

# Factors Associated with the Post-College Aspiration to Serve Reservation Communities among Native American College Students

Ronald Ferguson<sup>1</sup> & Terry Huffman<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Luther College, <sup>2</sup>College of Southern Nevada

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**Abstract:** *Strides toward Native American self-governance and determination have led to significant initiatives designed to protect and preserve community traditional practice and participation. A specific focus of this paper examines potential factors that affect Native American students' post-college aspirations with respect to participation and support for their communities. The findings derive from a survey of 86 Native American college students attending a predominately non-Native university. While not all Native American college students live on or near a reservation, the results indicate that students in this particular sample reported a significant aspiration towards reservation community involvement post-college. Such findings could potentially shape more effective collaborations between tribal communities and private and public institutions by emphasizing outcomes especially beneficial to reservation communities. This is particularly relevant to institutions of higher education that share an interest in the success of both Native students and the communities from which they come.*

**Key Words:** Native American college students, Native American post-college aspirations, Native American reservation community development

Forty years after the passage of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act and the optimism surrounding its potential to lead to greater community development, many Native American reservations remain economically and socially distressed (Anderson & Parker, 2008; Cornell & Kalt, 2000; Fogarty, 2007; Huffman, 2013). A collection of private and public efforts has emerged to facilitate community development projects and foster internal capacity building. Many of these initiatives involve partnerships between tribal governments, state and private universities, and private foundations. For instance, Harvard University operates the Harvard Project for American Indian Economic Development, the Bush Foundation funds the Rebuilding Native Nations Program, Northern Arizona University operates the Capacity Building for American Indians Project, while Humboldt State University maintains the Center for Indian Community Development (Huffman, 2011; Jorgensen, 2007; Norman & Kalt, 2015).

Tribal leaders and governments have identified reservation development as a priority. Indeed, each year millions of dollars in governmental and private funds target reservation

community development (Jorgensen, 2007). For instance, in 2015 the U.S. Department of the Treasury designated \$12 million specifically to increase the access to credit, capital and financial services on reservations through the creation and expansion of Community Development Financial Institutions primarily serving Native American communities (Pulugurtha, 2015). Over the decades, the effect is a patchwork of joint tribal governmental and private enterprise efforts resulting in varying degrees of success (Waara, 2003).

Moreover, economic development efforts have not advanced without controversy. Some argue that community development based on western capitalistic ideals is inconsistent with traditional tribal values (Stull, 1990). Indeed, these efforts could lead to not only further erosion of tribal culture and heritage but even to the constriction of tribal sovereignty (Skibine, 2008; Zaferatos, 1996). Others, however, contend that economic and social development of Native communities need not be a threat to traditional cultural values and ways (Guyette, 1996). For instance, Miller (2012) asserts that economic development based on capitalistic entrepreneurial enterprises is actually the best guarantee of tribal culture and heritage preservation:

If Indian people cannot afford to live on their reservations, how will they perpetuate their reservation-based communities and tribal governments? How will they pass their cultures and languages on to new generations and how will they expose their children to tribal elders and to religions and traditional leaders? If Indian and tribal governments do not have the resources to send their citizens to quality schools and colleges, who will study and perpetuate tribal nations, cultural traditions, and tribal languages? How will tribal leaders and reservation inhabitants build lasting governments and communities without the resources and infrastructure that life requires? (p. 5)

Given the complexity of the issues, community development efforts led by tribal governments with the cooperation of public and private institutions are and will continue to be highly important to reservations. Yet, ultimately it is the aspirations and actions of collective and individual tribal members that will make the most impactful and lasting contributions toward Indigenous community development (Huffman, 1986; Warry, 1998; Wood & Clevenger, 2012). Native American college students' desire to use educational success as a means to serve Indigenous peoples and communities constitutes a ubiquitous theme in the scholarly literature. Simply, previous researchers provide pervasive evidence that significant numbers of Native American college students hold as a goal to contribute back to Indigenous peoples and communities once they have completed their educational aspirations. Indeed, previously researchers have reported the motivation to serve Native communities among Native American high school students who are contemplating college (Lam & Guillory, 2008; Lee, 2013; Pavel & Inglebret, 2007). Thus, both before and while attending college, a powerful factor in the academic aspirations of Native American students is the goal to provide service to Native communities. This pattern is not only evident among students majoring in helping professions such as nursing, education, and social work (Pavel, Banks, & Pavel, 2002; Tate & Schwartz, 1993) but also for those studying in fields not traditionally identified as human service fields such as business, natural sciences, and engineering (Bergstrom, 2012; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001).

Using personal interviews with eleven students attending Sinte Gleska University on the Rosebud reservation of South Dakota, Carriere (2011) documented the importance of serving the community. Specifically, the students in her study embraced the four cardinal virtues of the Lakota as central to their education and post-college goals. Those traditional values include: *woohitika* (bravery), *wowacintanka* (fortitude), *wacantognaka* (generosity), and *woksape* (wisdom). The

participants regarded the post-college service to Native peoples as primary to their motivation for attending college. Moreover, they considered the four Lakota cardinal virtues as naturally leading a person to serve others.

While Carriere's study specifically involved Lakota students attending a tribal college, other studies have reported similar findings among Native students enrolled in predominately non-Indian higher educational institutions. For instance, in three separate studies, Huffman (1986, 2008, 2011) found evidence that Native American college students frequently report the goal to work and serve on a reservation following their higher educational experience. In fact, he also reported that the desire to serve Native peoples is a powerful and sustaining motivation to work toward academic success (Huffman, 2008).

Clark (2012) documented the desire to contribute to Native communities among fifteen Native American college students. Her qualitative study revealed the rich and nuanced motivations to remain in college and the ambition to serve. Similar to Huffman (2008), Clark argues that the motivation to serve others has a powerful sustaining influence in the educational journey of the participants in her study.

Likewise, Williams (2012) reported that a desire to serve Indigenous communities is an integral part of the educational goals of Native American students. She further argues that a call to service is a vital component of traditional notions of leadership among Native peoples. Williams explains:

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 in being committed, proactive, respectful and 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. (2012, p. ii)

In a quantitative study of 103 women and 73 men, Hansen, Scullard, and Haviland (2000) also found Native American college students demonstrate a preference for vocations that allow them to serve Native communities. However, these researchers also report a gender difference among their sample. Specifically, female students were more likely to prefer traditional helping professions and greater desire to serve Indigenous peoples compared to male students. The Hansen et al. study suggests the possibility that a number of important factors, such as gender, age, and cultural orientation, likely contribute to the aspiration to serve Native communities among Native American college students.

The findings reported in previous research raise a number of important questions. Namely, while there is ample evidence indicating a pervasive desire to serve Indigenous peoples among Native American college students, what specific characteristics are related to the desire for such service? Moreover, what features specifically are associated with the aspiration to help Native communities among those who have elected to pursue their education at a predominately non-Indian institution? This study examines various factors associated with the self-reported aspiration to work with Native peoples and communities following college graduation among a sample of

Native American students. This investigation is especially important as it involves Native students enrolled in a predominately non-Indian university and who come from a variety of social and cultural backgrounds. Thus, the findings provide insight on the aspirational goals of Indigenous individuals pursuing higher education in a non-tribal college setting.

### **METHOD**

The data used in this analysis were derived from a survey on the perceptions of the college experience among Native American students attending a university located in the Northern Plains. The university is a public, four-year institution with a limited number of professional graduate programs in business and education. The institution includes a student enrollment of approximately 2,700 students of whom about 4% are Native American.

During a five year period, each new Native American individual attending the university was sent information on the research, a request for participation, and a survey instrument. In total, 232 Native American individuals enrolled in the university during the research period. Ultimately, over the course of five years, 101 survey questionnaires were returned. Thus the response rate for the study was 44%. Students were provided several reminders of the survey and its importance to the Native American student leadership as well as the general Native American student body. Nevertheless, these efforts still yielded a response rate of 44%. However, many of the returned questionnaires included missing data on key variables and, resultantly, were not sufficiently completed. As a result, only 86 completed surveys were ultimately included in this data analysis. Consequently, the study achieved a 37% completion rate. Given that the public is faced with a constant stream of inquiries for information, especially in the form of surveys, a response rate of one-third or better in social science research is generally expected (Sapsford, 2007).

It is also important to note that the original primary intent of the research was not to examine the aspiration for post-college service. Rather, originally the survey was designed to simply explore a wide range of experiences and perceptions of the higher educational careers among a sample of Native American students. Thus, this research effort reports a small slice of the original investigation.

### **INVESTIGATIVE ETHICS AND RESEARCH WITH NATIVE AMERICANS**

The leadership team of the university's Native American student association initiated the research investigation. They desired to secure documentation on the higher educational experiences and perceptions held by the university's Native student body. The study followed all research with human participants policies established at the university as well as the American Sociological Association's code of ethics including institutional permission to conduct the investigation, informed consent of the participants, and guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity of participants, and minimization of risk. Additionally, the survey was created in consultation with Native American students and included items of interest to the university's Native American student organization. Moreover, the research was reviewed and approved by the institution's Institutional Review Board.

### **OPERATIONALIZATION OF VARIABLES**

The researchers selected one dependent variable and seven independent variables for analysis. All variables were measured by either a single-item question (coded as a dummy variable), a single Likert scale item, or a single semantic differential item. For instance, as an

indicator of post-college aspiration (PCA), the key dependent variable, the researchers used responses to the survey question “After completing college I would like to have a career in which I can work directly with and help other Native Americans and communities.” The dependent variable was measured using a semantic differential scale with a range five-point range between “least likely” to “most likely.” The independent variables included: 1) gender of the participant (GEN); 2) age of the participant (AGE); 3) year in college (YIC); 4) reservation background (RES); 5) fluency in a tribal language (FTL); 6) participation in traditional tribal ceremonies (PTC); and 7) impact of college on an appreciation of tribal heritage (ATH).

The dependent variable and independent variables were operationalized as follows:

*Dependent Variable*

- Post College Aspiration (PCA) – the self-reported post-college goal to pursue a career serving Native peoples (measured by a single semantic differential item coded: 0 = least likely to 5 = most likely).
- *Independent Variables*
- Gender (GEN) – gender identification reported by the participant (coded: 0 = male; 1 = female).
- Age (AGE) – the self-reported age indicated by the participant (coded: 1 = 20 years or younger; 2 = 21 to 24 years; 3 = 25 to 29 years; 4 = 30 years or older).
- Year in College (YIC) – the self-reported class standing by the participant (coded: 1 = freshman; 2 = sophomore; 3 = junior; 4 = senior; 5 = graduate).
- Reservation Background (RES) – the self-reported indication of living the majority of one’s life on a reservation or designated tribal area (coded: 0 = no; 1 = yes).
- Fluency in a Tribal Language (FTL) – the self-reported indication of level of fluency in a tribal language (coded: 1 = not at all and not attempting to learn; 2 = not at all but attempting to learn; 3 = only a little; 4 = moderately; 5 = fluently).
- Participation in Traditional Tribal Ceremonies (PTC) – the self-reported indication of active participation in traditional tribal ceremonies (coded: 0 = no; 1 = yes).
- Impact of College on an Appreciation of Tribal Heritage (ATH) – the self-reported evaluation indicated by the response to the question “Overall, I feel that my experiences in college have helped me gain a greater appreciation of my American Indian heritage” (coded: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = agree; 4 = strongly agree).

The researchers identified these specific variables contained in the original data set for analysis as a means to consider how a variety of characteristics are associated with the aspiration to service Native communities. As such, this research represents an exploratory investigation. Tables 1 and 2 provide the frequency distributions for the dependent variable and independent variables.

## STATISTICAL PROCEDURES

Statistical analysis of the data consisted of zero-order correlation and regression analysis. Specifically, zero-order correlation and regression analyses provide the means for exploring general relationships between the variables. Regression analysis also indicates the amount of variance in the dependent variable post-college aspirations (PCA) accounted for by the independent variables. However, the study involved a small sample size. Thus, caution is required in the interpretation of the findings due to the potentially enhanced distortions produced by

sampling errors and selection bias. Nevertheless, the statistical procedures used for the analysis of these data are frequently and successfully employed with small sample sizes (Hoyle, 1999).

## FINDINGS

The findings for this study are divided into three parts. First, we present the general patterns revealed by the frequency distributions. Second, we discuss the zero-order correlations findings. Here we specifically identify the significant correlations between the dependent variable post-college aspiration to serve reservation communities and the independent variables. Finally, we present the associations between the variables as indicated by regression analysis.

### FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTIONS

One of the most revealing findings emerging from the frequency distributions is just how prevalent the desire to serve Native communities is among this sample of Native American students (Table 1). Among the 86 students, 55 (64%) indicated that they were either “somewhat likely” or “most likely” to serve Native communities after completing college. Indeed, over half, 47 students (55%) said they most likely would serve Native peoples after college. Conversely, only seven students (8%) said that it is “somewhat unlikely” or “not at all likely” they would serve Native communities upon completing their studies.

*Table 1. Frequency Distributions of Dependent Variable: Post College Aspiration to Serve Reservation Communities (PCA)*

		<i>n</i>	%*
PCA	Not at all likely	4	5
	Somewhat unlikely	3	3
	Unsure	24	28
	Somewhat likely	8	9
	Most likely	47	55
*Percentages have been rounded			

The frequency distributions among the independent variables also reveal a number of important patterns (Table 2). Specifically, reflective of the general Native American student enrollment, female students ( $n = 56$ , 65%) outnumbered male students ( $n = 30$ , 35%). This is very close to the actual Native American gender composition of the university (approximately 60% female and 40% male). The students who elected to participate in the survey tended to be older than the traditionally aged college student. Fifty-three students (61%) were 25 years and older. However, that does not mean that they were necessarily upper-classmen. Exactly half of the students were either freshmen or sophomores and half were either junior, seniors, or graduate students. In fact, one-third of those completing the survey were freshmen ( $n = 27$ , 32%). Perhaps not surprising given the location of the university in a rural region of the Northern Plains in close proximity to a number of reservations, the majority of the sample reported a reservation background as the place of their rearing ( $n = 58$ , 67%). However, the majority of the sample could not be characterized as proficient in a tribal language. Only 13 (15%) self-reported that they were either “moderately fluent” or “very fluent” in a tribal language. Nevertheless, 36 (42%) did say they could speak “a little” of a tribal language. Participation in tribal ceremonies appears common among the sample. Sixty-eight (79%) of the participants said they either “occasionally” or



“frequently” participated in tribal ceremonies. Yet, one-fifth of the sample ( $n = 18$ , 21%) indicated that they “never” participate in tribal ceremonies. The majority also related that college had a positive impact on their appreciation of tribal culture and heritage. Sixty-five (77%) out of the 85 students who responded to the question either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that being enrolled in college caused them to have a greater appreciation of tribal culture. Conversely, only 20 students (23%) “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” that college had positively impacted their appreciation of tribal culture and heritage.

Table 2. Frequency Distributions of Independent Variables

		<i>n</i>	%*
GEN	Male	30	35
	Female	56	65
AGE	18 or younger	4	5
	19-20	9	11
	21-24	20	23
	25-29	20	23
	30 or older	33	38
YIC**	Freshman	27	32
	Sophomore	16	19
	Junior	22	26
	Senior	15	17
	Graduate	5	6
RES	Reservation Background	28	33
	Non-reservation Background	58	67
FTL	No and not learning	26	30
	No but attempting to learn	11	13
	A little	36	42
	Moderate fluency	10	12
	Very fluent	3	3
PTC	Never	18	21
	Occasionally	42	49
	Frequently	26	30
ATH**	Strongly Disagree	3	3
	Disagree	17	20
	Agree	38	45
	Strongly Disagree	27	32

\*Percentages have been rounded

\*\*Missing data,  $n = 85$

**ZERO-ORDER CORRELATIONS**

Table 3 represents the zero-order correlations among the variables. It is important to identify the significant correlations with the dependent variable post-college aspiration to work with Native American people (PCA). The dependent variable is significantly correlated with five independent variables: gender (GEN),  $r = .223$ ,  $p < .05$ ; age (AGE),  $r = .275$ ,  $p < .05$ ; fluency in a tribal language (FTL),  $r = .215$ ,  $p < .05$ ; participation in tribal ceremonies (PTC),  $r = .314$ ,  $p < .01$ ; and impact of college on an appreciation for tribal heritage (ATH),  $r = .379$ ,  $p < .01$ .

*Table 3. Zero-Order Correlations*

	GEN	AGE	YIC	RES	FTL	PTC	ATH
GEN	---						
AGE	.207	---					
YIC	.041	.476**	---				
RES	.012	.114	.154	---			
FTL	-.030	.419**	.120	.146	---		
PTC	.199	.298**	-.004	-.119	.409**	---	
ATH	.013	.252*	.112	.196	.350**	.301**	---
PCA	.223*	.275*	.199	.203	.215*	.314**	.379**

\* $p < .05$ \*\* $p < .01$ 

GEN – Gender

AGE – Age

YIC – Year in college

RES – Rearing on a reservation

FTL – Fluency in a tribal language

PTC – Participation in tribal ceremonies

ATH – Impact of college on an appreciation for tribal heritage

PCA – Post-college aspiration to serve Native communities

Thus, the dependent variable was statistically significantly correlated with all the independent variables with the exception of two variables. Specifically, post-college aspiration to work with Native people was not significantly correlated with the independent variable year in college (YIC),  $r = .199$ . The dependent variable is also not significantly correlated with reservation background (RES),  $r = .203$ . This is noteworthy as previous researchers have noted an association with a person's personal connection to a reservation and the inclination to use his/her educational success to serve Native communities (Beynon, 2008; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002; HeavyRunner & Morris, 1997; Huffman, 2013).

There are a number of other notable statistically significant correlations among the independent variables. For instance, age (AGE) is positively correlated with fluency in a tribal language (FTL),  $r = .419$ ,  $p < .01$ ; participant in tribal ceremonies (PTC),  $r = .298$ ,  $p < .01$ ; and impact of college on an appreciation of tribal heritage (ATH),  $r = .252$ ,  $p < .05$ . These patterns provide evidence that older students tend to be closer to traditional tribal cultures than younger individuals. This tendency has been noted by other scholars as well (Horse, 2005; Whitesell, Mitchell, & Spicer, 2009).

The variables fluency in a tribal language (FTL), participation in tribal ceremonies (PTC), and impact of college on an appreciation of tribal heritage (ATH) all evidence statistically



significant positive correlations with each other. This suggests a strong connection between these indicators of tribal cultural affinity. We need to note that the variable reservation background (RES) is not statistically significantly correlated to any other variable including the three variables that may reasonably be regarded as indicators of tribal cultural affinity (FTL, PTC, and ATH). This is notable as it might be expected that those with closer background ties to a reservation may also hold greater affinity with traditional tribal culture (Kenyon & Carter, 2011; Pewewardy, & Fitzpatrick, 2009)

### REGRESSION ANALYSIS

The regression analysis findings render further insight on the association of the dependent variable with the independent variables from that provided by the correlation analysis (Table 4). Post-college aspiration to help Native peoples is only significantly associated with two independent variables. Specifically, these associations include participation in tribal ceremonies (PTC), Beta = .215,  $p < .05$ , and impact of college on an appreciation of tribal heritage (ATH), Beta = .253,  $p < .05$ .

*Table 4. Multiple Regression Analysis for the Dependent Variable Post-College Aspiration*

Independent Variable	Unstandardized beta	Standardized beta
GEN	.415	.169
AGE	.040	.041
YIC	.102	.109
RES	.361	.142
FTL	.011	.010
PTC	.360	.215*
ATH	.369	.253*
R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>
.516	.266	.199

\* $p < .05$

Collectively, the seven independent variables account for about 20% of the variance in the dependent variable. Nevertheless, the regression analysis confirms the importance of the association between the post-college aspiration of the Native students in this sample and their self-reported participation in tribal ceremonies as well as the impact college has had on their appreciation of tribal heritage.

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

A number of important conclusions emerge from this study. Consistent with previous research, this study provides additional evidence on the pervasive desire among Native American college students to serve Indigenous communities. Well over half the individuals in the sample indicated a desire to work on behalf of Native peoples once their college careers have been completed. There are at least two forms these desired contributions can take. They may involve the actual physical relocation to the reservation or tribal community after college is complete (Huffman, 2011; Zahrt, 2001). Or they may simply include “giving back” to the community

through altruistic and political contributions while geographically removed (Jorgensen, 2007). Which ever the case, the cultural expectation to be mindful of the welfare of the community is a traditional value among tribal nations (Beynon, 2008; Cherubini, Niemczyk, Hodson, & McGean, 2010).

Most of the students who participated in the survey were Lakota and well acquainted with the Lakota concept of *tiyospaye*. At its most basic, *tiyospaye* involves a system of kinship. However, it also includes complex cultural expectations surrounding social relations, personal obligations, and tribal leadership. In essence, *tiyospaye* connects to notions of service and responsibilities. In one of the most widely recognized ethnographies of the Lakota, Hassrick (1964) described the *tiyospaye*:

The *tiyospe*, a group of individuals banded together under a common leader and often related through descent or marriage to the patriarch, was the ancient and important core of Sioux society. Through the able guidance of an experienced and dependable elder, small groups of people co-operated in hunting and in war; in carrying out the daily chores of homemaking, rearing children, celebrating, and worshipping; in caring for the aged; and in burying the dead. To accomplish all of these successfully, the *tiyospe* was of necessity an intensely cohesive organization. In general, the *tiyospe* was composed of members of one or more families, and because of interrelation of family members was subject to a patterned system, the *tiyospe* itself was imbued with a sense of order. (p. 97)

The results of this study suggest that cultural expectations such as those included in the concept of *tiyospaye* are commonly embraced by the Native American students who participated in the survey. Many of these individuals will eventually provide leadership to their communities. Given this display of desired service, there is much to be encouraged about regarding the future of reservation communities.

The findings also demonstrate that attendance at a predominately non-Native college does not threaten a person's cultural identity, but rather can serve to strengthen a person's affinity with tribal culture and heritage (Huffman, 2005; Okagaki, Helling, & Bingham, 2009; White Shield, 2009). Over two-thirds of the participants related that being in college resulted in a greater appreciation of their tribe's culture and heritage. While the assumption that tribal culture is an impediment to success in college has virtually disappeared in education scholarship (Chadwick, 1972; Miller, 1971; Pottinger, 1989; Scot, 1986), this finding nevertheless provides encouraging insight on the higher educational experiences of many Native American students. It points to the fact that these individuals not only highly value their tribal traditions, but that college has served to reinforce the values of their ethnicity. It thus seems reasonable to expect that their future leadership to reservation communities will be consistent with tribal values and expectations.

Finally, the findings provide empirical evidence that the post-college aspiration to serve reservation communities is associated with two powerful and critical variables. Namely, both the correlation analysis and regression analysis show that a desire to serve Indigenous peoples is related to the participation in tribal ceremonies (a behavioral, culturally-affirming action) and a greater appreciation of tribal culture while in college (an affective, culturally affirming state).

Taken in sum, this research amplifies the notion that enticing Native students towards persistence in higher education via the promise of personal economic and career benefits may fall short of their intended aim. Rather, if indeed the focus on community support and preservation is at the heart of what may motivate a student to aspire for academic persistence and completion, a

narrow focus on future personal gain may actually be counterproductive to both the needs of students and Indigenous communities.

### LOOKING FORWARD

Native Americans leaders are looking for initiatives to preserve and strengthen community traditions and practices (Jorgensen, 2007). As collaboration between Indigenous communities and public and private college and universities continue, there are profound implications for communities if findings, such as the ones in this study, are considered. Sustaining and growing traditional community practices will require the involvement of young people. The results of this study indicate that significant numbers of students are interested in college success as a means to further their role in tribal traditions and community revitalization. College and universities are uniquely positioned to develop opportunities to turn this desire among significant numbers of their students into ways that can serve the community needs of reservations by cooperating with tribal leaders in creating service opportunities. Essentially, these partnerships should expand beyond merely assisting students to persist in current mainstream educational and professional pathways, but to also include growth and development in tribal identity and reservation community involvement. Future partnerships should be predicated on the understanding that there are significant, long-term societal and community outcomes at stake.

While this work has yielded some important insights into the factors contributing to post-college aspirations for Native students, it is not without certain limitations. Foremost, there were challenges getting a high enough response rate for respondents in this study. While the response rate and numbers are consistent with current trends, the 37% completion rate yielding only 86 students does suggest that duplicating such a study may yield more participants and a greater appreciation of this phenomenon. Perhaps greater use of the Native American student leadership in the recruitment of participants would help future researchers to achieve a higher response and completion rate of surveys. Additionally, as most of the students were Lakota, it should be noted that generalizing to other Indigenous tribal individuals might not be an accurate reflection of broader trends in all Native American communities.

This research has allowed for an expanded look at post-college aspiration. Particularly, as with many studies that focus on the subject quantitatively, it would be beneficial to follow up with qualitative research using personal interviews. Given the strong connection between post-college aspirations and tribal traditions involving service to others, exploring how students see their contributions to Indigenous communities would be highly useful and insightful. Additionally, the inclusion of respondents from other tribal nations beyond the Northern Plains would surely provide greater context and nuance beyond those provided by this study.

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