Reclaiming the Narrative: Creating and Sustaining Culturally Appropriate University Programs for American Indian Students

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Abstract

Using Kirkness and Barnhardt's (2001) Four R's approach, the paper will demonstrate both successes and challenges in the development and implementation of sustainable programs for recruitment and retention of American Indian students at a Primarily White Institution of higher education. Historically, the University of North Carolina Asheville (UNC Asheville website, n.d.) has had very few continuous and concerted efforts to recruit, retain, and build relationships with the surrounding American Indian community. This can be seen most clearly in the current institutional data, which shows that the American Indian student population makes up only 0.005 percent of the total student community. However, a recently signed Memorandum of Understanding between the institution and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians offers hope for the future.

Introduction

In the spring of 2015, UNC Asheville and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that outlines various ways in which the two parties can partner to develop and implement sustainable programs for the recruitment and retention of American Indian students. UNC Asheville Chancellor

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Mary K. Grant commented at the signing of the agreement, "This is an important day as we look to make sure we are an institution that is welcoming and supportive in creating a global multicultural community on campus—and it begins right in our own backyard. This is a partnership that we value" (UNC Asheville News Center 2015). Key features of the agreement include the reserving of ten spots each semester for EBCI students meeting the minimum entrance requirements, an out-of-state tuition waiver for EBCI members, the creation of an American Indian Science and Engineering Society chapter, the development of a Cherokee Language program and an American Indian Studies program, among other items. The EBCI, in return, will provide cultural enrichment opportunities on campus and work to develop internships for UNC Asheville students on the Qualla Boundary.

Former Principal Chief Michell Hicks commented at the time, "Our relationship that we have built will continue to grow and get stronger moving forth. We've built a lot of buildings over the years [in Cherokee] . . . but the most important part of infrastructure, from my perspective, is the minds that we develop. I look forward to seeing the intellectual infrastructure that's going to come out of this university." While momentous for both parties, it also marks a transition away from dialogue to action, something that Primarily White Institutions (PWIs) often struggle to do in a meaningful way (Brayboy 2003). In the following sections I will provide context to the agreement and analyze current efforts using Kirkness and Barnhardt's (2001) Four R's approach to student affairs that will highlight some of the ways in which UNC Asheville has worked to follow through with the MOU agreement. In doing so, I will also discuss challenges and offer recommendations for future initiatives.

My Role

Currently, I serve as the faculty mentor for the Native American Student Association and the director of American Indian Outreach for the university, and I am a joint-appointed assistant professor in the Department of Education and Interdisciplinary Studies. As an enrolled member of the Cherokee Nation, the job of recruiting and retaining American Indian students is both a personal and professional endeavor. The opportunity to work with Native students from various tribes is one of the most rewarding experiences of my professional career. As Karen Francis-Begay states, "When our Native American students succeed, we all succeed" (Hibel 2016). Helping students navigate the complex terrain of higher education is challenging as I, myself, often feel isolated and tokenized being the only faculty member enrolled in a federally recognized tribe. Pewewardy (2013) echoes many of my own personal struggles and experiences in the academy as a tribal citizen. Racism, isolation, cultural conflict, and a lack of institutional support are very real issues that I confront every day. However, this work provides an opportunity to subvert the historical pattern of higher learning institutions ignoring and marginalizing native students. Shotton et al. (2013) in the introduction to *Beyond The Asterisk: Understanding Native Students in Higher Education* argue that:

> Native scholars and practitioners have long struggled with the invisibility of Native people within the academy; often excluded from institutional data and reporting, omitted from the curriculum, absent from the research and literature and virtually written out of the higher education story.

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I share the story of one institution's attempt, and my role in it, as an inherent exercise of tribal sovereignty and indigenous methodologies. According to Waterman et al. (2013) indigenous systems value observation and personal experience. Thus, by saying "this is my experience," "this is how I understand," "this is my people's understanding," we are enacting our sovereignty (Waterman et al. 2013, 165). Sharing knowledge in this way is a political and spiritual act.

There is another, albeit often unspoken, goal of this work. Helping foster success with Native students in higher education strengthens and reinforces sovereignty efforts by the various tribes and communities the students come from. In this way, success in higher education can serve as a foundation for citizens of Native nations to utilize formal government structures to develop and pursue goals that will benefit and serve the community and its needs (Brayboy et al. 2012).

Braboy et al. (2012, 27) remind us that:

> . . . pursuing higher education folds into a larger agenda of tribal nation building, and vice versa—that nation building cannot be fully or adequately pursued without some agenda of higher education . . . and accounting for globalization and economic notions of nation building, in order for a tribe to be economically and politically successful, it must also be educationally successful.

Cunningham, McSwain, and Keselman (2007, 5) argue too that higher education is one of the main drivers for economic and social development in American Indian communities. The goal of Native nation building, however, is rarely discussed or acknowledged in the broader field of higher education (Braboy et al. 2012) and, more specifically, on UNC Asheville's campus. The story cannot fully be told without understanding the complexity of American Indian students' relationship to and experiences in higher education.

American Indians in Higher Education

American Indian student opportunities for higher education are often influenced and limited by a complex web of factors including socioeconomic status, life experiences, family expectations and responsibilities, culture, tribal education policies and practices, perceptions about the relevance of higher education for living and working in tribal communities, and goals for work and life beyond the degree (Brayboy et al. 2012, 31). These factors contribute to, but do not entirely account for, a culture of "invisibility" of American Indian students and faculty in all facets of higher education. As Fann (2005, 5) argues:

> The near absence of American Indian students on our college campuses deprives the higher education community of indigenous perspectives and contributions to research and teaching, while at the same time depriving American Indian communities of the contributions that a formally educated workforce can make to Native communities' sovereignty, self-determination, health, education, and economic development.

Lowe (2005, 34) too contends that Native American students continue to be underrepresented both in more prestigious private and four-year sectors of higher education while being overrepresented in less prestigious public and two-year sectors.

For more than fifty years there have been gains in enrollment numbers, degrees attained and the number of Native faculty found on university campuses. However, much of the data associated with American Indians in higher education depict a somber story:

- It is reported that Native American students make up 1 percent of the total college student population (Rafa 2016)

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- In 2008, 38.3 percent of Native American students completed a bachelor's degree, the lowest rate of all racial and ethnic groups and well below the national average of 57.2 percent (Shotton, Lowe, and Waterman 2013, 7)

- Seventy-seven percent of all Native American and Alaska Native students are likely to attend college and attain no degree or certification (Rafa 2016)

- Four percent of the Indigenous population in the US have a bachelor's degree compared to 27 percent of whites (Brayboy et al. 2012, 51)

- In 2012, only 26 percent of 18- to 24-year-old American Indian/Alaska Natives were enrolled in college, compared to 37 percent of the total population (Brayboy et al. 2012, 54)

- American Indian students are more likely to attend two-year colleges than four-year colleges (Brayboy et al. 2012, 55)

These numbers are staggering, especially if you consider Cunningham, McSwain, and Keselman's (2007, 1) position that access to quality education in general, and higher education in particular, is key to closing the economic and social gap. Essentially, then, the lack of higher educational success further marginalizes American Indian students and thus undermines tribal sovereignty and nation building efforts.

Paralleling the lack of success in higher education for American Indian students is the lack of pre-college readiness that is reported. According to Fann (2005), only 2 percent of college-bound American Indian and Alaska Native high school graduates have a combined SAT score of 1,100 or better compared with 22 percent of all college-bound high school graduates. Part of the issue is the lack of access to

college-prep curricula. Brayboy et al. (2012, 35) contend that American Indian students are most likely to be enrolled in general curriculum courses as opposed to college-prep and advanced placement courses and thus are the ethnic group with the lowest percentage of students who graduated with college-ready transcripts. The Center for Native Education (Rafa 2016) also reports that only 26 percent of Native high school graduates have completed a core college preparatory academic track, far less than any other ethnic group.

Compounding the issue is a lack of research on the topic (Lowe 2005). Tachine (2015) reports that, from 1991 to 2011, in two well-known college student affairs association journals, the *Journal of College Student Development* and *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, only 1.5 percent of titles or abstracts included Native Americans. Shield (2004, 122) further states that:

> The perspectives by Indian researchers and Indigenous Education leaders are unique, innovative, and very valuable, as there is a tremendous lack of Indigenous authored research in education and which is culturally meaningful to Indigenous people.

A significant issue is the lack of Native faculty in higher education, contributing further to the culture of "invisibility" on college and university campuses. In 2014 alone, out of 54,070 doctoral recipients only 109 were American Indian. Currently, Indigenous faculty make up roughly 0.5 percent of the faculty in four-year-degree–granting institutions and 0.7 percent of the faculty in public two-year institutions, whereas white faculty make up roughly 80 percent or more of the faculty across institutional types (Brayboy et al. 2012). This "invisibility" not only deprives the field of research but also of advocates, change agents, and mentors for Native students. Brayboy et al. argue that there are a number of persistent institutional

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barriers and burdens that marginalize Native faculty and block their advancement in tenure and promotion. The problem is historic, systemic and multi-faceted.

Kirkness and Barnhardt (2001, 1) argue that:

> From an institutional perspective, the problem has been typically defined in terms of low achievement, high attrition, poor retention, weak persistence, etc., thus placing the onus for adjustment on the student. From the perspective of the Indian student, however, the problem is often cast in more human terms, with an emphasis on the need for a higher educational system that *respects* them for who they are, that is *relevant* to their view of the world, that offers *reciprocity* in their relationships with others, and that helps them exercise *responsibility* over their own lives. [italics in the original]

As a PWI, UNC Asheville has struggled with issues of diversity and inclusion in all facets of campus life and organizational structure, particularly with American Indian populations.

The Institution

UNC Asheville is a four-year, coeducational, public liberal arts institution. It is distinctive in that it is the only designated liberal arts institution in the University of North Carolina system. UNC Asheville is primarily undergraduate, with all programs of study leading to the bachelor's degree, with the exceptions of teacher licensure programs and the master's degree in Liberal Arts and Sciences. UNC Asheville is a member of the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges, which consists of 29 member organizations that are state-supported liberal arts colleges. UNC Asheville founded—and recently hosted the 30th annual—National Conference on Undergraduate Research where in

2016 over 4,000 students came to present faculty-mentored research. UNC Asheville ranks eighth in the nation among public liberal arts colleges (*U.S. News & World Report's* "2016 Best Colleges," September 2015), and in 2016 *The Princeton Review* ranked the university number one in its listing of "Best Schools for Making an Impact." The university student population is about 3,800 undergraduate students and another 80 students enrolled in the Masters of Liberal Arts program (UNC Asheville Fact Book 2016).

Demographically, UNC Asheville can be classified as a Primarily White Institution, as its white student body population exceeds the 50 percent mark (Brown and Dancy 2010)—around 80 percent to be more exact (UNC Asheville Fact Book 2016). According to its mission statement, the university attempts to engage the diverse surrounding communities with a range of associated centers, partnerships, and initiatives in order to fulfill our public responsibility to address the needs of our community through a continuum of learning. UNC Asheville has developed a commitment to continuing service characterized by an informed, responsible, and creative engagement with the Asheville area, the southern Appalachian region, the state of North Carolina, and a diverse and increasingly connected world (UNC Asheville website, n.d.). However, the diversity of community members in the surrounding area has largely been invisible on campus, particularly the American Indian population. In terms of diversity-related programming, the school maintains an Intercultural Center and Office of Multicultural Student Programs located within the Intercultural Center, which houses spaces for meetings, social events, and programs involving groups such as Alliance, Asheville Students Interested in Asia (ASIA), Black Students Association, Hermanos Orgullosos en Las Americas (HOLA), the Native American Student Association (NASA), and Hillel, among other student-run organizations.

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The issue is that, according to statistics compiled by the Office of Institutional Research, minority students comprised only 10.7 percent of incoming freshman in 2012 and 9.5 percent of incoming freshman in 2013. This is out of a total of 603 incoming students. In 2013 minority students only made up 11.9 percent of total enrollment. According to university statistics, the number of American Indian students never reached higher than 0.55 percent over the past five years. For the 2015–2016 academic year, the university reported twenty American Indian students with nine being enrolled EBCI members, two Lumbee students, one non-enrolled Mohawk student, and eight self-identified from various other tribal communities. Despite being situated within a state with the largest American Indian population on the East Coast, the present Native student population makes up less than 0.005 percent of the total campus community. Paralleling these troubling statistics is the fact that only two Native faculty/staff members work on campus out of a total faculty/staff population of around 680. While frustrating, these numbers are not surprising, as, for centuries, mainstream colleges and universities have struggled to accommodate American Indians and create environments suitable for perseverance resulting in degree completion (Guillory and Wolverton 2008, 58). In addition, the university reports that only two out of 37 people from underrepresented populations held jobs in the executive, administrative, or management fields.

Various initiatives have been undertaken to attempt to address the lack of diversity on campus. In the fall of 2008, under the provost's leadership, the Diversity Action Council was formed and charged by the chancellor to turn words into action. Members were chosen specifically because of their direct responsibility for one or more diversity initiatives/programs on campus. As a requirement for graduation, all students must take a Diversity Intensive course. Ideally, culturally responsive practices would be utilized in all courses.

Realistically, teaching philosophies and methods are not adapting at a fast enough pace to meet the needs of the twenty-first century; therefore, the university utilizes the Diversity Intensive courses to partially fulfill their commitment to diversity as a central aspect of a liberal arts education and to offer students the opportunity to examine their own experiences and values alongside those of others. While various programs have been created, reports conducted, and conversations started, I am reminded of Brayboy's (2003, 72) words about the co-opting of diversity terminology by PWIs. He argues:

> Across America, colleges and universities have appropriated the language of diversity as a way of signaling their commitment to faculty and students of color. This article argues that language of diversity and efforts to implement diversity are bound to fail in the absence of an institutional commitment to incorporating strategies for diversity into their research, teaching, and service missions.

The issue, according to Brayboy (2003, 73), is that PWIs often think diversity is something that can be implemented without necessarily changing the underlying structure of the institution and its day-to-day operations. So, while there have been efforts made, there is still a long way to go to move beyond having conversations on diversity to deeply embedding diverse ideas, perspectives, ways of knowing, and voices into the very DNA of UNC Asheville.

The data presented above are particularly troubling, considering the American Indian population statistics in the state. North Carolina has the largest population of American Indians east of the Mississippi River, totaling more than 120,000 according to the latest Census Data (*A New Vision for Native Students* 2014). There are eight federally and state recognized tribes across the state. The total

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enrollment of American Indians/Alaskan Native students in North Carolina's public schools (K-12) in the 2012–2013 academic year was 20,597, of which 82 percent were enrolled in school districts receiving federal dollars through the Indian Education Act of 1972 (*A New Vision for Native Students* 2014, 5). The closest tribe to the university, by proximity, is the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians located about an hour's drive west of the campus, with another federally recognized tribe, the Catawba Nation, sitting just across the state border in South Carolina within a three-hour drive.

Despite the large number of American Indian students in the state, as compared to other East Coast states, when I began my position as a visiting assistant professor in 2012, there was only one EBCI student, no Native American student organization of any kind, and no recruitment or retention plan for American Indian students. As is the case with many PWIs, the history and culture of the land's original inhabitants was and remains largely invisible. The signing of the MOU agreement between UNC Asheville and the EBCI has the potential to transform the way in which the institution builds relationships across diverse communities. However, there are and will continue to be challenges moving forward.

How does UNC Asheville, as an institution of higher education, move past the "asterisk" phenomenon that Garland (2013) and others write about to build community engaged partnerships that are sustainable and culturally relevant for the American Indian students on campus? I recognize that there is not any one model that fits all of the diverse and varied experiences of students coming from the over 560 federally recognized tribes and the various state recognized tribes. In trying to answer the above question, I am reminded of the Four R's model: respect, relevance, reciprocity and responsibility (Kirkness and Barnhardt 2001) that has been developed for student affairs and that has implications for all facets of institutional

operation (Martin and Thunder 2013). Using the Four R's model, I will now outline some of the programs put into place over the course of the last four academic years and some ways in which the institution can improve and expand efforts to recruit and retain American Indian students.

Respect

Kirkness and Barnhardt (2001, 7) posit that the most compelling problem that Indigenous students face when they go to the university is a lack of respect, not just as individuals but more fundamentally as a people. The authors go on to lay out various ways in which the values, knowledge, and customs of many Indigenous students are not valued at higher education institutions. Brayboy et al. (2012, 42) argue, similarly, that cultural discontinuity or inconsistency between the student's home culture and that of the institution arises as Native students feel a conflict in perspectives and values leading them to question their degree of belonging at such an institution. Shield (2004) and Huffman and Ferguson (2007) contend that no single other factor has been identified more frequently as a contributing factor for poor academic achievement among American Indians than cultural conflict.

One of the ways that UNC Asheville has helped to foster respect is through the support of the Native American Student Association (NASA). For many of the American Indian students on campus, NASA has become a small family where they can build community, trust, and support for one another. Maintaining a student group for Native students is an important way for incoming students to feel included, safe, and respected (Springer, Davidson, and Waterman 2013). Four years ago it was defunct, but through recent efforts, by students and administrators alike, it has grown to be an intellectual and cultural outlet. NASA has been an integral part of organizing,

planning, and delivering events such as the A Tribe Called Red concert that brought together over 200 EBCI community members on campus, finger weaving workshops led by EBCI community members, a Violence Against Native Women workshop with Arming Sisters, panels on cultural appropriation, and an American Indian movie night, among other activities. Through these events the campus community has been able to learn from and with the Indigenous students on campus. Broadening these efforts from NASA into all facets of the campus curriculum is essential to foster the type of respect Kirkness and Barnhardt (2001, 8) envision. Increasing the university's domain of human knowledge to include and respect First Nations cultural values and traditions is a formidable task, but it is a task that we must begin if we are to make the institution more "user friendly" for First Nations students.

Culturally Relevant

The second R in the Four R's model is cultural relevance, which builds off the initial pillar of respect. Kirkness and Barnhardt (2001, 9) argue that:

> If universities are to respect the cultural integrity of First Nations students and communities, they must adopt a posture that goes beyond the usual generation and conveyance of literate knowledge, to include the institutional legitimation of indigenous knowledge and skills . . .

One way to do this is through the promotion of culturally relevant pedagogies and programming. Burke (2007, 2) contends that evidence of Eurocentric, privileged cultural values and traditions are embedded in the homogeneous perspectives depicted in college curricula, which may deny American Indian/Alaska Native students cultural relevance or opportunities for academic success.

This is particularly true at UNC Asheville, where one of the primary cornerstones of the curriculum is a humanities program that every student is required to take. There are four courses designed to span the entire undergraduate experience for students. The courses are titled: HUM 124: The Ancient World; HUM 214: Community and Selves from 300-1700; HUM 324: The Modern World; and HUM 414: The Individual in the Contemporary World. While I will not get into the academic minutia of the titles and governing disciplines, I will say that fairly quickly after I arrived on campus it became clear that the courses either did not include, discounted, or undermined the history, values, and knowledge of Native peoples. However, the institution has recognized the shortcoming of the HUM curriculum and has mandated a re-envisioning of each of the courses to be more inclusive in the perspectives the courses centralize.

Questions of cultural relevancy have helped to guide the development of programming around recruitment and retention for American Indian students on campus. There is a general belief amongst educators and academics that culturally relevant programs can improve contemporary American Indian students' chances for academic success. Martin (2005, 79) posits that cultural relevancy has implications for curriculum, instruction (teaching methods adapted to students' learning styles), evaluation (not limited to standardized tests), and governance. For examples of culturally relevant programming, in all facets of American Indian education, one can look to Tribal Colleges and Universities. At UNC Asheville we have tried to do this through the creation of a Native American Speaker and Performance series. Guests included Paul Chaat Smith (Comanche) of the National Museum of the American Indian, Former Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation Chad Smith, Perry Horse (Kiowa), the Warriors of AniKituwah (EBCI), Former Principal Chief of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Michell Hicks, annual EBCI stickball

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games, and a panel on Native health covering topics such as histori-cal trauma, food sovereignty, child social services, and the new EBCI hospital. These events are free and open to the public and meant to build a bridge between the academy and community. Martin and Thunder (2013, 43) contend that these types of culture-based pro-grams help to provide authentic, contemporary representations of Native people, which benefit all parts of the campus community and allow the campus Native community and local Native community a chance to renew bonds.

These events, however, are stand-alone and many students do not attend. The challenge for the institution is to move towards a more inclusive curriculum throughout students'—Native or non-Native—entire undergraduate experience so that learning about, from, and with Indigenous people is deeply engrained into their consciousness. An attempt is currently underway to develop an American Indian and Indigenous Minor program on campus. Martin (2005) argues that the establishment of American Indian studies programs can lead to higher persistence rates for Native students, particularly in mainstream institutions. Cultural relevancy, however, does not sin-gularly mean traditional curriculum. For a curriculum to be truly relevant to the needs and realities of Native students it also must be embedded into policies, rights, and the unique status of Indigenous peoples so that they can fully aid tribal communities and nations in the process of nation building (Brayboy et al. 2012). Many Ameri-can Indian students matriculating through colleges and universities, however, know little about Native rights, policy, or the status of Na-tive communities in the United States (Champagne 2003). For UNC Asheville, this means properly funding the program, hiring Native faculty to develop and lead courses, and retaining Native students to populate the courses. Admittedly, there are political and ideological issues associated with Native American studies programs across the

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country (Warrior 2008). However, it is my belief that through a curriculum grounded in the political, social, and cultural realities of our students the university can move closer towards embedding cultural relevancy in all facets of recruitment and retention.

Reciprocity

The third R that Kirkness and Barnhardt (2001, 12) describe is reciprocity. Providing examples of relevancy in practice, the authors theorize that, when teaching and learning is a two-way street, "Faculty members and students in such a reciprocal relationship are in a position to create a new kind of education, to formulate new paradigms or explanatory frameworks that help us establish a greater equilibrium and congruence between the literate view of the world and the reality we encounter when we step outside the walls of the 'Ivory Tower.'" An aspect of reciprocity is for the university to go to the community instead of expecting the community to come to them. One way in which UNC Asheville has tried to foster this type of relationship is through the development and implementation of a course taught at the local high school by a professor in the New Media program. For three semesters this professor has offered an introductory computer and media programming class to high school juniors and seniors on the Qualla Boundary. This has allowed them to gain valuable engagement with college-level courses and begin developing faculty relationships prior to entering higher education. As a result, many of the incoming EBCI students at UNC Asheville have originated from this course and once arriving on campus already have a faculty advocate.

Despite this success, the institution still has work to do in the area of reciprocity. The example above is one instance of the university having a presence and a commitment *in* the community, but the efforts cannot end there. Events such as parent night, counselor

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appreciation, community meet-and-greets, and UNC Asheville Admissions information sessions that are collaborative in nature and are hosted *within* the community expand notions of reciprocity, demonstrating that the institution is willing to work for and learn *with* the community. Too often, however, the administrative response is "can't they just come to campus?"—reinforcing the belief that the university is an out-of-touch ivory tower.

Responsibility

In terms of responsibility, Kirkness and Barnhardt (2001, 12) suggest that gaining access to the university means more than gaining an education—it also means gaining access to power and authority, and an opportunity to exercise control over the affairs of everyday life, affairs that are usually taken for granted by most non-Native people. I believe one way to do this is through the Family Engagement Model (FEM). Guillory and Wolverton (2008, 61) argue that this intervention-based model can enhance an American Indian student's sense of belonging and consequently leads to higher retention rates among American Indians. This mode, however, not only has implications for recruitment and retention but also for preparing American Indian students who graduate from UNC Asheville to go back into their community with skills and knowledge to serve. According to Guillory and Wolverton (2008) giving back to their tribal communities was the second most frequently cited persistence factor in a study on Native American student persistence.

FEM calls for an expanded approach that includes families in almost every aspect of a student's college experience. The essence of the FEM is to create a family-like environment for Native American students by making family and tribal members an integral component of the educational process of these students (Brayboy et al. 2012). UNC Asheville has begun to consider practices such as an

American Indian alumni luncheon that brings together graduates and current students to discuss issues of curriculum, on-campus jobs, programming, and mentorship. Another idea is to create an American Indian family weekend once a year that seeks to bridge the gap between campus and home life. As Martin (2005, 84) posits, organizing family events on campus once or twice per academic year may assist in maintaining the family ties that are so important to the success of American Indian students. This approach seeks to build on student and family strengths and, thus, invite the community into the college or university's activities. Brayboy et al. (2012) argue that the role of parents in cultivating early expectations for college is critical and is one of the most important factors of retention. FEM as an intentional strategy inherently moves the campus into a culturally responsive model that values community inclusion by seeking consultation and collaboration with families in designing outreach activities. One way I have called for the university to enact FEM is through the creation of a community council of alumni, parents, and tribal leaders to help assist in the planning, implementation, and decision-making process for outreach activities.

Another possible implication of a FEM model and a way to centralize the idea of responsibility, I argue, is through the fostering of student engagement with their home community during and after graduation. Karen Francis-Begay (Hibel 2016) posits that one of the three critical points of information of which key leaders on campus need to be aware is that tribes want a return on their investment. They invest hundreds and thousands of dollars in scholarships for their students to pursue a postsecondary education. The hope for many tribal leaders is that these students return to their community to serve. I have seen this firsthand with the American Indian students I have worked with. One of the initial indicators of success at UNC Asheville has been the students' personal desire to take the

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knowledge and skills they are acquiring and return to their home community. Some of the current students have discussed wanting to serve their community by working in the school systems, hospitals, in counseling, and various other ways. Students that have this intention tend to be more resilient and more focused and to excel in their course work. UNC Asheville has a unique opportunity to foster this type of learning through the Undergraduate Research Program. In 1978 the National Council of Undergraduate Research was founded on the campus of UNC Asheville and has blossomed into a national organization of individual and institutional members representing over 900 colleges and universities (Council on Undergraduate Research 2016). The central goal of the Council is to provide research opportunities for undergraduates, mentored by faculty members. As Francis-Begay (Hibel, 2016) argues, increasing the number of Native students in research and encouraging them to publish on issues that impact Native people and communities is one way to improve the visibility of Native students and issues in higher education. This past March, one of our American Indian students developed and presented on issues pertaining to tribal sovereignty. Tribal leaders and various members of his community showed up to the presentation to offer support, bridging the gap between the academy and community.

Conclusion

Over the past four years UNC Asheville has experienced success with the recruitment and retention of American Indian students as the population of students has risen from zero to twelve EBCI members—along with the momentous signing of the MOU. In moving forward, there are and will be challenges such as administrative support, funding, staffing, and possibly other unforeseen barriers. However, by using Kirkness and Barnhardt's (2001) work to guide the institution's activities, involving family in all aspects of the

students' experience and centralizing the tribal communities, there is hope. It is through these efforts that, as Austin (2005) contends, a university that works hard at recruiting and retaining American Indian students, with the tribal community centrally involved, can enjoy a large American Indian enrollment along with favorable retention and graduation rates for those students. This type of success can be personally empowering and contribute to the broader goal of nation building that tribes seek and, finally, move past the "asterisk" phenomenon at UNC Asheville.

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