you know, be humble and everything." She talks about angry Natives on campus and that it is important to get past anger, to keep going and further the community by earning a higher education degree. In addition to being humble, it is important to be confident enough to carry on the traditions and values that each Native student brings with them to campus.

Kateri explains:

Kind of like incorporating your Native American values with college. Because I know I pray every day and even though I'm so stressed out about this or stressed

out about that just like use your abilities with what you know. Like whatever you grew up with, you know, use that [be]cause it really helps in the end.

These Native student leaders understand the important values and characteristics that are necessary for future Native student leaders. They navigate their institutions and find their voices to use for other Native students who were not able to speak up. Being committed, proactive, open minded, respectful, and humble are the values and characteristics that Native student leaders express as important to possess in a university setting. The advice from current Native student leaders, who find their way and make pathways for future Native leaders on their campuses, is essential to these findings.

### **Characteristics and Values for Native Student Leaders in a Tribal Setting**

Similar to the preceding section, I think it is equally necessary to ask input regarding the characteristics and values that are important in a tribal setting. *In a tribal setting* means within the students' tribal communities. I wanted to understand how the recommendations of the students might translate to the tribal setting. What I discovered is that many of the same values arise in both settings; what differs is how these values and characteristics are carried out within the respective setting. This means that the Native student leaders need to modify their values and characteristics to the environment. Although many of the Native students did not grow up within their own tribal community, most were exposed to the culture and climate of the community. The important values and characteristics that arise are to be committed, respectful, humble, and proactive.

**Commitment.** One of the important values and characteristics that a Native student leader must have in a tribal setting is commitment. This is different from the university setting because it refers not only to being committed to the NSO and

successfully obtaining a degree, but also to being committed to the tribal community as a whole. For example, Walter states:

We have to have commitment in our tribal communities, [commitment] to progressing them, commitment to preserving the cultures and the language. You have to have the strength to do it, because it is hard. It's time consuming. Sometimes you don't think it's going to work, then you have to have the family and even there you have to have support. I think support goes with both sides: You have to be supportive to receive support.

As Phillip specifically states that commitment within the community is being a leader in an Indigenous or tribal framework:

In regards to an Indigenous community I think it's a lot of the same thing in breaking standards, because there's a lot of influence in the dominant culture and Western society. There are a lot of things as Indigenous people we just kind of take for granted and we just overlook, but they are really important to who we are and where we come from. And there are things that we do have to stand up for our sovereignty, our land, our languages, our relationships with the land. A lot of this isn't presented through an academic setting either, and a lot of that needs to be fought for by somebody.

These statements by current Native student leaders demonstrate their understanding of what will be required of them as future leaders within their own tribal communities or the general Native community. They see the needs that exist within their respective communities, and that addressing the needs will require commitment.

**Respectful.** Another important value and characteristic that emerges from the individual interviews is the need for Native student leaders to be respectful. Kateri, from the University of Idaho, provides an example:

I guess that would be like how people are respectful to each other. Like I know on my reservation there's some difficulties with the younger people and how they don't respect. I know for my generation, I know we're still young too but for the most part all my cousins, everybody, we're really respectful to people that we don't know, the elders of our communities. And we make sure that if an elder needs help to come out of their car, like I know my generation just goes and does it, you know, but it's kind of sad that I see younger people. I think it was a couple of days or Chief Joseph powwow or something, anyways, this girl was about

fourteen. I knew this one older lady and she was walking up the steps and everything and she was really struggling. I mean you could really tell and this girl is right in between me and her and she's like *old people take so long* and I'm just like *ohhh I would*, uh, someone said that, like, if someone, like, I just wanted to slap her. That just sounds mean but I was so angry that she said that and I ended up passing her to help her [the older lady] out. You just don't do that, and I think that like our communities we should probably still instill that, you know.

Although Kateri understands the importance of other values she places a great emphasis on respect and honoring the elders within the tribal community. A young adult herself, she recognizes the need to continue to instill that value in younger generations, especially if she and others become leaders within the community. Similarly, Nathan emphasizes the value of respect: "respect is important in developing you, if you can relate and communicate and respect all these Native students from different backgrounds, I think you can do the same with really anyone." Finally, the students see the impact that being respectful has within their own families, as Kateri states:

I don't know, I see it bringing you further on in life [be]cause, like, I know with me I don't think that if I was disrespectful or something I wouldn't be where I was or where I am today. If I wasn't, you know, smart or something like that, I probably would never be here and seeing that with all of my aunties and uncles how they have that respect level and then their getting, you know, higher positions and everything. Then it just takes you on further in life, and I think everybody should have those values, you know.

**Humble.** An additional important value and characteristic for Native student leaders to have in a tribal setting is being humble. In this context being humble is related to being respectful. For example, Kateri speaks about the value of respect and how that leads to being humble:

When you have these types of characteristics or values, you know, like respect. If you are willing to respect a person then they're willing to respect you back. If they don't respect you back then, you know, like being humble comes into it, you just are humble. You're just a nice person towards one another and even if they're mad or something, you know, they'll fall back on them. Just let it happen to them because they're going to get it, that's how my mom always said.

Even when the Native student leaders may not receive respect they believe that it is important to maintain a sense of humbleness so that through their actions other people may see their values and characteristics lived. As Walter explains, “I was always taught if you want to be a leader, the word *leader* is just a glorified term for servant. In order for you to lead, you have to serve those who put you in that position.”

**Proactive.** The final important value and characteristic that emerges is being proactive. This word takes on a different meaning because it is used in a different environment, the tribal setting. Native student leaders who speak about being proactive in this context state that it is important just to get up and do something. Phillip declares, “Just taking that first step is really just something that you have to do if you’re going to be a leader.” Most of the Native student leaders in one way or another express their understanding that it is up to them and their generation to step up and do something. Making a positive impact within their community is important to the Native student leaders, whether that means fighting to save their language or culture, or just going to their communities and doing something. As Joy from NC State states:

I guess just be proactive. A lot of people run on Indian time so we tend to procrastinate. If you’re proactive you will get stuff done in your tribal community that would usually take years. You could get done in months.

The Native student leaders understand the importance of being proactive and the critical role that is placed in their hands when they assume a leadership position. For many of these students, the values that they know are important within a tribal setting come from the teachings of their parents, grandparents, families, and communities. These values and characteristics also come though from their experiences as Native student leaders on their campuses. As Walter poignantly states, “That’s how it was taught to me is you accept a

leadership role. All those values they go with it, and you dedicate yourself to that role; you dedicate to that organization.”

### **Describing Indigenous Leadership**

This section provides a deeper understanding of how the Native student leaders describe Indigenous leadership, when limited to using just three words. I asked the students to describe Indigenous leadership using three different words and to provide an explanation for the choice of each word. What follows is a presentation of the three overarching words that resonated throughout the students’ descriptions, with a weaving of some of the other descriptive terms that fall within each emergent category. The three words used by the Native student leaders to describe Indigenous leadership are: commitment, community, and cooperation.

**Commitment.** For the Native student leaders this term describes the importance of multiple constructs, including using determination for the community, dedication, patience, and bravery and strength. In the following sub-sections the students speak about the importance of each construct associated with commitment. Their voices highlight the various hats that they wear, and the divergent tasks that they undertake, to advance their communities.

Commitment includes considerations such as planning, as Walter states:

Commitment, like I said. It takes a commitment to be a leader. It takes a commitment to do what’s asked of you to do: all the logistical planning, to do the different programming, and the event planning. Basically, taking care of your students; it takes a lot. You have to be committed to it if you’re going to do it. Because if you’re not committed not only will you suffer the organization itself will suffer. If you’re not committed to the organization it’s like you’re not committed to your family.



In this context the organization is the NSO. Commitment represents addressing the needs of the community through dedication to providing needed programs and event planning.

***Determination and Fighting for the Community.*** The Native student leaders describe the importance of determination for the community, encompassing strength, understanding, and determination. Leonard declares:

Any type of leadership, specifically tribal leadership, one has to be strong and have to know their individual strength points and know how they can use those to help benefit the position the leadership role. They have to have understanding of who they are as a tribal member as a tribal person and they have to understand the needs of their people. They have to understand just the whole cultural aspect so that they can use that to strengthen themselves, so they can strengthen their position for speaking for people. Then, determination, they have to be determined to work for the good of the people. They have to know how this will benefit this group, the overall picture of progressing through these modern times. Just keeping our Native nations alive and to prosper them to continue the traditions, the culture, the language so that we can just, you know, survive in these modern times.

Such determination is based on having the best intentions for people and the tribe. For Phillip, from the University of New Mexico, determination is about:

just perseverance and that it kind of ties back in with decolonization. It's just a push of Indigeneity in the context of community or even outside the context of the community and into surrounding borders. Specifically language, ceremony, and things like that. Heritage aspects of the community that are kind of shunned by the outside dominant society, but there's things that are really important to an Indigenous leader in an Indigenous community. Without those you really don't have the respect of the community.

To maintain commitment as an Indigenous leader the students understand that motivation and an understanding of cultural needs is necessary. Of greater importance is spiritual strength, which provides an inordinate commitment to the tribal community, as Sydney explains:

Then strength and it's all with the perseverance and power you have to have strength. I think that's where it brings it back to the spiritualness [sic] too, you know, with the Navajo culture you are basically prepared to go into conflict. Once you come out of that conflict your body, soul, and mind is all set again. Once you exit that, that way you don't bring back anything with you to infect the community. So strength is in that pride, strength from your community, and in a voice. I guess the one word I would say is *strength*, you know, because it means so many different things to everybody. It's all kind of the umbrella, all these other words are kind of underneath that for me so.

When an Indigenous leader is committed to the community they are willing to stand up as a voice for the community. That voice comes from the strength that the community provides by practicing traditional and cultural ways of being in battle. The Indigenous leader gives back to the community the strength they gain by serving as an Indigenous leader.

***Dedication.*** The word *commitment* is the resounding theme behind all of the descriptive terms. The word encapsulates not only determination but also dedication as it relates to ensuring that the members of the community do well. In this regard, for the Native student leaders dedication includes making sure that programs and events for the well-being of the community are created and planned. With dedication comes great sacrifice, as Art states:

I think as a leader you got to sacrifice a little bit of yourself. Maybe if it's sacrificing a little bit of your sleep time, your free time, you got to step up and you got to give a little bit of yourself to whatever organization you're going to be in. Motivation is absolutely 100% key and you know that's everything about you, your stature, the way you carry yourself. You have to be motivated and that will come across very clearly to your group.

Dedication means giving of oneself to the community, even when being in a leadership position and working in the community is hard. Scott states:

Well to add on to that I would say another word would be you have to be *dedicated*. Like Chad said, I mean ya'll a small group so you can't give up just

because ya'll a small group. You never give up so you have to stick to it and stay dedicated.

Whether in a small Native organization or a tribal community, Indigenous leadership requires dedication. This echoes throughout the voices of the Native student leaders.

***Patience.*** Commitment also requires patience to deal with people and to see desired progress achieved in the community. Cloud Hehaka Sapa speaks to this:

When working with other people, you know, you have to have patience. You know, people are going to be late; people are going to forget things. You know people are going to be people and sometime too high of expectations often leads to ending in friendships. I guess you could even say because you just, you got to have patience with people and with situations. You can never plan out everything as much as you think you can.

Patience is particularly important for the Native student leaders when they deal with their own tribal community. In this context they are involved with the people they grew up with...elders, peers and family.

The Native student leaders also state that it is important to have patience with the community and the environment of which they are a part. Clark observes that they need “patience because it’s going to take a long time to get anything changed.” This observation is especially appropriate for an environment where traditions and climate are set; it takes time to see change occur. Within tribal communities, for example, common practices are enforced and the upcoming Indigenous leaders need to patience to stay committed to the community and to their role in that community.

***Bravery and Strength.*** Other descriptive terms that encompass the word *commitment* is the need for Indigenous leaders to have bravery and strength. In this context commitment means that one is willing to have the strength in the face of

adversity to stand up for what is right. An Indigenous leader must be prepared to stand up for the whole organization or the tribal community. Charlie observes:

A leader should have strength and that strength should be performed in the ability to stand up to adversity whether it's one person in your group or the entire organization.

The Native student leaders also state that it is important to be brave. There are times when the Native leader is the only person of color in a room and they represent their organization or tribal community. Chad states:

I'd also say that you have to be brave by being such a small population and more than likely coming from a small organization you're representing students. It can be intimidating when you walk into a room where you know 90% of the people are of one race. It can be intimidating, so you have to be brave to do so.

The need to be brave in an Indigenous leadership role is necessary, not only in the face of adversity but also in places where no one else looks like the leader. Their role is to be committed to the leadership position and the community. Thus the voices of the Native student leaders describe commitment as encapsulating determination, dedication, patience, and bravery and strength. All of this occurs within a community that maintains and sustains the person.

**Community.** Another term used to describe Indigenous leadership is *community*. This term appears in most of the students' descriptions. It embraces considerations such as: understanding the concept of community, family and culture, responsibility to the community, developing a voice with pride, and vision and awareness for the community. In the following sub-sections the students speak about the importance of each of these, how they are inter-connected, and how community is a construct that should be inherently understood as an Indigenous leader. The Native student leaders are individuals who came from a community, whether that community is urban, reservation,

tribal, or rural. In addition, as leaders on campus they seek to build a community for themselves and other Native students. Both of these realities underscore the words and the voices of the Native student leaders.

*Understanding the Concept of Community.* We begin by looking at how the Native student leaders understand the concept of community. Cloud Hehaka Sapa uses community as his first descriptive term to describe Indigenous leadership:

Community first and foremost because I think in any Indigenous perspective one of the main differences from Western is the concept of ‘I’ and ‘I am nothing without my community.’ Whether that be here in the urban setting or if its back home in South Dakota then, you know, ‘I am only because they are.’ So I think that’s one thing that motivates me. The whole reason I’m doing this is for my community, not for me.

Cloud Hehaka Sapa’s understanding of the importance of community—as a Native person and even more so as an Indigenous leader—is reflected in every interview and focus group. The drive and motivation to accomplish personal goals and to succeed is for the good of the community. Phillip captures this well. Although he initially uses the descriptive term *decolonization*, his comments are more about the efforts to help the tribal community and to do so with the best of intentions:

Decolonization just because as stated before that the entire idea of an Indigenous leader is someone who comes from the community and it’s not someone who is there to lead the community and change them. They are there to maintain and keep the community healthy and safe and do their best as a leader, do their best by their people. It’s never an individual thing, even though the individual is only allowable through the community, without a community there is no individual.

The Native students understand the concept of community; this is seen in their words and their descriptions of the role of an Indigenous leader within the community. As an Indigenous researcher, I view the epistemology and understanding of the concept of community as the same, as a shared idea and lived experience as an Indigenous person.

***Family and Culture.*** The Native student leaders also describe how family and culture impact Indigenous leadership by contributing to support and development. Walter speaks about the broadness of the term *family* and how it can refer to various individuals who are not biologically related but are who he knows as his family:

That term *family* doesn't mean your mom, your dad, your sisters, and your brothers, and that's your grandma to. At least to me it does again this is just how I was raised, you know, the teachings I had growing up. To me when someone says *family* it means your aunts, your uncles, your friends, people your around, your community, your environment, you know, everything is your family, any person that you call friend. That sense of family is a key part of leadership [be]cause I mean, trust me, if you're on the exec[utive] board ya'll going to fight, ya'll going to have fun times just like a family. You'll are all doing the same goal and you will have fun. We'll laugh, we cry everything, and then culture that's from my personal perspective [be]cause I know I wouldn't be able to do the things that I do here leadership wise without the ties to the culture that I have. Without being able to lean on that when I need it for support being able to lean on what I was taught when I'm in a bind on what to do to help me, to help the people around me. So you have to be committed to that too because it's all connected I guess so for me.

This Native student leaders' understanding of community, family, and culture are tied together because in his perception of Indigenous leadership one cannot exist without the other. This understanding of the idea of family and how it impacts the Indigenous leader is important. Recognizing the role that family plays in the development of an Indigenous leader, Kateri states:

So your family plays in [contributes] because your family is who made you who you are. No matter what you say. They are the people that helped you on this journey all the way to where you are. They help supported you when you were in high school when you were a baby, you know. Because of them that's where you are and think that like no matter what in all the way until you're like in grandma status you're still going to have your family and that's still going to be a part of your leadership. And number two, your education as being Native American and not just, like, I say education but, like, not just books or anything you know like your tribal ways, your customs, your heritage. Like all the experiences that you had your education is like coming from your family or from your tribe. That becomes part of your leadership no matter what you're doing. Like I know my fishing skills or, you know, like, or any of that type of skills, like, it always plays

into your leadership and how you think and, you know, your values. That would be three values. What they taught you how to react with things that's kind of like what it would be, what would always play in, like I see Wilma and like, how she was raised and it plays in with her leadership. She doesn't realize that I don't think, but I see it and it's, it's a really good thing, like, what she does and how she presents herself. I can tell that her family taught her well. So, that's your values. So, I would say all three of those would be good for your Indigenous leadership.

Kateri indicates that family, culture, and values are the foundation for Indigenous leadership. The upbringing of the individual—through the values instilled through family and culture—consequently impacts the type of leader they become.

***Responsibility to the Community.*** This phrase embodies the description of community as it relates to Indigenous leadership is. For Good, it means being honest and spiritually connected in order to make decisions responsibly:

Community and honesty kind of go together because I think a downfall with our tribal leadership for my tribe, I don't know about other tribes [be]cause there's good or bad in all tribes is that the honesty and the community. People don't think so much about the entire tribe. They think so much about their family or other people that are going to vote for them. Spirituality is that, you know, we as Native people are spiritual and that's a big part of it, if we do how our ancestors did in the correct ways. When we started getting away from our spirituality that's when I think we started seeing things not right and that just makes it complete and good things will come from it. That's what I think.

For the Native student leaders, it is important to ensure that the image and spirit of the ancestors within Indigenous communities are respectfully upheld. Lillian states:

Responsibility just because the whole imagery of Native Americans is not accurate in a lot of places. And we have a responsibility not just to our ancestors but to the future of our people. To hold ourselves in a certain way especially as a leader [be]cause you're the role model you're the person that everybody that the public sees. So you have a responsibility to carry yourself in a certain manner that is a respectable.

This Native student leader describes the importance of upholding a positive image and defying the stereotypes and inaccuracies that some people hold about Indigenous peoples.

In addition to upholding a positive image, an Indigenous leader must be genuine in the efforts and role that he or she has, as Art suggests:

If you're not passionate about it, if you're ingenuine in any way, people will see straight through that. As a leader you're up in the spotlight and if you're just kind of faking it or winging it people can tell right away. That is never good to seem ingenuine as a leader.

***Developing a Voice with Pride.*** The Native student leaders understand the important role of community and how it defines Indigenous leadership. Associated with community is the concept of developing with pride a voice for the community to use.

Sydney offers:

I'm still old school, so I'm always thinking that we need to develop a voice anyways as a community that's not just individual but the tribal community. I think I see too many times where, um, organizations that get the momentum and start making a difference that their taken apart and separated because of internal conflict. One leader is becoming more of the dot, dot, dot get this done one, two and three. Another leader has that spirit in that perseverance and I think there needs to be a balance and there could be multiple leaders. You're going to call upon people to be motivators and say, 'Okay look, we're going to rally; we're going to do this and blah, blah, blah.' You'll always need that other person to kind of be on the shoulder and say, 'Okay well, we need to have these in place in order to get that done.' So that's the community that I see. Is that—you have multiple leaders, but, unfortunately, we have to deal with the reality of who we're dealing with and historically. Unfortunately, the government always looks to one person to represent the entire community. I think that's the one, the thing we really need to work against is stereotyping and misperceptions of tribal communities in that there's not one leader. I mean we've all seen the decline in it, and I think we are just too dependent on that and need to become more independent and develop our own communities. Again remember where you come from. And then a voice, and that goes back to when, you know, studying civil rights and actually kind of having some experiences with that. So, you know, it's great to have a rally, its great to have a march but you know who's working behind the scenes to do that. You know, you have to develop your own voice, like I said. When you go into an environment, a rally's not going to work; a protest isn't going to work. We've seen that on this campus recently. You need somebody who [is] able to kind of conform themselves and change in different environments and different areas to develop that voice as well.



Once a voice is formed it is also important to have pride as an Indigenous person and in the community that is served, whether the community is a NSO or tribal. Chad states:

I would say that you have to have pride. I don't know how to translate that into an adjective. You have to have pride because you have to be proud of who you are and proud of your people. Being in a student organization or the leader of that organization you have to show pride in that.

The voice of the community should be heard through the pride that the Indigenous leader has in who they are and the community they represent.

***Vision and Awareness.*** The voices of the Native student leaders also address the need to have a vision and awareness of the needs of the community. Charlie declares:

A leader should be aware, so that means aware of what is happening within their nation and other political dynamics. Then also aware of what people are actually facing. So, taking that leadership to the collegiate setting, you know, aware of what your members want to have happen. A leader should be concerned about issues, community, and actually the same thing. I guess the thing that I was thinking about when I talked about concerned is [that] a leader should really care that a Native organization or nation can progress, yes.

Being aware of the needs of the community means that an Indigenous leader should be invested in who they represent, and that they facilitate changes that will benefit the community. Consequently, an Indigenous student leader should have a vision for the future of the community. Clark states:

Vision because you need to remain focused through all of this. I guess it's sort of the same as patience, isn't it, but I think it's true; you need to have that idea. You have to be aware. You have to know where things are going, what's possible; you have to realistic about what can be achieved.

Without the community that an Indigenous leader represents there is no leader.

Therefore, for an Indigenous person a community is the center of leadership.

***Collaboration.*** The final term used to describe Indigenous leadership is *collaboration*. This term is associated in the students' descriptions with being open

minded, fair, cooperation, and understanding. In the following paragraphs the students talk about the importance of collaboration as an Indigenous leader. As previously discussed, the community is the center of Indigenous leadership, and this calls for the ability to collaborate within and outside of the community.

*Open Minded.* The first descriptive term associated with collaboration for an Indigenous leader is the need to remain open minded. As Joy states, they deal with the diverse backgrounds and life experiences of people within and beyond the community:

I would maybe say open minded because not only do you have to except people from all different tribes, we're all different. You have to be open minded to different people's perspectives and open minded to stereotypes. So, I think open minded and humble. Because, you could be able to handle it better.

Ben adds:

Teachable, having an open mind, respect for others ideas or ways. Sometimes you have to dumb it down for professors, hard to use one word to convey.

Collaboration means being willing to help others learn, whether or not they are part of the tribal community. Collaboration also means being willing to learn from others. In addition, collaboration necessitates good communication, as Lillian from the University of Oklahoma emphasizes:

Communication, because from what I've learned in college, communication is a huge issue among students. I can't imagine what it's like for tribal leaders to have to communicate with one another. I think it's a big issue that we need to learn how to communicate with one another, especially those individuals from different cultures within the Native American community. You have to understand who you're, who we're dealing with and how to communicate with them so that you can work with them, which brings the collaboration. I think that the future of Native, our Native leaders are going to be dealing with not just the state level or federal level but international as well as intertribal. So they're going to have to learn how to collaborate with different, you know, diverse ethnic backgrounds.

The Native student leaders understand that Indigenous leadership means being opened minded, teachable, and able to communicate with multiple audiences; these are not

confined to the tribal community but entail connecting with others across the state, nation and world. As Harris & Wasilewski (1992) state, Indigenous populations across the continent face similar issues, and collaboration across borders is important for future progress.

***Fair.*** Another descriptive term that falls under collaboration is the need for an Indigenous leader to be fair. Wilma states that it is important for an Indigenous leader to be “fair, holistic, and seeing from all aspects not just linear, understanding,” in other words, able to see from all viewpoints. Because community is the center of leadership for an Indigenous leader it is important to be “equal” in advocacy and leadership with the community. The students emphasize the role of cultural values, honesty, and integrity in this regard. These are associated with being fair to those with whom they work and represent.

***Cooperation.*** Another descriptive term that arises from the students’ voices is the importance of cooperation. Phillip states:

Cooperation is just that, if you’re going to be a leader in an Indigenous community you have to work with the people. It’s never your decision. I mean there are aspects of negativity and just other opinions about what you’re doing but you have to still work around that in an Indigenous community. A lot of that is just family BS is what it comes down to, a lot of just internal politics in Indigenous communities. I mean you really have to work around that.

As Phillip declares, for an Indigenous leader there are politics and issues that arise, but leadership calls for the Indigenous leader to cooperate within the community they work and to move past the politics and internal conflicts. Vera discusses the importance of cooperation and being egalitarian in leadership as an Indigenous person:

Ideally that cooperation would be one of them because it’s really, I don’t think this is possibly not unique, I’m not going to say it’s unique but I would say that in

my experience here and in a lot of other places is that one person doesn't rise to the top. There are some protocols where people are acknowledged as being higher level of whatever, whatever's society or something like. I would say in general cooperation and more egalitarian is the way I would see it. Let's see does that count as two? I would say that ideally again that people would respect difference so that way there's not tribal politics. On an individual level within the leadership you don't bring that up into, um, a position where it diminishes someone else's participation.

The Native student leaders see Indigenous leadership from their personal experiences, their involvement in the NSO, and their tribal communities. Based on these experiences they emphasize the need for cooperation.

***Understanding.*** Understanding, as the final descriptive term associated with collaboration, encompasses the ability to relate to the people the Native student leaders represent. Understanding also means reflecting on events and progress within the community, as an Indigenous leader, to make things better in behalf of the community. Clark emphasizes the importance of respecting previous Indigenous leaders and what they contributed to the current state of the community or organization:

Deference because you're going to have to respect the ones who came before. The politics is going to be a part, you know, an important part of changing anything. People are going to [be]offended especially if they feel like the work that they've done in the past isn't being respected and that can splinter a group in no time.

Understanding the role that prior leaders had in the advancement of the community or organization is crucial for contemporary Indigenous leaders. Leonard adds:

They have to understand who they are as a tribal member, as a tribal person, and they have to understand the needs of their people. They have to understand just the whole cultural aspect so that they can use that to strengthen themselves, so they can strengthen their position for speaking for people.

Recognizing the needs of the community builds the voice of the people. Full recognition of those needs necessitates reflection on the part of the leader, as Cloud Hehaka Sapa states:

Understanding, that's the part of reflection on things. You finish something and you have to reflect and understand what happened. What went well, what could have been better, and how can I reapply that to the next project that we're working on.

As a former Indigenous student leader I see the importance of continually reflecting on how to become a better leader and better serve the community.

The Native student leaders offer significant insights on Indigenous leadership. Their insights are captured by three words: commitment, community, and collaboration. Within each of these words multiple descriptive terms are included. Understanding their insights is imperative for this study because these are the voices not only of current Native college students but also of Indigenous community members. I close this chapter with the words of Big Country:

I guess I'll use unified because even though you are a leader you still have to not forget where you come from. Everybody that you're representing is unified in one person, if you're the leader for that tribal community, for any Native community.

## **Summary**

This chapter underscores the Native student leaders' voices regarding what they see as essential values and characteristics for a Native student leader in a university and tribal setting. Their voices illustrate the importance of being committed, proactive, open minded, respectful, and humble. Similarly, their collective voices describe Indigenous leadership with the three key words of commitment, community, and cooperation. What is important about this chapter is that the perspectives of current Native student leaders are provided, and these perspectives are derived from their personal experiences both as a Native student leader and with Indigenous leadership in general.

## **CHAPTER VIII**

### **Implications and Recommendations**

This chapter discusses the implications of the research study and offers recommendations for future research and practice. My hope is that researchers and practitioners will find ways they can promote leadership development for Native American college students. The first two sections provide a review of the statement of the problem and the methodology. The meanings of the study are discussed in the third section, which highlights the implications for tribal nations and universities. In this section the voices of the Native student leaders provide recommendations for promoting leadership development that is integral to Native college student success. The fourth section discusses the impact of campus climate and recognition of Native students on campus. In addition, it examines the most prominent meanings and findings that impact the Native student leader experience. The fifth section offers my observations through the voices of the Native students' narratives, recommendations for tribes and universities, descriptions of Indigenous leadership, and strengths and barriers of Native student organizations. The sixth section provides a deeper understanding of the recommendations for the Indigenous research paradigm and for research and practice. Finally, the seventh section includes my reflections springing from the study. My hope is that everyone who reads these recommendations will hear the Native students' voices, better understand how to serve Native students on our respective campuses, and see

connections to future research that will support the leadership development of Native college student leaders.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The Native American college student leadership perspective is absent from the literature. No documented studies have specifically incorporated a Native American student perspective of either leadership or leadership development. This study sought to document the Native American student perspective.

### **Review of the Methodology**

To ensure that the voices of the participants—current Native American college students—are shared this study utilized a qualitative methodology. Five focus groups were conducted among current Native American student leaders at five predominantly white institutions (PWI). Each PWI was located in and represented a distinct geographic region of the United States and diverse tribal nations from which student leaders came. In addition, one-on-one interviews were conducted with a Native American student leader at each institution to provide a narrative of his or her experience as a campus leader and perspectives regarding leadership and leadership development. Participants were chosen using purposive sampling through identification by Native American student affairs professionals at the five PWIs. Four participants from each of the PWIs were selected, with an additional participant selected at one PWI, for a total of 21 participants.

A phenomenological data analysis approach was used. This provided a basis to explore meaning making in human experiences (Polkinghorne, 1989). I took into account the “epoch” (or gaining awareness of one’s own experience and removing oneself from judgment) of the participants meaning making (Patton, 2002). The second step of the

phenomenological data analysis process was bracketing out, which allowed the topic or responses of participants to be seen in their own terms. These were then put into meaningful clusters. From the clusters, emergent themes were identified to gain the meanings of the various Native American college students' perspectives on leadership and leadership development.

### **Meanings of the Study**

**Implications for Tribal Nations.** The implications for tribal nations, with regard to the promotion of leadership development, are provided by the Native student leaders from their experiences and interactions within their respective tribes. This is derived from the individual interviews at each institution. Walter shares his experience about being further from home than any other college student from his tribe. His recommendations illustrate how his tribe is supportive of him and can be supportive of others:

I see if you're NSU you'd be able to; since my tribe is located in Northeast Oklahoma if you go to a college around there you'd be able to have as close of ties. If you go out even here or up north or down south, you know, we lose that long distance. They do and they don't, there's a lot of those questions; I guess that's a lot of my answers, because they do offer support. They offer well-being, you know, scholarship funds. That's a big thing. What better way to encourage a student than saying, 'We are going to help you pay off, we are going to help you pay.' By all means that doesn't pay everything, but, you know, for people who come from those communities they know how important that is, how important that we're going to give this amount of money to go to school and they take pride in that. I take pride in the fact that I know my tribe is helping me be here. I know my tribe is supporting me in that way financially to be here. Become a leader, and to become stronger in those values, to come back and become a leader amongst the tribe. So now individually every time I go home I have people encouraging me, you know, asking me questions. How am I doing? How are the organizations that I help with doing? How are these things doing, or do I need any help from them? What can they do to help me help the students here? So I think that as a tribe and as individual tribal members there's support.



Walter talks about not receiving as much support as other tribal members who attend a university closer to the tribe, but he feels support through the financial assistance he receives. That reduces his stress about finances and enables him to gain leadership experience and education while away so he can return and give to his tribal nation. He also talks about the emotional support he receives from the community members of his tribe, how they ask if they can help him as a Native college student leader and how things are going in college. By showing their concern he gains the support that he needs from his community, which encourages him to complete his degree and take his experiences back to the tribal community.

Phillip speaks about his experience of being a community member in his tribal community and how it is a safe place for Native college students to learn the values of leadership from a tribal perspective:

Well, they do some stuff where they incorporate you in tribal government, where they take high school students and intern them for a summer to actually help them become leaders. I think it goes beyond that and somewhat challenging the predominant notions of what the norm are. I think our communities are really safe places to do that because we already do have a separate perspective on leadership, on interactions, on the way you should live, your life. And I think our tribes could just support that identity within our students, allow them to go out and be strong people by going out and developing their foundations, developing their beliefs, and just believing in them, and supporting them however you can. I mean a lot of the stuff that tribes help out with is just a little bit of funding. There's really no pre-college development to help students be prepared for what their going to experience. I can kind of relate to that because I did come straight from home, I came out here to Albuquerque. I didn't know anybody. It was really me being on my own and just kind of learning on my own, but it would have been nice to have some more support from my tribe. Even though I'm not a tribal member, I'm more a community member. I grew up on Dresslerville reservation. I think that's just the support with elders, [be] cause elders are really important to us. I think that just their recognition of us doing something does support tribal students, especially when students still need to come back to their communities. I mean really the support we can build from the beginning can help them develop later if that makes sense.

When Native students are able to live in or go home to visit their communities they gain leadership experience by observing elders and tribal leaders. This teaches them from an Indigenous and tribal perspective. This emphasizes that the act of leadership is a group effort, not an individual one where leadership is learned and exercised. Phillip's narrative provides evidence that Native student leaders find it important to have the support of the community, which lets them know that they are welcome to come back home, work, and give back to their community.

Kateri talks about what the tribe is currently doing by giving out scholarships, but also addresses her concern that they are not visibly on campus to support tribal members attending the university:

Well, [do] you know how the Native American or the tribes give out scholarships or something? I think that maybe that should be required. I don't know, like, having the tribe come to the school why I have never seen any tribe come here and help out any of the students. Except like maybe one time and that was through Martin's class, you know. That's the first time I've ever seen that happen. So I think, you know, like, bringing in tribes in lecture, you know, people are like it's just a tribe or something but the tribe has a lot [of] resources as well. You know, sure, they give you a scholarship. You should be respectful and be willing to participate in what they're doing, and I think that would be another way of encouraging leadership. Like having some type of luncheon or anything, because I know people buy food, so offering free food for this. People will listen; many people think that, 'Oh they're not going to listen but there's always one person at least listening. That one person can take it to another person and that person could spread it, you know. That's the way I think of it.

Kateri believes that it is essential for local tribal nations to come to the university to demonstrate support for their tribal members, and that this should be reciprocated by the students. Coming on campus and meeting with students demonstrates support and encouragement for tribal members' higher education journey. Nathan indicates that tribes should not only provide financial support but also provide support for high school students to gain knowledge about applying for college and summer opportunities:

I mean my tribe I know has like scholarships and stuff they give out, but that's part of it is just being able to be at college so that you can have Native American college students to develop the leadership in. I haven't seen much going in terms of really programs trying to work with us on starting college. I think that's an area that maybe they should consider maybe offering more summer programs and stuff. I don't know that you would necessarily restrict it to just tribal members but either way. Yeah I think programs like that [are] probably not a bad idea.

Joy expresses the need for Native students to be able to see the opportunities they have for preparing for college and how to transition from life after high school:

I think if the tribe I didn't know if you could do this, but if they host different universities, actually has workshops on the community where kids can go and specifically have a professional. It would be great if it was a tribal professional [who could] tell them how to write their résumé, how to do interviews, and help them do the applications. Like we have title VII Indian education which helps you a lot, but it's not like being at your tribal building having someone help you. So I think that's something that can be implemented. Just giving more hands-on activity with just getting stuff and just saying 'Oh go do this,' actually helping them do it.

The tribe can play an important role for Native youth by showing them the opportunities they have after high school. Of greater importance for Native youth is seeing tribal members who are successful, and these members showing the youth how to prepare for success. The Native student leaders express the importance of tribal members being supportive once students leave their communities for college. They also highlight the importance of giving college students the opportunities to learn culturally through both tribal values at home and outreach to Native youth. All of this means showing Native college students the possibilities that await them after graduation and helping them to navigate their journeys with the resources—financial, spiritual, emotional, personal, etc.—that they need. Receiving tribal support while on a university campus and seeing tribal members as role models within the community demonstrate the value of community and how that is tied to leadership.

**Implications for the University.** The implications for the university are presented through the voices of the Native students who speak from their leadership experiences. Walter talks about the importance of access to the history of the Native student organization:

I mean, I guess really more access, not more access but more insight on exactly what we have to do exactly, what the organization is doing. I mean, I know when I became president of the American Indian Student Association, I really just had what the president before me; I didn't have any back knowledge of this organization. It has been on campus for over a hundred years and I only have knowledge of a year of it. So to me, I don't think I will ever be able to live up to some of the older president[s], the past presidents who had that knowledge and were able to make a success out of it. I feel like I'm trying to rebuild something that I have no idea of how it was originally. If the university can provide ways to help with other leadership abilities. I know they have programs here that help garner leadership in general, but when you go to those programs, if I went to one of those things I know I'd be the only person that looks like me. It would be your stereotypical college Indian or college student, um, upper middle class blonde hair, blue eyes, live[s] in a big sorority house—something like that. I still haven't fully been accustomed to that yet. I've been here for 3 ½ years and I'm still not fully accustomed to that yet. I think if they would be able to do that for not just maybe Indians but for multicultural, because what I've found is the Indians aren't the only ones feeling like that. We're not the only ones feeling ostracized and, 'Okay, yeah you're diversity, you're all over there,' and we're not the only ones that feel like that. There's numbers in minorities, I guess I could say, but maybe if they did a class that would garner those skills for minority this would include us. I think that would help better the leadership skills and the leadership quality that we have here.

Walter also addresses the importance of general university support for developing leadership skills, not only for Native college students but for minority students in general. He understands that in comparison to other groups there are not as many Native students, so combining efforts to support minority students would enable them to feel less ostracized and more unified on campus; this builds leadership as a community effort. Phillip expresses the importance of support from peers on campus as a means of developing leadership skills:

I think we do a lot of stuff here like through AISS. I'm currently entered in the mentorship program, the Sidekicks mentorship program. That really helps students who already had experience in the college setting relate their experience to younger students and get them more involved with activities. I think that's really important just to kind of, to get people out of their shells and open up. I know like Cloud Hehaka Sapa mentioned in the Native American Studies he's in a leadership development section and community development and that's one of those programs. That's really important because it is a perspective different from the norm. It is something that's very true in our communities and held very dear. I mean beyond just Native American students I think there are a lot of different peer mentorship groups that do help students succeed. A lot of stuff with graduate school, AISES and all this stuff, there are opportunities already provided. It's really just taking advantage of it by students. I mean getting the word out there so I guess that could be one way that schools could help is just making it more, not acceptable, but just more out there for students to get to. I also think there's a lot of stuff along the lines of just basic health that students need to take up and be leaders in. There's a lot of the social norms that drinking and partying, all this stuff, that is associated with college, that although the school like sends out statistics and all this stuff it's still up to the students to take a stand, kind of break the norm and be a leader in one regard or another. I think it still all relates back to the individual in this, their setting, and support, but the college is just one of their background features as one of their basis for foundation.

Phillip thinks that his peers, especially incoming students, should have mentors, who would expose them to opportunities for involvement and to the resources on campus. He speaks about the role that older Native college students and leaders have to set a positive example regarding healthy living. Again, this demonstrates the importance of communal leadership because each Native student has an opportunity to influence younger Native students.

Sometimes Native students need to see that the same amount of support and opportunities are given to them as to other underrepresented groups on campus. Walter comments on this:

I think, like, well first of all, like, with my university here, we're, I feel like a lot of people don't know that, we're here on campus and stuff. It's kind of, it would be kind of hard for that but if anything I think like having a workshop development or something. Even like having a retreat go on for just Native American students. I feel like the camp, its migrant program or something. They

do a lot with the Hispanics. They put all of this funding into the Hispanics, but where do the Native Americans come into play? I don't see that much funding going into the Native clubs or something. I think in just that aspect helping with funding and helping with like, like scholarships, you know. I don't even think there's like four or five scholarships, and I've heard of like different schools having like 20 or 30 scholarships for Native American students. I'm just like, we only have like 5, you know, so that's just like one thing. Like, encouraging youth to, like, go out and know that they have the university backing them up on whatever they're going to do, helping them on their journey to higher education. So, I think that's one thing that universities could do.

Native students might compare the services extended to other student groups and wonder why they are not afforded the same opportunities. Nathan offers an example of how he sees the funding, space, and support on campus as jeopardized:

Well, for one they can stop trying to down size our space. That was last year's fight. Honestly, there's been a lot of issues over the past few years. They've had shrinking staff and, you know like well, they say that there's like a hundred Native students that they recruit each year. Basically, we see maybe five, ten at most from each of those years. Now that's a complicated issue there [be]cause some people, they're just, you know—Cornell's not the easiest school around. Some people are just too busy to deal with it. I know I've been there at certain semesters; I just said I can't do anything that semester [be]cause [I'm] too busy, but it's like we do send out e-mails to them. I think they really need to do more to make sure that students who come here are aware of the organizations and at [the] very least of AIP and the resources available here. I think we also should look at doing more in terms of getting more students to take the AIS courses. I know recently we had a meeting with the Director of AIP and she asked what courses have people taken and most of the students, this would be students within one of our Native organizations, had never taken any of the courses. Now do they need to take those necessarily to be effective? No, I don't think they do. But you know, when we were in our group meeting and Charlie was talking about how she thinks these courses have really helped you out I would agree because [of] what, what I've been seeing. So right now neither of the co-chairs of one of our organizations have taken any AIS courses. One has said a number of offensive things that have drawn people away and the other is just too unsure of her to ever say anything. It's like, you know, now if they had taken some AIS courses and actually studied these issues before I don't think we'd have these same issues necessarily. But at the same time I don't know that we as an organization can really be trying to bring that level of education just to our members. I think, you know, at some point, yeah, you do actually have to read about some of these things that happened and that are still going on and understand how things are and that's more work. I think an organization can ask you to do I think (Researcher: be the university). Yeah so, I guess I would see those as big issues, you know, just that the university

has been cutting funds and not been having as many people for us to interact with on a daily basis who can, you know, inform us of things. Just have good conversations with. But also, you know, we're not seeing a lot of the students. So trying to find more ways to get students involved with us or at the very least with them over here at AIP. Then finally, that they need to try to find more ways to get more students to take these courses, because I think it has been a detriment that they haven't been taking these courses, yeah.

At Cornell for four years Nathan observes the threat of loss of funding and support for Native students through budgetary constraints throughout the entire campus. He also speaks about the impact that AIS courses have on Native student leaders and members in the Native student organization. Taking these courses gives Native students confidence and affirmation of knowledge to be effective Native student leaders. Providing opportunities for the Native student leaders to have a voice regarding what happens on campus is important. At the very least this means extending a gesture by inviting current Native student leaders to meetings, as Joy addresses:

For the university, I think, I know the chancellor does reach out to see what can help students. I don't know what it's called but I know we have, we get a chance once a year to go and tell him, you know, [what] we need help with. Also we have the Native American student or American Indian advisory council and me and Chad are the two student leaders. I think that is a great way; they're actually getting stuff done there. Finding ways to get more faculty, but to affect more students I think they're doing a good job already. I think having me and Chad on that advisory committee is what can help a lot too because the chancellor can do so much and then you have to motivate yourself to make the stand I guess or make a change.

Joy sees the importance of inviting Native students to sit on committees and to be a voice for Native students on campus. She also expresses the need for Native student leaders to accept the role they have by taking a stand on campus and by being a visible Native student leader.

The Native student leaders voice the need for universities to extend the same opportunities for leadership development that they give the general population to

minority populations, and to recognize nuances associated with leadership among the minority student populations. Similarly, they emphasize the impact that mentoring, funding, and AIS courses have on the development of current and future Native student leaders.

Universities with a Native American student population should take proactive approaches to how they serve Native students, to the opportunities that are provided to encourage leadership development, and to the support that Native student leaders and organizations receive. One way to acknowledge that Native students are on campus is for universities to develop reciprocal relationships with tribal nations in the surrounding areas. Some universities have developed specific administrative positions—such as a tribal liaison or a special assistant to the president—that are responsible to ensure that the university is accountable in these relationships. For Native students, seeing the value that their university places on building healthy relationships with their tribal community is extremely and positively impactful.

### **The Impact of Campus Climate and Recognition of Native Students on Campus**

The conversations with the Native student leaders underscore in a variety of ways the impact of campus climate and recognition on Native students. First, for Native students to have the support they need it is important to accommodate leadership development programs that are relevant to minority students. Second, university threats to take campus space away, or reduce or eliminate funding, produce a negative climate for Native students. Third, acknowledging the Native population and being open to learning about the culture and ways of Native peoples strengthen Native students on campus. Consequently, universities should recognize and seek to improve faculty, staff,



and institutional support for Native students due to the influence it has on Native student success (Fox, 2005). Fourth, visibility on campus—for example, when administrators and other organizations invite Native student leaders to represent Native students and their organizations—is a positive for all Native students. When Native students are acknowledged and recognized on campus it gives them opportunities to build their communication and leadership skills, which benefits not only the Native community but the whole university. Fifth, participation in a Native student organization on campus increases the connection that participating students have to the Native student community. During a time of separation from family and home this can provide a sense of support and stability. Together, these considerations indicate that campus climate and recognition of Native students on campus are pivotal to the positive experiences that Native students have at their respective higher education institution. Ultimately, every higher education institution is responsible to provide a positive and accepting atmosphere for each Native student and their unique culture and background.

### **Researcher's Observations**

In this section I provide observations about the voices of the Native student leaders, my prior experience as a Native student leader, and my current experience as an advisor of a Native student organization and how that coincides with the literature. These observations are organized in the following subsections: important characteristics for Native student leaders in university and tribal settings, descriptions of Indigenous leadership, strengths and barriers for Native student organizations, commentary on Native student observations, and impressions of the students.

**Important Characteristics for Native Student Leaders in University and Tribal Settings.** The important characteristics for a Native student leader to have, as discussed in Chapter Seven, are to be committed, proactive, open minded, respectful, and humble. With one exception—being open minded—these characteristics, which emerge from the voices of Native students, mirror each other in the university and tribal settings. The exception is likely due to the fact that being open minded is expected in a diverse environment like a university setting.

The students state that it is important for Native student leaders to be committed to the organization, to their goals of pursuing a degree, and to the betterment of the tribe. They indicate that commitment to both the university and the tribe is necessary. They accordingly must balance multiple responsibilities in both settings. As a former Native student leader I can attest the necessity of finding the right balance between the role of being a student and the desire to serve the community, including both NSO and tribe. As a NSO advisor I continue to see students struggle with finding the proper balance for their commitments to being a student and the desire to give back to the community through their service as a Native student leader. Because prior literature does not exist on Native student leaders' perspectives of the essential characteristics and values that Native student leaders must possess within university and tribal settings, I hope that this study will begin to provide insight and that subsequent research will build on the topic.

The other important values and characteristics that arise are the need to be respectful, humble, and proactive. Although these characteristics may have different meanings within the different environments of a university and a tribe, they are critical characteristics because the Native student leaders included them in both settings. The

values of being respectful, humble, and proactive are connected to stories of the Native student leaders' experiences and to their observations of watching other people serve as leaders within their communities and organizations. Many of the students tell stories about their own experiences, and I wish that there was room within this study to include them all. What is important to take away from this is that Native student leaders are reflective about these characteristics and values, about how they are connected to particular environments, and about how they are representative of the students' upbringing and culture.

**Descriptions of Indigenous Leadership.** In the interviews and focus groups I asked the Native student leaders to state the three words they would use to describe Indigenous leadership. The words offered most frequently were *committed*, *community*, and *cooperation*. The word *committed* term was particularly emphasized in the voices of the Native student leaders and included being determined for the community, dedication, patience, bravery, and strength.

Commitment for an Indigenous leader is important because they encounter obstacles and barriers in their roles; to succeed they must be committed to what they are called to do in service for the community. Commitment is thus associated with community. The latter embraces family, tribe, culture, responsibility to the community as a whole, and developing a voice with pride and awareness for how that voice may strengthen the community. For Native students, and especially for Indigenous leaders who work within their respective communities, leadership is about helping the community, being a voice for the community, and living as part of the culture of many Indigenous communities (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). Native student leaders recognize

this role—their role—in the community both on and off campus. The word *community* provides evidence of both the communal nature of Indigenous leadership and how the exercise and roles of leadership are linked to the community.

The third word, *collaboration*, encompasses being open minded, fair, cooperative, and understanding. For an Indigenous leader the ability to collaborate is essential because the concept of community is an integral cultural value for Indigenous communities. Collaboration entails working together for the benefit of the community, which means utilizing every person's strength, working together to build relationships with individuals and organizations, and doing whatever it takes to progress and advance the community.

The three words used describe Indigenous leadership—commitment, community, and collaboration—emerged in all of the responses of the Native student leaders across all five regions. As a former Native student leader, creator of a NSO, and a current advisor to a NSO, I know that these characteristics are important for Native student leaders to be able to emerge as effective Indigenous leaders for their communities. When Native students gain leadership experience and embody these values and characteristics, they will impact their university community through their presence and ultimately contribute their experiences back to their home communities.

**Strengths and Barriers of Native Student Organizations.** The Native student leaders provide insight, through their leadership experience in a NSO, of the strengths and barriers they have encountered. The strengths that emerge from the Native student leaders voices are communication and networking, building a community on campus, representing the Native students on campus, and being a role model for upcoming Native

students. For Native students, networking and communication allows to them to do a better job at building a community on campus. Having the opportunity to learn how to build a community for Native students through their leadership in planning events and programs helps Native students gain skills and become stronger Indigenous leaders. Students talk about the important role that the NSO and Native student center have in being their support on campus and how they impact other Native students to persist while at the university. Another strength that emerges is the Native student leaders representing the Native students through different committees, events, and programs that are in the general university community. As a Native student leader and advisor I see this taking place, and I help Native students learn how to interact in diverse communities and to be representatives for their respective Native community.

Another strength that emerges for the Native student leaders is being a role model. The strength that Native student leaders experience while seeing themselves as a role model comes from the programs and events they host throughout the year and the commitment they have to mentor upcoming Native student leaders. It is important for Native students to understand the status they have as a leader and as a role model. Native student leaders are often reflective and they think about how to improve and make the NSO and the community better for the future. The Native student leaders frequently talk about how they think of ways to give back to their own home communities, return to the university to promote higher education, and be a mentor to future students. Sharing the knowledge and experience they gain through their education is reflected throughout the students' voices.

The barriers that the Native student leaders experience in the NSO are transitioning into leadership, miscommunication, membership, and time. Throughout all universities represented in this research study the Native student leaders provided candid responses. Transitioning into leadership positions is seen as a barrier due, at times, to the lack of continuity and understanding of what prior leaders did. For Native student leaders it can be difficult to find the time to document what is done at the NSO. As a Native student organization advisor this is something that I also see as a barrier. Due to constraints associated with both time and resources student leaders and advisors often do not document the history, processes, and prior programs for a majority of NSOs.

Another barrier that emerges is miscommunication and how that impacts not only the progress of the organizations but also the officer's ability to carry out their roles and positions effectively. When Native students do not have prior leadership experience it is often difficult for them as a new leader to voice their opinions and to facilitate the diverse perspectives that each Native student brings with them. Advisors and professionals should consequently take this into consideration.

Membership and participation are also seen as barriers. Even in the regions and universities where there is a high Native student population there often is still a lack of participation in the NSO. I repeatedly heard in the Native student leaders' voices the need to increase the visibility of the NSO and participation among current Native students on campus. This may be associated with the next barrier mentioned by the Native student leaders, namely, time. Overwhelmingly they indicate that they do not have enough time to do everything necessary for their position while maintaining time for their family and friends. As a former Native student leader and current advisor I too find

that it is often difficult to balance the time that is necessary for a leadership position as a college student. For Native students time constraints may be heightened because they must balance their role as a student with roles within their families and communities, where there may be tribal ceremonies, events, or family commitments.

**Commentary on Native Student Observations.** Earlier in this chapter the observations of the Native student leadership experience and Indigenous leadership in general were highlighted. In these observations the student leaders emphasized the importance of working with various NSO's on campus and the miscommunication that can arise from working together, especially at universities where there may be four or more NSO's. When there is a higher Native student population on campus, with each student bringing their own interests with them, this creates diverse Native student organizations that can include a general NSO, major related NSO, Native American sorority or fraternity, and many others. These organizations help to address the needs of Native students and offer support as the students pursue their degree programs. For this reason a roundtable, or other type of opportunity for NSO's to communicate and collaborate on events and programs, is essential. Collaboration can allow NSO's to share the events they host and to address together the issues that affect the Native American population on campus.

Another observation, voiced by students on a campus with a high number of Native students, relates to the issue of visibility on campus. Stereotypes and misconceptions about Native Americans are still prevalent on campuses and they must be addressed. One of these Native student leaders spoke about one of his professors not knowing there are Native students on his campus. This concern verifies the important

role that campus climate has on Native students and their ability to feel accepted and recognized on campus.

An additional student observation relates to the overlap of Native students in leadership positions within the various NSO's on campus. I see this within my current position as a NSO advisor. This observation, along with others made by the Native student leaders, demonstrates the need to increase Native student participation in NSO's by communicating the benefits of participation and leadership positions. In addition, efforts should be made to determine if other culturally relevant terms or roles would increase interest among Native students. Also noteworthy, to address potential apprehension or uncertainty, is the need to provide opportunities to prepare incoming leaders to feel better equipped to be the face and voice for Native students across campus.

**Impressions of the Students.** As an Indigenous researcher and person the unique process associated with the Indigenous research paradigm allowed me to conduct the research study acknowledging not only my own culture and ways of being but also my connections, understandings and respect for the experiences of the Native student leaders. As I collected the voices of Native students across the country each time that I conducted a focus group or one-on-one interview, whether at the University of Oklahoma or Cornell University, I was impressed by the maturity of the students, the connections they have to who they are as an Indigenous person, and the commitment that each Native student leader reveals to do something good by giving back to their home community or mentoring younger Native students into their profession. I was impressed to witness the responsibility that each of them carries to build a strong Native community on campus and to give back when they finish their degree. The students did not see themselves as a



great leader who is able to accomplish mighty achievements on their own; rather, they work together in their organizations to get the job done and to build the Native community as a group. I was honored and blessed that each of the Native student leaders gave of their time to meet with me and to provide their voice and experiences to share with others.

### **Implications for the Indigenous Research Paradigm, Research, and Practice**

This section discusses the implications of the findings from this research study. The Native student leaders, from five regions within the United States, provide significant insight into the roles that their cultures, backgrounds, and experiences play in their perspectives of Indigenous leadership and their experiences as Native student leaders. The implications are addressed within the framework of the Indigenous research paradigm, research, and practice.

**Indigenous Research Paradigm.** The research paradigm employed for this research study is the Indigenous research paradigm, which is grounded in the belief that when Indigenous researchers are part of the research process the element of the non-Native researcher as outsider is removed, allowing inherent Native knowledge, values, and lived experiences to strengthen the research and to be seen through Indigenous eyes. Part of the assumption of the Indigenous research paradigm is that the research is not conducted *on* people or participants but *with* participants (Wilson, 2008). The components of an Indigenous research paradigm are conceptualized as a circle; each piece is interconnected and does not have more importance than the others. The pieces are comprised of ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology. An

interconnecting aspect of this framework is the relationality perspective which states that there are multiple ways of being and that all ways are related and tied to each other.

The purpose of this study is to explore the meanings and perspectives of leadership and leadership development among current Native American college students who are student leaders in Native American student organizations at five PWIs in the United States. This is a qualitative study with a purpose that allows the student voices to emerge. The findings are inherently tied to the Indigenous research paradigm. The findings emerge from how the Native student leaders know what they know about Indigenous leadership and their student leadership experiences on campus; the findings emerge through their perspectives as Indigenous persons. The narratives accordingly display the connections that each student has to their home community and family, and to how these connect to the students' respective campuses. This is all tied to relationality. As Indigenous people we are connected to our environment and the experiences that shape us as Indigenous people. As an Indigenous researcher and former Native student leader, I see that the students are able to relate and share their introspective views of Native student experiences and perspectives on leadership.

The use of the Indigenous research paradigm was necessary for this study so that as an Indigenous researcher I was able to acknowledge my own culture and ways of being and connect these to the Native students with whom I met and shared time. Being able to be a part of the research experience, as opposed to conducting research on the students, gave a unique perspective to the Native student leaders as they learned about my Native student leadership experience and the role that I have with Native students in my current position. Their voices merge with my own.

**Research.** No prior research studies have incorporated the voices of Native student leaders either with regard to the important characteristics and values for Native student leaders or how Native students describe Indigenous leadership. In addition, no prior research studies have asked current Native student leaders about their experiences in a Native student organization or how their leadership experience impacts either their definition of leadership or their motivation to pursue a degree. This research study begins to answer these questions. I hope it will influence future research on the Native student leadership and higher education experience at PWIs. I trust that asking current Native students their perspectives about Indigenous leadership, definitions, and their experiences as a Native student leader in a NSO will encourage future research that is more in depth and expands on what was found in this study. The following recommendations for future research are accordingly suggested to broaden the knowledge of Native student leadership development.

Researchers should continue to investigate how the prior leadership and life experiences of Native students influence them to become Native student leaders on campus. Although this research study includes a pre-focus group survey question on leadership experiences before college, a specific interview question on this topic is not included. Such an inquiry would be beneficial, particularly one conducive to narrative production.

Another line of inquiry relates to those individuals on campus who are the Native students' greatest advocates and sources of support. Addressing this consideration should facilitate understanding of how campuses can better serve the student participants of

NSO's, whose needs and sources of support may differ from other populations on campus.

Additional research should be conducted with former Native student leaders who are established in their careers as early or midlevel professionals. Such research could explore how their student leadership experiences assisted them and contributed to their transition into the workplace. Similarly, it could examine whether or not they remained connected to their tribe and the surrounding community, and if they chose to give back to the Native student organization after graduation.

Continued research on the Native student leadership experience and the perspectives of Native student leaders on Indigenous leadership will enable researchers to better understand the unique values and culture that Native students bring with them to campus. This includes exploration of whether or not Native students are also involved with non-Native student organizations and, if so, how their perspectives or exercise of leadership are impacted or adjusted in a different context. The potential is that this might encourage further research on current college student leadership development and enable higher education researchers to understand the importance of including Native students in research studies that attempt to construct models and theories, where the Native student voice is typically nonexistent. Future research studies should include the Native student voice not only on college student leadership development but also leadership in general. Researchers must be responsible to include all populations.

Numerous opportunities exist for researchers to continue to understand and develop the Native student leadership experience. This knowledge could lead to models

for Native student leadership development that could be implemented in colleges and universities where there is a strong Native student presence.

**Practice.** This research study offers potential benefits to practitioners, current leadership development professionals and Native student affairs professionals. Five recommendations for practice, flowing from the candid responses of the Native student leaders, are offered in the following paragraphs.

The first recommendation is to increase awareness and knowledge of how current Native student leaders perceive Indigenous leadership, their role as Native student leaders on campus, and in their home communities. For Native students leadership is not an individual task; rather, it is a group effort that is exercised on behalf of the community, which many Native students consider the NSO and centers on campus. Increasing the knowledge and awareness of the Native student leaders' perceptions of Indigenous leadership and the impact of their role may encourage professionals to find ways to learn more about the Native students on their campuses. The chapter on the Native student leadership experience provides an understanding of how their experiences impact them. The Native student leaders address what they see as benefits and barriers within the organization. This is beneficial knowledge and leads to the next two recommendations for practitioners.

The second recommendation is to continue support for Native students. Hearing from the various Native student leaders about the benefits they receive from their involvement in the NSO should encourage Native student affairs professionals, and higher education administrators where there are Native students, to continue to provide and build upon these positive experiences. Some of the positive experiences that the

students report are representing other Native students on advisory boards and receiving university support for programs and events hosted by NSO's. The Native student leaders understand the important role they have on campus to build a community and to serve other Native students. Barriers are also associated with that responsibility, according to the Native student leaders, which leads to the next recommendation.

The third recommendation is to reduce barriers for Native students. The barriers that the Native student leaders report are: transitioning into a leadership position, miscommunication within the NSO, low membership participation, and time management. When practitioners understand these barriers it opens the door to how we can provide training on considerations such as communication skills, time management, prioritization, record keeping, maintaining organizational history, setting realistic and attainable expectations, marketing NSO benefits, and outreach to non-participating Native students on campus.

The fourth recommendation is to acknowledge the impact of Native student leadership. Understanding how Native student leaders describe their student leadership experiences, and how they plan to give back their leadership experiences, will better enable practitioners in all areas of the university to realize the impact that student leadership has on Native college students. The words and phrases that Native student leaders use to describe their leadership experiences are rewarding, the importance of support, and the impact of participation. Although they understand that their primary role is to be a leader on campus they also understand the influence that their leadership has on the Native community. They indicate that they plan to contribute back to the university, the community and their professions by mentoring younger Native students in college

and high school, recruiting Native students to their campuses, and increasing visibility in specific career fields. These are significant benefits for everyone.

The fifth recommendation is two-fold, build Native student leadership development programs and, as necessary, modify existing programs. The findings of this research study can encourage current practitioners in the field of leadership development, student affairs, and Native student support services to build on what we do to develop incoming and new leaders. In addition, the findings can enable us to better assist current Native student leaders to improve their leadership skills, advance their future professions, and facilitate their transition back to their community after graduation. Specifically, the findings can be used to build or modify NSO leadership development programs to ensure that each student leader receives not only training to transition into leadership positions but also sustained support from Native and non-Native staff. Both training and support should align with the specifics that emerge from the voices of the Native student leaders.

These recommendations for practitioners can positively impact current Native students who are in leadership positions and those considering leadership in their organizations. They also can impact the broader student affairs professionals who serve Native students and develop leadership programming for students. I offer these recommendations, based on the findings of this research study and my own experiences as a Native American professional, because I think that their incorporation would significantly impact current and future Native student leaders.

### **Researcher's Self Reflection**

Long before I began this dissertation journey I knew what my research interests were. As a former Native student leader, current NSO advisor and now a doctoral

student, I recognized a gap in the literature that failed to include the voice and perspectives of Native students. When I began the research process I knew that it would be challenging due to time constraints and the amount of travel that would occur. Although I acknowledge that it is impossible to generalize these findings to represent all Native students, now having the voice of Native students from across the United States and from divergent universities is important. To complete this research study I balanced work and travel so that the dissertation would not conflict with important student events. And after each campus visit and meeting with the Native student leaders I was inspired and encouraged because what I knew was reaffirmed; Native student leaders have a desire, and inherent responsibility, to give back to their campus and home communities. I know that their leadership experiences shape them as leaders and as persons.

To be able to conduct the research as an Indigenous researcher, such that I was not separate from the research, was important. This facilitated though the emergence of a double consciousness (Du Bois, 1994). Simply put, as I went through the research process I felt as though I had to balance simultaneously being a researcher and Indigenous. Employing the Indigenous research paradigm though confirmed the importance of including my experiences, perspectives and understandings of the topic of Indigenous leadership concepts in ways that connected to the Native student leaders and to hearing their experiences and perspectives. This had to be balanced during the data collection and analysis processes. Every aspect of the research study—data collection and analysis, transcription, and writing—helped me grow as an Indigenous researcher and increased the admiration that I have for the Native student leaders. They touched and inspired me throughout my research, and they reemphasized the need for advocacy and



promotion to the academic community of the findings of Indigenous concepts of leadership. The voice of Native students and people has been suppressed for too long, and I am confident that these findings, implications and recommendations will hold value not only for Native students but also for the general community.

## **Conclusion**

This research study began to address the gap associated with the lack of inclusion of the Native student voice in college leadership development literature and research studies. This qualitative study brought to the surface twenty-one current Native college student leaders voices from five different regions and their perspectives on Indigenous leadership, definitions of leadership within the university and tribal setting, and the impacts of their Native student leadership experience. I conducted this study as an Indigenous researcher who was a former Native student leader and current NSO advisor. Being an Indigenous person and closely connected to various communities allowed me to connect with the universities and the Native students. The findings from this study are portrayed through an Indigenous research paradigm in which the knowledge and ways of knowing and being as an Indigenous person are respected. This allowed the voices and perspectives of the Native student leaders to emerge throughout the research study. The recommendations and implications for the Indigenous research paradigm, research, and practice were provided so that the Native student voice in leadership, higher education studies, and literature will be incorporated more often and respected as a unique voice within the diversity that exists on PWIs. I conclude this dissertation with a previous quote from one of the students, Big Country, that highlights the Native students' perspectives of Indigenous leadership and the role it has in our lives as Indigenous

people, “Even though you are a leader you still have to not forget where you come from. Everybody that you’re representing is unified in one person if you’re the leader for that tribal community or for any Native community.”

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## APPENDIXES



APPENDIX A

**Indigenizing Leadership Concepts and Perspectives  
of Native American College Student Leaders  
Recruitment Letter**

Hello,

I am contacting you because you have been recommended as a person who has gained leadership experience through your participation and leadership positions held in your respective Native American student organization at your institution. I would like to ask permission to meet and interview you in a focus group format regarding your thoughts and feedback about your perspectives of leadership, general thoughts on leadership development for Native American college students in Native American student organizations and plans after college.

Please know that your participation is voluntary and any information that you provide will be kept strictly confidential. Your name will not be used to identify you in any way.

Your willingness to participate and share your insights on Native leadership perspectives is greatly appreciated. I will contact you soon to hopefully arrange a time that we can meet.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

*Aho* (Thank you in Kiowa Language).

Sincerely,

Robin Williams, M.Ed., MHR  
011 Classroom Building  
Oklahoma State University  
Stillwater, OK 74078

## APPENDIX B

### **Informed Consent Focus Group**

Project Title: Indigenizing Leadership Concepts and Perspectives of Native American College Student Leaders

Investigators:

Robin S. Williams, M.Ed., MHR, Oklahoma State University  
Stephen P. Wanger, Ph.D., Oklahoma State University

Purpose:

The purpose of this research study is to examine leadership concepts and perspectives among current Native American college student leaders within five regions of the United States. This will be done through a focus group format at each public four year institution within the five regions.

Procedures:

You are being asked to participate in a focus group for one hour of your time to discuss your experiences and knowledge gained through your participation and leadership experiences in your respective Native American student organization. These will be audio recorded. We may contact you to provide an opportunity to member check the transcripts from the focus group.

Risks of Participation:

There are no known risks that are associated with this research study other than those that are regularly encountered in daily life.

Benefits:

There are no direct benefits to respondents. The overall benefit of the research is to contribute to the knowledge of the leadership perspectives of Native American college student leaders.

Confidentiality:

The researchers will not use the real names of participants. The records from this research study will remain private. Any written results will not include information that identifies you. Research records will be stored securely in a locked file cabinet and only the primary investigator will have

access to the cabinet and the records for six months after transcription of which the PI will transcribe all interviews. All data from this research study will be stored for six months, after which it will be destroyed by cross-cut shredding. This consent form will be stored securely in a locked file cabinet in the office of the primary investigator, and will be subsequently destroyed by cross-cut shredding. It is possible that the consent process and data collection will be observed by research oversight staff that are responsible for safeguarding the rights and well-being of people who participate in research.

**Compensation:**

There will be no payments or any monetary compensation for participation in this research study.

**Contacts:**

If you have questions about this research study you may contact the researchers:

Primary Investigator  
Robin S. Williams, M.Ed., MHR  
009 Classroom Building  
Stillwater, OK 74078  
(405) 744-0401  
[robin.starr.williams@okstate.edu](mailto:robin.starr.williams@okstate.edu)

Co-Primary Investigator  
Stephen P. Wanger, Ph.D.  
309 Willard Hall  
Stillwater, OK 74077  
(405) 744-3982  
[steve.wanger@okstate.edu](mailto:steve.wanger@okstate.edu)

If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact Dr. Shelia Kennison, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74078, (405) 744-3377 or [irb@okstate.edu](mailto:irb@okstate.edu).

**Participant Rights:**

Your participation is voluntary and you can discontinue the research activity at any time without any negative reactions or consequences.

**Signatures:**

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form has been given to me.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

Date

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX C

### **Indigenizing Leadership Concepts and Perspectives of Native American College Student Leaders Focus Group Protocol**

1. What is your tribal affiliation?
2. What is your major?
3. How many years have you been at this university?
4. What type of community did you come from (urban, reservation, tribal, etc.)?
5. What year(s) have you participated in your Native American student organization?
6. After you participated in the Native American student organization, did that impact your motivation to continue pursuing your degree? If so, how?
7. Were your definitions or views of leadership affected by your participation in the Native American student organization? If so, how?
8. What strengths or barriers have you seen in your leadership position in the Native American student organization?
9. How do you plan on using your leadership experience in the Native American student organization when you graduate?
10. If you could describe Indigenous (tribal or Native American) leadership using three words what would you use?
11. Lastly, if you could describe your leadership experience in the Native American student organization using three words what would you use?
12. Do you have any final comments or observations?

APPENDIX D

**Indigenizing Leadership Concepts and Perspectives  
of Native American College Student Leaders  
Recruitment Letter**

Hello,

I am contacting you because you have been recommended as a person who has gained leadership experience through your participation and leadership positions held in your respective Native American student organization at your institution. I would like to ask permission to meet and interview you one-on-one regarding additional thoughts and feedback about your perspectives of leadership, general thoughts on leadership development for Native American college students in Native American student organizations, plans after college and any life experiences that contributed to your involvement on campus in the Native American student organization.

Please know that your participation is voluntary and any information that you provide will be kept strictly confidential. Your name will not be used to identify you in any way.

Your willingness to participate and share your insights on Native leadership perspectives is greatly appreciated. I will contact you soon to hopefully arrange a time that we can meet.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

*Aho* (Thank you in Kiowa Language).

Sincerely,

Robin Williams, M.Ed., MHR  
011 Classroom Building  
Oklahoma State University  
Stillwater, OK 74078

## APPENDIX E

### **Informed Consent Interview**

Project Title: Indigenizing Leadership Concepts and Perspectives of Native American College Student Leaders

Investigators:

Robin S. Williams, M.Ed., MHR, Oklahoma State University  
Stephen P. Wanger, Ph.D., Oklahoma State University

Purpose:

The purpose of this research study is to examine leadership concepts and perspectives among current Native American college student leaders within five regions of the United States. This will be done through a one-on-one interview at each public four year institution within the five regions.

Procedures:

You are being asked to participate in a one-on-one interview for one hour of your time to discuss your experiences and knowledge gained through your participation and leadership experiences in your respective Native American student organization. These will be audio recorded. We may contact you to provide an opportunity to member check the transcripts from the interview.

Risks of Participation:

There are no known risks that are associated with this research study other than those that are regularly encountered in daily life.

Benefits:

There are no direct benefits to respondents. The overall benefit of the research is to contribute to the knowledge of the leadership perspectives of Native American college student leaders.

Confidentiality:

The researchers will not use the real names of participants.

The records from this research study will remain private. Any written results will not include information that identifies you. Research records will be stored securely in a locked file cabinet and only the primary investigator will have access to the cabinet and the records for six months after transcription of which

the PI will transcribe all interviews. All data from this research study will be stored for six months, after which it will be destroyed by cross-cut shredding. This consent form will be stored securely in a locked file cabinet in the office of the primary investigator, and will be subsequently destroyed by cross-cut shredding. It is possible that the consent process and data collection will be observed by research oversight staff that are responsible for safeguarding the rights and well being of people who participate in research.

Compensation:

There will be no payments or any monetary compensation for participation in this research study.

Contacts:

If you have questions about this research study you may contact the researchers:

Primary Investigator  
Robin S. Williams, M.Ed., MHR  
009 Classroom Building  
Stillwater, OK 74078  
(405) 744-0401  
[robin.starr.williams@okstate.edu](mailto:robin.starr.williams@okstate.edu)

Co-Primary Investigator  
Stephen P. Wanger, Ph.D.  
309 Willard Hall  
Stillwater, OK 74077  
(405) 744-3982  
[steve.wanger@okstate.edu](mailto:steve.wanger@okstate.edu)

If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact Dr. Shelia Kennison, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74078, (405) 744-3377 or [irb@okstate.edu](mailto:irb@okstate.edu).

Participant Rights:

Your participation is voluntary and you can discontinue the research activity at any time without any negative reactions or consequences.

Signatures:

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form has been given to me.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX F

### **Indigenizing Leadership Concepts and Perspectives of Native American College Student Leaders Interview Protocol**

1. What is your tribal affiliation?
2. What is your major?
3. How many years have you been at this university?
4. What type of community did you come from (urban, reservation, tribal, etc.)?
5. What year(s) have you participated in your Native American student organization?
6. After you participated in the Native American student organization, did that impact your motivation to continue pursuing your degree? If so, how?
7. Were your definitions or views of leadership affected by your participation in the Native American student organization? If so, how?
8. What do you see as important values and characteristics that Native American student leaders should have to be effective in your university today? How about your tribal communities today?
9. How do these values and characteristics relate to the development of leadership among Native American students?
10. How can your tribe encourage leadership development for Native American college students?
11. How can your university encourage leadership development for Native American college students?
12. What strengths or barriers have you seen in your leadership position in the Native American student organization?



13. How do you plan on using your leadership experience in the Native American student organization when you graduate?
14. If you could describe Indigenous (tribal or Native American) leadership using three words what would you use?
15. Lastly, if you could describe your leadership experience in the Native American student organization using three words what would you use?
16. Do you have any final comments or observations?

APPENDIX G

**Indigenizing Leadership Concepts through Perspectives  
of Native American College Student Leaders  
Pre-focus Group Survey**

1. Prior to coming to college were you in leadership positions or involved in student organizations?

\_\_\_ YES                      \_\_\_ NO

2. If yes, what types of leadership positions or organizations were you involved in?

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3. Is your family known for any special area (vocation) within the tribal or general community (ex. Tribal leaders, education, business, etc.)?

\_\_\_\_\_ YES      \_\_\_\_\_ NO

4. If yes, what area (vocation) is your family known for?

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## VITA

Robin Starr Williams

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: INDIGENIZING LEADERSHIP CONCEPTS THROUGH PERSPECTIVES OF  
NATIVE AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENT LEADERS

Major Field: Education

Biographical:

### Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2012.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Education at the University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma in 2007.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Human Relations at the University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma in 2004.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Psychology at the University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma in 2002.

### Experience:

Oklahoma State University, 03/07- Present, Stillwater, OK, Coordinator of Native Affairs, Office of Multicultural Affairs; Comanche Nation College, 01/05- 03/07 Lawton, OK, Academic Advisor.

### Professional Memberships:

National Association of Student Personnel Administrators- (NASPA), Indigenous Peoples Knowledge Community National Chair Present-13, National Indian Education Association, 08-Present; Co-chair College Strand for NIEA 2012, Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE), 10-Present.

Name: Robin Starr Williams

Date of Degree: July 2012

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: INDIGENIZING LEADERSHIP CONCEPTS THROUGH PERSPECTIVES OF  
NATIVE AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS

Pages in Study: 203

Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major Field: Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Scope and Method of Study: This study used a qualitative approach incorporating the use of focus groups and one-on-one interviews. Participants were chosen using purposive sampling through identification by Native American student affairs professionals at five Predominantly White Institutions (PWI). At four PWIs four participants were selected at each institution, and at one PWI five participants were selected, representing a total of 21 participants. The inclusion of these geographic regions acknowledges the varying and unique perspectives of Native college students and tribal people regarding leadership and leadership development.

Findings and Conclusions: The findings from this study were that the Native student leaders in Native student organization (NSO) have been impacted by their experiences in ways that were rewarding, supportive and increased participation. The benefits found from being in a NSO included communicating and networking, building a community on campus, representing Native students on campus, and being a role model. The barriers that the Native student leaders saw were transitioning into leadership, miscommunication, membership, and time required to be in a leadership position. The students also provided insight in the impact on motivation to continue to pursue a degree and on their definition of leadership through their Native student leadership experiences. What also arose from the voices of Native students were the observations they had of Indigenous leadership in the NSO and in general. The Native student leaders had every intention of giving back to their home communities and universities in the form of mentoring younger Native students, recruiting and increasing Native visibility in their respective profession, and building leadership and general skills to give back to the community and profession. Lastly, the Native student leaders were asked to describe important characteristics and values necessary for a Native student leader to have in a university and tribal setting. The values and characteristics found were the same and included being committed, proactive, respectful and included humble in both settings, with exception to the university setting where Native student leaders thought it was important to be open minded. When the Native students described Indigenous leadership, the overarching descriptive terms that arose were commitment, community and cooperation.

Stephen P. Wanger, Ph.D.

ADVISOR'S APPROVAL: \_\_\_\_\_