

## ABSTRACT

PETERS, BRIAN ANDERSON. "My Education, Not Only for Me and My Family but My People": Storied Experiences of Native American Students' College Choice at Four-Year Institutions in North Carolina. (Under the Direction of Dr. Joy Gayles).

While increased scholarship has begun to explore the stories of Native American students in higher education, less research has explored Native American student college choice. In this qualitative, narrative study, the experiences of seven Native American students' college choice at four-year institutions in North Carolina were explored. Perna's (2006) conceptual model of college choice provided a framework for the analysis. One research question guided this study: What were the storied experiences of Native American students from North Carolina when they chose to attend college?

Findings from this study indicate that Native American students described their college choice process through four themes: family, Native identity and community, external factors, and growth and opportunities. Native American students in this study were inspired by their families and Native communities to pursue higher education. The participants pursued medical and human services disciplines to return and support their Native communities after completing their degrees. To be successful and have a "home feeling" on campus, they looked for universities with thriving Native communities through student organizations and supportive Native faculty and staff. Factors such as distance from home, academic preparation, and federal recognition impacted the participants choice. Through the four themes of Native college choice, higher education researchers, policymakers, and administrators have a better understanding of how to connect and serve Native American students. With increased attention, Native American student participation rates within higher education may increase as they have a home feeling on campus and perceive higher education as a gateway for success for their families and communities.

© Copyright 2018 by Brian Anderson Peters

All Rights Reserved

"My Education, Not Only for Me and My Family but My People": Storied Experiences of Native American Students' College Choice at Four-Year Institutions in North Carolina

by  
Brian Anderson Peters

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
North Carolina State University  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Educational Research & Policy Analysis

Raleigh, North Carolina

2018

APPROVED BY:

---

Dr. Joy Gayles  
Chair of Advisory Committee

---

Dr. Susan C. Faircloth

---

Dr. Meghan M. Manfra

---

Dr. Paul D. Umbach

**DEDICATION**

To my wife, Brooke Bailey Peters.

## BIOGRAPHY

Brian Anderson Peters grew up in Roanoke, V.A. He started his higher education journey at Virginia Tech. Completing a bachelor's degree in history, Brian completed the University Honors Program, graduated *sum cum laude*, and salutatorian of his class in 2008. He completed his undergraduate thesis under the direction of Dr. Bud Robertson. After the tragic events on April 11, 2017, Brian was inspired to work in higher education where he could support college students. He moved to Williamsburg, V.A. where he completed his master's in education from the College of William and Mary. He completed his master's thesis under the direction of Dr. Pamela Eddy in 2010. After completing his first two degrees, he worked for a year in Residence Life at the University of Tennessee: Chattanooga. He then moved to Raleigh, N.C. where he worked at N.C. State as the Honors Village Community Director with the University Honors Program and University Housing for four years. During this time, Brian began his doctoral degree at N.C. State. In 2015, Brian transitioned across campus to academic advising with the Poole College of Management. He was then promoted to senior academic advisor in 2017 and serves as the college's representative to the University's American Indian Advisory Council. Brian has published scholarship in multiple disciplines: higher education, Native American student experiences, cooperative extension, and history.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are several people I would like to thank for helping me complete not only my doctoral degree but my entire educational journey. First, I want to thank Dr. Joy Gaston Gayles for her mentorship and guidance as my chair and advisor. Her ideas and challenging feedback made me a better scholar and inspired me to conduct research that could have a positive impact on others. I would also like to thank the rest of my committee for giving critical feedback and support: Dr. Paul Umbach, Dr. Meghan Manfra, and Dr. Susan Faircloth. I would also like to thank the N.C. State Higher Education and School of Education faculty for their teaching, scholarship, and mentorship over the past six years: Dr. Audrey Jaeger, Dr. Alyssa Rockenbach, Dr. Stephen Porter, Dr. Tiffany Davis, Dr. Lance Fusarelli, Dr. Deleon Gray, Dr. Brad Mehlenbacher, Dr. Demetrius Richmond, Dr. Kay Moore, and Dean Mary Ann Danowitz. I always felt included as a part-time student due to the teaching style of the faculty, the support of the college in my education, and funding my study abroad experience in St. Petersburg, Russia.

I would also like to thank the many NC State staff for their friendship, inspiration, and motivation. To my fellow Poole advisors: Melusian Wright, Jennifer McLamb, Megan Van Hook, Julie Lawson, Dr. Lauren Brown, Alissa Dodds, Christin James, DeWhitney Upchurch, and Keith Martin, I thank you all for being my daily partners in bringing positive change to the lives of our students. To Dr. Jason DeRousie, Brad Wingo, and Dr. Tamah Morant, thank you for your strong leadership within the office. And thanks to the rest of the Poole Office of Undergraduate Programs staff and faculty for their support and encouragement as I finished my degree, especially: Bonnie Yarboro, Stephanie Jares, Brian Newton, Dr. Janet Rakes, Tayah Butler, Rob Sandruck, Ellen Frost, Terry Price, Kathy Ford, Devona Mazyck, and Chandra Russell. In the University Honors Program, I would like to thank: Dr. Aaron Stoller, Carolyn

Veale, Dwayne Barnes, Marquette Russell, Dr. Sheryl Cornett, Dr. Tiffany Kershner, and Dr. Larry Blanton. Thank you for all the work you do to support NC State Honors students. And to my colleagues across campus, thank you for all the support and friendship the last few years at NC State. I would like to especially acknowledge the hard work and devotion of Division of Academic and Student Affairs and other NC State staff and friends for supporting our students. Thank you to Brittany Hunt, Dr. Barry Olson, Dr. Tim Luckadoo, Dr. Carrie McLean, Mindy Sopher, Mike Giancola, Adam Culley, Brian Matthis, Jennie Liner, Ralph Recchie, Sahana Sankar, Patti Baynes, Leigha Krick, Dr. Mike Mullen, and Dr. Tom Stafford for their support in my education. I also would like to thank my colleagues in the Executive Council for Phi Beta Kappa at N.C. State for their support and friendship the past several years.

I also would not have completed my dissertation, or remained at N.C. State, if it had not been for the N.C. State students. As my participants taught me in this study, your community on campus is essential for feeling at home and being successful. First, I would like to thank my cohort members for taking this journey with me: Nicole Guistwite, Alex Waldie, Dr. Callie Womble, Ariel Cochrane-Brown, Dr. Alicia Keating Polson, Ashley Gray, Ginger Draughon, and Darren Smith. In addition, there are several doctoral students who supported me along the way: Greg King, Dr. Beth Vincent, Nicole Ditillo, Chelsea Doub, Ben Dictus, Nathan Williams, Helen Wu, Katie Johnson, Katie Smith, Ashley McMillan, Sharbari Dey, Dr. Rob Moore, Whitney Richardson, Megan Ennes, Whitney McLaughlin, Desiree Unselt, Dr. Ashley Clayton, Dr. Alessandra Dinin, Dr. Shauna Morin, Dr. Matt Starcke, Dr. Thomas Green, Dr. Becky Crandall, Dr. Racheal Brooks, Dr. Regina Williams, Dr. Mary Medina, Holley Nichols, and Sarah Andrea. Thank you all for being continual inspirations and great friendship. And to the N.C. State undergraduates, especially from the University Honors Program, the Poole College of

Management, and the University Recreation and Wellness Fitness instructors, thank you for inspiring me every day.

I would not have been able to complete a doctorate if I had not had the strong mentorship from scholars outside of N.C. State. To Virginia Tech faculty who first inspired me to conduct research: Dr. Nancy Franz, Dr. Barry Garst, and Dr. Bud Robertson, and to my advisors and mentors at the College of William and Mary: Dr. Pamela Eddy, Dr. Dot Finnegan, Dr. Eddie Cole, and Dr. James Barber, I thank you all for supporting me through the years and for your friendship. I would also like to thank Dr. Tim Cain from the University of Georgia for his advice and support. And thanks to my international colleagues who attended Summer School 2017 in Russia for their friendship and advice on my research.

Over the years, I have developed close friendships with many wonderful people. I would like to thank Hunter Simmons for the many fun memories at Virginia Tech and beyond. To Kyle Lumsden for showing that true friendships last a lifetime. Thanks Caitlin Flynn, Helen Jones, Brittany Moore, Jen Eden, Jesse Oswald, and Sarah Davenport for their many years of friendship. I would also like to acknowledge the summer camp staffs that I had the pleasure of working with at W. E. Skelton 4-H Center who helped me become a better person. And thank you to my many friends I met at the College of William and Mary, especially: Kent Miller, Josh and Carolyn McCrea, Leila Derstine, Kelly Walker, Emily Miller, Dr. Justine Okerson, and Terry Fassanella.

To the Native American tribes and nations of the United States and Americas, I thank you for allowing an outsider to learn about your cultures and sharing your stories. To the participants, may your personal stories of empowerment and success embolden others to pursue their educational dreams. Thanks to the Native gatekeepers who connected me with participants at

their institutions, this study would not have been possible without your assistance. For the tribes of North Carolina, may you continue to fight for federal recognition, and I hope this research will assist your efforts in advancing the educational aspirations of your students.

To the victims and survivors of the tragedy at Virginia Tech, thank you for inspiring me to work in higher education in your memory. The community support at Virginia Tech that developed after the tragedy has inspired me to work with college students ever since.

I could not have completed this degree, or any of my successes, without the love and support from my family. First to my parents, Phil and Patti Peters, for their love, time, and financial sacrifices to pay for my sister's and my college degrees. We are forever thankful for the opportunities you have afforded us. To my sister, Sarah Lee, who first learned to put up with me and still wished to join a profession helping others as a social worker, I thank you for your love and support. To my extended family, thank you for your love and support.

Lastly, and most of all, I wish to thank my wife, Brooke Bailey Peters. Thank you for reading all my drafts, cooking dinner when I was in class, writing, supporting my academic pursuits, your love, and being there for me throughout the whole Ph.D. journey. Without you, this would not have been possible, nor would I have a reason to finish. Thank you.

*“Life’s like a movie,  
write your own ending,  
keep believing,  
keep pretending,  
we’ve done just what we’ve set out to do.*

*Thanks to the lovers,  
the dreamers,  
and you.”  
~The Muppets*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	xii
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xiii
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Problem.....	1
Gaps in Literature.....	6
Conceptual Framework .....	7
Perna’s College Choice Model.....	8
Definitions .....	11
Purpose .....	12
Research Question.....	12
Significance .....	12
Summary.....	14
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review</b> .....	<b>15</b>
Introduction.....	15
Native American Higher Education History.....	15
Colonial Period .....	15
Federal Period.....	16
Self-Determination Period.....	16
Tribal Colleges and Universities .....	17
Indigenous Education .....	18
Native American Student Experiences .....	19
Native Experiences at PWIs .....	19
Native Culture.....	21
Feelings of Home.....	22
Student College Choice.....	24
Underrepresented Students’ College Choice .....	25
Native American Students’ College Choice.....	27
Nelson’s <i>Paradox</i> .....	29
Perna’s College Student Choice Conceptual Model.....	31
Human Capital Theory .....	31
Sociological Approach of Status Attainment .....	33
Perna’s College Choice Conceptual Model.....	35
Layer 1: Habitus .....	37
Native American Habitus .....	37
Native Demographic Characteristics.....	38
Layer 2: School and Community Context.....	40
Layer 3: Higher Education Context.....	42
Layer 4: Social, Economic, and Policy Context.....	43
Appreciating Native Culture.....	44
Summary.....	45
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology</b> .....	<b>47</b>
Introduction.....	47

Narrative Methodology .....	48
Indigenous voices .....	48
Indigenous Storytelling .....	49
Quality Narrative Studies .....	50
Population .....	51
Data Collection .....	52
Participants .....	53
Interview Protocol.....	54
Data Analysis .....	55
Constant Comparative Analysis .....	56
Classical Content Analysis.....	57
Validity and Reliability.....	58
Positionality Statement .....	60
Role of the Researcher .....	60
Hierarchical Power.....	61
Ethical Considerations.....	63
Limitations.....	65
Summary.....	68
<b>Chapter 4: Participant Profiles .....</b>	<b>69</b>
Introduction.....	69
Participants.....	69
Kaylin.....	71
Heather .....	73
Ashley .....	74
Charlotte.....	75
Brittany.....	77
Beth.....	78
John.....	80
Summary.....	82
<b>Chapter 5: Findings .....</b>	<b>83</b>
Introduction.....	83
Emerging Themes .....	83
Family .....	84
Family Support.....	87
Supporting Their Families .....	88
Limiting Choice .....	89
Be Proud of Who You Are .....	96
I Gotta Make It .....	97
Native Identity & Community.....	100
Native Identity .....	100
Skin Color .....	107
Urban Versus Rural Tribal Communities .....	110
Learning Our Culture.....	116
Native Values .....	121

Faith.....	121
Caring.....	121
Perseverance and Personal Pride.....	124
Thriving.....	128
Community.....	128
On-Campus Native Community.....	130
Home Feeling.....	135
External Factors.....	139
Academic Prep.....	139
Advice and Assistance with College Application Process.....	146
Advice.....	146
Assistance with College Choice and Applications.....	148
First-Generation.....	150
Previous Higher Education Experience.....	153
Major.....	155
Marketing.....	157
Campus Setting.....	158
Native College Athlete Recruitment.....	159
Summer Bridge Programs.....	160
Growth & Opportunities.....	161
Giving Back to Community.....	161
Medical and Human Services Career Fields.....	164
Personal Growth.....	168
Summary.....	170
<b>Chapter 6: Conclusion.....</b>	<b>171</b>
Introduction.....	171
Theoretical Implications.....	171
Four Themes of Native American College Choice.....	171
Family.....	172
Distance from Family.....	174
Native Identity and Community.....	176
External Factors.....	183
Growth and Opportunities.....	184
Implications for Understanding Native College Choice.....	187
Campus Experience.....	189
Perna's College Choice Conceptual Model.....	190
Human Capital and Sociological Theoretical Underpinnings.....	191
Habitus.....	194
School and Community Context.....	196
Higher Education Context.....	198
Social, Economic, & Policy Context.....	201
Implications.....	202
Implications for Practice.....	202
Supporting Native American Student Enrollment.....	202
Recruitment.....	203

Application Assistance.....	205
Advanced Coursework.....	205
More Native Faculty and Staff.....	206
Educating Non-Native Higher Education Officials.....	207
Native American Students on Campus.....	208
Native Community Support .....	208
Native Families.....	211
University and Tribal Community Relations .....	211
Alternative Higher Education Programs.....	212
Implications for Policy.....	213
Native Financial Aid Policy.....	213
Federal and State Policy .....	216
Future Research.....	218
Four Themes of Native American Student College Choice.....	218
More Native American Student Studies .....	220
Native American College Student Choice.....	220
Qualitative Studies.....	221
Native American Student Development Theories .....	222
North Carolina Institutions.....	225
Personal Reflection .....	226
Conclusion .....	227
REFERENCES .....	230
APPENDICES .....	245
Appendix A: Semi-Structured First Interview Protocol.....	246
Appendix B: Semi-Structured Second Interview Protocol.....	247
Appendix C: Interview Participant Consent Form.....	248
Appendix D: Gatekeeper Research Letter .....	251
Appendix E: Participant Recruitment Letter .....	252
Appendix F: Participant Follow-Up and Member Checking Letter.....	253
Appendix G: Theoretical Codebook .....	254
Appendix H: Axial/Open Codebook.....	256

**LIST OF TABLES**

Table 4.1 Participants..... 69

**LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 1.1 Perna’s Student College Choice Conceptual Model ..... 9  
Figure 2.1 Perna’s Student College Choice Conceptual Model ..... 36  
Figure 5.1 Native American Students’ Four Themes of College Choice ..... 84  
Figure 6.1 Native American Students’ Four Themes of College Choice .....172

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### Problem

Little is known about Native American college student choice or the stories of success from Native American students who have successfully matriculated to four-year institutions. College choice is a process in which a student chooses to attend a particular institution of higher education (Perna, 2006). Native American students are the least likely to attend and graduate from higher education across all racial and ethnic groups in the United States (Brayboy, Fann, Castagno, & Solyom, 2012; Larimore & McClellan, 2005; National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2017; Pavel, Skinner, Cahalan, Tippeconnic, & Stein, 1998). Native American students have had low enrollment and graduation rates from postsecondary education due to a history of Western assimilation in education, negative experiences for Native American students on college campuses, and oppressive policies toward Native tribes from the federal government (Brayboy et al., 2012; Carney, 1999). Although Native American students are participating in higher education in larger numbers, current college choice research has not included Native American students as their low participation rates in higher education hinders statistically significant findings using national data sets (Bergerson, Heiselt, & Aiken-Wisniewski, 2013; Perna, 2000a, 2000b, 2006; Shotton, Lowe, & Waterman, 2013; Wang-Yeung, 2015). Without the inclusion of Native American stories of empowerment, persistence, and success, it is unknown how current models of college choice apply to Native American students (Perna, 2006).

The federal government and private foundations such as the Lumina Foundation and the Gates Millennium Foundation emphasized increasing college completion rates (Perna & Jones, 2013). More underrepresented groups must enroll in higher education to accomplish this goal.

Perna and Jones (2013) highlight the need to improve the access and success of minority students in higher education to meet the degree completion goals. Historically, Native American students have been excluded from these calls for research expansion and college access (Perna & Jones, 2013). Hearing Native college students' college choice stories and understanding the factors that influence their decision to attend college may increase the likelihood that future generations of Native American students may pursue higher education.

The number of potential traditionally aged college students has increased. The United States Native population has increased from 237,000 to 1.2 million in the past century, with over 35.6 percent under the age of 18, meaning more traditional-aged Native American students can enroll in postsecondary education. As of 1990, only 9 percent of Native Americans had a bachelor or higher degree (Pavel et al., 1998), highlighting the disparity between eligible Native American student enrollment and degree completion. As Tierney (1992) noted,

Native Americans are one of the smallest ethnic minorities of the United States population, and American Indian students are among the most underrepresented groups in academe. There is little research concerning [why they do not have a larger presence on campus and their] undergraduate experiences in higher education. (p. 1)

By studying their studies of success, traditional, and non-traditional Native American students can learn how to navigate higher education and complete their degrees.

In 2009, only 195,551 Native American students were enrolled in United States colleges and universities (0.9 percent of all undergraduates). Of these, a large percentage (43.5 percent) attended two-year institutions (NCES, 2017). In 2013, the 2007 cohort of bachelor seeking students showed a disparity in graduation rates based on racial identity. Native and African American students had the lowest graduation rate of any demographic at 41 percent compared to

71 percent for Asian students and 59 percent graduation rate for all students (NCES, 2016).

Larimore and McClellan (2005) predicted the retention rate of Native Americans at 15 percent and an attrition rate as high as 93 percent. It appears that administrators in higher education are failing at the recruitment of Native American students and are not providing the support necessary for Native Americans to complete a degree while on campus (Brayboy, 2005b; Brayboy et al., 2012; Murphy & Zirkel, 2015). Exploring the Native college choice process of applying, matriculating, and succeeding in higher education provided a counter-narrative to previous research on Native American student completion rates.

Native American students, despite the statistics, are increasing their participation rates and graduating from college. Native American students are persisting and completing their degrees (Brayboy et al., 2012; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Larimore & McClellan, 2005). Native American students perform well in K-12 education, graduate, attend college, and successfully enter the workforce (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010; Maynor, 2011). Before the 1950s, enrollment for Native American students was less than 5,000 students. In the 1960s, Native American students increased from 2,000 to 7,000 and the number of bachelor's degrees awarded to Native American students tripled by 1968 (Brayboy et al., 2012). Knapp et al. (2008) found between 1976 to 2006, 182,000 Native American students enrolled in higher education (as cited in Brayboy et al., 2012), a dramatic increase, showing the strength and resilience of Native American students in the United States higher education. In academic research, a problem needs to be defined to rationalize a research study (Creswell, 2013) but not to the detriment of underrepresented populations who are successful despite overwhelming socio-economic, political, and historical factors. By hearing the empowering stories of Native American students,

higher education may be able to recruit better and serve the students who overcome the most barriers.

For instance, Native populations may be less inclined to enroll in higher education based on their history of disenfranchisement within higher education (Carney, 1999). Early colonial colleges such as Harvard University, the College of William and Mary, and Dartmouth College stated in their charters that they would educate Native Americans (Carney, 1999; Wright, 1989). Instead, the institutions attempted to assimilate Native Americans into Western culture and Christianity. European fundraising dollars educated white students instead of educating Native American students (Beck, 1999; Benham, 2003; Brayboy et al., 2012; Carney, 1999; McClellan, Tippeconnic Fox, & Lowe, 2005; Thelin, 2011). After the colonial period, Native Americans were relocated under federal treaties. Native American higher education changed during the self-determination period (1934-present) as indigenous populations were allowed to determine for themselves the best means of educating Native American students (Brayboy et al., 2012; Carney, 1999; McClellan et al., 2005; Reyhner & Eder, 2003).

Higher education researchers have attempted to study the factors influencing Native American student retention (Belgarde & Lore, 2003; Brayboy et al., 2012; Heavy Runner & DeCelles, 2002; Tierney, 1991; Tinto, 1993). In addition, several studies have focused on the unique educational experience and persistence of Native American students (Brayboy, 2004, 2005b; Brayboy et al., 2012; Collins, 2015; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Tierney, 1991, 1992). With fewer Native American students enrolling in higher education, exploring the stories of college choice of current students as well as means to keep them retained in postsecondary is warranted. However, few studies have researched the college choice process for Native American students (Nelson, 2015; Perna, 2006).

Understanding the college choice experience of Native American students who have enrolled in higher education has many benefits such as earning potential (Becker, 1993; Perna, 2005). From the 1992 cohort year, bachelor's degree completion has shown to increase the average income of graduates compared to high school graduates (Perna, 2005). In 1999, students with bachelor's degrees on average made 19 percent more than high school graduates (Perna, 2005). While 66 percent of Native Americans have a high school diploma, 50 percent live below the poverty line (Pavel et al., 1998). It is imperative that Native American students complete a degree to be successful in the modern economy (Perna, 2005).

From the literature, we know a little about why Native American students choose not to attend college. Native Americans may not see the need for a Western colonized higher education to be successful (Brayboy, 2005b; Brayboy et al., 2012; Carney, 1999; Nelson, 2015; Wilkins & Kiiwetinesiik Stark, 2010). Nelson (2015) highlighted that Native American students have individual goals for higher education and wish to contribute back to their tribal communities, a process known as Native nation building. She proposed that Native American students live in a *paradox* as they balance their individual and community goals when considering attending college (Nelson, 2015). Native American students add a different lens to perceived purposes of higher education, so their desires to attend may vary from other students in postsecondary education.

Less research has been done looking at experiences of Native American students who chose to attend higher education (Dillman, 2002; Fann, 2005; Nelson, 2015; Saggio, 2001; Starks, 2010). More research is necessary to improve Native American matriculation rates into higher education to increase the number of Native American students in higher education. Research has been predominantly focused on similar findings of how Native American students

feel isolated, have low retention rates, and perceive a lack of Native culture on college campuses (Brayboy, 2004, 2005a, 2005b; Brayboy et al., 2012; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Keene, 2014; Lowe, 2005; Martin, 2005; Oosahwe, 2008; Oxendine, Oxendine, & Minthorn, 2013; Peters, in press; Roettele-Bickel, 2005; Shotton et al., 2013; Sides, 2005; Tierney, 1991, 1992). Fewer studies have looked at Native American student college choice. Several studies only partially looked at college choice, and no studies have looked at Native populations on the East coast where most tribes are only state recognized but not federally recognized tribes (Fann, 2005; Nelson, 2015; Oakley, 2005; Saggio, 2001; Starks, 2010). Federal recognition and a Native American student's identity may play a role in their college choice.

### **Gaps in Literature**

Until recently, research on Native American students in higher education was almost nonexistent. Only in the past fifteen years has attention been paid to the smallest student demographic within United States higher education. With low enrollments (Brayboy et al., 2012; Pavel et al., 1998), Native American students are commonly left out of national data set studies (such as the National Longitudinal Survey; Perna, 2006), including current models of college choice (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Perna, 2000a, 2000b; Shotton et al., 2013). The recent publication, *Beyond the Asterisk* (Shotton et al., 2013), highlighted the disparity of Native American students in higher education research, as their numbers create statistical outliers that are often removed from quantitative analysis. As they are removed from analysis, there is a gap in the literature about their storied experiences and how they chose to attend higher education.

This qualitative study explored Native American students' choice to attend college. Qualitative methods are best when researchers analyze smaller populations and hear narrative

stories of participants (Bold, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Riessman, 1993, 2008). Studies using qualitative methods have been successful in discovering Native American student experiences to counter dominant narratives (Bamberg & Andrews, 2004; Lowe, 2005; Nelson, 2015; Riessman, 2008; Roettele-Bickel, 2005; Sides, 2005). Collecting and sharing Indigenous stories counters the mainstream historical narrative taught in the United States, providing a complete perspective (Miller & Riding In, 2001). In this study, a narrative approach was used to discover the stories of Native American students who had chosen to attend four-year colleges in North Carolina (Bold, 2012).

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study examined the college choice narratives of Native American students in North Carolina using Perna's college choice conceptual framework (2006). Perna (2006) called for future research to extend her conceptual model of college choice to other populations. Native Americans and other demographics whose sample populations were too small to make significant findings. "For example, reflecting their small numbers in the U.S. population, such national databases as the NELS include too few American Indians/Alaskan Natives for detailed examinations of their college-choice decisions and behaviors" (Perna, 2006, p. 146). Further, random sampling of students does not produce significant statistical findings. Thomas (2004) studied where different racial identities that lived in Texas submitted their SAT scores. Although Native American students were included in the model, no statistical significance could be concluded in the results due to the small population size (.07 percent; Thomas, 2004). This study responded to this call for research using a qualitative approach due to the small number of Native American students in national datasets (Perna, 2006; Shotton et al., 2013). Qualitative methods are appropriate when not enough is known about a population and provides an in-depth

understanding of experiences for underrepresented populations that are understudied due to limits to national datasets (Creswell, 2013, 2014).

### **Perna's College Choice Model**

Perna's (2006) college choice conceptual model was used in this study. Perna (2006) created her conceptual model by synthesizing past literature based on theoretical concepts of human capital theory (Becker, 1975, 1993) and the sociological model of status attainment (Baum & Payea, 2004). According to human capital theory regarding student choice, students will consider feasible options (but not necessarily all alternatives) of colleges and then select an institution that will provide them the most net benefit compared to the price of attendance and net loss of foregone earnings (DesJardin & Toutkoushian, 2005). The sociological approach also highlights how socioeconomic characteristics influence student decisions, as a student may wish to increase their social status by attending higher education (Perna, 2006).

Perna's (2006) college choice model is a four-layered decision-making process model involving a student's habitus; school and community context; higher education context; and social, economic, and policy context (see Figure 1.1). These four factors are significant for a student to choose to attend postsecondary education (Perna, 2006).

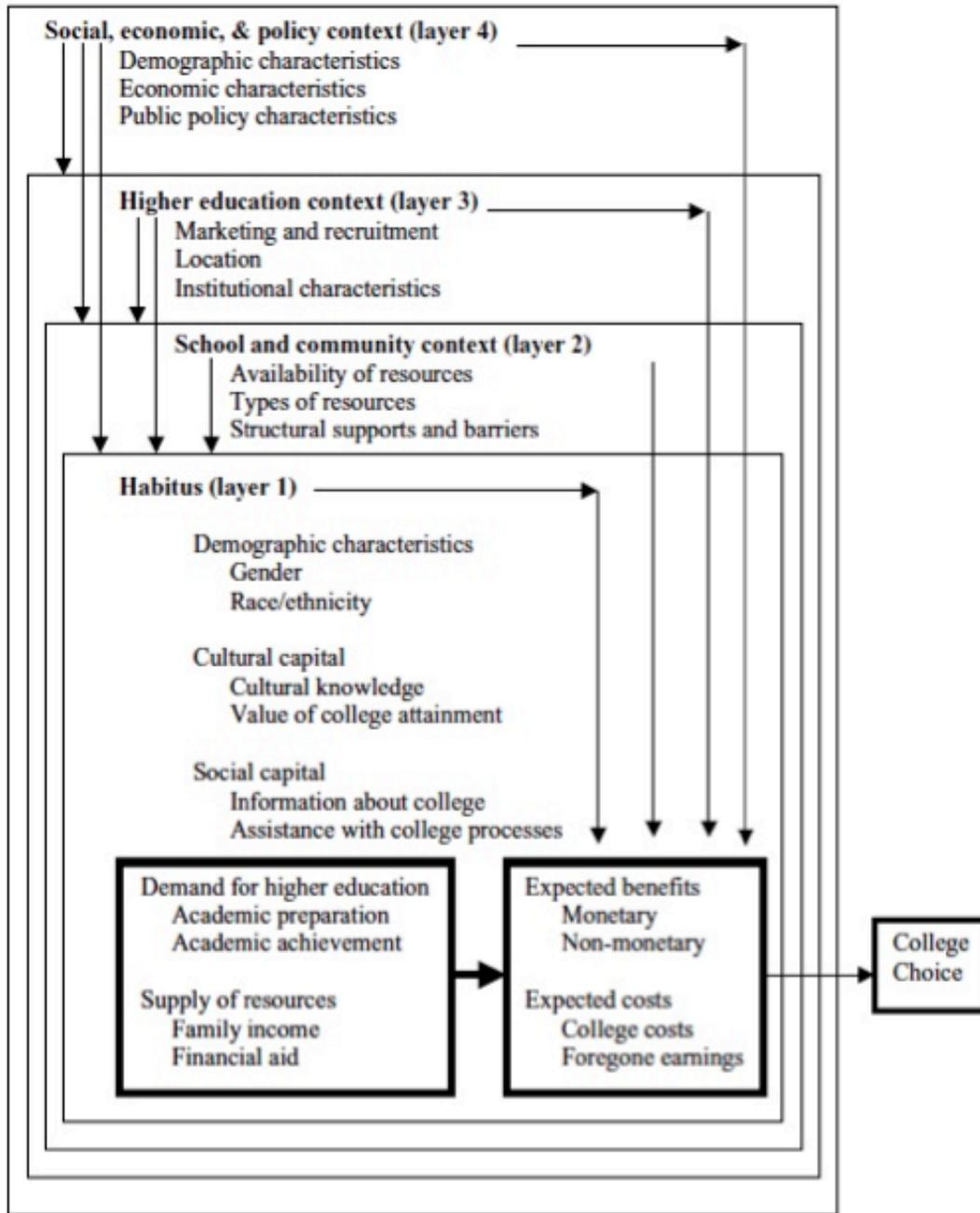


Figure 1.1:

*Perna's Student College Choice Conceptual Model.*

**Note.** From "Studying College Access and Choice: A Proposed Conceptual Model," by Laura Perna, 2006, *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*, 21, p. 117. Copyrighted 2006 by Springer. Reprinted with permission.

In this study, Perna's (2006) conceptual framework was used to see if Native American students discussed similar factors in their stories of how they chose to attend higher education.

The few studies that have partially explored Native American college choice have not used Perna's conceptual framework to see if the model captures the experiences of Native American student populations (Dillman, 2002; Fann, 2005; Nelson, 2015; Perna, 2006; Saggio, 2001; Starks, 2010). Dillman (2002) did not have a clear theoretical framework and focused predominantly on current Native American student experiences. Fann (2005), Nelson (2015), and Starks (2010) used cultural wealth, Native nation building, and culture of life frameworks in their studies to focus on the collective identities of Native American students. These studies are necessary for reflecting Native culture but are not as connected to current college choice literature, creating a gap between Indigenous scholars work and current research on college choice. Further, other than Nelson (2015), the Indigenous scholars did not provide a rationale for not using current college choice models (Dillman, 2002; Fann, 2005; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Nelson, 2015; Perna, 2006; Saggio, 2001; Starks, 2010).

However, research from Indigenous scholars has shown connections between their work and Perna's (2006). Saggio (2001) highlighted how institutional effects could influence Native American student choice, which would fit within Perna's (2006) third layer. Nelson's (2015) highlighted how Native American students make decisions similar to Perna's (2006) habitus layer. In this study, Perna's model (2006), in connection with supporting literature on Native American student college experiences (Austin, 2005; Benally, 2004; Brayboy, 2005b; Brayboy et al., 2012; Green & Forster, 2003; Keene, 2014; Murphy & Zirkel, 2015; Nelson, 2015; Oxendine et al., 2013; Peters, in press; Saggio, 2001; St. Germaine, 2008), was used to understand Native college choice in North Carolina.

## Definitions

- **Native American** (or Native peoples, American Indian, Indigenous): are all peoples within North America who identify as descendants from populations in the Americas before Western colonization (Oakley, 2005; Pavel et al., 1998). This may include “any person having origins in any of the original peoples of North America and maintaining cultural identification through tribal affiliation or community recognition” (Pavel et al., 1998, p. xxix). Native Americans are comprised of over 600 different tribal, cultural, and ethnic identities. In the context of this study, a Native American did not need to be from a federally recognized tribe (which are referred to as *nonrecognized*; Wilkins & Kiiwetinesiik Stark, 2010). Several tribes are still seeking recognition by the federal government although they are recognized by state governments (including seven of the eight tribes of North Carolina; Oakley, 2005; Richardson, 2005). For this study, a Native American is an individual or people who self-identifies as Native American as their predominant racial identity. Native Americans are also an eclectic people from different tribal nations and do not exist as a single racial minority (Brayboy et al., 2012; Oakley, 2005). The terms Native American, Indigenous, and American Indian will be used interchangeably as these terms are recognized to mean the same population (Brayboy et al., 2012). However, I will use the term American Indian sparingly as many Native communities find the term reflective of the continued colonialism in American society and the term simplifies the vast nations within the United States (Wilkins & Kiiwetinesiik Stark, 2010).
- **Native American Student**: students who are enrolled in higher education who primarily identify as a Native American (Brayboy et al., 2012).

- **College Student Choice:** refers to the process of a prospective college student choosing to attend a college or university within the United States. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) defined a three-stage process of college choice as predisposition, search, and choice. In this study, Perna's (2006) conceptual model of college choice follows this definition of college choice through a four-tiered decision-making process (see Figure 1.1).

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to learn the stories of Native American college students who chose to attend four-year institutions in North Carolina. North Carolina was purposefully selected (Creswell, 2014) as more Native Americans live in North Carolina than any other state east of the Mississippi River (Oakley, 2005; Richardson, 2005; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), and past studies on Native American student college choice focused on other areas of the United States (Fann, 2005; Nelson 2015; Saggio, 2001; Starks, 2010). This study aims to develop themes of college choice for North Carolinian Native Americans using a narrative design (Bold, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Riessman, 1993, 2008).

### **Research Question**

To explore how Native American students chose to attend four-year colleges in North Carolina, one primary research question guided this study:

What were the storied experiences of Native American students from North Carolina when they chose to attend college?

### **Significance**

Native American students are the least likely to attend higher education of any subpopulation (NCES, 2016, 2017). From 1993 to 2013, although other underrepresented populations increased their participation rates in higher education, Indigenous populations

remained at one percent of all college students (NCES, 2016). Many Native American students who do attend higher education have continued negative experiences on campus and do not feel at home on college campuses (Brayboy, 2005b; Brayboy et al., 2012; Carney, 1999; Murphy & Zirkel, 2015; Peters, in press). In addition, about half of the Native Americans in the United States live below the poverty line and reside in rural, under-resourced communities (Pavel et al., 1998). Low socioeconomic status (SES) families are less likely to apply, enroll, and graduate from college (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Heller, 2009; McDonough, 1997). With few Native American students attending, a history of negative experiences, and socioeconomic barriers, Native Americans have less access to and are less likely to pursue higher education. By exploring the empowered stories (Bold, 2012) of Native American students who decided to enroll in higher education, more Native American students may be inspired to attend postsecondary education as they learn counter-narratives of their peers.

In North Carolina, only 34 percent of students who come from under-resourced high schools have a bachelor's degree six years after completing high school (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009). Several attended less rigorous institutions, which have lower degree completion rates (Bowen et al., 2009). As other minority populations have been found to use social and human capital factors in their decisions to enroll in college (Perna, 2000b), less is known about how Native American students decide to attend college. By exploring the stories of how Native American students in North Carolina decided to attend college, campuses may be able to recruit more Native American students and be more welcoming to Indigenous populations. Higher education has not held its commitments to educate Native American students since the colonial period (Carney, 1999). Discovering how Native American students

chose to attend college can assist in providing more robust educational opportunities that Native tribes have been promised since the colonial period.

### **Summary**

This study explored the college choice process stories of Native American students in North Carolina. Using Perna's (2006) college choice conceptual model (see Figure 1.1), this study determined how Native American students in North Carolina chose to attend four-year institutions.

The remainder of this study is divided into five chapters. Chapter II is a review of the literature that provides a framework for the study based on Native American student history, experiences, and current college choice research. In Chapter III, the narrative methodology behind the research question is explained. Chapter IV provides a summary of the Native participants in the study. Chapter V highlights the major findings and emergent themes from the participants' stories. Chapter VI discusses the findings in relation to the research question, provides examples of policy and practice changes for college administrators, and concludes with recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

In the following section, a review of the literature on Native American students will define the framework of the analysis involving three concepts: Native American higher education history, current Native American student experiences, and student college choice. These concepts provide a conceptual framework for understanding the stories of Native American students' desire to enroll in postsecondary education.

### Native American Higher Education History

Providing context for Indigenous education in the United States is important to understand Native Americans' current perceptions of higher education (Carney, 1999). Major works on the history of higher education by Rudolph (1962) and Thelin (2011) provided a historical narrative of higher education but only briefly mentioned Native American students. Rudolph (1962) focused primarily on established institutions and students from privileged backgrounds. Thelin (2011) added African American and female students to Rudolph's narrative but barely mentioned Native American students even though one of the primary objectives in his narrative was to add minority perspectives.

**Colonial period.** One narrative history of Indigenous higher education was by Carney (1999). Carney (1999) identified three periods of Native American higher education: colonial, federal, and self-determination. The colonial period (1492-1778) described how colonial colleges were in part founded on assimilating Native Americans into Western culture after Columbus landed in 1492 (Carney, 1999; Roettele-Bickel, 2005). According to Carney (1999), three colonial colleges formed on with the concept of educating and assimilating Native American students into Western culture in their charters. Harvard University, the College of William and

Mary, and Dartmouth College were chartered to educate Native Americans, but in practice, used the ideals of educating Native American students as a fundraising tool with European philanthropists (Carney, 1999; Roettele-Bickel, 2005; Wright, 1989). Occum, the Native “black son” of Dartmouth President Eleazar Wheelock, fundraised for Dartmouth’s American Indian education in Europe. Returning to New Hampshire three years later, Occum discovered Dartmouth taught only 40 Native American students compared to the 112 White students supported by his fundraising. Similarly, Harvard only graduated two Native American students from 1636 to 1776 (Carney, 1999).

**Federal period.** Marginalization continued in Carney’s (1999) second period, the federal period (1778-1934). The federal period consisted of treaties and agreements between Native tribes and the United States government. Tribes were relocated to Indian reservations in the western half of the U. S. with agreements for funding and education. Higher education opportunities for Native Americans remained low during this period, as government officials found educational programs for them unsuccessful (Carney, 1999; Roettele-Bickel, 2005). Further, little financial aid was offered to Native American students, which prevented access (Brayboy et al., 2012). Instead of higher education, government officials offered assimilation-based primary, boarding school education. Focused on assimilation, Native American students were taught to adopt Western culture and accept lower class status in society (Carney, 1999).

**Self-determination period.** According to some historians, the self-determination period began with the Indian Reorganization Act (Wheeler-Howard Bill) of 1934 (Beck, 1999; Benham, 2003; Carney, 1999). The Indian Reorganization Act allowed tribes to create formal governments and end federal land-allotment policies. Carney’s (1999) self-determination period (1934-present) highlighted a change in federal policy that allowed Native tribes to govern and

educate their people. During the self-determination period, there has been a shift in the way Native American communities are perceived by the federal government. Indigenous communities were recognized as proud people, and a valued mixture of tribal cultures as their cultural, identity, and values began to be celebrated (Carney, 1999; McClellan et al., 2005; Roettele-Bickel, 2005).

During this period, access to financial aid helped increase the enrollment of Native American students in higher education (Brayboy et al., 2012). Aid through the New Deal, the G. I. Bill and grant programs from the Bureau of Indian Affairs has provided additional financial resources to Native American students to attend college. From the 1950s to the 1960s, enrollment of Native American students increased from 2,000 to 7,000 students and the number of bachelor's degrees awarded to Native American students tripled by 1968 (Brayboy et al., 2012).

***Tribal colleges and universities.*** Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) were also formed to serve Native American students on tribal reservations during this period (Benham, 2003; Boyer, 1997; Brayboy et al., 2012; Carney, 1999). Over half of the TCUs in the United States are two-year community colleges. In 2003, over 30,000 Native American students enrolled in TCUs (Martin, 2005). Native American students who attend TCUs do not have the cultural disconnect that Native American students feel at Primarily White Institutions (PWIs) and Ivy League institutions (Brayboy, 2004, 2005a), as they formed with Indigenous cultures in mind (Martin, 2005). As a result, a large disparity exists between the graduation rates of Native American students at TCUs and PWIs.

In 2003, TCUs had an 86 percent persistence rate due to the some using tribal critical race theory-based programs on campuses such as using tribal iconography, peer mentoring, and

bridge programs for Native American students (Brayboy, 2005b; Martin, 2005). Tribal critical race theory recognizes the colonization imposed on Native tribes and promotes the use of Native values and culture on college campuses (Brayboy, 2005b). However, as many Native American students are not enrolled in TCUs (Martin, 2005) and attend institutions that offer little recognition of Indigenous culture (Brayboy, 2004, 2005b; Brayboy et al., 2012), this study explored how Native American students choose between multiple types of four-year institutions in North Carolina that vary in their outreach to Native communities.

***Indigenous education.*** For 400 years, U.S. higher education educated Indigenous populations but has not considered their various cultures, values, and faiths. Higher education for Indigenous populations was not in Native interests but assimilation into Western culture (Carney, 1999). Many tribes are skeptical of Western education due to the history of assimilation-based education provided by the U.S. government (Brayboy et al., 2012; Carney, 1999). Additionally, Native American students are unsure about leaving their communities where they will become a minority at many institutions (Brayboy, 2005a, 2005b; Brayboy et al., 2012; Collins, 2015; Martin, 2005; Peters, in press; Sides, 2005). As some Native American students grow up in majority Native communities, moving to a college campus can be a difficult transition as they feel that they and their culture does not belong on campus (Collins, 2015; Martin, 2005; Peters, in press; Sides, 2005). When analyzing the stories of Native American students' college choice, one must consider the historical assimilation and annihilation of Indigenous populations in the United States and their negative perceptions of Western education (Brayboy et al., 2012; Carney, 1999).

## **Native American Student Experiences**

Native Americans are not members of a single identity but a mixture of “tribal membership, ... family culture and life-ways (modern, traditional, or pluralistic), and whether the student was in the majority or minority population of their community as a child” (Sides, 2005, p. 11). “Modern life-ways” refers to Indigenous families that live modern, Western society lives. Indigenous communities who live based on their cultural heritage are considered “traditional,” and several Native Americans live pluralistically between both cultures (Nelson, 2015; Sides, 2005). Native American students deal with several forms of oppression on college campuses, including cultural invisibility due to their low enrollments and institutionalized racism. It is important to recognize that some Native American students come from reservations or communities where Indigenous populations are the majority. Some of these students have adjustment issues going to a minority status on college campuses (Sides, 2005). Lacking a connection to their culture or Native peers, Native American students can feel lost and unwelcome on college campuses when they become a minority population at PWIs, which may influence other Native American students’ decision to attend college (Brayboy, 2005a, 2005b; Brayboy et al., 2012; Collins, 2015; Peters, in press; Sides, 2005).

**Native experiences at PWIs.** Until recently, the experience of Native American students at PWIs was relatively unknown. Lowe (2005) addressed this issue by summarizing qualitative studies in which she analyzed articles and student interviews to learn the storied experiences of Native American students on PWI campuses. Lowe (2005) found that even second-generation Native American students encounter influences to go home to their families multiple times a year. Even with full financial support, multiple support networks, and faculty mentors, students could not counter the desire to return to their home communities regularly to be with their

relatives and participate in tribal ceremonies and other activities. Native American students felt separated from the majority culture of the United States and wished to visit their families where they were culturally accepted. Combating Western majority culture, Native American students became depressed at PWIs, as they felt pressured to assimilate with the dominant Western culture. Not seeing a need for Western perspectives, Native American students believed they did not need to complete a four-year degree (Lowe, 2005).

Strayhorn (2012) stated all students seek a sense of belonging on college campuses. “Sense of belonging refers to students’ perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers)” (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 3). Students enter universities with a basic need to belong and based on those feelings have a positive or negative experience. A sense of belonging has also been found to influence college choice (Reay, Davies, David, & Ball, 2001). Reay et al. (2001) found students did not consider all higher education institutions, even ones closer to home, as they felt they would not fit in at those institutions. Students look for institutions where they were seeing other students like them and not feel like a minority (Reay et al., 2001)

Institutions have created summer bridge programs to improve students’ sense of belonging by building connections and easing the transition to college, especially for underrepresented students at PWIs (Strayhorn, 2011). Strayhorn (2011) found that summer bridge programs have positive effects on students’ self-efficacy and sense of belonging on campuses. For Native American students, participating in summer bridge programs focused on Native identity has shown to have positive outcomes and eased the transition for new Native American students (Brayboy, 2005b; Martin, 2005). However, the literature on sense of

belonging and summer bridge programs (Brayboy, 2005b; Martin, 2005; Reay et al., 2001; Strayhorn, 2011, 2012) has not investigated if these factors influence Native American students' college choice. By exploring the stories of Native American students, how Native explain their sense of belonging impacts their college choice can be explored.

**Native culture.** These cultural influences on Native American students often outweigh other predictors of student retention that have traditionally led to higher student success (Tierney, 1992). Roettele-Bickel (2005) found in her qualitative study of Native American alumni that Native American students who became biculturally-aware were more likely to graduate because they could relate, understand, and navigate both Native and Western cultures. Unfortunately, in many cases, there are few Native role models for prospective American Indian students to connect with within postsecondary education (Brayboy et al., 2012). With greater Native representation, more resources could be allocated to assist Native American students, as they process their dual identities of being a college student and a Native American (Nelson, 2015). However, with current low enrollments at many institutions, universities do not see cause to designate resources for a small percentage of a college's population (NCES, 2016, 2017; Pavel et al., 1998).

Brayboy (2005a) found that on some campuses, faculty had difficulty appreciating Native cultures and traditions. These cultural traditions had impacts inside the classroom as Native American students learned most effectively with Native pedagogy. American Indians have a tradition of passing knowledge verbally through stories (Brayboy, 2005a). Sides (2005) found faculty are often off-put by Native American students, as they often will not take notes in class. To appreciate the learning styles of Indigenous populations, college faculty and staff need to become more aware of the identity and cultural differences of American Indians such as

storytelling, family-centered, community-focused, pluralistic over individualistic, feeling isolated at PWIs, and historical perspective on Western education (Brayboy et al., 2012; Collins, 2015; Nelson, 2015; Sides, 2005; Tierney, 1999). By appreciating the cultural differences between Native American students and traditional Western culture, perceived barriers between faculty and Native American students can improve. Tierney (1999) highlighted how appreciating the cultural contributions of students with color add to college campuses and improves their success within higher education. Institutions should better explore means of helping Native American students connect with their campuses, appreciate their cultural identities to see how that may impact the experiences of current students, and the willingness of other Native American students to attend higher education.

**Feelings of home.** Collins (2015) completed a case study of Lumbee students at a southeastern, research-I, PWI. He found the support of Indigenous faculty, staff, and students as well as the support of Indigenous community members, representation through Native organizations, and inclusive curriculum provided a sense of place for Native American students (Collins, 2015). Collins' (2015) sense of place may relate to Brayboy's *home-like* feeling on college campuses (Brayboy, 2005b; Brayboy et al., 2012; Murphy & Zirkel, 2015). American Indian students have a greater comfort level on college campuses that expressed Native values, creating a feeling of home (Brayboy, 2005b; Brayboy et al., 2012). Native values include Indigenous-based pedagogy, Native spaces, and recognition of American Indian communities close to the university (Brayboy et al., 2012). With more Native Americans on campus and a connection to Indigenous culture, Collins (2015) highlighted a means for institutions to be more inviting to Native applicants.

Collins' (2015) work also connected with the concepts highlighted by Oxendine et al. (2013) and Peters (in press) that Native American student organizations have positive influences for Native American students' current college experiences. Native fraternity and sorority life organizations on college campuses provide a home atmosphere for Native American students, especially at PWIs (Brayboy, 2005b; Oxendine et al., 2013; Peters, in press). In this study, Native culture and the presence of Native communities on campus will be considered within the Perna's (2006) conceptual model as these opportunities may be highlighted in participants' stories.

This study focused on Native American students' college choice stories through the experiences of current Native American students. Findings may influence higher education aspirations for future Native American students. Nelson (2015) found that current Native American students' college experiences were strong factors in reflecting on their college choice and may positively or negatively influence other Indigenous families and friends' decision to attend higher education. If prospective Native American students do not feel welcomed on a college campus based on previous Native American student experiences, then it may influence their decision to attend higher education. With most Indigenous research focused on current student experiences (Brayboy, 2005a, 2005b; Brayboy et al., 2012; Collins, 2015; Lowe, 2005; Murphy & Zirkel, 2015; Nelson, 2015; Oxendine et al., 2013; Peters, in press; Roettelle-Bickel, 2005; Sides, 2005), a study focusing on Native college choice will broaden current understanding of Native American students' K-16 educational journey as well as fill the current research gap between college choice and Native American student research.

As there is no current model of how Native American students choose to attend college and the influences that impact their choice, this study addressed this literature gap by exploring

the lived experiences of Native American students who chose to attend higher education.

Through their stories, connections between current Native American students' experiences on campus and prospective Native American students' college choice were revealed. Knowledge of how Native American students chose to attend college may provide insights to administrators that could increase enrollment of Native Americans, providing a larger Indigenous peer group for students to connect with on PWI campuses.

### **Student College Choice**

A review of college choice research must first be explored to understand how Native American students' history and experiences in higher education impact their college choice. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) defined students' college choice as a three-staged process of predisposition, search, and choice. Predisposition refers to the predisposed feelings about attending college by a potential student based on their educational and occupational goals (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Perna, 2006; Terenzini, Cabrera, & Bernal, 2001). The second stage refers to a student's search for information about colleges and universities. The last stage refers to the selection of their preferred institution (Bergerson et al., 2013; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1993; Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, & Rhee, 1997; Long, 2004; Perna, 2006; Terenzini et al., 2001).

Research on college choice is important for higher education's enrollment managers, so they can understand how to attract prospective students as well as project enrollment based on several factors (Paulsen, 1990). According to Paulsen (1990), changes in prospective student demographics, job market opportunities, opportunity costs, growth of military servicemen and women, direct costs, competition, location, and curriculum changes influence the enrollment patterns of postsecondary education in the United States. External and internal factors within

higher education can impact the number and type of student enrollment. Institutions should focus their marketing strategies to highlight the geographic, demographic, and institutional characteristics of their universities to attract applicants as well as diversify the incoming student class (Paulsen, 1990).

Previous research has indicated that students' college choice is strongly influenced by students' parents, home communities, racial identity, and the family's SES (Bergerson et al., 2013; Bowen et al., 2009; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Manski & Wise, 1983; Maramba, Palmer, Yull, & Ozuna, 2015; Means, Clayton, Conzelmann, Baynes, & Umbach, 2016; Murphy & Zikel, 2015; Paulsen, 1990; Perna, 2000a, 2000b, 2006; Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, & Perna, 2008; Thomas, 1998). Parental involvement in a student's K-12 education and desire for them to attend higher education increased the likelihood of a student applying to college (Bergerson et al., 2013; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Perna, 2000b; Thomas, 1998). Minority populations and female students especially are more likely to apply for college if they have parent or mentor support (Bergerson et al., 2013; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Maramba et al., 2015; Perna, 2000b; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008). For minority and low-SES populations, knowledge of financial aid, college environments, the application process, and a sense of belonging also increased the likelihood of enrolling (Maramba et al., 2015; Means et al., 2016; Murphy & Zikel, 2015). As Native American students identify as members of an underrepresented population, many come from a low-SES background and lack Native American mentors on campus (Brayboy et al., 2012; Pavel et al., 1998). These factors may impact their college choice as well.

**Underrepresented Students' College Choice.** Researchers have investigated if the student's decision process to attend college varied across subpopulations that are traditionally underrepresented (Freeman, 2005; Gonzalez, 2008; Hillman, 2016; Means et al., 2015; Tierney

& Venegas, 2006). These studies highlighted that underrepresented populations are affected by additional factors compared to majority White populations in the United States when it comes to college choice (Freeman, 2005; Gonzalez, 2008; Hillman, 2016; Means et al., 2015; Tierney & Venegas, 2006).

For example, Latinx and African American college choice has been recently explored. Gonzalez (2008) investigated why Hispanic students are more likely to enroll in two-year institutions. She found that due to low-SES factors, even with positive predictors such as high-test scores and teacher encouragement, Latinx students were less likely to enroll in four-year institutions compared to White students (Gonzalez, 2008). Freeman (2005) found the influences of family and school to be the biggest predictors of college choice for African Americans. African American families are either automatically planning to attend college, encouraged to go beyond the current family's SES status, or lacked positive family influences (Freeman, 2005).

The geographic location of underrepresented populations may also impact a student's willingness to attend postsecondary education (Hillman, 2016; Means et al., 2015). Hillman (2016) using county and community zone data found communities with larger populations of Hispanics and records of low educational attainment had the fewest local colleges and university options for students to choose. Meanwhile, communities with predominantly Asian and White populations had more local institutions to attend (Hillman, 2016). With less local options, prospective students would have to travel further away from home to attend higher education, which may be a strong negative factor, especially if they are from working-class families (Hillman, 2016; Perna, 2010).

One study using Perna's (2006) college choice model found that African American students from rural communities formed their context of college from a rural perspective (Means

et al., 2015). The students did not know how to apply to schools even with family support, and they highlighted barriers to financial and academic opportunity in their communities (Means et al., 2015). As many Native American students come from rural, low-SES tribal communities and are an underrepresented population within higher education (Brayboy et al., 2012; Pavel et al., 1998), it is necessary to explore how Native American students chose to attend higher education as well.

**Native American Students' College Choice.** Research exploring Native American students' college choice is limited (Dillman, 2002; Nelson, 2015; Perna, 2006). As national dataset studies often exclude American Indians, the use of qualitative methods can bridge this gap in the literature (Shotton et al., 2013). Perna (2006) highlighted how the uses of qualitative methods such as life histories are effective in giving “voice to the experiences of students from underrepresented groups and for developing understanding [of] the barriers to college enrollment for these individuals” (p. 122). Further, she called for research on Native American student college choice, as her conceptual model may not apply to American Indian students (Perna, 2006).

Current knowledge on Native American student college choice has come from recent dissertations focused on American Indian student experiences (Dillman, 2002; Fann, 2015; Keene, 2014; Nelson, 2015; Saggio, 2010; Starks, 2010). For instance, Dillman (2002) conducted a qualitative study of Native American student choice in New Mexico from community, tribal, and research institutions. She found Native American students who decided to enroll in postsecondary education were influenced by: potential skill development, escaping their current life pattern, participating in bridge programs, pursuing education for education's sake,

becoming a Native role model, family encouragement, and disproving stereotypes (Dillman, 2002).

Other recent studies have focused on rural California students, preparatory programs, and institutional culture (Cross, Day, Gogliotti, & Pung, 2013; Fann, 2015; Keene, 2014; Saggio, 2010). Fann (2015) found that rural California Native American students are apprehensive to seek higher education due to students having to leave their tribal communities. They also seek knowledge from campus administrators for information on higher education and rely on their tribe's financial support to afford tuition. Keene (2014) highlighted that preparatory programs that provide education on the college application process, as well as strong mentoring, could increase a Native American student's chances of applying to and persisting at their institution. Saggio (2010) discovered through focus groups that Native American students look for Indigenous culture and peers on campuses to feel comfortable. Without a feeling of tribal identity on campus, Native American students are less likely to enroll, as they do not feel comfortable or welcome on campus (Brayboy et al., 2012; Saggio, 2010). Cross et al. (2013) found similar barriers to recruiting Native American students at the graduate level: lack of Indigenous faculty and mentors, lacking opportunities to serve Indigenous communities after completing their degree, obligations at home, feelings of isolation, and lack of indigenous culture on college campuses.

Less research has been conducted to explore the experiences of Native American students outside the Southwestern United States. Starks (2010) explored Native college choice in the Midwest by interviewing fourteen Native alums from either postsecondary or vocational schools using a phenomenological framework. The Indigenous participants shared common experiences implicating factors for attending or not attending postsecondary education. Female participants

highlighted the desire to rise out of poverty, self-determination, supportive communities, and family ties as reasons to attend higher education. Meanwhile, Indigenous men described negative factors informing their decisions. Factors such as lack of motivation, lack of academic preparedness, poverty, and substance abuse were primary factors in Native males' decision-making process (Starks, 2010). More research is needed from Eastern U. S. Indigenous populations (Brayboy et al., 2012; Collins, 2015) as well to represent the varying Native tribes in the United States in understanding Native American student college choice.

*Nelson's Paradox.* Nelson (2015) developed the most current understanding of Native American students' college choice. Native American students in the Southwestern region of the United States chose to attend college from a perspective of building up their community (Nelson, 2015), or through Native nation building (Brayboy et al., 2012). In her study, she conducted 34 interviews with Native alumni in a qualitative case study exploring college choice, college experience, and financial aid. Nelson (2015) found three major findings: Native American students do not perceive the college-going process as a linear process, attending college is a collective versus individual experience, and collective/tribal identity influenced their decision to attend higher education.

Nelson (2015) described a cyclical process connecting a Native American student's college choice and their experiences as students, as a means to understanding Native American students' college choice. The college-going process is not linear for American Indian students (Nelson, 2015). Instead, the cyclical process is constantly reevaluated over time as the students experience higher education and balance the paradox of their Native and individual identities (Nelson, 2015).

Nelson (2015) highlighted the *paradox* of individual and community-based decisions made by Native American students in their college choice. Nelson's (2015) *paradox* also connects with Roettele-Bickel's (2005) concept of bicultural awareness as Native American students navigate between two different communities and dueling cultural influences. Nelson's (2015) *paradox* combined other Indigenous scholars' research which described the importance of the Native American student college experience and Native nation building as factors in American Indians' perceptions of higher education (Brayboy, 2005b; Brayboy et al., 2012; Keene, 2014; Nelson, 2015; St. Germaine, 2008).

Native American college choice has not been extensively explored as few studies have explored the stories of Native American students' choice to attend higher education (Nelson, 2015; Perna, 2006). Previous studies have connected with Native American students' college choice, but Native choice as a primary topic has not been studied specifically (Austin, 2005; Benally, 2004; Brayboy, 2005b; Brayboy et al., 2012; Collins, 2015; Keene, 2014; Murphy & Zirkel, 2015; Oxendine et al., 2013; Perna, 2006; Peters, in press; St. Germaine, 2008).

To address this gap in the literature, the following study used Perna's college choice conceptual framework (2006) as an initial model of understanding Native college choice. The few studies that have explored in part Native American student college choice (Dillman, 2002; Fann, 2005; Nelson, 2015; Starks, 2010) have not tested Perna's conceptual model (2006). For instance, Dillman (2002) focused predominantly on current American Indian student experiences versus a particular theoretical framework. Fann (2005), Nelson (2015), and Starks (2010) used cultural wealth, Native nation building, and culture of life frameworks (respectfully) to focus on the collective identities of Native American students. These studies were necessary in reflecting Native culture but are not connected to current college choice literature, creating a gap between

Indigenous scholars' work and current research on college choice (Dillman, 2002; Fann, 2005; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Paulsen, 1990; Perna, 2006; Saggio, 2001; Starks, 2010).

In the following section, Perna's (2006) model is discussed in detail as well as its connections to Indigenous research (Austin, 2005; Benally, 2004; Brayboy, 2005b; Brayboy et al., 2012; Collins, 2015; Keene, 2014; Murphy & Zirkel, 2015; Oxendine et al., 2013; Peters, in press; St. Germaine, 2008) The model will help organize Native American students' stories into narrative themes (Bold, 2012; Reissman, 2008) to understand Native American college choice.

### **Perna's College Student Choice Conceptual Model**

Perna's (2006) college choice conceptual model was used in this study. Perna (2006) created her conceptual model by synthesizing past literature. Her model is based on theoretical concepts of human capital theory (Becker, 1975, 1993) and the sociological model of status attainment (Baum & Payea, 2004), which were missing from Hossler and Gallagher's model (1987). In the following sections, the theoretical underpinnings of Perna's model (2006) are defined and explored.

### **Human Capital Theory**

Human capital theory is an economic theory of investment behavior (Becker, 1975, 1993). Becker (1975, 1993) defined human capital theory as a mixture of on job training and skill development with education to increase earning potential over one's lifetime. Human capital compared to other forms of capital is "embedded or embodied in the person investing" (Becker, 1975, p. 98) as they are the benefactors of the investment. A student produces human capital by using time and goods to attend schooling and training (Becker, 1975, 1993). Younger generations increase earnings at a higher rate if training and education occur earlier in life, and compared to older generations, have a longer period to gain back foregone earnings (Becker,

1975). Foregone earnings provide an economic incentive for traditional-aged students to complete their education. Even though they will lose income during this period, they may potentially gain more wealth over their lifetime (Becker, 1975).

DesJardin and Toutkoushian (2005) summarized human capital theory in regard to education:

Human capital can be thought of as the collective skills and attributes that enable individuals to become more productive in the workplace. This human capital is either endowed at birth or acquired through training and education; hence the connection between human capital and education is referred to by economists as an investment in human capital. (p. 216)

According to human capital theory on student choice, students will consider feasible options (but not necessarily all alternatives) of colleges and then select an institution that will provide them the most net benefit compared to the price of attendance and net loss of foregone earnings (DesJardin & Toutkoushian, 2005).

Human capital theory predicts individuals will weigh personal investment costs, such as education, on the long-term economic gains, and opportunities the investments provide (Becker, 1962, 1975, 1993; DesJardin & Toutkoushian, 2005; Perna, 2006; Schultz, 1961). For higher education, we assume that by investing time and money in education, students will make higher incomes over their lifetime compared to those not completing a college degree (Becker, 1993; Perna, 2006; Turner, 2004). Heller (2009) found college graduates on average made more than \$60,000 a year, while non-degree students make on average less than \$30,000. In addition, he found lower-SES populations were less likely to enroll and graduate from college (Heller, 2009). Underrepresented and low-SES students who do complete a college degree, or have attended

some college, are more likely to earn more than students without any college education (Becker, 1975, 1993). This may provide credence to the economic underpinnings of human capital theory in students' college choice process as attending college may result in more lifetime earnings, (Becker, 1975, 1993), more employment opportunities (Turner, 2004), and increase one's social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000; Tierney & Venegas, 2006; Webb, Schirato, Danaher, 2002).

An assumption of human capital theory is rational decision making. Human capital models assume students make decisions based on credit constraints, meaning they will choose the best college for the lowest price (Avery & Hoxby, 2004; DesJardin & Toutkoushian, 2005). Students "calculate the expected costs and benefits from each institution under consideration and then choose to enroll in the institution with the highest utility of net expected benefits" (DesJardin & Toutkoushian, 2005, p. 193). The human capital gains of attending college are eventually earning more than the previously missed opportunity costs of attending college and gaining learning from college faculty and staff as well as knowledge from interacting with peers (Avery & Hoxby, 2004). DesJardin and Toutkoushian (2005) stated that researchers should be cautious to assume students always make rational decisions. Multiple unobserved factors may influence a student's choice to attend college and their ultimate decision may not fit within an economic model (DesJardin & Toutkoushian, 2005). As Native American students may have different needs than majority students, this study will attempt to understand how Native American students chose to attend their institution and what may have influenced their decision.

### **Sociological Approach of Status Attainment**

Unlike human capital theory which is based on economics (Becker, 1993), Perna's (2006) second theoretical underpinning is a sociological approach to status attainment. Status attainment

refers to the increased social status and educational opportunity benefits of having attended a college (Baum & Payea, 2004; Bowen, 1997; Leslie & Brinkman, 1988; Perna, 2006).

Increasing one's status attainment and the aspiration to do so is influenced by the "student's family and high school background, as well as the student's academic ability" (Paulsen, 1990, p.

7). Status attainment can also increase one's social capital. Social capital is:

... involvement and affiliation with a group has positive benefits. Interpersonal networks provide people with resources they can use in other areas of social life. A wealth of social capital infers the potential for economic and cultural capital connections; a lack of social capital suggests people would be poor in economic and cultural capital. (Tierney & Venegas, 2006, p. 1689)

By striving to increase their social status through attending college, students' social capital may also improve as student's networks expanded to peers who potentially have higher degrees and potentially higher earning job opportunities (Baum & Payea, 2004; Bowen, 1997; Leslie & Brinkman, 1988; Perna, 2006). What is not known is how Native American students reach for status attainment in majority cultures while still meeting the needs of their home communities (Brayboy et al., 2012; Nelson, 2015). As tribal communities are strong, Native American students may already have a strong social capital from their tribe, which may influence a student's decision to leave their home communities for a university where they may not have the same social capital benefit (Brayboy et al., 2012; Tierney & Venegas, 2006). Further, the desire to gain social status as a Native American student may vary compared to students from a majority culture (Paulsen, 1990). It is unknown if Native American students consider status attainment in college choice. The use of Perna's (2006) college choice model assisted in

discovering what sociological factors Native American students consider compared to majority students.

In relation to college choice, the sociological approach also “emphasizes the ways in which socioeconomic background characteristics influence student decisions” (Perna, 2006, p. 110). For instance, a student may wish to increase their social status within society. Access to higher education may be particularly lacking for low-SES communities. Their enrollment rates have not increased along with other demographic groups since the 1970s. This disparity may impact Native communities more as about half of Indigenous populations live below the poverty line (Pavel et al., 1998; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008).

The sociological approach adds the multiple contexts and perspectives a student may bring in choosing to attend college (Perna et al., 2008). These broader contexts add to human capital theory (Becker, 1975, 1993) to emphasize that a choice to attend college may be more nuanced than a pure economic cost-benefit analysis. In this study, Perna’s (2006) model will be used to understand how Native American students consider human capital and sociological approaches in their college choice decision.

### **Perna’s College Choice Conceptual Model**

Perna’s college choice model (2006) has four conceptual layers (see Figure 2.1). As Perna (2006) stated her model:

assumes that an individual’s assessment of the benefits and costs of an investment in college is shaped by the individual’s habitus, as well as the school and community context, the higher education context, and the social, economic, and policy context. (p. 101)

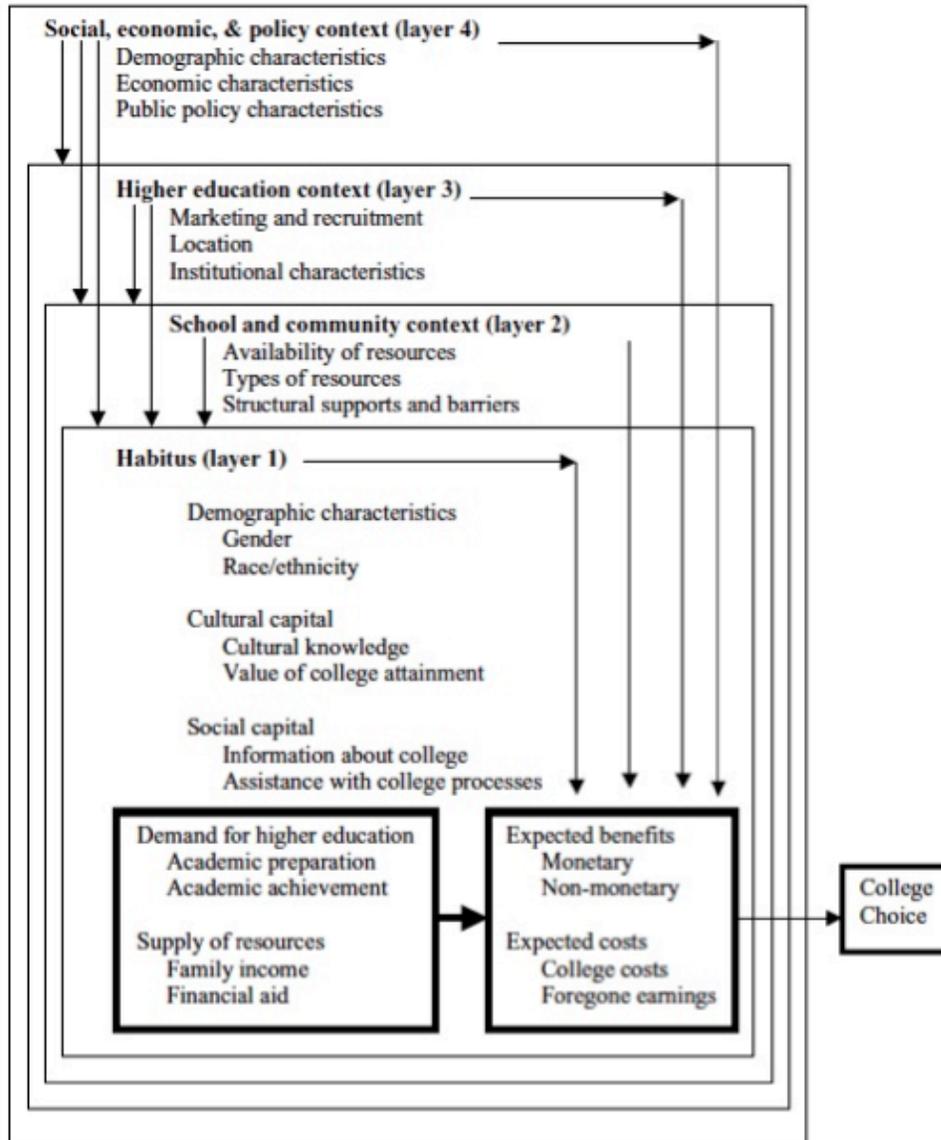


Figure 2.1:

*Perna's Student College Choice Conceptual Model.*

**Note.** From "Studying College Access and Choice: A Proposed Conceptual Model," by Laura Perna, 2006, *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*, 21, p. 117. Copyrighted 2006 by Springer. Reprinted with permission.

Perna's (2006) four layers illustrate the multiple ways policymakers can influence enrollment in higher education, and the multiple contexts students consider before choosing to attend college

(Perna et al., 2008). In the following sections, the four layers are outlined with connections to Native American student college choice and experiences literature.

**Layer 1: habitus.** Mixing human capital theory and sociological models, Perna's (2006) conceptual model for college choice is primarily focused on a student's habitus (layer 1). Defined by Bourdieu (1977), habitus is "a subjective but not individual system of internalized structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class and constituting the precondition for all objectification and apperception" (p. 86). In other words, habitus is an internalized system of beliefs and ideals about the world that an individual learns from his or her environment that shape individual expectations and attitudes on they perceive success in a hierarchical stratified social system (Bourdieu, 1977; Maynor, 2011; McDonough, 1997; Perna, 2006; Thomas, 1998; Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002). Based on these hierarchical systems that are internalized by students, privileged students are more likely to stay in higher social class, and students from underprivileged backgrounds remain in dominated cultures (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000; Maynor, 2011). Often the oppressed, dominated cultures are unaware of their domination, continuing the inequality in society and education (Freire, 1970). Both positive and negative learned values and cultural contexts are transportable and durable that students take with them across different contexts (Webb et al., 2002). So, a Native American student who has chosen to enroll in higher education brings their culture, history, and individual experiences with them when they attend college (Brayboy et al., 2012; Webb et al., 2002).

**Native American habitus.** As Perna's (2006) model is based on Bourdieu's (1977) habitus, does habitus explain Native experiences in education? Maynor (2011) explored this topic in a quantitative study that investigated "habitus to determine whether it was predictive of

the educational achievement patterns for American Indian students in North Carolina” (pp. 3-4). Maynor’s (2011) sample followed 1,495 third graders from 1998 to 2007 in the North Carolina public schools and the UNC college system if they enrolled. Seventy-five percent of the Native American students in the sample were from low-SES backgrounds, and the low-SES Native American students lagged behind their Native peers in reading and math scores (Maynor, 2011). Of the 22,775 students who entered the UNC system in 2007, only 266 identified as Native American. Of these students, only 73% remained at their institution after freshman year, which was significantly less than non-Native American students at 82% (Maynor, 2011). Maynor’s (2011) study highlighted that Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of habitus could apply and be used to understand the educational experiences of Native American students in North Carolina. As many lived in low-SES communities, they consistently underperformed against their peers in higher SES communities. Further, all Native American students, regardless of SES status, scored significantly lower in proficiency test than their White peers (Maynor, 2011). North Carolina public schools did not have a significant positive impact on the achievement of Native American students providing credence to habitus in studying Native American student success as the socioeconomic and ethnic factors could not be outweighed by external influences (Maynor, 2011). The decrease in scores based on SES status and being a Native American shows the reproduction of dominant societal norms on the Native American students from achieving the same as the majority, white students (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000; Maynor, 2011).

*Native demographic characteristics.* Perna’s (2006) first layer of habitus reflects in regard to college choice “an individual’s demographic characteristics, particularly gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, as well as cultural and social capital” (Perna, 2006, p. 117). These various capitals merge to form one’s habitus. In particular, past research has shown a

student's family, friends, and financial opportunity are major factors in a student's decision to attend college (McDonough, 1997; Perna, 2006). For example, Nelson (2015) highlighted how Native American students' aspirations to attend college influenced their decision to attend college which connects to Perna's habitus layer (2006).

Parental effects on Native American students' choice have been found to particularly important. Austin (2005) stated that Native American parents wish their students to enroll in colleges and universities where they will see a greater number of Native American students. "American Indian parents (like potential American Indian college students) usually favor a university with a large American Indian enrollment and positive retention and graduation rates as the university to attend" (Austin, 2005, p. 43). As many Native American students are first or second-generation college students (Pavel et al., 1998), strong parental involvement in the college selection process may particularly influence an Native American student's choice in institutions or desire to attend postsecondary education at all.

Institutions should consider how their relationship with families of Native American students not only influences their choice in college but their on-campus experience as well (Brayboy et al., 2012). Brayboy et al. (2012) stated Native American students prefer being close to home and feel as though they are part of a community. For Native American students, the proximity to home and continued strong connection with the tribal community may weigh strongly in a Native American student's choice to attend college.

Likewise, gender plays an important role in choosing to attend college or not for Native American students. The growth rates of male and female Native American student enrollment have differed over time (Brayboy et al., 2012; Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Ginder, 2008; NCES, 2016, Starks, 2010). Knapp et al. (2008) found from 1976 to 2006, 110,000 female Native American

students enrolled in higher education compared to 71,200 males (as cited in Brayboy et al., 2012). From 1990 to 2013, Native male participation rates decreased from 44 percent to 36 percent while Native female rates increased from 56 to 64 percent (NCES, 2016). As the gender gap continues to grow, it is important to discover the potential barriers that are preventing Native men from enrolling in postsecondary education compared to women.

Lastly, similar to other students, the cost of higher education is a major factor in a Native American student's decision to attend college. Native American students are concerned they will not be able to repay student loans as many are from impoverished backgrounds and bachelor required job opportunities are limited in Native communities (Brayboy et al., 2012; Tierney, Sallee, & Venegas, 2007). Tierney et al. (2007) found that Native American students on average receive less federal aid than other students. Many assume Native American students receive aid from their tribes for higher education. Most tribes do not have the financial resources to provide aid to students seeking higher education (Tierney et al., 2007). Supplemental aid from tribes is also competitive. For example, the Navajo in 2002 provided supplemental aid to only 38.6 percent of their student applicants (Tierney et al., 2007). With rising tuition and less aid available for Native American students, the choice to attend college based on costs may influence several potential Native American students.

**Layer 2: school and community context.** The school and community context (layer 2) recognize the school structures and resources assist or impede student college choice (McDonough, 1997; Perna, 2006; Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Starks, 2010; Tierney & Venegas, 2006). For instance, high schools where guidance counselors provide information and encourage higher education can have a positive influence on students as the students have a better understanding of how to applications, chances of acceptance, and enrollment (McDonough,

1997). Knowledgeable peer counselors, students who have been trained to discuss the college-going process, and applying for admission/aid, has also been found to have positive effects on their peers applying for college (Tierney & Venegas, 2006). Advanced curriculum, such as AP classes, can prepare students for college-level courses and impact their aspirations for attending higher education compared to students who complete basic high school diplomas (Perna, 2006). Native American students may have less access to these educational opportunities as half live below the poverty line and attend under-resourced K-12 schools (Pavel et al., 1998).

Native high school students are the least likely to graduate with college-ready coursework (Brayboy et al., 2012; Greene & Forster, 2003). The lack of educational opportunities such as AP courses and college counseling for Native American students is similar to other under-resourced communities which impacts their decisions to go to college (McDonough, 1997; Means et al., 2015; Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Starks, 2010). Previous research has indicated that Native American students may not be receiving the educational preparation necessary for admission to postsecondary institutions (Greene & Forster, 2003). High schools that serve more Native American students are less likely to offer AP, IB, and honors courses (Benally, 2004; Brayboy et al., 2012). Fann (2005) found that non-college bound Native American students are also less likely to receive information about colleges and entrance exams from high school counselors. Lacking curriculum and counselor support, Native American students are already at a disadvantage in applying for postsecondary education.

Native American tribal communities in Perna's (2006) layer two may also contribute significantly to a Native American student's choice to attend college. Native American tribes may value higher education more or less depending on their history and experiences of past students (Brayboy et al., 2012; Carney, 2005; Nelson, 2015). Tribal identity is important to

Indigenous culture, and the value of higher education from the tribal community can influence a student's choice to attend college (Brayboy et al., 2012; Oakley, 2005).

**Layer 3: higher education context.** The third layer of higher education context refers to how institutions influence choice (Perna, 2006). Institutions may provide information about colleges either passively or through targeted marketing and recruitment (Chapman, 1981; McDonough, Antonio, & Trent, 1997; Paulsen, 1990; Perna, 2006). Further, the attributes of the individual institutions can influence a student's choice as students look for colleges with particular characteristics that match their identities (Nora, 2004). Institutions control whom they admit, whom should receive institutional aid, and how much space is available to students (Manski & Wise, 1983; Paulsen, 1990; Perna, 2006; Perna, Steele, Woda, & Hibbert, 2005).

For Native American students, the presence of Native American students, faculty/staff, spaces, and programs at different colleges and universities may influence their decisions (Austin, 2005; Brayboy, 2005a; Brayboy et al., 2012; Collins, 2015). Austin (2005) stated that universities with Native faculty, support systems for Native American students, designated housing communities, and Native culture-based programming are institutions parents wish their students to enroll. Austin's (2005) findings are similar to Nora's (2004) study, which highlighted how students look for institutional characteristics that connect with their identity.

For Native American students, the presence of Native faculty may be particularly important for choosing a college or university (Brayboy, 2005a; Brayboy et al., 2012; Collins, 2015). Brayboy et al. (2012) stated the, "presence (or lack thereof) of Indigenous faculty in the U. S. colleges and universities" (p. 91) are important for bridging higher education and Native nation building. Native faculty also provide mentoring and support to students on college campuses. "Indigenous faculty typically mentor Native American students from across campus

and advise other students of color and White students interested in Native issues” (Brayboy et al., 2012, p. 94). With the support of Indigenous scholars and staff, Native American students may be more inclined to enroll in an institution with additional Indigenous populations and traits.

Saggio (2001) highlighted how institutional effects could influence Native American student choice, which would fit within Perna’s (2006) third layer. In his study, Saggio (2001) found that Native American students who attend a small bible college in Arizona choose the institution because of its large Native population (78%), small student size, low student/professor ratio, and active recruitment of Native American students to the college. Although this case study is specific to one institution in the Southwest United States, Saggio’s (2001) findings highlight that Native may choose their colleges based on institutional effects similar to other students (Perna, 2006). Exploration from a different state and multiple institutions will expand Saggio’s (2001) original analysis to see how much the higher education context (Perna, 2006) influences a Native American students’ college decision in North Carolina.

**Layer 4: social, economic, and policy context.** The last layer of Perna’s (2006) conceptual model is the social, economic, and policy context (layer 4). Social forces such as demographic changes, economic conditions, and public policies can have either a direct or indirect effect on college student choice (Perna, 2006).

The fourth layer of Perna’s model (2006) may be different for Native American students as several tribes in the United States are *nonrecognized* (Wilkins & Kiiwetinesik Stark, 2010). *Nonrecognized* tribes may have fewer resources from which to offer financial aid to Native American students, as they do not receive the same federal benefits as state recognized tribes. The issues of sovereignty, self-determination, and self-governance are important to Native communities (Brayboy et al., 2012). Any discussion of an economic, policy, and governmental

context layer in connection with Native American students must recognize the historical disenfranchisement of tribes in the United States and the continuing struggle for recognition from the federal government by several Indigenous communities (Brayboy et al., 2012; Carney, 1999). In this study, these themes are particularly important as the Eastern Band of Cherokee is the only tribe in North Carolina that is federally recognized by the U. S. government (Oakley, 2005; Richardson, 2005). A Native American student's view of self-identity may be particularly impacted by the recognition of their tribe by the federal government or by other tribal communities.

*Appreciating Native culture.* Native Americans think about their tribal community when weighing decisions (Brayboy et al., 2012; Nelson, 2015; St. Germaine, 2008; Wilkins & Kiiwetinesiik Stark, 2010). Each tribal member is to contribute to the community. Referred to as nation building (in the context of education; Brayboy et al., 2012; Nelson, 2015; St. Germaine, 2008), Native American students are encouraged to learn about their tribe, create future leaders, and contribute back to their communities. Thus, a major component of Native American life is giving back to one's community and returning to the tribe upon the completion of one's degree (Brayboy et al., 2012; Nelson, 2015).

The use of Perna's model (2006) for a study of college choice for Native American students may highlight the cultural differences between the majority of students and Native American students about habitus. Perna (2006) stated the integration of theoretical concepts allowed for differences in groups as "the pattern of educational attainment is not universal but may vary across racial/ethnic, socioeconomic, and other groups" (p. 115). As Native experiences on college campuses have been historically negative (Brayboy et al., 2012; Carney, 1999), the understanding of Native perspectives (Brayboy et al., 2012; Nelson, 2015) to Perna's (2006)

model provides a framework to appreciate alternative Indigenous values in Native American students' college choice process. For example, Brayboy et al. (2012) summarized the factors influencing Native American students' decision to attend college that vary from other populations:

American Indian and Alaska Native American student opportunities for higher education are influenced by a complex web of factors that include 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. All of the above are constrained or mediated by K-12 school contexts, policies, and practices; discrimination and academic tracking; students' proximity to colleges and universities; postsecondary institution costs; admissions requirements; and outreach and political policies based on the notion of who merits college education as enacted through financial aid, affirmative action, and accountability plans. (p. 31)

With many connections to Perna's (2006) framework such as SES status, family, and education, the use of Perna's model provides a preliminary understanding of the college choice process for Native American students.

### **Summary**

The current research on Native American college choice has not included North Carolina Native populations (Dillman, 2002; Fann, 2015; Keene, 2014; Nelson, 2015; Saggio, 2010; Starks, 2010). Nor have any of the current studies looked at Native college choice using a narrative methodology, allowing participants' voices to be the driver of the findings (Elliot, 2012; Riessman, 1993, 2008). Native college choice research has highlighted aspects of Perna's

(2006) college choice model such as improving one's SES, campus contexts, and community support (Dillman, 2002; Fann, 2015; Keene, 2014; Saggio, 2010; Starks, 2010). Further, Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model might not be an appropriate conceptual framework for studying Native American student college choice as Nelson (2015) found Native college choice may not be a linear process. By using Perna's (2006) college choice model for understanding Native American college student choice, the current gap in knowledge about how Native American students chose to attend college in North Carolina was explored.

In this study, I explored the lived experiences of North Carolina Native American students in higher education and how they chose to enroll in a four-year institution with a narrative approach (Bold, 2012; Creswell, 2013). Based on the literature, I expected findings from the study to connect in part to national college choice research (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Paulsen, 1990; Perna, 2006; Tierney & Venegas, 2006), as well as recent Native American college experiences and choice studies conducted in other regions of the United States (Austin, 2005; Benally, 2004; Brayboy, 2005a, 2005b; Brayboy et al., 2012; Collins, 2015; Dillman, 2002; Fann, 2015; Keene, 2014; Oxendine et al., 2013; Nelson, 2015; Peters, in press; Saggio, 2010; Starks, 2010).

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

This study was a qualitative narrative study (Bold, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Elliot, 2012; Riessman, 2008). Narrative inquiry was an appropriate methodology because the main focus of the study was based on a set of events (Bold, 2012) and understanding and analyzing stories (Creswell, 2013). Further, “narrative analysis is appealing because its interpretative tools are designed to examine phenomena, issues, and people’s lives holistically” (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004, p. xi). By exploring a participant’s experiences in context, a deeper understanding of the daily experiences of smaller populations can be gained. In this study, I explored the process, events, and experiences of Native American students in North Carolina who chose to attend four-year institutions.

A qualitative methodology was chosen for this study as Native American students make up less than one percent of college students (NCES, 2016). Qualitative methodology is seen as a better means of discovering new phenomena and provides an avenue for Native stories to be shared by reducing the power owned by the researcher (Creswell, 2013, 2014; Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004; NCES, 2017; Riessman, 2008; Shotton et al., 2013). By using a narrative approach, the “unique insights into the range of multiple, intersecting forces that order and illuminate relations between self and society” (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004, p. xii) for Native American students who chose to attend higher education could be better understood.

The following research question guided this study to explore Native American students’ college choice at North Carolina four-year institutions:

What were the storied experiences of Native American students from North Carolina when they chose to attend college?

## **Narrative Methodology**

A qualitative study using a narrative approach allowed the voices of the participants to drive the research findings (Bold, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Riessman, 1993, 2008). Narrative research is a means of organizing and understanding participant's experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004). These experiences are expressed through "lived and told stories" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 40), so researchers may make meaning of the experiences through reflection (Bolton, 2006). The participants' past experiences are then matched into sequential clauses to create a story out of the events shared (Labov & Waletzky, 1997). In this study, a mixture of themes from the multiple participants created an experienced narrative of the Native American students' choice to attend postsecondary education in North Carolina.

By providing an avenue for Native experiences to be shared, narrative methods reduce the power dynamics inherent in research (Bold, 2012; Elliot, 2012; Riessman, 1993, 2008), as well as addresses the lack of Native voices in American history (Brown & Au, 2015; Carney, 1999). As Indigenous stories are shared, a larger audience may hear the Native context in which American Indian students chose to attend colleges and universities to influence postsecondary policies to be more inclusive of Native cultures (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

### **Indigenous Voices**

As Native voices have traditionally not been shared with outsiders, their everyday experiences are less known. Narrative methodology provides an avenue for researchers to discover the everyday lives of participants as well as the meaning found within participants' stories (Bolton, 2006). Often the experiences of participants are remembered and articulated back through stories (Bold, 2012). Although the stories may not be completely factual, it is the

meaning and truth of what the participants believe and feel based on their experiences that is relevant to research (Bolton, 2006). The meaning of stories is both individual and collective to the culture of the participants (Bolton, 2006).

Unlike fictional stories, life does not have a beginning, middle, or end for participants who are still navigating everyday life (Berger, 1993). As Berger (1993) highlighted, narratives “... deal with specific individuals and particular conflicts, problems, threats, or whatever that complicate their lives” (p. 162). In this study, the decision to attend higher education was the problem and conflict Native American students grappled with before choosing to enroll in college. Further, narrative provided an avenue for individual stories to be shared that draws attention to the lived experiences of marginalized voices (Reissman, 2008). As Chandler, Lalonde, and Teucher (2004) state, “lives may sometimes be lived like a story, but they are not stories, they are lives” (p. 252). Thus, the lived narratives in this study will be shared in the hopes to improve higher education policy and increase the number of Native American students entering higher education by understanding their choice process.

**Indigenous storytelling.** Narrative inquiry was also chosen as the method connects with the Native tradition of storytelling (Collins, 2015), making the method more culturally appropriate for this study. Storytelling is at the heart of Native cultures and is the method by which much of Native history is passed down through families and communities (Collins, 2015). As narrative methods allow participants to share and own their stories (Smythe & Murray, 2000), narrative inquiry provides a means for marginalized groups’ stories to be shared within research (Bold, 2012).

As a non-Native researcher, the use of narrative storytelling provides an avenue for participants to be heard that may be counter to my majority perspective (Bamberg & Andrews,

2004). As Guillory and Wolverton (2008) noted, "...Native Americans are the experts at being Native American, and thus it is imperative that their voices be heard when creating policy that can directly or indirectly affect their educational lives" (p. 63). In this study, the use of narrative inquiry allows Indigenous voices to speak about their experiences directly and drive the research findings.

In addition, Chandler et al. (2004) found in their study comparing the narrative stories of Native and non-Native youth in Canada, that Native youth identified more as *narrativist* versus majority students. According to the researchers, *narrativists* identify personal persistence by "understanding all the admittedly distinct time slices that make up their own ... biography as related to chapters in what is argued to be one of the same life" (Chandler et al., 2004, p. 248). In other words, Native youth took the moments of their lives and connected them to their personal and cultural history, providing a more holistic and collective story than non-Native youth participants who did not connect their stories to their communities (Chandler et al., 2004). By providing an avenue for Native American students to tell their story on how they choose to go to college, connections between their community, and individualistic decision-making will be discovered.

**Quality narrative studies.** Narrative research is a qualitative research method widely used in education (Bold, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Riessman, 1993, 2008). To conduct a quality study, Elliot (2012) stated narrative studies should include:

1. An interest in the lived experiences and appreciation [for] the temporal nature of that experience.
2. A desire to empower research participants and allow them to contribute to determining ... the most salient themes in an area of research.

3. An interest in process and change over time.
4. An interest in the self and representation of the self.
5. An awareness [that] the researcher himself or herself is also a narrator. (p. 283)

In this study, all of the narrative goals outlined by Elliot (2012) were achieved. The participants' stories were highlighted in the analysis will explore the lived experiences of the Native American students relative to current understandings of college choice. Participants had the opportunity to member check the findings, so their shared story was owned by the participants (Bold, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Elliot, 2012). Before agreeing to participate, the participants understood the purposes of the study to improve higher education for Native populations. The purpose of the study was highlighted in their recruitment letters and consent forms. To address Elliot's (2012) third guideline, the study highlighted the college choice process of the participants and how their views on their college choice changed over time. I noted the participants' descriptions of themselves and others as they told their story. Lastly, I was mindful of sharing the participants' voices over my voice by bracketing his personal biases and lived experience (Creswell, 2013).

### **Population**

To participate in the study, students identified as Native American currently enrolled in a four-year North Carolina institution. Four-year institutions were chosen as Native American enrollment in four-year institutions increased from 18 percent to 32 percent (NCES, 2016). North Carolina was purposefully selected (Creswell, 2014) as more Native Americans live in North Carolina than any other state east of the Mississippi River (Oakley, 2005; Richardson, 2005; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), and past studies on Native American student college choice did not sample North Carolina Indigenous populations (Dillman, 2002; Fann, 2005; Nelson, 2015; Saggio, 2001; Starks, 2010). About 124,000 Native Americans live in North Carolina with a

projected growth of .2 percent (about 20,000) in 2015 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). With the eighth largest Native population in the United States, and a growing population, more traditionally-aged North Carolina Native American students may plan and be eligible to attend higher education compared to other states (Oakley, 2005; Richardson, 2005; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

The state of North Carolina officially recognizes eight Native American tribes: Eastern Band of Cherokee, Coharie, Lumbee, Haliwa-Saponi, Sappony, Meherrin, Occaneechi Band of Saponi Nation, and Waccamaw Siouan. Although North Carolina recognizes these eight tribes, the Eastern Band of Cherokee is the only tribe recognized by the federal government (Oakley, 2005; Richardson, 2005). For this study, Native students met the criterion for participation if they identified as a Native American from one of these tribes, attended a North Carolina four-year institution, and were at least the age of 18 (Creswell, 2014).

The Lumbee tribe has 55,000 members and is currently being considered for federal recognition by the U.S. Congress (Reilly, 2015). Without federal recognition, most tribes in North Carolina do not qualify for funding for health care, schools, police, or fire protection from the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs (Richardson, 2005). For tribes, cultural pride, and tribal sovereignty are major concerns (Oakley, 2005).

### **Data Collection**

A Lumbee gatekeeper was consulted on the study's interview questions. She supplied contact information for additional gatekeepers at other institutions and assisted in recruiting participants for the study. Gatekeepers at the various institutions received a recruitment letter from me to assist in finding interested participants (see Appendix D). Participants received a separate letter to advertise the study and sought their participation (see Appendix E). To increase

the likelihood of participation, Native American students received a \$25 gift card compensation (Creswell, 2014) for participating in the study.

**Participants.** Native participants were selected based on the criterion sampling outlined above. As a result, multiple stories and college contexts are shared in the analysis while going in depth into each participant's individualized story (Bold, 2012; Creswell, 2014). Gatekeepers from different four-year North Carolina institutions were contacted by e-mail to recruit participants to reduce the institutional effects of participant answers. Gatekeepers were chosen if they worked in Multicultural Student Affairs offices or had positions on campus that served Native American students. These institutions were specifically selected as they provided a wide range of institutional types, represented the wide geographic footprint of North Carolina, and I had gatekeeper connections that assisted in recruiting participants that met the criterion. Snowball sampling (Creswell, 2013, 2014) was attempted to increase the participation of Native American students in the study as well as increase the diversity of four-year institutional types and geographic locations. Participants were asked to reach out to other Native American students they knew that might be able to participate. Snowball sampling was not effective compared to gatekeeper recommendations and direct recruitment. Overall, fourteen Native American students expressed interest in the study and seven agreed to participate after receiving study information and consent forms.

Data from the participants' stories were collected in two interviews (Bold, 2012; Creswell, 2014). Two interviews were conducted so to build trust and rapport with participants in the first interview (Bold, 2012), provide opportunities for theme clarification, and garner more in-depth conversations with participants (Bold, 2012; Creswell, 2014). Two interviews also provided opportunities for triangulation. Triangulation is the process involved in "collaborating

evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). Triangulation of the data was conducted by checking participants’ stories across two separate interviews and through two methods of data analysis (Creswell, 2013, 2014). By finding supportive evidence in multiple locations, the validity of the findings was increased (Creswell, 2013). In the following sections, the interview protocol is in connection with narrative inquiry.

**Interview protocol.** Participants were interviewed in person with the primary investigator in two 60 to 75-minute interviews. The first interview used a question protocol based on the Perna’s conceptual framework (2006; see Appendix A). Semi-structured interviews were used to allow participants to share their story which may not have fit within the conceptual model (Bold, 2012; Creswell, 2014; Elliot, 2012; Perna, 2006). Narrative interviews allowed the participant to share their experiences and allowed me to ask pointed thematic questions related to the research question (Bold, 2012). The semi-structured interview protocol allowed participants to express their stories, create new themes for analysis, and allowed me the flexibility to guide a conversation back toward the research questions (Bold, 2012).

Interviews have been found to be the most common form of collecting personal narratives by social scientists (Maynes, Pierce, & Laslett, 2008). Even in formal interviews with protocols, the narratives supplied by participants are shaped by their understandings of their lived experiences (Elliot, 2012). Narrative interviews were specifically chosen for this study because I was interested in the Native participants’ “lives: their experiences, their emotions, and their thoughts about their situation” (Bold, 2012, p. 96).

After completing the initial interviews with the participants, follow-up interviews were conducted. The second interview explored the emerging themes from the first interviews (see Appendix B) and provided opportunity to learn more from the participants as well as ask for

clarifications on data from the previous interview (Bold, 2012). Participants had the option of conducting their follow-up interviews in person or digitally via online video chat software. Options to conduct secondary interviews online provided flexibility of scheduling for participants. Secondary interviews provided opportunities to ask more pointed questions to participants from their first interviews. The second interview provided opportunity to build additional rapport with the participant and explore themes from the first interviews.

Before conducting the preliminary interview, I shared with the participants an IRB approved Informed Consent Form (see Appendix C). They were allowed to ask me questions about the study and the risks involved. Following narrative best practices (Creswell, 2013; Riessman, 2008), interviews were recorded with two electronic tape recorders. I tracked major concepts and observations as well as personal thoughts and emotions during the sessions in a notes journal. I reviewed the journal notes during theme development. I transcribed the interviews and then shared with participants for member checking (Creswell, 2013) to increase validity (see Appendix F). Allowing the participants the opportunity to review, edit, and add to their transcripts allowed the ownership of the narratives to stay with the participants until they consented to their stories being shared (Bold, 2012). To protect their identities, the participants were referred to by pseudonyms. The study followed all Institutional Research Board (IRB) protocols and procedures.

**Data analysis.** Atlas.ti qualitative software assisted in the analysis of the data to track codes, themes, and to develop conceptual models of understanding. I transcribed the interviews to gain more data emersion for the analysis (Creswell, 2014). To analyze the data, I used a constant comparative analysis and classic content analysis (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

***Constant comparative analysis.*** A constant comparative analysis was used first as I wanted to answer the general research question of the study based on data from both interviews (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Theoretical and emergent (or axial/open) codes were used first to analyze the narrative interviews (Bold, 2012; Creswell, 2014; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Thematic coding was conducted first in the constant comparative analysis. Thematic coding in narrative inquiry consists of the researcher seeking and identify themes in the narratives. The experiences of the participants usually involve relationships between people and contexts (Bold, 2012). Thematic coding is used best in narrative studies when categories of analysis are predetermined (Bold, 2012). In this study, theoretical thematic codes were based on Perna's (2006) conceptual model of college choice (see Appendix G).

After thematic coding, axial/open codes (Bold, 2012; Creswell, 2014; Riessman, 2008) emerged from the participant interviews (see Appendix H). Axial coding in this narrative study addressed how Native American students described their college choice process in new and divergent themes outside of the Perna's conceptual model (2006). The use of open coding in narrative studies allowed new themes from the participant's stories to emerge (Bold, 2012). As the stories of Native American students chose to go to college was currently unknown in North Carolina, the use of open coding allowed the stories of the participants to drive the findings of the study and provided a holistic picture to their experiences (Bold, 2012; Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004).

In addition to thematic and axial coding, initial theme results from first round interviews were shared with participants before conducting second round interviews. Sharing themes from the constant comparative analysis provided opportunities for participants to correct my

interpretations and make sure the emphasis of the narrative theme development remained in the participants' stories (Bold, 2012; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

***Classical content analysis.*** To increase triangulation of the data, I also conducted classical content analysis to increase the validity of the findings (see Appendices G & H; Bold, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Classical content analysis counts the frequency of codes within the transcript data. Counting code frequency highlighted which codes were used the most often and highlighted the importance of concepts from the participants (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

In the analysis, rich, thick descriptions were used to form conclusions (Creswell, 2013). Narratives are most effective when they are the basis for a scholar's work and are written verbatim from the participants. For readers to understand the thoughts and meanings of the participants, extensive quotes from the participants were used to contextualize the reader into the participants' world (Kaler, 2003). In this study, extensive quotes were used in the coding of the major themes to provide examples of key concepts in the findings. This allowed an opportunity for the Native voice to be shared, as Native voices are often not heard due to their small numbers (Carney, 1999).

The narratives were analyzed thematically (Bold, 2012; Riessman, 2008). The theoretical codes highlighted connections between the participants' experiences and themes found in the Perna's (2006) model. Open, axial codes appeared throughout the study that formed new themes and concepts for understanding Native choice based on the participants lived experiences (Bold, 2012). The combination of theoretical and emergent themes was used in the analysis to discover the experiences of Native American students who chose to attend college in North Carolina. Working with participants, common themes were developed through the analysis of the data.

## **Validity and Reliability**

According to Creswell (2013), validation in qualitative research is the “attempt to assess the ‘accuracy’ of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants” (pp. 249-250). A strength of qualitative research is the length of time in the field, as well as using thick descriptions. Reliability in qualitative methods is the stability of data from quality recordings, verbatim transcripts, and participant checking (Creswell, 2013).

To increase the validity of this study, I conducted several additional qualitative procedures. During the interviews, Native American students’ stories were audio-recorded with two recorders. The use of two recorders ensured accurate recordings in case one recorder malfunctioned during the interview. Transcription of the interview data was conducted by me and double-checked before the analysis to make sure the transcripts matched the stories shared by participants. Transcribing the participants’ stories verbatim except for grammatical edits ensured the stories used in the analysis were valid to the experiences of the participants (Bold, 2012). Extensive quotations from the transcripts were used in the analysis, so their stories drove the research findings (Bold, 2012; Reissman, 2008). The use of second interviews also increased the validity of the participant’s stories as many referenced examples they mentioned in their first interviews. Member checking was conducted after the interviews were transcribed to honor the participants’ voices shared in the interviews. Participants had the opportunity to review their transcripts to ensure their college choice story was reflected in the interviews (see Appendix F; Creswell, 2013, 2014).

Validity was also increased through the analysis of the findings. Triangulation of codes and themes between participant’s interviews was conducted to ensure validity of the participants’ stories (Creswell, 2013). In addition, codes were cross checked by an independent, outside

Indigenous scholar who had knowledge of Native American student research and had experience with qualitative methods. The outside researcher was provided a codebook, and the Indigenous scholar's transcript codes were compared to mine. After theoretical coding was conducted on one participant's initial interview, the independent researcher and I had 87.5% inter-coder reliability. Similar open codes were developed between the researchers such as "family" and "home." Completing this analysis early in the coding process ensured more trustworthiness in the coding and theme development of all seven preliminary interviews. The use of the independent Native researcher increased inter-rater reliability of the codes, increased trustworthiness of themes used in the analysis, and increased the likelihood that the findings of the study represented the experiences of the participants (Bold, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Elliot, 2012).

Before the second-round interviews were conducted, participants reviewed the themes from the constant comparative analysis to member check to see if the themes matched their ideas (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Participants were also provided an opportunity to provide feedback on the findings of the study to ensure the themes reflected their experiences. Findings that did not match the major theme conclusions of the analysis were highlighted, and alternative perspectives were addressed. These cases of negative case analysis shed light on negative or disconfirming evidence that provided a realistic assessment of the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2013).

As I was the collector of data from the participants through interviews, it is also important that I tracked changes in my perceptions over the course of the study to increase validity (Creswell, 2013). Tracking my perceptions increased the study's validity as I was held accountable to the standards of telling the story of the participants and remained subjective (Creswell, 2013). I kept a journal to reflect the changes in his perceptions of the study over time.

## **Positionality Statement**

In narrative research, it is important for the researchers to place themselves in the context of their study (Bold, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Elliot, 2012; Smythe & Murray, 2000). The following section is my positionality statement, so biases and power structures created through the completion of narrative interviews with Native American students were reduced. As I was the main analyzer of the qualitative data, a statement of positionality framed my perspective as well as provided a lens for readers to interpret (Creswell, 2013). Further, the positionality statement highlighted the ethical considerations done I completed before conducting the narrative study (Bold, 2012).

**Role of the researcher.** When I started my Ph.D. program, I hoped to conduct a study that would have a positive impact on the field of higher education. I also wished to explore a topic that would improve the educational opportunity for others compared to what I had received as a privileged middle-class, White male. Many populations in the United States do not have the same educational opportunities afforded to me, so I hoped to pursue a topic that contributed to solving this problem. In my first year of the program, I learned Native American students' college completion rates and their college experiences had not improved at PWIs (Carney, 1999; Thelin, 2011). I believed a study exploring Native college choice would highlight Native American students' stories of empowerment and success that are currently unknown in North Carolina. A better understanding of Native American students' college choice could increase the likelihood of future Native American students' enrollment through positive educational policy changes.

I initially became interested in working with Native American students specifically through a congruence of factors. As a student of higher education history, I knew about the lack

of educational opportunity offered to Native American students from colonial colleges. After reading recent literature and speaking with a Native American student that I advised, I realized how low enrollment of Native American students in higher education has continued and negatively impacts the Native American students on campus. Issues impacting Native education have persisted over the past 400 years as well as influenced their perspectives on postsecondary education in the United States. My research agenda then changed to be more transformational and proactive in assisting this population as they are still marginalized and largely ignored on college campuses (Brayboy et al., 2012).

Higher education policymakers might be able to make positive policy and procedure changes that would increase Native American student matriculation if they knew the lived experiences of current Native American students who chose to attend higher education. I chose a narrative approach to my study to allow the stories of the participants to be the major source of data. Narrative methods reduce the power dynamics between the researcher and the participants (Elliot, 2012), which I believe is particularly important when working with underrepresented populations as a white male researcher. I assumed their reasons for attending college were different from the majority of college students and may not have fitted within current models of college choice (Perna, 2006). Since Native Americans have a strong oral history tradition that was predominately ignored by early American historians (Carney, 1999), the use of a narrative approach honored the culture and history of Native American students while providing them an opportunity to share their narrative to Western society.

**Hierarchical power.** In qualitative research, a level of hierarchical power exists between the researcher and the participants (Bold, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Elliot, 2012). As the interviewer asks the questions, participants feel obligated to answer even if it does not connect to their story

or culture. To address the power within my study, I incorporate several modifications to ease the concern of the Native participants. First, gatekeepers were used to recruit participants. Buy-in from trusted gatekeepers ensured apprehensive students that participating in the study was helpful for future Native American students considering higher education. Interviews were conducted in locations determined by the Native American students where they felt more comfortable to participate in the study. Similarly, the interviews were semi-structured and open-ended, so that a participant could express their lived experience without interruption. I also tried to reduce any power dynamics that would have occurred working with students at my home institution. As a full-time senior academic advisor, none of the participants in the study were my advisees. By not including my students, I did not have participants who believed they had to agree to participate in being interviewed to complete their degree.

As a non-minority White male, I also believed it was important to advocate for underrepresented students in higher education to increase their participation rate in college as well as to promote social justice within education. Using a transformative theoretical framework assisted me in letting participants' voices be heard through the analysis and helped bracket my personal college choice experience as a privileged, White male with advanced education. The needs and thoughts on education from Native populations varied from my upbringing, so I bracket my personal opinions and experiences in hearing their stories (Creswell, 2013). Further, I hoped my research would add to the growing literature by Indigenous scholars (Brayboy et al., 2012, Nelson, 2015) who not only conducted most of the research on Native American students but have lived experiences of attending K-16 education in the United States as a Native American. By conducting this study, I did not intend as a White man to overstep Indigenous scholars work but build upon their legacy of empowering Native communities.

**Ethical considerations.** Ethical considerations were considered to not cause harm or deception to the participants (Creswell, 2013, 2014; Smythe & Murray, 2000). As Smythe and Murray (2000) highlight, narrative ethical standards emphasize participants' ownership of their narratives and creation of the themes from the narratives be in conjunction with the researcher. To achieve this goal, this study included additional narrative research ethical standards (Bold, 2012). For example, participants were provided opportunities to review their interview transcripts and provide feedback on their interviews (see Appendix F; Creswell, 2013). They also had an opportunity to review preliminary results and had opportunities to provide feedback on the analysis of the findings (Smythe & Murray, 2000).

Likewise, beyond gaining simple consent for participating in the study, a *process consent* (Smythe & Murray, 2000) was used in this study. *Process consent* allows a participant not to have their stories included in the analysis even after they have granted permission during the interview. As the interview may have progressed into topics participants may not have anticipated, *process consent* allowed participants to continue to control their stories and later leave the study if they had no longer wished to participate (Smythe & Murray, 2000).

Narrative research may make it possible for participants and knowledgeable readers to identify participants in the study (Smythe & Murray, 2000). I protected the participants' identities, and their narrative stories did not include information that would have revealed their identity. All data collected in the study were stored in a portable hard drive and locked in a closet safe only accessible by the researcher. Unfortunately, due to the small numbers of Native American students in North Carolina, it might be possible to identify the Native participants through their narratives. To address this concern, I disclosed to the participants that their

identities might be discoverable in the consent form, so if they wished to participate in the study, they were fully aware of the risks involved regarding anonymity.

In working with Native American students, it is important to note any biases I brought to the study for ethical considerations. I identify as a White male with no tribal affiliation.

Gatekeepers connected with Native American students on the college campuses assisted in gaining access to Native American student participants as Native American students may have been skeptical of trusting a white researcher. The interviews followed IRB protocols such as consent forms, and participants understood that they could stop participating in the study at any time.

During the interviews, Native participants used their tribe's language or Native vernacular during the interviews. To honor their culture and history, I asked for translations, clarifications, and correct spellings of Native words to ensure the true meaning of the participant's words were used in the analysis. I asked for the clarifications during the interview and had the participants review the spellings in my research journal. The participants were extensively quoted, and themes were crosschecked with the participants for validity (Creswell, 2013).

Lastly, reciprocity was addressed with participants by highlighting the potential positive outcomes of understanding Native college choice. The focus of the research was to discover how Native American students chose to attend four-year colleges in North Carolina. The study added to the literature of Native American student choice and could inform educational policies to increase Native American student enrollment. By stating the benefits to the participants, reciprocity was avoided as the study highlighted their stories. From their stories, future Native

American students may wish to attend college and campus administrators can adjust their policies to better serve prospective Native American students (Smythe & Murray, 2000).

### **Limitations**

The study had several factors limiting the generalizability of the findings to other Native American students considering higher education. This study was delimited to in-state Native American students who chose to attend four-year institutions in North Carolina. Native American students attending North Carolina institutions may come from multiple tribes and states across the United States. Thus, the initial sampling criterion limited the participation of Native American students attending higher education in the state. Future studies should investigate how Native American students chose to attend college by collecting a national sample from multiple tribes and states.

Further, as this study was a qualitative narrative study, there were a limited number of participants in the sample. Qualitative research is strong when looking for individual stories to explore a larger problem that is currently not understood within the literature (Creswell, 2014). This study wished to understand the storied experiences of Native American students who chose to attend four-year institutions in North Carolina as this population had not been previously explored. Future studies should use a larger sample and quantitative methodology to discover larger trends in Native choice. Further studies could explore if Perna's (2006) college choice model applies to Native American students across the United States by exploring each layer of her model as well as if the model as a whole is adequate in understanding an underrepresented groups perspective on college choice.

Native American student experiences in North Carolina may not apply to other Native tribes in the United States. Native tribes in North Carolina were not removed from the state

compared to other tribes during the Andrew Jackson administration. Instead, many of the tribes in North Carolina hid in remote mountains, swamps, or uninhabitable lands to avoid forced removal (Oakley, 2005). This variance in experience of Native tribes in North Carolina compared to other tribes in the United States who were forced to move west, or are from Western states, may provide a varying perspective on Native college choice that does not apply to experiences from Native communities elsewhere.

This study focused on the storied experiences of current four-year institution Native American students. To have a fuller grasp of Native college choice, a longitudinal study using a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods may provide a fuller picture of the college-going experience of Native American students. Missing from this study are the voices of Native Americans who choose not to attend higher education. As participants in this study ultimately chose to attend higher education, barriers that may have prevented other potential Native American students may not be clear. By following a sample of students who will eventually to decide to attend or not attend higher education would collect missing perspectives in this study. Similar to Maynor's (2011) study, data following Native American students through their K-12 education with a mixture of qualitative interviews may provide a complete understanding of the college-going process of Native American students.

Almost half of the Native American students participating in higher education attend a two-year institution, and most of the TCUs in the United States are community colleges (Martin, 2005; NCES, 2017). Studies on Native choice should include students who chose to attend two-year institutions compared to four-year institutions as well as technical programs. Further research should also explore the experiences of Native American students who choose to attend

for-profit institutions that may be online-based, so Native American students may not need to leave their home communities to attend.

A disproportionate number of participants in this study came from the Lumbee tribe compared to the other tribes within North Carolina. The Lumbee tribe has the greatest proportion of tribal members in the state (Oakley, 2005) and represented most of the participants in the study. As the Lumbee tribe is also not federally recognized (Oakley, 2005; Richardson, 2005), the disproportionate number of Lumbee participants may have overemphasized the concepts of federal recognition compared to the Cherokee participant or other state recognized tribes who are not seeking federal recognition. In this study, sample procedures were used to diversify the sample by recruiting at multiple institutions and communicating with gatekeepers the need for multiple tribes to participate. Unfortunately, these efforts led to participants only from three tribes within the state. Future studies should build connections with the other tribal communities within North Carolina to hear their stories within the literature.

During the interviews, participants did not speak in length about the cost of their education. Participants highlighted the need for financial aid but did not discuss the cost of higher education. The question protocol in this study did not ask a direct question about the cost. As the participants in this study were already college students, prospective Native American students who considered higher education, but did not enroll due to cost, were not in the sample. Future studies should investigate the impact of cost in Native American college choice and follow participants beginning in high school to see the impacts of costs on college choice.

Lastly, only one male Native American student participated in the study. Future studies should interview or sample more students and have equal distribution of male and female Native participants. This may become increasingly more difficult as more Native female students attend

and graduate from higher education than male students (Knapp et al., 2008 as cited in Brayboy et al., 2012; NCES, 2016). Collecting success stories of male Native American students may provide additional insights in how to recruit and retain male Native American students within higher education.

### **Summary**

This study was a qualitative narrative study (Bold, 2012; Creswell, 2013). The study was guided by the following research question:

What were the storied experiences of Native American students from North Carolina when they chose to attend college?

A qualitative study using a narrative approach allowed the voices of the participants to drive the research findings (Creswell, 2013; Riessman, 1993, 2008). Narrative research is a means to “culturally develop ways of organizing experience and knowledge” (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004, p. x) and understand participants’ “...way of understanding experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). These experiences are expressed through “lived and told stories” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 40), so researchers may make meaning of the experiences through reflection (Bolton, 2006). Through the participants’ written and oral stories, understanding of how Native American students chose to attend colleges and universities in North Carolina was discovered.

## CHAPTER IV: PARTICIPANT PROFILES

### Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to learn the stories of Native American college students who chose to attend four-year institutions in North Carolina. Participants were selected for this study if they met the participant criteria of being a Native American student in higher education at a four-year institution in North Carolina. In this chapter, demographic information and profiles of the seven unique Native participants are summarized. Through their experiences, themes of Native college choice emerged. This chapter summarizes their lived experiences as Native American students choosing and attending four-year institutions in North Carolina.

### Participants

Seven Native American students from seven different four-year institutions in North Carolina participated in this study (see Table 4.1). The Native American students represented different institutional types and geographic locations within the state. In this study, they were all given pseudonyms to protect their identities: Kaylin, Heather, Ashley, Charlotte, Brittany, Beth, and John.

Table 4.1:

*Participants.*

Participant	Tribal Nation	Age	Year	Institutional Type	Major
Kaylin	Lumbee	18	Freshman	Large, Public, Research I, Land-Grant University	Life Sciences First Year
Heather	Lumbee	21	Junior	Small, Private All Female, Liberal Arts College	Exercise Science

Table 4.1 (continued)

Ashley	Lumbee - Waccamaw Siouan	21	Senior	Mid-sized, Central Regional Public University	Psychology
Charlotte	Eastern Band of Cherokee	33	Alumni & Master's Student	Mid-sized, Western Regional Public University	Entrepreneurship
Brittany	Lumbee	24	Senior	Mid-sized, Eastern Regional Public University	Exercise Physiology
Beth	Waccamaw Siouan	20	Junior	Mid-sized, Southern Regional Public, Historically Native University	Social Work
John	Lumbee	19	Sophomore	Large, Research I, Flagship Public University	Pre-Clinical Lab Science

Participants for this study self-identified as members of three of the eight state recognized tribes: the Lumbee tribe, the Eastern Band of Cherokee tribe, and the Waccamaw Siouan tribe. One of the participants, Ashley, identified as a combination of Lumbee and Waccamaw Siouan heritage. Six of the participants identified as female and one participant identified as male. Heather was the only participant who attended a private institution. She also attended a women's college and identified as a collegiate athlete. Charlotte was the only participant from the Eastern Band of the Cherokee tribe and identified as a graduate of a four-year institution in the western region of North Carolina. At the time of the study, she was completing her master's degree from the same institution. She also attended a community college in the western part of the state before attending her four-year institution but did not earn an associate degree. All of the other participants in the study were current undergraduate students ranging from first-semester

freshman to graduating seniors, who had only attended one institution. Participants' majors were predominately focused on human health or social services.

Most of the participants in this study identified as either first-generation college students or the first in their family to attend a four-year institution. Kaylin and John were the only participants to self-identify as second-generation students whose parents graduated from four-year institutions. Of the participants who stated their parents studied at community colleges, four participants' parents earned, or were completing, nursing associate degrees.

The parents also ranged in socioeconomic status, often connected to where their home community was located within the state. Brittany and John considered themselves middle-class and grew up in urban communities in the Piedmont region of the state. Ashley did not identify as middle-class but spent most of her high school years in the suburb of a major metropolitan area in the central region of North Carolina. Kaylin, Heather, Charlotte, and Beth all grew up in rural, low socioeconomic communities across North Carolina.

### **Kaylin**

Kaylin was an 18-year-old in the first semester of her undergraduate career during the study. A member of the Lumbee tribe, Kaylin attended a large, research I land-grant institution in North Carolina. In her college, she at the time was considered a Life-Science first-year major where she would have the option to choose a specific science-based discipline later in her academic career.

Kaylin seemed destined to choose her college as both her parents and her two older brothers were alumni. Growing up, Kaylin had the opportunity to visit campus several times, and she fell in love with it at an early age. She described her living room growing up as being plastered with her land-grant's logo and colors. "It's like our whole house is [my college]

everywhere with all of the decorations. If you walk in, you immediately know it is a house of [my college] alumni. I did come to campus a few times before coming [to college].” Kaylin highlighted she was on campus several times for football games and to visit her brothers when they were enrolled, making her familiar with her eventual college choice.

When describing her upbringing, Kaylin came from a predominately rural, Native community consisting of her tribe in the southern region of the state. She also attended K-12 schools that were predominantly non-white with equal numbers of Native, African-American, and Latinx students. In school, Kaylin took AP courses and was valedictorian of her class. Kaylin was particularly proud of her work ethic to graduate first in her class.

Although she graduated top of her class, she found her first semester of college to be difficult. Having experience previously on campus, she found transiting to campus easy but academics to be difficult. Though she took advanced math in high school, she felt behind her classmates in terms of completed credits and her introductory calculus course. She also felt discouraged when the instructor of the course began the course stating they should already know all the introductory material that she had not been taught. Looking back on her high school experience, she wished she would have had more opportunity for advanced courses and that her instructors pushed students harder to prepare them for college.

Outside of academics, Kaylin was becoming involved on campus by her second interview later in the same semester. She became connected with the campus Native American student association and was speaking with an alumnus from her home county that was part of an HNAFS organization on campus, Alpha Pi Omega. Kaylin seemed interested in joining the sorority that served Native American students on campus and created a family for her on campus. After

completing her degree, Kaylin hopes to have a position that will serve others, especially her Native community.

### **Heather**

Heather was a 21-year-old junior studying exercise science. A member of the Lumbee tribe, Heather grew up in a rural Native community in the central region of the state. Her community was outside of the traditional home area of her tribe. Heather was the only participant to attend a four-year private institution. She also attended a small, women's college where only female students may attend as undergraduates. Heather was also unique as she identified as a college athlete, playing softball as a catcher at a Division III school. Unlike the other participants in this study, Heather chose her institution because she was recruited by her head coach:

I was hoping to go somewhere and play but I didn't know where I wanted to go or whoever would want me. And then coach here reached out to me and I was like, okay here's someone, let's see what's happening here.

For Heather, being an athlete was a major part of her identity and why she chose her institution. Unfortunately for Heather, her institution's NCAA division level does not include academic scholarships for athletes. Heather described receiving some aid from the school to attend, but not to the same degree Heather described others assumed she had in aid as an athlete and a Lumbee tribe member. She grew up in a rural, low socioeconomic county and her family did not have many financial resources. Heather's family lost their home while she was a sophomore in college and her parents were recently divorced. As her tribe is not federally recognized, Heather believed her tribe lacked resources that could have supported her family. She hopes federal recognition could mean more opportunities for her and her family. Though her

family lacked financial resources, Heather described the love and closeness of her family as invaluable. She stated her parents often travel to watch all of her games.

Heather's campus involvement centers around her softball team: practice, training sessions, and traveling to games. She was particularly proud that her institution had many small traditions that made the campus home for her and helped her grow as an individual. After completing her degree, Heather was not completely sure what she wanted to do for a career, but she hoped it is related to a medical field.

### **Ashley**

Ashley was a 21-year-old senior at a central, Piedmont region mid-sized public university. Ashley identified as Lumbee - Waccamaw Siouan and grew up in a suburban community in the central portion of the state. She was on track to graduate from her institution the spring semester after her interviews with a degree in psychology. Originally, Ashley pursued higher education to become a medical doctor. Taking after her mother who at the time of the study was attending community college for a nursing degree, Ashley hoped to become an OBGYN so that she could serve female patients. After starting at her institution, she switched majors after taking introductory science courses and decided that was not for her. Ashley plans to enroll in a graduate counseling program where she can provide single mother counseling services.

Ashley's family lived in a suburb area, and she was the only Native American student in her high school. As her family moved a lot, she attended three different high schools. She described her high school experience as one where she had to deal with ignorant questions from her peers about Native Americans. Even though she described her high school experience as good, Ashley was not sure if she should embrace her Native identity in high school based on her

interactions with her peers. Hoping to get into colleges, she opted to take basic curriculum courses in high school to boost her GPA. Looking back, she wished she had opted to take a few more advanced classes to prepare her for college but believed her choice of curriculum helped her be admitted to several institutions in the state.

Her grandfather lives in the Piedmont region of the state, and Ashley lives with him while attending school about an hour from her mother's house. Ashley hoped to live off campus while in college and living with family members reduced the financial stress on her family. She originally wanted to attend a different institution than her college choice, but her mom required her to go to her current institution to save on rent. At least "once a week," Ashley travels home and works at a local retail store. Her extra income helps support her family and is assisting in paying for her tuition.

Ashley was very involved with a Native American association on campus. She helped organize events with local tribal members and took on leadership opportunities. Ashley credits her organization's advisor for pushing her out of her comfort zone, acting as a role model for other Native American students, and creating a second home for her on campus. Previous members of her organization also assisted Ashley with her graduate applications, so she may have a better chance of being admitted. For Ashley, going to her institution helped her grow personally and become connected to her Native culture.

### **Charlotte**

Charlotte had an alternative path to her bachelor's degree compared to the other participants in this study. Charlotte is a member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee tribe, the only federally recognized in the state. She grew up in Cherokee territory in the western portions of North Carolina where the choices for higher education are limited compared to more populous

regions of the state. At the time of the study, Charlotte was 33 and planned to complete her master's degree in Entrepreneurship from a four-year, public regional institution in the western portion of North Carolina. Before starting her master's, Charlotte completed a bachelor's degree in business from the same institution.

Charlotte's path to higher education took several turns. Growing up, Charlotte attended Cherokee school and public schools. She found her Cherokee school experience lacking and was happy she switched to public education while still in elementary school. In high school, she felt like she did not belong because she was too light to fit in with other Cherokee students and too dark to connect with her White peers. Charlotte's struggles with her identity also impacted her in the classroom. One of her teachers took favor to Charlotte until she learned Charlotte was Cherokee and then ignored her. "And my teacher stopped talking to me. I barely passed the class from that time on." Charlotte said she almost failed the class simply because she was Native American.

When considering her college choice, Charlotte wanted to stay local. She initially applied to local and out-of-state schools, but ultimately only considered options in the surrounding area to be near her family and her partner at the time. "But then I factored moving away, and I was in a relationship then. You know, and I knew if I went to school I wouldn't be in our relationship anymore even though we'd try." Charlotte attended a local community college and almost completed an associate degree. She quit her program after receiving poor advice from an advisor saying her community college credits would not transfer to a four-year institution. Leaving higher education, Charlotte began working for her local tribe, got married, and had two boys.

Six years after leaving her community college due to poor advising, Charlotte decided to go back for her degree, but this time enroll directly in a four-year institution. She enrolled in her

current institution which was about a two-hour drive from her home community. Luckily her previous credits did count, and she was half-way to completing her bachelor's. Further, as her tribe provides funding for one degree, Charlotte had her bachelor's degree paid for by the Cherokee tribe. Charlotte shares her story with other Cherokee tribe members to encourage them to pursue higher education as her journey was not direct nor easy.

### **Brittany**

Brittany was a 24-year-old member of the Lumbee tribe. She was a senior studying exercise physiology at a mid-sized, eastern regional public university in North Carolina. Brittany planned to graduate from her university in the spring semester and was considering graduate school options after taking a gap year away from school. From the Piedmont region of the state, Brittany grew up in an urban area which she credits as providing more educational opportunities than other Native American students at her institution had received. "My parents thought that raising us there would provide us with better education and recreational opportunities, plus my father's job paid him well." Further, she noted growing up in a predominantly White neighborhood assisted her in her transition to college as she was used to being with many non-Native American students. However, for Brittany, attending her college provided an opportunity to be around other students of color and avoid the same kinds of questions that Ashley endured.

Brittany originally wanted to become a dentist. Knowing a bachelor's degree was required to enter dental school, Brittany looked for institutions that had dental programs in the state that she could attend after graduating. She originally wanted to attend a flagship institution in the state that had a dental program, but she received advice that changed her mind. During her senior year of high school, she had the opportunity to intern for a local dentist who happened to

be on the board of the dental school at her eventual institution. She ended up following her mentor's advice who stated the technology would be newer at her eventual college choice.

After enrolling in her college, Brittany switched majors to exercise physiology as she discovered she had a larger passion for assisting others on a daily basis. She hopes to one day become a physical therapist or own a gym. She hopes to own a gym that provides a less expensive option for her tribe as there are limited gym options in the rural parts of the state. Brittany's gym would provide a place for young tribe members to go after school and learn to make healthy life choices.

Brittany was an active member of her Native sorority on campus, Sigma Omicron Epsilon, Inc. She credits her sorority and the Native American student association on campus for giving her a second home and helping her learn about her culture. Brittany also stated her sorority sisters helped her overcome the depression and anxiety she had early in her college career, as she adapted to her new environment, endured a horrible roommate, and grieved the death of a close friend from home. Brittany enjoyed how her Native community was comprised of several tribes and appreciated the opportunity to learn more about her Native culture.

### **Beth**

Beth was a member of the Waccamaw Siouan tribe. A 20-year-old junior, Beth studies social work at a mid-sized, southern regional public, historically Native-serving institution. For Beth, her degree was about serving her tribe and giving back to her community after graduating. Beth became interested in social work after job shadowing a social worker who worked in her community. After completing her bachelor's degree, Beth hopes to pursue a master's in social work and then come back to work in her Native community.

Beth was from a rural, low socioeconomic county in the southeastern region of North Carolina. She and her family live in the traditional lands of the Waccamaw Siouan tribe. Beth was particularly proud of her tribe, and she and her sister have been active in their community. In high school, she worked hard to be near the top of her class. To be successful, she took as many advanced courses that were offered at her high school. Even though she took advanced courses, in Beth's opinion, her high school education lacked resources to prepare her for college. She was also upset about the lack of Native history taught in her coursework when her tribe was in the same county. As Beth made an effort in her classes, and even stayed at school late because the access to the internet was limited at home, Beth gained the attention of her teachers who encouraged her to go to college after completing her degree.

Beth's college search began when four different institutions came to her local community to discuss their opportunities. She only applied to those four institutions. One university was four hours away in the western portion of the state, so her family prevented her from enrolling. Instead, she opted for her college choice as it was created to support Native American students and was about an hour from home. Another university was within thirty minutes of her home, but she felt more at home at her preferred college. Unfortunately for Beth, as a first-generation four-year college student, she was not sure how the college application process worked nor how to apply for financial aid. She wished her guidance counselor could have provided more support in her college search and applications.

After starting college and attending orientation, Beth became aware of the resources on campus. She had not been aware that when choosing between colleges, students should look for the resources offered to students. Beth was lucky that her preferred major was offered at her college choice and that she had classes with Native American instructors who connected her to

different opportunities on campus. At the time of the study, Beth was a peer advisor assisting other college students in academic difficulty. She also volunteered at recruitment events, speaking to other prospective Native American students, and served as an orientation leader. She became a member of a Native sorority on campus and was making plans to apply to social work master's programs the following year.

### **John**

John was the only male participant in the study. A 19-year-old sophomore at a large, research I flagship public institution, John was a pre-clinical lab science major as he was not yet able to declare his preferred major. His institution requires students to complete their general education courses before starting a major their junior year. Upon completing his degree, he hopes to become a "clinical laboratory scientist."

John was a member of the Lumbee tribe and only considered himself Native American even though his father is white, as he and his sister were raised as Lumbees. For John, he is not half-Native American, but only Native American. John grew up in an urban community in the Piedmont region of North Carolina. Growing up, he stated he was shy and quiet in school because he was overweight and could not connect with his white peers. John jumped at the opportunity to attend a new, more rigorous school and was able to define himself as an outgoing individual who was involved in band, student organizations, and connected with his teachers.

John took several AP courses as he had several educational opportunities growing up in an urban community. His magnet high school featured many AP courses and he also went downtown where his home county created a career center which offered multiple AP classes. For John, the educational opportunities he received growing up in an urban community prepared him

for college and he saw his upbringing as a privilege compared to his Lumbee family members living in a rural part of the state that is the traditional home of his tribe.

John also stated he grew up in a predominantly white neighborhood. When he started at his college of choice, for John, even though the university only had around 100 Native American students, that was more Native American students in an educational community than he had ever experienced. John enjoyed the opportunity to be around more Native American students and learn more about his Native culture. Further, his experience in a predominantly white neighborhood eased his transition to college. He found his transition to a PWI easier than his Native peers as he grew up with mostly white students.

John was engaged with campus at an early age and was connected with Native faculty and staff on campus before choosing his institution. As a distinguished powwow dancer, John had visited his college choice several times when his institution hosted an annual powwow. His experience at his college made his ultimate college choice his dream school. His mother had connections with Native faculty and staff on campus. John became connected with the director of a Native American center on campus who assisted him with his college applications, essays, and applying for financial aid. Though he was a second-generation college student, John's parents had attended college as non-traditional students and were not sure how to help him apply to college. John's mentor eased his process to applying to schools and he credits her for assisting him into being admitted to his college of choice. Further, John credits the summer bridge program on at his institution for helping him learn how to navigate campus, connect with resources, meet more Native faculty and staff, and connect with other Native American students before the rest of the student body arrived for the fall term.

## Summary

In this chapter, a profile of each Native American student participants' narrative was highlighted. All seven participants had unique stories about their college choice and their higher education experience. Other than tribal affiliation and attending public North Carolina K-12 education as minorities, the participants choose their institutions for various reasons. Participants attended seven different institutions in North Carolina and grew up in different regions of the state. They identified from three different tribes and had varying experiences based on the socioeconomic status of their surrounding communities. Through their stories, themes of Native American student college choice for Native American students in North Carolina emerged. In the next chapter, their common narrative themes are described.

## **CHAPTER V: FINDINGS**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to learn the stories of Native American college students who chose to attend four-year institutions in North Carolina. North Carolina was purposefully selected (Creswell, 2014) as more Native Americans live in North Carolina than any other state east of the Mississippi River (Oakley, 2005; Richardson, 2005; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), and past studies connected to Native American student college choice focused on other areas of the United States (Fann, 2005; Nelson 2015; Saggio, 2001; Starks, 2010). This study discovered how North Carolina Native American students described their college choice using a narrative design (Bold, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Riessman, 1993, 2008). The following research question guided this narrative study:

What were the storied experiences of Native American students from North Carolina when they chose to attend college?

In the following chapter, the findings on how participants answered the research question are outlined. This study discovered four emerging themes that Native American student participants used to describe their college choice in North Carolina: family, Native identity and community, external factors, and growth and opportunities.

### **Emerging Themes**

Through the interviews with the participants, four major themes of Native American students' college choice emerged from their stories: family, Native identity and community, external factors, and growth and opportunities. In Figure 5.1, the four themes connect in understanding the stories of how these Native American students chose to attend a four-year institution in North Carolina.

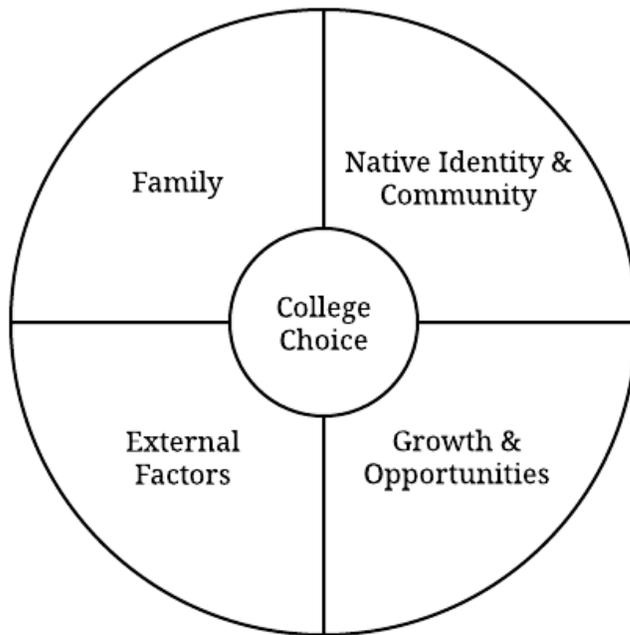


Figure 5.1

*Native American Students' Four Themes of College Choice.*

The family theme related to the influences of the participants' family had on their desire to attend higher education and their choice of institutions. The theme of Native identity and community related to what the participants' described as their tribal identity, how they learned and shared their culture with others, how Native values influenced their decision making, and how they searched for Native communities on campuses. The theme of external factors related to the varying influencers that expanded or limited a Native American student's college choice options. The fourth major theme of growth and opportunity described how Native American students rationalized the intended benefit of higher education for themselves and their tribal communities.

**Family**

The first theme that emerged from the narrative interviews was family. Native families were integral in the participants' lives. Their families influenced if and where Native American

students went to college. One of the reasons Native families had a strong impact on the participants' decision was due to how close participants said they were to their families. Beth described her family as close:

Because a lot of times Native American people are really close to their families. And it's kind of tough for them to leave their family just because they are so tight. Like, you'll see that a lot in Native American communities and families. You'll see their family ties are really close. It's really hard when someone has to go away from their family to get education, and go to college...

Heather also highlighted how close her family was as well:

...my family is very close.... I know a lot of people have said they wish their family was close as mine. That's how close we are. We do everything together. We all stay in our community. We should probably call it our neighborhood as all of my family lives in this one area. I know in October, we all get together and go to Holden Beach and we all fish. Everybody in my family on [the] way, we all know whom we are passing on the way.

Native American students relied on their family members to inspire them to go to college and help with their choice. Kaylin discussed how she made all her major decisions in consultation with her Native family:

Your family is always whom you spend your time with. You know, when you have discussions about where you want to go to school, what you want to do for the rest of your life, your family is the people you talk to about those things. So, just because they're such a big part of your life and always around, especially in those situations, they're always giving their feedback.... Advise you on situations that you're going through. It's kind of like, taking what they say and using that.

Kaylin continued in her story why her family was close by describing the amount of time they spent together and why it was important to her and Native communities:

Okay, so I consider myself and my family to be very family oriented. So, when I was younger, before I or my brothers went to college or anything, every Friday night we would go visit my dad's mom's house. So, we'd spend Friday nights there with her and like my dad's sister, and her family, and my dad's brother and his family. So, every Friday night, it was just a time for our family to gather together and have fellowship, spend time there. So that was really nice. We definitely don't do as much as we used to now. Now it's more like during the holidays, cause we've grown up and out and gone our separate ways. It's definitely something I miss, but growing up, it meant a lot to me.

You know, being family oriented is very important. Family is your support system that will help you through a lot. So that was just really cool for me. And through that, I've gotten a lot closer with my cousins on my dad's side. So that was just really cool. I would like to continue that when I get older and have our own kids and my own family. Bring them back together with my brothers and my parents, you know whenever we could do that on a regular basis.

Kaylin's family came together quite often and supported each other regularly. Participants' college choice was impacted by the family's support, as the participants decided to go to college and potentially leave home. As families were important to the participants, they discussed how their family influenced their college choice: through family support, students supporting their families in return, limiting college choices for the participants, family pride, and motivating Native American students to be successful.

**Family support.** Native families supported participants to go to college. Even when the family was going through financial difficulties, the support of their families led students to apply and remain in higher education. For example, Heather stated her family lost their home while she was a sophomore in college:

...my family was evicted from my childhood home around this time last year. It was a hard time. I also expressed to you how close my family was. Without our family we wouldn't have made it. We persevered through the struggle. Yeah, it's still hard, but we are making it.

Although her family lost her home, Heather continued to attend her private institution, so she could earn a degree and avoid economic difficulties like her family experienced at home. As she further explained,

... [my parents] knew how hard it was ... to do anything without a diploma. My daddy says all the time that he's, he does so much better than these other people, but because they got higher than him because they have a degree. He wants me to do the same.... But [my parents] know how hard it is and they don't want it be that way [for me].... Really my parents were like, "you're going to college. I don't care if you flip burgers after you go, but you're going." Which I knew they wanted me to go, but I also knew I wanted to go. Me and my family, getting the college life and all of that, I wanted to go there, and be the one of the first in my family that do something. Just really wanted to better myself and hopefully, when my children are here, they'll want to do the same.

Heather was not alone in having a supportive family. Ashley wished to pursue a medical degree to make her family proud and provide financial resources back to her family. Ashley described how her family supported her after she switched career paths:

Because I wanted to go to med school and wanted to make my family proud because most of everybody stopped at high school and didn't pursue a college career. Well, I was like, I'll be the different one. I do want to go.

To the participants, having the support from their families was instrumental in choosing to attend college.

***Supporting their families.*** Native American students voiced a desire to reciprocate the support their families provided them. Seeing education as a means to the middle class, Brittany stated how her parents made several sacrifices so that she could be in college. Brittany's parents hoped Brittany would have an easier life than they had, so they pushed her to attend higher education. Brittany hoped her college degree would support her family in the future:

My mom always tells me all the time when she was little, you know her parents really didn't push college. She really, to this day, wishes that they did. Because they didn't ever talk about it, she really didn't realize how important it was.... [I]n Robeson County; you know all that in that area, they work on farms and do all that stuff. And that's what they were used to. But my dad, he did all of that, he went on with his head straight to school, he learned the value of education. Him working, ... flying around the world all the time, helping with different airports, going to different trainings, I guess its opened his eyes to a lot. And he just wants, they both want, what's best for both of us. Me and my brother....

I think it's my largest fear because I think if I don't accomplish something ... I don't want to be working paycheck to paycheck to live. If I have a family one day, I ... don't want them to ever feel, you know, the struggle I guess. Cause my parents grew up poor. I see how hard they have worked to make us happy, and I would say we are middle

class. And they push me every day, saying even though my dad has a really great job, he still knows I can do better. Hearing the stories my momma would be tellin', you know about her parents wouldn't eat ... just so they could eat. You know it really does mean something. And it makes me; it makes me have a drive, to be more successful. So that I can take care of them. I want to be their retirement plan. And my mom has never had a bedroom for herself. So just knowing that if I work hard, one day, maybe I can build them a house, and she can have a room for herself.

With strong family support, for Brittany, higher education was a means to pay back her parents for their life sacrifices for her success and make sure they are taken care of later in life.

**Limiting Choice.** Participants stated in their interviews that they limited their college choices based on their families. For instance, many of the Native American students stated that the distance from their family home was a personal factor in their decision making. As the Native families of the participants were particularly close, many of the participants stated they did not want to go to college too far away from home. The participants did not want to be far from their families. John explained how leaving home and his family by going out-of-state meant more to him than paying out-of-state tuition costs:

So, because I was Native, a lot of people accused me of limiting myself in college choices because I would openly tell people, "I do not want to go out-of-state" because my home is North Carolina. And on a deeper sense, my ancestors and all of my people have been here. So, if I were to leave, I mean, I wouldn't just be leaving my family and friends, I'd be leaving my whole aspect of my life. It is a deeper understanding than some Natives. I have a deeper identity in this land than other Natives do, so that's encouraged part of the decision about how far do I want to go. So [my college] is about an hour away

from where I live in [the central Piedmont region of North Carolina]. And I still wanted to be able to go back and see my sister and be close enough to see my girlfriend in Sampson County in her tribe and also see the Lumbees. So that was another reason why [my college] was a good choice, because it's kind of in the middle of everything. I have equal access to go and visit all my friends and family

Weighing his family, tribal heritage, and relationships, John wished to go to school where he could balance the distance between his needs. John continued explaining why going to college far from one's family is difficult for Native American students in general:

I guess just 'cause it was just a complete culture shock. Like I said, to me, there are some things at [my college] that I was already used to. I'm used to not seeing a whole bunch of Native people. So, to me, like, there's a hundred times more Native people than what I'm used to versus, you get to a PWI, and you're walking with 2,000 other people, and not a single other person looks like you. I mean, that just hits people, and it hits them hard.

And in general, Native people, a big reason if they make it to college and [they] don't finish is because they don't have a solid foundation. Cause college will rock you. I mean it will test you, push you to your limits. And some people don't have someone to fall back to, something to hold on to like the [university's Native American center] I have or an academic advisor who's Lumbee or just having that community that helps me. So that's just the main reason why Native people, our ancestors, have always been based in our communities, we've always, Native people have a strong sense of pride in their home, and that goes deeper than the city they are from. My family is walking on the same land their ancestors walked on thousands of years ago. And that's something specific only to Indigenous people. Something people can't relate to that, the feel, to have that

feeling and then have to leave. You know you have to leave the place where their custom to, not just their whole lives, but generations of their life.

For John, distance from home was not only separation from his family, but separation from his identity and heritage. In his second interview, John further described how distance from families influenced his and other Native American students' college choice:

Yes, definitely. So, it definitely has an influence, as we mentioned beforehand, when I know a lot of my peers in the Lumbee tribe went to [historically Native-serving institution near traditional Lumbee territory], which isn't necessarily [a] bad thing, but I do know a lot of people don't want to leave their family. You can see that, you know, when you look at all the people in Pembroke, you know, not many live on campus cause some are from their community. Which I don't think is a bad thing unless people feel like that is their only choice. However, I do know some people who go to [historically Native-serving institution], and they thrive, and they do really good things afterward. They have a lot of good programs, but I do know for a fact that some went there cause some don't want to leave their family. And then some might go to community college for the same reason. Like I said, I don't find anything in particular wrong with that; some people might feel like they aren't prepared for a four-year university or aren't prepared to leave.

Other participants from different tribes described selecting a college close to home as well. Beth, from the Waccamaw Siouan tribe, showcased how attending a college near her home community made her feel more comfortable:

You'll find that, that [distance] will have a lot of impact on deciding where you want to go to college. That did for me because I wanted to stay close to home, I didn't want to be too far away. So [historically Native-serving institution] was the right opportunity and

right place, right location. Also, it's also here in a Native American community, too. So, I wouldn't be completely out of my comfort zone.

Being close to home also had the benefit of Native families visiting the participants versus the participants having to come home to see family. Heather enjoyed being a few hours away from home as her family was able to come to her athletic events on campus. As a student-athlete on her college's softball team, Heather competed regularly. Even though she was close to her family, she wished she lived closer to her community in rural North Carolina, "a lot of them come and watch me play which is a really big thing in my family...but it's hard enough that it's hard to go see them."

Some participants became more aware of the impact of distance from home on their college choice after starting college. Kaylin was more aware of the distance from home after starting college. "But definitely something, I was kind of like aware of it before I came to college, but now I'm definitely aware of it now that I'm here, that there's not many Lumbees anywhere else."

Charlotte became more aware of distance's impact on her choice after completing her bachelor's degree. She discussed seeing how colleges advertised to prospective students helped her recognize the importance of closeness to home in a Native American student's choice:

I started working when I was fourteen, I worked and went to school. I hadn't really planned on leaving, hadn't really thought about moving away. At that time, when I was considering going to school, I did not know what I wanted to major in or do. So, I joined the workforce. The new [casino] had just opened up, and I was able to start working there and get paid a decent wage plus, take some classes as I worked.

Recently I have seen some of the billboards, and I guess through some of the conversations we've had, when I see the billboards now, there's more like, "Go to [my college], it's closer to home." And I'm like, huh that's a good choice. And I think [my college] has become more proactive in our [Native] community as well.

Charlotte's university, recognizing the benefits of its location in western North Carolina to Charlotte's tribe and other Appalachian students, started advertising directly to these students who wished to stay close to their home communities.

Alternatively, Brittany highlighted how she wanted to be a bit further from her family: Well I didn't want to go to [two local colleges] because I'm from [the Piedmont region] and ... I just want to get away from home. Because I love my parents, don't get me wrong, but I felt like it would help me grow up a lot if I learned how to do everything by myself.

Hoping college could be a growth opportunity, Brittany chose an institution that was a few additional hours away from home, so she could live on campus and meet students from other, diverse backgrounds. When considering life after college, Brittany wished to remain somewhat close to home, "I'll probably stay in North Carolina. Like I said my family is very family oriented. And it would be really hard to leave." All seven participants highlighted wanting to be closer to home in their college choice.

Native families also limited the college choices of the participants. Either due to distance or socioeconomic factors, participants were limited from attending institutions that were considered unacceptable to Native parents. Even if participants were more comfortable being further from home, their parents would limit where they could attend. For example, Ashley had a preferred institution on the east coast of North Carolina, but was not allowed to attend that

institution as it was considered too far away from their home in the central portion of the state by her mother:

So, when I toured [east coast university], I had a place to stay, but my mom was like, “that’s too far away, I’m not going to let you do that.” So, when we went to [a central regional university], my grandfather stays there, down the road. So, she said that I could stay with grandpa, and you can drive to school. I said that could work, so that’s how I ended up at [my college] versus [my preferred institution].

As Ashley’s family already owned a home in the community near her college, Ashley chose her institution to save costs. Paying rent for an additional apartment at her preferred college seemed too expensive for Ashley’s mother. When asked specifically if her mom limited where she attended college, Ashley stated,

Yes, she did as she’s paying.... [S]he would have to pay the bills until I could get a job. I don’t, I mean, I understand that we own the house, but the bills still have to get paid. She was like rather than add on another bill to what we already have, how about you go to [my college] where we’re already paying the bills? So, you could stay there.

Although Ashley’s preferred institution had her preferred major and even a Native American Studies minor she was interested in exploring, Ashley chose her institution to save financial resources and be closer to home. While attending college, Ashley returns home each weekend via an hour-long commute to be with her family. She also works a local retail job near her home in order to supplement her family’s income and pay for college.

Family also limited Charlotte’s choices. As a member and employee of the Eastern Band of Cherokee tribe, geography played a significant role in her college search. Compared to other areas of the state, western North Carolina had fewer institutions to choose from and even fewer

four-year institutions. Charlotte chose her university in western North Carolina due to its proximity to home, which allowed her to spend time with her family and work part-time for her tribe:

It's the closest four-year institution because I was commuting...There weren't a lot of options online. That hadn't even been developed yet. I think it got developed around the last two-three years that I got done.

As leaving her home community was not an option, Charlotte's four-year institution was her only option to receive a bachelor's degree. Driving an hour from home to attend classes and then returning home to support her two sons, shortening or eliminating her commute became an important factor in her decision making:

Commuting both ways to and from school, I spent a little over two hours driving to get there and back. Not including the class/lecture time which could be anywhere from one to three hours long. One time I had to sit for three hours [in a] economics class at night before I could head home. After I made it through the class, I thought this is killing [my] family life, you know? So, I started trying to schedule day classes during work hours, the tribe worked with me, by offering education leave and I factored in my lunch. To provide you with an idea of a typical day, I commute from 12 p.m. to about 1:20 p.m. (factoring trying to find parking at the campus), sit through an hour lecture, grab a snack from a vending machine for lunch, pray that I didn't get a ticket from parking to close, commute about an hour back to work, focus on work, pick up kids after work, cook dinner, make sure the kids are bathed and tucked in, spend time with my husband, [and] stay up late into the wee hours of the night doing homework. I did this for a couple of semesters about two to three times a week.

With the development of online classes, Charlotte found the best means of completing her master's degrees as she was able to stay at home with her family. When she chose to continue with her master's, her main question to the faculty was, "do you have anything online?" Charlotte was a major proponent of online programs, as they allowed her to stay in her tribal community, earn her degree, and spend more time with her family that she did not have with her previous degrees. With new technologies such as online courses, distance may become a less limiting factor in a Native American student's college choice as they would not need to leave their Native community.

**Be proud of who you are.** Native tribes are proud of their college students and use current students as success examples to tribal children to pursue higher education. Participants highlighted that as college students, they bring pride to their families and tribal community. Beth emphasized how her family is proud of her accomplishments on campus:

My family? Just because they put so much, like they're, when I go home and stuff, there's so much emphasis on, "[Beth], you're doing so well in college, you're a junior in college, you're about to graduate from a university."

Family and Native pride were rooted in Beth at a young age:

Okay so growing up, in my family it is very important, our culture is very important to us. So, me and my sister grew up in powwow circles, we all, me and my sister both were Waccamaw Siouan Ambassadors. Both held the title of as Little Miss Waccamaw Siouan, from tiny tot Waccamaw Siouan to Teen Waccamaw Siouan.... And our culture is something very important to us. And that's something that's been instilled in us from our mom and our dad both. Our dad has always told us that, "be proud of who you are. Don't ever let anyone else tell you something different." And my mom has always made sure

we know that we are Native American, and we are leaders. So that means that the little children in our community is always looking up to us and stuff.

As a college student, John felt similar to Beth in that he was an ambassador to his Native community. He spoke on how his mom's pride in him was related to his Native identity and participating in powwows:

Cause my mom wasn't really anywhere involved in the Native community until she was eighteen. That's when she went to her first powwow. Where I went to my first powwow when I was four months old. And I know my mom is proud of that me and my sister came up different, and [we] had a head start that she didn't have. She's proud to see now what I can do because I started on it. And she's told me many times, like when she was my age, that she had just learned to dance and learned what it meant to be Indian. And now I'm a champion dancer, and I've been dancing my whole life.

With proud parents, Native American students received motivation and support to pursue higher education and continue with their education.

***I gotta make it.*** Being seen as success stories within their communities came at a cost. Participants worried what their families might think if they quit school, changed majors, or were not successful academically. As Beth stated, "...I don't want to disappoint [them]." Heather felt the same way about her first few years of college. "I was dedicated my freshman year. I was dedicated, I was telling myself each night, 'I'm not going to disappoint my parents. I'm not going to disappoint my grandma and my papa; I gotta make it.'"

Brittany stated she wanted to accomplish a bachelor's degree, so her current and future family could have future success:

I think it's my largest fear, because I think if I don't accomplish something, or say like [my] friends at school, I don't want to be working paycheck to paycheck to live. If I have a family one day, I ... don't want them to ever feel, you know the struggle, I guess cause my parents grew up poor.

Coming from a Native family that had already made several sacrifices for Brittany's success, she wanted to "make it" so her family could improve their socioeconomic status. Brittany wanted to ensure her family remained out of poverty, which drove her to be successful in higher education.

Charlotte highlighted how her drive for success not only proved her grandmother wrong but became an example of how to "make it" for the rest of her family:

I wanted to prove my grandma wrong. She just wanted me to stay at home and do the craftwork. And when I applied for the budget and finance job for the tribe, she said I wouldn't get it cause I was trying to move up in my career as well. She basically said that since I don't have a degree, I won't get it. I got the job, and I kept working on getting my education, and it's funny, cause when I finally got to graduate, she started on my dad, brother, [and] sister-in-law. She told them that since I done it, that they need to go back to school and finish, too. I know that she did not say those things to me to hurt me, she just didn't want me to get my hopes up. Without her, my husband, [my] brother and his wife, my mother, and [my] mother-in-law, I could not have completed my journey. They have all helped me in some way or another. They have all kept my husband and children entertained at one point in time, so I could focus on getting my school work completed. Like I said, we didn't live that far from them. We all live in the same area; the boys could run to my brother's house, could go to my grandma's house, they could go to my dad's house. They could all stay in that area...

By providing Charlotte with negative motivator, Charlotte's grandmother inspired Charlotte to work harder and be successful. Through Charlotte's success, the rest of her family had an example of pursuing higher education. As Beth mentioned, her success then provides an example to the rest of her tribe:

And then when I go to my community, a lot of people tell their kids you need to look at [Beth], you need to do what she does cause she's there, she's making it. So, I feel like if I fail, not only am I going to fail my parents; I feel like I'm going to fail my community, too. So, it's just like I push for myself, but I also have people looking at me, too.

Feeling as they "gotta make it" to support their families, participants were motivated to seek and remain in higher education and provide a positive example to younger generations.

Participants described how their families encouraged, motivated, and limited their college choices. Overall, Native families pushed the participants to receive a higher education to achieve new opportunities. Beth highlighted this idea when she described her grandmother who encouraged her to go to college:

She's always pushed us since we were, like, extremely little, she's always been saying, "Youngins, without your education, you're not going to get anywhere in life." And we were going really, I mean, I knew we had to go to school and really didn't understand it. But now coming to college, seeing how many open doors I have because I've been in college, not [just] in college, but at a four-year university. And, just, I get to meet new people and experience new things, and I actually get to bring back those resources to my people ... a door I guess. And when it's a door opener for me, I can bring my people, too. I can open doors for my people as well.

For Beth, pursuing higher education opens doors for her family and her community, which motivated her to pursue higher education. Participants in this study believed their families played a major role in their desire to pursue higher education and to be successful. Alternatively, as Heather put it more succinctly, when asked how families influence the decision to go to college, “I think families influence college, period.”

### **Native Identity & Community**

The second major theme to emerge from participants’ interviews was their views on their Native identity and community. Throughout the narratives, being a Native American was a major point of emphasis for the participants. All the participants were proud of their heritage and wished for others to recognize them as Native and their tribe. When discussing their Native identity, participants highlighted their tribe’s recognition status, their skin color, the differences between urban and rural Native communities, the desire to learn and share their culture, and how their Native values influenced their college choice. Further, community was important for the Native participants in this study regarding their college choice. In discussing community, participants stated supportive communities at home, on campus, and campus having a “home feeling” due to presence of Native American students, faculty, and staff helped them select their institution in North Carolina.

**Native Identity.** In North Carolina, only one tribe is federally recognized. Federal recognition of the North Carolina tribes was mentioned by some of the participants. When discussing tribal recognition, participants discussed how recognition related to their tribal identity, and how federal recognition could impact their funding for higher education. The other participants discussed how they wished their tribes were federally recognized. Kaylin felt federal recognition would add prestige to the Lumbee tribe:

Yeah, so me personally it hasn't caused any issues, but you know, as that is my culture and the tribe that I'm associated with, I would like it to be federally recognized. So just kind of have that stance and view as a nation and [be] recognized, it gives us some prestigiousness, so I'd really like that for us. But yeah, that is something I'd say we are working on as a tribe, and we are fighting to get that recognition. So hopefully that happens soon.

In her second interview, Kaylin highlighted how the Lumbee tribe fighting for federal recognition gave her pride in her community, and why it was important for her tribe to be federally recognized:

So, my tribal community, the Lumbee Tribe, I am proud that they are fighting for federal recognition now. A lot of tribes, or group of people, it's easy to be okay with not being federally recognized, it's like being content with living like that. But the fact that the people of my tribe are trying to fight for that, I'm proud of that. As I'm learning more about it, my culture and my tribe, I'd like to take that walk with them to help them any way that I can as I'm growing up .... Cause like I mentioned it's so easy to be contempt with that, [with] not being federally recognized. I felt like a lot of outsiders, a lot of people of Native American heritage from other tribes, when they view the Lumbee tribe, ... not being federally recognized, they don't see it as being like a real tribe, it seems something made up. Cause we aren't nationally recognized, it don't feel like people outside of the Lumbee tribe respect the tribe as much. So, I think with that federal recognition, respect will come with it. And we'd be more known here.

Heather, another member of the Lumbee tribe, was excited that her tribe was pushing for federal recognition in the U.S. Congress. Hoping for any sign of recognition, she highlighted how the Lumbees had marched in President Donald Trump's inauguration parade in January 2017:

I would say I'm proud of my tribe as far as them gaining more recognition by the state as well as the nation. One thing I am really proud of them for is marching in the presidential inauguration. That's a big step for our tribe as well as the community. It's, I guess you could say, putting us on the map."

For Kaylin and Heather, federal recognition brought pride to their tribe and hoped they would be recognized more as Native Americans by their peers with recognition.

Not all state recognized tribe member hoped that their tribe will seek or gain federal recognition. Beth from the Waccamaw Siouan tribe felt federal recognition would actually cause more issues for her tribe:

Honestly, I have mixed feelings about being federally recognized just because being federally recognized there's things; there's different things you have to go about. And you'll get more money per se, but they kind of get to choose where that money goes to. And our tribe, we won't get, it's not like we'll get money and you choose where it goes. It's more like you get money, and you have to show where it goes. And they might not necessarily see where the money should go here. For example, we think the money should go to housing for Native people who are in poverty or elderly. Just people who can't afford their own housing, and they might not see that as an issue. Well, they might not see that as something that needs to be funded, so I have mixed feelings about being federally recognized because there are so many regulations and stuff. And I don't really know if that's going to help us the way that it should be, so.

Beth believed her tribe did not need to be federally recognized, but she still identified as and connected with other Native American communities.

Through their stories, the disparity in financial resources between tribes with and without federal recognition became stark. Charlotte was the only participant who was from a federally recognized tribe. Charlotte mentioned how federal recognition has allowed the Cherokee tribe to provide resources to their students and tribal members:

... that's something they try to do to help their students to encourage them to go to school. But what happens is if say they for example at smaller college, like [private, all women's college in North Carolina], you got one student going there, they may give a check to that student to give to the school. The reason they do that is so that it won't mess with FAFSA or federal funding because then they don't get any help, because they need it. Because the cost of living is different here. And then [my college], where you got several enrolled students going there. They give them one big check from what I understand and then it goes to them so often and then every semester, you know beginning and ending so they know it's coming.

As the Eastern Band of Cherokee is federally recognized, the tribe decided to build a casino on their reservation. The funds from the casino are then shared with registered tribal members as a per capita as well as funding for one higher education degree. For Cherokee students in North Carolina, the funding for higher education is covered, providing access for tribal members who may come from a low socioeconomic background. If other tribes in North Carolina were federally recognized, they might be able to include more funding for their students as well.

The support for Cherokee students in higher education is important to Charlotte's tribe, and more work is being done to encourage Cherokee students to seek higher education. Charlotte

discussed how the Cherokee community was becoming more involved with Native American students in their tribe who are interested in pursuing higher education to prepare them for college:

Now they have a lot more things that our tribe offers for education, and they do like a summer program, education summer youth program, so they'll take all the kids that are interested in going to college, go to the different colleges. So, I think they are trying to do a lot more proactive things to get them ready and geared for college. And that's something we didn't have before that I wished we have had.

Even though the Cherokees already provide Cherokee students per diem and college tuition for one higher education degree, the tribe has recognized that Cherokee students needed additional resources such as college visits and proactive programs to prepare them for college.

Though there may be some controversy between the federally recognized and *nonrecognized* tribes (Wilkins & Kiiwetinesiik Stark, 2010) in North Carolina, participants stated that they were all connected as Native Americans. Beth highlighted how some tribal members believe they are separate people, but she felt they were all connected as Native Americans:

Well, there's a lot of people that say, there's a lot of controversy between Lumbee people. Lumbee people's Lumbee people, Coharie is Coharie people, we're not all the same. But if you really look at it and you look back in history, we all came together to survive. We all came together to really live, and there's many, many tribal, tribal marriages, our tribe, and Lumbee people, Coharie people, Tuscarora people, we've had a lot of mixed families, and they'd be both tribes. And as far as me, I think, I really don't think, I don't like to separate us cause we are stronger together. That's pretty much why I

say that Lumbee people, even though they are a different tribe, are still my people because they are Native American. So, they're always, they're always going to be my people, and as far as the Haliwa-Saponi, they're a different tribe, but they are always going to be my people because we're all Native American. I just think we are stronger together than we are separate, so I don't really look at it that way. Well, you're just this tribe, you're this tribe, or you'll look at it as if well yeah, you're Lumbee, but you're still Native American. I'm Waccamaw Siouan, but I'm still Native American.

Ashley stated similar feelings when it came to Native American students coming together to support each other, regardless of tribal affiliation. "... Some people say, well this tribe really isn't accepting, and this tribe is this, that, or the third. But from personal experience, I realize that they're willing to help you if you ask for it. If you ask for help, they will go above and beyond for anyone who needs help."

Tribes in North Carolina provided varying levels of financial support to their prospective college students. Many of the participants came from low socioeconomic backgrounds, so the access to additional funds made college accessible. Charlotte highlighted how her tribe covers one degree for their tribal members, "if you get an associate, and it's a good thing I didn't finish my associates and went back to get my BS, because then I would have had to pay for the BS. Because it only funds for the associates or BS, not both." If a Cherokee student chose a two-year degree, they would not receive funding for future bachelor or higher degrees later in life. Luckily for Cherokee students, funding for higher education is separate from the per capita allotment, so they receive a considerable funding to support themselves.

The lack of financial resources to tribal students has negatively impacted participants as well. Heather, a member of the Lumbee tribe, talked about how her family has a lot of financial

need for her education. Even though she was a college athlete, the division of her college does not provide scholarships for full tuition and her family had several financial concerns:

My mom and dad separated when I was maybe a junior going into my senior year in high school. They divorced when I was a senior [in high school]. So, my mom and my sisters lived in our childhood home, and my dad stayed in an apartment. Our house bills came to where my mother could no longer afford them, so we were forced to leave. I knew that my tribe does thing for families such as build families houses and things like that. I tried to contact them, but I never heard back from them. Seeing my family struggle and knowing that my mother did everything she could to make things work and, in the end, it wasn't enough made me want to do better. It made me want to become more [with] my life, that way, I don't have to struggle or see my family struggle.

Heather used her family's financial situation as a driver to attend higher education and ensure her future family does not have the same struggles. Though she has the motivation to succeed in college, she wished she could get more financial support from her tribe to support her education. "Also, another thing with the Lumbee tribe, I really didn't get a lot of help like you would think Native Americans got help because they are sort of a minority in colleges...." Though the tribe provides some funds to their members, Heather believed she did not receive more support from the tribe as she was not as actively engaged in the community compared to some of her peers. "Like some people get different scholarships from them .... I just wish they gave out more and helped out more, all the people that are affiliated." Heather also felt her access to additional funding was reduced from her institution because she felt like they assumed she would be receiving aid from her tribe similar to the Cherokee tribe:

Yeah, I felt like a lot of people think that Native Americans ..., they get money from Cherokee tribe or whoever but it's really not like that. I know our tribe isn't the biggest, a lot of people have never heard of us, but it would be nice to be recognized and help sometimes.

To Heather, tribal financial support to her education would have provided more opportunities for her and Lumbee tribe recognition may provide these future resources:

I just wish they gave out more and helped out more, all the people that are affiliated.... Recently my mother and my two sisters were removed from our childhood home. I actually reached out to the Lumbee people because I knew they helped families in need. They never contacted me back. That also comes with what I said about in my tribe it's about the people you know. I guess that is another reason I have a drive to succeed. I don't want to struggle or see my family struggle again.

Depending on the resources of the tribal community, the amount of support a Native American student may receive from their community can vary.

***Skin color.*** The color of some of the participants' skin had an impact on their Native identity. Two participants had at least one parent who was not Native American. For Heather, she identified as a mixed-race individual. "Yes, I [am mixed race]. My birth certificate does say Native American written on it, so. I don't know how you would consider; I say I'm Native [American]. That's how I identify myself." John, however, did not wish to be referred to as mixed-race but Native American only, even when talking about his white family members:

I just, I grew up Indian. I really couldn't relate to my dad's family. We're technically blood-related, but I couldn't relate to them. When I would see his family as a kid, I'd actually feel uncomfortable. And I didn't have anything to talk about. And not any of

them know what a powwow is. Yeah, they are normal white people more or less. I actually couldn't relate to them. So that's just another reason why, I've never considered myself half or part Native, I've just been Lumbee or Native American. Yet people still feel need to ask, so.

John continued his story in how he felt growing up defending his Native identity:

I mean, yeah, that's why I was raised only Indian. And for some reason, some people can't wrap their heads around it. "But only one of your parents is Native." Yeah. "So, you're only half Native." And I've almost fought people for calling me that because it's a slap in the face to me. To me that says, no matter how many powwows I go to, no matter how much I know about my own people, I'll never be as Native. And there is Indian people who are 100% families are Indian, even their parents, and they couldn't tell you what a powwow was.... And that's really been worse, I'm getting a minor in Native American studies, so I've taken classes, so that's been enforced more. We've talked about, I've established and said all the time that Native American is not a race. Why even is a race up for debate? Native American definitely isn't one. It's an ethnicity that most people don't realize is also political thing. So, like, ethnically, Eastern Natives, my ancestors are Siouan, Algonquian, and Iroquois. And I'm also part of a nation, the Lumbee Nation. I've got a card in my wallet that says so. And it's not halfway filled in; it's the same card that everybody else has. Now that does get tricky. There is a blood quantum thing with most tribes. Some tribes don't have a blood quantum, if you can just prove you have any kind of ancestry. But the Lumbees do have a one quarter blood quantum, so that kind of gets tricky, but the bottom line is, you can't be half French. You are either a citizen of a country, or you are not, and I'm a citizen of the Lumbee Tribe. I

have any rights and privileges that comes like any other 50 some thousand members. So that's another thing I had to grow up dealing with.

As John alluded to in his comments, some participants identified themselves by their Native blood levels. Participants stated how they were; for example, "full-blooded Lumbee" or how their particular ancestry came from multiple tribal communities.

The tone of one's skin also had an impact on Charlotte growing up as she did not particularly fit in with her Native peers nor the White students in her classes:

It was weird because I couldn't fit in with my Native friends because to them I was white and then I couldn't really fit in with well with my white friends because, I did for a while because they didn't know I was Native.... High school, my friends from middle school changed, or maybe I changed because I was lighter then. Light, not like I'm light now, but at [my elementary school], we didn't see color. You know, or maybe I was just naïve, I didn't. You're my friend because you're my friend. We got to [high school], well you know, I'm lighter, they're dark, I no longer fitted in. They had a Native American group, or whatever, I tried to participate, but I didn't fit in. And what really hurt me was we all tried out for basketball and all the girls that did really well in elementary school in basketball, they didn't get selected for the team when we went to [my high school]. But I did, and I think they held that against me cause they said the only reason I got on the team was cause I was light. But we had darked colored players on our team too, but they didn't get no grief, but I did.

She also discussed in her story how her education was impacted by her Native identity. As she did not necessarily look Cherokee, how she was treated changed once one of her teachers learned she was Native:

I had a computer teacher.... She doted on me, I was one of her favorite students. I could do no wrong. She'd work with me and let me do stuff, she'd help me if I had questions. I mean she just thought the world of me. We got to go home early, I got to ride the bus back to Cherokee because it was during the parade, October week. And that's when she found out I was Native American, and that I lived on the Cherokee Reservation. And my teacher stopped talking to me. I barely passed the class from that time on.

Charlotte highlighted that after her teacher learned she was Cherokee, she would no longer call on her in class and purposefully tried to fail her in the course. Charlotte barely passed the class simply because she was Native American. Although Charlotte is only one example, other Native American students in North Carolina may have similar experiences as an underrepresented population. If Native American students have negative experiences in K-12 education, their desire to continue into higher education may be reduced. Lacking supportive teachers, Native American students may be less academically prepared due to potential racism in North Carolina K-12 education.

*Urban versus rural tribal communities.* Several participants highlighted how their experience growing up in an urban tribal community compared to a rural community influenced their identity and impacted their perceptions of going to college. In North Carolina, there are a few urban tribal communities near Charlotte, Fayetteville, Raleigh, and Greensboro. In discussing his experience growing up in an urban tribal community in the Piedmont region of the state, John highlighted how these Native communities came to be:

And just giving you a little background on that, that population really grew around the 70s (1970s). For instance, my grandparents moved there when my mom was younger in the mid-70s for job opportunities. That's also why there are large Indian populations in

Charlotte, Fayetteville, and Raleigh. So those are the four urban Indian centers, and that's how they started cause people would move from, a majority area from Robeson County, that's just because we're such a large tribe, but there are Haliwa-Saponi people in Greensboro, Coharie, [and] different tribes. So that's how me and my friends grew up is that our grandparents knew each other, and our parents knew each other, so we were a whole other Indian community. It's kind of separate from Robeson County, but that doesn't mean we all didn't have our own ties to Robeson County. I still go every summer and visit my other grandma who lives there. I still have a lot of friends and experiences down there with my cousins, swimming in the Lumbee River and fishing, doing lots of stuff down there that people do. So, I was still very much so connected with Robeson County, but in that sense, I have two Native communities that I grew up around, an urban Native community and the tribal territory.

When considering college, John stated growing up in an urban setting placed him in a privileged position compared to some of his Native peers. Students at John's high school considered high school the next step of their education. John highlighted how this was not true for other Native American students who do not come from urban areas:

... I think I just really hit it on particularly why I wanted to go to college. You know background is probably the number one thing, that's what really sets me apart. I'm an urban Native, and I just had very different experiences that I hate that my fellow Natives didn't get to have. And I mean, a lot of people don't understand this, it's not their fault. You know, there's a lot of Lumbee people who didn't consider college an option. And if they did, it was [a Native-serving institution] because that's the one here. They don't get

to think that I can go out of the state, but I choose not to go out of the [North Carolina], but if I wanted to I could. Some people, it's hard enough just leaving that community.

John continued that he grew up in predominately non-Native area. Growing up in a white-majority neighborhood helped him transition to his PWI compared to his Native friends who came from rural tribal communities:

... being Native is a beautiful thing. But you're not always going to be around your people when you go somewhere, you know? You have to learn. I mean, for me, compared to some of my other Native friends, it was a culture shock to them, because I've been around different cultures, but they haven't. So, you just have to really adjust and think outside the color thing sometimes. It's good advice, but you know, color doesn't really, I guess, make you want to go to this school, or this school. You have to go with whatever makes you feel best.

During his two interviews, John highlighted the importance of the Native community on his campus as a major factor in his college decision. However, he did state that this might not be the same for Native American students who are coming from majority Native communities:

I'd also like to mention that some people, if you were to ask other Native Americans, or you probably already have, it might not be that much of a priority to them about a Native community. I can't speak on specific people, but I can tell you for a fact that there are some people who, particularly if they grew up in a Native community, it might not matter to them so much to have Native communities at college [be]cause, they're used to be around Natives. In [historically Native-serving institution], I'm a majority race so that definitely, that background shapes the decision. My particular background, I wanted to be around more Native people, and then there are some Native people who, I'm not saying

this is a bad thing, might not be as involved in communities or definitely not in powwows. Actually, all the Natives in the state, very few go to powwows or care about powwow dancing. You don't have to do that to be Native American; there are a broad, wide spectrum of identities.

Native American students may choose their college based on if there is a strong Native community on campus. The importance of the Native community on campus may vary depending on where the Native American student grew up.

Brittany saw similar experiences for Native American students at her college who were from majority Native, rural communities. Brittany described her friends having culture shock on campus compared to her experience as an urban Native. "For Native friends at [my college], they dealt with culture shock from going from majority Native communities to minority status on campus. It was not difficult for me because I grew up in a white neighborhood." Brittany's parents had moved from Robeson County to the Piedmont region of the state for job opportunities and better education for Brittany. They also wanted Brittany to grow up in a community that had less crime as Brittany stated Robeson County had one of the highest crime rates in the nation at the time. Though Brittany and John did not grow up in Native communities, they were aware of the adjustment struggles their Native friends had on their college campuses. Growing up in predominately white neighborhoods helped them adjust to their PWIs compared to their friends.

Brittany described her engagement with other Native American students as a highlight of her college choice. Living in an urban area provided her opportunities her family members in rural communities did not have, but left Brittany open to defending her identity in her predominantly white community:

I got to experience what it's like to be around other Native Americans that aren't my family. It's just; I grew up in a white neighborhood. I was the only colored for a while. Then we had more people, maybe one or two come into the community that were colored, so it's ... being in a white neighborhood and schools [has] been a mixture. I've always been the only Native American. So now ... I just feel at home, because I don't have to explain who I am or any of that. Cause people just know. A lot of people are uneducated about Native Americans. They think we are extinct or that I'm Hispanic or Black or White. And even though I say I'm Native American, they still don't understand what that is, and it's really sad. Some people are like, "so why don't you speak Spanish?" And I'm like, "that's not Native American, ... I don't speak Spanish." So, I guess that's why I feel so at peace at [my institution]. Because I don't have to explain who I am.

John also spoke on the need to defend his identity as he was not seen as a Native American by people in his home community:

My life would have been significantly different if I had grown in Robeson County. I would not be as involved with Native culture, because where I grew up, the second I started school, I was always questioned about my identity. People, nobody's ever walked up to me and said, "Hey, are you Native American?" unless I was fully (hand gestured to show Native items in his attire). If I'm walking down the street, nobody says, "Hey, are you Native American?" I think I've gotten every other ethnicity but Native American. I've had people come up to me on the street and speak Spanish to me. I've had people think I was French, Samoan, Italian, mixed, [and] everything else; whereas I go to Robeson County, nobody has ever asked me if I was, nobody asked me what I was. And also growing up, when I told people I was Native American, the first thing they say is,

“well, you don’t look Indian.” Versus Robeson County, nobody’s told me that because I look like the people there. I talk like them. Everybody wants to know where I’m from and they would get real confused when I’d say [Piedmont region of the state]. So, when I started saying Robeson County, it’s really answer[ed] the question they [were] really asking. I’ve never considered myself having an accent, apparently, it’s there, cause when you’re in [Piedmont region], it’s like really?

Both Brittany and John had to defend their identities when they were not with other Native American students as no one else looked like them. Higher education allowed them to be with a supportive Native community on campus.

John also highlighted how he did not fit within the Native community or non-Native community at times because of where he grew up:

And that was another thing about hard growing up was even the way I talk and other aspects of my life. I never really fit into either of them. Like, there’s some ways I couldn’t relate to my classmates.... But in other ways, I couldn’t relate to my family’s life in Robeson County.... For example, like the way I talk, when I went down to Robeson County, I speak like Victorian English in their minds. I speak very proper versus when I go back to school, everybody says I sound country or [they ask], “where am I from?” So, I’m stuck right in the middle; I don’t really fit in. I do remember it being hard growing up in middle and elementary school because I didn’t really fit into both places. I didn’t fit in; I definitely didn’t fit in at [the local Piedmont cities]. But I can remember going down to Robeson County and not fitting there either cause I’d be the only one worried about ruining my shoes walking through random mud fields. It was like, “he’s the city cousin.”

I'd have allergies really bad, so I'd be the one worried when they rode horses.... I definitely couldn't relate to any of them there.

Finding solace in the powwow dancing community in North Carolina, John stated he was able to build his Native identity through powwows even though he grew up in an urban, middle-class neighborhood. Where a Native American student grew up varied their higher education experience and what the Native participants looked for on college campuses.

***Learning our culture.*** One benefit of choosing to attend higher education for the participants was the opportunity to learn more about their culture and share their culture with others. John shared how he was learning about his identity through Native American cultural lessons and how that knowledge is impacting his tribe:

... if something happens to a tribe out West, I relate to it, it hurts me because I feel a part of a larger Indigenous community. Whereas older generations didn't. If my grandparents were to visit the Cherokee village, you know they have that reenactment village, they wouldn't really relate to it. Whereas when I did, I kind of, the first things to go through my mind were, my ancestors lived like this. My ancestors used to do these things. And I can't say with 100 percent certainty, but I can say most older generation Native people wouldn't have thought that. They would have been separate from their identity. These other Natives in the history books and how they lived were separated, that wasn't their people.

So, you can still see that tension. For instance, we'd have Tribal Council meetings. Some people don't see the importance of why Lumbees need a powwow. This girl might be like, this costs a lot of money and we could use that money for other things. Great example is we started to bring back a very ancient game called stickball. It's like a

southern version of lacrosse, similar but very different, very different game in many ways. And we'd, with the help of the Choctaw, and there's two different styles, there's the Cherokee and Choctaw style, and the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians came to Robeson County and taught a bunch of Lumbees. And even though, these are the two styles, Cherokee and Choctaw, it was a popular game throughout the Southeast. So there like, here, we want to give back to the community. And there's been talk about building a stickball field. And some people, it's divided, cause some people don't see the importance of that. Like why do we need to spend money on this field when we got people who are hungry and homeless?

... And they're not wrong, there are other problems, but they don't see like, all these, I always tell people, culture is a big puzzle, it's a bunch of little pieces that fit together that paint a very vivid image of how our people lived. So, I like to go to events on about Native food-ways, Indigenous food. That's a piece of the puzzle. They recently built a log house and a wigwam at the cultural center, that's a piece of the puzzle. And it all relates to how we lived, with language and all of that. And some people just don't see how they all fit together. Some people don't see, I mean, a lot of tribes are working now, as far as healing, cause there's a lot of issues in our tribe. Psychological that goes back hundreds of years, you know, they keep, it's called historical trauma, cause there's a reason Native people have high rates of alcoholism. And it's just generational; it compounds every generation; the problems don't stop with a new generation. They just come in different forms.

So now we're trying to learn, let's go back to cultural methods. Some tribes have had tribal circles; we just meet in a circle like our people would have hundreds of years

ago and discussed issues. And it's a therapy based on our own traditions. And some people don't see how doing things like learning our language could help with that. Or playing this ancient game could help with that. And it has helped people, there's just some people ... who just don't see the connection. So, like they say, "I've never played that game, stickball is not part of my culture. The Siouan or Tuscarora language isn't part of my culture." So, some of the ancestors of the Lumbees came from many different tribes. Some of them were Siouan speaking and others were Iroquois, like the Tuscarora, we're starting to do more ... powwows in the state, we're starting to do more Iroquois social dancing. Like the powwow I was just at, we did smoke dancing. That's the same thing; you could go to the Holden-Shawnee Tribes of New York, we're starting to do that here. Because there were a lot of Iroquois people in North Carolina, and they just didn't disappear. But some people are like, that's the Iroquois up north, that's them, and they just don't see how it all connects.

Though John did not know he would be learning more about Native American history and culture in college in his classes and activities, he emphasized the importance of that knowledge in his development and success in college. Brittany wished she could take the knowledge she has gained now and taught others back in her K-12 experience about her culture:

Well if I was more, I knew what I know now, ... and I took the time maybe to go meet some other [Native] families and go learn how to bead and knew all this stuff. I would definitely educate like in high school how to bead, make things, and bring more to table [about] my Native culture. Because at that time, being the only Native American in your whole school sometimes you really don't know what to do because you are your only source. And being so young and active, I didn't really think about the impact I could have

made to even my teachers and some of the students. And now if I had it all over again, there's a lot of things I wish I could have done.

Kaylin also emphasized teaching her culture to others as important:

Like I mentioned earlier, now I want to learn more about my heritage, my culture, and through that, I think that would be a great opportunity to learn about who I am and Native American culture. And once I learn that I can spread it to other people.

After learning more about their Native culture on campus, participants developed a desire to help pass it on to future generations. When considering their college choice, the participants wanted to attend institutions where they could learn more about their Native cultural heritage.

Unfortunately, a few participants grew up with negative experiences when it came to sharing their tribal culture and history. Brittany shared the lack of her tribe's history in her K-12 education:

I just feel like as a whole, the only tribe I've heard people talk about Natives is the Cherokee. You know it's not even my tribe, it's all the other tribes because I guess because we are so small, and no one really takes the time to educate themselves, everybody already assumes when I tell them I'm Native American, that I'm Cherokee. It's kind of shocking because I guess, I know about all these different tribes, but in school, sometimes we don't really, we zoom over everything, we keep it going. So, I'm like I feel like they are missing a lot within that. And I remember even in my classes, in AP classes, they'd ask us how does it feel to be Native American? Or you're the only one, and I'd always, be like no, it's crazy cause no one knows that we are here. Nobody ever takes the time to read about things outside of our school textbook.

Ashley, in her two interviews, discussed how non-Natives would be curious to learn but would ask inappropriate questions or not like the answers she shared with them:

It was kind of confusing as I wanted people to know about my culture but don't want the way people get. Are you a real Indian? Do you live in a tipi? Dumb questions. Honestly like I guess I'm Native American, but I don't want to answer questions about it. Don't ask me about it!

Brittany and Heather described similar stories of being asked if they lived in tipis and would then have to defend their answers to the non-Natives who expected stereotypical answers based on what they had seen in movies. Brittany in her second interview described how her culture was oversexualized and stereotyped as well, especially during Halloween when college students would dress in costumes:

Because I feel like mainstream media over does the culture and very sexualizes it. And I don't, I'm not something to be sexualized. I'm not just something that's in the history books. I'm standing right in front of you. And also answer some of the stupid questions that we get. And to avoid people asking if we believe in things they may have seen on TV or aren't real.

Participants believed they needed to learn their culture and share it with others to combat the overall perspective in the United States that Native Americans no longer exist, or if they do, then they look and act similar to Native Americans seen in westerns. And as John pointed out, if he did not learn his culture and pass it on, who would?

... I live with Native Americans today, but there aren't that many Native Americans. So, the numbers dwindling, so I want to preserve that culture and traditions of Native

American culture as much as I can. Just so my kids and the next generations coming up can learn more about the background of their ancestors.

*Native values.* Native American values were also emphasized by participants as impacting their college choice. Native American values were described in four main areas: faith, caring, perseverance and personal pride, and thriving. A few participants discussed how their personal faith guided their decision. For some participants, college education provided a new means to care and support their Native communities. Participants also discussed how choosing and surviving higher education gave themselves personal pride and allowed them to thrive. The participants were able to choose the right institution for them based on Native values.

*Faith.* For three of the participants, faith played a role in their college choice. If participants mentioned their faith, they stated that they were Christian, and that faith was a major part of their identity, upbringing, and family life. When considering her college choice, Brittany talked about how she sought God's guidance in her decision. "And I just really prayed, I'm really firm believer, and I was like, where ever you want me to be God, guide me in that right direction." Charlotte also mentioned how she prayed extensively about her decision to go back to for her bachelor's degree:

... I also did a lot of praying and one scripture that helped me was 'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path' (Psalm 119:105). God is greater than anyone or anything, and he will help me if I ask.

For a few Native participants, faith was a means of making the right college choice.

*Caring.* Participants discussed the value of caring within the Native Americans and how they hoped to contribute back to their communities after completing their degrees. Either caring for family, teachers, fellow Native American students, or other tribal communities, the value of

caring for others was shown throughout their stories. As Charlotte pointed out about her grandmother, “she didn’t care what day it was or what was going on. If somebody needs help, or somebody needs something, she helped. She may have told you what she thought about it, but she helped.”

Kaylin discussed how the care she had received from her teachers in high school led to her current success:

I had some pretty great teachers and some that weren’t the greatest, but I had that balance of people that teach that actually care about their students, actually cared about my success.... Care[d] about me, about my learning, me as a person. So, I had this one teacher .... The first time I had him I was world history.... I don’t know, it was just like, you could tell by his questions that he really cared about his students. More than just him. You know standing there in front of us for that class for an hour for us, or however long they were, he would start up with a conversation about what we were going to be discussing that day. He cared about our opinion. He didn’t view us as like lesser intelligent or a simple person because we were students and he was a teacher. He treated us like an equal and [we] appreciated that. He made it seem like we were welcome. We could go talk to him about school or whatever it was. You could go talk to him about anything. So, I had him freshman year, I then had him again in twelfth grade but for an elective. Throughout my four years of high school, he was just like a really big part of my experience, so I would go talk to him about if I had a problem or just needed to talk, he was always there to listen. That was really cool. And he was also a great teacher, and we really learned a lot, and he got me. And I wasn’t like the biggest history fan, but he made me excited about history the way that he taught. You could see like interest he had in it,

and it rubbed off to his students, so that was cool. It was like him being excited about learning and teaching. That was just one example.

Brittany stated part of the reason she went into higher education was for future opportunities, so her future family would not need to struggle like her parents did:

I feel like I want to be successful by living a healthy life. You know I want to be able to play with my children when they grow up. But also, with health I want to be able to provide them with what they really need, like a roof over their head, food on the table, you know without them having to see my struggle.

Concerned for her future family, Brittany showed care for her family in her college choice and career aspirations. She discussed further how Native communities care for one another on and off campus:

... I'm really proud that we all stick together. Especially when I go down home, even though I'm not from there. I'm always made to feel welcome as far as welcoming me in, cooking for me. I'm doing this, that, and third with [hurricane relief].... We got to bring food to Lumberton and really, I really got to see how the Native community comes together and help each other out. Being that I'm not from there, it touched my heart because it was really good to see my people do for each other. Cause some people lost their houses, lost some of their families, and somebody I know, who is in my family, she just got married, she lost her house that she had just purchased. So, seeing people come together and make sure people had a place to stay really touched my heart. And in a different way and it made me even more grateful because my family in [Piedmont region] asked for donations and people in the area were willing to give things and send it on to

Lumberton. So, it really just made me feel good as well that my family was so involved that everybody else was all right.

When I asked her to elaborate why this might be the case, Brittany simply stated everyone in her community (friends, church, her sorority, etc.) started relief efforts without asking. The care for other Native Americans did not need to be asked for in her opinion.

*Perseverance and personal pride.* Participants discussed how their college choice and experience in higher education helped them develop personal pride as they persevered over the insecurities they felt about their abilities. They now share these stories with other Native American students to encourage them to pursue higher education. Kaylin was in her first semester of college when the interviews were conducted. Despite being her high school's valedictorian and having several AP credits, Kaylin doubted her ability to succeed in her new environment:

Okay so yeah, it's kind of, it makes me feel like less than the people I am around. But that's the thing I'm trying to break away from. Comparing myself to the people around me. It's not a competition with anyone else in the room with me....I don't know, it's just something I'm trying to break away from and that way I don't feel less of a person.

Kaylin discussed being proud to have made it this far in her educational journey.

Heather, a junior, had similar feelings after being successful navigating her academics, overcoming family issues at home, and balancing her student-athlete schedule. When asked how she felt about her journey, she stated, "Slowly overcoming. I still wish I had been more prepared, but I'm here now so all I can do is do all that I can and do better." Charlotte had similar fears when she decided to return to higher education after stop-gapping for six years between her community college and her bachelor's degree:

... I knew I had to take the leap; I had to hold my nose and just had to jump and go for it because I wanted to better myself, I wanted a better job, I wanted more out of life. And I knew this was the only way to get those things. And I wanted to be a good example for my babies.... I cried, I tell yeah. Especially when I took this summer class in financial analysis, quantitative analysis. I felt like that was my breaking point. Once I went through that and passed, I was like, "I can do anything."

The participants felt apprehensive about their success, but as they approached graduation, or had completed their degrees, they talked about their perseverance through college with pride.

Charlotte talked about her bachelor's degree:

... when I finally did graduate through [my college]. You know how they always send you out all the graduation stuff? I bought the biggest frame they had. You guys are going to know this, it's going to be on my office wall. It took me long enough to get it; it is going to be here as big as I can get it.

Ashley had a similar experience of first not feeling like she fit in higher education and wanted to quit but persevered through the support of her Native community on campus:

I have wanted to quit school for a while now because I would say my sophomore till first-semester junior year, I was not passing my classes like I wanted to. So, I wanted to say forget it, I'm done. But because of the people I had behind me, pushing me to keep going, I was able to get tutors for the classes and get help. And tried to pass the class as best as I can. So, I guess that could be perseverance. Just kept trying at it, finally got it.

Ashley switched majors and found a career field that would care for others. She hopes to pursue a master's degree after completing her bachelor's degree.

Charlotte hopes long journey to completing her degree will inspire other Cherokee students to pursue higher education:

... I use my story to motivate others cause it didn't happen overnight, it didn't happen over four years like they say even if it's a four-year degree. Whatever. It took me like two-four years, eight years almost. Round up. But it can be done. And that's something, I appreciated my grandparents, I appreciated my family for, and my husband for because ... he's like, "you can do anything you put your mind to." Now I know I may never ever be an engineer, but if I wanted it bad enough, I could figure it out and do it. I try to push my boys, I get overwhelmed, and he'll say, "well how do you eat a whale?" ...One bite at a time.

As Native American students find success in higher education, they are sharing these stories with younger Native prospective students to inspire them to attend college.

For Brittany, her success countered what she stated seems to be the norm or the accepted narrative that Native American students will start college and then quit after struggling on campus. She hoped her success would inspire others:

I'm proud just because my mom and dad, they don't have a bachelor's degree. So, to be able, me and my brother, to be able to be the first, for them really means something. As well as being in a sorority, and he's in the fraternity, the Native you know. Plus, a lot of people in [my community] who are Native are really not tied to our culture. They might wear the earrings, but they have no idea what it's like, what we're about. They just know that we are Native American. So being here and being educated on myself, learning how to bead, doing all that stuff and learning about my culture, has really excited me and continues to push me through this college experience. Because they are always

encouraging me, doing this that and whatever, studying together, going out to eat. But they also tell me, what it means to be Native and actually do something with myself, because not a lot of people take advantage of college and sticking with it. A lot of people go back home and help their families or work at a local restaurant, or you know, different places where they can get a job. So, I'm not a statistic; I'm actually doing a thing.

Beth agreed with Brittany in getting involved on campus and connecting with Native faculty and staff helped her overcome her initial difficulties transition to college and be successful at her institution:

So, when I first got here ..., I knew there were Native American people on campus, but I didn't yet have that relationship or connection with them. So, my first year I was feeling lost and I didn't, it wasn't necessarily me about who I was or not having proof that I was Native American, I just, for me it was about finding my own voice and seeing where I fit on campus and stuff. And so, in my first year, I feel like it was really hard. Then by the end of the semester, I kind of was like, I just jumped in and I was, by the end of my second semester, just jumped in by going to go talk to people. And try to build that relationship with other people. [A Native administrator] was actually one of my first professors for a strategies and success class that they were doing on campus and I was in that class. That's actually how our relationship got started with him being my professor and then going into my mentor and then my boss, it just kept evolving. So that was pretty much one of the things that I persisted over was coming into college, really not knowing anything about college or being a first-year college student, and it was just, and my parents didn't go to college, so I was first-generation here, and then trying to find that

gap. Just trying to find that gap, get over that statistic of a lot of Native American students dropping out after their first year, I was just trying to get over that.

Through their stories of choosing to go to college, many of the participants highlighted how they have persevered over initial feelings of doubt to be successful within higher education and that they hoped their stories would help future Native American students pursue higher education.

*Thriving.* Connected to personal pride was the concept of thriving due to attending college. Many participants discussed that Native American students need to find a campus where they will personally thrive when making their college choice. Ashley spoke how higher education provided her access to future success after her bachelor's degree:

I think going to college was the best thing I could have done because it gives me more options with having that degree versus not having it. And then going to grad school will give me more options with having a grad degree, a master's degree on top of regular four-year bachelor's.

Ashley also highlighted how thriving at your campus was more important than if your parents had not attended higher education:

Because some people choose colleges based on, you know, family, ties to college. Whom do they know that goes there? But I think if you don't feel like you fit into a college, you aren't going to thrive. You won't want to go to class; you won't want to have anything to do with the college. So, feeling like you fit in kind of helps with getting over the nervousness of being in college if that makes sense.

Participants believed the institution where they could thrive was their ideal college choice.

**Community.** One aspect of Native identity highlighted by the participants was the support they receive from their communities as Native Americans either on or off campus.

Having a supportive community on campus encouraged some participants to attend their institution. If they were not aware of Native communities on campus, participants saw the benefit of a strong Native community on campus after enrolling. Charlotte described that Native Americans are culturally “tight-knit” communities which leads to Native Americans supporting each other:

We are a tight-knit little community, like a small town. So, if anything happens you know, it ripples through the community and impacts everyone. Sometimes these can be good things; sometimes they could be bad. But the thing that I have seen within our community is, I think we have one of the most giving communities, we do fundraisers to help each other. I think that says a lot. It doesn't matter if we have disagreements or not, when somebody else hurts, we help. We help each other.

Some examples shared by the participants included: providing health care, sending aid and supplies to hurricane victims, or simply answering calls for assistance. Regarding higher education, Native communities encouraged students to enroll and supported them while on campus.

Growing up in a supportive tribal community helped some students get to college. Viewing their entrance into college as an accomplishment, participants such as Kaylin attributed their success in part to the support they received from home:

... growing up, the community was just so big for me from the support [and] motivation growing up. So, I just want to pay it forward, give back to them. I feel like I just owe that to them. So yeah, I'm just so grateful for what they have done for me, and I just want to give back to them any way that I can.

***On-campus Native community.*** Support from Native communities continued for students when they were at college as well. Ashley highlighted how the local Native community near her college came to one of her campus' Native Heritage Month events to support her and her Native American student organization:

Like for example the event we just did, we invited the [local] Native community. And because they knew what we were trying to do, they came out and supported [us]. And most of them I know personally, and they said, "I'm proud of you, we're proud of what you are doing, cause we've been trying to do this for the longest [time]. And not many people would listen, so we're proud of what are doing."

Ashley continued by describing how she received support from the local Native community near her campus. Coming to campus with a supportive Native community helped her make it to her senior year and they have helped her graduate school applications:

Yes, it's opened my eyes to new things. It's been a support system that I didn't know I had there. It's given me friendships that will last lifetimes, like one of the people that was in our association, went down to grad school in Florida. I talked to him, and was joking "I'm coming," and he said, "come on." He said if I needed help with [my] grad school application, let me know. If you need help figuring out where you want to go to grad school, let me know. It was just like ... let me know. So, I've gotten a support system. I've also gotten the recommendations needed for grad school.... People were like well if you need a recommendation, come let me know. So, it's helped out.

John was the only Native American student at his high school. During the college choice process, he made it a priority to seek out a campus with a strong Native community so that he would have more access to Native peers:

So, another thing is that all Native people are connected in some way or another. And I really started to make those connections, so that really influenced my choice of [my college] as I already had a history with it. And I didn't really think about it till I got older. And then I already had that foundation of, you know, going to the powwow for years and years as a child. And then the actual college choice came on my radar, just building off each other, everything kind of just worked out. And I already had an Indian community, that was a priority for me when choosing to go to college is: what kind of Native community did it have on campus? Was it going to be a college where it only had a few, and I'd have to work, and try to build it up? Or did it already have a nice thriving community? And it was hard for me to get other people to understand why that was a priority. Because, to be honest, when you go to college, some people don't have to worry if there is going to be white people or black people. You know, it's common knowledge. But for me, I have [to] think like, "am I going to have to be somewhere where I can't relate to anybody else?" And even at [my college] see, and I didn't really realize this until started classes is, you know I've been exposed to this Native community, and me being the only Native person in my high school, I see more than a few Natives, that's like a huge Native community to me.

When asked to elaborate more on why having a Native community on campus influenced his college choice more than preferred major options, John stated,

So that, that was like I said, was hard to get people to see why that was a priority. They were like, especially me going into STEM, I took biotechnology courses throughout high school.... So, you know my biotech teacher was like, "yeah [my college], a good school, but there's, I'd only get to major in biology." Whereas places like [North Carolina's land-

grant institution], they have far more options that would be more precise to what I actually want to do as a professional. You know they have so many more majors in STEM that are much more specific maybe [than] what [my college] has to offer. Because [my college] has a lot of things but because the focus on humanities and social science side, some of them are rather broad at the undergraduate level.

So, you know people were like, “well, why don’t you apply to [two elite, private institutions in North Carolina]?” And I mean, I just, I never did because I knew if I went to a university like that, [would not have] better options. Cause [my college] has very good options, but more specific options in what I want to do. It wouldn’t matter, because I wouldn’t thrive there if I didn’t have some kind of community there that I could relate to. And that’s why a lot of Native Americans have such a low college education rate because at some level, it doesn’t matter how smart you are, if you can’t thrive where you are at, you can get all the A’s you want, but you won’t feel like you belong there. That’s when I would feel like, and I’ve been on [small, private college]’s campus, I just didn’t feel like I belonged there. It didn’t feel like home.

Whereas [my college], that feeling of comfort, knowing I had a community to turn to, knowing that there’s people on campus ... whose job was to help me get through. Other Native American people [I] can relate to. Because I can’t see any academic advisor because they can’t relate to what I’m going through unless they are Native American, too. So that was a big, that was one of the number one factors. You know academics was there, but it was more of like, when I go to this campus, is it going to feel like a home? Or just a place I go to read books, study. And I’ve always felt like college was more than just that....

I feel like I belong here. I have a place. It doesn't matter how big the university is, I still do things here. I am part of this network of people here on campus, especially being in the Native community. I know a lot of people here, and I knew a lot of people before I got here which influenced my decision knowing I had a community here waiting for me. Yeah, it definitely feels like home, I feel comfortable walking the same routes to class. I just feel like where I want to be and should be.

For John, having a supportive Native community on campus was the main factor in his college choice decision.

Having a Native community on campus was not a primary reason for choosing their institution for all of the participants. Ashley discussed how financing her degree was the largest impactor in her decision. However, after attending, Ashley also valued supportive Native communities on campus as something for Native American students to consider. When asked in her second interview about what she would tell a prospective Native American student, Ashley shared the following:

When I was looking for an institution, no it didn't influence my decision. It was more financial reason, but now that I've had that background, I'd tell somebody to find, if you are a Native American student, find an institution that has a Native community. Cause most of them are willing to take you in no matter what tribe you're in. Because they are excited to have somebody trying to do better with their life. So, with that being said, it's like that family outside of your family that you can go to if something is wrong. Or if you have a problem with your classes, regardless, that person is there to talk to. So I'd say, find something, find an institution with that community because it will help get you through.

Native communities on campus were often described as a mixture of tribal affiliations. Those communities came together through student organizations on campus like Native American Student Associations (NASA) and Native fraternities and sororities (HNAFS). Native American students on campus found places to express their culture, heritage, and support each other at PWIs. Brittany highlighted how her experience with her Native sorority sisters supported her at her institution:

It feels really good actually. For me when we are all together, we just click. It's something; I can't even explain it. All I can say is that I feel like I'm at home and I feel like they've been my best friends since I met them or talked to them. It's funny cause we're all different shades...

When asked a follow-up question about how many different tribes were represented in her friend group, Brittany highlighted multiple tribes, "... mainly Lumbee, Tuscarora, Haliwa-Saponi. And I have Coharie." Native American students valued the support of their native peers both on and off campus across tribal affiliations.

Brittany described how her Native community supported her in college. In her first semester, Brittany stated she had an alcoholic roommate and felt disconnected on campus. Focusing on herself and then connecting with her Native sorority, she found a second community to support her on campus when faced with personal tragedy:

Well, so last year, my best friend, he drowned. Well, we haven't known each other for a really long time, but we got really close. Throughout his death, he was graduating from [a local college near her home], he was about to teach the following week at his first week of teacher's school, and he had just been accepted to a master's program. So, he died, it was like, really tough for me.

But long story short, I went through a really deep depression.... But through that depression, I don't know, I found myself. You know, I always heard my friends say, "you need to take care of yourself." Well I did take care of myself. But follow my dreams, because sometimes I felt like that I do so much for others, that sometimes, I forget about myself. I was going through this really hard time, I was thriving [because my friends helped me] get me through this hard moment. And now I'm seeing a counselor because my anxiety was, you know, was really bad. I take on so much stuff that I really don't know how I can control it, but I get it done. I don't know how I get it done.

But through it all, plus with my alcoholic roommate that I told you about, I was just really low in life, but it really makes me realize what kind of person I am because I didn't fail out of school, I didn't flunk, I'm still graduating on time. And, like to some people, that might not mean a lot, but for me it does. Because I am a minority and my people, I hear, when they do go through tough times, they're culturally shocked, so they just go back home. So, you know, I'm very happy and proud of myself. I can find it in myself to still be whom I need to be when times are hard.

*Home feeling.* When choosing a specific college, participants looked for a college that had a "home feeling" to them based on the presence of Native American students. For all the participants except for one who is doing an online program, their college felt like a home to them. Kaylin stated it was something she was looking for when picking her institution. "And you know my senior year, doing like different college visits, visiting other schools, I never felt like that 'homey' feel like I did at [my college]. So yeah, I really love the environment." Brittany also looked for a home feeling when selecting her institution. "And I feel like that's why when I went

to [two other institutions] I didn't feel like at home and when I went to [my college] for orientation, I was like, yeah, this is where I'm supposed to be."

Kaylin agreed in her second interview, highlighting it was her friendships that made her campus feel like home to her:

My friends have definitely made me feel like a homey feeling; they are like family to me already. And just being here and living on campus, definitely gives it more of a home feel because it's giving you so much time here. We are all together during all times of the day and stuff, it's really nice. It definitely feels like home.... So yeah, you know, when you are talking about home, it's more than just the place that you are living. It's more than just the building, it's the people you are there with and the interactions you have. That's what's more important, what makes it feel more like a home.

Ashley described home feeling as more about feeling like her fit on your campus, regardless of where your parents might have gone to school:

Because some people choose colleges based on, you know, family, ties to college. Whom do they know that goes there? But I think if you don't feel like you fit into a college, you aren't going to thrive. You won't want to go to class; you won't want to have anything to do with the college. So, feeling like you fit in kind of helps with getting over the nervousness of being in college, if that makes sense.

John had similar views about fitting at one's institution to be successful:

Just find the one that's the best fit for you. Like I said, there is nothing wrong with not wanting to leave. Like I mentioned before, I wasn't interested in going out-of-state, and I felt like North Carolina has plenty of colleges to choose from and I wanted to be in a position where I can still be engaged but some people, everybody's different. Some

people really want to leave Robeson County, and some people don't. Cross country maybe. I think, as long as it's a good college for you, academically, socially, you like the environment, and then any decision you make will be a good one. And reach out to me as I'm willing to help.

Heather discussed how being on her campus felt like home to her and that it would be the main piece of advice she would share with prospective students (either Native or non-Native):

My campus definitely does feel like home. The people here are so helpful and passionate about what they do. Having friends here makes it even better. They are your family when you're away from home.... Choose a school that will feel like home. No matter the circumstances go where you want to go. This is the time of our lives. We don't want to go through life living by what-ifs instead I did. Don't be afraid to be different. People love to hear about your culture and who you are. Don't be afraid to show yourself off.

When considering institutions, participants believed prospective students should have that home feeling to be comfortable and successful in higher education.

For a few participants, having a supportive Native community on campus was part of the reason they felt at home on their college campuses. The presence of Native faculty, staff, and students, or connections to local tribes, supported the participants' success in college and made them feel more at ease about their college choice. For John, he started meeting the Native community at his college at a young age by participating in powwows and connecting with Native faculty and staff when he began researching colleges:

I think it's right when I got to high school when I started to start meeting them, the staff members there. And I guess when I kept going to the powwow, I started ... to like the community that was there beyond just the powwow. When college, when you are in high

school, that's when you really start thinking that is going to be a thing, it's going to happen a few years down the road. So, I was able to meet [Native faculty advisor] who even told me about this interview; I met him. And it's just cause he's so involved in the community, it was like, "you want to go to [my college]? Here's the people you need to know." So, I got to meet ... the director of the [Native American center on campus]. [The director] and my mom have known each other for years. She's actually parents to one of my girlfriend's tribe, the Coharie. So, another thing is that all Native people are connected in some way or another. And I really started to make those connections, so that really influenced my choice of [my college] as I already had a history with it.

Ashley in her second interview connected her concept of fitting in on campus with the presence of a supportive Native community:

...I started I didn't feel like I fit in. I didn't really want to go to class; I didn't really want to be there. I wanted to be home and be with my family because that's what I was used to. But I found my Native community and then it was a little bit different because now I have this family here, maybe I'll [have another Native American student] in class. Or maybe I'll meet that one Native American student that isn't part of this group and I can bring them to it.

Ashley shared in her story that she went to a high school where no one else identified as Native. Coming to her institution and getting involved in a Native American student organization provided her an opportunity to be with other Native American students that she had not previously experienced. "So just to have that support system is like, 'well I'm not the only Native American student here,' there are others of us on campus." For Native American students, a Native community on campus can lead to one's success.

## External Factors

The third major theme that emerged from the participants' stories were various external factors that influenced their college choice. First, Native American students perceived their academic preparation for college differently, impacting their choice and success in higher education. Participants also discussed how they received advice and assistance with their college applications. Most of the participants in the study highlighted how their college choice was impacted as first-generation college students, not sure how the college search process worked. Participants compared institutions based on their academic major offerings, how the colleges marketed to Native American students, and the different campus settings. One participant discussed her college choice through her recruitment as a student athlete and another discussed how access to summer bridge programs may be beneficial to Native American students and impact their choice. Native American students chose their four-year institution based on these external factors.

**Academic prep.** Participants discussed how prepared they felt for higher education based on their K-12 education. As mentioned above, where the participants grew up limited the availability of resources and impacted how they felt about their academic preparation for college. Beth discussed how her educational community lacked many resources:

Well, I went to one of the poorest counties in North Carolina, and we didn't really have ... resources.... And now that I'm in college, and knowing what I know now, I feel like I wasn't taught. I believe I was taught the bare minimum. I didn't feel like I was taught like everything that could have been taught. I think that's from a lack of resources and a lack of; I don't really know. Just because like the things that were in our history books like Native Americans, we didn't talk about Native Americans even though we had a Native

American tribe right there and we could have used them. We could have used my people as a resource to teach others about Native Americans. We didn't really do that, so I think I was taught the bare minimum in K-12.

In Beth's opinion, being in a different community could have provided additional opportunities such as AP classes. She felt a local high school near her college offered more resources for their students and a more comprehensive curriculum than her rural county had. Though she lacked opportunity, she made the most out of what was available, "if you pushed yourself in high school, then they'd actually give you more and better prepare you. But you had to show you were willing to learn." Beth took as many AP course she could take in her high school, but still felt unprepared for college courses once she started attending her institution:

Okay so like coming to college I, in high school I took all AP classes, AP Calculus, AP Geometry. Any AP that was offered at [my high school] I would take which wasn't really needed but still an opportunity. And I was in honors classes, too. So, I took all honors classes, all AP classes, and coming into my freshman year at [my college], I really struggled in math because it was just new stuff to me. It was not things that I was taught and he, and I remember my professor, he kept saying, "well this is stuff you should have learned in high school." And I'm like, no. And then it kind of made me feel insecure in a way because I was really smart in high school and when I came to college, it was just like, whoa, I don't know this stuff, you know? And then I really struggled my freshman year coming into college just because I wasn't prepared.

Though she took advanced coursework, Beth felt less prepared for college coming from an under-resourced high school.

On the other hand, John had several educational opportunities. He spoke extensively of the educational privileges he had compared to many other Native American students and spoke about how the same high school Beth mentioned in her interview did not prepare Native American students for college:

I just, I can [go] on and on about how good my high school experience was. So, it does hurt when I hear other kids, especially Lumbee kids who had the polar opposite high school. It's a 3A, 4A high school, you're a number, a lot of teachers, I've heard of good teachers there, but majority, I haven't heard nearly enough kids talk about high school like I do mine. About how they weren't challenged academically, people didn't want to be there. I can remember one person who really wanted to be at out of [southeast central high school]. Or any high school down there. I mean, that hurts, as I wouldn't be who I am now if it wasn't for those great opportunities I had. I mean, I just, my social life exploded.

John credited his academic preparation for letting him see college as his next step and prepared him to be successful at his elite, public institution:

Go to college? Like I said, I never really had to think about it. I always knew I was going to college. It was sort of like I knew I had to go to middle school. I knew I had to go to high school. And after that, I knew I had to go to college. And I definitely say that's a privilege that many Native people don't have. They don't automatically expect themselves, or that they're ready or that they can go to college. I knew it would be expensive; I'm in a lot of debt right now. I never had to question from an academic standpoint, I never.... I was a little nervous about getting into [my college], but I knew I could get into, let's be honest, I knew I could get into a college. Just realistically, I could

get into a college. [My college], it was definitely up there as my dream school. That was my top choice.

With strong academic preparation, John believed he was ready for his college, and he would be admitted to multiple institutions he could choose between. Depending on where they were from, the view of educational opportunity varied by the participants as the same case high school brought up by both participants seemed to have more or fewer resources depending on the participant's background. The amount of academic preparation of the participants varied, impacting their college choice. Some students such as John applied to elite and safety schools while other participants applied to only regional institutions with lower admissions requirements.

Other participants described similar feelings about how their academic preparation varied their readiness for college. Kaylin mentioned her high school having few AP class opportunities:

But then after coming to [college], from the school I came from, they didn't prepare me as well for college as others did. For example, at my high school, we didn't have many AP classes, in fact, in my senior year, they only offered one AP class. Then I came to [college], and there are people who have like 30 credit hours....they had more AP classes at their high school

...So yeah, I felt like a lot of high school for me was focused on that final exam. So, the whole semester was focused on preparing to pass that exam rather than be like, learning what we were studying, like memorizing for the first exam. Or like finding that you can apply that to our lives. Go to use it on the exam we are going to take but just specifically for that because that was a problem in high school. But I enjoyed it for the most part. It's like a lot of it wasn't as challenging as it being, like it should have been more challenging to be more prepared for college.

When I asked her why her high school offered fewer AP courses, Kaylin described how a lack of resources meant fewer opportunities and allocating resources to accreditation priorities:

But my senior year the only thing that was offered was AP Literature. So yeah [the principal] just wasn't really for that. We were talking, and I remember at a meeting one time where the principal and parents were there, and they were there to advocate for AP Calculus at our school. And he was saying the only teacher there that could teach AP Calculus was a math teacher for a freshman class, and he was just saying how his scores were really good, so he didn't want to take her out of the freshman math. I guess that was like the test scores for math one weighed more for the school. Not really sure, so that's why he didn't really want that. And now that I'm in college calculus, haven't that background of you know, pre-calculus would have helped me out a lot. Cause everything is like [from] scratch for me. I've never heard of anything related to calculus, so I feel like I'm really wishing that I would have had that. But my principal wouldn't.

Despite having caring instructors who invested in her success, the lack of higher level classes created a feeling of “being behind” when she started at her college.

Many participants attended high schools where they lacked resources such as advanced placement courses or counseling services to assist them with college applications. Heather highlighted how her high school could have had more resources for her to be successful in college:

I feel like ... my schools could have done a better job [preparing] us.... I don't want to say [my community was] low-class but not in like in a high-middle class. We didn't really have ... opportunities like more fortunate schools had.... Like a lot of other schools have [more] opportunities than me. Because a lot of schools, got [their students] more

prepared for college, like college ready classes.... Just more opportunities in general. Not really like specifically.... I wish I had it when I was there because I definitely would have [taken] it.

The resources available to Native American students in K-12 settings changed how they perceived college as a future option and where to enroll. John seemed to have infinite options in preparing him for future success in his K-12 education based on where he lived in the Piedmont region of the state:

Even though it was a magnet school, they still only offered eight AP classes because it was such a small school. They would always try to start a new one, but you'd only have five kids sign up. But, this is another great opportunity, I had at [Piedmont region] has a career center. It's a separate school that offers every AP class for all high schools in the county. I think [the county] has twelve high schools, so it's a pretty big school district. [Y]ou wouldn't be enrolled in it, you would be enrolled in your home school, and you could plan your schedule, so you could plan to go to the career center and take, so they offered all forty-something AP classes. They offered CTE classes, like auto-mechanics, culinary arts, cosmetology, you could take all of that.

Ashley had multiple options as well growing up in a similar area but had a different experience. She moved three times while in high school and avoided AP and honor classes. Ashley had the ability to take these courses, but as she was hoping to be admitted to colleges, she opted to take regular sections of classes to boost her high school GPA:

I just stayed in regular classes as it was easy, and I didn't have to worry about my grades.... I didn't like being challenged in high school, being able to get by with thinking about college, how that would go. And I knew honors classes, they push a little bit harder

in honors and AP classes. Like I don't want to mess my GPA, my high school GPA up, so I can't get into college. I figured take main classes and be done with it.

At the time she was hoping to be an OBGYN so having an exceptional high school GPA was more important to her to get into a college that offered her preferred major.

Charlotte described how the Cherokee tribe offers a Cherokee K-12 school. The school provides an opportunity for the tribe to teach their own members Cherokee language and culture while focusing on basic education. However, Charlotte described how her and one of her son's experiences in Cherokee elementary school, in her opinion, was not setting them up for future success:

But, what grade was I in? Second grade, I still couldn't read well, I couldn't do math well, I wasn't progressing there. I was just there. They ran it more; when I was in school, I think they ran it more like a daycare. Unless you really took to it. They did, so, I ended up getting transferred to [local elementary school] in third grade. [The elementary school] challenged me a little more or pushed you a little more. And I've noticed that with my kids cause I let my son go to Cherokee for first grade. He loved it, he had friends, he liked the class. You know what, first grade, they had him write every day in the way he thought it should be spelt. They didn't correct him, they didn't do anything, they just wrote every day. However, they wanted to. Whatever topic they wanted to. They were never corrected. How are they supposed to get the concept of a paragraph and write their stories out?

Looking back on her experience, Charlotte wished she had taken more advanced classes later in her K-12 education to get further ahead and have more educational opportunities. At the time, she was not aware of the benefits of advanced courses might lead.

**Advice & assistance with college application process.** Participants spoke about how they had received advice and assistance with their college applications. These mentors provided clarity to participants as many were first-generation college students. For participants who did not identify as first-generation, their parents went to college at a non-traditional age, so they were not aware of the traditional college search process.

*Advice.* Kaylin particularly liked how Native American students would speak on their college experience. Kaylin described how in high school some Native American students from her college came to her high school to talk prospective Native college students. For her, hearing the stories of other Native American students who attended the institution was more helpful in choosing a college:

The school talked about what they offered. Some of the students talked about their experiences they had here at school. I just remember that being an eye-opening experience for me as like, it was amazing to see how much they loved their school. And it was just really cool; they were taking time out to come talk to us. Come talk to us about [my college] and persuading us to come to their school. It was like with [my college], they'd be like, they wanted us.

After hearing about colleges from students who came to her community, Kaylin was further impressed by current students who were panelists at info sessions during her college tours on campus:

And during many of those visits, there would be a student panel involved during the day. So, I got a lot of my advice from those.... [I]t's just nice to hear from students who are currently in school. Things they are liking about school and things that they are not liking. And just for me to use that information, help me decide which one would be best

for me.... I was planning to become a student here, so hearing from a current student and hearing what they are currently facing and going through; it seemed more real than a professor who didn't go to that institution and doesn't know what it's like in your situation. Or maybe an alumnus, but the things that have changed since from when they were a student to now. So, hearing it from a current student made it more real, and I could relate more.

Heather also spoke about how current students at her institution helped her to decide to come to her institution. "They helped me a lot in deciding where I wanted to go."

For other participants, trusted mentors provided guidance on where to apply and attend college. Brittany received advice to attend her institution from a dentist she worked for as an intern. At that time, she hoped to go on to dental school:

And at the time the dentist I was working with, he went to [flagship public institution], and [flagship public institution] was my first choice of schools. Well after talking to him, he recommended to me going, even though he went to [flagship public institution]'s dental school, to go to [my college]'s cause it's newer. And he told me how much more beneficial it would be for me.

Brittany followed the advice of her supervisor and looked at her college. Brittany found it was a better fit for her overall.

Participants also highlighted how lack of advising or received poor advice impacted their choice. After a staff member declined to provide Ashley the information she requested at a possible institution, she felt like she was not a priority for them: "What is going to happen when I come to financial aid or advising, are y'all going to say you don't have time for you right now,

later? So, I said [that] was not going to work.” Charlotte delayed entering her four-year college because her community college advisor said nothing would transfer:

I got discouraged when she (advisor) said nothing would transfer so I kind of quit altogether...But you know when an advisor tells you that, you're like what's the point. It's why you're there.... So, I said, why am I going here?

If she had received the correct information that most of her credits would have transferred to her four-year institution, she might have received her bachelor's degree sooner.

*Assistance with college choice and applications.* Participants discussed their college choice with their families before making a decision. When family members did not have all the information, Native American students connected with other advisors who could help them with their college applications. John spoke about how a Native staff member at his preferred institution helped him with his college applications, and he believed the application process was easier due to her guidance:

... [Native staff mentor] was the one who really helped me.... And when I met her, I already knew that [my college] was my dream school. That's where I wanted to be in the next few years. But she, she helped me with things with the Common App, read every one of my essays. Got them down to every perfect word. Commented on everything. I always sent her my essays. She helped me with FAFSA and how to start that.

So, I really didn't, as good as my school was, I really didn't get a whole lot of help with college besides just academically I felt prepared for college. Course there are a lot of things I that I do now that are harder than high school, but I will say, my first semester in college, it was as hard as I thought it was going to be. So, I definitely had some struggles, but one of them was not being underprepared. But other than that, my

high school as far as guidance counselors, I didn't, I was fine with them. I mean they knew me, and we were good, but other than that, they didn't really help a lot of us. They'd have a FAFSA workshop, and it would be in March, and we'd already submitted ours. That's where [my Native mentor] stepped in and really handled the logistical stuff because at first like I said, my parents went to college, but it was just so much more different. They went years ago; my mom went to a community college, and my dad went on the GI Bill, and both of them were older. They didn't stay on campus, my mom or my dad. My dad was, he was like 22 when he started, and my mom was you know, mid-to-late 20s when she started. So that's where I got a lot of help.

The assistance with college applications helped John with his process as the assistance from his high school was not as helpful as his Native mentor who worked in higher education.

Not all Native American students had advisors who could assist them with college applications. Beth highlighted how she wished there were more guidance counselors in high school, so she could receive more assistance in applying for college:

So, I knew I wanted to go to college, it wasn't really a choice, but when it comes to applying to college and stuff like that, I had no idea. I had no idea what I was doing. And my guidance counselor, she helped us apply for scholarships and stuff, but ultimately it was kind of like, up to us. So, it was really hard applying for colleges and applying for scholarships because like, I was pretty much on my own. I had help from other teachers and stuff, but it wasn't never like, okay let's sit down, this is how you do it, this how you write for scholarships. This is how you apply for colleges. It was never like that. It was like, well here's the information and this, and they talk to me like a normal conversation, but it was never like, let's sit down at a computer and show you.... I was really interested

in [four institutions]. And I applied to all of them. And it kind of like took me a long time because there was always something that was missing in my application before I submitted it, so it took me a long time to figure out how to do it myself.

Although Beth struggled with her applications and financial aid, she did have encouragement from her family, teachers, and guidance counselor to pursue higher education, ultimately deciding on a Native-serving institution that many of her mentors had attended and was about an hour from home.

**First-generation.** Over half of the participants identified as first-generation college students. First-generation college students are students whose parents did not previously attend a college or university (Cataldi, Bennett, & Chen, 2018). As the first in their family to attend college, the college search and application process was unknown to the participants. For Beth, the entire college choice process was a mystery:

So as far as applying for colleges and stuff, it was extremely hard for me, just because my mother had never been to an institution and my father hasn't either. They've only done community colleges, so it was like left up to me, myself. So, I remember college day at my high school and [four universities] came out.... And I applied to all of them. And it kind of like took me a long time because there was always something that was missing in my application before I submitted it. So, it took me a long time to figure out how to do it myself.

She continued that her school lacked resources to educate her about what to look for in institutions and how to apply for financial aid. Beth believed more assistance in the process would have been helpful for her and her classmates:

I think there is a lack of resources there and I think that's something that needs to be touched on. As far as [Beth's home county], ... I'm not the only one that feels that way, a bunch of my classmates felt like they needed extra help finding colleges, finding scholarships, and just needing that help. Because a lot of us were first-generation college students, and I've kind of stayed in touch with some of my high school, too. Because I was so involved in a lot of things ... in high school. And every graduating class I've spoken to and stuff, and I'd ask, "how's college search going? You're about to graduate so where are you looking at?" And they've all told me, "Well, I really don't know." So, I've kind of seen that as a pattern that a lot of our parents didn't go to college, didn't have that experience. So, for us, kind of falling short. So, I would just, I ... really don't know how to go about problem-solving, but it's an issue that needs to be fixed.

When asked to speak more in depth about her application process, Beth shared her experience about not knowing the resources at the institutions to which she was applying:

... like I said when I was applying for college, I really didn't know what to look for and stuff. Like for students who had ADD, or ADHD, if you look at the disability thing when you apply, they'll tell you all the resources available you have as a student. So, I knew nothing about that. It wasn't until I started coming to college and getting involved that I realized that students are supposed to look at [those] things like that before they apply for college. I knew nothing [about] that. It was actually when I got into college that I went to my freshman orientation, and they're telling us about the resources and stuff. And then I had this really good "strategies for success" professor ... and he was telling us about the resources and stuff. And then I got really involved on campus, so that's when I started figuring out what everything [my institution] had to offer.

Beth also stated she needed aid to afford higher education but was unsure how financial aid worked as a first-generation student:

And then financial aid. There's different factors you need to be looking at for college and stuff. And I really didn't know that. I was just like, I just had the thought process where you applied for college, and you get in, I guess. I don't really know.... But more it should be like getting to know everything you should know so you can apply for college.

She continued in her second interview how financial aid should be explained to prospective students when they are choosing between institutions so that they can make an informed decision:

And I'd definitely would tell them to look at financial aid, too. It was a huge factor in dealing with institutions. A lot, I've seen a lot of my fellow high school students, classmates, and they wanted to go off. They got into the college, but their financial aid just wouldn't cover it, so they had to decide to go somewhere else.

As a first-generation student, Beth needed more assistance to understand the college application process, how to choose an institution, and how to apply for aid to assist her in affording her degree.

Participants who were not first-generation had similar difficulties to their first-generation Native peers. Their parents completed associate degrees, or they had completed bachelor's degrees as older, non-traditional students. Without the traditional college experience, participants stated they were not sure what they were supposed to do in the application process. John found the application process a mystery even though he attended a highly regarded magnet school where most of his fellow graduates went on to college:

So, when I went to college, I tell people, it wasn't really as much a help that people would think it was, as neither of [my parents] knew how to fill out a FAFSA, neither of them. So that's why I tell people it is a privilege, as I've always saw college as an option. I never question if I could go. So that's a privilege a lot of others don't have, especially in my people. I was still in the same boat as a lot of people. I had to figure out, me and my parents, had to figure out how to do things as far as how do you even apply? ... and they went in the late 80s and 90s (1980s and 1990s), but yeah, they both went to college, and my sister does now. I always knew college was an option since a kid; I will say that. I never, like, I never had to wonder could I go to college like some of my other family does in Robeson County.

John highlighted how his mother completed an associate degree and that his father earned a bachelor's degree from a south-central regional college as a non-traditional student through the GI Bill. As both of his parents' college experiences were not the traditional-aged, out of high school experience, they were not sure how to support John in his college choice. Even though John had the privilege of being a second-generation college student and attending a high school with prospective college students, John found the application process difficult.

***Previous higher education experience.*** Previous experience with higher education influenced participants' college choice. For participants whose parents attended college, the opportunity to visit college campuses influenced their choice. Kaylin chose her parents' and siblings' alma mater:

When I was younger, I was on campus because my parents were alumni and my parents would take us to football games, tailgates, things like that. So that definitely had a part in my choosing [my college] because I had already been experienced with [the] campus so

much before coming. So yeah, it's like every time I came I just felt more in love with it. And you know my senior year, doing like different college visits, visiting other schools, I never felt like that "homey" feel like I did at [my college]. So yeah, I really love the environment.... I had already spent [time] before senior year, or before high school, or even really looking for a college to attend I had already spent a lot of time at [my college]'s campus. So, from an early age, I've been in love with the school. So always in the back of my mind, I thought I would come here, but I tried to keep an open mind. Like I said, I looked at other colleges, and other things to make sure I was making the right decision.... [My college] was always in the back of my mind because that's the school I had been associated with the most in my life.

Previous experience on campus attending powwows as a child influenced John's decision to attend his institution:

But I guess to get down to the main reason I really wanted to go to [my college], and I've always really wanted to go to [my college] right when started high school, that was my dream school, [my college]. And the best reason I could give is, so they hold a powwow annually and I'm a powwow dancer. So, I've been going to [my college]'s powwow since; I can't even remember the first time I went it's been so long, since at least when I was four or five years old. So, I've always had an idea of, that's always been a part of my past, going to [my college] for the powwow. And then it wasn't until I got older that I started to see other aspects of the school besides just the gym where they have the powwow with.

For participants with the privilege of not being first-generation students, attending higher education was next logical step in their education, and if they had been on campus previously, they leaned toward enrolling in those institutions.

**Major.** Participants also highlighted how they choose their college based on the majors offered or they were unaware they should consider potential majors when picking colleges. Brittany stated one of the major reasons she chose her institution was her original major and career aspiration of becoming a dentist. “I went to [my college] because I initially went into dental assisting school and I wanted to be a dentist.” For Beth, she lucked out that her college offered her preferred major of social work. Before applying to colleges, she knew she wanted to go into social work after doing an internship her senior year of high school:

... my senior year I kind of did this internship, job shadowing with a social worker in my community. And she actually does the child welfare at the Boys & Girls Home at Waccamaw. I really enjoyed that, job shadowing her. She actually got to sit down with these kids and actually got to let these kids know they are valued. That your circumstances don't define you, they define them. And then you, even though these things happen in your life, you still make it, you're still a person.... So, you know I've always, when I got to job shadow her, I got to see how much of a huge impact she had on those kids, it was just like, you're making a difference and something I want to do. I want to make a difference. But yeah, I mean don't really know. I wish that I did.

Beth knew she wanted to be a social worker, but she did not know that her college offered social work as a major. As a first-generation student, she was not even aware that you should consider potential majors when choosing between colleges.

John highlighted that the access of certain majors for him helped him choose his institution. For him, his college offering his preferred major was more important than attending a historically Native-serving institution where he could be around more Native American students:

I'm just not saying that if you stay in [southeast region of North Carolina] that means your life is, I mean, what I guess what I'm saying is that when people say they want to go to [historically Native serving institution], for some people that is a good place. If you want to do education, social work, nursing, they have really good programs. But if you want to have an interest in science like me, I'm not saying [historically Native serving institution] has a bad science program; I would just tell people there are other options to consider.

At John's institution, he has to apply to his future major after completing general education requirements. He hopes to study clinical lab science, so he can do that as a profession after graduating. Though he chose his institution based on major and familiarity with the college, it did have an active Native community on campus that made him feel at home on campus.

Reflecting on what she would tell a prospective Native American student, Kaylin emphasized the importance of considering your future major as part of one's choice:

So first I would definitely say look at your different options. So before deciding on a school look at your different schools, visit them, talk to students that go here. See the big pictures of how the different schools you have the opportunity of going to. And once you do that, ask the questions that are important to you. For the things you are looking for in a school. Ask those questions, so you know if that school provides those things or not.

Definitely the majors they offer. You want a school that offers you your major.... Like if you have a major in mind, a career goal for your future, you want to be sure you choose a

school that has that pathway for you. If not, you might end up doing something you might not like as much or dreamed of. So that's definitely important, your major.

**Marketing.** How institutions marketed to Native American students influenced their college choice similar to other applicants. Charlotte mentioned how her institution in western North Carolina advertised to her tribal community:

We have a little site here in town, and they'll put up stuff. They'll put ads in the One Feather (Cherokee newspaper), they'll put things on social media to educate people on going to school, and what [my college] has to offer. And they have a Native American program at [my college]. So, you become part of a group when you are there.

Some universities hold recruitment events in Native communities in North Carolina to encourage Native enrollment. Kaylin highlighted how she came to a preview event for her institution in her local community:

But with [my college], they had this ... preview event. They came to [a nearby county], which is ten minutes from where I live. So that was really cool. So, some representatives from [my college] sent some people from admissions, and some students came to talk about the school. The school talked about what they offered. Some of the students talked about their experiences they had here at school.

Native American students also found out information about colleges in North Carolina by attending college fairs held in their local high schools. Ashley did not realize there were so many institutions in North Carolina before attending her high school's college fair:

It was because I didn't realize how many colleges [there] were in North Carolina and the surrounding areas. So, I would have chosen maybe two but from the college fair, they

sent people from admissions, and [there were] like this is our school, this is what we do.

And we would love to have you. So, it gave me more options.

Attending college fairs in smaller high schools influenced where Native American students within those communities applied. Beth stated only four colleges came to her high school's college fair and those were the only institutions where she applied.

**Campus setting.** Native American students also wanted to like the setting of their chosen institution. John highlighted how his campus had green spaces which made him like his institution compared to others:

... one thing I did like about [my college] is there's, this is going to sound weird, but there's trees. There's an ecosystem, squirrels, and chipmunks running around. And I like that; I like being in nature when I'm at school.

Kaylin had similar feelings about her campus based on the campus architecture and students having pride in their institution:

... I think it's a beautiful campus. Like the bricks everywhere, like it's totally beautiful. Not that the [other] campuses weren't as beautiful, but I just really liked the look of [my college] and everyone seemed really friendly when I was here. Anytime I'd visit I'd see like a ton of people in [my college] clothes and have that [my college] pride and that was cool for me. So yeah, I don't know how to explain the feeling, but it just felt like I belonged here from the beginning, so that was cool.

Kaylin elaborated more in her second interview how being on campus and getting a feel for campus can help one choose their right college:

... it's just so different looking at a school's website or talking to a representative of a school on the phone; you get a different feeling understanding the school's environment

when you visit the school. You get to see what it actually looks like and you're actually seeing how it looks like during the day. You see students passing by and just get feel of the life of the student when you are on campus rather than just looking at it through a picture.

By liking their campus setting, Native American students enjoyed their college more and could picture themselves on campus. This especially became true for Heather who was apprehensive about attending an all-female school but came to like the campus after visiting:

That's why I was very nervous about coming here. I know girls are a lot of drama. I know all that comes with girls. But when I came on my visit here, it was nothing like that. All the girls are friends, everybody is nice. It's just totally different. It's like we are our own little world here and outside is just different.

Similar to other students choosing between colleges, the Native participants wanted to like the setting of their campus.

**Native college athlete recruitment.** Heather's experience as a college athlete was unique in her college choice process. In her story, she mostly mentioned being recruited by her softball head coach and how that influenced her college choice, a school she had not heard of before her recruitment:

Really [my coach] just came, watched me play, liked me from the get-go, and I knew two other girls who played on my team, they went here, and they said they really liked it. They helped me a lot in deciding where I wanted to go. And my coach, she's really helped me through this whole process. She's the one that told me about the school. How the classes are. What the professors are like. She was more focused on my academics side

over my athletic abilities. She really cares more about what we are doing in the classroom than going on the field. Which was a really good thing for me.

After her initial visit to campus, Heather highlighted how her head coach continued to recruit her by coming to Heather's games. She made her decision while playing at a softball tournament out-of-state that her future head coach attended. "I think my coach was there and we played a game and I was like, 'okay daddy, I think I want to go to [my college] because I liked it, and I loved it, I want to go.'"

Athletic recruitment played a large role in the college choice process for Heather.

**Summer bridge programs.** One participant was involved in a summer bridge program after choosing to attend his institution. John's university offered students the opportunity to take a few classes during the summer before their first fall semester to ease the transition to higher education. John and many of his Native friends participated in the summer bridge program:

I also went to a summer bridge program which really helped me, so I started the summer before fall [semester]. I took two classes and the director over that is [a Native staff member]. So, when my mom found out he was over it, it was no longer an option if I was going. So that also helped. And even if I didn't go, I could still confidently say it wouldn't have been such a huge transition. Not as much as other people, definitely.... summer bridge helped [me] a lot to give me a head start before the actual semester started. I got to spend the summer here which, that really helped me out a lot.

John stated that he was not aware of the program when he applied to his institution, but that it was such a positive resource for him, that he thinks other Native American students should attend such programs at their institution if they are offered. John stated it allowed him to figure out campus, register for fall classes with an advisor, see the various other resources at the

institution, and connect with other Native American students before most students enrolled for the fall semester. According to John, Native American students should consider colleges that have these opportunities to be successful in higher education.

For participants, varying external factors influenced their college choice. Sharing these concepts with future prospective Native American students would assist their choice according to the participants. If prospective students become more aware of the positives of advanced K-12 education, major options, and programs on campuses to ease their transition, than Native American students may be more likely to choose to attend higher education.

### **Growth & Opportunities**

The last major theme to emerge from the participants' interviews explained why they wanted to pursue higher education: growth and opportunities. To the participants, higher education meant personal development and access to future opportunities while serving their Native communities in return.

**Giving back to community.** Participants were interested in pursuing higher education, so that they could give back to their families and communities. Kaylin explained that her family has always been there for her, so she hoped to have a stable career in the future to support them:

You know family is important to me. So, having that family and support system that I can always depend on so when things like financially aren't right, I would always have them to be stable. Just constant in that. But also, being successful in career, in the career that I choose. So maybe like having a stable job and having a steady income. Not having to worry about [finances], that stability.

To Kaylin, higher education provided access to jobs that have a stable income that will support her and her family. Beth explained further why it is important for Native American students to come back and serve their Native communities after receiving an education:

... I was thinking I could do something with my social work degree; I could work with Native, Indian Affairs. And I was thinking about that; I don't know. I mean, it's important. It's not just important to me but to my people, to my elders, and my community. And it's, I just feel like I owe it to them because where they brought us from to now to keep our identity, keeping whom we are, keeping our tribe known, and recognized. Letting people know, the surrounding people that we are here. I think it's just kind of a way for me to pay it forward, to kind of get them what they deserve. I mean, I know that I'm going to graduate with my bachelor's degree and I know I'm going to work for my master's. But pretty much it's going to be not just for me but for my people too.

By serving her community, she will help keep her people and her culture stay alive.

John described how he and potentially other Native American students wanted to have successful careers as well, so they could serve their people:

... I want to be able to help my people with my career. Using the skills that I have to make my community a better place. And I might not know what that is yet, right now I'm just focused on getting through undergrad, getting a job. But I do know there are options beyond that, whatever they are. My decision is going to be influenced by my people, trying to help them. You know it might not be directly as a social worker, or I might not even live in Robeson County, but I do know that's something I want to do. I don't really know what that looks like and I'm going to find out.

He continued by highlighting that it was almost a duty to go to college and serve his community, as his grandparents did not have the same opportunities that he had:

It has always been important to me as a kid. Growing up in a tribal community, growing up always knowing I was Native American. Seeing the struggles my people face now, what they faced for hundreds of years throughout history, it has always involved struggle. I just, I feel obligated to help because my grandparents weren't even allowed to go to college. My granddad finished school, and as a kid, he had to go work in a tobacco field, cotton field. He probably would have killed to go to school. I know a lot of the older generation dreamed of going to school, so I feel like I have the obligation to go cause I succeeded in high school so it's like, my people didn't get a chance, so cause I can, I'm not going to take it for granted. Same for college, you know, I know for a while, my mom probably didn't think college was an option. So, I know that it's a privilege for me to go, so I don't take that for granted.

Lastly, Charlotte highlighted that it is in tribal communities' best interest to support Native American students in higher education so that they may contribute back to the tribe as skilled workers:

I think it is important for them to support members to get education, so that we can have better quality workers, people who are more professional in higher positions. Because one of the things that they do when they hire is tier one, I think, is being Native American. That's your preference. Native American preference so why not hire someone that is qualified that is Native American doing that job? To do it. Instead of outsourcing it? You can save money if you help your own people grow.

By pursuing higher education, Native American students believe they can eventually give back to their people.

*Medical and human services career fields.* Participants highlighted that one way to serve their Native communities was based on their future career aspirations. For instance, Kaylin hoped to one day be an optometrist and own her own practice, so that she can provide affordable health care to her tribal community:

So, for me my idea is to be an optometrist. So back home in Robeson County, it's pretty, poverty is high back there. So, there are no optometry schools in North Carolina, so I'd have to go to another state if I keep the same mindset. But I'd have to travel to another state to get my degree, ... but after graduating, maybe [after] getting some experience with some others, I'd like to travel back home and offer affordable care to the people in my community. So, I'd like, I just know that it's hard back for people back home. You know poverty is just a really big thing, so I'd like really to contribute in any way that I can to provide affordable care .... [They would be] able to afford better care.

Following up on these themes in her second interview, Kaylin highlighted why supporting her tribal community was important to her future career:

... definitely my career aspirations. So being an optometrist, what I want to do once I finish my education, after undergrad and optometry school, and then maybe travel around the country some to get some experience with other doctors, I would like to return back home and care about people in my community. The people of my tribal community, being able to serve them any way that I can, providing optometry care at affordable prices, because I know back home, poverty is a pretty big thing. People of my tribal

communities, provide [them] some kind of medical services that I can for a fair price, affordable to them.

Ashley initially pursued higher education as a gateway to medical school. She described how higher education was a gateway for her intended career:

I wanted to be an OBGYN. I wanted to be, you know every child says they want to be a doctor. I was determined I wanted to be a doctor. Well, I said, in order to get there, I have to get into college, so...I kind of needed good grades. When I got to college, I decided that wasn't the best plan for me, but up until college, I decided I wanted to go to med school to do what I wanted to do.... They want us to get out of the small Native community and be able to come back and help the community. And well you can't do that without an education.

Even though she changed her major and career path from medicine, she found a new passion for human services by providing counseling services for women:

When I started I wanted to be an OBGYN; I wanted to help women, I wanted to help families stay together. Once I decided OBGYN was not for me, I switched to psychology, and we have to take a career in psychology class where we had different people come in and talk about different ideas you could do with a psychology degree. And she came in and spoke to us and I said, "that's what I want to do." Because I could still help women, better women and help them that way. Keep families together; I said that works, that's what I want to do.

Brittany, similar to Ashley's experience, went into higher education hoping to pursue a medical based degree. After deciding to become a dentist was not for her, she found a new calling in physical therapy:

Yeah, one of my biggest things is that I love helping people. I think that's why I've gotten so involved at [my college] because I love making a difference. That's the reason too I felt like I switched my major, because working in the dental field, you can help someone, we can clean their teeth and all of that. But I wasn't able to build a relationship like I wanted to. But with physical therapy, it's very rewarding to give back, to teach a child who can't walk, to walk who can't, or stuff like that. Just be able to see how they grow and their process, even when the journey is long, it's very rewarding at the end.

Brittany also wants to serve her local community by offering a community wellness center as an alternative career path if she did not become a physical therapist:

So, one of my dreams is to open my own gym. And so, they have a basketball court, pools already there, it's already a business, I think it's a great opportunity to see if this is something I really wanted to do. Because I'm about to graduate in May. So, either my eyes are going to open more to that or to go to PT School because I'm really torn between the two. Because when I think about job opportunities, and what I want to do with my life, I think about other things than money, like what am I doing it for? Because I'm more of a giver. I like for people to think better about themselves or help them in any ways possible. But like, that's what gives me, it makes me want to be more a difference in the world or change the world.

Asked why a community gym would serve her tribal community, Brittany explained how her local gym was a positive influence in her life growing up in an urban area:

Well, I guess since I was young, I was really active. I played basketball, track, [and] cheerleading. And I'm not the kind of person, personality, that I couldn't sit behind a desk. I always have to be up around, talking, moving, or talking to somebody. If not, it

drives me crazy. It drives me crazy to sit down in one spot. So, I really find that just being active. As far as community wise, when I was younger, going back to the Native community, they didn't really have a YMCAs, or they don't have YMCAs or anything like that. I've always told myself that I'd love to be able to put a gym out there, or anywhere else, so Native children, or adults, anybody could, you know, have a stress reliever, get active.... Cause there are, I don't want to say a lot of obese people, but there are a lot of people that aren't as healthy as they should because they really don't have the opportunities given to them that the cities do.... Native Americans, you know, have a high alcoholism rate, we have a high crime scene, and poverty rate back down in Lumberton. And you learn about that stuff in class, and you don't want people to ever judge your people because of what they hear, this, that, and third. If there is ever an opportunity that I could influence, or be a role model for the community, for them to change that, it has to start somewhere. So maybe being a child, being more active in positive things in life, maybe you wouldn't choose that lifestyle. Because not everybody comes from a stable home.

For Brittany, either career option provides resources to her tribal community.

Beth knew she wanted to serve her community when she entered college. She hoped to be a social worker in her Native community after completing her future master's degree. She explained why she was motivated to serve others:

But I'm really passionate about numerous things in my life and stuff so, like for child welfare, I'm very passionate for children. And then the VA, the Veterans Association, I'm really passionate about military and helping them transition back into being a citizen.

And I'm interested in mental health and all this stuff. So, it's kind of hard for me to be like set in stone be like this is where I want to work every day. I just really don't know.

To understand why so many of the participants were interested in these fields, I asked how tribal communities influenced their college choice and their career aspirations. When asked if tribal communities influenced their college choice, two of the participants said no, but that it did influence their career choice. For example, Ashley described that the lack of resources in tribal communities leads to a push by the North Carolina tribes for Native American students to pursue those fields. "Career choices maybe cause there is a big push for counseling and doctors. 'So maybe you want to go for this or that.' Like putting that idea in your head." Though they may have said no to the question of college choice, if a Native American student initially hoped to become a doctor based on their community's influence, then tribal communities did influence their decision to pursue higher education.

**Personal growth.** Participants discussed how they chose to attend college to grow as individuals. As Heather stated, college "loosened [me] up to the next level... just made me an all-around better person. Socially and all of that." She highlighted further that college would help her get over her shyness:

I was really shy in high school, so I knew if I came here I would have to come out of my shyness. Get out of my comfort zone. And coming here and being involved in all of these traditions really makes you do that.

Ashley had a similar experience at her institution when she stated college, "...opened my eyes to new things." When asked to elaborate, Ashley described learning how to write well and speak in front of groups. Similar to Heather, Ashley was also shy before college but was pushed by a Native advisor to come out of her shell:

[When] I started college, I was the shy type. I was the person back in the corner. And our advisor said, by the time you graduate college, you'll be the one up by the front of the room. In the stadium type classrooms, the person up in the front. I told her no, that was not going to be me. It'll never be me.... Now I'd be the person in front of the classroom to give a speech if it needs to be given.... [She pushed me] out of my comfort zone. You know I don't want to, I'm not ready for this, and she's doing it without you realizing she's doing it. Giving you different leadership opportunities, giving you different things, you have to do like last weekend we talked to a bunch of high school students. And she was like y'all are going to be the one talking to them, not me. So, she had us go out and talk to different students. She had us talking to parents, talking to school administrators about why the students should go there. Different stories we had about [my college].

College also prepared the Native American students to be adults and provided them the skills to handle the stresses of life. As Brittany stated,

It's been a long journey. It's been stressful, many tears. It's been well worth it. I'm not the same person I once was especially in college because I've grown so much, and I'm not so dependent on my mom and dad for everything. They do help me out a lot, but you know, living in the same household, have you done this? Have you done that? I just wanted, they've done it, so I wanted to do it for myself as well. Because I use to want to be a homebody, I used to comment saying I was going to stay there the rest of my life, but now I'm like, no, I'm too old for that. I need to grow up and accomplish, you know, whom I set my goal to be.

Home and family was important for Brittany, but now she prepared to go out in the world on her own. For John, college prepared him to think about various perspectives:

It's changed my perspective, it's helped me understand, because you're dealing with different people on a daily [basis]. It's an eye opener and kindness does matter. Be kind to people because they may treat you mean or be some way towards you, but you don't know what they've been through or might be going through.

Though personal growth may not have been the priority for the participants to choose to go to college, the experience of attending has shaped their view of their education and themselves. The participants hoped other Native American students would feel inspired to pursue higher education, so they may also have personal growth opportunities.

### **Summary**

This study was a qualitative narrative studying exploring Native American student college choice at four-year institutions in North Carolina. The narrative study was guided by one research question:

1. What were the storied experiences of Native American students from North Carolina when they chose to attend college?

The Native participants explained their college choice narratives through four main themes (see Figure 5.1): family, Native identity and community, external factors, and growth and opportunities. Through their four narrative themes, Native American students in the study made sense of their lived experience of choosing to attend four-year institutions in North Carolina. As Beth summarized, her aspiration for higher education connected her personal, family, and community needs. "My education, [is] not only for me and my family but my people."

## **CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION**

### **Introduction**

This study was a qualitative narrative study (Bold, 2012; Creswell, 2013) exploring the college choice of Native American students in North Carolina at four-year institutions and was guided by the research question:

What were the storied experiences of Native American students from North Carolina when they chose to attend college?

Through their stories, we have a better understanding of Native American student college choice at North Carolina four-year institutions for these seven students. In this chapter, the four themes of Native college choice are discussed in relation to current literature. Implications for practice and policy are reviewed in the context of the findings. The chapter concludes with future research recommendations, a personal reflection, and summary remarks.

### **Theoretical Implications**

In this section, a summary of the findings is discussed in relation to current college choice literature. First, the four themes of Native college choice from the participants are discussed and their implications on the literature. Connections to the findings in relation to Perna's (2006) conceptual model of college choice are also highlighted. Through these four themes, we have a deeper understanding of how Native American students described their college choice experience and how Native college choice relates to college choice literature.

### **Four Themes of Native American College Choice**

In this study, seven stories of Native college choice were collected. Through their stories, four themes of Native American college choice emerged: family, Native identity and community,

external factors, and growth and opportunities (see Figure 6.1). In this section, their four themes of college choice are discussed in regard to current literature.

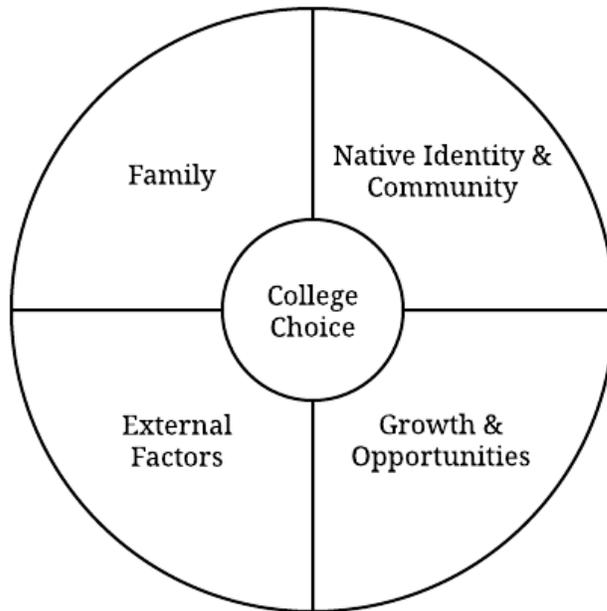


Figure 6.1

*Native American Students' Four Themes of College Choice.*

**Family.** Across all seven participants, Native families were important in the Native American students' desire to pursue higher education. Participants described their Native families as the strongest influencer on their desire to pursue higher education and where to enroll. For example, families hoped Native American students would pursue higher education to improve their economic opportunity. The stories of the participants connect with the case study participants described by Guillory and Wolverton's (2008). As Native families are important in a Native American student's persistence (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008), this study found that Native families were important in their desire and enrollment in higher education as well. North Carolina Native American students stated their parents encouraged them to seek a college

education and pursue a major that would give back to their Native families and communities. For Native American students, their families are influential in the initial desire to pursue higher education and persist through graduation.

Participants in this study described how family influenced their college choice as a means of increasing their potential lifetime earnings. For two of the participants, a college degree was viewed as ensuring employment and funding for their families. Freeman (2005) highlighted that minority populations view higher education as a gateway for future success for their children and future family prosperity. The results of this study support the view that higher education is seen as a gateway to success for Native communities as well. College was described by the participants as an investment in securing future employment that would support themselves and avoid current or past financial struggles for their families. The notion that higher education is a gateway for future success may apply to several minority populations where access to higher education has been limited in United States history (Carney, 1999). For the participants in this study, earning a college degree helped ensure financial stability for the student and their family members through perceived increased job opportunities that come with a college education.

The family theme of Native college choice is connected with college choice literature. Previous studies showed that parental involvement in K-12 education and the desire of parents for their children to attend higher education increased the likelihood of enrollment in higher education (Bergerson et al., 2013; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Perna, 2000b; Thomas, 1998). This study highlights how Native family encouragement may have similar positive impacts on Native American students' desire to seek higher education. Participants in this study expressed similar parental encouragement as Native parents strongly advocated for quality K-12 education in their communities, encouraged enrollment in higher education, and assisted them in their college

choice process. Native parents saw the opportunities for their children and the family's long-term success connected with pursuing higher education. Parents and extended family members were described by the participants as motivators to seek higher education to avoid economic struggles and to be successful role models for the family. Participants described how their families highlight their college education as success stories to younger family and community members to further encourage more Native American students to pursue higher education. As their families were considered the most important part of to all the participants lives, the influence of Native families on college choice may be significant. Further research should explore if families impact Native college choice more or less than other populations.

*Distance from family.* Lowe (2005) stated Native American students wished to attend a college or university near their home communities as they wished to return home often. For Native American students in this study, the distance from their families was particularly important in their college choice for the same reason as they wanted to see their family members. Family was their support network and the fabric of their daily life as they engaged with family members regularly. By attending college, the participants were purposefully separating themselves from their families, so they hoped to reduce the distance as much as possible when it came to their college choice.

The participants in this study also stated their Native parents did not want them to attend institutions too far away from home which was not mentioned by Lowe (2005). For two of the participants, the distance from the family limited their college choices as their parents disqualified institutions that they deemed too far away from home. Thus, Native American students may be limited in their college choices based on their and their parents' perceptions of distance from home. If Native American students do not live near four-year institutions, then the

prospective students or parents may not view bachelor degrees as feasible due to the separation of the Native American student from their home communities. Further studies should investigate the differences in college choice of different demographic groups based on distance from their families to see the impact of distance on their college choice. Colleges and universities should also explore means of providing more educational opportunities in tribal communities to reduce or eliminate distance concerns that Native families may have about leaving home.

In addition, four of the participants' families lived in North Carolina rural communities. The number of four-year institutions in their local communities was limited compared to Native American students from urban and suburban communities. Their experience of a limited number of college choices in their local communities connected to previous research on higher education deserts in rural communities (Hillman, 2016; Perna, 2010). Hillman (2016) highlighted how Hispanic populations have fewer higher education options compared to other demographics. In this study, Native American students from a rural community had few higher education options. With fewer local higher education options, the participants stated they had fewer institutions to choose from, and many of their Native friends did not pursue higher education so they would not have to leave their communities. As most of the Native participants in this study were from rural areas, the lack of colleges limited their choices, and may have deterred other Native American students from seeking higher education. If we hope to increase the participation of Native American students in higher education, more opportunities for higher education must occur in rural communities near tribal communities.

However, participants from North Carolina's cities or suburbs lived near multiple four-year institutions. Counter to the experiences of the rural Native participants, the three students from these areas had multiple college choices within short distances from their families. They

also described college as their next logical step in their education compared to rural participants who sought higher education. The rural participants described how they were not the norm in their communities for attending higher education while the urban participants stated most of their classmates went to college. For North Carolina Native American students, the location of their home community may influence their college choice as the distance from institutions vary depending on where they live in the state.

**Native identity and community.** Native American students in this study discussed in depth their Native identity, their cultural values, how they felt during their college choice process, and their experience in higher education. Previous research has found that tribal identity is essential to Indigenous culture (Brayboy et al., 2012; Oakley, 2005). Participants in this study highlighted how the value of higher education from the tribal community could influence a student's choice to attend college as well. As the participants in this study became more aware of their Native culture and heritage, they also became more aware of the continual oppression of their people (Carney, 1999), and how that impacted communal issues such as addiction, poverty, and low higher education participation rates (Pavel et al., 1998). Participating in higher education inspired the Native American students to serve their tribal communities and improve the lives of tribal members. If higher education provides opportunities for Native American students to explore their identity and increase the likelihood to serve their Native communities, then tribes have incentives for encouraging their students to enroll in higher education as they bring their learned skills back to their tribal communities.

Participants highlighted how they and their parents viewed higher education as a means of economic opportunity (Becker, 1993; Perna, 2005) and building up their communities. The opportunity to obtain a degree meant more financial security for the student, their families, and

their tribal communities. Brayboy et al. (2012) described Native nation building as Native American students hoping to serve their tribal communities. In this study, participants stated their desire to enroll in higher education connected with Native nation building as they hoped to give back to their tribal communities after completing their degree. Participants hoped to serve their communities through human services and medical fields in North Carolina. By providing affordable services and medical treatments to their tribal communities, they hope to provide services to their people where they could all grow stronger as a tribe. All seven participants in varying degrees believed giving back to their communities with their education was important. For them, seeking higher education provided an economic opportunity (Becker, 1993; Perna, 2005) and opportunities to engaged with Native nation building (Brayboy et al., 2012; Nelson, 2015).

Strayhorn (2012) stated all students seek a sense of belonging on college campuses. Students, especially students of color, enter PWIs with a basic need to belong. Based on those feelings, they then have a positive or negative experience on college campuses. College students emphasize, “social acceptance, support, community, connections, and respect to their own identity, wellbeing, and academic success” (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 5) when considering how they feel on campus. Students look for institutions where they see other students like them and not feel like a minority (Reay et al., 2001). Findings from this study support these concepts in that Native American students also look for college campuses where they feel like they will belong similar to other underrepresented populations. Native American students in the study looked for other Native American students, faculty, and staff on college campuses to see if they would fit on that campus and be supported. For Native American students in this study, their sense of

belonging in higher education was based on how connected they thought they might be with other Native Americans on campus.

Further, the participants' sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012) developed through the presence of strong native communities on campus and a feeling of respect for their Native identity. Universities that provide resources for Native communities to thrive and make efforts to learn Native culture through curriculum and programming were seen as better options for the participants. In relation to college choice, their sense of belonging impacted their decision to apply or attend certain institutions. If a strong Native community did not exist on campus, or they perceived that their tribal culture would not be appreciated, participants did not believe they would belong at those institutions. This study supports Reay et al.'s (2001) conclusions that a sense of belonging can impact college choice, but for Native American students, the presence of strong Native communities on campus was considered by the participants. If a college or university campus does not have a strong Native community, then the institution should highlight how they are attempting to embrace Native culture in spaces or programs to create and support the development of these communities. How the presence of communities of color and prospective student's sense of belonging impacts underrepresented students' college choice needs to be explored.

Connected to sense of belonging, participants in this study looked for institutions in North Carolina that they described as having a "home feeling." The home feeling was created by the campus aesthetics, presence of thriving Native communities on campus, and an appreciation of their Native identity. The home feeling described by the participants sounds similar to the concepts of *home-like* feeling developed by Brayboy et al. (2012). Students look for a *home-like* feeling on campuses (Brayboy, 2005a; Brayboy et al., 2012; Collins, 2015; Murphy & Zirkel,

2015). Previous research has shown that a lack of *home-like* feeling on campus has led to negative experiences for Native American students in higher education (Brayboy, 2005b; Brayboy et al., 2012; Carney, 1999; Cross et al. 2013; Murphy & Zirkel, 2015; Peters, in press). Further, if Native American students do not have a supportive community on campus, they are more likely not to persist (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008). This study adds to the literature in that the “home feeling” also influences a Native American student’s college choice. If students do not feel like they will have a home on campus, then they will not choose that institution. Further, if Native American students on campus do not have a home feeling, then that experience is shared with prospective Native American students, making it less likely that other Native American students will enroll at that institution. For participants in this study, they looked for a campus of choice where they would feel like they fit and could thrive as future students.

Six of the participants highlighted how they developed a home feeling on campus through Native American student organizations. Older participants described their involvement and leadership to support the Native communities through Native American student associations or Historically Native American Fraternity and Sorority (HNAFS) organizations (Oxendine et al., 2013; Peters, in press; Saggio, 2010). Younger participants described becoming involved in these areas. Strong, thriving Native communities on campus increased the likelihood that a participant chose one institution over another. With increased Native presence on campus, the opportunity to provide additional programming and cultural events for the larger campus community could increase the cultural awareness of local tribes. When considering Native college choice, emphasizing supportive Native community organizations may increase a Native American students’ interest in a particular college as they see the organizations as examples of a thriving Native community on campus.

Institutions must have and must increase the number of Native American students on campus to have Native American student organizations on campus. Participants in the study highlighted how they wished to attend institutions where there were other Native American students. Native American students have a more *home-like* feeling if other Native American students, faculty, and staff are on campus (Brayboy, 2005b; Brayboy et al., 2012; Collins, 2015; Murphy & Zirkel, 2015; Strayhorn, 2012). In this study, participants highlighted how the presence of Native Americans impacted their choice to attend their institution as they knew they would be supported by Native peers and mentors on campus.

Three of the participants' parents were described as looking for Native allies on campus that could support their student. Native parents were described by the participants as preferring an institution over others based on the presence of Native faculty and staff. Similar to previous research (Austin, 2005), Native parents preferred their student attend colleges in North Carolina where there were Native faculty and staff. Some of the participants described already having connections with Native staff before enrolling, increasing the participant's likelihood of attending that institution. Similar to Austin's (2005) findings, Native parents in this study engaged with Native staff to assist their student with their application and encouraging their participation in summer bridge programs which were tailored for Native American students transition to PWIs. As Native American students are leaving their homes and communities, having supportive faculty and staff on campus that can relate with Native American students may provide support for their success, while giving Native parents peace of mind. Other summer bridge programs for Native American students have shown to increase persistence rates (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Strayhorn, 2011). One participant in the study believed summer bridge programs could influence a Native American student's college choice if they were made aware

of the programs during the search process. For John, building Native connections and acclimating to campus before other students arrived should be advertised to Native American students, so they can receive the same benefits he enjoyed at his institution. He only had the benefit of attending the program because his mother had connected John to the Native staff member who ran the program. If Native American students become aware that programs such as summer bridge exist to assist them in transitioning and adjusting to college, while making connections with other Native American students, then those students have a better chance of academic success and feel at home on campus.

However, four of the participants did not have assistance from their families in connecting with Native faculty and staff on college campuses. They wished to attend institutions that had Native faculty and staff, but their parents were not aware of how the college application process worked or who to contact for information about different colleges. Similarly, the participants did not mention how, if at all, their parents were engaged in making connections with Native faculty and staff on campuses. As all four participants in this example were first-generation college students, they did not know to look for supportive Native members on campus that other participants' parents actively pursued. Although Native parent engagement is important to connecting Native American students with Native faculty and staff (Austin, 2005), this study highlighted how first-generation Native American students need support from campus communities to connect them to Native faculty and staff, or personnel who are knowledgeable about Native issues and concerns, to provide mentorship and provide a support network for Native American students.

As Native American students feel more at home on college campuses, this may increase their participation rates in higher education. Tierney (1999) highlighted how appreciating the

cultural contributions of students of color added to college campuses and improved their success within higher education. Providing students with agency and allowing their identity to contribute to campus versus conform adds to the campus climate (Tierney, 1999). Tierney (1999) focused predominately on African American and Latinx students. This study contributes to his work in that Native American students also want and need for their culture to be celebrated and taught to others versus being perceived as a problem. Participants in this study celebrated their identity as members of North Carolina tribes. They dealt with racism in K-12 education and, for the Lumbee participants, are fighting for federal recognition. For Native American students to feel sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012) and a *home-feeling* (Brayboy et al., 2012), more Native American students need to participate in higher education and feel free to express their identity on college campuses.

By adding Native culture and organizations on college campuses, Native American students may feel more comfortable and provide opportunities for non-Natives to learn indigenous cultures (Saggio, 2010). Participants in this study, in particular, focused on their college choice and success based on Native organizations on campus that provided opportunities to learn Native culture and history. Their experiences connect with previous research highlighting the benefits of HNAFS organizations add to the Native experience on campus for North Carolina students (Oxendine et al., 2013; Peters, in press). HNAFS organizations may be example of thriving Native communities on campus that Native American students look for in their college choice in addition to being a positive experience for current students (Oxendine et al., 2013; Peters, in press). As HNAFS organizations formed in North Carolina (Peters, in press), these organizations may provide a unique Native community space for North Carolina Native American students and may influence where they choose to attend college compared to other

states. HNAFS organizations and Native American student associations can be highlighted to prospective Native American students as examples of strong Native communities on campus as well opportunities to express their tribal culture. More research should investigate the impact of HNAFS organizations as well as Native American student associations on college campuses about college choice and their contributions to expressing Native culture on campuses. The impact of these organizations may vary in other states compared to North Carolina.

**External factors.** Several external factors influenced whether Native American students want to pursue higher education and where they chose to attend. For instance, some participants in this study had issues with the college application process and felt like they lacked the resources in their home communities to assist them with their college search and choice. Two participants in this study from rural communities discussed difficulty understanding the college application process and were not sure how to apply for aid. When considering Native college choice, higher education staff and policymakers should consider how a lack of resources in rural communities may hinder students desire to enroll in higher education, as they are not sure of the process or the amount of aid they might receive. Previous research has indicated minority and low-SES populations' knowledge of financial aid, college environments, application processes, and their sense of belonging on campus increased the likelihood of enrolling in higher education (Maramba et al., 2015; Means et al., 2016; Murphy & Zikel, 2015; Reay et al., 2001). Native participants in this study from these communities shared similar examples of lacking cultural capital such as understanding the college application process and looking for supportive communities on campus. However, this study adds to the literature in that Native American students from privileged communities also felt like they needed assistance with the college application process similar to the participants from rural communities. First or second-generation

participants were seeking assistance with their college application processes. Participants even from resource-heavy high schools believed they could have received more assistance with the college application process than was offered by their school's guidance counselors. More assistance needs to be provided to Native American students to assist them in the college application process, regardless of their home community.

Participants in this study felt differently about their academic preparation to attend higher education. For the two participants from more privileged, middle-class backgrounds, they were cognizant of the differences in their education compared to their tribal members in rural, low-SES communities. Participants from under-resourced communities and identified as first-generation students felt behind when starting college and that their K-12 education lacked adequate resources to help them be successful. Keene (2014) highlighted that preparatory programs that provide education on the college application process, as well as strong mentoring, could increase a Native American student's chances of applying to and persisting at their institution. More preparatory programs and Native mentors for Native prospective college students may bridge this gap in academic preparation in North Carolina as well. In the implications section below, I expand further on additional funding for K-12 public education in North Carolina.

**Growth & opportunities.** Participants in this study discussed how they viewed higher education as a means for personal growth and opportunity. Also, they saw higher education as a means to improve their Native communities in North Carolina. Similar to Guillory's (2008) findings, Native students pursue and persist in higher education to "give back" to their communities. Overall, the participants described the three North Carolina tribes represented in this study as supportive of their students attending higher education, regardless of higher

education's previous history (Brayboy et al., 2012; Carney, 2005; Nelson, 2015). Participants highlighted how their success was a point of pride in their tribal communities and they felt empowered by the support of their people. Sharing their stories of empowerment to prospective Native American students may inspire them to pursue higher education, so they may feel pride and empowerment for seeking a college education as well.

Native American students described having personal goals and goals for their communities upon graduation similar to Nelson's (2015) findings where students live in a *paradox* of serving personal and community needs. Nelson (2015) found Native American students in the Southwest region of the United States balanced individual goals with community goals as part of their Native identity. For North Carolina Native American students, Native communities encouraged the participants to study medicine and human service fields. This may explain most of the participants in this study identified one of these disciplines as their major. They hoped to take their education back to their communities to provide care for other tribal members. It appears that North Carolina tribes advocate for Native American student success and hope they will pursue professions that will then serve their community's needs. The desire to work in medical and human services fields may also be related to their parents' employment as four of the participants' parents were or studying to be, nurses. Future studies should investigate the relationship between parent occupations and Native college choice and career aspirations. Overall, participants supported the concept of Nelson's (2015) *paradox* of meeting individual and community goals but within the current health and human services needs of North Carolina tribal communities. On a theoretical level, the participants did not seem to be balancing their individual and community goals as Nelson (2015) states. Instead, their individual and community goals are one in the same. Their career aspirations served their communities as well as their

personal goals. They intend to bring their education and learned skills back to their community. They desire to work in professions that would serve their tribal community who encouraged them to enroll in higher education.

As the participants were hoping to enter medical professions or work in fields such as social work, graduate education was the next step for several of the participants. Many received help from Native faculty and staff mentors in their applications for graduate school and highlighted how their Native communities helped them get to a point where graduate study was possible. Lessons from this study could help counter current negative narrative experiences of Native American students seeking graduate education (Cross et al., 2013). Cross et al. (2013) found barriers to recruiting Native American students at the graduate level due to lack of Indigenous faculty and mentors, lacking opportunities to serve Indigenous communities after completing their degree, obligations at home, feelings of isolation, and lack of indigenous culture on college campuses. If Native undergraduate students feel connected to a Native community, develop strong connections with Native mentors, and are aware of the needs of their specific communities, Native American students may be more inclined to pursue graduate degrees and remain within higher education. Increasing the number of Native graduate degree students may also increase the number of Native faculty and staff on campus that could support current Native undergraduate students on campus. Universities must first increase and improve the Native undergraduate communities on campus to promote Native graduate student success.

Dillman (2002) found Native American students who decided to enroll in postsecondary education were influenced by potential skill development, escaping their current life pattern, participating in bridge programs, pursuing education for education's sake, becoming a Native role model, family encouragement, and disproving stereotypes. Her findings matched with the

experiences of North Carolina Native American students. Participants hoped to gain new skills, improve their SES status for themselves and their families, became role models for other tribal members, were encouraged by their families and communities to attend, and felt pride and self-worth for their accomplishments. The participants in this study articulated these goals within four themes of college choice. Families and tribal communities supported and encouraged Native American students to enroll while the students hoped to develop their Native identity and give back to their communities upon completing their degree. This study supports Dillman's (2002) findings but places the concepts in a framework that can be shared with admissions staff, guidance counselors, and Native communities in relation to assisting Native college choice. By focusing on the four themes of Native American college choice, educators will be able to articulate the benefits of higher education to prospective students in meaningful ways.

Using the four themes of Native college choice, Native American students in this study highlighted how they overcame several barriers to reach higher education, and for many, they are now ready to graduate and enter graduate school or join the workforce in their Native community. By sharing their stories of empowerment through these themes of Native college choice, more Native American students may apply and aspire to higher education within North Carolina.

### **Implications for Understanding Native College Choice**

The Native stories in this study were similar to the experiences found by Nelson (2015) and Saggio (2010). The stories of the participants provided support for Nelson's (2015) *paradox* where attending higher education was for personal goals and for support of their local communities. However, as mentioned above, the participants in this study found their personal and communities' goals as one. For them, the pursuit of higher education meant opportunity for

them personally and their community. In addition, participants in this study emphasized helping individuals in medical or human services fields specifically. When considering Native college choice, more research should explore how Native American students want to support their Native community and see how their career aspirations impact their college choice.

Saggio (2001) highlighted how institutional effects could influence Native American student choice. In his study, Saggio (2001) found that Native American students choose their institution because of its large Native population, small student size, low student/professor ratio, and active recruitment of Native American students to the college. In this study, Native American students did not necessarily look for a large Native community, but at least a thriving Native community that a Native American student could join to feel supported and to be with other Native American students. Native participants believe that joining a Native community or organization on campus helped them in their college career and is an opportunity to consider in Native college choice. A sizeable Native population may help Native American students choose one institution over another (Saggio, 2001). This study found that any Native community on campus can be a decisive factor. If Native American students know they are not the only Native American students on campus, they may have a more home feeling that the participants described in this study as important in choosing an institution and persisting. Further, additional institutional effects such as college major, location, campus architecture and size, and support from Native faculty and staff were important to the participants in this study. Even if the Native American students were not aware of all of these items at the time of their choice, participants stated they were important to their current success, so they should be highlighted to prospective Native American students. Considering Native college choice, participants in this study highlighted that when institutional characteristics were important. Similar to other studies (Perna,

2006; Saggio, 2001), Native American students want to go to college where they offer particular majors, enjoy the campus setting, and feel like they belong (Strayhorn, 2012).

**Campus experience.** The Native participants in this study chose their college based on having a home feeling about their campus. As discussed above, home feeling can be developed by having a Native faculty, staff, students, and culture on campus where students felt welcome and appreciated (Brayboy et al., 2012). Regarding college choice, participants in this study emphasized that Native communities on campus create the home feeling for them. Their experience connects with Brayboy et al.'s (2012) concepts of creating a *home-feeling* on college campuses by having the presence of Native organizations, spaces, and programs. In this study as mentioned above, Native organizations and HNAFS (Oxendine et al., 2013; Peters, in press) were of particular interest to the participants as they provided opportunities for Native culture to be shared on their college campuses.

Native American students also looked for a home feeling when they visited college campuses as prospective students. Participants highlighted how being on campus helped them discover if they felt at home and if the campus was a fit for them. Their experience connects with Okerson's (2016) findings that students' on-campus visits are influenced by campus aesthetics, campus vibe, and personal interactions with staff and students on campus as influential factors if a student chooses an institution. The Native participants discussed looking for a campus where they felt at home, where they liked the physical environment, and the vibe on campus. To feel at home, they were particularly interested in interacting with Native faculty, staff, and students on campus. If a campus lacked a strong Native community on campus when they visited, participants described being less inclined to apply or choose that institution where they knew they might not thrive.

This study investigated how North Carolina Native American students choose four-year institutions. Previous Indigenous research (Dillman, 2002; Fann, 2015; Nelson, 2015; Saggio, 2010) only partially investigated Native college choice and none used Perna's (2006) conceptual model of college choice as a conceptual framework. In this study, four themes of Native American college choice described the decision of the Native American student experiences to attend four-year institutions in North Carolina: family, Native identity and community, external factors, and growth and opportunities. These themes of Native college choice add to the literature of college choice as it provides Native voices to Perna's (2006) framework and showcases the importance of their identities as Native Americans when it comes to their choice.

### **Perna's College Choice Conceptual Model**

In this study, Perna's (2006) model of college choice was used as a conceptual framework to understand Native college choice. Perna's (2006) model was purposefully selected as it combined both human capital and sociological theories, and the model was not created with Native American students in mind. Previous research on college choice did not include Native American students (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Perna, 2000a, 2000b; Shotton et al., 2013). Perna (2006) called for research seeing if her model applied to Native American students. In this section, connections between the findings from this study and her model of college choice are discussed.

Findings from the study supported that Native American student participants' college choice process could be understood using Perna's (2006) model. Native American students in this study shared stories that fit within Perna's (2006) four layers. However, the participants in this study put particular emphasis on family and serving their community as motivators to seek higher education. When considering Native American student college choice, the impacts of

family support and serving a student's local community may have more importance than with non-Native American students. Future studies should investigate if these views are shared among all Native American students seeking higher education and explore the implications of this study in regard to college choice literature.

**Human capital and sociological theoretical underpinnings.** Perna (2006) stated her model of college choice combined both human capital and sociological theories to form the theoretical basis for her model. Findings from this study support this perspective of college choice. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) described college choice as a three-stage process of predisposition, search, and choice. Predisposition refers to the predisposed feelings about attending college by a potential student based on their educational and occupational goals (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Perna, 2006; Terenzini et al., 2001). The second stage refers to a student's search for information about colleges and universities. The last stage refers to the selection of their preferred institution (Bergerson et al., 2013; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler et al., 1999; Hurtado et al., 1997; Long, 2004; Perna, 2006; Terenzini et al., 2001). Participants in this study did not describe their college choice as a staged process but more in connection with human capital and sociological factors. They described their drive to attend higher education, their families' desire for them to go to college, their socioeconomic upbringing, and serving their local communities as themes in choosing an institution compared to a staged process. Further, many were confused by the application process, were not sure what to research about institutions, limited their choices based on distance, and applied to institutions that visited their local communities or they had previous experiences on campus. Participants experiences were similar to Nelson's (2015) participants who did not describe college choice as linear process. Attending college was both a collective and individual experience, and their tribal

identity influenced their decision to pursue and give back to the community. In addition, participants reflected on their college choice process in the context of their current experiences on campus. Based on their experience, participants were able to highlight what they wished they had known, or what they would emphasize now to prospective Native American students. As they reflected on their choice, they described layered and intersecting themes that sounded more like Perna's (2006) framework than a linear process (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

Further, Native American students in this study described increasing and supporting human capital (Becker, 1975, 1993). According to human capital theory in regard to student choice, students will consider feasible options (but not necessarily all alternatives) of colleges and then select an institution that will provide them the most net benefit compared to the cost of attendance and net loss of foregone earnings (DesJardin & Toutkoushian, 2005). Participants described in their theme of personal growth and opportunity a means to improve themselves by investing their time and resources to improve their socioeconomic standing. Students from low socio-economic backgrounds, in particular, described how higher education would increase their job prospects (Turner, 2004). Heller (2009) described higher education as a means to increase one's income, and Native American students reiterated this belief in their desire to attend higher education in North Carolina. In this study, participants pursued medical and human services fields that were perceived as well-paying careers and gave back to their communities. They related their success to serving their North Carolina tribal communities. Instead of only improving their benefits (DesJardin & Toutkoushian, 2005), Native participants hoped to improve their communities and increase the human and social capital of future prospective Native American students by improving their home communities after graduation. As family and

tribal community and identity were two major themes in their college choice, the participants in this study hoped their success could lead to the success of their tribal communities as well.

More research should investigate Native American students' college choice based on cost. As this study did not ask the participants direct questions about the cost of higher education, participants mentioned their reasons for pursuing higher education and other factors that weighed significantly in their decision. Emphasizing their families and home communities, distance from home appeared to weigh more in their decision than cost. Unlike previous research that highlighted how students might choose the cheapest option (Avery & Hoxby, 2004; DesJardin & Toutkoushian, 2005), Native American students in this study focused on the importance of their family and being close to their Native communities more than cost. Further studies should investigate Native American students as they are completing high school to see how higher education cost impacts a Native American students choice to enroll in college.

Native American students in this study did highlight how their tribal identity affected their aid. Charlotte had funding from the Cherokee tribe to cover the cost of higher education, but the other participants did not have this same opportunity. As a few Lumbee participants highlighted, their peers thought they received funding from their tribe similar to the Cherokee nation. Connecting with Tierney et al. (2007) findings, Native participants in this study stated they were perceived by others to have received aid even when they might not be receiving much. More studies looking at the impact of cost on Native American student college choice would further explain how Native American students perceive the cost of higher education and how the opportunity costs vary between federally and state recognized tribes.

Native American students also described how they wished to improve their social capital (Tierney & Venegas, 2006) and within their Native communities. Native American students

hoped to connect with Native American students on campus to have a supportive community while away from home. Connecting with other Native American students who were successful in higher education and with Native alumni who supported their development and graduate school applications, highlights how Native American students in this study increased their social capital (Tierney & Venegas, 2006). Their experience connects with previous research on the positives of social capital (Baum & Payea, 2004; Bowen, 1997; Leslie & Brinkman, 1988; Perna, 2006), but focused on Native networks compared to other potential networks on and off campus. As more Native Americans complete bachelor's degrees, it will be interesting to see how the value of social capital may or may not increase in a student's motivation to pursue higher education.

Participants in this study also wanted to improve the social capital of their communities. Previous researchers wondered how Native American students reached for status attainment but served their Native communities (Brayboy et al., 2012; Nelson, 2015). For participants in this study, increasing their status inherently improves their community as they bring their gained education, skills, and networks back to their communities after completing their degree. Their education provides them with opportunities to be role models and leaders in their tribal communities, thus improving their status and improving their communities. For urban Natives, they bring cultural knowledge back to their predominately white neighborhoods to be shared with other Native family members. By pursuing higher education, Native American students saw their gains in social capital as benefits for their communities.

**Habitus.** Perna's (2006) first layer of habitus reflects in regard to college choice, "an individual's demographic characteristics, particularly gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, as well as cultural and social capital" (Perna, 2006, p. 117). These various capitals merge to form one's habitus. Family, friends, and financial opportunity are significant factors in a

student's decision to attend college (McDonough, 1997; Perna, 2006). As highlighted above, participants mentioned how their families, tribal community, tribal identity, and the financial opportunity of attending higher education outweighed potential costs of attending four-year institutions in North Carolina. In this study, Native American students were influenced by where they were raised in regard to their habitus to attend higher education. Either from urban or rural communities, their home communities influenced their decision to attend and their experiences on campus. Urban students felt more inclined to attend higher education and saw college as the next logical step in their education compared to their Native peers from rural communities. Students from rural, majority Native communities felt unease to leave their community and had a harder transition to college, especially at PWI institutions in North Carolina. Their experience connected to previous findings that Native American students have a hard time moving into a minority status after growing up in a majority Native community (Brayboy, 2005a, 2005b; Brayboy et al., 2012; Collins, 2015; Martin, 2005; Peters, in press; Sides, 2005) and were more apprehensive to leave their community (Fann, 2015). This study provides support to what Sides (2005) described as Native life-ways. Where a Native American student was raised and if they switch from a majority to minority status impacts their college experience. Unique to the participants in this study were Native participants from the opposite perspective who came from urban communities and described easier transitions to college. As those three participants came from predominately white neighborhoods, attending a PWI was not abnormal for them. Instead, they found the opportunity to attend a PWI with other Native American students from tribal communities as opportunities to learn more about tribal culture. More research should investigate the varying experiences of the Native American students based on their home communities and

update Sides (2005) life-ways theory to reflect the experiences from both tribal and non-tribal communities.

Native American students in this study also connected with Perna's (2006) effects of being a first-generation college student in one's habitus. First-generation Native American students in this study did not know about higher education or the application process from family, friends, and their tribal community. They felt behind and limited in their choices. Their experiences are similar to Means et al.'s (2015) study showing minority students from rural communities face barriers to financial and academic opportunity in their communities when applying to colleges. However, unique to the Native participants in this study, second-generation Native American students also felt behind and did not have resources to assist them with higher education. They had other privileges in academic preparation and access to other social networks to assist them with their applications compared to rural participants, but all the Native participants had difficulty in applying to college. More research and assistance in the Native college student application process should look into this phenomenon described in the participants' stories.

**School and community context.** Perna's (2006) second-layer of college choice was school and community context. School structures and resources assist or impede student college choice (McDonough, 1997; Perna, 2006; Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Starks, 2010; Tierney & Venegas, 2006). Participants in this study made several connections between available resources at their school and support from their tribal communities in their themes of college choice. For example, participants wished they had more guidance counselors to assist them in their college search and application process. John highlighted how he needed outside help to complete his applications and that programs to complete the FAFSA were too late in the school year to be

helpful. McDonough (1997) stated guidance counselors could assist in these areas. Native American students stated they lacked the support they needed to be successful.

Participants in this study also discussed their varied levels of academic preparation. Some had access to advanced curriculum while others described limited access to AP classes based on the resources at their high schools. Having a limited number of AP classes and limited academic resources were similar K-12 experiences of other Native American students in the United States (Benally, 2004; Brayboy et al., 2012; Greene & Forster, 2003; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008). However, instead of their academic preparation impacting their persistence in college (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008), the participants in this study highlighted how their academic preparation impacted their college choice as well. Students who had limited AP classes and school resources felt behind in academics, applied to more public-regional institutions, and described their Native peers in their home communities as less likely to pursue higher education. Perna (2006) believed students who took more AP classes and advanced curriculum would increase their aspirations for college. Five participants in this study partially supported this claim as they took as many advanced courses that they could take to prepare them for college. Though some found the quality of the education they received lacking compared to their peers at other schools in North Carolina, Native American students wanted more of advanced curriculum opportunities to prepare themselves for college.

However, one participant highlighted how she did not take advanced classes to increase her chances of being admitted to college. Her desire to attend higher education was the same as her peers, but she wanted to better guarantee her path to higher education with strong grades by taking “easier” basic curriculum courses. Overall, Native American students in this study acknowledged the opportunity their K-12 education provided them with access to higher

education. As only 34 percent of North Carolina students from under-resourced high schools graduate with a bachelor's degree within six years (Bowen et al., 2009), Native American students were driven to complete their college degrees despite their K-12 education preparation.

Participants also described how they wished their Native history was taught in their K-12 education. As their tribal communities lived in North Carolina for thousands of years, the lack of sharing any of their tribes' histories in school, even when the school was located in a traditionally Native community, frustrated Native participants in the study. Their experiences described a lack of support for Native history in K-12 education similar to experiences of Native American students outside of North Carolina (Miller & Riding In, 2001). More sharing and celebrating the contributions of the Native tribes in North Carolina may improve the educational experiences of Native American students and provide opportunities for non-Native American students to learn about the eight tribes located in the state. With improved high school experiences, more Native American student may wish to remain in education and pursue college degrees.

**Higher education context.** Native American students also described their college choice based on Perna's (2006) higher education context layer. The third layer of higher education context refers to how institutions influence choice (Perna, 2006). Institutions share information either passively or through targeted marketing and recruitment (Chapman, 1981; McDonough et al., 1997; Paulsen, 1990; Perna, 2006). Further, the attributes of the individual institutions can influence a student's choice as students look for colleges with particular characteristics that match their identities (Nora, 2004). Institutions control whom they admit, whom should receive institutional aid, and how much space is available to students (Manski & Wise, 1983; Paulsen, 1990; Perna, 2006; Perna et al., 2005). Saggio (2001) previously highlighted how institutional

effects could influence Native American student choice similar to Perna's (2006) model. Stories from the participants in this study supported institutional effects across the seven universities in North Carolina in this study. Participants highlighted that campus aesthetics, majors, and presence of Native communities on campus were factors they weighed when considering their choice. Hoping for a home feeling and a sense of belonging from each institution, participants from North Carolina tribes looked for a college that would meet their needs and had supportive Native Americans on campus to support their success (Brayboy, 2005a; Brayboy et al., 2012; Collins, 2015; Strayhorn, 2012). In this study, participants emphasized, however, the presence of Native faculty, staff, and students as an important portion of their final college choice between one institution over another. Further exploration of the importance of current Native Americans and their culture on campus could explore the impact of on Native American students' college choice.

Institutions can influence a student's choice as students look for a college with characteristics that match their identities (Nora, 2004; Saggio, 2001). Participants in this study highlighted they preferred the campus they had visited previously for campus events such as powwows and collegiate sports. They also sought institutions that offered Native American studies majors or minors. If other institutions wish to increase the number of Native American students on campus, investment in Native programming and educational opportunities may increase the likelihood Native American students to apply to their college.

Nelson (2015) believed current Native experiences impacted Native American student college choice. Participants in this study stated similar experiences of looking for Native American students, faculty, and staff and the presence of a thriving Native community on campus. When considering choice, Native American students were more inclined to attend an

institution they had visited with their parents, or they had heard positive experiences about from their families, friends, and K-12 teachers. For the Native participants in this study, the experiences of current Native American students on campus influenced if they wanted to attend one institution over another. Six participants highlighted how they became engaged with Native communities on campus and how they believed a positive Native community supported their success academically and socially. As they share their story with prospective Native college students, future generations of Native American students may determine their college based on the experiences of their peers.

Similar, institutions who made efforts to visit predominately Native communities and to let current Native American students express their college experience influenced some participants to apply and enroll in their eventual college choice. As Native American students previously sought information from campus administrators (Fann, 2015), participants in this study also valued institutions who visited their community during their college choice process, and who let Native voices speak about their own experiences.

In this study, participants also discussed the varying levels of advice they received in their higher education journey. Native American students rely on campus administrators for information (Fann, 2015), as they are more likely to be first-generation. In this study, even second-generation Native American students were not sure of how higher education and the application process worked. Correct information must be shared with Native American students by campus advisors to increase access to higher education. Charlotte's experience from her community college advisor, for example, delayed her first college degree by eight years as she believed none of her community college credits would count at a four-year institution. Native participants also looked for Native faculty and staff mentors on their campus to help them while

on campus. Their experience connects with what Brayboy et al.'s (2012) described as a desire for Native mentors on campus. Even with more Native faculty and staff on college campuses, North Carolina institutions should invest in educating advisors on how to support Native American students and making sure they provide accurate information for their success.

**Social, economic, & policy context.** Perna's (2006) fourth layer consisted of the social, economic, and policy context of a college student's choice. Social forces such as demographic changes, economic conditions, and public policies can have either a direct or indirect effect on college student choice (Perna, 2006). Previous research has shown Native Americans think about their tribal community when considering decisions (Brayboy et al., 2012; Nelson, 2015; St. Germaine, 2008; Wilkins & Kiiwetinesik Stark, 2010). Participants in this study described similar experiences in weighing the thoughts of their community and tribal elders in making decisions. More specifically, Native American students in this study valued the opinions of their family members in decision-making more than their larger community. When considering their college choice, they described talking about their choice extensively with family members.

Mentioned as part of their Native identity theme, participants described how their Native tribal identity impacted their college choice. Depending on the federal recognition of their tribe, Native American students had varying levels of financial aid. For *nonrecognized* tribes (Wilkins & Kiiwetinesik Stark, 2010), if they were pursuing federal recognition, they hoped recognition would increase their or future students' opportunities and was a point of pride in their identity.

As Native American students in this study discussed their college choice in the context of each of Perna's (2006) layers of college choice, there is support for understanding Native college choice with her model. A national and larger quantitative study could explore if Perna's (2006) model could apply to all Native American students but may be limited in feasibility based on the

current number of Native American students in higher education. For the Native participants in this study, they explained their college choice through four themes of Native college choice. Later in this chapter, a discussion on the future research implications for the four themes of Native college choice is discussed as well as further research opportunities based on the findings of this study.

### **Implications**

In this section, implications of this study are discussed. The findings and non-findings lead to several implications for practice and policy. First, implications for higher education practice will be summarized. Higher education policy implications regarding Native American enrollment are then highlighted.

#### **Implications for Practice**

This study contributed to the growing literature on Native college students' stories of success (Brayboy et al., 2012; Larimore & McClellan, 2005; Peters, in press; Shotton et al., 2013). By sharing the stories of Native American students thriving in K-16 education, more prospective Native American students may enroll in higher education, which counters the narrative that Native American students do not succeed in higher education. This study highlights the need to support Native enrollment, to support Native American students while on college campuses, to improve higher education relations with local tribes, and to consider the use of satellite and online programs for Native communities.

**Supporting Native American student enrollment.** The participants in the study discussed the desire to attend a college or university near their families and tribal communities. Participants mentioned how their tribal communities at varying levels supported their efforts to attend higher education. Higher education should focus on enrolling Native American students

that are within a short driving distance from tribal communities, so Native American students have the means to travel home and be connected with their communities.

***Recruitment.*** To accomplish this goal, North Carolina higher education admissions officers and marketing specialists should recruit Native American students in their surrounding area and across the state. Charlotte highlighted how advertisements in her community that emphasized attending college near her tribal community connected with her. For instance, a Cherokee student may be less inclined to enroll in an institution in the eastern or central areas of North Carolina and wish to enroll at an institution in the western region of the state. Further, if a Native community is near the state border, institutions in surrounding states could recruit Native American students from those communities and consider them for in-state tuition rates. Highlighting the closeness of an institution to a tribal community may encourage Native American students to enroll as they learn that four-year institutions are close to their home communities. For institutions, tailored marketing and recruiting tribes in their local communities may garner more local Native applicants and provide a rationale for allocating advertising funds in these communities. For tribes, they may be more inclined to encourage their students to apply to certain colleges as they will know someone on campus to support the Native American students.

Recruiting Native American students should begin at an early age, so Native American students and families are more familiar with college campuses. Higher education institutions should build connections with local tribes to learn the issues affecting them and assist them in their efforts. Faculty members could, for example, have research incentives working on issues provided by tribal governments such as tribal policies, agriculture, and K-12 education evaluations. Research could provide prospective Native American students an opportunity to

become familiar with universities. In this study, even if first-generation, participants applied to North Carolina institutions with which they had some connection with while in high school. Either through a campus visit, or having current Native American students visit Native communities for admission information sessions, institutions who made an effort to connect with prospective Native American students received applications from the participants. As Native American students hope to give back to their communities, Native American students may be more inclined to pick an institution where they know they are already working on tribal issues. Outreach programming to Native American students in K-12 education may provide more opportunities for Native American students to become familiar with state institutions and hopefully apply. If institutions wish to increase their Native populations on their campus, continual engagement with local tribes in their surrounding communities is necessary, especially if they let Native voices speak for the institution. This provides more rationale for hiring more Native faculty and staff, so the effort to recruit Native American students is shared with more individuals across the university.

Participants in this study looked for Native communities on campus and were influenced by the experiences they heard from current Native faculty, staff, and students. Native American students and their stories can be shared on the college's website or through targeted mailings for prospective Native American students to see as they consider institutions. Native voices in admissions materials and descriptions of their successes and activities on campus may increase the comfort level of attending that institution. Institutions that promote the stories of Native American student success on campus and that outreach to local tribal communities may encourage more Native American students to apply to those institutions.

***Application assistance.*** Participants in this study discussed how they had difficulty with the college application process. Native American students who identified as first-generation, rural, or whose parents had non-traditional college experiences, felt unsure of how the college application process worked and did not know what they should be looking for from institutions. Programs such as the College Advising Corps (2018) may be able to assist this process. As College Advising Corps (2018) programs are focused on supporting local communities with college applications, institutions with these programs should include, or increase their support, for counties with large Native populations. If college campuses do not have a College Advising Corps program, institutions could develop programs to reach out to rural counties in their surrounding areas to assist with college applications. Additional assistance with how to apply to higher education may increase participation rates as the mysticism of the application barrier is removed for Native American students.

***Advanced coursework.*** Participants in this study emphasized their academic preparation as a factor in their admission and readiness for college coursework. Native American students in this study expressed that AP, IB, dual-enrollment, and honors courses better prepared them for higher education and made them more competitive for admission. However, many of the participants came from rural communities where the opportunity to take advanced courses was less likely. High school guidance counselors, teachers, and parents should encourage their Native American students to take advanced classes offered in their high school to prepare them for higher education as well as to advocate with their local governments and school boards to increase funding for an advanced curriculum. Local counties should investigate if they can dedicate the funds to hire or train teachers to teach AP courses. Further, remote technology classrooms where students can engage with an instructor located in a different school may assist

in spreading resource funds across multiple high schools. If communities lack funding for an advanced curriculum, surrounding counties could potentially pool funds to create career centers where multiple AP classes are taught, and students could commute to these locations. John described how his home county had a center which provided opportunities for students in multiple high schools to participate. Rural communities could create a shared center located near the border of surrounding counties, providing a resource for students and saving funds for county school budgets.

The lessons learned from the participants about the need for advanced coursework can be shared with local administrators to use as examples for more funding in K-12 education in North Carolina. Admissions staff at recruitment events in North Carolina should emphasize to Native American students the importance of taking advanced coursework to increase their odds of acceptance into colleges and being prepared academically. The stories of the Native American students in this study can be shared with future students as examples on why advanced coursework is helpful and that students, even from under-resourced high schools, can find success in higher education in North Carolina.

***More Native faculty and staff.*** Findings from this study highlighted how Native American students looked for Native faculty and staff on college campuses. Native American students were more likely to enroll in institutions that had Native American mentors on campus where they felt they would be supported by Native staff. Institutions should do more to recruit and retain Native American faculty and staff if they hope to increase the number of Native American students on their campuses. More Native faculty and staff will help create Native communities prospective Native American students are looking for in their college choice.

*Educating non-Native higher education officials.* The four themes of Native American student college choice for North Carolina students at four-year institutions provide a framework for higher education officials to learn and appreciate Native culture. As the presence of Native faculty, staff, and students is low nationally in higher education (Brayboy et al., 2012), it is imperative that non-Native faculty and staff in higher education increase their awareness of tribes in their local area. They will be more able to understand and support Native American students on campus and to encourage Native enrollment by prospective students. Attending on-campus events such as Native American student organization's events and annual powwows provide opportunities for college campuses to increase their awareness. The four themes provide an introduction in understanding what is important to Native American students in North Carolina and what potentially motivates them to pursue and succeed in higher education.

For example, admissions officers in North Carolina could use the Native American student choice themes to understand the perspectives of Native American students better, know what Native American students may be seeking their institutions, and how the students may choose their institution. Admissions officers could emphasize the institution's connections with Native tribes, the building of Native communities on campus, and the resources for Native American students. If these programs do not currently exist, institutions can highlight how they are planning to improve in these areas and how future funds are being allocated to support Native communities on campuses such as Native spaces, centers, and courses. Other officials on campus can use the four themes as an introduction to Native cultures and as a way to explore Native history in their state. Educational programs for faculty and staff could cover the histories and contributions of local tribes in their state, detail the meaning of family and community values for Native American people, and provide stories of current experiences of Native American students

on campus. By prominently appreciating and celebrating the contributions of tribes on PWI college campuses, Native enrollment may increase, and colleges will be able to learn more about Native culture.

**Native American students on campus.** After Native American students have successfully matriculated to colleges and universities, institutions need to continue to develop positive experiences for Native American students, so they have a better overall college experience, will be retained on campus, and could share their experiences with prospective Native American students. Participants in this study agreed with previous research that showed that the experience of current Native American students (Nelson, 2015) impacted their view of colleges in North Carolina. Thus, administrators need to consider how they are supporting current Native American students to encourage enrollment of additional Native American students to their campus. In this section, how campus administrators can support native communities, their families, and improving relations with local tribes and Native programming is discussed.

***Native community support.*** One of the keys to Native American student success is thriving Native communities on campus. Participants in this study looked for college campuses with a strong Native community or found success after becoming involved with a Native organization on campus. Institutions should create or enhance their Native communities by encouraging Native American student groups, programs, places, curriculum, and language on campus.

Participants in this study mentioned increased feelings of belonging and academic achievement on campus after joining Native American student organizations and HNAFS organizations. Student affairs professionals should encourage the creation of these organizations

and advise them to assist with their development. Empowered Native organizations can hold more Native programs on campus outside of Native American heritage month that teaches their campus community Native culture such as bead-making, powwows, and Indigenous People's Day. Having more times to showcase their presence and culture on campus, Native American students may feel more at home, and that they belong as much as other student populations on campus. Further, non-Native American students have more opportunities to connect and engage with Native American students about tribal cultures. If events include local tribes, this also increases the chances for Native families to be connected on campus and for potential future students to be actively engaged with the university community. With continual involvement on campus, Native enrollment may increase if Native American students know they will have a place where their Native culture is highlighted and celebrated. Native American students should have an office or space in student centers and could have Native living-and-learning communities where Native American students can come together and see other Native American students on campus. By having a physical location for Native American students to frequent, Native American students would have more opportunities to see other Native American students.

The participants described personal growth and development through their involvement in Native American organizations. Being involved on campuses has shown to improve student retention in higher education (Astin, 1999). For participants in this study, Native American student organizations taught them leadership skills that they could share with their home communities. Participants highlighted how they wanted to contribute to the leadership and advancement of their people. Campus recruiters could emphasize Native American student organizations and how prospective Native American students may gain leadership skills as an extra benefit for attending higher education. Further research should investigate the connections

between Native nation building (Brayboy et al., 2012) and leadership development of Native American students in higher education.

Institutions can also support Native American students on campus by providing Native curriculum. Participants in the study mentioned how they were interested in colleges that provided Native American studies majors or minors but found few options on college campuses. For instance, the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and the University of North Carolina-Wilmington offer American Indian Studies majors and minors. These majors and minors were described by participants as an incentive for attending those institutions even if the students ultimately did not choose those institutions. The participants wanted to learn more about their people's culture and history. Further, it provides non-Native American students opportunities to learn about the tribes in their local area. Institutions who may not be able to offer majors and minors to Native American students can explore if Native-based elective courses could be taught by faculty within their disciplines. Academic departments could reward faculty members for creating and teaching courses related to Native Americans as a larger institutional curriculum goal. Native culture, language, and history-based courses could count toward university's general education requirements. For instance, the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill offers courses in Cherokee as a language as well as classes discussing Native American history and art (American Indian and Indigenous Studies, 2018). A Native American student who speaks his or her tribe's language could also count their Native language for foreign language requirements. Any Native American course that fits within a Native American student's general education advances a Native American students' progress towards a degree while providing a means to learn more about their culture.

*Native families.* The importance of family must be recognized by higher education professionals to support Native American students on campus. Attending higher education, for Native American students in this study, meant time away from their families. Participants in the study mentioned how they visited home regularly or chose institutions that were not too far from their tribal communities. Institutions could support Native American students by organizing Native family weekends where Native American students' family members are invited to campus, so Native American students do not need to travel home as regularly. Institutions could host Native families on campus and could use these times to do more Native programs other than powwows to highlight Native culture. Transversely, if Native American students are traveling home regularly on weekends, higher education could organize carpool services where Native American students from similar communities could carpool via a university vehicle. This would reduce the travel costs for Native American students and provide them opportunities to connect with other Native American students from their tribal community. Lastly, a Native mentoring program could be created where Native American students could be connected with urban Native families who live near campus. This would provide Native American students who may be further from home an opportunity to have an additional supportive Native family unit while attending PWIs.

*University and Tribal community relations.* Colleges and universities should develop relationships with Native tribes in their local area. Conversations and memorandums of understanding between higher education officials and tribal leaders may assist in the development of policies and decisions related to Native American students. For instance, to encourage Native American student enrollment, financial aid officers could consider aid programs that may support Native American students from tribes that may not have the means to

provide additional financial aid to their students. Continued conversations between tribes and administrators can provide more opportunities for collaborative programs on college campuses and in the tribal communities. This would increase the exposure of college and universities to Native American students and increase the presence of Native culture on campuses.

*Alternative higher education programs.* Higher education can support Native American students by developing programs that would allow Native American students to remain in their tribal communities to be with their families. Development of online programs may provide access to higher education for tribal communities that are not near four-year institutions and provide access to institutions that are distant. For example, Charlotte highlighted how her institution developed more online classes, so she did not need to leave her family to attend class. Satellite campus and extension programs in tribal communities would also provide access to higher education for Native American students who do not wish to leave their communities. Satellite campuses can provide full degree programs and certificate programs that would benefit the tribal communities such as business, STEM, health, and agricultural extension.

Faculty, staff, and local government officials can apply for grants related to increasing broadband internet in rural communities to support more online and local education. Beth highlighted how she did most of her assignments at her high school as internet was not available in her home community. By developing and encouraging the advancement of high-speed internet and education in tribal communities, Native Americans in those communities would have more access to information currently not available in some Native communities.

As the Native American population in the United States continues to grow (Pavel et al., 1998), higher education has an opportunity to increase the number of Native American students attending their institutions. By providing support for Native American students on campus,

prospective Native American students may have a better idea of how they will be supported while being away from their tribal communities and feel like they belong on campus.

### **Implications for Policy**

Through the stories of the seven Native participants, several policy recommendations for North Carolina and the United States emerged. In this section, recommendations for Native American financial aid and policy changes at the state and federal level are discussed. Higher education and government officials should consider these policy recommendations when developing or revising current educational policies.

**Native financial aid policy.** North Carolina institutions should consider their current financial aid policies regarding North Carolina Native American tribes. As stated by Brayboy et al. (2012), access to financial aid can encourage enrollment of Native American students. In this study, participants discussed how access to aid assisted them in attending their university. If institutions are hoping to diversify their student demographics, scholarship opportunities focused on Native applicants may encourage enrollment. For example, Native American students who are not from federally recognized tribes are not eligible to apply for some Native scholarships. Institutions should broaden these scholarships opportunities for any Native American student who is a member of a tribal nation versus being a member of a federally recognized tribe.

Aid packages can consist of need-based and merit-based scholarships to encourage enrollment and to retain Native American students to complete their degree. As institutions review their financial aid programs, they should consider that Native American students are predominately coming from communities with less academic opportunities such as multiple AP courses. Increases to need-based financial aid, for example, may support Native American students from these communities and keep Native American students enrolled who otherwise

may not be able to afford higher education. Merit-aid programs may also be used, but as an incentive for current Native American students to remain in higher education if they are doing well academically.

Scholarships for Native American students and toward specific tribes near college campuses may also increase enrollment of Native American students. For instance, institutions in the southeast region of North Carolina could offer scholarships for tribes located in their region of the state such as the Lumbee or Waccamaw Siouan tribes to encourage local Native American student enrollment. Aid for local Native American students who may be less inclined to leave their community may view a local scholarship as a means to attain a college degree from a four-year institution close to family. Higher education institutions should work collaboratively with local tribal leaders to learn the best means of aid to support Native American students from each tribe in the state.

Participants in the study also highlighted a varying level of financial support for higher education from their tribal communities. The North Carolina Eastern Band of Cherokee students receive financial support to fund at least one college degree while other *nonrecognized* tribes (Wilkins & Kiiwetinesiik Stark, 2010) offered varying levels of financial support to their Native American students. North Carolina tribal leaders should consider if they can support more financial aid to their Native American students who could become future tribal leaders in their community. Native aid could also be connected with local community service after completing a degree, requiring Native American students who receive aid to commit to working to support tribal communities. This would provide a mutual benefit of supporting local tribal communities economically and providing resources to students to seek higher education.

Connecting to the theme of personal growth, scholarship programs could also include a student development program that would support Native American students in their leadership skills and knowledge of Native culture. Aid would support the continued enrollment of students and a development program attached to the scholarship would provide a space for Native American students to be together, learn Native culture, and connect with Native faculty and staff. The aid program could start with a summer bridge program (Strayhorn, 2011) to assist Native American students with their transition to college and then provide them with leadership development opportunities, so that upon graduation, they could return as a potential leader to their tribal community.

In the fall semester of 2018, three institutions in North Carolina will reduce their tuition to \$500 for in-state students after receiving additional funding from the state legislature (NC Promise, 2018). Two of the three four-year institutions are close to Native communities, and one of the universities is also a historically Native-serving institution. State officials and higher education officials should continue to provide low-tuition higher education opportunities for North Carolina students. It is yet to be determined how the decreased tuition will impact Native American student participation in higher education, but lower tuition has the opportunity to provide access to more students across the state who before could not afford to attend a four-year institution.

Lastly, participants in this study were looking for institutions with the presence of Native faculty and staff on campus. Native American students who complete their college degree, pursue a terminal degree, and work on college campuses should be encouraged. Incentives such as loan forgiveness programs can be provided to Native faculty and staff who work in higher education. Native American students could be made aware of current loan forgiveness programs

such as the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program (Federal Student Aid, 2018) that provides loan forgiveness to students who work in government and non-profit organizations for ten years, such as higher education. New shorter-term loan forgiveness programs specifically for Native American students could also provide an extra incentive for Native American students to remain on campus to support new Native American students. Loan forgiveness terms for Native American students could be shortened from ten to five years, similarly to school teachers, if they return to their tribal community and work in non-profit agencies or tribal governments to support the needs of their tribal community.

**Federal and state policy.** Several implications for federal and state policy emerged from this study. First, tribal recognition was important to the identities of the participants and influenced the amount of aid they received from their tribe to pursue higher education. Recognition was a particular point of emphasis for the Lumbee participants in this study as they are currently seeking federal recognition (Reilly, 2015) and they see federal recognition as a point of pride, self-identity, and potential funding for tribal members. As Lumbee tribal members wish to be federally recognized, the U. S. Congress should accept the Lumbee tribe as a federally recognized tribe.

The State of North Carolina could modify their educational policies to support Native American students. First, according to the participants, North Carolina K-12 education is lacking North Carolina tribal history. As North Carolina has the largest population of Native Americans east of the Mississippi River (Oakley, 2005; Richardson, 2005; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), recognizing the presence and impact of North Carolina tribes on North Carolina's history should be included in K-12 education.

In addition, more educational funding needs to be sent to low-SES communities within the state. Participants from these communities described their high schools as under-resourced, and many of their friends did not aspire to higher education because they did not have adequate education or resources to attend college. More investment in K-12 education needs to be addressed to prepare students for college to improve overall enrollment in North Carolina higher education. Alternatively, additional funding for preparatory programs could help supplement K-12 education for students who are struggling academically. By supporting these under-resourced schools, Native American student enrollment may also increase.

More guidance counselor support in North Carolina high schools may support higher education enrollment. Even with guidance counselors in high schools, participants highlighted how the small number of counselors in their schools meant they did not have close connections with their counselor. Counselors were described as being unable to help the Native participants in applying to colleges. More funding for guidance counselors in high schools and additional funding to expand College Advising Corps programs in North Carolina counties may increase the number of applicants to higher education.

Lastly, North Carolina needs to continue to improve its transfer pathway programs (University of North Carolina, 2018) for students who attend community colleges and then transfer to four-year institutions. One participant shared in her story how she was told her credits from a community college would not count at a four-year institution. Charlotte then quit higher education for six years before starting her four-year degree, thus delaying her bachelor degree completion from four years to ten. North Carolina could improve the pathways program (University of North Carolina, 2018), so students who opt to attend a local community college would have a more accessible means of transferring to a four-year institution and completing a

bachelor's degree in the shortest amount of time. North Carolina policymakers can work with higher education professionals to develop more seamless programs that advance students to a bachelor's degree institution while providing a lower-cost, closer-to-home option for Native American students.

Overall, Native American students who successfully graduate from high school, apply, are admitted to colleges, and then graduate from four-year institutions need to be celebrated. By sharing the success stories of Native American students in higher education, higher education professionals may counter the narrative that Native American students quit higher education and do not complete their degree. Highlighting the success stories of Native American students in higher education provides examples of how future practices and policies could be improved to enhance the educational outcomes of Native American students in North Carolina.

### **Future Research**

Through the findings of this study, multiple research opportunities to further understand Native college student choice and Native American student college experiences can be explored. In this section, future research opportunities related to the findings are discussed. Methodological recommendations for future studies related to Native American students are also highlighted.

### **Four Themes of Native American student College Choice**

The four themes of Native American student college choice need to be researched further to see if the experiences of these seven Native participants also apply to Native American students throughout North Carolina. Replicating the study to include students from all eight state recognized tribes and representing all of the four-year institutions within the state would provide a larger sample to determine if the storied experiences of the seven participants are similar to other Native American students. In addition, do their experiences apply to four-year institutions

nationally? A large, national quantitative study exploring the college choice experience of Native American students would provide a more complete picture of Native American student college choice and how their choice connects with the literature (Perna, 2006).

In this study, only four-year institutions in North Carolina were explored. Future studies should explore if the four themes of Native choice apply to Native American students who choose to attend two-year institutions. A significant portion of TCUs in the United States are community colleges (Martin, 2005); therefore, it would be interesting to investigate if the motivations of community college Native American students were different from four-year enrollees. Further, does attending a local community college where a Native American student would not have to be away from their family and Native community have an impact on their decision compared to attending four-year institutions that may be further away? Does the lower tuition incentivize Native American students to enroll in a community college compared to a four-year degree program? Then similar to Charlotte's experience, do Native American students who complete an associate degree progress on to a bachelor's degree program? A case study investigating two-year college enrollment will also be interesting to observe as the new NC Promise (2018) program becomes available, providing a community college tuition price at four-year degree institutions in North Carolina.

The four themes of Native college choice need to be tested by quantitative methods. Quantitative studies could explore if the findings in this study applied to Native American students more broadly across the United States and potentially across other Indigenous populations. Quantitative methods could explore the impact of each Native college choice theme to see if specific themes factored more in a Native American student's choice than others. For instance, does the number of AP courses and other academic prep courses predict college

enrollment more than distance from home? How much does the desire of Native families for their children to attend higher education impact their decision to enroll in college?

Understanding the impact of each theme, admissions officers could emphasize different points when discussing admission to a Native American student that may increase their likelihood to apply. Further, state policymakers could have more data to justify additional funding for public schools in low socio-economic communities if additional advanced curriculum indicated a higher propensity to apply, enroll, and succeed in higher education. By applying quantitative methods to the four themes of Native college choice, the generalizability of the themes will be more known.

### **More Native American Student Studies**

In general, more research needs to be conducted on Native Americans students. From student college choice, their experiences in higher education, and their post-secondary education plans, Native American students are one of the least researched population in the United States (Shotton et al., 2013). In this section, recommendations for studies related to Native college choice and Native American student development are discussed. With further research, higher education administrators and policymakers may be able to adjust policies and practices to encourage Native American student participation and learn from the success of Native American students.

**Native college student choice.** More studies should investigate Native American student college choice. Studies could explore college choice for Native American students using state and national data sets. Studies focusing on Perna's (2006) model of college choice would connect Native American students' experiences with current understanding of college choice for other demographics in higher education. Through surveys and data sets, the experiences of Native American students may provide evidence for predicting their success in higher education.

With increased quantitative studies, Native American students would no longer be considered statistical outliers in higher education research (Shotton et al., 2013). These studies could also incorporate mixed methods to learn more Native American students' stories of success and discover findings that could be generalizable to large populations nationally.

*Qualitative studies.* Research on Native American students should continue with qualitative methods as well. This study connects with several Indigenous scholars' work highlighting counter-narrative stories of Native American student success (Bamberg & Andrews, 2004; Lowe, 2005; Nelson, 2015; Riessman, 2008; Roettele-Bickel, 2005; Sides, 2005). Qualitative stories provide opportunities for scholars to learn the experiences of Native American students who are on our college campuses and to learn about the experiences of Native Americans in the United States. This study added to the stories Native college choice in the literature, but more research is needed to understand the full experiences of Native American students in higher education.

As the experiences of the Native American students in this study were all unique, it would be interesting to conduct a large longitudinal study of Native American students from multiple tribes. Native American students could be tracked through their K-12, college choice, higher education, and post-degree lives. Following participants overtime would provide a more nuanced and deeper understanding of the lived experiences of Native American students. By following multiple participants, comparisons among Native American students from various tribes and home upbringing could be analyzed. Further, the decision of students who ultimately decide not to attend higher education, or to attend a two-year institution, could be explored. The four themes of Native American student college choice could be compared with the experiences

of all the Native American students to see if the four themes are more generalizable than from the seven participants in this study.

Another longitudinal study could explore the experiences of Native American students applying to colleges and universities. Many participants in this study did not know about the process to apply to colleges or knew what to be looking for on college campuses. Similar to Holland's (2014) findings on minority students' perceptions of the college application process, Native American students may understand the process differently as they are less likely to have family or community members who attended college. Understanding the challenges that may face Native American students in applying to college could lead to policy recommendations and tailored programming to assist Native American students in their application process.

One example of a qualitative research method that could be beneficial to learning Native experiences is using case studies. Different Native tribes could participate in a multi-case, case study comparing their students' participation and success in higher education. Do tribes that provide significant financial support for Native American students increase the likelihood of completing a degree? Do tribes who created TCUs have higher completion rates than students attending PWIs (Martin, 2005)? Are the experiences of Native American students from various tribes different on college campuses, and if so, what are the differences in institutional characteristics or upbringing impacting their experience? Through these studies, tailored support programs and structures could be created to serve the specific needs of the various tribes in the United States.

**Native American student development theories.** One surprising finding of this study on Native college student choice was the participants' emphasis on their on-campus experience and development. Further research should explore student development of Native American students

as their experiences may be different from current student development theories. For example, participants highlighted becoming involved on campus and joining student organizations. Astin (1999) highlighted how students were more likely to be retained in higher education and grow in leadership skills by becoming involved on campus. Future studies could explore Astin's student involvement theory (1999) on Native American students to see if his theory applies to their experiences. Native American students in this study highlighted involvement that connected them with other Native American students and culture which is slightly different from directly being involved on campus. Connections between how Native American students' sense of belonging (Stayhorn, 2012) and creating home communities on campus (Brayboy et al., 2012) needs to be explored further. How does the creation of Native organizations and communities impact how Native American students perceive their fit on campus?

In this study, participants also discussed hoping to give back to their communities through their careers, learning their Native culture, and sharing their knowledge with others. Their experiences connect with Brayboy et al.'s (2012) theory of Native nation building where Native American students are inspired to learn their culture, share with others, and support their community. A study exploring Native nation building on Native American students in North Carolina would determine if North Carolina Native American student experiences connect with the current understanding of Native nation building. Findings from this study highlighted how for these participants, giving back to their North Carolina tribes was based on health and human services. Is contributing back to the communities based on these fields unique to these participants or potentially a representation of how North Carolina tribes view Native nation building (Brayboy et al., 2012)?

Studies could explore Native identity development. Winters (2012) described Native identity development as the transition process Native American students experience coming from majority Native community and then attending a PWI. In this study, Native American students attended higher education from both urban and rural communities. Participants from urban communities discussed a smoother transition to higher education than their peers from rural communities. Native identity development (Winters, 2012) could be explored for Native American students coming from majority tribal communities, and a phenomenological study could explore the transition of Native American students from predominantly non-Native communities. How are the transitions between these two types of Native American students different and how can student affairs and multicultural affairs staff support Native American students enrolled in their colleges and universities based on their background?

Only one male Native American student participated in the study. Future studies of Native college choice and Native American students should include more male participants to learn from their experiences as they are enrolling in fewer numbers than female Native American students (NCES, 2016) and may have more negative experiences (Brayboy et al., 2012; Knapp et al., 2008; Starks, 2010). Findings in this study did not match literature related to male Native American student experiences (Starks, 2010; Winters, 2012), as John grew up in an urban community with multiple educational opportunities. Future studies could explore if the experiences of male Native American students differ from female Native American students in North Carolina and in the United States.

Lastly, one participant in this study identified as a collegiate athlete. No research has explored the intersection of Native American student experience and development on college campuses with research related to collegiate athletes. Future studies should explore the

experiences of Native collegiate athletes at multiple institutions to learn their stories. Native college choice studies should also collect the stories of Native American student athletic recruitment and how they may choose their college based on their experience. As participants in this study struggled with not being at home, exploring how Native American students navigate a student-athlete schedule, coursework, and being engaged with their home communities would be informative on how to best support these students.

### **North Carolina Institutions**

North Carolina public and private institutions could research the college choice and experiences of Native American students in the state as well. With new UNC System tuition policies such as NC Promise (2018), access to higher education for low-SES communities may increase. NC Promise's (2018) \$500 tuition at three regional institutions, with two near predominantly Native communities, may increase Native American student enrollment in higher education. Policymakers and researchers should track changes in enrollment at these institutions to see if the lower tuition provides opportunity costs and job market training opportunities (Paulsen, 1990) in Native communities not available previously. Alternatively, does the lower tuition decrease the enrollment of low-SES students from other universities in the state as cheaper cost options now exist within the state? Further, researchers and higher education staff at these institutions should collect stories and data on the students who enroll in these institutions to see if the NC Promise (2018) program encouraged them to enroll at their institution compared to other colleges, or if the program encouraged them to enroll in higher education at all.

One participant mentioned the benefits of institutions who offered summer bridge programs. Summer bridge programs allow Native American students to start college in the summer months before other students return to campus (Strayhorn, 2011). With Native faculty

and staff support, summer bridge programs could ease the transition for Native American students entering college. John's story connected with studies which highlighted how bridge programs provide an easier transition to PWIs for Native American students and other underrepresented student populations (Brayboy, 2005b; Martin, 2005; Strayhorn, 2011). Studies following the experiences of Native American students who enroll in bridge programs compared to Native American students who do not participate in bridge programs in North Carolina may justify encouraging first-year Native American students to start college in bridge programs. Further, positive outcomes could provide additional justification for the creation or expansion of bridge programs at institutions in North Carolina and nationally in supporting Native American students or other underrepresented student groups.

### **Personal Reflection**

I choose to do this topic for my dissertation as I wanted to do a study that would help others. Native American students' stories of persistence and desire to attend higher education were inspiring. Participants stated they wished to pursue higher education for their families and their communities. Native families in North Carolina made several sacrifices, so the participants could be enrolled in higher education. Participants were cognizant that two-generations before, they may not have had the means, or the ability, to attend higher education based on their family's socioeconomic status and state policies.

After earning their degree, the participants hoped to give back to their community, supporting their people so that their tribes continue to thrive, and that their culture remains alive. Native Americans have endured four-hundred years of oppressive policies yet continue to support their local communities on a daily basis. Society can learn from tribal communities about supporting and believing in each other. If we all supported each other as Native communities

support one another, more opportunities for growth and success could be achieved across the United States. We must all do better to learn about the Native tribes in our communities, the rich history and culture they bring, and how we as a society can move forward together.

Though this study, I hope we can take the lessons of the participants' college choice as a means to improve higher education practice and policies to increase enrollment of Native American students. Further, we must improve the experiences Native American students on campus. I have personally learned a lot about Native culture, values, and history. We could all do more to continue to learn about the Native communities in the United States and their contributions to our society. I hope to share the findings gleaned from this study with other higher education professionals to increase awareness of the issues facing Native American students in higher education. More research needs to be conducted to support their educational journeys, to educate non-Native higher education professionals about Native American culture and perspectives, and to provide more college access to the caring Native communities in the United States. Their stories have inspired me to continue professional work in higher education, so that others may be empowered to reach for success and opportunity.

### **Conclusion**

This study explored how seven Native American students chose to go to four-year institutions in North Carolina. Through their stories of perseverance emerged four themes of Native college choice: family, Native identity and community, external factors, and growth and opportunities. Higher education professionals and policymakers should focus on how the four themes of Native college choice influence a Native American student's choice to attend higher education and where. We may encourage more Native American students to seek higher education if we focus on supporting their desires to improve their families and their Native

communities. More Native American students on our college campuses will provide opportunities for Native and non-Native American students to learn Native culture and history (Brayboy et al., 2012) and potentially lead to more economic opportunity for Native American students as they graduate from higher education (Becker, 1993; Perna, 2005). By listening to Native American students' stories, we have a better understanding of Native college student choice, adding to the growing literature (Brayboy et al., 2012) on Native American college students in the United States. More studies exploring Native American student success in enrolling and graduating in higher education may improve the completion rate of Native American students nationally and provide additional counter-narratives of Native American student success in higher education

This study provides a framework for future studies to see if the four themes of Native college choice applies to other Native American students in North Carolina and in the United States. The four themes showed support for understanding Native college choice using Perna's (2006) conceptual model of college choice, with particular emphasis on family, academic preparation, and serving one's community as drivers to enroll in higher education. Native American students in this study shared their paths of success that can be used with other prospective Native American students to inspire them to enroll in higher education, and thereby increasing participation of Native American students in North Carolina four-year institutions. As Native American students hope to give back to their families and Native communities, admissions staff, and guidance counselors should focus on the tangible benefits of higher education when speaking with Native American students. Increased participation of Native American students in higher education will meet the goals of increasing participation and diversity in higher education (Perna & Jones, 2013), will allow more opportunities to see Native

Americans and their cultures on college campuses (Brayboy et al., 2012), will further the education of a growing demographic in the United States (Pavel et al., 1998), and will develop the personal and community goals of Native American students.

## REFERENCES

- American Indian and Indigenous Studies. (2018). Courses in American Indian and Indigenous studies. *University of North Carolina: Chapel Hill*. Retrieved from <https://americanindianstudies.unc.edu/courses-in-american-indian-studies/>
- Astin, A. A. (1999). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Development, 40*(5), 518-529.
- Austin, R. D. (2005). American Indian nation parents and leaders. In M. J. Tippeconnic Fox, S. C. Lowe, & G. S. McClellan (Eds.), *Serving Native American students (New Directions for Student Services, 109)*, pp. 41-48). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Avery, C., & Hoxby, C. M. (2004). Do and should financial aid packages affect students' college choice? In C. M. Hoxby (Ed.), *College choices: The economics of where to go, when to go, and how to pay for it* (pp. 239-302). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Bamberg, M., & Andrews, M. (2004). *Considering counter-narratives: Narrating, resisting, making sense*. Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing.
- Baum, S., & Payea, K. (2004). *Education pays 2004: The benefits of higher education for individuals and society*. Washington, DC: The College Board.
- Beck, D. R. M. (1999). American Indian higher education before 1974: From colonization to self-determination. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education, 27*(2), 12-23.
- Becker, G. S. (1962). Investment in human capital: A theoretical analysis. *Journal of Political Economy, 70*(5), 9-49.
- Becker, G. S. (1975). *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis with special reference to education* (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Becker, G. S. (1993). *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis with special reference to education* (3rd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Belgarde, M. J., & Lore, R. K. (2003). The retention/intervention study of Native American undergraduates at the University of New Mexico. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 5(2), 175-203. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.prox.lib.ncsu.edu/docview/196716944?accountid=12725>
- Benally, S. (2004). *Serving American Indian students: Participants in accelerated learning opportunities*. Boulder, CO: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education.
- Benham, M. K. P. (2003). The journey of the Native American higher education initiative and tribal colleges and universities. In M. K. P. Beham & W. J. Stein (Eds.). *The renaissance of American Indian higher education: Capturing the dream* (pp. 3-24). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Berger, A. A. (1997). *Narratives in popular culture, media, and everyday life*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Bergerson, A. A., Heiselt, A. K., & Aiken-Wisniewski, S. (2013). Refocusing college choice: Women's reflections on their postsecondary education choices. *NASPA Journal about Women in Higher Education*, 6(2), 185-211.
- Bold, C. (2012). *Using narrative in research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Bolton, G. (2006). Narrative writing: Reflective enquiry into professional practice. *Educational Action Research*, 14(2), 203-218.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J.C. (2000). *Reproduction in education, society and culture*. London, UK: Sage Publications.

- Bowen, H. R. (1997). *Investment in learning: The individual and social value of American higher education*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Bowen, W. G., Chingos, M. M., & McPherson, M. S. (2009). *Crossing the finish line: Completing college at America's public universities*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Boyer, P. (1997). First survey of tribal college students reveals attitudes. *Tribal College*, 9(2), 36-41.
- Brayboy, B. M. J. (2004). Hiding in the ivy: American Indian students and visibility in elite educational settings. *Harvard Educational Review*, 74(2), 125-152.
- Brayboy, B. M. J. (2005a). Transformational resistance and social justice: American Indians in ivy league universities. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly [H.W. Wilson - SSA]*, 36(3), 193.
- Brayboy, B. M. J. (2005b). Toward a tribal critical race theory in education. *The Urban Review*, 37(5), 425-446.
- Brayboy, B. M. J., Fann, A. J., Castagno, A. E., & Solyom, J. A. (2012). Postsecondary education for American Indian and Alaska Natives: Higher education for nation building and self-determination. K. Ward, & Wolf-Wendel, L. E. (Eds.). *ASHE Higher Education Report*, 37(5). San Francisco, CA: Wiley Periodicals, Inc.
- Brown, A., & Au, W. (2015). Race, memory, and master narratives: A critical essay on U.S. curriculum history. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 44(3), 358-389.
- Cabrera, A. F., & La Nasa, S. M. (2000). Understanding the college-choice process. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 107, 5-22.

- Carney, C. M. (1999). *Native American higher education in the United States*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- Cataldi, E. F., Bennett, C. T., & Chen, X. (2018). First-generation students: College access, persistence, and postbachelor's outcomes. National Center for Educational Statistics. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018421.pdf>
- Chandler, M. J., Lalonde, C. E., & Teucher, U. (2004). Culture, continuity, and the limits of narrativity: A comparison of the self-narratives of Native and non-Native youth. In C. Daiute & C. Lightfoot (Eds.), *Narrative analysis: Studying the development of individuals in society* (pp. 245-265). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Chapman, D. W. (1981). A model of student college choice. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 52(5), 490–505.
- Clandinin, D., & Connelly, M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- College Advising Corps. (2018). College advising corps: Increasing opportunity for America's students. Retrieved from <https://advisingcorps.org/>
- Collins, M. L. (2015). *Navigating the academy: Lumbee Indian students and higher education* (Doctoral dissertation). ProQuest (UMI 3710592)
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

- Cross, S. L., Day, A., Gogliotti, L. J., & Pung, J. J. (2013). Challenges to recruit and retain American Indian and Alaskan Natives into social work programs: The impact on the child welfare workforce. *Child Welfare, 92*(4), 31-53.
- Daiute, C., & Lightfoot, C. (Eds.) (2004). Editor's introduction. *Narrative analysis: Studying the development of individuals in society* (vii-xviii). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- DesJardin, S. L., & Toutkoushian, R. K. (2005). Are students really rational? The development of rational thought and its application to student choice. In J. C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research vol. XX* (pp. 191-240). UK: Springer.
- Dillman, M. L. (2002). *The college experience of Native American students: Factors associated with their choice of major, performance, and persistence* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL.
- Elliot, J. (2012). Gathering narrative data. In S. Delamont (Ed.), *Handbook of qualitative research in education* (pp. 281–298). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Faircloth, S. C., & Tippeconnic, III, J. W. (2010). The dropout/graduation rate crisis among American Indian and Alaska Native American students: Failure to respond places the future of Native peoples at risk. Los Angeles, CA: The Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles at UCLA. Retrieved from [www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu](http://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu)
- Fann, A. J. (2005). *Forgotten students: American Indian student narratives on college access* (Doctoral dissertation). ProQuest (UMI 3208343)
- Federal Student Aid. (2018). Public service loan forgiveness (PSLF) program. *U. S. Department of Education*. Retrieved from <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/repay-loans/forgiveness-cancellation/public-service>

- Freeman, K. (2005). *African Americans and college choice: The influence of family and school*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Gonzalez, L. M. (2008). *College choice of Latino high school students: Influence of demographics, academic preparation, and academic self-efficacy beliefs on intended level of post-secondary institution* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <http://repository.lib.ncsu.edu/ir/bitstream/1840.16/3090/1/etd.pdf>
- Greene, J. P., & Forster, G. (2003). It's about family: Native American student persistence in higher education. *Journal of Higher Education*, 79(1), 58-87.
- Guillory, J. P. (2008). *Diverse pathways of "giving back" to tribal community: Perceptions of Native American college graduates* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from [http://www.dissertations.wsu.edu/Dissertations/Spring2008/j\\_guillory\\_042408.pdf](http://www.dissertations.wsu.edu/Dissertations/Spring2008/j_guillory_042408.pdf)
- Guillory, R. M., & Wolverton, M. (2008). It's about family: Native American student persistence in higher education. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 79(1), 58-87.
- Heavy Runner, I., & DeCelles, R. (2002). Family education model: Meeting the student retention challenge. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 41(2), 29-37.
- Heller, D. E. (2009). The role of finances in postsecondary access and success. In L. W. Perna & A. P. Jones (Eds.), *The state of college access and completion: Improving college success for students from underrepresented groups* (pp. 96-114). Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hillman, N. W. (2016). Geography of college opportunity: The case of educational deserts. *American Educational Research Journal*, 53(4), 987-1021.

- Holland, M. M. (2014). Navigating the road to college: Race and class variation in the college application process. *Sociology Compass*, 8(10), 1191-1205.
- Hossler, D., & Gallagher, K. S. (1987). Studying college choice: A three-phase model and implications for policy-makers. *College and University*, 2, 207-221.
- Hossler, D., Schmit, J., & Vesper, N. (1993). An exploratory study of the factors associated with parental saving for postsecondary education. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 64(2), 140-165.
- Hurtado, S., Inkelas, K. K., Briggs, C., & Rhee, B. S. (1997). Differences in college access and choice among racial/ethnic groups: Identifying continuing barriers. *Research in Higher Education*, 38(1), 43-75.
- Keene, A. J. (2014). *"College pride, Native pride" and education for Native nation building: Portraits of Native American students navigating freshman year* (Doctoral dissertation). ProQuest. (UMI 3662070)
- Knapp, L. G., Kelly-Reid, J. E., & Ginder, S. A. (2008). *Postsecondary institutions in the United States: Fall 2007, degrees and other awards conferred: 2006-07, and 12-month enrollment: 2006-07* (NCES 2008-159). Washington, D. C.: National Center for Educational Statistics, Institute of Educational Sciences, U. S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2008/2008159rev.pdf>
- Labov, W., & Waletzky, J. (1997). Narrative analysis. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 7, 3-38.
- Larimore, J. A., & McClellan, G. S. (2005). Native American student retention in U.S. postsecondary education. *New Directions for Student Services*, (109), 17-32.

- Leech, N. L., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2007). An array of qualitative data analysis tools: A call for data analysis triangulation. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 22(4), 557-584.
- Leslie, L. L., & Brinkman, P. T. (1988). *The economic value of higher education*. New York, NY: American Council on Education, MacMillan Publishing Company.
- Long, M. C. (2004). College applications and the effect of affirmative action. *Journal of Econometrics*, 121(1-2), 319-342.
- Lowe, S. C. (2005). This is who I am: Experiences of Native American students. *New Directions for Student Services*, 109, 33-40.
- Manski, C. F., & Wise, D. (1983). *College choice in America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Maramba, D. C., Palmer, R. T., Yull, D., & Ozuna, T. (2015). A qualitative investigation of the college choice process for Asian Americans and Latina/os at a public HBCU. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 8(4), 258-271.
- Martin, R. G. (2005). Serving American Indian students in tribal colleges: Lessons for mainstream colleges. *New Directions for Student Services*, (109), 95-98.
- Maynes, M. J., Pierce, J. L., & Laslett, B. (2008). *Telling stories: The use of personal narratives in the social sciences and history*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Maynor, P. J. (2011). *Bourdieu's habitus and the educational achievement of North Carolina's American Indian students: An empirical investigation* (Doctoral dissertation). ProQuest (UMI 3465049).
- McClellan, G. S., Tippeconnic Fox, M. J., & Lowe, S. C. (2005). Where we have been: A history of Native American higher education. *New Directions for Student Services*, 109, 7-16.

- McDonough, P. M. (1997). *Choosing colleges: How social class and schools structure opportunity*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- McDonough, P. M., Antonio, A. L., & Trent, J. W. (1997). Black students, Black colleges: An African American college choice model. *Journal for a Just and Caring Education*, 3, 9–36.
- Means, D. A., Clayton, A. B., Conzelmann, J. G., Baynes, P., & Umbach, P. (2016). Bounded aspirations: Rural, African American high school students and college access. *The Review of Higher Education*, 39(4), 543-569.
- Miller, S. A., & Riding In, J. (Eds.). (2001). *Native historians write back: Decolonizing American Indian history*. Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press.
- Murphy, M. C., & Zirkel, S. (2015). Race and belonging in school: How anticipated and experienced belonging affect choice, persistence, and performance. *Teachers College Record*, 17, 1-40.
- National Center for Educational Statistics. (2016). Status and trends in the education of racial ethnic groups 2016. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2016/2016007.pdf>
- National Center for Educational Statistics. (2017). NCES. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/>
- NC Promise. (2018). The NC Promise Tuition Plan. Retrieved from <https://ncpromise.com/>
- Nelson, C. A. (2015). *American Indian college students as Native nation builders: Tribal financial aid as a lens for understanding college-going paradoxes* (Doctoral dissertation). ProQuest. (UMI 3703169)
- Nora, A. (2004). The role of habitus and cultural capital in choosing a college, transitioning from high school to higher education and persisting in college among minority and nonminority students. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 3(2), 180–208.

- North Carolina University: A System of Higher Education. (2018). NC Community College transfer. Retrieved from <https://www.northcarolina.edu/Transfer-Student-Success/ NC-Community-College-Transfer>
- Oakley, C. A. (2005). *Keeping the circle: American Indian identity in Eastern North Carolina, 1885-2004*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.
- Okerson, J. R. (2016). *Beyond the campus tour: College choice and the campus visit* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). The College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA. Retrieved from <https://publish.wm.edu/etd/1463413085/>
- Oosahwe, E. S. L. (2008). *Strategizing success: Narratives of Native American students in higher education* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest. (UMI 3304450)
- Oxendine, D., Oxendine, S., & Minthorn, R. (2013). The historically Native American fraternity and sorority movement. In H. J. Shotton, S. C. Lowe, & S. J. Waterman (Eds.). *Beyond the asterisk: Understanding Native American students in higher education* (pp. 67-80). Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
- Paulsen, M. B. (1990). *College choice: Understanding student enrollment behavior*. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report, 6. Washington, D C: The George Washington University Clearinghouse on Higher Education.
- Pavel, D. M., Skinner, R. R., Cahalan, M., Tippeconnic, J., & Stein, W. (1998). *American Indian and Alaskan Natives in postsecondary education*. Washington, DC: National Center for Educational Statistics.
- Perna, L. W. (2000a). Differences in college enrollment among African Americans, Hispanics, and Whites. *Journal of Higher Education*, 71(2), 117–141.

- Perna, L. W. (2000b). Racial and ethnic group differences in college enrollment decisions. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 107, 65-83.
- Perna, L. W. (2005). The benefits of higher education: Sex, racial/ethnic, and socioeconomic group differences. *The Review of Higher Education*, 29(1), 23-52.
- Perna, L. W. (2006). Studying college access and choice: A proposed conceptual model. In J. C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (pp. 99-157). Netherlands: Springer.
- Perna, L. W. (2010). *Understanding the working college student: New research and its implications for policy and practice*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
- Perna, L. W., & Jones, A. P. (Eds.). (2013). *The state of college access and completion: Improving college success for students from underrepresented groups*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Perna, L. W., Rowan-Kenyon, H., Bell, A., Thomas, S. L., & Li, C. (2008). A typology of federal and state programs designed to promote college enrollment. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 79(3), 243-267.
- Perna, L. W., Steele, P., Woda, S., & Hibbert, T. (2005). State public policies and the racial/ethnic stratification of college access and choice in the state of Maryland. *Review of Higher Education*, 28(2), 245-272.
- Peters, B. (in press). Fighting isolation: How four Native women created change at UNC: Chapel Hill. *American Indian Quarterly*, 42(3).
- Reay, D., Davies, J., David, M., & Ball, S. J. (2001). Choice of degree or degrees of choice? class, 'race' and the higher education choice process. *Sociology*, 35(4), 855-874.

- Reilly, K. (2015, April 16). With a new bill, North Carolina's Lumbee Tribe continues to push for federal recognition. *The Stanly News & Press*. Retrieved from [http://www.thesnaponline.com/news/with-a-new-bill-north-carolina-s-lumbee-tribe-continues/article\\_5c51e2da-e3a7-11e4-90ef-ef2a0523832e.html](http://www.thesnaponline.com/news/with-a-new-bill-north-carolina-s-lumbee-tribe-continues/article_5c51e2da-e3a7-11e4-90ef-ef2a0523832e.html)
- Reyhner, J., & Eder, J. (2003, 2007). Higher education of American Indians. In L. Foster (Ed.). *The history of higher education: ASHE reader* (3rd ed.) (pp. 694-702). Reprinted from: *American Indian education: A history*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Richardson, G. A. (2005, Fall). The state and its tribes. *Tar Heel Junior Historian*.
- Riessman, C. K. (1993). *Narrative analysis: Qualitative research methods series, 30*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Roettele-Bickel, G. M. (2005). *Native American strategies for student success in postsecondary education* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of South Dakota, Vermillion, South Dakota.
- Rowan-Kenyon, H. T., Bell, A. D., & Perna, L. W. (2008). Contextual influence on parental involvement in college going: Variations on socioeconomic class. *The Journal of Higher Education, 79*(5), 564-586.
- Rudolph, F. (1962). *The American college and university: A history*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.
- Saggio, J. J. (2001). The Influence of institutional culture on institutional choice and post-freshman persistence of American Indian/Alaska Native American students at a Bible College. Paper presented at annual meeting of 1st Annual Graduate Student Conference on American Indian Research, Tempe, Arizona.

- Schultz, T. W. (1961). Investment in human capital. *American Economic Review*, 51, 1–17.
- Shotton, H. J., Lowe, S. C., & Waterman, S. J. (Eds.). (2013). *Beyond the asterisk: Understanding Native American students in higher education*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
- Sides, J. E. (2005). *Native American students in higher education: Improving instruction in the multicultural classroom and enriching the multicultural campus community*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC.
- Smythe, W. E., & Murray, M. J. (2000). Owing the story: Ethical considerations in narrative research. *Ethics & Behavior*, 10(4), 311-336.
- St. Germaine, R. (2008). Nation building for native youth aims to strengthen tribes. *Indian Country Today*, 28(10), 7.
- Stanton-Salazar, R. D. (1997). A social capital framework for understanding the socialization of racial minority children and youths. *Harvard Educational Review*, 67(1), 1-41.
- Starks, J. E. (2010). *Factors influencing the decisions of Native Americans to attend or not attend college or vocational school: An phenomenological study* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest. (UMI 3433010)
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2011). Bridging the pipeline: Increasing underrepresented students' preparation for college through a summer bridge program. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 55(2), 142-159.
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2012). *College students' sense of belonging: A key to educational success for all students*. New York, NY: Routledge.

- Terenzini, P. T., Cabrera, A. F., & Bernal, E. M. (2001). Swimming against the tide: The poor in American higher education. *Report No. 2001-1*. New York, NY: College Entrance Examination Board.
- Thelin, J. R. (2011). *A history of American higher education* (2nd ed.). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Thomas, M. K. (2004). Where college-bound students send their SAT scores: Does race matter? *Social Science Quarterly*, *85*(5), 1374-1389.
- Thomas, S. J. L. (1998). *The college choice phenomenon: An exploration of parental perceptions* (Doctoral dissertation). ProQuest. (UMI 3091816)
- Tierney, W. G. (1991). Native voices in academe: Strategies for empowerment. *Change*, *23*(2), 36-45.
- Tierney, W. G. (1992). Official encouragement, institutional discouragement: Minorities in academe-the Native American experience. *Interpretive Perspectives on Education and Policy* [series]. New York, NY: Ablex Publishing Co.
- Tierney, W. G. (1999). Models of minority college-going and retention: Cultural integrity versus cultural suicide. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *68*(1), 80-91.
- Tierney, W. G., Sallee, M. W., & Venegas, K. M. (2007). Access and financial aid: How American Indian students pay for college. *Journal of College Admission*, *197*, 14-23.
- Tierney, W. G., & Venegas, K. M. (2006). Fictive kin and social capital: The role of peer groups in applying and paying for college. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *49*(12), 1687-1702.
- Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

- Turner, S. E. (2004). Going to college and finishing college: Explaining different educational outcomes. In C. M. Hoxby (Ed.), *College choices: The economics of where to go, when to go, and how to pay for it* (pp. 13-56). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- U. S. Census Bureau. (2010). *The American Indian and Alaska Native population: 2010*. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-10.pdf>
- Wang-Yeung, L. W. (2015). *Examining factors influencing Asian American and Latino Americans' student choice* (Doctoral dissertation). ProQuest. (UMI 10013410).
- Webb, J., Schirato, T., & Danaher, G. (2002). *Understanding Bourdieu*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Wilkins, D. E., & Kiiwetinesiiik Stark, H. (2010). *American Indian politics and the American political system* (3rd ed.). Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Winters, N. C. (2012). From the reservation: A theory regarding the development of Native American students. *Journal of the Indiana University Student Personnel Association*, 27-36. Retrieved from <http://education.indiana.edu/graduate/programs/hesa/iuspa/>
- Wright, B. (1989). 'For the children of the infidels'? American Indian education in the colonial colleges. In L. F. Goodchild & H. S. Wechsler (Eds.), *ASHE Reader on the History of Higher Education* (1st ed.) (pp. 53-59). Needham Heights, MA: Ginn Press.

**APPENDICES**

**Appendix A**  
Semi-Structured First Interview Protocol

- 1) Please tell me about yourself and your tribal community.
- 2) Tell me a story about you growing up that includes your family.
- 3) If you had to describe your K-12 educational journey, what would it be?
- 4) How did you decide whether or not to go college?
- 5) Could you walk me through how you choose your current college?
- 6) Tell me a story that helps me understand your educational experience to the present.
- 7) Is there anything else you would like to share today?
- 8) When and where is a good time to meet for a second interview if you would like to continue to participate in the study?

**Appendix B**  
Semi-Structured Second Interview Protocol

- 1) This interview is a follow up on some of the themes that emerged through the first-round interviews. What is something about you that I should know that we did not discuss last time?
- 2) Family emerged as a recurring theme. Do you think families influence Native college choice? Why?
- 3) Native identity and values also emerged as a major theme. Can you tell me a story about you, your family, or your tribal community that you are proud of and why?
- 4) Can you share with me a personal story of thriving or perseverance?
- 5) Many participants received advice and information from others when choosing their institution. What advice did you receive, or wished you had received, when choosing your institution?
- 6) Based on your experience, what advice would you give to prospective Native American students looking to go to college?
- 7) In the interviews, the concept of college feeling like a home emerged. Does your campus feel like home to you?
- 8) Thinking about your tribal community, does your community influence your college choice and career aspirations?
- 9) Do you have any last thoughts you would like to share?

**Appendix C**  
Interview Participant Consent Form

**North Carolina State University**  
**INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH**

**Title of Study:**

"My Education, Not Only for Me and My Family but My People": Storied Experiences of Native American students' College Choice at Four-Year Institutions in North Carolina.

**Principal Investigator:**

**Brian A. Peters**

**Faculty Sponsor (if applicable):**

**Joy Gaston Gayles, Ph.D.**

**What are some general things you should know about research studies?**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to participate in this study, to choose not to participate, or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue.

You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from participating in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to participants. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

**What is the purpose of this study?**

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study is to understand the experiences of Native American students who have decided to enroll in colleges in the state of North Carolina. Through this study, a larger understanding of how Native American students choose to attend college in North Carolina will be obtained. With this knowledge, educational policies may be modified to encourage and increase the enrollment of future Native American students into higher education.

**What will happen if you take part in the study?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to read and sign this consent form. You may ask any questions about the study before participating. Participants will be asked a series of questions regarding their decision to enroll in a NC university. Two in-person interviews will be conducted a few months apart. Interviews will last 60 to 75 minutes. For your convenience, your second interview can be done remotely via online video chat software. You may choose to end the interviews at any time. Your interviews will be recorded using two tape recorders to ensure quality recordings. Interviews will be transcribed verbatim. The researcher will provide you a copy (via email) of the transcription for your review and you may provide edits or additional feedback on your interview transcript.

After all the interviews, the researcher will develop a narrative analysis. The narrative analysis, the researcher will check for validity by providing preliminary findings to you and a copy of the final findings will be provided to you.

All data collected may be used in future publications and presentations by the researcher. By consenting to participate, you are granting permission for the researcher to use your narrative in multiple settings related to this research and potential future publications.

### **Risks and Benefits**

The interviewer will ask questions regarding your decision to attend college. This may cause emotional distress as you reflect on potentially negative experiences you may have experienced during your life. You may choose to stop or end the interview at any time. No personally identifying information will be shared in future publications or presentations of this study. However, due to the small number of Native American students in North Carolina four-year institutions, it may be possible for a well-informed person to read your narrative and conclude you are a participant in the study. By participating, you are accepting this risk.

The proposed study will add to the growing literature examining college student choice and will add a Native American student perspective to the literature. This information may also be helpful to campus administrators to support Native American students and to increase enrollment can use this information. Further, the narrative study may provide additional information on how to support and advise students in wishing to pursue a college education in the United States.

### **Confidentiality**

The information in the study records will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Digital data will be stored securely in an external hard drive and locked in a safe. Paper notes and written reflections will also be stored in the safe. No reference will be made in oral or written reports, which could link you to the study. You will NOT be asked to write your name on any study materials so that no one can match your identity to the answers that you provide.

### **Compensation**

You will receive a \$25 gift card for participating in both interviews in this study.

### **What if you are a NCSU student?**

Participation in this study is not a course requirement and your participation, or lack thereof will not affect your class standing or grades at NC State. Students in the Poole College of Management are not eligible to participate in this study. If this applies to you, please inform the primary investigator.

### **What if you have questions about this study?**

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Brian Peters, at bapeters@ncsu.edu and (540) 309-1378.

### **What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator at dapaxton@ncsu.edu or by phone at 1-919-515-4514.

**Consent to Participate**

“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.”

**Subject's signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Investigator's signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix D**  
Gatekeeper Research Letter

Dear <<Gatekeeper>>,

My name is Brian Peters and I am a current doctoral candidate at NC State University studying Educational Research and Policy Analysis in Higher Education. I am contacting you today in the hopes that you may assist me in locating potential participants for my study that has passed NC State's IRB committee.

My dissertation research is a qualitative study using narrative inquiry to explore how Native American students in North Carolina chose to attend four-year institutions. In current college choice literature, Native American students are often excluded due to their low enrollment numbers in national data sets. Further, current Indigenous scholars' research has primarily focused on on-campus experiences of Native American students compared to their experiences choosing to attend colleges or universities.

In this study, I will be interviewing Native American students from multiple four-year institutions in North Carolina. As a current staff member at <<INSERT INSTITUTION'S NAME>>, I was wondering if you would be willing to assist me in finding participants for my study? If so, would you mind forwarding my letter to potential participants or providing me contact information, so I may contact them directly?

Students who participate will be asked to participate in two 60-75-minute interviews. To qualify for the study, participants must be: 1) Over 18 years of age 2) a student at your institution and 3) identify as a Native American student from one of North Carolina's eight tribes. Student will be able to leave the study at any time and will receive a \$25 gift card for participating in both interviews.

If you have questions or concerns about my study before contacting potential participants, please feel free to contact me via email at [bapeters@ncsu.edu](mailto:bapeters@ncsu.edu) or via phone at (540) 309-1378. You may also contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Joy Gayles, if you have additional questions or concerns at [jggayles@ncsu.edu](mailto:jggayles@ncsu.edu).

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate any assistance you are able to provide.

Sincerely,

Brian Peters

**Appendix E**  
Participant Recruitment Letter

Dear <<Potential Participant>>,

My name is Brian Peters and I am a current doctoral candidate at NC State University studying Educational Research and Policy Analysis in Higher Education. I am contacting you today in the hopes that you may be interested in participating in a study that has passed NC State's IRB committee.

My dissertation research is a qualitative study using narrative inquiry to explore how Native American students in North Carolina chose to attend four-year colleges and universities. In current college choice literature, Native American students are often excluded due to their low enrollment numbers in national data sets. Further, current Indigenous scholars' research has primarily focused on on-campus experiences of Native American students compared to their experiences choosing to attend colleges or universities.

If you are willing to participate, you will be interviewed twice by me a few months apart. Interviews will last approximately 60-75 minute and will be conducted in-person. If you choose, your second interview can be conducted digitally using online video software. To qualify for the study, you must be: 1) Over 18 years of age 2) a student at a four-year institution in North Carolina and 3) identify as a Native American student from one of North Carolina's eight tribes.

If you choose to participate, you will be compensated with a \$25 gift card for completing both interviews. A formal consent form will be emailed to you in advance of the interview. Please review the consent form and either scan and send a copy back to me at [bapeters@ncsu.edu](mailto:bapeters@ncsu.edu) or provide a printed and signed copy at the interview.

If you have questions or concerns about my study before considering participation, please feel free to contact me via email at [bapeters@ncsu.edu](mailto:bapeters@ncsu.edu) or via phone at (540) 309-1378. You may also contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Joy Gayles ([jggayles@ncsu.edu](mailto:jggayles@ncsu.edu)) if you have additional questions or concerns.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope you will chose to participate and I look forward to hearing your story.

Sincerely,  
Brian Peters

**Appendix F**  
Participant Follow-Up and Member Checking Letter

Dear <<Participant>>,

Thank you again for taking the time to meet with me and sharing your story. As I mentioned in your interview, attached is the transcript of your interview for your review. Please take some time to read your interview transcript and let me know if there are any changes or additions you would like to make to your narrative.

If I do not hear from you after five days, I will assume your transcript is satisfactory. If you need more time to complete your review, please let me know and I will be happy to work with your schedule.

Also, as I mentioned in the interview, if you know of another Native American student attending a four-year institution in North Carolina who may be interested in participating in this study, please send me their contact information. Feel free to pass my information to your friends and family members who might be interested in participating.

Please let me know if you have any additional questions or concerns. If at any time you would like your story removed from the analysis, please let me know.

Best wishes,

Brian Peters

**Appendix G**  
Theoretical Codebook

---

*Conceptual Framework Initial Theoretical Codebook*

---

Layer 1: Habitus	<i>f</i>
Cultural Capital - Cultural Knowledge	25
Cultural Capital - Value of College Attainment	21
Demand for Higher Ed - Academic Achievement	29
Demand for Higher Ed - Academic Prep	64
Expected Benefits - Monetary	24
Expected Benefits - Non-Monetary	13
Expected Benefits - to Community	30
Expected Costs - College Costs	4
Expected Costs - Foregone earnings	1
Gender	10
Social Capital - Assistance with College Processes	17
Social Capital - Information About College	27
Social Capital - Parental Encouragement	53
Supply of Resources - Family Income	16
Supply of Resources - Financial Aid	19
Tribal Identity	78
Layer 2: School & Community Context	
Availability of Resources	68
Structural Supports & Barriers	50
Tribal Community Support	26
Types of Resources	22
Layer 3: Higher Education	
Historical Context	17
Home Feeling	42
Institutional Characteristics	99
Location	41
Marketing & Recruiting	29

Native Spaces	5
Presence of Native Faculty Students & Culture	60
Previous Higher Ed Experience	43
Relationship with Tribe	6

---

Layer 4: Social, Economic & Policy Context

---

Demographic characteristics	77
Economic characteristics	73
Giving Back to Community	28
Public Policy	14
Tribal Recognition	27

---

**Appendix H**  
Axial/Open Codebook

---

*Axial/Open Codebook*

---

Family	<i>f</i>
Distance from Home	31
Limiting Choices	7
Fear Driving Success	4
Pride	22
Support	65

---

Native Identity & Community

---

Home Feeling	31
Native Community on Campus	31
Closeness & Togetherness	29
Supportive Native Community	45
Urban vs. Rural/Reservation Native	50
Power	8
Caring	30
Tribal Support	52
Tribal Recognition	61
Thrive	23
Pride	43
Faith	15
Insecurity	50
Perseverance	28
Learn Our Culture	27
Skin Color & 1/2 status	27
Adjusting	43

---

External Factors

---

1st Generation	19
Advise	45
Academic Prep (easy or rigorous path)	33
Assistance with choice & applications	14

Native Culture & Programs	36
Major Options (known or unknown)	15
Bridge Programs	36
Recruiting Prospective Native American students	6

---

Growth/Opportunities

Give Back to Community Upon Graduation	3
Personal Growth	43
Medical or Public Service Jobs	42

---