## ABSTRACT

LOCKLEAR, BRITTANY L. We are Still Here: An Exploratory Case Study on Native American Community College Students Enrolled in Transfer Programs. (Under the direction of Dr. Carrol Warren)

"The country needs to understand the struggle of Indians to be Indians.
Every tribe had a trail of tears." Dr. Helen Maynor Schierbeck, Lumbee Tribe

Native American college students in the United States face significant educational disparities. However, there has been limited research on how they demonstrate resilience within their communities. This research study explored the experiences of Native American community college students enrolled in transfer programs while also considering the perspectives of faculty and staff involved in these programs. Despite efforts to close opportunity gaps, Native American college students continue to face challenges and underperform compared to other racial and ethnic groups. This study fills a critical research gap by investigating the experiences of Native American students in community colleges enrolled in transfer programs, focusing on their perspectives on the enrollment and transfer processes. This research study addresses key questions about personal and social experiences, academic strategies, available support resources, and the transfer process. Nine Native American students, seven faculty members, and 12 staff members participated in interviews and focus groups, offering valuable insights. The findings highlight the challenges faced by Native American students in higher education, including financial constraints, difficulties in adapting to the academic environment, experiences of racism, the weak ethnic identity of self, cultural and personal isolation, feelings of alienation, and cultural conflicts. The findings from this research study emphasize that the challenges participants identified can be overcome with adequate support and resources, such as the inclusion of Native American faculty and staff, a culturally responsive curriculum, and the presence of Native American student organizations. “We are still here” is one participant’s reflection on their experiences that highlighted all sentiments. These factors not only benefit

individual Native American college students but also positively impact their communities. The findings of this dissertation indicate that further research is needed, along with practical implications aimed at enhancing the educational experiences of Native American students in higher education settings. Postsecondary leaders must understand Native people's history, sociocultural needs, and desires to uphold their commitment to diversity and increase Native American student enrollment and attainment.

# We are Still Here: An Exploratory Case Study on Native American Community College Students Enrolled in Transfer Programs

by
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## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the resilient Native American community college students, whose unwavering determination and pursuit of knowledge inspire us to overcome barriers and strive for excellence. May your courage, strength, and endless potential in your educational journey empower generations to come.

To the trailblazers who came before me, I extend my deepest gratitude for the path you forged, allowing a Lumbee Native American woman from a small town to access fair and just education. Your remarkable resilience serves as an enduring symbol of strength, and your steadfast presence reaffirms the legacy of "we are still here" that will continue to inspire future generations. With profound appreciation, I honor your indomitable spirit.

Last but not least, I dedicate this research to my beloved parents and prayer warriors, James and Delois Locklear, and my cherished sister, Demetriss Locklear, who have been my tireless pillars of strength. Thank you for your unwavering support and the invaluable guidance you provided throughout my doctoral journey. Your boundless love and steadfast encouragement have been the pillars that propelled me toward completing this program. I am eternally grateful for your presence in my life and the countless ways you have uplifted and inspired me. Their love, guidance, and sacrifices have shaped my path as a Native American (Lumbee) woman. Their belief in my dreams and relentless support have nurtured my educational journey. I am forever grateful for their teachings, wisdom, and ancestral connection that have instilled a deep sense of identity and purpose in me. I dedicate this achievement to their enduring love and unshakeable faith in me.

I extend my heartfelt appreciation to my extended family, who have been my constant inspiration and encouragement. Your belief in me and your relentless support has been my guiding light. I am grateful for your sacrifices, patience, and understanding during the long hours spent pursuing this academic endeavor.

To a special friend, your love, patience, and understanding have been my anchor throughout this dissertation journey. Your constant support, belief in my abilities, and encouragement have sustained me through the highs and lows. I am forever grateful for your presence by my side.

I am indebted to my circle of friends, whose presence have been an invaluable source of joy and solace. Your words of encouragement, countless adventures, late-night conversations, and understanding during moments of self-doubt have been instrumental in fueling my determination to persevere. Thank you for being my pillars of strength.

This achievement belongs to all of us, and I am forever indebted to you for your selfless contributions.

## BIOGRAPHY

Brittany Locklear, a Lumbee Native American woman, takes great pride in her roots and hails from Robeson County, North Carolina. She was raised by her loving parents, James and Delois Locklear. Brittany's educational journey began with her Bachelor of Science in biology, which she obtained from the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. Fueling her passion for education and biology, she pursued a master's degree in science education, Grades 9-12, with a concentration in biology from the same institution. Recognizing her commitment to academic excellence and leadership, Brittany embarked on a transformative path to North Carolina State University, where she recently earned her doctorate in Community College Leadership in 2023. Brittany has 14 years of experience in education, eight years as a Grades 9-12 science teacher, and six years as a biology community college instructor.

Beyond her academic pursuits, Brittany finds solace in spending quality time with her loved ones, cherishing the bonds of family and friends. In her leisure moments, she immerses herself in the joy of reading and seeks new experiences through her passion for travel. Brittany's multifaceted journey and unwavering dedication to inspiring those around her reflect her deep commitment to personal growth, knowledge, and a balanced life.

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In conclusion, this achievement is not mine alone. It is the culmination of the love, support, and collaboration of all those who have touched my life profoundly. I am forever grateful for your presence and contributions. May we continue to inspire and uplift one another on our respective paths, guided by the wisdom of our ancestors and the boundless possibilities that lie ahead.

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# CHAPTER 1

For more than five centuries, the Indigenous people of North America have endured the harmful, violent, systemic, and insidious consequences of colonization within the United States (Fetter & Thompson, 2023). Colonization has manifested in various ways, including the violation and dishonoring of treaties, direct acts of violence, forced displacement from ancestral lands, exploitation of natural resources, systemic attempts at assimilation through boarding schools and prohibition of Indigenous practices, federal policies that undermine tribal sovereignty, as well as the ongoing erasure, marginalization, and objectification of Native American communities

Moreover, Native American communities continue to grapple with the enduring consequences of colonization, such as poverty, unemployment, and limited socioeconomic opportunities (Fetter & Thompson, 2023). Education is a significant avenue for Native Americans to make meaningful contributions to their communities and break free from intergenerational cycles of poverty resulting from colonization. The researcher in this study sought to provide insight into the experiences of Native American community college students in their efforts to persist from one semester to the next in community college transfer degree programs. Transfer programs are designed to facilitate students' transition from community colleges to four-year institutions. Exploring the experiences of Native American students in these programs can uncover factors that contribute to their academic success or hinder their progress, allowing for targeted interventions and support. This qualitative exploratory case study was guided by two overarching research questions, which also sought the perspectives of the faculty and staff who serve students at community colleges with a higher demographic of Native American students compared to other community colleges. To triangulate data, document

analysis was conducted to explore the transfer programs and services offered to community college students who seek to advance and persist toward degree completion.

Native Americans are the most underrepresented population in higher education, consisting of 0.9% of undergraduates and 0.5% of graduate students despite the current trends of increased enrollment (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Native American/American Indian and Alaska Native students have the lowest college enrollment rate and highest attrition rates of any racial/ethnic group, according to recent data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2023). The underrepresentation of Native American college graduates can be better explained by the following excerpt, "For every one American Indian or Alaska Native who has a bachelor's degree, seven White individuals do" (Brayboy et al., 2012, p. 56), confirming, there are significantly more White individuals with a bachelor's degree when compared to American Indians or Alaska Natives. Identifying factors that help Native American college students succeed in higher educational institutions is central to discussing Native American persistence (Okagaki et al., 2009). For instance, Dodd et al. (1995) revealed research findings that successful Native American college students who perceived college education as a way to reach a future goal coupled with the ability to cope with competing educational demands and cultural differences promoted student persistence.

Native American students represent approximately 1% of the U.S. college population (Aud et al., 2010; DeVoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008). Native American students remain among the least-represented demographic in higher education (Minthorn et al., 2018). Furthermore, approximately 39% of first-time, full-time undergraduate Native American students will graduate from college within six years of entering college compared to 74% of Asian students, 64% of White students, 60% of two or more races, 54% of Hispanic students, 51% of Pacific

Islander students, and 40% of Black students (de Brey et al., 2019). This case study explored the perspectives of Native American community college students who enrolled in transfer programs; the perspectives of community college faculty and staff associated with serving students enrolled in transfer programs also contributed to the data. The participants' personal, social, and academic experiences contributed to a better understanding of the community college students transfer process, specifically for Native American students.

It is important to consider the pre-college-ready population of students as it frames generations who will be coming through the higher education pipeline. Native American students at the secondary level also make up a unique minority group among the United States' school population (Okagaki et al., 2009). "Kill the Indian in him, and save the man." Captain Richard H. Pratt (Pratt,1892, p. 46), boarding school pioneer, coined the phrase in 1892 as his motto for educating Native Americans. These words resonate with many Native Americans today as a constant reminder of the government's attempts to "Americanize" Native Americans in the 18th and 19th centuries. Boarding schools intended to assimilate Native Americans into the Western world (Reyhner, 2018); however, the United States has a long-standing obligation to educate Native Americans. According to the Executive Office of the President (2014):

> The United States has a unique nation-to-nation relationship with and owes a trust responsibility to Indian tribes. The federal government's trust relationship with Indian tribes (based on treaties, agreements, statutes, court decisions, and executive orders) charges the United States with moral obligations of the highest responsibility. Yet, despite the United States' historic and sacred trust responsibility to Indian tribes, there is a history of deeply troubling and destructive federal policies that have hurt Native

communities, exacerbated severe inequality, and accelerated the loss of tribal cultural traditions. (p. 4)

The White House Initiative American Indian and Alaska Native Education (WHI-NATCU) is a significant governmental effort that stems from President's Executive Order 14049, signed on October 11, 2021. This initiative within the Department of Education fosters educational equity, excellence, and economic opportunity for Native Americans while reinforcing the foundations of Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs). The central goal of the White House Initiative (2015) is to provide comprehensive support to initiatives that contribute to the betterment of the nation by expanding educational opportunities and enhancing educational outcomes for American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) students. By doing so, the initiative emphasizes the principles of tribal self-determination, ensuring that AI/AN students across all levels of education are allowed to engage with and learn their Native languages and histories. This commitment extends to facilitating their access to well-rounded and competitive education, thus equipping them with the knowledge and skills necessary to pursue higher education, embark on successful careers, and lead fulfilling and productive lives. Through its strategic efforts and collaborations, the White House Initiative endeavors to address the existing disparities and challenges faced by AI/AN students while nurturing their cultural identities and promoting a sense of belonging within the educational landscape. By striving to bridge the achievement gap and promoting inclusive educational practices, the initiative aims to cultivate an environment conducive to the educational, social, and economic advancement of Native American communities. In summary, the White House Initiative (2015) on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity for Native Americans and Strengthening Tribal Colleges and Universities (WHI-NATCU) is a dedicated platform for

propelling educational development and empowering AI/AN students. By championing the ideals of equity, cultural preservation, and academic advancement, the initiative seeks to foster a brighter future for Native American communities while enriching the fabric of the nation.

Researchers have become increasingly aware of the value of cultural sensitivity, "… higher education has been found to be not only isolating but also hostile for Native American students" (Fish & Syed, 2018, p. 394). The body of literature on the retention of Native American students, examined from an institutional vantage point, remains notably scarce (Keith et al., 2016). There is a scarcity of research that sheds light on the specific pathways of resilience for Native American/Alaska Native students (Fetter & Thompson, 2023). Researchers HeavyRunner and DeCelles (2002) stood out for indicating the need for improved actions to support Native American students decades ago, sharing, "institutions fail to recognize the disconnect between the institutional values and [Indian] student/family values; hence the real reasons for high attrition rates among disadvantaged students are never addressed" (p. 8).

It is crucial to thoroughly investigate and analyze the most pertinent factors for the academic success of Native American students in higher education institutions. Educators fail to identify "what truly motivates AI/AN students to attend, persist, and graduate from college" (Guillory, 2009, p. 22). Unfortunately, Guillory predicted that "…mainstream higher education institutions will continue to address AI/AN college student retention and graduation attrition from uninformed positions" (p. 22). There was limited research found on Native American undergraduate students due to Native Americans being one of the smallest and most underrepresented groups in higher education (McClellan et al., 2005). Guillory (2009) noted that policymakers, administrators, faculty, and staff made several attempts to develop strategies and

implement programs to recruit and retain Native American students over the years; however, the results were minimal.

Recruiting and retaining Native American students has been a historical challenge for United States mainstream colleges and universities (Guillory, 2009). To understand Native American experiences in higher education, "one must consider multiple cultural and personal factors that may relate to students' belief systems" (Okagaki et al., 2009, p. 159). To understand the experiences of Native American students in higher education it is important to consider how Native American students' cultural background and personal experiences influence their perspectives and approaches to higher education. In addition, the "American Indian research asterisk" refers to the issue where data on Native American students is typically not recorded or discussed in quantitative study findings or is noted as not statistically significant (Garland, 2007, p. 612).

The researcher in this exploratory case study intended to "move beyond the asterisk" and add to the literature to increase awareness and understanding of Native American students and their experiences while enrolled in a transfer program at a community college. This study holds significance for leaders of community colleges and four-year universities interested in enhancing transfer programs and partnerships within postsecondary institutions, moving towards the advancement of completion rates of Native American students. Overall, studying the experiences of Native American community college students in transfer programs serves to advance educational equity, improve student outcomes, promote cultural affirmation, and inform policy and practice to create more inclusive and supportive environments for Native American students.

North Carolina community colleges have reason to be concerned about the enrollment of Native Americans.

- First, it is essential to ensure equal access to education for all student populations, including Native Americans, to promote educational equity and inclusivity. For example, in the 2020-2021 academic year, the Department of Public Instruction reported a cumulative enrollment of 15,953 students who identified as American Indian and/or Alaskan Native (Perry-Graves, 2023).
- Second, Native American students bring unique perspectives, knowledge, and cultural contributions to the learning environment, enriching the educational experiences of all students. By actively supporting Native American students in transfer programs, community colleges can create a more diverse and inclusive educational environment that fosters cross-cultural understanding, sensitivity, and appreciation.
- Third, community colleges are responsible for addressing historical and systemic educational disparities that have disproportionately affected Native American communities. By providing targeted support and resources to Native American students who may be enrolled in transfer programs, community colleges can help these students overcome barriers they may face, such as limited access to educational opportunities due to cultural disconnects.
- Fourth, promoting the success of Native American students in transfer programs aligns with broader state and national goals of increasing educational attainment and workforce development, indicated by the work of the White House Initiative American Indian and Alaska Native Education on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity for Native Americans and Strengthening Tribal Colleges and Universities (WHI-NATCU).

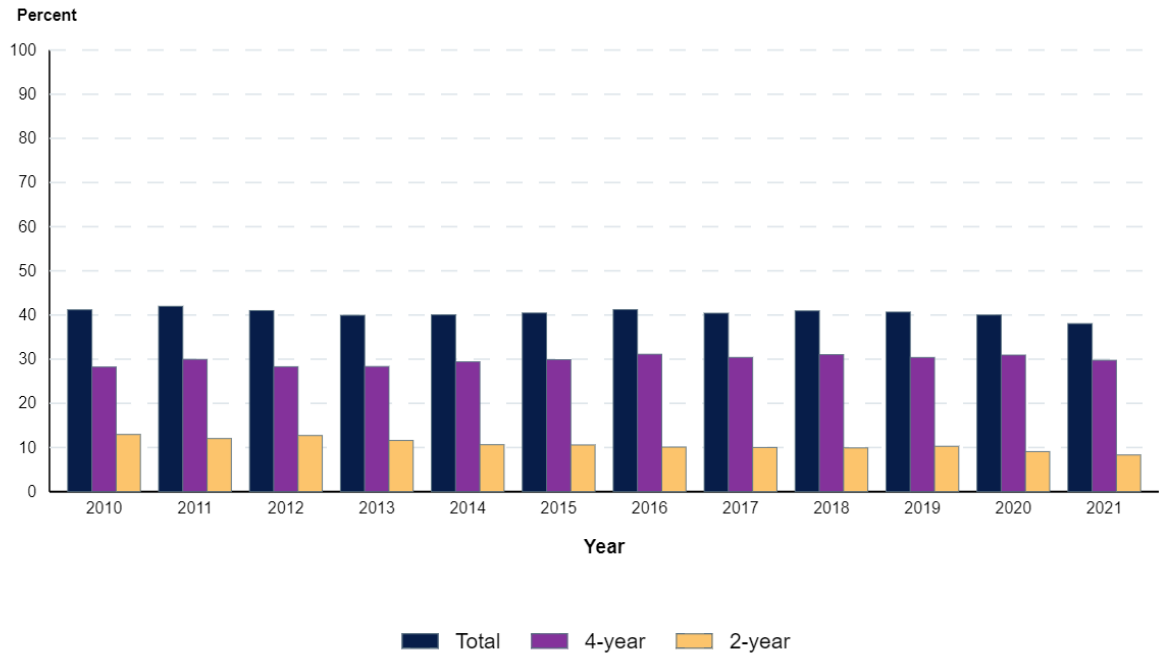
Native American/Alaska Native (NA/AN) graduates experience a disparity in the return on their educational investment compared to their peers, evidenced by higher unemployment rates across various levels of educational attainment (de Brey et al., 2019; Shotton et al., 2013). By supporting the educational journeys of Native American students and facilitating their successful transfer to a four-year institution, community colleges can build a more educated and diverse workforce, benefiting the state's economy and society. Overall, by being committed to acknowledging the unique needs of Native American students enrolled in transfer programs, North Carolina community colleges demonstrate actionable steps towards promoting educational equity, cultural diversity, historical reconciliation, and the overall success and well-being of their students and communities.

**Background Information**

According to the American Community Survey conducted by the Census in 2021, individuals identifying as American Indian or Alaskan Native comprised approximately 1% (*n* = 3,158,694) of the total United States population (*n* = 331,893,745). Among American Indian or Alaskan Native individuals aged 25 or older, only 15.4% (*n* = 259,243) had attained a bachelor's degree or higher. While this figure represents an increase from 13.4% (*n* = 201,473) in 2010, it remains below the national average of 32.9% (*n* = 73,356,319). Dating back to the fall of 1976, Native American students comprised 0.7% *(n* = 76.1*)* of the total postsecondary enrollment *(n* = 10,985.6*).* Surprisingly, despite the passage of 44 years, the percentage of Native American students in postsecondary education remains unchanged as of Fall 2020 (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2022). See Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*College Enrollment Rates of 18-to-24-Year-olds, by the Level of Institution: 2010-2021*




*Note:* This figure demonstrates the college enrollment rates of 18-to-24-year-olds by the level of institution: 2010 through 2021. In this figure, the college enrollment rate is defined as the percentage of 18-to 24-year olds enrolled as undergraduate or graduate students in 2-or 4-year institutions. From "National Center for Education Statistics. (2023). College Enrollment Rates. *Condition of Education.* U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cpb/college-enrollment-rate.

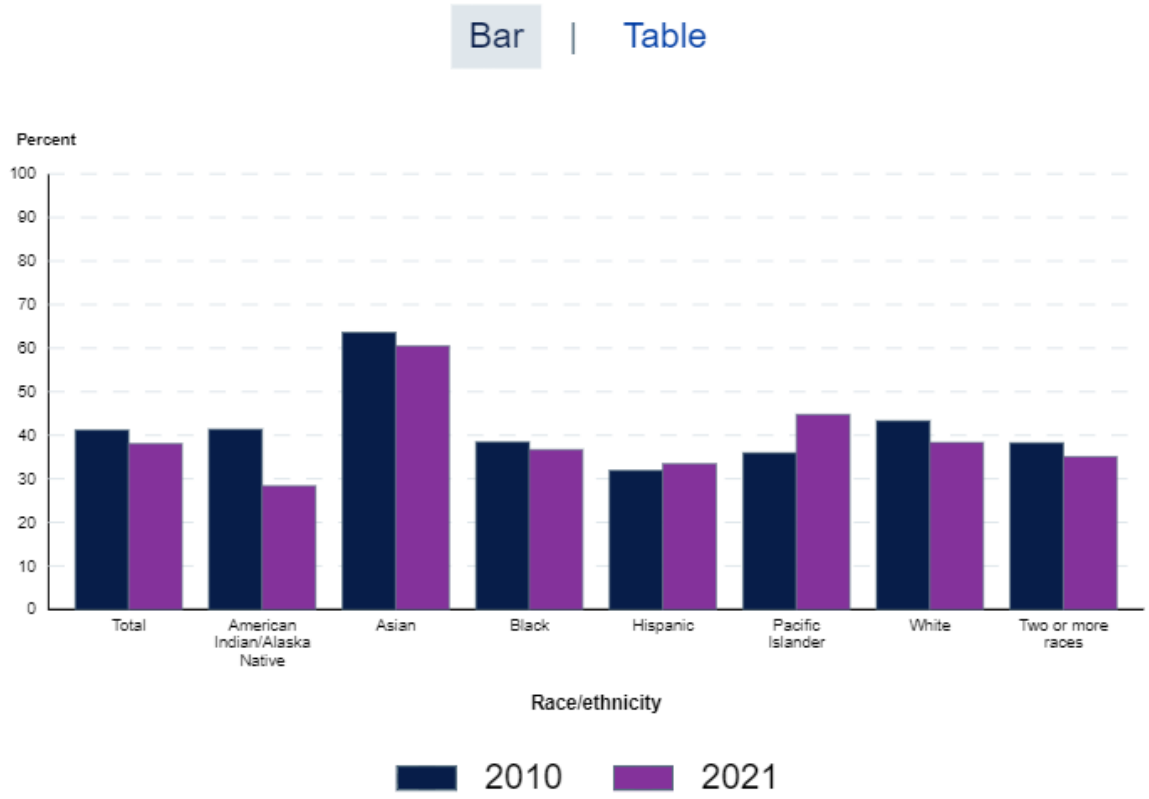
The overall college enrollment rate for 18-to-24-year-olds decreased from 41%, with 28% enrolled in four-year institutions and 13% enrolled in two-year institutions in 2010 to 38% in 2021, with 30% enrolled in four-year institutions and 8% enrolled in two-year institutions in 2021. The decline in college enrollment rate for two-year institutions, from 13 to 8 percent over

the specified period, served as the primary force behind this phenomenon. Conversely, the enrollment rate for four-year institutions in 2021 (30%) exhibited no significant deviation from the rate observed in 2010.

The college enrollment rates by ethnicity were as follows: Asian 60.5%, White 38.3%, Hispanic 33.4%, Black 36.7%, two or more races 35.1%, Pacific Islander 44.8%, and American Indian/Alaska Native 28.4%; providing statistical data that support the finding that Native American students have the lowest college enrollment rate of any ethnic group (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). The college enrollment rate for American Indian/Alaska Native students decreased from 41.4% (2010) to 28.4% (2021), according to the National Center for Education Statistics in 2023. There was no measurable difference between the college enrollment rates for White, Black, Asian, Pacific Islander, and two or more races. It is important to note that over the past decade, there has been a substantial decline in Native American enrollment. Figure 2 depicts the college enrollment rates of 18-to-24-year-olds by race for 2010 and 2020.

**Figure 2**

*College Enrollment Rates of 18-to-24-Year-Olds by Race/Ethnicity: 2010 & 2020*




*Note:* This figure demonstrates the college enrollment rates of 18-to-24-year-olds by race/ethnicity: 2010 and 2021. In this figure, the college enrollment rate is defined as the percentage of 18-to 24-years old enrolled as undergraduate or graduate students in 2-or 4-year institutions. From "National Center for Education Statistics. (2023). College Enrollment Rates. *Condition of Education.* U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cpb/college-enrollment-rate.

Notably, Native American students prefer public institutions over private ones (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). As of Fall 2020, 83% of Native American students were enrolled in public institutions, with 45% attending public four–year institutions and 38%

attending public two-year institutions. The desire for AI/AN students to achieve degree completion is evident, considering the number of degrees awarded to AI/ANs has more than doubled for each degree level (associate's, bachelor's, master's, doctoral, and first professional) between the school years 1976-1977 and 2005-2006 (DeVoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008). For example, in 1976-1977, 3,300 bachelor's degrees were awarded to AI/ANs compared to 10,900 awarded in 2005-2006. The graduation rates for first-time, full-time Native American students who began their studies in four-year institutions in 2014 were notably lower than the overall student population. Only 42% of Native American students could graduate within six years, while the graduation rate for all students stood at 64% (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2022). However, in two-year institutions, Native American students tend to graduate at a similar rate as other racial/ethnic groups within three years, with a graduation rate of 30% for Native American students compared to 34% overall. In the 2019-20 academic year, out of the more than two million bachelor's degrees awarded, a total of 0.4% ($n$ = 9,151) were conferred upon Native American students (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2022).

Education attainment expectations have increased yearly for Native American students who choose to go to college (de Brey et al., 2019; DeVoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008). Nevertheless, in 2018, Native American students composed approximately .7% of the total college and university student population compared to 55% White, 19% Hispanic, 14% Black, and 7% Asian/Pacific Islander (de Brey et al., 2019). The retention of Native American students has been a struggle for academic institutions, and the reasons span across multiple areas: "…including blatant racism toward Native American students, inadequate pre-college preparation programs, and cultural bias on the part of higher education structures and philosophies" (Lundberg, 2007, p. 405). Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive

strategies prioritizing cultural inclusivity, financial support, and academic preparedness. Culturally sensitive support programs, dedicated financial aid initiatives, and targeted academic support services can enhance the retention rates of Native American students in postsecondary institutions (Nirschl-Coats, Valerie, 2013).

According to the Executive Office of the President (2014):

> While progress has been made in recent decades, American Indians and Alaska Natives continue to have worse educational outcomes than the general population by nearly all measures. Twenty-two percent of American Indians and Alaska Natives ages 25 and older have not finished high school, and only 13 percent have completed a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 29 percent of the U.S. population who have a bachelor's degree or higher. (p. 14)

Despite the government's reports, Native American students continue to have the lowest college enrollment and graduation rates of any ethnic group in the United States (DeVoe & Churchill, 2008; Keith et al., 2016; Native American Students in Higher Education, 2019). The recruitment and retention of Native American students at colleges and universities has been challenging for years (de Brey et al., 2019; Guillory, 2009).

**Statement of the Problem**

According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2022), Native American transfer enrollment declined by 15.6% (*n*=-3,100*)* after two years of the pandemic. Furthermore, the decline experienced by Latinx and Native American transfer students is nearly twice as high as that of their counterparts from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, as the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center reported in 2022. The decreased number of Native American community college students who successfully transfer to a four-year institution

contributes to the lack of achievement of equitable educational opportunities and upward mobility for this population. Despite the potential benefits of transferring to a four-year institution, Native American students face unique barriers and obstacles that hinder their successful transition. Several factors have been identified as contributing to the attrition of Native American college students, including financial concerns, challenges in adapting to the school environment, experiences of racism, a lack of strong ethnic identity, cultural and personal isolation, feelings of alienation, and cultural conflicts (de Brey et al., 2019; Fetter & Thompson, 2023; Shotton et al., 2013). These factors collectively contribute to the higher dropout rates among Native American students and highlight the need for targeted interventions and support systems to address these challenges and promote student retention and success (Fetter & Thompson, 2023). Understanding and addressing the factors contributing to this decrease in transfer rates is crucial for promoting educational attainment and fostering the long-term success of Native American students in higher education.

Native American students are among the least likely to graduate from college, with only 42% of Native American students who enter college earning a bachelor's degree within six years, compared to 64% of all students (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2022). Most research focuses on the Native American population of students in higher education but fails to highlight the population of Native American students in community colleges. Failure of community colleges to comprehend the distinctive experiences of Native American students, their use of college services and support, and the potential advantages of targeted outreach initiatives will result in declining persistence and degree completion rates within this population.

For instance, insufficient outreach efforts can result in low enrollment of Native American students in community colleges. Native American students are often excluded from

postsecondary data and research due to their small sample size (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2022). Comprehending the experiences of Native American college students holds significant importance in the broader pursuit of achieving equity in higher education. However, research often relegates Native American students to a mere asterisk or footnote, with arguments suggesting that their small numbers make them challenging to study (Tachine et al., 2017). As a result, Native American students are frequently excluded from educational discussions, rendering them effectively "invisible" (Tachine et al., 2017). Consequently, professionals in higher education seeking to improve access and success for Native American students receive inadequate guidance on effectively supporting them. Without a diverse student population that includes Native American students, community colleges may miss the opportunity to provide tailored support and resources to address their specific needs. This lack of representation and support can discourage Native American students from enrolling in community colleges, reducing access to higher education opportunities. In addition, inadequate outreach efforts may fail to establish strong connections and support systems for Native American students within the community college environment.

the Postsecondary National Policy Institute (2022) noted that familial dynamics impacts college-level achievement for Native American students. Native American students encounter lower college attendance rates within their families, primarily because they are first-generation individuals pursuing higher education. In 2021, only 24% of Native American children under 18 lived in a household where a parent had completed a bachelor's degree or higher. In comparison, 59% of White children lived in similar households. Among all racial and ethnic groups, Native American children had the lowest likelihood of residing in households with parents with bachelor's degrees or higher. As a result, these students may experience difficulties navigating

the college system, accessing necessary academic and personal support services, and feeling a sense of belonging. Without the necessary support, Native American students may face higher dropout rates, disengagement, and lower progression rates toward degree completion. Without targeted outreach efforts to attract and support Native American students, community colleges risk perpetuating a cycle of declining degree completion rates for this population.

Approximately 10% of AI/AN students attain a bachelor's degree, and about 17% of AI/AN students earn an associate degree (McFarland et al., 2019). Despite the progress made in post-secondary education enrollment and graduation rates of Native Americans over the last 30 years, retention rates of persistence-to graduation are still among the lowest rates of any ethnic group. Public higher education institutions' retention rates differ for all student populations. Still, the gap is significant among African American, Hispanic, and AI/AN students. AI/AN students who receive a high school diploma and begin attending a public college have the highest dropout rate of any other student population (Patterson et al., 2017). The college dropout rates of AI/AN students in public universities in the United States are well documented. Because of the lack of cultural awareness in many communities where higher education is accessible for Native American students, they may still struggle due to adapt and acclimate.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this case study was to examine the experiences of Native American community college students participating in associate degree transfer programs while also considering the perspectives of faculty and staff members involved in providing services within these programs. By exploring the experiences and insights of Native American students and the perspectives of faculty and staff, this study aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the transfer process and identify strategies to enhance the support and success of Native American

students in their journey from community college to four-year institutions. Furthermore, a qualitative case study approach allowed the Native American community college transfer students to share their unique perspectives, stories, and lived experiences. Collecting qualitative data through interviews and focus groups provided a platform for the participants' voices to be heard and their narratives to be acknowledged, empowering them to shape the narrative surrounding their educational journeys. This representation contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges, successes, and aspirations in the transfer process of Native American community college transfer students.

The existing literature emphasizes the need for additional qualitative research studies focusing on the Native American higher education experience. There is a significant gap in the understanding of the unique perspectives, challenges, and successes of Native American students in higher education. As Huffman (2008) noted, “the heavy reliance on quantitative research has limited our understanding of the personal encounters, dilemmas, strategies, and triumphs of Native American students from their own standpoint” (p. 4). By addressing this research gap through qualitative research, researchers can gain deeper insights into the experiences of Native American students in higher education. This understanding will enable schools to develop effective strategies, policies, and support systems that promote their educational attainment and well-being. It is essential to prioritize qualitative research that amplifies the voices and perspectives of Native American students and the educators who serve them to understand better the unique needs and aspirations of this population of students in higher education.

Furthermore, the existing literature highlights the lower retention rates among Native American students than other ethnic groups (Shotton et al., 2013). Surprisingly, a limited number of published research studies focus on Native American college students, despite their increasing

enrollment in post-secondary educational institutions (Willmott et al., 2015). Addressing the factors crucial in retaining academically successful Native American students in postsecondary education is critical. To promote successful outcomes for Native American students in higher education, it is essential to concentrate on those who have already achieved success and analyze the motivators and tools they used to attain their goals (Keith et al., 2016).

In addition, the dearth of research found that was specifically dedicated to Native American college students affects the training and opportunities available for higher education professionals to acquire knowledge and understanding of this student population (Willmott et al., 2015). Despite the undeniable link between colonization and the experiences of Native American college students today, the aspect of learning through their lived experiences has received inadequate consideration from experts (Fish & Syed, 2018). Research has confirmed the disregard for the Native American population, indicating that this group of citizens is "…often ignored as a cultural group given their small numbers" (Willmott et al., 2015, p. 86), underscoring the critical need for extensive research that addresses the unique experiences of Native American students in higher education. The findings in Willmott et al.'s study indicates the need to develop a dedicated research agenda tailored to Native American populations. Such an agenda is crucial for effectively serving Native American students pursuing college completion. Faculty, administrative leaders, students, and families will benefit from a research agenda encompassing qualitative studies that delve into various topics such as Native American college student recruitment strategies, the establishment of collaborative relationships between institutions and Indigenous communities, and pre-college orientation programs. Higher educational institutions must start asking more complex questions about the causes and effects of low student retention rates among Native Americans in post-secondary institutions. Further

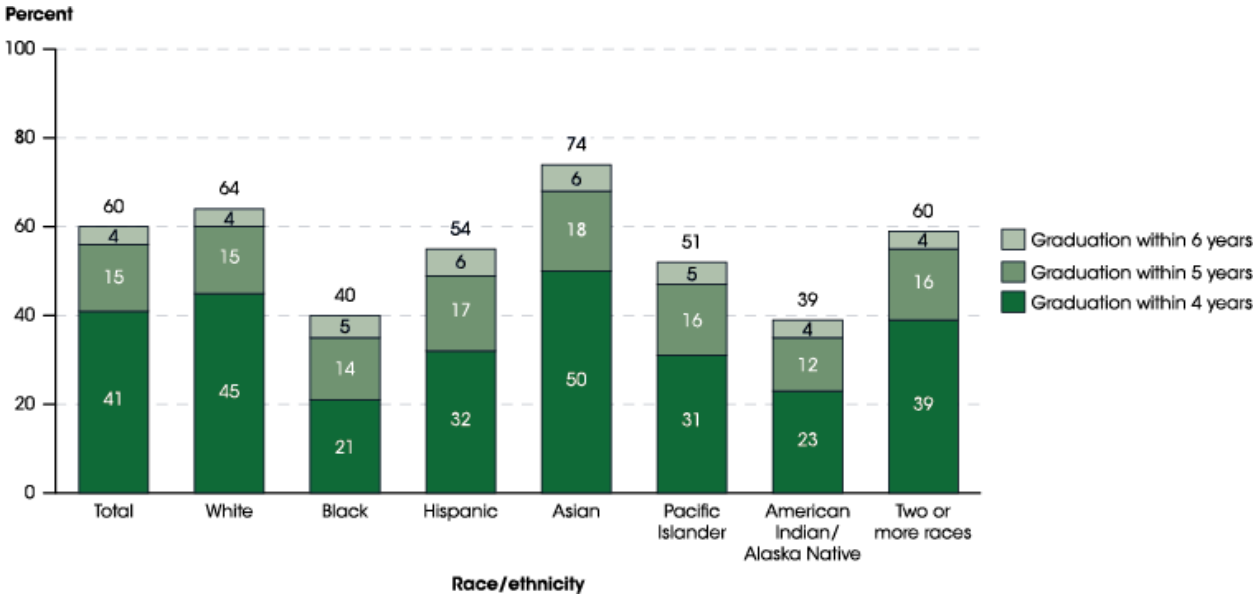
research in this area will contribute to the ability of Native Americans to successfully sustain and complete post-secondary educational opportunities in community colleges and universities and contribute to the understanding of the educators who serve them during their academic journeys.

The current literature focuses on the obstacles and barriers faced by American Indian/Alaska Native students in college (Fish & Syed, 2018). It is crucial to address the factors relevant to the retention and persistence of academically successful American Indian/Alaska Native students in postsecondary education and explore what higher education institutions can do to support Native Americans in this endeavor. Qualitative studies on the Native American student experience in higher education are lacking in the existing literature, highlighting the need for higher education institutions to actively listen to the voices of Native American college students (Guillory & Wolverton, 2018).

Understanding the strategies to help Native American students succeed in their educational pursuits is paramount for higher education institutions serving the Native American student demographic (Al-Asfour & Abraham, 2016). Figure 3 sheds light on the completion rates of students seeking a bachelor's degree at four-year institutions; the figure presents the percentage of students who successfully earn their bachelor's degree within six years. For instance, the six-year graduation rate for first-time, full-time undergraduate Asian or Pacific Islanders was 74%, Caucasians had a rate of 64%, African Americans had a rate of 40%, Hispanic students had a rate of 54%, and American Indian/Alaska Native students had a rate of 39%, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2018). Conversely, for each racial/ethnic group, the four-year graduation rates for first-time, full-time undergraduate students were 50 percent or lower. These statistics provide a comparative perspective among ethnic groups and their graduation outcomes within six years.

**Figure 3**

*Graduation Rate from First Institution Attended for First-Time, Full-Time Bachelor's Degree-Seeking Students at 4-Year Postsecondary Institutions, by Race/Ethnicity and Time to Completion: Cohort Entry Year 2010*




*Note*: Data are for 4-year degree-granting postsecondary institutions participating in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Graduation rates refer to students receiving bachelor's degrees from their initial institutions of attendance only. The total includes data for persons whose race/ethnicity was not reported. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data. From U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Winter 2016–17, Graduation Rates component. See Digest of Education Statistics 2017, table 326.10.

## Research Questions

Two overarching research questions framed this study. The first question, includes sub-questions 1a, 1b, 1c, and 1d, which pertains to students' experiences, and are represented throughout article one. The second research question, includes sub-questions 2a, 2b, and 2c, which pertains to the faculty and staff who serve the students, and are represented throughout article two. An impact brief highlights the two main research questions. The research questions were used to explore community college transfer programs from the Native American student, faculty and staff perspectives.

### *Student's Experiences*

Research questions based on student perspectives (those enrolled in a community college transfer program) include:

**Research Question 1:** What contributes to the students' successful outcomes?

**Research Question 1a:** How do personal and social experiences shape Native American community college students' persistence?

**Research Question 1b:** What academic strategies do Native American community college students employ to persist?

**Research Question 1c:** What do community college students view as the most supportive resources in their enrollment and transfer process?

**Research Question 1d.** How is the transfer process from a community college to a four-year university for Native American students different from other demographics?

### *Faculty and Staff Experiences*

Research questions based on faculty and staff perspectives (those delivering services in a community college transfer program):

**Research Question 2:** What contributes to the successful outcomes of the students who participate in a community college transfer partnership program?

**Research Question 2a:** How do transfer partners define academic success?

**Research Question 2b:** What support services do community college faculty and staff implement to increase Native American students' participation and persistence?

**Research Question 2c:** How does the transfer process from a community college to a four-year university for Native American students differ from other demographics?

***Impact Brief – Exploring the Experiences of Students in Transfer Programs***

Article Three, the Impact Brief, highlights the findings from two overarching research questions designed to explore the experiences of Native American students enrolled in two-year transfer degree programs representing three North Carolina community colleges and the experiences of faculty and staff who provide support services and instruction to Native American students:

**Research Question 1:** What contributes to the students' successful outcomes?

**Research Question 2:** What contributes to the successful outcomes of the students who participate in a community college transfer partnership program?

## Theoretical Framework

Several studies have focused on Native American students' persistence in higher education; however, most of the literature concerning this specific demographic takes a deficit approach, emphasizing barriers and obstacles instead of persistence and retention strategies leading to degree attainment (Fish & Syed, 2018). Research on ethnic minority students that takes a deficit perspective, concentrating solely on their failures, can foster negative and

prejudiced attitudes. Such attitudes can permeate among faculty, staff, and administrators, leading to lowered expectations and silencing the voices of these students (Keith et al., 2016).

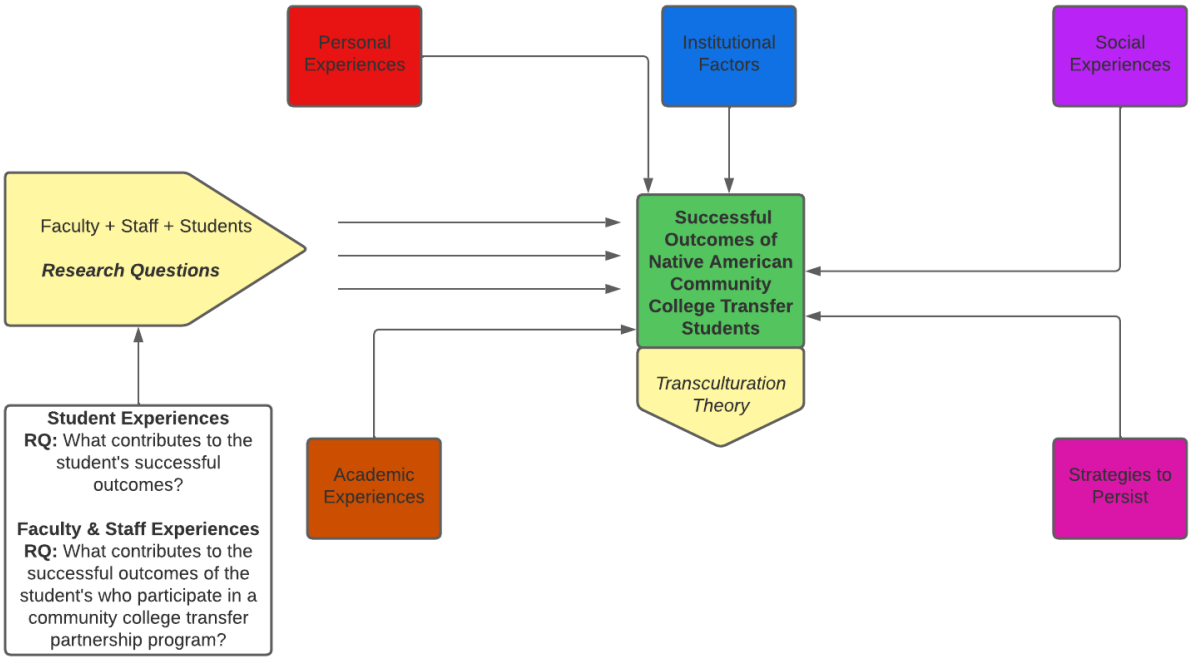
According to Huffman (2010), there are four established theoretical perspectives on Native American educational disparities; cultural discontinuity theory, structural inequality theory, critical race theory, and transculturation theory. Each approach differs based on their assumptions and conclusions for academic success and the lack of Native American students. Each theory shares the common goal of examining the complexity of Native American students' educational outcomes. Of the four theories, the most appropriate one driving this study was transculturation theory because transculturation theory states that Native Americans participate in learning the culture of mainstream colleges while maintaining and using their cultural heritage to make a strong identity and a sense of purpose.

**Conceptual Framework**

Driven by the two overarching research questions, this conceptual framework embraces Transculturation Theory (Huffman, 2010) to connect the outcomes of Native American community college transfer students to the personal experiences, institutional factors, and social experiences of the academic outcomes and persistence that occur during their educational journey. Figure Four depicts the conceptual framework the researcher created for this research study.

**Figure 4**

*Conceptual Framework*




*Note. Conceptual Framework with Inputs and Outputs*

The conceptual framework includes the inputs (personal, social, and academic experiences, strategies to persist, and institutional factors) that lead to the successful outcomes of Native American community college transfer students' which is driven by transculturation theory. This conceptual framework ties directly to the research questions for this study.

## Limitations of the Study

This study was subject to the general limitations of case study research and several specific limitations unique to this project. To begin with, the researcher's position as a faculty member at a North Carolina community college could potentially bias the research findings, particularly regarding student-faculty relationships and institutional policies. To mitigate bias,

the researcher acknowledged this potential bias, employed transparent practices, and sought multiple data sources throughout the collection process.

Another limitation to consider is the potential for a limited sample size due to the specific focus on Native American transfer students in North Carolina community colleges. As such, generalizing the findings to other populations or contexts is impossible. Additionally, the qualitative nature of the study involved researcher subjectivity, which may limit results in data collection and analysis.

Moreover, relying on self-reported data collected through online forms, interviews, and focus groups could have potential biases, as participants may not have been able to recall or report their experiences accurately.

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated that all interviews and observations be conducted via Zoom to adhere to the Centers for Disease Control protocol. Furthermore, the pandemic may have reduced the number of participants who could contribute, further limiting the sample size. Finally, this study was limited to data collected from participants attending or working at three community colleges in one state which may limit the generalizability of the results to other programs or regions. In addition, student participants were all enrolled in a two-year associate degree transfer program.

**Delimitations of the Study**

The researcher established three specific delimitations in this exploratory case study to narrow the focus of the study.

- First, the study examined only the experiences of Native American students attending community colleges in North Carolina enrolled in a community college transfer degree program of study. This delimitation allowed for a specific and

targeted investigation into the experiences of a particular population of students with shared characteristics and academic goals.

- Second, the study relied on self-reported data collected through online forms, individual interviews, and focus groups. This method allowed for rich and detailed data collection about the experiences of Native American community college transfer students.
- Third, the study focused on the experiences of Native American students in transfer programs established by three community colleges, excluding those not enrolled in transfer programs or pursuing other academic goals and excluding those enrolled at other community colleges. This delimitation enabled the study to investigate the unique experiences of a specific population with a common academic trajectory while potentially excluding the experiences of Native American students pursuing other educational paths.

**Definitions of Terms and Acronyms**

Several terms and acronyms were used in the development and execution of this research study.

**American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN):** Anyone having origins in any of the original peoples of North America (including Central America) and South America and who maintains tribal affiliation (federally and state-recognized tribes) or community involvement (DeVoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008).

The terms "***American Indian***," "***Native American***," "***Native***," "***Indian***," "***Alaska Native***," and "***Indigenous***" are used interchangeably to refer to the Indigenous peoples of what is now the United States.

**BraveStep:** A transfer partnership between five NC community colleges and the University of North Carolina at Pembroke; the program allows prospective UNCP students to start their college career at a local community college and transfer to UNCP after completing 30 credit hours. Students receive guidance from the community college and university through a collaborative model designed to provide support and guidance from start to transfer. The program prepares students to succeed academically at the university level at the transfer time. The program also allows students to participate in North Carolina's Reverse Transfer Program, enabling them to obtain an associate degree from the local community college with the credits earned at the university (UNCP Website, 2020).

**Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA):** A statewide agreement to facilitate seamless credit transfer between North Carolina community colleges and public universities. Its purpose is to enhance the transfer process for students, ensuring a smoother transition between institutions (College transfer/articulation agreements, 2022).

**Ethnic Group**: A collective of individuals who possess a common sense of identity due to their distinct cultural heritage, customs, historical narratives, language, and more (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2023).

**Minority:** People who are members of the ethnic minority, Native Americans (McClellan et al., 2005, p. 8)

**Native American Higher Education:** The experiences of people who are Native American in European American institutions of higher education, people who are Native American in tribally controlled institutions of higher education, and the broader construct of tribally controlled colleges and universities (McClellan et al., 2005, p. 8)

**Retention:** A measure of the rate at which students persist in their educational program at an institution, expressed as a percentage. This is the percentage of first-time bachelor (or equivalent) degree-seeking undergraduates from the previous fall who are again enrolled in the current fall for four-year institutions. For all other institutions, this is the percentage of first-time degree/certificate-seeking students from the previous fall who either re-enrolled or completed their program by the current fall (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015, p. 9).

**Transfer-Ready Students:** Students who have completed a transfer-preparatory program (IPEDS Glossary, 2019)

## Significance of the Study

The contemporary manifestation of racism against Native Americans can be understood as invisibility, which significantly contributes to a crisis in college access and completion among Native American students (American Indian College Fund, 2019). Native American students historically face barriers and disparities in accessing and succeeding in higher education. Understanding their experiences in transfer programs can shed light on their unique challenges and help identify strategies to promote equitable access to educational opportunities. Transfer programs are designed to facilitate students' transition from community colleges to four-year institutions. Exploring the experiences of Native American students in these programs can uncover factors that contribute to their academic success or hinder their progress, allowing for targeted interventions and support. The available research about Native American students in the context of community colleges is notably limited. Furthermore, the current rates of Native American student participation in community college associate degree transfer programs remain unknown due to limited research and focus. The focus of existing studies and reports may not

delve into detailed ethnic breakdowns, making it difficult to ascertain the rates of Native American student participation.

For example, data collection methods may not specifically track the participation rates of Native American students in transfer programs. Institutions might focus on the overall enrollment or graduation rates without specific breakdowns by ethnicity or tribal affiliation. In addition, Native American students may choose not to self-identify or disclose their ethnicity during enrollment processes or surveys. This can result in underrepresentation or incomplete data regarding their participation in transfer programs. This study aimed to address the literature gap by collecting evidence that strengthens the understanding of this demographic within the community college and the four-year university population. Adopting a case study approach to examine community college transfer programs contributes to the existing body of scholarly work. It provides valuable insights for administrators and policymakers in making informed decisions about enhancing the persistence, retention, completion, and transfer of Native American college students and improving transfer program initiatives in the future.

The primary objective of this case study was to delve into the personal, social, and academic experiences of students enrolled in a community college transfer program. Focusing specifically on Native American students, this research study yielded a more comprehensive understanding of the transfer process within the community college setting. The findings shed light on the factors that influence the successful transition of Native American students from one semester to the next at community colleges in preparation to transfer to four-year institutions and enable educators to develop strategies to support their educational journeys effectively. Understanding the experiences of Native American community college students in transfer programs can inform the development of policies and practices that address their specific needs.

This knowledge can guide institutions in implementing culturally responsive programs, creating supportive environments, and fostering partnerships with Native American communities. Furthermore, the case study encompasses the viewpoints of faculty and staff members involved in transfer programs in the community college setting, offering a comprehensive perspective on the transfer process, particularly concerning Native American students. To triangulate data, the researcher conducted a comprehensive document analysis to provide further evidence of the studied case.

## Organization of the Study

This qualitative case study examined the experiences of Native American community college students enrolled in an associate degree transfer program. Chapter one introduces the study, the problem, the purpose, and the research questions. Chapter two provides an in-depth look at the literature associated with the participation of Native American students in post-secondary educational institutions. Chapter three defines the methodology used for this study and frames the research questions and analysis procedures. This research study consists of three articles: Article One examines the experience of Native American community college transfer students, Article Two explores the perspectives of faculty and staff associated with a community college transfer program, and Article Three is an impact brief for practice, examining the potential opportunities for community college transfer programs to identify and create partnership programs with four-year institutions that support the success of Native American college students.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the identified problem, research purpose, theoretical framework, conceptual framework, research questions, limitations, delimitations, key

terms, the study's significance, and the study's organization. Chapter two delves into an examination of scholarly literature and the theoretical framework concerning the participation of Native American students in post-secondary educational institutions.

# CHAPTER 2

## Review of Literature

The latest statistics on the demographic makeup of minority populations in the United States from 2017 to 2021 reveal that 2.7 million individuals in the United States identified solely as American Indian and Alaska Native, while 6.3 million identified as American Indian and Alaska Native either alone or in combination with one or more other races (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019a). Within the population aged 25 and over, 15.5% of individuals identifying solely as American Indian and Alaska Native held a bachelor's degree or higher. Meanwhile, among those who identified as American Indian and Alaska Native, either alone or in combination with one or more other races, 21.8% possessed a bachelor's degree or higher. Additionally, 5.3% of American Indian and Alaska Native individuals alone, and 7.8% of those identifying as American Indian and Alaska Native, either alone or in combination with one or more other races, held a graduate or professional degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019b). Therefore, approximately 1% of the total population in the United States identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019b).

However, in the United States, among the approximately 16 million college students enrolled in college in the fall of 2020, AI/ANs are still considered the minority representing approximately .64% *(n=102,400 students)* of the total college population (Hanson & Checked, 2023). Since 2010, there has been a downward trend in postsecondary attendance among students of American Indian or Alaska Native descent. For example, from the fall of 2010 to the fall of 2020, Native American enrollment experienced a notable decline, dropping from 196,000 to 123,000, reflecting a significant decrease of 37% (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2022). The purpose of this chapter is to review and discuss the history of Native American

education, examine current trends in the Native American student population, explore post-secondary educational institutions' efforts to serve Native American Students, and incorporate a comprehensive review of transculturation theory.

**History of Native American Education**

The history of Native American education is complex and deeply intertwined with the colonization and displacement of Indigenous peoples in North America. Pre-1492 is considered a pre-contact era, where Native American tribes developed diverse educational systems, passing down knowledge and traditions through oral teachings and experiential learning. For centuries, Indigenous education was primarily based on traditional cultural practices and passed down through oral traditions; however, with the arrival of European settlers in the 16th century, the educational landscape for Indigenous peoples began to shift. For example, Harvard College was established in 1636, and Native American students were educated to serve as translators and cultural intermediaries. Then in 1776, the Continental Congress called for the assimilation of Native Americans through education in mission schools. According to Dehyle and Swisher (1977), researchers have studied Native Americans more than any other ethnic group in this country. Formal education for Native Americans developed differently from others in this country, and "based on principles of sovereignty and trust responsibility, the history of Indian education is unique, complex, and not clearly understood by the majority of mainstream America" (Dehyle & Swisher, 1997, p. 114). Native American people exchanged nearly 1 billion acres of land to the government in exchange for self-government, protection against invasion, and particular services provided to Native Americans in perpetuity (Dehyle & Swisher, 1997).

> The foundation of this unique relationship is one of trust: the Indians trust the United States to fulfill the promises which were given in exchange for land. The federal

> government's obligation to honor this trust relationship and to fulfill its treaty commitments is known as its trust responsibility. (Pevar, 1992, p. 26)

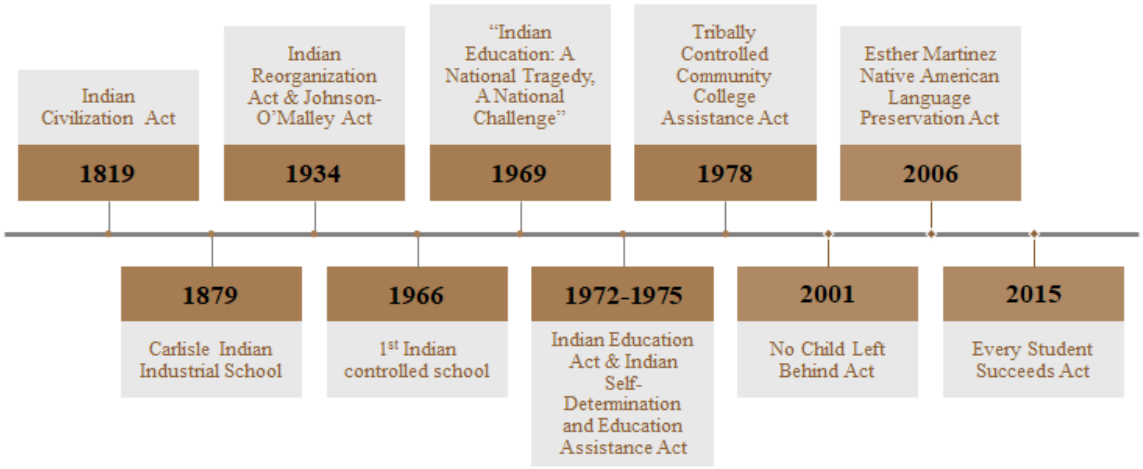
In the early years of colonization, some Indigenous peoples welcomed the opportunity to learn from Europeans and adapt to their ways of life. For nearly 100 years (1778-1871), there were more than 400 treaties (97 treaties addressed education for Native Americans) established between Native Americans and the federal government, which allowed for the exchange of land for promises on behalf of the federal government, which in turn resulted in a special relationship between Native Americans and the federal government (McClellan et al., 2005). Various Christian missionary organizations established schools for Native American children, aiming to convert and civilize them.

According to Brayboy and Lomawaima (2018), "The history of American Indian education can be summarized in three simple words: "battle for power" (p. 82). Historians have provided educational context to the experiences of Native Americans, "Schools are the battlegrounds of American Indian education in which epistemologies, ontologies, axiologies, pedagogies, and curricula clash" (Brayboy & Lomawaima, 2018, p. 82). There have been several historical milestones in the education of Native Americans in the United States, such as the Indian Civilization Act of 1819, the establishment of boarding schools in 1879, the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, and the Esther Martinez Native American Language Preservation Act in 2006. In the early 20th century, there were only two colleges focused on Native American higher education: Sheldon Jackson College, which was founded in 1878 to educate Alaskan Natives, and Croatan Normal School, the only state-supported four-year institution for Native Americans until 1953, which is now known as the University of North Carolina at Pembroke (McClellan et al., 2005). It is important to reflect on the historical meaning of education for

Native American students, "…when considering the current experiences of Native American college students, it is critical that we first understand the role that the U.S. government has played in Native American education" (Fish & Syed, 2018, p. 387). Figure 5 highlights significant milestones in the history of Native American education.

**Figure 5**

*History of Native American Education (19th-21st century)*




*Note.* This figure depicts the Historical Educational Milestones in the History of Native American Education.

For example, in the 19th and 20th centuries, the U.S. government forcibly removed Native American children from their homes. Government officials transported the children to residential boarding schools hundreds of miles away (Patterson, 2017).

- The late 1800s through the mid-1900s is considered the Indian Boarding Schools era. There were several federal policies to promote the establishment of off-reservation boarding schools, such as the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania.

- The Dawes Act of 1887 was passed and encouraged Native American assimilation and allotment of tribal lands, often linked with education policies. In the late 1800s through the early 1900s, boarding schools focused on eradicating Native languages, cultures, and traditions, aiming to "kill the Indian, save the man" (Pratt., 1892, p. 46).
- In 1819, the Indian Civilization Act passed by Congress provided funding to religious groups and individuals willing to live among and teach Indians. The act resulted in the establishment of so-called mission schools.
- In 1830, President Andrew Jackson authorized the Indian Removal Act, which granted the unsettled lands west of the Mississippi to exchange Native American lands within the existing state borders. Some of the tribes went peacefully; however, several tribes resisted the relocation policy.
- In 1838 and 1839, the Cherokee tribe was forcibly moved west by the United States government. The forcible relocation during the fall and winter months resulted in approximately 4,000 Cherokees' death and became known as the "Trail of Tears" (Ehle, 1988). Federal officials stopped funding mission schools by the end of the 19th century (Reyhner, 2018).
- The Morrill Act of 1862 and 1890 allowed the establishment of publicly funded colleges on federal land. The act used nearly 10.7 million acres of Indigenous lands, accounting for 245 tribal nations and communities and 52 universities, to advance economic development by creating nationwide access to higher education in the United States (Keith et al., 2016). The benefits at the cost of the Native people are still evident today, "…institutions continue to profit from the

stolen land on which their buildings were constructed without acknowledging its cost. As a result, higher education exists and prospers in the United States at the cost of Native American peoples" (Coulson-Johnston et al., 2022, p. 3).

The research paper "Land Acknowledgment: A Trend in Higher Education and Nonprofit Organizations" by Thomas Keefe (2019) highlighted that acknowledging Indigenous lands and peoples has gained prominence in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Nearly all higher education institutions in Canada have implemented territorial acknowledgments as a common practice. Starting in 2018, a similar movement emerged in the United States, urging colleges and universities to adopt land acknowledgments. Furthermore, various organizations, particularly cultural institutions, have also embraced recognizing Indigenous lands in addition to colleges and universities (Keefe, 2019).

- The Carlisle Indian Industrial School was established in 1879 as the first off-reservation boarding school, which set forth specific dedicated time to academic studies and vocational programs. All instruction provided to the Native American students was in English (Reyhner, 2018). The Carlisle Indian Industrial School aimed to civilize Native American children through cultural assimilation. Its founder Captain Richard Platt (1892) was heard several times saying, "Kill the Indian in him and save the man" (p. 46). The Executive Office of the President (2014) noted that the infamous maxim "encapsulated both the objective of his assimilationist vision and the psychological and actual violence with which it was executed" (p. 8). The boarding schools caused Native American children to be removed from their homes with force and deprived them of their Native American culture (Glenn, 2015). The purpose of the Carlisle Indian School and many other

> boarding schools was to "assimilate Native Americans by absorbing children into an educational institution framed by Euro-American values and beliefs, while at the same time, minimizing those of Native Americans" (Fish, 2018, p. 387).

Those who have been involved in the formal education of Indians have assumed that the main purpose of the school is assimilation. The Indian would be better off, it was believed, if he could be induced, or forced, to adpot [*sic*] the White man's habits, skills, knowledge, language, values, religion, attitudes, and customs-or at least some of them. Assimilation, to be sure, is a reciprocal process, and in the course of it the White man has learned much from the Indian. But it was always the White man's way of life which must set the pattern. Formal education has been regarded as the most effective means for bringing about assimilation (Berry, 1968, p. 116).

- The Indian Reorganization Act was passed during the Indian Reorganization Era (the 1930s-1950s). The Act supported tribal self-governance and the preservation of Native cultures and languages. At the time, Native educators and activists started advocating for community-controlled schools and cultural revitalization.
- The first tribal college in the United States, Navajo Community College, was established during the Civil Rights and Self-Determination Movements (the 1960s-1980s); the National Indian Education Association (NIEA) was founded in 1969 and allowed for the advocating for Native educational rights and self-determination.
- the Indian Education Act was enacted in 1972 and provided funding to culturally relevant education and Native language programs.
- The Indian Child Welfare Act was passed in 1978; it protected Native American children from removal by state agencies. The Tribally Controlled Community

College Assistance Act of 1978 was established to support the establishment and growth of tribal colleges and universities.

- The Native American Languages Act was passed in 1990. The Act supported the preservation and revitalization of Indigenous languages.
- The establishment of The Equity Land-Grant Status Act in 1994 recognized tribal colleges and universities as land-grant institutions, ensuring access to federal resources.
- The Esther Martinez American Languages Preservation Act of 2010 expanded the language revitalization efforts and funding.

There have been ongoing efforts focused on culturally responsive education, tribal control of education, and the integration of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in recent years. Collaborative partnerships between tribal communities, schools, and educational institutions aim to improve educational outcomes for Native American students. Therefore, the ongoing challenges and efforts continue to shape Native American education (Tippeconnic et al., 2005).

**Socioeconomic Impacts**

During 2019, the Native American population in the United States experienced a median household income of $49,906, whereas the overall national median stood at $69,560. Alarmingly, 28.4% of Native American individuals lived below the poverty line, which was twice the national average. Furthermore, as of December 2021, Native Americans faced an unemployment rate of 7.9 percent, significantly surpassing the national rate of 3.9 percent (The Hunt Institute, 2022). Due to the number of Native Americans still living in poverty despite educational ventures in prior years, the Indian Office by the Brookings in 1928 began an

independent investigation into the quality of education being provided to Native Americans by the government, also known as the Meriam Report (Reyhner, 2018). The report's outcome conflicted with those who touted national policies concerning Native Americans were failproof (Sibley, 2014). According to the report, the average national per capita income in 1920 was $1350, while the average Native American made only $100 a year; moreover, the investigation resulted in the discovery of vocational education programs that used students as labor to allow the schools to remain open and to save the government money. The findings urged the government to include more child-centered and culturally appropriate education programs to adhere to the progressive education philosophy. The report indicated that the health of Native Americans was far worse than the wider population.

Exacerbating the report, many Native American children in boarding schools suffered from tuberculosis and other lung diseases (Sibley, 2014). Additionally, the socioeconomic status of Native Americans indicated that Native Americans were more impoverished than the average American. The report suggested that the education of Native American children should occur within their local communities and to cease forcibly removing Indian children from their homes and relocating them to boarding schools. In addition to boarding schools, higher education institutions such as Harvard, William and Mary, and Dartmouth "operated from Christian-based educational models to convert Native Americans from savages to civilians" (Fish & Syed, 2018, pp. 387-388). In 1932 only 385 Native Americans were enrolled in college (Fish & Syed, 2018). According to Lomawaima (1999), the goal of colonial colleges was "to transform Indian people and societies and eradicate Indian self-government, self-determination, and self education" (p. 5). A shift in control of Native American education from government control to tribal power to increase the college enrollment of Native Americans became the new trend (Fish & Syed, 2018).

## Legal Movements

In 1934, President Franklin D. Roosevelt passed the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), commonly known as the "Indian New Deal," which granted specific rights to Native Americans (Reyhner, 2018). Congress allowed the establishment of contracts with states and territories to pay for the education of Native American students, which is still currently in place and even allows for federal Impact Aid to provide funding to support the education of Native American students who live on nontaxable Indian land. Furthermore, in 1934, the Johnson-O'Malley Act (JOM) was passed to allow Native American children supplemental education programs and activities while attending public schools. In 1940, bilingual texts were introduced to Native Americans to expedite English language acquisition for Native Americans. The first Indian-controlled school established in 1966 in the Navajo Nation allowed Indian communities where Native Americans controlled their own educational system. However, despite government officials' numerous policy changes in 1966, only 1% of Native Americans were enrolled in college (Wright & Tierney, 1991). Consequently, in 1968, the establishment of tribal colleges was introduced to address the high college-dropout rate of Native students (Reyhner, 2018). In 1969 the U.S. Senate released a special report entitled "Indian Education: A National Tragedy, A National Challenge," which brought more attention to Native American education or lack thereof, despite the introduction of the tribal colleges.

The American Indian Movement (AIM) began in the 1970s to provide an alternative pathway to education by introducing and establishing "survival schools," which focused on necessary learning and living skills and promoting Native American culture. Even today, some Native Americans are using the premise of the "survival schools" as a template for charter

schools that will teach the state-mandated curriculum and include a cultural component for the Native American students (Reyhner, 2018).

The United States Congress passed the Indian Education Act of 1972 and the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 and provided funding to assist Native American students on and off reservations to close the educational gap between Natives and non-Natives (Reyhner, 2018). The Indian Education Act of 1972 was a significant milestone in the historical timeline of Native American education. After a tumultuous cultural decline, the act improved AI/AN's educational quality (Still, 2013). The Indian Education Act of 1972 allowed for the formation of an Office of Indian Education, housed within the Office of Education, which led to the establishment of the National Advisory Council for Indian Education and provided a communication line between Native Americans and Congress on the priorities of Native American Education (Still, 2013). All these actions allowed the Native American voices to be heard by the federal government, and in 1978, Congress passed the Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act, which would provide grants to tribally controlled community colleges and use for other purposes (Reyhner, 2018). Following the Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act, Congress passed the Language Revitalization Act in 1990, a federal policy to safeguard, defend, and advance the rights and liberties of Native Americans in utilizing, practicing, and cultivating their languages.

Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, which focused on the academic achievement of minority students, including Native Americans (Reyhner, 2018). Despite the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, the achievement levels of all groups have risen for all but Native Americans. According to Title VII, an entity of the No Child Left Behind Act, the United States is obligated and held responsible for the education of Native American

students, the only ethnic group in the history of the United States, to correct the unlawful cession of land and resources from tribes years ago (Still, 2013). Title VII is two-fold: it addresses the specific educational needs of Native Americans and establishes educational equity. In 2006, Congress passed the Esther Martinez Native American Language Preservation Act to preserve Native American languages by promoting and allowing Native American languages during instruction in Indian immersion schools (Reyher, 2018).

There were 183 Bureau of Indian-Education run schools in the United States in 2013 (Reyhner, 2018); however, according to "The State of Education for Native Students," a report released in 2013 by the Education Trust, there has been no improvement in academic achievement levels since 2005 (Reyhner, 2018). Also, in 2013, the federal government attempted to remove Title VII from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which ensures the fulfillment of the United States' trust responsibility and strives to deliver equitable, accountable, and excellent educational services to Native students (Still, 2013).

In 2015, President Obama passed Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the nation's national education law, and ensures equal opportunity for all students (McGuinn, 2016). President Obama was committed to the education of Native Americans. Obama stated, "forging a new and better future together...so that you [Native Americans] can be full partners in America's economy, and so your children and grandchildren can have an equal shot at pursuing the American dream" (The White House, 2010, p. 1). Although the efforts of the government to establish programs and policies serve to advance education for Native Americans, their hope remains low. "Native people are reminded that education has too often been underfunded or masked as a tool for the federal government's assimilation and termination policies" (Still, 2013, p. 30). Unfortunately,

the history of cultural destruction and genocide of Native American culture at the hands of non-Native Americans has had a long-standing impact on all generations of Native Americans (Lundberg, 2007).

Overall, the history of Native American education is one of resilience in the face of centuries of colonization and oppression. Indigenous peoples have fought to maintain their cultural traditions and to ensure that their children receive a culturally relevant and academically rigorous education. The ongoing struggle for Indigenous education serves as a reminder of the importance of respecting and preserving Indigenous peoples' unique cultures and histories (Lundberg, 2007; McGuinn, 2016; Reyhner, 2018; Still, 2013; Wright & Tierney, 1991).

**Current Trends in Serving Native American Students**

Native American education currently remains a complex issue. Many Indigenous communities continue to advocate for greater control over their education systems and for preserving their languages and cultures. There has been a growing recognition of the importance of serving Native American students in a culturally responsive and effective manner; “U.S. higher education has been less successful serving students from low-income families, non-white racial/ethnic groups, and students whose home culture is quite different from that of the dominant university culture” (Lundberg, 2007, p. 405). In the 2015-2016 school year, 88% of Native American fulltime, full-year undergraduate students received financial assistance compared to 66% of Asian and 74% of White students (de Brey et al., 2019). Native American students have historically been underrepresented in higher education, with low enrollment and graduation rates compared to their non-Native American peers (de Brey et al., 2019; Lundberg & Lowe, 2016; Swisher & Tippeconnic Fox, 2007). Many Native American students identify with

all three categories mentioned above, which magnifies the obstacles and barriers in their quest for postsecondary education.

In the 2017-2018 academic year, Native Americans had the lowest high school graduation rate of any ethnicity, with 74%, compared to the national average of 85% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). Furthermore, in 2000, 16% of 18-to-24-year-old Native Americans were enrolled in college compared to 19% in 2016, showed no significant difference compared to their rate in 2000 (de Brey et al., 2019). Furthermore, for students starting a bachelor's degree at a four-year institution in fall 2010, Asian students had the highest six-year graduation rate of 74%, followed by White students at 64%, two or more races at 60%, Hispanic students at 54%, Pacific Islander students at 51%, Black students at 40%, and Native American students at 39%, the lowest of all racial and ethnic groups (de Brey et al., 2019). Native American students may not have access to the same quality of K-12 education as their non-Native peers, making it more difficult to succeed in college (Turner et al., 2022). This can be especially challenging for students who are the first in their families to attend college and may have a different level of familiarity with the college application process or the expectations of college-level coursework (Turner et al., 2022). Higher education institutions must prioritize partnerships with K-12 schools to ensure Native American students reach postsecondary institutions. In addition, it is crucial to consider the non-traditional approach that Native American students have to their postsecondary education. Native American students are more likely than other ethnic groups to enroll part-time, work full-time, and be single parents (de Brey et al., 2019; DeVoe & Darling-Churchhill, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

According to Guillory and Wolverton (2008), the average age of a Native American student was much higher than that of other college students; therefore, many Native American

students are not only students but also serve in dual roles as parents with family responsibilities. In recent years, however, there has been an effort towards more focus on increasing access to and success in higher education for Native American students.

Keith et al. (2016) identified several obstacles as hindrances for Native American students seeking higher education. Potential obstacles include inadequate preparation, struggles to adapt to the academic community, familial and personal issues, cultural disparities, social seclusion, and financial constraints. One of the key challenges facing Native American students in higher education is a lack of access to college preparatory programs and resources. Many Native American students attend underfunded schools and do not have advanced courses or support services to help them prepare for college (Swisher & Tippeconnic Fox, 2007). Numerous Native American students exhibit inadequate preparedness for college-level coursework and require supplementary preparatory classes. Empirical data obtained from the American College Testing (ACT, 2021) program indicate that Native American students, on average, received lower overall scores than their White counterparts, with an average score of 18.6 as opposed to 23.3, respectively (ACT, 2021). This disparity can make it difficult for these students to meet college admission requirements and discourage them from applying.

Studies conducted in this domain reveal that Native American retention is influenced by various elements, namely familial assistance, support from faculty and staff, institutional dedication, and ties to their ancestral land and cultural heritage (Nirschl-Coats, 2013). According to Lundberg (2007), there have been several studies that have identified student-level variables that assist Native American students in being successful in college-level coursework, such as high academic aspirations, good study habits, quality interactions with faculty and staff,

maintenance of Native American cultural traditions, reliance on spiritual resources, and support from family.

Several researchers have investigated whether or not Native American students decide to enroll and persist through college, and the results are complex.

- Guillory (2009) noted pre-college academic preparation, family support, supportive faculty, student associations, multicultural offices, peer mentoring programs, academic counseling, and institutional commitment as factors generated from research regarding Native American retention and persistence in college.
- Jackson et al. (2003) noted that strong family support, structured social support, faculty and staff relationships with students, and spirituality contribute to Native American college student retention.
- Al-Asfour and Abraham (2016) identified an individual's mindset, culture and spirituality, family support, quality interactions with faculty, mentoring, and student engagement as the most critical factors for Native American students' success.
- Guillory and Wolverton (2008) noted financial support, family support, cultural and social support, and academic preparation as the main factors associated with Native American student retention.
- Lopez (2018) identified four emerging themes influencing American Indian and Alaska Native post-secondary persistence: family support, institutional support, tribal community support, and academic performance.

According to the findings of most researchers, key factors contributing to the retention of Native American students in higher education include familial support, support from faculty and staff, institutional commitment, and connections to their homeland and cultural heritage (Nirschl-Coats, 2013). Additionally, Nirschl-Coats (2013) noted that financial aid, prejudice, and social factors also play a role in the retention of Native American students.

Lundberg (2007) noted that, "postsecondary education may be seen as another attempt to acculturate Native American students" (p. 407). According to Reyhner and Eder (2004), Native Americans have every right not to trust anything European due to the continued oppression and mistreatment of Native Americans for hundreds of years. "Native Americans have endured genocide, oppression, and mistreatment by the dominant culture and the federal government" (Lundberg, 2007, p. 406).

**Socioeconomic Status**

According to Cabrera (1978), American Indians have been subjected to a historical legacy characterized by economic exploitation, military conquest, political manipulation, and social disregard, rendering them victims of these detrimental forces. Sociodemographic factors have been found to impede educational achievement, with lower rates of high school graduation, difficulties in adapting to college learning environments, financial constraints, and the notion that selecting a career and its corresponding major should be solely based on earning potential (Keith et al., 2016). The poverty rate among Native American adults is the highest in the United States, standing at 27%, in contrast to 9.9% among White individuals (Devoe & Churchill, 2008; Keith et al., 2016). In 2011, one in four American Indians and Alaska Natives lived in poverty (Austin, 2013). The effects of not being able to attain access to education and sustain an average wage contribute to the poverty levels; "…poverty is not just an economic phenomenon: it is a cyclical

condition that affects multiple generations and is often accompanied by a range of social problems which greatly affect a person's ability and desire to pursue education" (Cunningham, 2007, p. 16). For example, many Native Americans report detrimental physical and mental health implications due to poverty (Fish & Syed, 2018); therefore, a cycle of limited educational and economic opportunities results in poor educational outcomes for Native Americans.

"Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups (2019) reported in the 2015-2016 academic year, grants were received by a significant portion of full-time, full-year undergraduate students. Specifically, 88 percent of Black students, 87 percent of American Indian/Alaska Native students, and 82 percent of Hispanic students were beneficiaries of these grants. Notably, these figures surpassed the percentages of White (74 percent) and Asian (66 percent) students. Unfortunately, Native American students are more likely to need financial assistance than White students (McFarland et al., 2019). For example, in 2011-2012, 85% of Native American students received some type of federal grant aid, compared with 69% of White students (McFarland et al., 2019). According to M. Lopez (2018), finances can become a significant barrier to persistence. For example, Lee et al.'s (2010) study revealed that students indicated that the lack of money for books or finances to continue their education influenced their lack of persistence. According to McFarland et al. (2019), 21% of Native American children under 18 lived in a household with a parent who completed a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 52% of White families. Native American students are also less likely to be prepared for college because they are more likely to attend high schools that offer little to no access to Advanced Placement or college prep courses. According to Keith et al. (2016), factors linked to sociodemographic characteristics that helped Native American students persist and

eventually graduate included receiving support from their families and maintaining connections with their home area and culture.

**Cultural Identity**

Another challenge facing Native American students in higher education is the lack of cultural support and understanding on college campuses. Native American students may feel isolated and disconnected from their culture and community while attending college, which can negatively impact their sense of belonging and overall well-being (Gorski & Singer, 2010). To address this disconnect, many colleges and universities have established Native American centers and cultural support programs to provide a sense of community and connection to culture for Native American students.

According to Tucker et al. (2016), historical trauma can lead to the development of historical loss thinking and impact Native American students, which can be associated with symptoms of depression. "… the historical trauma wrought by colonialism influences Native American college students by way of their mental health...the historical trauma experienced by Native American people transcends generations" (Fish & Syed, 2018, p. 391). Fish and Syed stated that Native American students who attend educational institutions that have been used to strip the Native Americans of their cultural identity can trigger thoughts of historical losses. For example, Harvard, William and Mary, and Dartmouth "operated from Christian-based educational models to convert Native Americans from savages to civilians" (pp. 387-388). Native American culture is foundational to one's ability to develop a sense of self, commonly referred to as self-continuity which Fish and Syed defined as *self-continuity* or "the ability to form a self-conception that extends *backwards* into the past and *forward* into the future" (p.

392). As a result, it may be difficult for Native American students to establish a sense of self when their culture has been oppressed for several generations.

According to Huffman (2008), “how much difficulty American Indian students will face in college depends in large measure on how they see and use their ethnic identity” (p. 3). Huffman (2001) used transculturation theory and resistance theory to suggest that Native American students rely upon their cultural identity to succeed academically, compared to those Native Americans who have become culturally assimilated and do not persist in higher education. Moreover, compared to White students, according to Okagaki et al. (2009), Native American students spend more time learning about their culture and heritage to have a stronger sense of ethnic identity. “forethnic minority students to do well in school, their ethnic identity must be compatible with a positive academic identity” (p. 159).

**Cultural Reliance on Family**

Native American culture relies heavily on family ties and land (Lundberg, 2007). Strong family support was the most reported influence on Native American college student persistence in post-secondary educational quests (Lopez, 2018). For example, several studies have identified family relationships as an effective support system for Native American college students, promoting college retention (Okagaki et al., 2009). HeavyRunner et al. (2002) noted the importance of family members in Native American college student success. HeavyRunner et al. suggested that family members’ engagement with college students increases student persistence and retention.

Furthermore, Makomenaw (2012, 2014), M. Lopez (2018), and Schmidtke (2008) also found supporting evidence that family relationships and encouragement are integral to Native American college student persistence. Family encouragement could include visiting home,

hearing encouraging sentiments from family, and family telling their students how proud they were that the students were in college (M. Lopez, 2018). However, Native American students have reported family concern over whether their quest for postsecondary education would strip them of their culture, identity, and skills as a barrier to their persistence to complete their educational journey (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008). Okagaki et al. (2009) stated that Native Americans have less familial support for their education than White students. Families are more apt to support their students' higher education pursuits when formal education is viewed as a way for Native Americans to give back to their communities (Austin, 2005; de Brey et al., 2019).

**Peer, Staff, and Faculty Relationships**

In addition to family relationships, Native American college students have identified peer relationships as a significant positive factor in higher education (Bosse et al., 2011); however, "positive academic experiences should not be limited to those who have access to peers with cultural capital" (Fish & Syed, 2018, p. 396). Higher education institutions should afford the resources to navigate educational systems for every student. According to Fish and Syed, faculty and staff must understand Native American students and their ways of being. Research indicates that the relationship between Native American college students and Native American faculty and staff may lessen the feelings of isolation and contribute to a positive learning experience for Native American college students (Flynn et al., 2012). J.D. Lopez (2018) noted the importance of support services as a significant influence on persistence through the institution's academic and social mentoring to help students become more suited for university life.

According to Brayboy et al. (2015), if Native American students do not feel a sense of belonging, they are more likely to drop out of college. Additionally, Lundberg and Schreiner (2004), in their quantitative study, identified that African American and Native American

students were less satisfied with their faculty-student interactions than other students of different ethnic groups because of their desire to meet faculty expectations. Faculty play an integral role in postsecondary education because faculty provide academic instruction and mentoring, which in turn influences student persistence (J.D. Lopez, 2018). For example, in one study, researchers noted that as students' attitudes toward faculty increased positively, there was a positive influence on their respective GPAs (Beck et al., 2014).

**Post-Secondary Educational Institutions Efforts to Serve Native American Students**

According to Adelman et al. (2013), access to quality education (K-16) is needed to close the economic and social gap between ethnic groups. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2007) states that the evidence is clear about the striking disparities in the educational achievement and attainment levels of Native Americans compared to their White counterparts. Lundberg (2007) identified inadequate higher education school counseling, inadequate academic preparation, racism, and enrollment in prestigious institutions as institutional variables that hinder Native American persistence and successful post-secondary education outcomes. Furthermore, institutional practices and policies may contribute to Native American students' lack of self-confidence in their academic ability, ultimately harming their academic success or lack thereof (Lundberg, 2007). Fish and Syed (2018) suggested that institutions acknowledge the generational, historical losses experienced by Native Americans by recognizing their role in assimilation and removing Native Americans from their cultural ways of being. For example, Fish and Syed (2018) included measures such as the removal of posters that promoted biological warfare on Native Americans (e.g., Jeffrey Amherst and the presentation of blankets and smallpox) and non-celebration of Columbus Day (i.e., inaccurate histories) due to negative stereotypes, all to deconstruct institutional racism. According to Brayboy (2005), institutions

emphasize Euro-American values while neglecting the association between the historical trauma of Native Americans and the education system. Therefore, it is difficult for Native American students to develop a sense of belonging within educational institutions when the Native American culture is nonexistent (Tachine et al., 2017).

Several researchers offered ways to increase the enrollment of Native American students in higher education.

- Cunningham (2007) recommended increased funding for federal programs that have a direct impact on Native Americans, the establishment and increase of state funds available for Native American students, improvement of outreach efforts to tribal college students and parents, collaborative efforts between K-12 guidance counselors and college admissions staff, and providing scholarships and support services to Native American students who plan to attend college. When considering the role institutions of higher education play in developing increased economic mobility, “Higher education is one of the main drivers of economic and social development for all American Indian communities” (p. 51).
- Lundberg (2007) emphasized the role of the institutions and the institution’s value on diversity as part of the model to improve Native American student success outcomes and student engagement and involvement. For instance, according to Akee and Yazzie-Mintz (2011), Native American students who academically persist are the Native American students who can sustain their tribal identities, culture, and values, enabling them to adapt to the respective institution.

- Fish and Syed (2018) recommended that non-native faculty and staff provide a learning environment that supports Native American culture, values, and traditions.
- Guillory (2009) suggested that colleges and universities allow AI/AN students to maintain connections to family and tribal communities, address single-parent students and students with family issues, and provide academic assistance through peer mentoring as strategies to meet the needs of AI/AN students.
- M. Lopez (2018) recommended that colleges and universities have American Indian support services, positive student-to-faculty interactions, academic support, events that families can attend, increased mentoring opportunities, and educational policies that support cultural obligations to increase the persistence of Native American college students. Higher education institutions must assess their efforts and policies to serve AI/AN students and "must undergo transformation to be consistent with the cultural values, traditions, and beliefs of Native American students" (Fish et al., 2018, p. 400).
- Al-Asfour and Abraham (2016) suggested the following strategies for improving student retention, persistence, and completion rates of Native American college students: increased student engagement, implementation of Native American culture and spirituality in course curricula, improved faculty-to-student relationships, an early alert system to identify students who are struggling academically, cross-curricular discipline content to intertwine academia with personal experiences, recognition of academic deficiencies, and proper mentoring availability. Also, according to McClellan (2003), "Student affairs professionals

[have] almost no knowledge of Indigenous-based resources upon which to draw in working with Native students" (p. 16).

- Willmott et al. (2015) suggested that a Native American population's research plan should be developed to serve Native American students better in their journey to degree completion. The research agenda should include topics on Native American college student recruiting techniques, community relationship building, pre-college orientation programs, the importance of home, career, and professional development training sessions for Native American students' post-graduation, mentoring, transfer policies and practices, and linking Native American families and cultural leaders to institutional representatives.

**Tribal Colleges and Universities**

Native American tribes have established higher education institutions to meet their people's needs (Al-Asfour & Abraham, 2016); "Tribal colleges and universities (TCUs) were established in response to poor retention and graduation rates of Native American students enrolled in mainstream higher education institutions" (p. 46). According to Guillory and Wolverton (2008), mainstream higher education institutions failed to accommodate Native American students' needs; therefore, tribal leaders decided to establish TCUs as an alternative to serving Native American students. TCUs allow Native American students to maintain their cultures, traditions, languages, and families to obtain an education (Al-Asfour & Abraham, 2016). TCUs have a different approach to education than mainstream higher educational institutions and offer more individualized approaches. "Tribal colleges are unique entities in that they work around the needs of students and their communities, not vice versa" (Al-Asfour, 2012, p. 23). Furthermore, TCUs also have an academic access policy similar to the open-door policy

at community colleges; however, TCUs face challenges similar to mainstream higher educational institutions, such as lack of funding, low-income levels, poor academic preparation of students, and deteriorating facilities. Still, the TCUs continue to serve their communities as needed. According to the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (2018), there are 35 accredited tribal colleges and universities in the United States across 14 states.

**North Carolina Community College Efforts to Serve Transfer Students**

According to the North Carolina Community Colleges System website,

> The mission of the North Carolina Community College system is to open the door to high-quality, accessible educational opportunities that minimize barriers to post-secondary education, maximize student success, develop a globally and multi-culturally competent workforce, and improve the lives and well-being of individuals by providing: (a) education, training, and retraining for the workforce including basic skills and literacy education, occupational and pre-baccalaureate programs; (b) support for economic development through services to and in partnership with business and industry and in collaboration with the University of North Carolina System and private colleges and universities; (c) services to communities and individuals which improve the quality of life. (Mission & History, 2018, para. 1)

In 1963, Governor Terry Sandford united junior colleges and industrial education centers as the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS). Community colleges serve a dual purpose: to prepare students academically and technically by providing curriculum and continuing education courses. According to Governor Terry Sanford in 1961:

> We must give our children the quality of education which they need to keep up in this rapidly advancing, scientific, complex world. They must be prepared to compete with the

> best in the nation, and I dedicate my public life to the proposition that education must be of a quality that is second to none. A second-rate education can only mean a second-rate future for North Carolina. (Mitchell, 1966, p. 48)

In 1995, the General Assembly strengthened the NCCCS in preparing students to transfer to four-year universities by establishing common course numbering and a plan to transfer credits between the NCCCS and UNC System schools. According to the North Carolina Community College System (2022), obtaining a community college education in North Carolina is important for several reasons.

- First, community colleges offer a more affordable option for higher education. The average tuition for a community college in North Carolina is $2,531 per year for in-state students and $5,245 for out-of-state students (North Carolina Community College System, 2022), compared to $7,155 for in-state students and $24,311 at a four-year public university (Public North Carolina Colleges 2023 Tuition Comparison, 2023). This can make a significant difference for students needing more financial resources to attend a four-year university.
- Second, community colleges provide access to various academic programs and career training options. From associate degrees in fields such as nursing and engineering to short-term certificate programs in areas like cybersecurity and digital media, community colleges offer various options for students to pursue their educational and career goals (North Carolina Community College System, 2022).
- Third, community colleges in North Carolina have strong partnerships with local businesses and industries, which can provide students with valuable internships

and job opportunities. These partnerships also help ensure that the curricula at community colleges are relevant and in line with the needs of the local job market (North Carolina Community College System, 2022). Finally, community colleges in North Carolina offer flexible scheduling options, including evening, weekend, and online classes, making it easier for students to balance their education with work and other commitments (North Carolina Community College System, 2022).

In conclusion, obtaining a community college education in North Carolina is important for its affordability, wide range of academic and career training options, strong partnerships with local businesses, and flexible scheduling options.

**Transfer Process – Comprehensive Articulation Agreement**

Transfer programs between North Carolina community colleges and universities are designed to provide a seamless transition for students who wish to transfer from a community college to a four-year institution. These programs make it easier for students to transfer credits and ensure they are well-prepared to succeed at the four-year institution.

One example of a transfer program in North Carolina is the University of North Carolina (UNC) system's Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA). The CAA is an agreement between the North Carolina Community College System and the University of North Carolina system that provides guidelines for transferring credits between community colleges and UNC institutions. It establishes a standardized set of courses that community college students can complete to guarantee the transfer of credits to UNC schools. The CAA ensures that students who meet the specified requirements can transfer with junior standing and without losing credits or having to retake equivalent courses. Under the CAA, students who earn an associate degree at

a community college are guaranteed admission to a UNC institution, provided they meet certain requirements (UNC System, 2020). The CAA aims to streamline the transfer process for students by clearly outlining the credits that will transfer between the two types of institutions. It also includes a set of general education courses accepted for transfer by all UNC institutions, making it easier for students to complete their degree requirements. Additionally, the CAA includes several other resources and support services to help students navigate the transfer process and succeed at the four-year institution.

The Transfer Advisory Committee (TAC) is a collaborative platform between North Carolina community colleges and University of North Carolina (UNC) four-year colleges. Its primary purpose is to enhance and facilitate the transfer process for students transitioning from community colleges to UNC institutions. The committee promotes seamless credit transfer, ensures academic continuity, and fosters student success. The committee maintains accountability, equity, and excellence in the transfer experience by fostering communication, sharing best practices, and addressing transfer-related challenges. Through its efforts, the Transfer Advisory Committee aims to create a supportive and efficient pathway for students seeking to further their education at UNC four-year colleges after completing their studies at community colleges (Transfer Toolbox, 2023).

The Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA) and the Transfer Advisory Committee (TAC) are two interconnected components within the North Carolina Community College System and the University of North Carolina (UNC) system that work together to facilitate a smooth transfer process for students. In summary, the CAA provides the framework and guidelines for credit transfer between community colleges and UNC institutions, while the TAC acts as a collaborative body that discusses and implements strategies to improve the

transfer process. Both the CAA and TAC aim to create a more seamless and efficient pathway for students transitioning from community colleges to UNC four-year colleges, enhancing educational opportunities and facilitating student success.

Transfer programs like the CAA can benefit community college and university students. The CAA ensures that community college students who meet the specified requirements can transfer their credits seamlessly to UNC institutions. This saves students time and money by allowing them to enter four-year colleges with junior standing without the risk of losing credits or retaking equivalent courses. The CAA provides a standardized set of courses that fulfill lower-division general education requirements at UNC institutions when completed at a community college. This clarity in course selection helps students plan their academic journey and ensures that their credits will transfer and count towards their chosen bachelor's degree program.

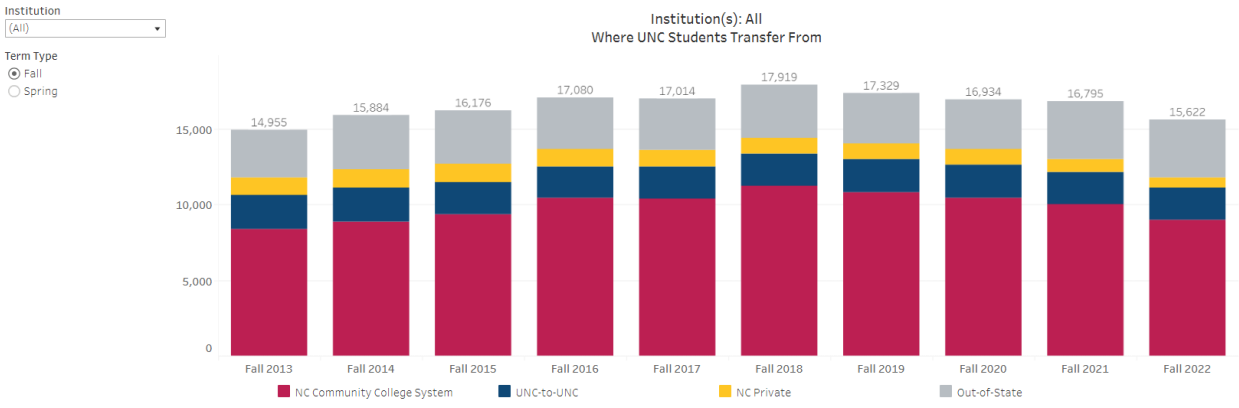
For community college students, these programs provide a clear pathway to a four-year degree and can help to reduce the time and cost of completing a bachelor's degree. For universities, these programs provide a source of highly motivated and academically prepared students who are more likely to succeed in college. The TAC is a platform for collaboration between community colleges and UNC institutions. This collaboration leads to improved coordination, articulation agreements, and curriculum alignment, all designed to benefit students. The TAC also addresses transfer-related challenges and works towards enhancing student support services, such as advising and counseling, to facilitate a successful transition. Through the CAA and TAC, students gain access to valuable resources, including transfer guides, articulation agreements, and information on admission requirements and scholarship opportunities. These resources help students navigate the transfer process, make informed decisions, and access the necessary support for a smooth transition to a four-year college. The

CAA and TAC open broader educational opportunities for community college students. Students can start their academic journey at a community college, save on tuition costs, and then transfer to a UNC institution to pursue a bachelor's degree. This pathway provides flexibility, affordability, and the chance to explore various academic options. The collaborative efforts of the CAA and the TAC aim to enhance student success. By aligning the curriculum, promoting communication, and providing comprehensive support, students are better equipped to navigate the transfer process successfully and achieve their educational goals. Overall, the CAA and TAC in North Carolina benefit college students by streamlining the transfer process, ensuring credit transferability, providing resources and support, and expanding educational opportunities. These initiatives contribute to a more efficient and seamless educational pathway for students pursuing a bachelor's degree after starting at a community college.

Several other transfer programs in North Carolina aim to facilitate the transition from community college to university through partnerships. For example, the College Transfer Pathway program is a program between the North Carolina Community College System and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, allowing students to complete their associate degree at a community college and then transfer to UNC-Chapel Hill with status as a junior (UNC-Chapel Hill, 2020). According to recent data, the number of NC community college students who transfer to four-year schools continues to grow. Figure 6 provides a detailed view of the transfer student enrollment trends from fall 2013 to fall 2022.

**Figure 6**

*Transfer Student Enrollment for NC Community College Students*




| Transferred From | Fall 2013 | Fall 2014 | Fall 2015 | Fall 2016 | Fall 2017 | Fall 2018 | Fall 2019 | Fall 2020 | Fall 2021 | Fall 2022 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| NC Community College System | 8,383 | 8,864 | 9,354 | 10,459 | 10,386 | 11,202 | 10,798 | 10,445 | 9,986 | 9,004 |
| UNC-to-UNC | 2,233 | 2,228 | 2,127 | 2,036 | 2,121 | 2,122 | 2,196 | 2,175 | 2,157 | 2,079 |
| NC Private | 1,152 | 1,228 | 1,199 | 1,142 | 1,105 | 1,074 | 1,007 | 1,012 | 855 | 708 |
| Out-of-State | 3,187 | 3,564 | 3,496 | 3,443 | 3,402 | 3,521 | 3,328 | 3,302 | 3,797 | 3,831 |
| **Total** | **14,955** | **15,884** | **16,176** | **17,080** | **17,014** | **17,919** | **17,329** | **16,934** | **16,795** | **15,622** |

*Note. NCCCS Data for 2013-2022 Transfer Enrollment*

During the academic year 2021-2022, the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) witnessed an enrollment of 574,181 students. In parallel timeframe, the University of North Carolina (UNC) System welcomed around 13,000 new transfer students, with 60% of these individuals originating from the NCCCS (McClellan, 2022). In 2022, the enrollment disparity between American Indian or Alaska Native students and White students at a North Carolina four-year university was stark. There were only 121 American Indian or Alaska Native students enrolled compared to 8,604 White students (Workbook DB transfer, 2023).

The Comprehensive Articulation Agreement guarantees admission to one of the 16 UNC System schools for any college student who completes an associate degree in arts or science at an NC community college. Also, general education transfer credits help students transfer to a four-year university before earning a degree at an NC community college; however, according to The Transfer Playbook (2016), “the transfer process does not work well for most students” (p. 1).

According to The Transfer Playbook (2016), national survey data indicates that 80% of college students who begin their education at a community college intend to attain a bachelor's degree. Approximately 14% of college students who entered a community college in the fall of 2007 transferred to a four-year university and earned a bachelor's degree within six years (Jenkins & Fink, 2016) indicating a need to address the lack of successful community college transfers to four-year universities.

The Transfer Playbook (2016) suggested three strategies that will help the community college and four-year universities partners in the transfer process: (a) make transfer student success a priority; (b) create clear programmatic pathways with aligned, high-quality instruction; and (c) provide tailored transfer student advising (p. 3). The Transfer Playbook "is a practical guide to designing and implementing a key set of practices that will help community college and four-year college partners realize the promise of the transfer process" (p. 3).

In conclusion, transfer programs between North Carolina community colleges and universities are designed to provide a seamless transition for students who wish to transfer from a community college to a four-year institution. These programs can benefit both community college and university students, providing a clear pathway to a four-year degree and a source of highly motivated and academically prepared students, respectively.

**Transfer – Partnership Programs**

There are multiple transfer partnerships between NC community colleges and NC four-year universities; examples include BraveStep, C-STEP, C3, PackTrac, PATH, and Pirate Promise. This study was initially established to focus specifically on the BraveStep transfer partnership program. BraveStep is one example of a transfer partnership between an NC

community college and the University of North Carolina at Pembroke (UNCP), an area in NC with the largest Native American population east of the Mississippi River.

This program allows prospective UNCP students to start their college career at a local community college and transfer to UNCP after completing 30 credit hours. Students receive guidance from the community college and university through a collaborative model designed to provide support and guidance from start to transfer. The program is designed to prepare students to succeed academically at the university level at the time of transfer. Furthermore, the program allows students to participate in North Carolina's Reverse Transfer Program, enabling them to obtain an associate degree from the local community college with the university's credits. The UNCP website shares details about the BraveStep program allowing UNCP to establish and build pathways between community colleges and four-year universities to improve student outcomes, reduce financial burdens, and maximize public investment.

According to Fish and Syed (2018), "institutions of higher education are ripe sites for intervening in the experiences of Native American college students given the role that Native American students and campus professionals play in these contexts" (p. 397). The five community colleges in North Carolina identified as potential partner institutions for the BraveStep program were invited to participate in this study because of its concentrated population of Native American students.

**Theoretical Framework**

Native Americans have historically faced significant barriers to accessing higher education; however, in recent years, there has been a concerted effort to increase the representation of Native Americans in higher education and to support their success once enrolled. This effort has been driven partly by recognizing the value of diversity in higher

education and a desire to address the ongoing effects of colonialism and systemic discrimination against Native American communities.

Cultural discontinuity theory is considered one of the most influential perspectives on Native American education. It has been applied to studies involving elementary and secondary students (Huffman, 2010). Cultural discontinuity theory is defined as "a school-based behavioral process where the cultural value-based learning preferences and practices of many ethnic minority students–those typically originating from home or parental socialization activities–are discontinued at school" (Tyler et al., 2008, p. 281). Cultural discontinuity has been used to explain racial/ethnic minority student success or failure based on whether the students feel like their school systems are culturally aligned with their home lives (Taggart, 2017).

Structural inequality theory is considered a privileged system with resources and opportunities created by economic institutions. According to Huffman (2010), societies like the U.S. are structured to provide unequal access to different social groups' resources and opportunities; therefore, those with access to privileged resources and opportunities gain more advantages than those who do not have access to the same resources and opportunities. Structural inequality theory has been used in previous Native American education studies; however, critical race theory is becoming a dominant perspective in Native American educational studies. Critical race theory emphasizes race as the factor that separates people into social groups. Critical race theory emphasizes race most at all public policy levels.

### *Transculturation Theory*

While cultural discontinuity theory, structural inequality theory, and critical race theory have been used to guide research to support understanding the educational pursuits of Native American students, this study aligned best with transculturation theory. Transculturation theory

is unique compared to cultural discontinuity theory, structural inequality theory, and critical race theory because transculturation theory was developed to explain Native American educational experiences (Huffman, 2010). Transculturation theory is a two-fold perspective; the theory attempts to understand Native American college students' educational experiences and explain why Native American college students achieve academic success. Transculturation theory evolved for Native American students and has been applied to Native American higher education; however, its theoretical perspective to understand students' experiences applies to various races/ethnic groups. Applied to this study, transculturation theory explored the educational experiences of academically successful Native American students participating in community college transfer programs to transfer to a four-year university.

One concept that can be useful in understanding the experiences of Native Americans in higher education is transculturation theory. Transculturation theory is a concept developed by Cuban intellectual Fernando Ortiz in the 1940s to describe how culture is transmitted and transformed due to contact between different cultural groups. According to Ortiz (1947), transculturation involves adopting certain cultural elements from one group by another group and synthesizing these elements with preexisting cultural practices to create a new, hybrid culture. Transculturation is "the process by which an individual of one culture can enter and interact in the milieu of another culture without loss of the person's native cultural identity and ways" (Huffman, 2008, p. 147). According to Huffman (2010), transculturation theory has been widely applied to Native American higher education.

In the context of Native Americans in higher education, transculturation theory can help to explain how Native American students may have to adapt to mainstream cultural practices to succeed in college. This may involve adopting new ways of speaking, dressing, and behaving

and engaging with academic practices and expectations that they may find unfamiliar. At the same time, Native American students may also be able to draw on their cultural traditions and practices to enrich their college experiences and support their success. One example of how Native American students may engage in transculturation in higher education can be seen in the use of cultural centers and other support services on college campuses. These centers can provide a space for Native American students to connect with others who share their cultural background and access resources and support to help them navigate the college experience. At the same time, cultural centers can serve as a way for Native American students to retain their cultural identities and practices, even as they adapt to mainstream college culture.

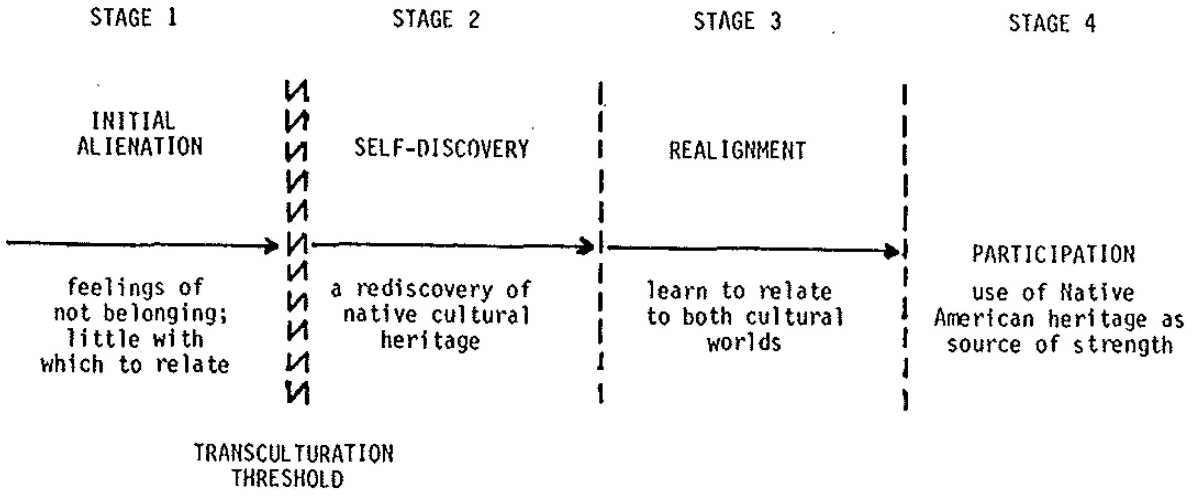
In conclusion, transculturation theory can be a valuable tool for understanding the experiences of Native Americans in higher education. It highlights the complex cultural adaptation and retention process that Native American students may engage in as they navigate the college environment and the importance of support services and cultural centers in helping them succeed.

In the 1940s, Fernando Ortiz, a Cuban writer, and ethnographer, introduced transculturation, “a process by which racial minorities could overcome cultural barriers to operate effectively in a majority-dominated society” (Huffman, 2010, p. 95). Transculturation is a socialization cycle that collects ever-expanding social aptitudes and information. However, many American social scientists (Hallowell, Sill, and Huffman, 1986) have changed Ortiz’s (1947) original transculturation theory while maintaining that a transculturation cycle will positively affect outcomes. Therefore, individuals can expose themselves to new cultures and learn new concepts while remaining steadfast to their identity. According to the transculturation theory, an individual can learn new ways and beliefs while maintaining their tribal practices,

which is an ongoing process. Figure 7 depicts the process of transculturation through four stages: alienation, self-discovery, realignment, and participation.

**Figure 7**

*The Process of Transculturation*




*Note.* Stages of Native American transculturation (p. 4). Huffman, T. (1990) "The Transculturation of Native American College Students." *Faculty Publications-School of Education, 113,* 1–8.

**Initial Alienation.** There are four stages of the Native American transculturation process: initial alienation, self-discovery, realignment, and participation (Figure 7). Native American students experience mainstream college as "outsiders," causing an initial feeling of alienation (Huffman, 1990). Native American students may experience isolation from other Native and non-Native Americans during stage 1 of the transculturation process. According to Huffman, Native American students who have trouble in this early stage of college life will have the most significant potential to be unsuccessful in their academic endeavors. Many college students quit college because of the feeling of alienation and isolation early in their academic careers.

**Self-Discovery.** However, some Native American students can persist through alienation and move into stage 2 of the transculturation process, self-discovery (Figure 7). In self-discovery, Native American students have successfully navigated the feelings of isolation and alienation from non-Natives and Native American students. They have reached the threshold of the transculturation process. During self-discovery, Native American students intentionally relate to both cultural worlds while maintaining their Native American values and morals. Self-discovery allows Native American students to exist in the mainstream college setting while remaining steadfast to their Native American ways (Huffman, 1990).

**Realignment.** Stage three of the transculturation process is realignment; Native American students begin to make necessary adjustments in their academic, personal, and social worlds (Huffman, 1990). Native American students can assess the situation and apply the action required to maintain academic success, "…in short, they learn to cross-cultural boundaries when necessary" (p. 6). Native American students must operate in two cultural levels simultaneously, the Native American cultural level and the college mainstream level.

Transculturated students can interact within and between cultures, which is determined by the current situation. The final stage in the transculturation process is participation; Native American students can interact with Native Americans and non-Natives in their personal, social, and academic worlds without feelings of alienation while holding to their Native American traditions.

**Participation.** During the participation stage, Native American students focus on their studies and make "use of their Native American heritage as a source of strength, confidence, and identity" (Huffman, 1990, p. 6). The final stage of the transculturation process requires others' support to ensure the Native American students' participation in their academic studies.

Furthermore, according to Huffman (2010), transculturation theory has three vital components:

- First, transculturation is socialization. Transculturation involves cultural exchanges and a continued process of cultural learning and relearning. During transculturation, individuals can learn more about their culture and new and different cultures and expand their current cultural knowledge. Transculturation is similar to biculturation; however, biculturation results in individuals adopting mainstream cultural elements and cultural heritage. Also, biculturation is a form of acculturation, which is considered a form of assimilation that results in individuals losing some of their minority cultures. Transculturation theory, as intended, asserts that cultural exchanges do not lead to cultural loss (Huffman, 2010).
- Second, by having a solid ancestral character, individuals can enter a new social learning experience without dreading the loss of their traditional legacy. According to Huffman (2010), "tribal identity for Native youth is especially critical as it serves to personalize an individual's ethnicity and locates him/her socially, culturally, emotionally, and perhaps even spiritually" (p. 9). Transculturation theory has a solid backbone, emphasizing a robust tribal identity that results in the confidence to navigate mainstream-dominant educational institutions. According to White Shield (2009), transculturation is derived internally and emerges within an individual and is not a result of external forces on one's cultural beliefs.

- Third, the cycle of transculturation encourages scholastic industriousness (Huffman, 2010). According to Huffman (2010), “transculturation theory rejects the notion that Native American students must undergo some form of cultural assimilation to succeed academically in mainstream-dominant education” (p. 101). Several research investigations have supported the connection between Native American educational success and a strong tribal identity (Whitbeck et al., 2001; Powers, 2006; Vadas, 1995). For example, Powers (2006) found a positive correlation between educational outcomes and tribal identity. The results of this study suggest that culture-based programs influence urban American Indian students’ educational outcomes by enhancing those educational conditions that promote school success for all students...”some American Indian students may benefit more than others from educational practices grounded in Native culture. Cultural programming was more strongly associated with the school outcomes of students who most strongly identified with their Native culture” (pp. 42-43).

Okagakim et al. (2009) reported that a strong tribal identity is necessary for Native American students’ persistence in mainstream-dominant educational institutions. Additional research outcomes “…appear to corroborate Huffman’s (2001) findings that students who have a strong identification for their American Indian culture and an openness (but not assimilationist) view to the majority culture appear to have positive education-related beliefs and experiences” (p. 172).

Engagement in the learning process is a main aspect of transculturation theory, which promotes that “Native American students engage in the process of learning the cultural nuances found in mainstream dominant educational settings while retaining and relying upon their tribal

heritage to forge a strong tribal identity and sense of purpose" (Huffman, 2010, pp. 95-96). Consequently, evidence suggests that Native American students engaging in mainstream-dominant educational institutions result in a more enriched and appreciated tribal heritage (Huffman, 2008; Huffman & Ferguson, 2007). According to Ogbu (1992), ethnic minority youth must learn "that they can participate in two cultural or language frames of reference for different purposes without losing their own cultural and language identity or undermining their loyalty to the minority community" (p. 12). Interestingly, "transculturated students are the least researched and understood among Native American college students" (Huffman, 1990, p. 6). According to Huffman, there are three overarching reasons why transculturated students have not been researched.

- First, historically existing research assumes (Boutwell et al., 1973; Carroll, 1978) that Native American students are assimilated and not transculturated in their college experiences.
- Second, many of the research studies focus on the rates of assimilation of Native American students, and the calculation of those assimilation rates and degree of assimilation were measured using a quantitative method (Huffman, 2010). Therefore, the qualitative view of the Native American college student experiences was not included in previous research studies. Okagaki et al.'s (2009) study provides quantitative research support for transculturation theory.
- Furthermore, ethnocentrism is the third and final overarching reason transculturated students have not been included in the research. Previous research asserts that assimilation is the key to the academic success of all minorities, especially Native Americans. An academically successful Native American study

> contradicting assimilation or ignoring the assimilation model was not included in the examples of Native American educational achievement research (Medicine, 1986). Expanding the efforts to further understand assimilation in the context of Native American students' research has highlighted that the "…success in college for traditional Native American students does not impinge on greater assimilation at all...for many students, the retention of traditional cultural identity and heritage is crucial for greater academic achievement and success" (Huffman, 1990, p. 7).

According to Huffman (2011), an emerging research body supports the premise and assumptions of transculturation theory. For example, Huffman et al. (1986) studied Native American students living and learning in South Dakota. They found that strong identification with Native American culture was associated with academic success in Native American students. Also, Davis (1992) conducted a study implementing transculturation theory as the theoretical framework, and the findings also supported transculturation theory's premise and general assumptions. Davis discovered that Native American students used their ethnicity to engage fully with the mainstream college population. Davis' work focused on the outcomes of Native American college graduates (1992), "these graduates were able to retain their Indian culture, to be Indian and to be a successful student in the middle class system" (p. 29). Okagaki et al. (2009) examined the relationship between ethnic identity and attitudes toward education. They noted that a strong Native American ethnic identity results in high regard for the importance of education. Okagaki et al.'s study provides quantitative research support for transculturation theory.

Transculturation theory was chosen as the driving theoretical framework for this study for several reasons.

- First, this qualitative exploratory case study allowed Native American college students' voices and experiences to be heard and included in the existing body of research within higher education, serving to expand beyond quantitative studies.
- Second, this research adds to the growing body of knowledge about Native American students using narratives from Native American participants who identified the attributes that contribute to their academic success and persistence.
- Third, this study used a research methodology that incorporated triangulated case study data (transculturation process) more appropriate for addressing Native American college students' experiences in higher education. According to Minthorn et al. (2018), "there has been a continued call for increased representation of Indigenous perspectives and voices in the scholarship" (p. 9).

This study meets the call to include Native American voices in academic research and prompts the closure of the existing gap. The inclusion of Native American student experiences regarding success and persistence during college offers value to the existing scholarly literature in higher education research. In conclusion, Native American students face unique challenges in higher education, including cultural barriers and a lack of support. The researcher used transculturation theory to understand how these students navigate these challenges and adapt to mainstream higher education institutions.

**Review of Gaps in the Literature**

Native American students have historically been underrepresented in higher education, and there is a significant gap in the literature on their experiences and needs. According to a report from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2018), only about 18% of Native American high school graduates go on to enroll in college, compared to about 60% of

White graduates; in addition, Native American students are the least likely racial or ethnic group to complete a bachelor's degree within six years of starting college (NCES, 2018). There are several reasons for this gap, including financial barriers and a lack of understanding of the unique challenges and needs of Native American students (NCES, 2018). This gap is even wider for Native American students from low-income families or who live on reservations (NCES, 2018). Despite this significant gap in enrollment, there is a notable lack of research on the experiences of Native American students in higher education. While there has been a growing focus on Native American students' experiences in higher education, there are still some notable gaps in the literature regarding the specific experiences of Native American community college students enrolled in transfer programs. Understanding the transfer processes and policies that impact Native American community college students is crucial. Research on how transfer agreements, articulation policies, and credit transfer evaluations affect Native American students can help identify potential barriers or facilitators to their successful transition.

A review of the literature by Warrior et al. (2019) revealed that much of the research on Native American students has focused on their K-12 education or the challenges they face in the transition from high school to college. There is little research on the specific experiences and needs of Native American students once they are enrolled in college. There is a scarcity of research specifically dedicated to exploring the experiences of Native American community college students within the context of transfer programs. Most existing literature on Native American students in higher education tends to focus on their enrollment and retention rates, cultural identity, or challenges faced in general without delving deeply into the transfer process and its impact. Furthermore, there is limited research on the positive attributes and cultural strengths of Native American students and their role in fostering success in college (Keith et al.,

2016). Native American community college students have diverse identities and experiences that intersect with their Indigenous heritage. However, limited research examines the intersectionality of identities, such as gender, socioeconomic background, or tribal affiliation, and how these factors may influence their experiences in transfer programs.

One area where the literature is particularly scarce relates to the academic and social support systems that Native American students need and have access to succeed in college. While some studies address institutional support for Native American students in higher education, there is a need for more specific research on the types of support mechanisms available to Native American community college students in transfer programs. This includes exploring the effectiveness of academic advising, counseling services, cultural centers, and other resources tailored to their unique needs. While little research exists on the general benefits of academic and social support for college students (e.g., Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), research on the specific types of support most effective for Native American students is missing.

For example, it is not clear whether Native American students benefit more from culturally specific support programs or from more general support programs that are open to all students. Scholarly literature misses an opportunity to highlight the effectiveness of interventions and support programs for Native American students. While there are several initiatives and programs aimed at increasing the success of Native American students in higher education (e.g., the Native American and Alaska Native Children in School Program, the Tribal Colleges and Universities Program), there is a lack of research on the long-term effectiveness and improvement efforts of these programs. Based on what existing research provides, it is difficult to know what strategies are most effective in supporting the success of Native American students in higher education. Not much is known about the contributing factors to the low enrollment

rates of Native American students in higher education. While some studies have identified barriers such as financial constraints and a lack of academic preparation (NCES, 2018), there is a need for more research on the specific factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of Native American students in college. This includes research on the role of cultural and societal factors and the impact of policies and practices at the institutional level.

Al-Asfour and Abraham (2016) noted that Native American college students encounter different obstacles than other ethnic groups in their educational journey. According to Huffman (1990), several factors have been identified to justify the minimal record of scholarly achievement of Native Americans, such as low achievement motivation, lack of parental and community support, poor academic preparation, and inadequate financial support; "Native Americans have one of the lowest levels of higher educational achievement among American racial and ethnic groups" (p. 2). There are a lack of qualitative studies that directly capture the voices and experiences of Native American community college students in transfer programs. Incorporating their perspectives through interviews, focus groups, or surveys can provide valuable insights into their unique challenges, successes, cultural strengths, and specific support needs. Despite the efforts of researchers, the difficulties experienced by Native American students in higher education remain unknown (Brayboy et al., 2012), and scholarly research on Native Americans in higher education remains limited (Minthorn et al., 2018).

Willmott et al. (2015) analyzed 20 years of scholarship in the leading higher education journals and found that 1.3% ($n$=36) of 2,683 articles focused on Native Americans in higher education. Findings generated three central themes from the conducted analysis of the 2,683 journal articles, professional association conference programs, and reflective memos: (a) research explicitly focused on Native American populations is lacking; (b) the lack of research

impacts training and opportunities for higher education professionals to learn about the Native American college student population, and (c) the current research does not include the Native American experience (Willmott et al., 2015, p.86). Native Americans are considered a forgotten group within the literature. and it is evident that the Native American voice has been excluded from higher education academic research for decades. There is a need to address the issues facing Native Americans in higher education. Furthermore, according to Love (2009), minority student retention has been identified as mainstream higher education's most challenging and pressing issue. This qualitative research study adds to the growing body of knowledge on the lived experiences of Native Americans who are a part of the student population in higher education.

In conclusion, the literature has significant gaps in the experiences and needs of Native American higher education students. Further research is needed to understand the specific challenges and unique needs of Native American students at different stages of their academic careers to understand better how their lived experiences impact the effectiveness of interventions and support programs. It is critical to conduct strengths-based research on Native American students in higher education, particularly at community colleges (Coulson-Johnston et al., 2022). Until these gaps are filled, it will be difficult to effectively support the success of Native American students in higher education. Addressing these gaps in the literature can lead to a deeper understanding of the experiences, challenges, and successes of Native American community college students enrolled in transfer programs. It can also inform the development of targeted interventions, policies, and support services that are culturally responsive and promote their educational attainment and overall well-being. This research study resulted in a three-article dissertation. Article one focuses on the Native American community college transfer student

experience. Article two focuses on the faculty and staff perspectives of community college transfer program students. Article three is an impact brief that explores recommendations for practice to build and strengthen partnerships with universities identifying potential opportunities to focus on the Native American student population.

Chapter three provides a detailed review of the research design and methodology used for the study, including details about site selection, the sample population, participants, data collection, and data analysis processes established to guide this work.

# CHAPTER 3

## Research Design and Methodology

The literature review in chapter two revealed a significant gap in the scholarly research literature on Native American higher education student experiences, highlighting the need for qualitative research. Chapter three outlines the research design and methodology relied upon for this study. This case study aimed to explore Native American community college students' experiences as enrolled students in associate degree transfer programs. This study collected data from student, faculty, and staff perspectives. The participants' personal, social, and academic experiences within these three groups contribute to a better understanding of the community college student's transfer process through the unique lens of Native American students. This dissertation is a three-article dissertation.

- Article one focuses on data collected from the Native American community college students enrolled in transfer programs.
- Article two focuses on data collected from the faculty and staff perspectives of community college transfer program students.
- Article three is an impact brief exploring potential opportunities for community colleges to build and strengthen partnerships with universities with a focus on the Native American student population through recommendations for practice.

### Qualitative Case Study Research Design

According to Merriam (2009), qualitative methods are implemented in research studies to better understand people's perceptions of a particular phenomenon; "…qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make

sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (p. 9). Merriam emphasized four common characteristics of qualitative research:

1. The concern is understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants' perspectives.
2. The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis.
3. The researcher primarily employs an inductive research strategy.
4. The product of a qualitative study is richly descriptive (p. 14).

Creswell (2013) defined qualitative research as "an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). According to Creswell,

> Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or representation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change. (Creswell, 2013, p. 44)

A qualitative exploratory case study was the best approach for this study because the researcher aimed to develop an in-depth description and understanding of the transfer process for students, specifically Native American students. The design of this case study was a single embedded case study because multiple cases were explored within one case (Yin, 2003).

In addition, Creswell (2013) explained five "approaches" of qualitative research: narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. Yin (2018) described qualitative research as collecting data from various resources, evaluating the data, analyzing evaluations to produce findings, and presenting the results. Case study researchers study an issue through one or more cases; however, there are many definitions for case study research.

- According to Stake (1995), the case or "object" might be an event, a process, a program, or several people.
- Merriam (2009) described a case study as "an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (p. 40).
- Yin (2014) described a case study in terms of the research process as "...an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 18).
- Dul and Hak (2007) defined a case study as "a study in which a) one case (single case study) or a small number of cases (comparative case study) in their real-life context are selected, and b) scores obtained from these cases are analyzed in a qualitative manner" (p.4).
- The common overall purpose of case study research is to examine and explore a case(s) intensively to understand better phenomena that are new, unexamined, or not understood (Yin, 2014). According to Yin, the case may be a concrete entity, such as an individual, a small group, an organization, or a partnership, or at a less concrete level, it may be a community, a relationship, a decision process, or a

specific project. In contrast, other researchers present case study research as a strategy of inquiry, a methodology, or a comprehensive research strategy (Densin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Yin, 2014).

- Thomas (2015) explained that a "…case study is defined not so much by the methods that you are using to do the study, but the edges you put around the case" (p. 21).

This exploratory case study with a single embedded design relied upon the participants' views on community college transfer programs. This qualitative research was conducted in a natural setting, and the researcher collected data and served as the instrument. During semi-structured interviews, the researcher asked broad, general questions and gathered the participants' words to analyze and look for common themes by focusing on the meaning of the words. The researcher collected and integrated additional forms of collecting data through questionnaires and an analysis of documents, creating data triangulation (citation). This design allowed for the development of an in-depth understanding of community college transfer programs from the perspectives of students, faculty, and staff. This exploratory case study employed inductive thinking to move from specific observations about individual occurrences to broader generalizations and theories.

Case study research has been implemented for many years by various disciplines such as psychology, medicine, law, and political science; however, case study research is especially popular among social scientists. Case study research can be traced to anthropology and sociology in the 1920s (Hamel et al., 1993). Case study research is best applied when the research addresses descriptive or explanatory questions such as what happened, who, how, and why (Yin, 2003). In addition, case study research helps describe a situation or phenomenon occurring in the

present, where an in-depth description is functional and where the researcher does not need to manipulate events (Yin, 2003).

Yin (2003) has identified three types of case studies:

1. Exploratory – the case study is used to define questions and hypotheses or test out a research procedure.
2. Descriptive – the case study describes a particular phenomenon within its context.
3. Explanatory – the case study explores cause-effect relationships and/or how events happen.

Yin (2014) stated there are three conditions for the use of a case study: the purpose must be to answer "how" or "why" questions, the researcher must have little control over the events, and the focus of the research must be on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context, especially when boundaries between the phenomenon and context may not be evident. This exploratory case study aimed to answer "how" and "why" questions related to community college transfer programs from the student, faculty, and staff perspectives. The researcher had little control over the events, allowing participants to share their experiences in their natural settings. In addition, according to Yin (2018), five components of a research design are applied to a case study:

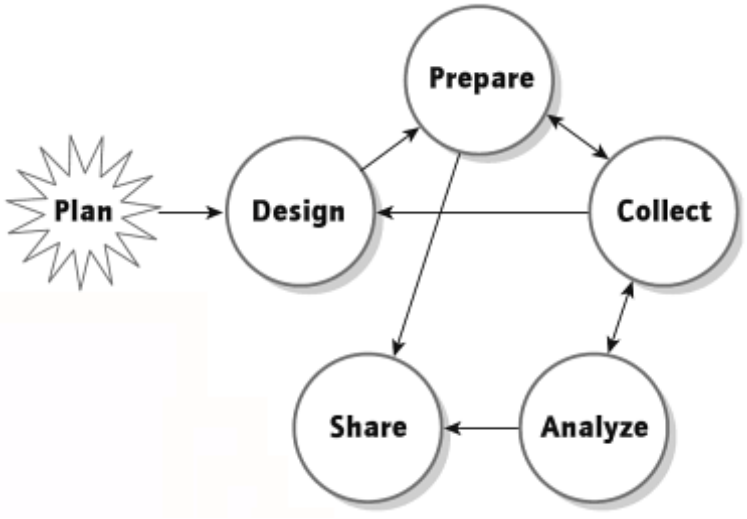
1. A case study's questions;
2. Its propositions, if any;
3. Its case;
4. The logic linking the data to the propositions;
5. The criteria for interpreting the findings (p. 27).

In case study research, the researcher explores a “real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information” (Creswell, 2013, p. 97).

Two major case study designs are single-case and multiple-case (Yin, 2018). Single-case design is “analogous to a single experiment, and many of the same conditions that justify a single experiment also justify a single-case study,” which was the most appropriate design for this study (Yin, 2003, p. 39). The data collection tools used in this research study included virtual focus groups, virtual one-on-one interviews, and document analysis (Creswell, 2013). This exploratory case study was a single embedded case study examining community college transfer programs from the student, faculty, and staff perspectives. Figure 8 depicts the process of doing case study research as a linear but iterative process. Case study research has six elements: the plan, design, preparation, data collection, analysis, and reporting (Yin, 2018).

**Figure 8**

*Doing Case Study Research*



*Note:* Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.), Sage (p. 1).

In this study, the researcher used a qualitative exploratory case study approach with a single embedded design to understand Native American students' experiences and those of the faculty and staff who work with students enrolled in community college transfer programs. This approach was appropriate for the current study because the researcher sought to explore a particular program, its affiliates (students/faculty/staff), and specific institutions. The case study methodology was applied to collect and analyze data. The research questions that guided this study included:

## Research Questions

There is one overarching research question and several sub questions associated with Article One – Student Perspectives (those enrolled in a community college transfer program).

### *Research Questions – Article One – Student Perspectives*

**Research Question 1:** What contributes to the student's successful outcomes?

**Research Question 1a:** How do personal and social experiences shape Native American community college students' persistence?

**Research Question 1b:** What academic strategies do Native American community college students employ to persist?

**Research Question 1c:** What do community college students view as the most supportive resources in their enrollment and transfer process?

**Research Question 1d.** How is the transfer process from a community college to a four-year university for Native American students different from other demographics?

***Research Questions – Article Two – Faculty and Staff Perspectives***

There is one overarching research question and several sub questions associated with Article Two – Faculty and Staff Perspectives (those delivering services in a community college transfer program).

**Research Question 2:** What contributes to the successful outcomes of the students who participate in a community college transfer partnership program?

**Research Question 2a:** How do transfer partners define academic success?

**Research Question 2b:** What support services do community college faculty and staff implement to increase Native American students' participation and persistence?

**Research Question 2c:** How is the transfer process from a community college to a four-year university for Native American students different from other demographics?

***Research Questions – Article Three – Impact Brief***

This brief highlights the findings from two overarching research questions designed to explore the experiences of Native American students enrolled in two-year transfer degree programs representing three North Carolina community colleges and the experiences of faculty and staff who provide support services and instruction to Native American students:

**Research Question 1:** What contributes to the students' successful outcomes?

**Research Question 2:** What contributes to the successful outcomes of the students who participate in a community college transfer partnership program?

Table 1 depicts a step-by-step approach that guided the researcher to complete the exploratory case study research in this qualitative study.

**Table 1**

*Step-by-Step Approach to Case Study Research*

| Step | Data Collection & Analyses Process |
|---|---|
| Step 1 | IRB submission and approval |
| Step 2 | Communicate with gatekeeper |
| Step 3 | Purposeful sampling |
| Step 4 | Solicit Participation from Students, Faculty, & Staff |
| Step 5 | Schedule Virtual Student Interviews (Focus & One-on-One) |
| Step 6 | Schedule Virtual Faculty Interviews (Focus & One-on-One) |
| Step 7 | Schedule Virtual Staff Interviews (Focus & One-on-One) |
| Step 8 | Data Collection (Interviews, Classroom Observations, & Advising Sessions) |
| Step 9 | Data Analysis (Transcribe & Coding) |
| Step 10 | Findings & Conclusions |

## Site Selection and Sample

The National Conference of State Legislatures (2020) reported there are 574 federally recognized tribes in the United States. Native Americans comprise approximately 1.3% of the United States population, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2019a). The researcher designed his case study to focus on the community colleges that partner with a transfer program, the BraveStep Program, in North Carolina to highlight the experiences of Native American student participants. Purposeful site selection was implemented in this research due to the demographic included in the population to study, Native Americans. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, North Carolina has the largest Native American population east of the Mississippi River and the eighth-largest Native American population in the United States. The State of North Carolina

recognizes eight tribes: Eastern Band of Cherokee, Coharie, Lumbee, Haliwa-Saponi, Sappony, Meherrin, Occaneechi Band of Saponi Nation, and Waccamaw-Siouan.

According to Patton (2002),

> The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term purposeful sampling. Studying information-rich case yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations. (p. 230).

The BraveStep Program recognizes five community college partners. These five institutions were selected as the sample population for the study because of their connection and partnership with the BraveStep program established to increase transfer from North Carolina community colleges to the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. Of the five community college partners, at least one had the largest percentage of Native American students enrolled within the past five years out of the 58 NC Community Colleges, with Native Americans comprising 47% of curriculum students (2019 Equity Report for NC Community Colleges).

One community college had 155 Native Americans enrolled in a transfer program at one point within the past five years, the highest of 58 North Carolina community colleges (NC Community College Dashboard). The North Carolina Community College System website indicates that it serves approximately 700,000 students annually at 58 colleges across 100 counties in North Carolina. The system is the third largest in the United States, with more than 275 programs of study intended to prepare North Carolina residents for the workforce. Selecting five community colleges as the sample was based on their partnership with the BraveStep program. Also, the researcher collected data from the faculty and staff who work with transfer

initiatives, and conducted a document analysis. The initial sample of five institutions resulted in three contributing data to the participant population.

**Participant Selection and Recruitment**

Once NC State University granted IRB approval, the researcher invited the five community colleges that partner with the BraveStep program to participate in the research study; invitations were sent via email to a gatekeeper at each institution (Appendix A). Four emails were sent requesting participation in the research study to each of the five community colleges. Three of the five community colleges confirmed participation, and the researcher requested IRB approval for the three sites selected for the study (Appendix G). Once all approvals were obtained, the researcher began the data collection process. The researcher had access to a gatekeeper at the three identified sites to connect with the individuals invited to participate in the study (Creswell, 2013).

Homogeneity was used to select participants for this study; for this study the group included faculty, staff, and students associated with transfer degree programs. The sample consisted of Native American community college students enrolled in a transfer degree program and faculty and staff affiliated with the transfer degree programs. A gatekeeper at each of the three community colleges supported the recruitment process at the three community colleges. Initial requests for interviews and focus group participation in this case study were sent via email and phone when email attempts were unsuccessful. The initial email included an electronic request packet consisting of a point of contact letter (Appendix A), an informed consent form (Appendix B), a pre-questionnaire (Appendices E and F), and a copy of the interview protocol (Appendices C and D). If email attempts were unsuccessful, follow-up emails or phone calls requesting participation were sent, and the gatekeeper was contacted. All participants were

provided an electronic copy of the informed consent form (Appendix B) and had the option to withdraw from the research study for any reason at any time. Participants acknowledged informed consent electronically.

## Sample Population

A total of 119 students were included in the sample population. From this initial outreach, 15 students electronically consented to participate in the study, and nine confirmed times to connect for a virtual one-on-one interview or focus group. For this study, 29 faculty and staff were included in the sample population, 19 faculty and staff electronically consented to participate, and 19 faculty and staff confirmed times to connect for a virtual one-on-one interview or focus group.

## Data Collection Overview

### *Interview Data*

Data were collected using virtual interviews, virtual focus groups, and a review of documents associated with each community college's transfer process for students. The purpose of including virtual interviews as part of the data collection process was to collect a richer source of information from a small number of people about their attitudes, behaviors, preferences, feelings, attitudes, opinions, and knowledge (Creswell, 2013). Interviews are most effective for qualitative research because interviews help explain, better understand, and explore the research subject's opinions, behaviors, and experiences; interviews can also facilitate rapport-building and trust between the researcher and participant, enhancing the data quality. In addition to interviews, faculty and staff contributed to the data collected through focus groups in this exploratory case study.

### *Focus Group Data*

The purpose of the focus groups, as part of the data collection process, was to gather data from multiple participants in a relatively short time while also providing an opportunity to explore and understand participants' attitudes, beliefs and experiences in-depth. According to Kruger and Casey (2015), focus groups are a useful tool for "exploring people's beliefs, attitudes, opinions, experiences, and behaviors" (p. 17). They can be particularly valuable when seeking to understand complex or nuanced phenomena. In addition to facilitating rich and detailed data collection, focus groups can stimulate discussion and debate among participants, potentially leading to new insights or perspectives. By bringing together individuals with diverse backgrounds and experiences, focus groups can generate a range of opinions and viewpoints, which can help identify commonalities and differences among participants. Faculty and staff contributed to the data collected through virtual and focus groups.

## Document Analysis

As part of the data collection process, the researcher conducted document analysis because it allowed the researcher to gather rich and detailed data about a particular case from various sources. According to Yin (2018), document analysis is valuable in case study research because it allows researchers to triangulate data from multiple sources and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the case under study. Systemic document analysis involves the methodical examination and assessment of various documents, including printed and electronic (such as computer-based and Internet-transmitted material) (Bowen, 2009). The researcher could access all documentation relating to transfer programs, partnerships, and articulation agreements through public access on websites and by disseminating documents provided through emails to the researcher. The documents included in the review were BraveStep program requirements,

partnership agreement documentation between one community college and its university partners, Transfer Articulation Agreements, and University Studies documents.

## Data Collection Process

After consent was obtained, participants completed an electronic pre-questionnaire to allow for the collection of demographic data. Virtual interviews with students were held, and faculty and staff participants were included in focus groups. With the support of the gatekeeper, the researcher created and emailed participants a Doodle poll to allow the participants to choose which day and time would be best suited for either a focus group session or one-on-one interview. Once the participants responded with the specified date, time, and preference of either a focus group interview or one-on-one interview, the researcher created the virtual Zoom link and emailed all participants the required information to join the virtual focus groups or one-on-one interviews. Data were collected from the virtual interviews and focus groups through videos and audio recordings, written transcripts, and notes taken by the researcher. The researcher created a semi-structured interview protocol for faculty and staff (Appendix D) and a semi-structured interview protocol for students (Appendix C) to implement as a guide during focus group interviews with faculty and staff and one-on-one interviews with community college student participants who met the criteria of being enrolled in a transfer program and identified as Native American through a pre-questionnaire (Appendix E).

### *Faculty and Staff Participant Data Collection*

Faculty and staff completed the pre-questionnaire (Appendix F), confirming their engagement with institutions' transfer programs. The semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix D) included structured and open-ended questions. The semi-structured interview format was most appropriate for this study because it allowed for rich, in-depth discussion

between participants and the researcher and lasted approximately one hour (Saldana, 2015). The open-ended questions allowed more participants to elaborate on their experiences with the community college transfer program. Next, the transcriptions from the recorded Zoom sessions were reviewed in preparation for coding and theming the data. All data collected were stored on a password-protected device, and all NC State data security measures were followed.

### *Student Participant Data Collection*

For the student participant data collection process, students were asked to complete a pre-questionnaire (Appendix E) to confirm their engagement with the institution's transfer programs. The interview protocol (Appendix C) consisted of a semi-structured format incorporating structured and open-ended questions. The researcher chose this approach as it facilitated in-depth discussions between participants and the researcher, typically lasting one hour (Saldana, 2015). Using open-ended questions allowed participants to provide detailed insights into their experiences with the community college transfer program. The recorded Zoom sessions were transcribed and carefully reviewed in preparation for coding and theming the collected data. To ensure data security, all collected information was stored on a password-protected device, and strict adherence was maintained to NC State's data security measures.

## Data Analysis

In this study, the primary data sources were virtual focus groups, virtual one-on-one interviews, and a review of documents associated with the program. The virtual one-on-one interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed via Zoom. The interviews and focus groups were transcribed a second time with OtterAi. Then, the researcher read each transcription in its entirety to become familiar with the data and obtain a holistic view of the experiences of each participant. The researcher used Saldana's (2015) inductive coding technique to code the

data from the one-on-one student interviews and focus groups. Inductive coding is a widely used method of data analysis that involves identifying themes and patterns in qualitative data without being constrained by pre-existing categories or theories. Saldana's approach to inductive coding involved a systemic and iterative process of identifying and refining themes in the qualitative data collected for this study. After reviewing transcripts for accuracy, the researcher began the coding process with an initial reading of the data to gain a general understanding of the content and context. The researcher then engaged in open coding, which involved identifying and labeling concepts, ideas, and themes from the data. The researcher read through the interviews and focus group transcripts, identified chunks of text relevant to one another, and developed initial codes.

After the initial coding, the researcher reviewed and refined the codes relevant to the research questions from the students' perspectives (Saldana, 2015). This stage of coding was exploratory, allowing for the discovery of new themes that may not have been previously considered. Then, the researcher engaged in axial coding, which involved organizing the codes into related categories and subcategories. This stage allowed for identifying patterns and relationships between the codes, which helped to build a more comprehensive understanding of the data. The researcher then analyzed the data for patterns and themes. The codes were grouped to identify larger patterns, such as recurring themes or common experiences. Selective coding was used to refine and focus the analysis on the most significant themes and patterns identified in the data. This stage involved making connections between the categories and subcategories and developing a coherent narrative that would reflect the underlying themes and meanings of the data. Then, the researcher used NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software, to further code and analyze data. The researcher imported the data into NVivo and created a coding framework by

creating codes and categories that reflected the research questions and themes. The researcher navigated through the data and assigned codes to the relevant text segments using manual and automated coding based on the research questions. Process coding allowed the researcher to align the codes with the participants' shared perspectives. Significant statements from data collection were pulled and placed into statement groupings. The researcher examined the statement groupings for common themes and compared and contrasted them. The researcher then used the information to draw conclusions about the data and recommend further research.

The researcher used inductive coding in the context of Native American student retention in higher education, to analyze qualitative data such as interviews, focus group discussions, and observations to identify patterns and themes related to the experiences and perspectives of Native American students. This approach allowed the researcher to develop an understanding of the issues and challenges these students face without imposing preconceived theoretical frameworks or assumptions. Transculturation theory was applied to the data analysis to help explain the processes of cultural change and exchanges that occur when Native American students interact with the dominant culture in higher education institutions. This theory suggests that cultural exchange is a two-way process where the dominant and minority culture are influenced by one another. The application of transculturation theory in this study creates an understanding of the cultural exchange and experiences of Native American students in higher education.,.

**Document Analysis**

Analyzing documents is a common approach in qualitative research. Document analysis comprises three stages: skimming, which involves a superficial examination; reading, which involves a thorough examination; and interpretation (Bowen, 2009).

- The first step was to select the documents relevant to the research questions (Morgan, 2022). The researcher had to exhibit the ability to distinguish relevant information from irrelevant information by identifying and separating them accordingly (Bowen, 2009).
- The second step was to read the documents carefully, noting key themes, issues, and ideas (Morgan, 2022). The researcher read the documents multiple times to get a deep understanding of the content.
- The third step was to code the data (Morgan, 2022). This involved identifying key concepts, themes, and ideas in the documents and assigning codes or labels to them. The researcher completed the coding manually.
- The fourth step was to organize the coded data into categories or themes (Morgan, 2022). This involved grouping similar codes to form broader categories.
- The fifth step was to analyze the data (Morgan, 2022). This involved interpreting the categories and themes to identify patterns and relationships between the data.
- The final step was to draw conclusions based on the analysis (Morgan, 2022). The researcher made interpretations and drew inferences from the data to answer the research questions (Morgan, 2022). It was important for the researcher to validate the conclusions by referring to the original documents and checking that the evidence supports the conclusions (Morgan, 2022).

**Constant Comparative Method**

The constant comparative method in this qualitative exploratory case study was used to analyze the data and develop a theory based on the empirical evidence collected through interviews and document analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 2017).

The researcher collected data through interviews, focus groups, and document analysis to gather rich and detailed data about the studied case (Saldana, 2015). Next, the researcher:

- analyzed the data and coded it, breaking it down into smaller units and assigning labels or codes to each unit;
- compared the coded data within the case to identify patterns, themes, and categories that emerged from the data;
- grouped similar codes to form more abstract and general categories than the codes;
- identified subcategories within each category to capture the nuances and variations in the data;
- compared the categories and subcategories from the student interviews and focus groups with the faculty and staff focus groups (Glaser & Strauss, 2017).

The researcher then used the categories and subcategories to explain the relationships between the concepts and phenomena identified in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). Using the constant comparative method in a qualitative exploratory case study, the researcher can systematically analyze the data, identify patterns and themes, and develop a grounded theory relevant to the studied case. The researcher relied on data analysis processes that included: compiling the data, disassembling the data, reassembling the data, making sense of the data, building an explanation, and drawing conclusions (Yin, 2003). Yin's approach to data analysis emphasizes the need for systematic and rigorous analysis of case study data, which involves disassembling and reassembling the data to identify patterns, themes, and categories and building an explanation that accounts for the data. The researcher used three sources of data (focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and document analysis) for data triangulation to ensure the

validity of the research. The researcher emailed a follow-up message to the participants after the interviews to allow the participants the opportunity to include any additional comments that were not included in the focus groups or one-on-one interviews.

Transculturation theory was relied upon in the context of Native American students, to understand how their traditional culture and the dominant culture in the educational system interacted and shaped their academic experiences. Using the constant comparative method, the experiences of Native American students with the application of transculturation theory helped to analyze data, allowing for a way to compare findings with previous studies and theoretical concepts continuously. This approach helped to identify patterns and themes that emerged from the data and provided insights into how transculturation theory can be applied to Native American students' academic experiences.

**Data Security**

The data were protected with a password-protected computer and software tools. The researcher used NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software, to code and analyze data. The researcher imported the data into NVivo and created a coding framework by creating codes and categories that reflected the research questions and themes. The recordings and all research data were stored in an encrypted file or folder.

**Trustworthiness and Credibility**

According to Yin (2018), four tests are used to establish the quality of most empirical social research: construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability. Construct validity identifies correct operational measures for the studied concepts (Yin, 2018). In addition to the focus groups, interviews, and pre-questionnaires, the researcher also analyzed documents

used by each institution's transfer programs. This included a review of documentation, including student educational plans and each institution's list of established transfer partners.

The multiple data sources allowed for data triangulation between documents, interviews, and focus groups, leading to the convergence of evidence (Yin, 2018). The researcher intended for the case study's findings to be supported by more than one single source of evidence; therefore, the study's construct validity is strengthened because the multiple sources of evidence provide multiple measures of the same phenomena. External validity shows whether and how a case study's findings can be generalized, how universal the results are in a specific case. In external validity, the outcomes apply to practical situations. For example, in this exploratory case study, the researcher gained an in-depth understanding of the transfer process and community college transfer program, hoping to develop a set of best practices for the community college sites included in this study.

Reliability demonstrates that the operations of a study can be repeated with the same results (Yin, 2018). The overall goal of reliability is to minimize the errors and biases within a study. In this exploratory case study, the researcher documented the procedures followed in the case study. Before collecting any data, the researcher recruited colleagues to review and make suggestions on the interview protocol for students, faculty, and staff to provide insights. Their feedback allowed the researcher to clarify the protocol to be better aligned with the intention of this study. The case study protocol included an overview of the case study, data collection procedures, protocol questions, and a tentative outline for the case study report. The researcher established a password-protected case study database that was stored electronically. The purpose of the case study database was to preserve the collected data in a retrievable form. The case study database included the researcher's notes, documents relevant to the research study, tabular

materials, and the researcher's narrative materials. The researcher adhered to the three tests used to establish the quality of the empirical social research: construct validity, external validity, and reliability.

**Positionality Statement**

As a Native American woman working in higher education, my positionality is complex and multifaceted. On the one hand, my cultural background and experiences as a member of an Indigenous community inform my perspective and understanding of the world. On the other hand, my position within higher education also affords me certain privileges and power structures influenced by dominant Western paradigms and values.

I acknowledge that my positionality may have affected how I engage with research questions and participants, particularly regarding race, culture, and identity issues. It was my responsibility to reflect on and be transparent about my biases and assumptions, as well as to recognize the potential for my positionality to influence the research process and outcomes.

Moreover, I recognize that my experiences and perspectives may differ from those of other Native American women and individuals from different cultural backgrounds. As such, I aimed to approach research with an open mind and a willingness to learn from diverse perspectives and to center the voices and experiences of the participants in my research.

**Organization of Articles**

Article one focuses on research questions 1, 1a, 1b, 1c, and 1d, which were explicitly related to the Native American student experience. The significance of the study, theory, a brief review of the literature, and findings and recommendations for practice will conclude the first article. Article two focuses on research questions 2, 2a, 2b, and 2c. Article two highlights the faculty and staff perspectives, the significance of this part of the study, the theoretical

connection, and a brief literature review, with findings and recommendations for practice concluding the article. Article three was designed to conclude this study as an impact brief. Article three explores potential opportunities for community colleges to build and strengthen partnerships with universities uniquely positioned to serve the Native American student population.

**Chapter Summary**

Chapter Three outlined this case study's research design and methodology. The qualitative case study method was appropriate for this research study because it explores the transfer process at community colleges and specifically highlights Native American students in higher education. This research adds to a growing body of knowledge on the experiences of Native Americans in higher education and the transfer process through a community college transfer program. Qualitative research is an appropriate method to explore a problem or issue (Creswell, 2013). This qualitative exploratory case study explored the experiences of Native American students in higher education, specifically those enrolled in a two-year associate degree transfer program, and the experiences of the faculty and staff providing supportive services and instruction. In addition, the researcher conducted document analysis to triangulate the data. Attrition rates are disproportionately high for Native Americans, and Native American students are the least likely to graduate from college compared to other populations (Shotton et al., 2013). In addition, Creswell (2013) emphasized the use of qualitative research as a means to hear silenced voices. The findings of this research allowed students, faculty, and staff voices to be heard from their perspectives central to their affiliation with a community college transfer program. Consistent with the reality identified by researchers, "…Native Americans are the experts at being Native American, and thus their voices must be heard when creating policy that

can directly or indirectly affect their educational lives" (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008, p. 63). After the completion of data collection and analysis, the Native American voice was heard, and this research benefits all stakeholders affiliated with community college transfer programs.

# CHAPTER 4

## Results

Chapter four presents two articles, each focused on two different participant populations captured by the data in this study. This research study was designed to gain insights into Native American students, faculty, and staff perspectives on community college transfer programs. The researcher adopted a qualitative exploratory case study approach to answer the research questions, employing a single embedded design. This study explored transfer programs, their affiliates (students/faculty/staff), and specific institutions. The case study methodology supported data collection and analysis. This dissertation is framed as a three-article dissertation, with the first two articles presented as part of chapter four. Two articles examine two sets of research questions, the first describing Native American students' experiences and the second exploring faculty and staff experiences. The findings from this study included data that overlapped between the experiences of students, faculty, and staff.

### Article One – Native American Students' Experiences with Transfer Programs

Article one answers research questions 1, 1a, 1b, 1c, and 1d, which were designed to explore Native American students' experiences enrolled in community college transfer programs. Research questions for this article were based on the student's perspectives (those enrolled in a community college transfer program):

**Research Question 1:** What contributes to the student's successful outcomes?

**Research Question 1a:** How do personal and social experiences shape Native American community college students' persistence?

**Research Question 1b:** What academic strategies do Native American community college students employ to persist?

**Research Question 1c:** What do community college students view as the most supportive resources in their enrollment and transfer process?

**Research Question 1d.** How is the transfer process from a community college to a four-year university for Native American students different from other demographics?

## Theoretical Framework

Native Americans have historically faced significant barriers to accessing higher education and display one of the highest secondary education attrition rates in the United States; however, in recent years, there has been a concerted effort to increase the representation of Native Americans in higher education and to support their success once enrolled. Efforts towards the support of this population of students have been driven partly by the recognition of the value of diversity in higher education and by a desire to address the ongoing effects of colonialism and systemic discrimination against Native American communities. Most applicable to understanding the experiences of Native Americans in higher education is transculturation theory.

Transculturation theory was a concept developed by Cuban intellectual and anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in the 1940s to describe how culture is transmitted and transformed due to contact between different cultural groups (Ortiz, 1947). Transculturation theory is unique due to its attempt to explain why Native Americans succeed in college compared to why Native Americans fail (Huffman, 2010). Transculturation theory is an essential framework for understanding the persistence of Native American students in college. This theory emphasizes the interaction and exchange of cultures between different groups and highlights the importance of cultural adaptation in cross-cultural settings.

According to Ortiz (1947), transculturation involves adopting certain cultural elements from one group by another and synthesizing these elements with preexisting cultural practices to

create a new, hybrid culture. In the context of Native Americans in higher education, transculturation theory can help to explain how Native American students may be required to adapt to mainstream cultural practices to succeed in college. Transculturation theory may involve adopting new ways of speaking, dressing, and behaving and engaging with academic practices and expectations that may be unfamiliar to them. At the same time, Native American students may also be able to draw on their cultural traditions and practices to enrich their college experiences and support their success. Finally, transculturation theory can help educators and policymakers understand the challenges experienced by Native American students and develop strategies to support Native American students' success.

Native American students may experience transculturation in higher education through their involvement in cultural centers and support services available on college campuses. Cultural centers offer a platform for Native American students to engage with peers who share their cultural heritage while providing them with resources and assistance to navigate their college journey. Furthermore, cultural centers enable Native American students to preserve their cultural identities and customs while integrating and adapting into the larger college community.

Transculturation theory serves as a valuable tool for comprehending the experiences of Native Americans in higher education. This theory emphasizes the intricate cultural adaptation and preservation process that Native American students undertake while navigating college life. The setting of this case study recognizes the significance of cultural centers and support services in facilitating students' success. Transculturation theory underscores the importance of embracing cultural adaptation, amalgamation, and acculturation to address the distinct challenges faced by Native American students in higher education. By using this theory and identifying its connection to the findings in this study, policymakers and educators can develop effective

strategies that promote the success of Native American students and ensure that college education is a feasible option for all students, regardless of their cultural background.

## Literature Review

Numerous studies and debates have focused on the experiences of Native American students in postsecondary institutions. These students encounter distinctive obstacles when pursuing higher education, including historical trauma, systemic inequalities, cultural dissonance, and financial barriers. Historical trauma refers to the emotional and psychological harm that Native American communities have suffered due to centuries of colonization, forced relocation, genocide, and cultural oppression (Brave Heart, 2003).

Moreover, systemic inequalities significantly impact Native American students' experiences in postsecondary education. These students are more likely to face poverty and limited access to educational resources than other ethnic and racial groups in the US (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Possible challenges encompass insufficient readiness, difficulties acclimating to the academic community, personal and family concerns, cultural differences, social isolation, and financial limitations (Keith et al., 2016). Additionally, Native American students are less likely than their peers to attend and graduate from college (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). Factors such as insufficient preparation for college, a lack of support systems, and limited financial resources contribute to this disparity. Research indicates that college affordability, rather than academic performance or other factors, is the primary obstacle preventing Native American students from earning degrees (National Study on College Affordability for Indigenous Students, 2022). In addition, many Native American families struggle with poverty, making it challenging for students to afford the expenses associated with higher education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). Additionally,

Native American students may have limited access to financial aid and scholarships designated for their community (Brayboy et al., 2015).

Cultural dissonance presents another challenge for Native American students in postsecondary institutions. Many Native American students come from rural communities and may struggle to adjust to mainstream society's academic and cultural norms (Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, 2022). For example, the emphasis on individualism in Western culture can conflict with the collective values of many Native American communities (Brayboy et al., 2015), leading to feelings of disconnection and alienation for Native American students in college. The literature spanning the last 35 years has revealed that a strong and positive ethnic identity among American Indian/Alaskan Native students correlates with a higher probability of establishing a stable psychosocial foundation, contributing to the successful attainment of a college degree (Huffman, 2011).

Despite the obstacles identified as inhibitors of the success of Native American students, postsecondary institutions can support Native American students in various ways. One approach is to provide culturally responsive programming and instruction that acknowledges these students' unique experiences and strengths. Courses or workshops on Native American culture and history could be curated, the creation of support networks for Native American students could be designed, and counseling services sensitive to the impact of historical trauma could be offered as a supportive structure to serve this population of students better. Another approach is to increase financial resources available to Native American students, including scholarships, grants, financial literacy resources, and advocacy efforts to increase federal funding for Native American education (National Congress of American Indians, 2021).

Native American community college students face significant challenges in their educational pursuits. Studies suggest cultural connection and targeted support services can enhance the success rates of Native American students enrolled in postsecondary institutions (Brayboy et al., 2015). Therefore, community college leaders must acknowledge and address the challenges associated with access to better serve their Native American student populations.

## Research Approval

The process of gaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval through North Carolina State University (NC State) involved several steps, including submitting an application, obtaining necessary approvals and certifications, and complying with all relevant regulations, training, and guidelines. The first step in gaining IRB approval (Appendix G) was to submit an application outlining the process for data collection, informed consent, and data protection measures. Once the application was approved, the researcher obtained approval from the three participating college sites, who acknowledged receipt of NC State's IRB approval and granted access to the researcher as approved in the NC State IRB document on file.

## Population

Five community colleges were selected as part of the sample population due to their roles in a transfer partnership program. A gatekeeper was identified at the five institutions to liaise between the researcher and the participants. The gatekeeper identified potential participants at each selected institution. Three of the five institutions agreed to participate in the study; two declined to respond. The approved NCSU IRB was provided to the gatekeepers at the three participating sites. The gatekeeper identified student participants who were enrolled in a college transfer program and identified as Native American. The gatekeeper at each participating institution contacted the sample population by email and distributed the point of contact email

from the researcher. The email communication included a summary of what the participants could expect if they agreed to be a participant in the study. If the researcher did not receive a response after one week, the gatekeeper sent an email reminder. Once participants confirmed interest in participating in the study, informed consent (Appendix B) was distributed by the researcher electronically to each participant, and each participant was confirmed electronically. The gatekeeper connected participants with the researcher based on times provided in a Doodle poll, which the researcher created. Once the researcher confirmed the date and time, the researcher created a Zoom meeting link and shared the meeting details with the participants. Participants were allowed to participate in a one-on-one virtual interview or a focus group. The researcher hosted the virtual interviews and focus groups based on the selected date and times chosen by the participants. The researcher followed the student protocol (Appendix C). Participants were provided with a copy of the informed consent and given the option to withdraw from the study. The interviews and focus groups were audio and video recorded through the Zoom software platform.

Participants will not be identified in the discussion of findings using real participant names. All public sharing of the study's findings and discussion will remove identifiers and replace the participants' names with pseudonyms. Each pseudonym assigned to student participants represents prominent Lumbee Indians who positively impacted the Lumbee community (Appendix H). The recordings were retained for transcription and data analysis purposes, and any identifying information was not included in the final transcription. The data were protected with a password-protected computer and software tools. The researcher stored the recordings and identifiable research data in an encrypted file or folder.

The researcher emailed more than 100 Native American students (student names and emails provided by the gatekeeper at each institution) enrolled in a community college transfer program requesting participation in the study from the three institutions, with 15 consenting to participate in the study and nine students following through with participation in the study. Five students participated in one-on-one interviews, and four participated in two focus groups. The participant group was reflective of 67% ($n$=6) of students who identified as female, of which five were enrolled as full-time students and one was enrolled as a part-time student. Thirty-three percent ($n$=3) of the participants identified as male, of which two were full-time students, and one was a part-time student. The student participants' ages ranged between 18 to 39 years old. All student participants identified as Native American, specifically a member of the Lumbee Tribe, and were all enrolled in a college transfer program at their respective institutions. Table 2 provides insight into the student participants' demographics for this exploratory case study.

**Table 2**

*Student Participants Demographics*

| Pseudonym | Program | Gender | Student Status | Age Range | Marital Status | Yearly Income | Family & Dependents | Employment |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cora | AA & AS | Female | Full-time | 29-39 | Single | <$25,000 | 2-4 | Unemployed |
| Debbie | AA & AS | Female | Full-time | 18-28 | Single | <$25,000 | 0 | Part-time |
| Cheryl | AS | Female | Full-time | 29-39 | Married | $25-$50,000 | 2-4 | Unemployed |
| Kathleen | AA, AS, & Gen Ed | Female | Full-time | 18-28 | Single | <$25,000 | 0 | Unemployed |
| Helen | AA, AS, & Gen Ed | Female | Full-time | 18-28 | Single | <$25,000 | 0 | Part-time |
| Earl | AA & AS | Male | Full-time | 18-28 | Single | $50-$100,000 | 0 | Full-time |
| Robert | AA & Gen Ed | Male | Part-time | 18-28 | Single | $25-$50,000 | 0 | Part-time |
| Clifton | AA & Gen Ed | Male | Full-time | 18-28 | Single | $50-$100,000 | 0 | Full-time |
| Betty Jo | AS | Female | Part-time | 29-39 | Married | $50-$100,000 | 2-4 | Full-time |

## Participants

Each participant contributed to the conversation and brought a unique perspective to the dialogue.

***Cora*** is a 30-year-old, divorced mother of three children (ages 8-11) who married in high school and quickly became a military wife who decided to go to a community college once the youngest child was enrolled in school. Cora also previously attended for-profit and non-profit institutions, enrolling in various medical terminology, computer science, and automotive classes. Cora hoped to attend UNC Charlotte to major in engineering, specifically mechatronics.

***Debbie*** is a 23-year-old, full-time student pursuing an associate in science and arts. Debbie began her academic career at a four-year university with intentions of majoring in biology and chemistry, hoping to apply for pharmacy school; however, after working as a pharmacy technician for several months, Debbie realized pharmacy was not what she wanted to do for the rest of her life. Debbie hopes to become a licensed practical nurse, then registered nurse, and eventually a physician assistant.

***Cheryl*** is a 34-year-old, full-time student, married mother of four children pursuing an associate in science degree. Cheryl wants to become a nurse or a social worker. Cheryl chose to attend a community college because of the proximity to her home.

***Kathleen*** is a 22-year-old, full-time student who initially intended to start her academic career at a four-year university; however, after learning the total cost of attending a four-year university versus a community college, she decided to start her academic career at a community college. Kathleen has plans to become a registered nurse, work in a hospital setting for several years for experience, and then pursue a bachelor of science in nursing. In addition, Kathleen is pursuing an associate in science degree, associate in arts, and general education degrees.

***Helen*** is a 22-year-old, full-time student who intends to become a pediatric nurse. Helen is pursuing an associate in science, art, and general education degree. Helen is also employed full-time at a local rest home, working 35-40 hours weekly, including every weekend.

***Earl*** is a 25-year-old, full-time student who wants to become a mathematics teacher for underprivileged children. Earl works three part-time jobs while attending community college and has maintained a 3.5+ grade point average for the last four semesters. In addition, Earl participated in the Career and College Promise in North Carolina during his high school years and is finishing the requirements to obtain an associate in science, art, and general education degree. In addition, Earl plans to graduate from community college and immediately transfer to a four-year university to major in education, specifically mathematics, and hopes to obtain his master's in mathematics.

***Robert*** is a 28-year-old, part-time student who wants to become an architect. Robert works full-time and attends classes in the evening and online due to his work schedule. Robert has been working on obtaining his associate in arts and general education degree for several years due to financial hardships and unexpected life events. Robert wants to transfer to a four-year university to obtain his bachelor's in architecture and open his future architecture firm.

***Clifton*** is a 26-year-old, part-time student who plans to become a certified public accountant. Clifton is pursuing an associate in arts and general education degree and plans to transfer to a four-year university to major in business administration with a concentration in accounting. Clifton also wants to obtain his ’master’s in business administration. Clifton works full-time and prefers online classes due to his work schedule.

***Betty Jo*** is a 34-year-old wife, part-time student, mother of two children (ages 1-2), and full-time employee pursuing an ’associate in science degree. Betty Jo plans to become a

registered respiratory therapist and transfer to a four-year university to obtain a bachelor of science in respiratory therapy degree. Betty Jo has worked in the food industry for 17 years and wants to live out her dream of becoming a respiratory therapist.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

After receiving consent, the researcher offered participants two options. Participation could occur in a one-on-one interview or a focus group. The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with five student participants and two focus groups with two students each, virtually using Zoom. The researcher used a semi-structured interview protocol with open-ended questions to encourage detailed responses from the student participants. During the interviews and focus groups, the researcher facilitated the conversations following the interview protocol and made notes as needed during the interviews and focus groups. After each interview and focus group, the researcher reviewed the Zoom recording and transcript for the accuracy of the data collected.

The researcher used Saldana's (2015) inductive coding technique to code the data from the one-on-one student interviews and focus groups. Inductive coding is a widely used method of data analysis that involves identifying themes and patterns in qualitative data without being constrained by pre-existing categories or theories. Saldana's approach to inductive coding involves a systemic and iterative process of identifying and refining themes in qualitative data. After reviewing transcripts for accuracy, the researcher began the coding process with an initial reading of the data to understand the content and context. The researcher then engaged in open coding, which involved identifying and labeling concepts, ideas, and themes from the data. The researcher read the interviews and focus group transcripts, identified chunks of text relevant to one another, and developed initial codes. After the initial coding, the researcher reviewed and

refined the codes relevant to the research questions from the students' perspectives. This stage of coding is exploratory, allowing for the discovery of new themes that may not have been previously considered. Then, the researcher engaged in axial coding, which involved organizing the codes into related categories and subcategories. This stage allowed for identifying patterns and relationships between the codes, which helped to build a more comprehensive understanding of the data. The researcher then analyzed the data by looking for patterns and themes. The codes were grouped to identify larger patterns, such as recurring themes or common experiences. Selective coding was used to refine and focus the analysis on the most significant themes and patterns identified in the data. This stage involved making connections between the categories and subcategories and developing a coherent narrative that would reflect the underlying themes and meanings of the data. Then, the researcher used NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software, to code and analyze data. The researcher imported the data into NVivo and created a coding framework by creating codes and categories that reflected the research questions and themes. The researcher navigated through the data and assigned codes to the relevant text segments using manual and automated coding based on the research questions. After the data were coded, the researcher used NVivo to identify patterns, themes, and relationships. The researcher then used the information to draw conclusions about the data and recommend further research.

Data collection through interviews and focus groups was essential to this exploratory case study. The importance of these methods lies in the fact that they allowed the researcher to gather rich and detailed data directly from the participants, which provided insight into their experiences, attitudes, and behaviors (Saldana, 2015). Data collection through interviews and focus groups effectively gathered rich and in-depth information in this exploratory case study.

Both methods provided valuable insights into the experiences and perspectives of Native American community college students enrolled in a transfer degree program.

**Findings – Student Participants (Themes)**

Native American community college students face unique challenges that affect their personal, social, and academic experiences in transfer programs. These challenges range from cultural disconnection to financial barriers, leading to low retention and graduation rates (Keith et al., 2016). Despite these challenges, Native American students have made significant strides in enrolling in and completing college degrees in recent years. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2023) data, the enrollment rate of Native American students in higher education has increased in recent years. In 2020, college enrollment among the 18 to 24-year-old Native American population stood at 22%, while the corresponding figure for the general U.S. population was 40% (NCES, 2023). While this gap has narrowed, Native American students still lag their non-Native American peers in college enrollment.

According to Brayboy et al. (2012), Native American students' enrollment patterns in two-year institutions are influenced by their socioeconomic level, high school preparation, and proximity to four-year universities. The personal, social, and academic experiences of Native American community college students in transfer programs are complex and interrelated. Community colleges must recognize and address these students' unique challenges to increase their retention and graduation rates. This requires a holistic approach that includes culturally responsive teaching, increased access to academic and social support services, and financial support. By prioritizing the success of Native American community college students, community colleges can be critical to advancing equity and promoting social justice.

For this study, the student participants chose to attend a community college for reasons such as the cost of attending, proximity to home, two-year commitment versus a four-year commitment, smaller class sizes, class schedules being better suited for working students, the reputation of the community college, their love of the community, student-friendly campus options, the opportunity to complete the first two years of general education classes before transferring to a four-year university, and the allowance for flexibility for familial obligations. To promote the academic success of Native American students, it is crucial to maintain a positive outlook that values and integrates the knowledge, experiences, abilities, and accomplishments of Native American students (Keith et al., 2016). It is imperative to identify strategies that can help Native American students achieve academic success. The findings from the interviews and focus groups with students resulted in several themes presented below. Note that all names are pseudonyms.

### *Theme #1: Access to Affordable and Accessible Community College Education for Native American Students*

The first theme is a result of participant interview data which serves to answer research questions 1, 1a, 1b, 1c, and 1d:

**Research Question 1:** What contributes to the student's successful outcomes?

**Research Question 1a:** How do personal and social experiences shape Native American community college students' persistence?

**Research Question 1b:** What academic strategies do Native American community college students employ to persist?

**Research Question 1c:** What do community college students view as the most supportive resources in their enrollment and transfer process?

**Research Question 1d.** How is the transfer process from a community college to a four-year university for Native American students different from other demographics?

Various barriers, including financial constraints, lack of resources, and cultural and linguistic differences, can hinder access to education. Transculturation theory can help clarify how community colleges and Native American communities can work together to overcome these barriers and provide greater access to education.

**Affordability.** Financial challenges pose a significant barrier to higher education for many Native American community college students, limiting their access to financial aid, causing high tuition costs, and limiting job opportunities. The cost of obtaining a college degree is rising for numerous students, particularly in states with a significant decline in state funding (The College Board, 2016). Community colleges often offer lower tuition and more financial aid options to alleviate these issues, which is crucial since many Native American students come from low-income families (AIHEC, 2018). The financial challenges can make it difficult for students to balance work and school or to afford basic needs like housing and food. The cost of attendance is often cited as a significant barrier for Native American students attending four-year universities (Brayboy, 2006). Native American students may need more financial resources to afford the high tuition, fees, and other expenses associated with college (NCES, 2018). Additionally, community colleges may offer more financial aid options, such as grants and scholarships, which can make attendance more feasible for Native American students (Brayboy, 2006). Affordability is critical because it impacts whether these students can access financial aid, including grants and scholarships, which can help cover the cost of tuition, fees, books, and other expenses.

According to the Lumbee Tribe website, Project ACCESS (Achieving College Opportunities, Community Engagement, and Student Success) is a partnership between the Lumbee Tribe, the [County Public Schools], [Community College], and the [University of North Carolina] to improve access to higher education and career preparedness for American Indian youth of [County]. Project ACCESS can remove the financial and transportation barriers for Native American students by funding books, fees, and transportation costs for Native American students. Transportation can be a barrier, as public transportation is not always an option or affordable. Kathleen shared that the expenses required for tuition and books were why she chose to attend a community college instead of a four-year university.

> *I knew I wouldn't get any financial aid because both my parents work and were blue-collar workers. My Ma told me that it would be hard to pay for [University Name], and I needed to think of another plan for college. At first, I was kinda mad, hurt because I wanted to go to [University Name], but it is what it is. I wound up going to [Community College], and I will graduate soon with an associate degree, then hope to find a job, work some, save some money, then I might go to [University Name] to get a four-year degree.*

Community colleges are less expensive than four-year institutions, but tuition and fees can still be prohibitive for low-income students, including Native Americans. Many Native American students may struggle to meet their basic needs, such as housing, food, and healthcare, making it difficult to afford college. Earl shared, "At one point, I had three jobs. I was working at a nursing home, Walgreens, and Subway, just to make ends meet." Addressing basic needs insecurity is critical for supporting Native American students and ensuring they have the resources to succeed in college. Affordability also impacts the debt that Native American

students may incur to pursue a college degree. Student loan debt can have long-lasting financial implications, particularly for students from low-income families, and can limit opportunities for these students after college. Therefore, the cost of attending a community college can limit Native American students' ability to stay in school and earn a degree. Financial struggles can lead to students quitting or taking longer to finish their studies, adversely affecting their job opportunities and earning capacity. The combination of skyrocketing tuition costs and reduced need-based financial aid has a detrimental impact on students and their capacity to persist through college (Tachine & Cabrera, 2021). Robert shared,

> *I was paying for everything out of pocket. … and I didn't get any financial aid because I got laid off at that point in time. So everything was just pretty much out of pocket. And that was another big factor as far as me choosing a community college versus a four-year university for the tuition and stuff like that.*

**Location and Transportation**. In addition, location is an essential factor for Native American students attending community colleges, as many Native American communities are in rural or remote areas, making traveling to four-year colleges costly and time-consuming. Attending a community college in an urban or suburban area can provide students with more resources, support services, and job opportunities, but it may also impact their cultural identity. Community colleges are often located in more urban areas and may be more accessible for Native American students (AIHEC, 2017), yet the fact remains that this population of students resides in more rural communities. In addition to transportation access, students also face access challenges with technology. Many Native American students attending community colleges come from rural or remote areas with limited access to high-speed internet and modern

technology. This lack of infrastructure can hinder their ability to participate in online classes, access educational resources, and engage in remote learning. Helen shared,

> *I don't have high-speed internet at my house. It's not available where I live. So if I have a major project or exam I will usually either go to my grandparent's house in the city or I will go to Starbucks to get the work done. Who knows when high-speed internet will be available at my house? It is supposedly in the works, but it has been that way for a couple of years now.*

**Location and Cost of Living.** The cost of living can vary widely depending on location, impacting the affordability of attending college for Native American students. Students attending college in urban or suburban areas may experience higher housing, food, and transportation costs, which can be challenging to afford, particularly for students from low-income families. In addition, the location of a community college can impact the availability of job opportunities for Native American students. Students attending college in an area with a strong job market may have an easier time finding employment after graduation, which can be important for students who need to support themselves financially. Betty Jo shared that she struggles daily with finances as a mother of two, working full-time, and going to school part-time.

> *I ain't going to lie, there have been times I had no idea if I would be able to afford my rent for the month. I am always trying to budget for daycare, school, food, rent, utilities, and everything else life throws at me.*

Therefore, the location of a community college can significantly impact Native American students. Socioeconomic barriers, historical oppression, and the culture of poverty attributed to past relocations have created challenges for Native American families, affecting their ability to prioritize education, lifelong skills, and overall well-being in their home environments (Keith et

al., 2016). By recognizing and addressing the unique needs of Native American students based on location, community colleges can create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment that promotes academic success and personal growth. This may include providing access to resources and support services, addressing basic needs insecurity, and supporting cultural identity and community engagement.

**Cultural Identity.** The location of a community college can impact the cultural identity of Native American students. Native American students may feel more connected to their cultural heritage if they attend a community college located in a region with a large Native American population or a community that actively celebrates and preserves Native American traditions. When Native American students attend a college in an area with a strong Native American community, they may have greater access to cultural events and activities that celebrate their cultural traditions. They may also have more opportunities to engage with other Native American students, which can help them form a stronger sense of community and build a network of support. Betty Jo shared that by attending a local community college, she was surrounded by other Native American students and felt she could share her experiences with her classmates because they were Native American.

> *My experience is unique. I guess because I went to [Community College] with some of my Native American friends. Plus, the president of [Community College] is Native American, so during Native American heritage month, there are all kinds of events on campus, making me feel even more connected to my "people" and the community. We have local Native American dancers, businesses such as food vendors, and small businesses who set up during the events. It does make a difference when you can look around and see people*

*who look and speak like you. I honestly feel at home when I am in class because my classmates look like me and sound like me.*

On the other hand, if Native American students attend a college located in an area with little to no Native American presence, they may feel isolated and disconnected from their cultural identity. This can lead to feelings of loneliness and a lack of support, negatively impacting their overall college experience. Students attending college in a predominantly non-Native American area may need help to connect with their cultural heritage and feel isolated from the community. Robert shared that the experience of attending a predominantly white institution is different from attending a local community college.

*I do feel that as a Native American student, that you sometimes it feels like you have a double standard that you have to show up and show out more than some of the other qualified candidates just because of that Native American stigmatism, as far as being uneducated, and you know, things of that sort compared to going to the local community college where you are part of the majority and not the minority.*

Debbie shared that she had attended [Community College] and was a minority and it was a horrible experience.

*You can't go through school and be miserable in the place where you are at. I mean, you can but it's like I said, you're going to be miserable. When I did, I didn't want that for myself. I dreaded going to class every day because I felt like I wasn't seen and I know without a doubt that I was not being heard.*

### *Theme #2: Opportunities for More Comprehensive Personalized Support Services for Community College Native American Students*

The second theme is a result of participant interview data which serves to answer research questions 1, 1a, 1b, 1c, and 1d. Personalized support services can include academic advising, counseling, career services, and other resources designed to help students succeed with their educational goals. Transculturation theory can help clarify how these services can be adapted to serve the needs and improve the experiences of Native American students. Besides financial barriers, Native American students may face cultural barriers to acclimating to higher education. Many Native American students may experience tension between their cultural identity and the academic environment. They may feel that their cultural heritage is not valued or understood, or they may need help to reconcile the values and beliefs of their community with those of the broader society. Native American community college students may also experience discrimination or prejudice based on race, culture, or ethnicity. This can manifest in overt acts of racism or more subtle ways, such as a lack of representation in the curriculum or a lack of support services tailored to the unique needs of Native American students.

Many Native American students come from communities that value staying close to home and maintaining connections to their families and tribes (Brayboy, 2006). Community colleges, which are often located near these communities, offer a way for Native American students to continue to be connected to their families and cultures while pursuing higher education (AIHEC, 2018). Many Native American students come from communities where higher education is not a priority, or few role models have gone to college. This can make it difficult for Native American students to envision themselves as college students and to see college as a viable option. Robert shared,

*I had no clue about college. No one in my family had been to college. Plus, my Mom was a single parent working two jobs and I knew I had to keep working if I went to college. I got a job in high school at a local fast-food restaurant to help my Mom with the bills and I knew she needed me. So, I faced reality that I would have to work and go to school at the same time because that was the only option for me and Mom. And the community college was a lot cheaper and I could choose the classes based on my work hours.*

**Support Specific to Native American Students.** Community colleges often have programs and resources specific to Native American students and can provide a sense of community and belonging (Lomawaima, 2013). Community colleges may have a more culturally sensitive approach to education than universities and may be more attuned to the needs of Native American students. According to a report by the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (2018), "many Native American students find community colleges to be a comfortable and welcoming their culture and community" (p. 2). For example, community colleges can prioritize hiring Native American staff and advisors who can provide culturally sensitive and relevant support services to Native American students. These staff and advisors can provide mentorship, counseling, and other resources tailored to the unique experiences and challenges faced by Native American students. Community colleges offer numerous successful outcomes for Native American students, including increased access to higher education, transfer to four-year institutions, job training, career preparation, culturally responsive education, and access to support services. As a result, community colleges provide a more affordable and accessible entry point to higher education, which can be especially advantageous for Native American students who may not have the same financial resources or academic preparation as other students. Helen shared,

*My parents already knew I would not be eligible for financial aid and knew if I went to a community college, they could afford to pay for my classes each semester and save some money instead of going straight to a university. I could do my first two years at a community college and then transfer. That's one of the reasons I chose a community college because I didn't want the cost of my education to be a burden to my parents who were already paying for my brother to attend a four-year university. I could get my basics out of the way and then take my core classes at the university. The community college was affordable plus the community college was a shorter commute for me too, so it was a win-win situation for me. Plus, I had already taken some classes at the community college while in high school so it was an easy transition for me.*

Moreover, community colleges often provide vital student support services such as tutoring, counseling, and career services that can aid Native American students in achieving academic and professional success. Additionally, some community colleges have programs and courses specifically designed for Native American students, offering culturally responsive education that honors Native American traditions and values while equipping them for success in the wider world. Earl shared,

*It would be nice if [Community College] had a Native American support group or something specifically for Native Americans. And it needs to be something where the advisor or person who gets to know the students personally and can provide advice to Native American students. That would definitely be a really good advantage that Native American students would be able to use. My brother was murdered two weeks ago and I just wish I had had somebody at school I could go talk to about the situation and how it had impacted my work over the last couple of weeks.*

In this way, community colleges can serve as a valuable pathway for Native American students to achieve their academic and career goals by providing personalized support services. By granting access to higher education, job training, and support services, community colleges can help Native American students surmount obstacles to success and realize their full potential. Clifton shared,

> *[Community College] could do more for the Indian students. Even though there are a lot of Indians that go to school there, there is lack of support for the Indian students. For example, I have not ever heard of a scholarship specifically for Indian students or even an organization that is specifically for Indian students. And, we need more Indian faculty. I have been here now for two years, I think I have had maybe 1, at the most 2 Indian teachers. I would like to see teachers who look like me. I know there are Indian male professionals in our county who are more than qualified to hold a job as an instructor.*

Native American students with access to support systems, such as peer networks, academic support services, and culturally sensitive counseling, are more likely to have positive personal and social experiences in community college. These support systems can provide a sense of belonging, validation, affirmation, and academic and emotional support. According to Henderson (2015) and Lomawaima (2013), community colleges offer a more convenient, cost-effective, personalized, and culturally sensitive option for Native American students. Robert shared,

> *I have experienced racism and microaggressions while attending [Community College]. I remember questioning the teacher's viewpoint on assimilation of Native Americans in the past. The teacher told me that we were only going to cover what has been documented in the textbook and that our feelings or opinions really don't matter. We have course*

*material to cover, and with time constraints, it's important to stay on topic and cover as much material as possible. At the moment, I was taken back to a time where I had been racially profiled and how I was treated just because I was not white, and I lost respect for the teacher. It would be nice if that would never occur again, but I am pretty sure it will continue to occur unless the school steps in and makes some necessary changes. The minority viewpoint is just as important as the majority viewpoint.*

**Class Size and Personalized Attention.** Native American students may choose to attend a community college due to the smaller class sizes and more personalized attention (Henderson, 2015; Lomawaima, 2013). Community colleges typically have smaller class sizes than four-year universities, which can benefit students who may feel overwhelmed in a larger classroom setting (Henderson, 2015). Additionally, community colleges often have a more personalized approach to education, with more opportunities for one-on-one interaction between students and instructors (Lomawaima, 2013). Robert shared, "Most of the time, community colleges have a smaller setting, smaller classroom, compared to a four-year university, which might have 100 students in a classroom, and you don't have that one-on-one interaction with your professor." Clifton shared,

*There is no way I would be interactive in a class if there were 100 students in there. Because you know it's just my personal feeling toward it. I'm not an outgoing person. So I mean having that one-on-one and being able to talk with the professor whenever you need them, he or she, at that point in time, may help me get a better insight for how I want to proceed through that class.*

Rhoda shared that her decision to attend a community college was based on the experiences of other students. “I heard so many great things about [Community College] and decided in May right before graduation to attend [Community College].”

**Sense of Belonging.** Native American students may feel socially isolated on campus, particularly if they are a minority in a predominantly non-Native American environment. They may struggle to find a sense of belonging or to connect with other students who share their cultural background. Henderson (2015) found that community colleges offer more flexibility in scheduling and course offerings, allowing Native American students to balance their education with their responsibilities to their families and communities. Robert shared, “But for me, it was more suited for my working schedule; it’s easier for me to go to a community college and work at the same time to get my degree.” A range of individual, cultural, and institutional factors shapes the personal and social experiences of Native American community college students.

**Academic Readiness and Support.** Native American community college students may also face academic challenges, such as a lack of preparation for college-level work, access to academic support services, or confidence in their academic abilities. Earl shared that participating in the Career and College Promise while in high school was one of the reasons he chose to attend a community college instead of a four-year university.

> *Well, during high school, I started the CCP program with [Community College]. Um, and I had graduated with some college credits. So my original plan while in high school, I had applied to [University Name] and got accepted. And right before I graduated, I had changed my mind. Um, mostly because I had thought that it would be I'm not gonna say easier, but you know, more convenient to go ahead and get my two-year degree versus going straight to a university. So that was my, you know, final decision. Also, when I*

*graduated high school, I had different plans than what I did now. Originally, I wanted to be a nurse and, you know, go into nursing school, but those are not my plans anymore. So you know, I'm going to [Community College], you know, getting a degree. And then, you know, apply to a university and figure out what to do with my life.*

Improving academic preparation for Native American community college students can involve a range of efforts designed to address the unique challenges and needs of these students (Fish et al., 2018). This can include strengthening K-12 education in Native American communities. This can involve providing resources and support for teachers, developing culturally relevant curricula, and building partnerships between K-12 schools and colleges to ensure students are well-prepared for college-level work. Another strategy is to create pre-college programs that provide academic support and college readiness resources to Native American community college students. These programs may include summer camps, mentorship programs, and workshops on developing academic skills, study habits, and career exploration. Earl shared,

*If I had not taken classes as a CCP student, I probably wouldn't have even attended college because I am a first-generation college student, and I don't really have anybody to talk to about school other than my advisor. Luckily I did well as a CCP student, and I figured I might as well finish it since I started, and now I am more determined than ever to get my degree and to transfer.*

Community colleges can provide tutoring and academic support services to Native American students to help them improve their skills and prepare for college-level work. These services can include one-on-one tutoring, study groups, and academic coaching. Bridge programs can provide additional academic support for Native American students who need extra help

preparing for college-level work. These programs may include courses designed to bridge the gap between high school and college-level work and academic support services such as tutoring and study skills training (Running Bear et al., 2021). Kathleen and Helen shared that they had formed a study group with the other Native American students in their class. Kathleen shared,

> *We just kinda clicked. I really had not even thought about the fact that we were all Native American. I think we did it without even thinking. The support you get from a group who share similar experiences is a great feeling because you can just you know be yourself and you don't have to explain or feel the need to explain certain situations or experiences.*

### *Theme #3: Reducing Socioeconomic Barriers for Community College Native American Students*

The third theme is a result of participant interview data which serves to answer research questions 1, 1a, 1b, 1c, and 1d. The experiences of Native American students in mainstream higher education institutions can vary depending on factors such as the student's background and the institution they attend. Historically, Native Americans have faced significant barriers to higher education, including systemic racism, poverty, and lack of educational opportunities. Socioeconomic barriers can include financial constraints, lack of access to resources, and social marginalization. As a result, Native American students are often underrepresented in higher education and may face unique challenges during their college experience. Structural barriers also play a role in the low enrollment and completion rates of Native American students in higher education. Native American students may face challenges in accessing quality K-12 education, making it difficult to meet the academic requirements for college admission. Native American students may encounter transportation, housing, and other logistical challenges that

can make it difficult to attend college (NCES, 2018). Transculturation theory can help clarify how partnerships and collaborations among community colleges, Native American communities, and other organizations can address these barriers.

**Fostering Inclusiveness.** Native American students often face unique challenges in higher education, including financial barriers, cultural isolation, and discrimination. One way mainstream higher education institutions can support Native American students is by identifying targeted coping strategies. They can also foster an inclusive and welcoming environment by raising awareness of Native American students as a distinct cultural group, promoting student-faculty/staff interactions, and establishing mentoring programs. Additionally, they can strengthen ties between the institution and tribal communities by increasing community engagement (Keith et al., 2016). For example, higher education institutions could prioritize recruiting and retaining Native American students. This includes offering targeted recruitment efforts to Native American communities and providing financial support to make college more accessible for Native American students. Financial support could take many forms, including scholarships, grants, and work-study programs that could help students cover the costs of tuition, textbooks, and living expenses. Higher education could also provide resources and support for Native American students, such as counseling services and academic advising. Robert shared,

> *I am involved in a club, Men of Honor, and basically what it does is it focuses on the young men at [Community College], getting them together, discuss things, opportunities, and look at the future outlook of exactly what will happen after I finish with my associate's degree and then transfer. The club is great because, as men, it is looked down upon to share what you are struggling with in life, and with the club, I feel like I am not*

*alone, and I can get advice and encouragement from others who are going through the same stuff.*

In addition, mainstream higher education institutions could include Native American perspectives in the curriculum. Too often, higher education institutions neglect to acknowledge the contributions of Native American cultures and societies, instead focusing solely on Western viewpoints. Integrating Native American perspectives into the curriculum would not only enrich the educational experience for Native American students but also help educate all students about the richness and diversity of Native American cultures.

Higher education institutions could create spaces that support Native American students, such as Native American cultural centers or student organizations. These spaces allow Native American students to connect with their culture, language, and traditions and other students with similar experiences. Moreover, higher education institutions could address the systemic barriers that prevent Native American students from accessing and thriving in higher education. This includes addressing institutional racism, discrimination, and historical trauma. Native American students face the legacy of colonization and genocide in the United States, and institutions must acknowledge this history and work to create an environment that promotes healing and equity.

Additionally, higher education institutions must work to build partnerships with tribal communities, including consulting with Native American leaders and communities to develop policies sensitive to their needs and values. Improving the successful outcomes of Native American students requires a multifaceted approach that considers the unique challenges faced by Native American students. By prioritizing the recruitment and retention of Native American students, including Native American perspectives in the curriculum, creating spaces that support Native American students, and addressing systemic barriers, higher education institutions can

create a more welcoming and inclusive environment that promotes the success of Native American students.

Debbie had a unique experience because she started at a four-year university and then transferred to a community college.

> *I know everyone's experience with [Four-Year University] is totally different. Some people love it. Some people hate it. It's a personality thing, I think. I can remember being in high school and the way it was marketed to us. The [Four-Year University] was made by Lumbees for Lumbees. I felt like there was no lookout for a Lumbee when it comes to support or resources. It was I could reach out to a resource, and it would take them weeks to get back to me. And that is just one example, I have more. So, I decided to attend [Community College] because it was smaller, and any time I have a question it is okay, we have a problem; we got to fix it now before I can move on to my next problem. [Community College] feels homey, and they value me as a student.*

Research has indicated that Native American community college students share more positive experiences regarding building rapport with faculty and staff than Native American students who choose to attend a four-year university (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016, p. 15)

### *Theme #4: Prioritization of Partnerships Between Community Colleges and Universities for Native American Students*

The fourth theme is a result of participant interview data which serves to answer research questions 1, 1a, 1b, 1c, and 1d. Community colleges have an opportunity to prioritize partnerships with colleges and universities by developing relationships with tribal communities, increasing visibility and access to resources, fostering relationships with Native American

student organizations, exploring joint programs and transfer agreements, offering Native language and culture courses, and providing professional development. Community colleges that seek to develop relationships with tribal communities can work towards collecting input from tribal leaders and elders to understand their needs and priorities.

**Intentional Partnerships.** Increasing visibility and access to resources for Native American students, such as financial aid, academic counseling, and culturally relevant programming, are opportunities for community colleges to develop intentional partnerships. Community colleges can foster relationships with Native American student organizations and involve them in partnership discussions to ensure their perspectives and needs are heard and addressed. Cheryl shared,

> *It would have been nice to have financial aid workshop[s] for incoming students because I had no idea of where to begin with financial aid. I didn't know about a FAFSA or a residency form. I had to go to the school multiple times to get everything turned in.*

Institutions should take proactive steps to offer informative and comprehensive processes to Native American families to ensure they are not taken aback by the costs of a full academic year at college (Tachine & Cabrera, 2021). Helen shared,

> *I would be interested in a Native American student organization. It would be a big help if there was a group for "us" specifically where we could meet and share our experiences and learn from each other on how to navigate college.*

**Collaboration and Joint Programs.** Community colleges have the potential to explore joint programs and transfer agreements with universities that allow students to transfer from a community college to a four-year institution seamlessly. These agreements could help community college students save time and money while pursuing higher education.

Collaboration on research projects between community colleges and universities could provide alignment with the academic programs and interests of students and build institutional capacity contributing to the development of new knowledge in a particular field. Robert shared,

> *I wish [Community College] would work with area universities to help get me prepared for those classes and professors. Like I would like to do some on-campus visits and get to talk with some of the students in my intended major to make sure I am on the right track. It's always great to hear from someone who is doing what you want to do, and you can ask questions and really figure out, Okay, is that what I want to do?*

Resource exchanges with partner institutions could be a chance to share faculty expertise, instructional materials, and technology between community colleges and partner institutions, reducing costs and increasing efficiency.

Many community colleges have agreements with four-year colleges and universities that allow students to transfer credits and complete their bachelor's degrees, providing a cost-effective way for Native American students to earn a four-year degree. For example, the North Carolina Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA) is a statewide agreement that provides a smooth and seamless transfer process for students who wish to transfer from a community college to a four-year institution in North Carolina. The purpose of the CAA is to ensure that students who complete an associate degree at a North Carolina community college can transfer to a participating four-year institution in the state with junior standing and without loss of credit, meaning students can complete their first two years of college at a community college and then transfer to a four-year institution to complete their bachelor's degree. The function of the CAA is to establish uniform transfer requirements for community colleges and four-year institutions in North Carolina. The agreement specifies the courses that will transfer between institutions and

outlines the general education requirements for transfer students. The CAA benefits students by providing a clear and consistent transfer process that reduces the time and cost of earning a bachelor's degree. It also benefits community colleges and four-year institutions by facilitating collaboration and promoting student success (Comprehensive Articulation Agreement, 2015). Robert shared his interest in transferring to a four-year university once he graduates with his associate degree.

> *I have already researched the school I want to attend and spoken with an admissions advisor. All of my credits will transfer, and I will be a junior, which is a weight off my shoulders because I am halfway done with the degree, and I can hopefully get a job in my chosen field.*

Eliminating the burden of making academic plans to transfer, the CAA and partnerships which are a part of the agreement, add value to the experiences of Native American community college students. Overall, the North Carolina Comprehensive Articulation Agreement is an important tool for improving access to higher education, promoting student success, and facilitating collaboration between community colleges and four-year institutions in North Carolina.

Partnerships within community colleges could also bridge the connection between Native American students and their culture. Offering courses in Native languages and cultures to provide a welcoming and inclusive environment for Native American students is another example of potential partnerships that could be created to strengthen students' experiences. Helen shared,

> *It would be cool if I could take a class on Native American history while I attend [Community College]. The history I do know is about the Lumbee Tribe and some*

*general Native American history knowledge, but I would like to take an official class about my heritage. And it would be even better if the professor was Native American and could actually relate to me since I am Native too.*

**Faculty and Staff Support / Development.** Through identifying thoughtful internal partnerships, community colleges can provide professional development opportunities for faculty and staff to better understand the experiences and needs of Native American students and to develop culturally responsive teaching practices. The active support provided by faculty and staff plays a pivotal role in fostering the retention of Native American students in higher education, as highlighted by Nirschl-Coats (2013). Cora shared her disappointment regarding a specific situation with an instructor who was not familiar with the geographical area of the college and had limited knowledge of Native Americans, especially Lumbees.

*I wore a shirt to class one day, and my instructor called me out in front of my peers to explain my shirt. I was so embarrassed and intimidated. The instructor kept on and on about my shirt and what it meant, and why was it important. I wish the instructor would have asked me one on one or not ask me at all. How can you teach at a school that is a county with a large population of Native American students and have no idea of the "language" spoken by the community?*

Robert shared,

*Many times, the instructors have no basic understanding and cannot relate to what exactly what a Lumbee or person of color goes through on a daily basis. I hate having to explain in detail how I am feeling to a person who has no idea what it is like to be a person of color. Like, what you go through is not going to be the same as what I go*

*through. I want to say, Have you ever been stereotyped or singled out because of the color of your skin or your appearance, if not then you have no clue.*

Non-Native American faculty and staff should actively engage in a deliberate endeavor to thoroughly explore Native American history and proactively acquaint themselves with its implications for their Native American students (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Nirschl-Coats, 2013). Native American students have emphasized the significance of compassionate and supportive faculty and staff members in making a difference in their college education (Reyhner, 2018). Community colleges have the opportunity to provide specialized training in cultural identity, curate essential readings for faculty and staff professional growth, and establish reading circles that enable faculty and staff to engage in meaningful discussions and innovative brainstorming sessions. These initiatives collectively could contribute to the enhancement of cultural diversity awareness within the higher education landscape.

**Program Pathways.** Community colleges often offer career and technical education programs that can lead to well-paying jobs in fields such as nursing, computer science, and skilled trades. These programs serve to provide a pathway to economic mobility for Native American students. In this study, student participants stated that they would meet with an assigned advisor based on their major once each semester to plan and register for the current and upcoming semesters. The assigned advisor would provide students with a baccalaureate degree plan based upon the students' intention to transfer to a four-year institution; in addition, a community college student educational plan would be implemented to ensure students complete the required courses before transfer. The student could request a degree audit to review progress in the college transfer pathway and was allowed to connect with a four-year university transfer program representative. Earl shared,

*Well, I had a Native American faculty member that I befriended my first semester, and I would go to her, and we would talk about my educational goals and experiences, and she would suggest the classes I needed to take. If it had not been for her, I would have had no clue. I went to my assigned advisor, and they kinda just looked at the requirements and said, take this and that, and never really got to know me as a person. So that's why I keep going back to that one instructor who really listened and had experienced some of the same situations attending a school as a minority and not really having anyone to turn to for questions.*

Earl shared that having a Native American instructor was motivation and one of the reasons he was so "driven" to finish. "I'm definitely driven. I see [Instructor's Name] who is Native American, and I say to myself I can do it too. If she can do it, I can do it."

One participant decided to attend a community college versus a four-year university due to a previous community college experience as a College and Career Promise student. Earl wanted to finish the required courses to obtain an associate in science and then transfer to a four-year university. Earl expressed having a great experience with the community college and a desire to obtain a credential as a "stepping stone" in his pursuit of employment.

*I knew we couldn't afford for me to go to a university. The tribe had paid for my classes as a CCP student, and I was about halfway finished with my two-year degree when I graduated high school. So, I decided to just go ahead and keep going and finish at the community college and get my degree. And for real, that would be enough because nobody in my family has a college degree. I will be the first of 12 kids who went to college.*

**Partnerships and Cultural Capital.** Overall, prioritizing partnerships with colleges and universities requires a commitment to understanding the unique needs and perspectives of Native American students and a willingness to collaborate with tribal communities, student organizations, and other institutions to provide culturally responsive support and programming. Transculturation theory can help clarify how partnerships between community colleges and universities can prioritize the needs of Native American students. One way transculturation theory can relate to the prioritization of partnerships between community colleges and universities for Native American students is through the concept of cultural capital. Cultural capital refers to the knowledge, skills, and cultural background individuals bring to their educational experiences. Native American students often bring unique cultural knowledge and experiences to their education, which can be leveraged through partnerships between community colleges and universities. By prioritizing partnerships between community colleges and universities, Native American students can benefit from the exchange of cultural ideas and practices between the two institutions. Community colleges can provide a supportive, culturally sensitive environment for Native American students, while universities can offer more advanced coursework and resources. Through these partnerships, Native American students can develop a strong sense of cultural identity and gain valuable academic and career skills. By creating educational programs and resources that are more inclusive and responsive to the needs of Native American communities, community colleges can help Native American students overcome barriers and provide greater access to education.

Table 3 provides insight into the research questions for this article and their direct connection to the questions listed on the interview protocol (Appendix C) designed to collect data from Native American community college students enrolled in a transfer program.

**Table 3**

*Crosswalk of Student Interview Questions, Themes, and Research Question #1*

| Student Interview Questions | RQ 1: What contributes to the student's successful outcomes? | RQ 1a: How do personal and social experiences shape Native American community college students' persistence? | RQ 1b: What academic strategies do Native American community college students employ to persist? | RQ 1c: What do community college students view as the most supportive resources in their enrollment and transfer process? | RQ 1d: How is the transfer process from a community college to a four-year university for Native American students different from other demographics? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Q1 | X | X | X | X | X |
| Q2 | X | X | X | X | X |
| Q3 | | X | X | X | |
| Q4 | X | X | X | X | X |
| Q5 | X | X | X | X | X |
| Q6 | X | X | X | X | X |
| Q7 | X | | | | |
| Q8 | | X | X | X | |
| Q9 | | X | X | X | |
| Q10 | | X | X | X | |
| Q11 | X | | | | |
| Q12 | | X | | | |
| Q13 | X | X | X | X | |
| T1: Accessibility | X | X | X | X | X |
| T2: Support Services | X | X | X | X | X |

**Table 3** (continued).

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| T3: Mainstream Higher Education | X | X | X | X | X |
| T4: Partnerships | | | | | |

*Note*. "RQ" means Research Question

Note. "T" means Theme

## Implications for Practice – Student Participants

This section includes the implications for practice. The implications of this exploratory case study highlight the need for cultural sensitivity development, academic support services, financial aid, career services, and community involvement. This study sought to furnish practitioners with efficacious recommendations that can be implemented in higher education institutions, intending to enhance the academic outcomes of Native American students enrolled in college transfer programs based on the unique experiences of Native American students.

### *Implication for Practice #1: Culturally Sensitive Professional Development for College Faculty and Staff*

Community colleges have a unique opportunity to strive to create a safe and welcoming atmosphere for Native American students. Cultural sensitivity includes educating faculty, staff, and other students about the unique needs of Native American students, as well as respecting cultural values and traditions. Cultural sensitivity refers to understanding and appreciating different cultures' beliefs, values, and customs. It requires individuals to be aware of their own cultural biases and to approach interactions with people from different cultural backgrounds with an open mind and respect. For the Native American students who participated in this study, cultural sensitivity from their peers and educators was essential to their success in college.

A sense of belonging and connection to cultural identity significantly predicts persistence and academic success among Native American students in postsecondary institutions (O'Meara et al., 2017). In a survey of 8,000+ students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds across 41 higher education institutions in the United States, results showed that Native American students who reported a stronger sense of belonging and connection to their cultural identity were more likely to persist in their academic programs and achieve their goals. Higher education institutions

should prioritize promoting cultural sensitivity and providing a supportive environment for Native American students, which can help Native American students feel a sense of belonging on campus and encourage them to maintain their cultural identity. The data collected in this study reveals that cultural sensitivity is a concern, and a sense of belonging can lead to increased engagement in academics and other aspects of campus life, improving their academic outcomes. Robert shared,

> *A predominantly White institution, or something like that, they don't have no basic understanding and cannot relate to exactly what a person of color goes through. It's not okay to portray Thanksgiving as a "good" time between the pilgrims and Indians. The real story is not told or portrayed in education. The pilgrims' ultimate goal was to assimilate Indians and force colonization. That was not a good time for Indians; I don't care what the history books tell us, I have done my own research and know that is not the case at all.*

Clifton added, "Yeah, and why are we still acknowledging Christopher Columbus when the governor has proclaimed the day as Indigenous People's Day? Like how are Indians suppose to be okay with that with everything that has happened over the years."

Cultural sensitivity helps build trust and rapport between Native American students and their instructors and peers. When Native American students feel that their culture and perspectives are respected and valued, they are more likely to engage in class, seek support services, and participate in extracurricular activities. Furthermore, cultural sensitivity can reduce the incidence of discrimination and microaggressions against Native American students on campus. Community colleges can create a safe and welcoming environment for all students by fostering a culture of respect and inclusivity. In addition, cultural sensitivity professional

development can help non-Native academic institutions understand and appreciate the cultural values and practices of Native American students.

### *Implication for Practice #2: Advancement of Academic Support Structures for Native American Students*

The community college participating sites from this study have the opportunity to provide academic resources such as tutoring and advising to help Native American students succeed. Academic support may include providing access to special programs, courses, and scholarships tailored to the needs of Native American students. Native American students' primary concern when seeking to access higher education, is apprehension over inadequate academic preparation for college. Institutions can hire dedicated staff members with experience and knowledge of Native American culture and history to provide academic support, mentorship, and guidance to Native American students (Mosholder & Goslin, 2013). Betty Jo shared,

> *To me [Community College] has failed me, I don't know any resources. Every time I call the school, no one answers, teachers and advisors barely email me back. I was struggling with my biology class, and I reached out to several advisors to seek help. No one ever contacted me back. Luckily, I passed my class with a B. With only the help of myself. I definitely needed some sort of tutor at one point in the semester. I was able to bring my grade up from a D to a B. I wish I had access to tutoring or something; anything would have been better than what I got.*

**Targeted Support Services.** One effective strategy to assist Native American students facing unique challenges in higher education, such as being the first in their family to attend college or living far from home, is to provide targeted support services (Turner et al., 2022). To address these challenges, schools can offer support services such as tutoring, academic advising,

and mentorship programs, which can help students feel more connected to the campus community and succeed academically (American Indian College Fund, 2019). Academic support services can help Native American students overcome academic challenges and succeed in higher education. By providing these services in a culturally responsive way, academic institutions can promote academic achievement while respecting and honoring Native American cultures and traditions. Betty Jo shared, "I have used the tutoring service on campus for a couple of my classes, especially my math class. I don't know if I could have passed the class if I hadn't gotten tutoring."

Institutions have the chance to adopt initiatives aimed at assisting Native American students in navigating instances of hostility on campus and facilitating a smoother transition from high school to higher education (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Nirschl-Coats, 2013). It is crucial for postsecondary institutions to consider the social, academic, cultural, and psychological needs of Native American students (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Nirschl-Coats, 2013) to create an inclusive and supportive environment for their success.

### *Implication for Practice #3: Equitable Access to Financial Aid Resources for Students from Diverse Socio-Economic Backgrounds*

Efforts towards outreach and education to students and families from diverse socio-economic backgrounds about the availability of financial aid resources and how to apply for them is an area to improve within community colleges. For the three community colleges that participated in this study, it was evident that ensuring increased access to financial aid opportunities, such as grants, scholarships, loans, and tuition waivers, made higher education more accessible and affordable for Native American students. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2020), compared to all other races or ethnic populations, Native American populations

have the highest poverty rates (24.1%), which is almost twice the national rate (12.8%). The identification of education as a significant factor in mitigating poverty levels represents a prominent theme within academic discourse (Keith et al., 2016). Kathleen shared,

> *And sometimes it's even hard to get your financial aid figured out when you don't have that one-on-one person to talk to because you don't know where your monies going. Yeah, I got emails, but we don't really have anybody like come in and talk to us about it.*

Clifton shared, "At first I didn't really care if I transferred or not, but now that I am in my last semester and I have been accepted into [University] and I am actually kinda surprised to be honest. I really didn't think about it until I checked my mail and had a letter from [University]."

Tachine and Cabrera (2021) indicated through their research, "a better understanding of how college cost is directly affecting educational attainment is necessary if we are to address the long-standing underrepresentation of Native students pursuing and attaining college degrees" (p. 10). Native American students desire more access to supportive structures for financial aid. Institutions can simplify the financial aid application process by using a streamlined and user-friendly application process, providing clear instructions, and offering assistance to students and families who may need it. Earl shared,

> *I didn't get any assistance. I had to finally go to the school and sit down with a financial aid person for them to go over how to apply for financial aid and talk about how to apply for scholarships. I had no clue what to do because I was the first in my family to go to college. And I felt so dumb having to ask people questions, and some of the people just looked at me when I would ask a question, like, you should know how to do this and that.*

By regularly communicating with Native American students about financial aid opportunities, offering financial literacy and budgeting workshops, and providing emergency

funds to students who may face unexpected financial challenges, community colleges can make options for more continuous support available. Cora shared,

> *My truck broke down, and I didn't have a way to go back and forth to school. And nobody would take me because it is a 45-minute drive. So, I called and talked with a lady because I was going to drop out, but she told me I could apply for emergency funds. So I applied and did all the paperwork, and sure as day, they paid for my repairs to my truck, and I didn't have to drop out. It was a blessing, too, because I didn't know what to do.*

By implementing strategies like the one mentioned by Cora, the community college she attended ensured that a student from a diverse socio-economic background had equitable access to financial aid resources, which helped her overcome financial barriers and achieve her academic goals.

***Implication for Practice #4: Culturally Sensitive Career Mentoring and Guidance for Native American Student***

Participants in this study experienced a need for more guidance on accessing supportive career placement services. By considering strategies to tailor career counseling services to the needs and goals of Native American students, community colleges can adopt a more culturally sensitive approach to career mentoring. Career mentoring services could include skills assessments, interest inventories, and career values and guidance on career exploration, job search strategies, and networking. Debbie expressed,

> *Yes, there are job fairs, but it's left up to the person to create a resume, apply for the job, and then hope and pray you get an interview or at least know someone who works there who can get you in the door. [Community College], in my opinion, could do more to help*

*students at least get an interview somewhere where I might have a chance to get employed.*

As a result of experiences like Debbie's, community colleges may consider ways to provide a higher level of career placement support, including resume development, job searching, and navigating the interview process, with additional support to guide Native American students toward successful employment outcomes after graduation. Native American students' success in completing their degrees and finding employment heavily relies on community colleges being available to them (Coulson-Johnston et al., 2022).

**Internships and Job Opportunities.** Providing internship and job opportunities specifically designed for Native American students, such as partnerships with tribal organizations or Native American-owned businesses, is an example of meeting the career mentoring and guidance needs of Native American students. Robert shared,

*We live in Indian Country, so you would think the business owners would want to help out their "own" people. It would be nice if [Community College] could set up an internship or apprenticeship with the [Indian Tribe] so Indian students could get some real-world experience before embarking on finding a full-time job placement.*

Through implementing culturally relevant career access strategies, it is possible for community colleges to provide guided support structures that can help Native American students effectively navigate career services and succeed in their chosen careers. Offering culturally responsive career services, academic institutions can help Native American students bridge the gap between their cultural backgrounds and the mainstream job market.

### *Implication for Practice #5: Exploring Partnerships with Local Native American Communities*

Findings from this study indicated that partnership opportunities between the three community colleges and four-year universities could be improved, specifically for Native American students. For example, the BraveStep Partnership Program, designed to grant opportunities for transfer access, could benefit from increased awareness and participation. It is important for postsecondary institutions to consider the idea of partnership development with local Native American communities to generate collaboration and shared success opportunities. Institutions have the opportunity to establish communication with local Native American communities to build relationships and understand their needs and priorities. Community involvement may include internships, job shadowing experiences, and working with community members to identify and address local needs. Involving tribal leaders on college campuses can foster a stronger sense of comfort, connection, and belonging for Native American students, ultimately strengthening their bonds (Coulson-Johnston et al., 2022). Betty Jo shared,

> *Every year there are several pow wows, and you would think [Community College] would work with the tribe to encourage student participation during school hours or even after hours with our families; especially since the majority of the students are Native and from the community. I would have loved to go to a pow-wow or cultural center to learn more about my heritage and talk with elders on how to improve the community for my kids. There is always more that can be done to help out the Indian students.*

Collaboration with local Native American communities to plan and develop joint initiatives, such as cultural events, research projects, or service-learning opportunities, like that

mentioned by Betty Jo, provides a connection for Native American students and builds their sense of belonging.

The identification of common goals and areas of interest with local Native American communities, such as increasing access to education, supporting economic development, or promoting cultural preservation is something for community colleges to consider. Debbie shared,

> *You would think that the school would work with the community members and tribal areas to make sure the Indian students were getting as much as possible from the school to be better off when they do graduate and can give back to the community.*

**Building Mutual Trust and Respect.** Community colleges can consider Debbie's experience as an opportunity to build trust and respect by engaging in respectful dialogue, listening to and valuing the perspectives of Native American communities, and recognizing their sovereignty and self-determination. By exploring partnerships with local Native American communities, higher education institutions can create meaningful connections and contribute to positive change in their communities while providing valuable learning opportunities for their students, faculty, and staff. The exploration of partnerships can help create a more inclusive and supportive academic environment for Native American students while fostering a deeper appreciation of Native American cultures and traditions among non-Native students, faculty, and staff. Umar shared,

> *We have access to a local tribal government with council members who meet monthly with the public, which would be a great way to expose our students to the local tribal communities as well as exposing the students to the business side of the tribal business. And this would be a great way to build a relationship with the local tribe members and help build a partnership with the community.*

## Recommendations for Future Research

This section includes the recommendations for future research that emerged from this study. These recommendations focus on further understanding the Native American student perspective in higher education and improving transfer outcomes for community colleges and universities. The current and future program planning in higher education institutions should prioritize the development of strategies aimed at aiding Native American students in recognizing their strengths and attaining successful academic experiences. Additionally, research efforts should be directed toward advancing said strategies. This study focused on three community colleges and was a qualitative exploratory case study limited to one region in North Carolina.

### *Recommendations for Future Research #1*

Findings from this study revealed that Native American students had limited access to technology to access distance learning opportunities. Earl shared,

> *The most important resource for me is the internet; however, due to where I stay, I don't have access to high-speed internet, so I have to plan to visit the college to get assignments completed by the deadline. Many times, I have to plan my days in advance because of my work schedule and figure out when I can go to campus and hope the campus is open so I can get my work done. Or sometimes I will go to Starbucks or McDonald's to get my work done, especially on the weekends.*

Clifton shared, "Yeah, I would definitely say internet availability is a major downfall for a lot of the colleges around here, community colleges." Robert shared that he did not have broadband access, so he would make other arrangements.

> *Probably one of the most important resources for me at this point in time is the ability to go to the library and access the internet and use computers to get projects and stuff done.*

*And unlimited resources in the library, whether it be actual books, internet, or the ability to be able to go online and look at resources pertaining to the actual coursework that I am doing.*

Considering this finding, a future study could identify the use of technology and online resources available to enhance the success of Native American students in higher education at the community college or the four-year university.

***Recommendations for Future Research #2***

This study revealed that Native American students experience challenges navigating from one level of education to the next. Robert shared,

*Man, I had no idea what to do. Yeah, I talked with my high school counselor about colleges, but I didn't know what I wanted to do. I barely graduated high school, was working fast food, but knew I couldn't do that for the rest of my life. So, I decided to go to college. I went to [Community College] and was told to do all these different things, and I had no clue about what they were talking about, so I waited and waited and finally went back a year later. Luckily, the lady I met with helped me with everything I had to do. Like, she help me step by step because nobody in my family had went to college."*

Earl shared,

*I completed my application for [University] however, at the time, I did not have the money to pay for the application fee, so I reached out directly to the university and spoke with someone in admissions and explained my situation, and she informed me of a possible tuition waiver. I was super excited and gladly accepted, and within a couple of days, I was notified that my application had been submitted successfully.*

Native American students often experience challenges during the registration and advising process, which can be critical to successfully enrolling and accessing tools to be successful in the community college. Future studies could investigate the challenges Native American students face when transitioning from high school to college. Future studies may center on qualitative methodology framed to capture the student's voice from the secondary school setting before entering college.

***Recommendations for Future Research #3***

The findings in this study revealed that financial resources for attending community college were limited for the Native American student participants. Betty Jo noted,

> *I couldn't get no help. I'm a single mother of two, and I work two different jobs just to make ends meet, so I couldn't get financial aid. That's the reason I am still in college because I pay out of pocket, so I have to make sure I can pay for my tuition and books each semester before I register. I actually always register like the week before classes because I never know if I will have the money or not for classes after working and taking care of my two kids. But I know I am sacrificing now so I can get a better job after college.*

Earl shared,

> *Man, I had no idea where to even begin with college. I knew from the jump that I wasn't going to a university. That was definitely out of the picture. I will never forget going to [Community College], and the lady asked me about a FAFSA, and I was like, I have no idea what you are talking about. I had never heard of it and sure did not know how to complete it.*

Future research could narrow to focus on the community college administrator's perspective regarding college access and affordability for underserved Native American students.

***Recommendations for Future Research #4***

This study revealed the importance of college and university programs designed to support Native American students. Clifton noted,

> *I am a participant in a program for Indians in STEM and in the AISES club on campus. It's a good program and has helped me to meet other Indians at [Community College]. But, sometimes, it feels more like a burden than an opportunity because you have so much pressure to do good in school and not let anyone down. But it does keep me on my toes, plus I can get help when I need to from a tutor or a coach. Whenever I get behind, or I miss class, I get a call or an email from the success coach to check in with me and see what's going on. It's like a Big Brother relationship from back in the day.*

Clifton's experience indicates an opportunity for future research to focus on supplemental programs like the ones mentioned by participants to identify what works well to support the success of Native American students while enrolled in college. In this study, several student participants expressed their appreciation of a Native American history class offered at the community college level. Robert shared,

> *I wish we did have a Native American history class at school. I would definitely sign up for that class. I registered one time for an African American history class, but it was canceled because there was not enough students signed up for it. So, I ended up taking American History, which honestly was just a more in-depth history class that I had already had in high school. I wanted to learn about "my people" or at least people of*

*color. We are still here…It's beyond time for everyone to recognize that Indians still exist and we are making strides in this world.*

***Recommendations for Future Research #5***

Interviews with student participants revealed that students desire to see community college educators who look like them, leading and teaching in the classroom. In educational settings, faculty members who are Native American or belong to other minority groups are highly beneficial for providing support, guidance, and mentorship to students who identify as minorities (Keith et al., 2016). Cheryl noted,

*I love to see minorities have a leadership position. … it gives me a little bit of courage to say that I'm not the only one who is wanting to, you know, go further. It means more to me to have Indian teachers than White ones because I can see myself in them. I know if they can do it, I can do it too.*

Similarly, Cora shared,

*In all honesty, it's just nice to be able to sit down and talk with another female Indian in higher education. It really does make a difference when you have teachers, instructors, professors who look like you and talk like you. You feel like you actually do belong, and you can do this. At my school, I am the minority, and I have not had an Indian teacher since I have been in college. Luckily enough, though, my Mom knew a lady who worked at the school, and any time I have a question, I go to her, and she tries to help me out. She is Indian, so I feel like I can talk to her, and she will understand what I am saying or going through.*

A future research study could use this insight to investigate how universities and colleges can increase the recruitment and retention of Native American faculty and staff to be more

representative of the diverse student population, especially in regions with a concentrated population of Native American adults.

**Conclusion—Student Participants**

Native American students face significant barriers to higher education, including financial, cultural, and structural obstacles. Despite these challenges, Native American students have made significant progress in recent years in enrolling and completing college degrees. The six-year graduation rate for Native American students has increased from 37% in 2006 to 45% in 2016 (NCES, 2018). Several efforts are underway to support Native American students in higher education and will help increase this underserved population's access to and success in higher education. These efforts include initiatives to improve access to quality K-12 education, increase funding for financial aid and other assistance, and provide support services such as tutoring and mentorship to help Native American students succeed in college.

Current enrollment and graduation statistics show that Native American students are not effectively served by mainstream institutions or non-Native colleges and universities (NNCUs) (Brayboy et al., 2012). It is essential to realize that Native Americans' daily lives and historical experiences are different and unique to each tribe (Brayboy et al., 2012). Obtaining a community college education is vital for its affordability, wide range of academic and career training options, strong partnerships with local businesses, and flexible scheduling options. It is important to acknowledge the challenges that Native American students face in higher education and to support and fund initiatives that provide them with the resources and support they need to succeed.

However, Native American community college transfer students represent a resilient and determined group striving to pursue their educational goals. These students face unique

challenges and barriers as they navigate their academic journeys, including financial constraints, cultural adjustments, and limited access to resources and support services. Despite these obstacles, Native American transfer students exhibit remarkable resilience and determination, seeking opportunities to continue their education at four-year institutions. They often possess a strong sense of cultural identity and a desire to make a positive impact on their communities. Through their experiences, Native American community college transfer students contribute to the rich diversity of the higher education landscape while paving the way for future generations of Indigenous scholars. Therefore, a holistic approach that recognizes the unique cultural and educational needs of Native American students is necessary to improve their persistence and success in higher education. Students of Native American descent, enrolled in college throughout the United States, bring a valuable abundance of cultural experiences, values, and strengths that enrich the learning environment (Keith et al., 2016).

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## Article Two – Faculty and Staff Perspectives on Native Americans in Transfer Programs

A qualitative exploratory case study approach with a single embedded design to understand community college faculty and staff perspectives working with Native American students enrolled in transfer programs guided the research design for this article. This study explored transfer programs and the affiliated faculty and staff who work at specific institutions. The case study methodology supported data collection and analysis. Article two provides the faculty and staff perspectives on community college transfer programs and the Native American students served by those programs. Article two answers research questions 2, 2a, 2b, and 2c. Research questions based on the perspectives of faculty and staff (those delivering services in a community college transfer program) include:

**Research Question 2:** What contributes to the successful outcomes of the students who participate in a community college transfer partnership program?

**Research Question 2a:** How do transfer partners define academic success?

**Research Question 2b:** What support services do community college faculty and staff implement to increase Native American students' participation and persistence?

**Research Question 2c:** How is the transfer process from a community college to a four-year university for Native American students different from other demographics?

### Theoretical Framework

Transculturation theory is relevant to understanding the dynamics of the faculty and staff at higher education institutions, particularly in terms of how cultural exchange and interaction can shape their identities, values, and practices. Transculturation theory, first proposed by Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortiz in the 1940s, posits that culture is constantly in flux due to the exchange of ideas and practices between different groups (Ortiz, 1947). This process is

particularly relevant in higher education, where faculty and staff come from various cultural backgrounds and interact daily with students from diverse cultural backgrounds (Huffman, 2011). At its core, transculturation theory concerns how cultures interact and transform each other in unequal power relations, which can involve the exchange of cultural practices, beliefs, and values between dominant and subordinate groups, leading to the emergence of new hybrid cultural forms.

In higher education, transculturation theory can demonstrate how faculty and staff from different cultural backgrounds interact in academic and administrative settings (Huffman, 2011). Faculty and staff can be led to new approaches to teaching, research, and service through the exchange of ideas, perspectives, and knowledge. Moreover, transculturation theory can highlight the challenges and opportunities that arise from such exchanges, particularly in contexts of cultural differences and inequalities. For example, faculty and staff from historically marginalized communities may face barriers to full participation in academic and administrative processes, limiting their ability to contribute fully to the institution's mission and goals.

At the same time; however, transculturation theory can help to identify strategies for promoting more equitable and inclusive interactions among faculty and staff from diverse cultural backgrounds (Huffman, 2011). This can involve the recognition and celebration of cultural differences, as well as the development of policies and practices that support cultural exchange and understanding. According to Perez (2016), transculturation can lead to positive and negative outcomes. On the positive side, it can promote cultural exchange and understanding, leading to a more inclusive and diverse campus community. However, it can also lead to conflicts and misunderstandings, especially if the process is not managed effectively. Overall, transculturation theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the complex dynamics

of cultural exchange and interaction within higher education institutions and for promoting more equitable and inclusive practices among faculty and staff (Huffman, 2011).

One of the critical implications of transculturation theory for higher education is the importance of understanding and valuing cultural differences. Faculty and staff who are aware of the various cultural backgrounds of their students are better equipped to create a positive learning environment and support student success (Dávila, 2018). In addition, faculty and staff in higher education can support the transculturation process by providing cultural competency training for themselves and their colleagues (Sánchez & Galvez, 2018). Cultural competency training can help to increase awareness and understanding of different cultural practices and perspectives and can also help to prevent misunderstandings and conflicts. Cultural competency can be achieved through inclusive teaching practices, such as incorporating diverse perspectives into course materials and using multiple modalities for instruction (Pérez, 2019). External to the student population, faculty and staff also benefit from a culturally inclusive environment.

Transculturation theory also highlights the importance of supporting the professional development of faculty and staff from diverse cultural backgrounds. Providing opportunities for career advancement and recognizing and fostering a sense of belonging and community among diverse faculty and staff can contribute to connecting theory to professional development opportunities (Sánchez, 2020). In addition to cultural competency training, faculty and staff can support transculturation by creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for all campus community members. Faculty and staff can impact the learning environment by promoting diversity and inclusion initiatives, such as creating affinity groups or developing inclusive policies and practices (Hale, 2019). In higher education, faculty and staff members from marginalized cultural backgrounds may face pressure to conform to the dominant culture of the

institution and may struggle to maintain their identities and practices (Li, 2018), negatively affecting their sense of belonging and well-being and their ability to effectively support and advocate for their students (Lopez, 2020).

Overall, transculturation theory highlights the importance of cultural exchange and understanding in higher education and suggests that faculty and staff have a role to play in supporting this process. By promoting an environment that involves building learning opportunities about cultural competency and creating a welcoming and inclusive environment, higher education professionals can help foster a more diverse and inclusive campus community.

**Literature Review**

Community college faculty and staff play a vital role in the success of transfer programs with colleges or universities. These programs allow students to seamlessly transfer from a community college to a four-year institution, often at a lower cost and with more flexibility than directly attending a four-year college or university (M. Lopez, 2018); however, the experiences of community college faculty and staff with these transfer programs can vary widely.

Many community college faculty members feel undervalued and unsupported by four-year institutions, leading to a lack of motivation to facilitate transfer pathways for their students (Smith, 2020). This, in turn, is detrimental to the success of transfer students who may need more guidance and support from their community college faculty. Community college faculty and staff may feel overwhelmed by the administrative responsibilities of managing a transfer program. In addition, community college staff often have to navigate complex and differing transfer agreements between their institutions and four-year universities (Jones, 2019). Transfer agreements can be challenging to interpret and lead to staff and students needing clarification. This can make it difficult for community college staff to properly advise and assist students in

the transfer process. Another challenge that community college faculty and staff members may face is a need for more collaboration and communication between the two institutions (Javalgi & White, 2020). Increased collaboration between the two institutions can provide greater clarity and understanding for students and faculty. To effectively support transfer students, community college faculty and staff members must work closely with their counterparts at the university to ensure that all parties are on the same page and that students are receiving the support they need.

One major issue community college faculty and staff identified is the need for more precise communication and collaboration with university partners (M. Lopez, 2018). The issue of minimal communication and lack of effort to collaborate can result in misunderstandings and discrepancies in the transfer process, causing stress and confusion for students and faculty. In addition, many community college faculty and staff reported feeling that their input and expertise were not valued by their university partners, leading to a lack of trust and collaboration (Brown & Smith, 2020). One of the primary challenges is the lack of resources and support from the community college and the university (Javalgi & White, 2020), resulting in a need for more funding for marketing and recruitment efforts and inadequate support for student services such as academic advising and tutoring.

Despite the challenges, there have been efforts to improve the transfer experience for community college faculty and staff. The creation of transfer articulation agreements, which clearly outline the transfer requirements and credits for specific programs, has helped to streamline the process for both parties (Brown & Johnson, 2018). According to a survey by M. Lopez (2018), those who reported strong partnerships and communication with their university counterparts had more success recruiting and retaining transfer students. In addition, faculty and staff who could advocate for their students and collaborate with university partners were more

likely to report satisfaction with the transfer program. Brown's (2021) survey revealed that those who felt supported by their university partners and had adequate resources and training were more likely to have a successful transfer program. These faculty and staff also reported feeling more fulfilled in their jobs, as they could see their work's tangible impact on their students' lives.

In addition, professional development opportunities for community college faculty and staff, such as workshops and conferences focused on transfer issues, have been shown to increase their knowledge and understanding of transfer policies and procedures (Williams, 2017). One effective strategy is the establishment of partnerships with local universities, giving students access to resources and support that may not be available at their community college (Lee & Burkland, 2018). Another strategy is to provide students with clear and concise information about the transfer process, including deadlines, requirements, and other relevant details (Javalgi & White, 2020), helping to alleviate students' confusion or feelings of uncertainty about transferring to a four-year institution.

Community college faculty and staff face unique challenges with transfer programs and colleges and universities, and the experiences vary greatly. Helpful resources and support, such as clear communication, collaboration with university partners, and the ability to advocate for and support students, address these challenges and improve the transfer experience for faculty, staff, and students. To create a positive and effective transfer program, colleges and universities must recognize the value and contributions of community college faculty and staff.

**Research Approval**

The process of gaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval through North Carolina State University (NC State) involved several steps, including submitting an application, obtaining necessary approvals and certifications, and complying with all relevant regulations and

guidelines. The first step in gaining IRB approval (Appendix G) was to submit an application outlining the process for data collection, informed consent, and data protection measures. Once the application was approved, the researcher obtained approval from three of the five colleges requested for participation, who acknowledged receipt of NC State's IRB approval and granted access to the researcher as approved in the IRB document on file.

**Population**

Faculty and staff who taught or worked in direct student-facing positions in transfer programs were selected to be part of the study population. Twenty-nine faculty and staff were emailed from the three participating institutions, with participation confirmed via email with the agreement being received by the researcher acknowledging a commitment to participate in the research study, resulting in a 65% (*n*=19) response rate. Of the faculty and staff participants, 47% (*n*=9) were males, and 53% (*n*=10) were females., Of the participants, 79% (*n*=15) were Caucasians, 16% (*n*=3), were Native Americans and part of the Lumbee Tribe, and 5% (*n*=1) were African American. Table 4 provides an overview of the makeup of the staff focus group participants. The researcher facilitated one focus group with staff that included 12 staff members. Table 5 provides an overview of the makeup of the faculty focus group participants. The researcher facilitated a second focus group with faculty, including seven faculty members.

**Table 4**

*Staff Demographics*

| Institutional Role | Gender | Age | Staff | If you answered Native American in the previous section, please specify the Native American Tribe here. | What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed? | How long have you been employed in higher education? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Staff-Program Director, Industrial Systems & Apprenticeship Coordinator | Male | 51-61 | Caucasian | | Master's Degree | 26-30 years |
| Staff-Dean University Transfer & Health Sciences | Male | 51-61 | Caucasian | | Master's Degree | 11-15 years |
| Staff-Office Admin. Program Coordinator | Female | 29-39 | Caucasian | | Master's Degree | 11-15 years |
| Staff-Disability Services Counselor | Female | 40-50 | Caucasian | | PhD, EdD, or higher | 1-5 years |
| Staff-Admin Assistant to VP of Student Services | Female | 18-28 | Caucasian | | Bachelor's Degree | 1-5 years |
| Staff-Dean of Applied Sciences & Engineering | Male | 51-61 | African American | | PhD, EdD, or higher | 26-30 years |
| Staff-Enrollment Management Coordinator | Male | 40-50 | Caucasian | | Master's Degree | 11-15 years |
| Staff-Career Center Representative | Male | 18-28 | Native American | Lumbee | Master's Degree | 1-5 years |

**Table 4** (continued).

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Staff-VP Enrollment Management | Male | 40-50 | Caucasian | | PhD, EdD, or higher | 15-20 years |
| Staff-Dean Planning & Research | Female | 29-39 | Caucasian | | Master's Degree | 11-15 years |
| Staff-Director Transfer Center | Female | 29-39 | Caucasian | | Master's Degree | 6-10 years |
| Staff-VP Instruction | Female | 40-50 | Caucasian | | PhD, EdD, or higher | 11-15 years |

**Table 5**

*Faculty Demographics*

| Faculty | Gender | Age | Ethnicity | If you answered Native American in the previous section, please specify the Native American Tribe here. | What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed? | How long have you been employed in higher education? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Faculty-English Instructor | Female | 40-50 | Caucasian | | Master's Degree | 21-25 years |
| Faculty-Biology Instructor | Female | 51-61 | Native American | Lumbee | Master's Degree | 6-10 years |
| Faculty-English Instructor | Male | 29-39 | Caucasian | | Master's Degree | 1-5 years |
| Faculty-Dean of Arts & Sciences | Female | 51-61 | Caucasian | | PhD, EdD, or higher | 11-15 years |
| Faculty-History | Male | 29-39 | Caucasian | | PhD, EdD, or higher | 11-15 years |

**Table 5** (continued).

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Faculty-Biology | Female | 40-50 | Caucasian | | PhD, EdD, or higher | 21-25 years |
| Faculty-Associate Professor Biology, C-Step Coordinator | Male | 29-39 | Native American | Lumbee | Master's Degree | 6-10 years |

**Data Collection and Analysis**

After receiving consent, the researcher offered participants two options. Participation could occur in a one-on-one interview or a focus group. The researcher conducted one staff focus group with 12 staff participants and one focus group with 9 faculty participants virtually using Zoom. The researcher used a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix D) with open-ended questions to encourage detailed responses from the faculty and staff participants. During the focus groups, the researcher facilitated the conversation following the interview protocol and made notes as needed during the focus groups. After each focus group, the researcher reviewed the Zoom recording and transcript for the accuracy of the conversation.

The researcher used Saldana's (2015) inductive coding technique to code the data from the focus groups. Inductive coding is a widely used method of data analysis that involves identifying themes and patterns in qualitative data without being constrained by pre-existing categories or theories. Saldana's approach to inductive coding involves a systemic and iterative process of identifying and refining themes in qualitative data. After reviewing transcripts for accuracy, the researcher began the coding process with an initial data reading to understand the content and context. The researcher then engaged in open coding, which involved identifying and labeling concepts, ideas, and themes from the data. The researcher read through the focus group transcripts, identified chunks of text relevant to each other, and developed initial codes. After the initial coding, the researcher reviewed and refined the codes relevant to the research questions from the faculty and staff perspectives. This exploratory coding stage allows one to discover new themes that may not have been previously considered. Then, the research engaged in axial coding, which involves organizing the codes into related categories and subcategories.

This stage allowed for identifying patterns and relationships between the codes, which helped to build a more comprehensive understanding of the data.

The researcher next analyzed the data by looking for patterns and themes. The codes were grouped to identify larger patterns, such as recurring themes or common experiences. (Saldana, 2015). Selective coding was used to refine and focus the analysis on the most significant themes and patterns identified in the data. This stage involved making connections between the categories and subcategories and developing a coherent narrative that would reflect the underlying themes and meanings of the data. Then, the researcher used NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software, to code and analyze data. The researcher imported the data into NVivo and created a coding framework by creating codes and categories that reflected the research questions and themes. The researcher navigated through the data and assigned codes to the relevant text segments using manual and automated coding based on the research questions. After the data were coded, the researcher used NVivo to identify patterns, themes, and relationships. The researcher then used the information to draw conclusions about the data and recommend further research.

Data collection through focus groups was essential to this exploratory case study which allowed the researcher to gather rich and detailed data directly from the participants, providing insight into their experiences, attitudes, and behaviors (Saldana, 2015). The focus groups provided valuable insights into the experiences and perspectives of community college faculty and staff affiliated with community college transfer programs.

**Document Analysis**

The researcher conducted a document analysis of transfer-related documents provided by the three participating institutions. The analysis aimed to examine the differences in information

presentation across the institutions and identify common themes related to accessibility, support services, mainstream higher education, and partnerships. The findings revealed variations in the institutions' formatting and presentation of information. For instance, the BraveStep requirements document listed all the necessary courses at the community college for transferring to the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. However, one institution used a Word document format, while another incorporated an embedded link for accessing BraveStep information. Despite the differences in presentation, all the reviewed documents exhibited an intention to streamline the transfer process. Moreover, the transfer agreements document included detailed explanations of articulation agreements with multiple colleges and universities. Additionally, it provided links to specific institutions and the community college program for further information.

Similarly, the university studies (Appendix L) document featured specific articulation agreements with various colleges and universities and designated points of contact for program-related inquiries and student services. The document analysis offered valuable insights into the diverse approaches the three institutions employ in presenting transfer information. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how institutions aim to facilitate communication about the transfer process and enhance students' accessibility to mainstream higher education through strategic partnerships. Table 8 represents the analysis of the documents reviewed, BraveStep requirements (Appendix J), partnership agreement documentation between one community college institution and university partners (Appendix K), transfer articulation agreements (Appendix M), and university studies document (Appendix L). The left column includes the titles and types of documents reviewed, and the crosswalk indicates the alignment of the document review with the themes generated.

**Table 8**

*Crosswalk of Document Analysis*

| Documents Reviewed | CC Document | University Document | T1: Accessibility | T2: Support Services | T3: Mainstream Higher Education | T4: Partnerships |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| BraveStep Requirements | X | X | X | | | X |
| Partnership Agreement Documentation | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Transfer Articulation Agreements | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| University Studies Document | X | X | X | X | X | X |

Note. “T” means Theme; “CC” means Community College

**Findings – Faculty and Staff**

Multiple studies have identified key student-level factors contributing to the success of Native American students in college-level coursework (Lundberg, 2007). These factors include having high academic aspirations, cultivating effective study habits, engaging in meaningful interactions with faculty and staff, maintaining Native American cultural traditions, drawing strength from spiritual resources, and receiving support from family. To support Native American students with the achievement of academic success, faculty, staff, and educators must tackle institutionalized racism, engage students in advising from an early stage, address issues of social isolation and negative peer pressure, facilitate mentoring relationships, and connect students with relevant organizations on campus (Keith et al., 2016).

Faculty and staff can be critical in supporting Native American students enrolled in transfer programs at community colleges. Faculty have the opportunity to make an effort to understand the cultural backgrounds of Native American students and incorporate that knowledge into their teaching practices. Community college faculty and staff:

- achieve a greater understanding of students' cultural backgrounds through incorporating Indigenous perspectives into course materials and assignments, using culturally relevant teaching strategies, and being mindful of how Native American students may approach learning.
- serve as mentors and advisors for Native American students, provide guidance on academic and career goals, connect students with resources and opportunities, and offer support and encouragement.
- have the skills to create a campus culture that is welcoming and inclusive of Native American students, including organizing events and activities that

celebrate Native American culture, creating spaces for Native American students to connect, and promoting respect and understanding across the campus community.

- can advocate for resources and support that will benefit Native American students. This can include advocating for funding for Native American student organizations, pushing for the hiring of more Indigenous faculty and staff, and working to secure grants and scholarships specifically for Native American students.
- play a crucial role in supporting Native American students in transfer programs at community colleges by providing culturally responsive teaching, mentoring, and advising, creating a welcoming and inclusive environment, and advocating for resources and support.

Faculty and staff play a critical role in Native American student success by adopting various roles within the framework of transculturation theory, including cultural interpreters, culturally responsive educators, advocates and allies, intercultural facilitators, and bridge builders. By doing so, faculty and staff can support Native American students in navigating the mainstream academic environment while valuing and affirming their Native American identities, thus promoting academic success and overall well-being. Transculturation theory can be applied in the context of Native American student success to clarify how faculty and staff facilitate the academic and cultural integration of Native American students into the mainstream academic environment while valuing and affirming their Native American identities.

This study revealed that community college faculty and staff have the opportunity to serve as cultural interpreters, helping Native American students navigate the mainstream

academic culture by guiding academic expectations, norms, and procedures. They also help students understand and negotiate the complexities of campus life, including social dynamics, campus resources, and administrative processes. In addition, faculty and staff can adopt culturally responsive teaching practices incorporating Native American perspectives, knowledge, and pedagogies into the curriculum. This can include incorporating Native American literature, history, and cultural practices into course materials and valuing and affirming Native American students' voices, experiences, and contributions in the classroom. In addition, faculty and staff can act as advocates and allies for Native American students, creating a supportive and inclusive environment that recognizes and addresses the unique challenges and barriers that Native American students may face. This can include advocating for policies and practices that promote Native American students' success, providing mentorship and support, and fostering a sense of belonging and community on campus.

Faculty and staff can facilitate intercultural interactions and exchanges between Native American students and the broader campus community. This can involve organizing cultural events, dialogues, and workshops that promote cross-cultural understanding, respect, and appreciation. Faculty and staff can also create opportunities for Native American students to share their cultural knowledge, traditions, and perspectives with the broader campus community, promoting mutual learning and appreciation. Finally, faculty and staff can serve as bridge builders, connecting Native American students with academic and career opportunities, networks, and resources both within and outside the campus. This can include mentoring, advising, and providing access to research opportunities, internships, scholarships, and professional networks that can enhance Native American students' educational and career pathways. Therefore, faculty and staff play a critical role in the success of Native American

students in higher education, and their efforts can be understood through the lens of transculturation theory. The role of faculty in postsecondary education is crucial as they fulfill the dual responsibilities of delivering academic instruction and providing mentoring support. Their influence on student persistence has been emphasized in research (J. D. Lopez, 2018).

### *Theme #1: Prioritize and Streamline the Transfer Process for Native American Students*

The first theme is a result of participant focus group data which serves to answer research questions 2, 2a, 2b, and 2c. Community college transfer programs often provide students with a smooth transition from a two-year college to a four-year college or university. Programs can include particular transfer admissions criteria and transfer credit agreements for transfer students. Programs also provide resources such as academic advising, financial aid, and transfer orientation programs. Additionally, they provide tailored services such as specialized academic programming, tutoring, and counseling. These programs promote a successful transition by minimizing the time and effort it takes for students to transfer. In addition, community colleges could develop partnerships with four-year universities to facilitate transfer pathways for Native American students. Creating articulation agreements and transfer pathways and providing support services to ensure a smooth transition from the community college to the four-year institution are examples of what can be done to generate supportive structures for transfer programming.

The faculty and staff from the participating institutions in this study acknowledged that many Native American students face financial barriers to higher education, including limited access to financial aid and scholarships and the need to balance work and family obligations with attending school. The institutions, in this case, could work to address the financial barriers that Native American students face by providing financial assistance, such as scholarships, grants,

and work-study programs. In addition, the institution could also offer emergency funds to address unexpected financial needs that may arise. According to Sara, “Native American students are often first-generation students without the support from family and friends.” Wanda shared,

> *Now CCP students, if we start plugging these in more with CCP students, they are a majority Native American because the state gives them free tuition to CCP students, but they have to pay for their textbooks and fees. But in [County], the [Native American Tribe] will pay for tribal members' textbooks and fees. So really, the Native American students are getting everything for free. So, we have a lot more CCP students who are Native.*

The faculty and staff who participated in this study also recognized the resilience and determination of Native American students, who may have overcome significant obstacles to pursue their academic goals. Financial constraints can significantly hinder Native American students from pursuing higher education; however, community college transfer programs that establish partnerships with four-year institutions can offer financial support to Native American students. These partnerships can include joint scholarship programs specifically for Native American students and opportunities for financial aid packages tailored to the needs of Native American students. Paul shared, “Native American students are often first-generation students without the support from family and friends. My role is to encourage recruitment, growth, and remove barriers if I can for transfer students.” One idea was to have four-year institutions consider providing additional funding for community college transfer programs to support outreach efforts, recruitment, and retention of Native American students. By leveraging financial resources through partnerships, community college transfer programs have the opportunity to

help Native American students overcome financial barriers and pursue their academic goals. Sara shared,

> *I support the local students, and I encourage each and every student to take advantage of our grants and scholarships that we offer to the Native American student so they can afford to pursue their ultimate dream of a four-year degree.*

The faculty recognized the valuable contributions that Native American students bring to the classroom through their unique perspectives and experiences. Paul shared,

> *I see more socioeconomic differences than race differences. For instance, the majority of our Native American students receive the Pell Grant and other financial aid because, unfortunately, many of the students are from low-income areas of the county. However, many of these students have experienced things in life that someone of the majority race would never understand. For example, I have never experienced racial profiling, but my Native American and African American students have both expressed numerous times when they experienced racial profiling right here in their own hometown.*

In addition, Paul shared,

> *Regardless of the circumstances, I feel as though we could all learn from each other if we would just listen to each other, especially our students. Their experiences shape who they are in the present day and who they will become. We have the opportunity to help mold and shape them into successful individuals.*

Some focus group participants in this study viewed Native American students as lacking preparation for college-level work, particularly in Math and English. This may be partly due to disparities in K-12 education resources and quality in Native American communities. Wanda shared,

*That goes back even from our high schools, the programs that help Native Americans stay in school, especially males because there's a high dropout rate in the high schools but and I don't know there's a difference in the process though. I do feel like [Community College] that I teach the majority of my students are Native American. I don't know if they're all going when they're not on university transfer programs. But they're almost all the students I teach at [Community College] are Native American. But I don't know if their transfer process is any different.*

The participating community college institutions in the study all recognized the importance and implementation of articulation agreements with four-year colleges or universities such as C-Step (UNC Chapel Hill), the Pirate Promise (East Carolina University), $10K Degree (Fayetteville State University), Pack Trac and C3 (NC State University), and several others for transfer students. Charly emphasized the importance of early intervention, the "infancy" of many of the articulation agreements, and the future possibilities of effectiveness for the students and college. Charly shared,

*I think they will be effective. It's still in its infancy. But I do foresee that, you know, in the long run, once we become more familiarized, once students become more familiarized and once its more, you know, more commonplace to take part in transfer programs, and I do foresee that they will very likely be more beneficial in the long run.*

In addition, Ashley shared,

*Fayetteville State, you know, started with the $10K Degree, so it's like a signing bonus for our students, you know, to go towards their tuition and stuff out of pocket. And all that makes a big difference for students. And that's a lot of money.*

In the context of institutions prioritizing transfer for Native American students, transculturation theory can provide a framework for understanding the importance of building relationships between different institutions and communities to support the transfer of Native American students. When institutions and communities work together to support Native American students in transferring from community colleges to four-year colleges and universities, they create opportunities for cultural exchange and the development of new identities. Institutions prioritizing transfer for Native American students can use transculturation theory to guide their efforts by focusing on building relationships and partnerships with Native American communities, tribal colleges, and other institutions. By working together and exchanging ideas, these institutions can develop transfer pathways and support services tailored to the needs and cultural backgrounds of Native American students. Wanda shared that the coordinator for C-Step was very hands-on with potential transfer students for UNC Chapel Hill.

> *She has taken those students to basketball games at Carolina football games, and they have done weekend trips where they spend the night in the college dorms they get. Carolina is very much involved with their education. They make visits say, a couple of times a semester or meetings with other C-STEP students. So that one is pretty active. I mean, she gets tickets in the mail to pass out to the students when they have games and things like that. So she can request certain dates for students request certain dates. They also have Carolina has separate dorms, separate housing for students who are transferring from community colleges. ECU does that too.*

In addition, Umar shared,

> *Like you said, everybody wants to go away to college. And it's just the big thing, it's like, you've not been a success. If you are not saying I'm going to Chapel Hill, I'm going to*

*State; I'm going here. If you say I'm going to go to RCC my first two years and then transfer out, about everyone automatically assumes, well, you're not done well enough in high school to be able to make that transition. And I believe if there's some way that we could get rid of that stigma, have to you know, you've not accomplished you're not a success, you know, everybody wants to toot their kid's horn if they can say they're doing these days versus looking at what is actually the success that the student can have, and going through programs like this. So, I think if we can change the mindset of our counselors because they are pushing to get away from here, if that's what the student wants, versus looking at what's going to be best. And overall, I think we could change the mindset of our community as well as our high school counselors. We could probably get more of our students going through these programs and end up being a lot more successful, and that retention rate of them staying in college when they do go away, I think, would be higher.*

Therefore, institutions must prioritize transfer and streamline the process of transferring students to ensure success, especially for underserved minority populations such as Native Americans.

***Theme #2: Design Culturally Responsive Support Services for Native American Students***

The second theme results from participant focus group data which serves to answer research questions 2, 2a, 2b, and 2c. The participating community colleges in this study recognized the need for culturally responsive support services to help Native American students succeed in college. Culturally responsive support services for Native American students, such as academic advising, counseling, mentorship programs, and tutoring, can be tailored to the unique needs and experiences of Native American students and can help to create a supportive and

inclusive campus environment. Native American faculty and staff can support and guide Native American students, including academic advising, counseling, and advocacy. In addition, many Native American students attend colleges and universities in rural areas, which can limit their access to resources such as tutoring, academic advising, and mental health services. Ashley shared,

> *I don't see where they honestly have any more of a struggle any more than any other student. The only thing I might say that might be a little bit different for Native American students is that the majority of the time, they are first-generation students, and many are non-traditional students. You know, there are certain aspects that when your parents have gone to college, things that you know about already, and in a lot of your homes where you have Native Americans, not all of them have parents or have grandparents, or even they might not even have a cousin, you know that's gone to college. So for them to kind of sometimes understand how the system works. That's how they might have a little disadvantage. But once they get here, the college does a great job acclimating them to all their basic needs. There are programs here, they just have to reach out for it like anybody else would.*

Lane added, "They face the same challenges that minorities or first-generation students face." However, Marcus noted,

> *Let's be honest. I am more inclined to see the struggles of Native American students compared to my counterparts since I am Native American. I am more in tune with that population of students. And even more so, I have experienced many of the same challenges that they are facing such as isolation, PWIs, microaggressions, racism, and so much more. We need to practice having more empathy for our students of color.*

Furthermore, Tim shared,

*I think this research is great and right on time. We need to do more for our underserved minority students, especially students of color. We need to put forth more effort into ensuring that minority students receive services that are specific to their needs to ensure success in academics. For example, I would love it if we could offer a club specifically for Native American students, such as [Native American Student Club], or even a club for students of color because we all know that their experiences as students of color will vary greatly between groups based on their race, gender, etc.*

Hudson, a staff member, shared,

*I do think training on cultural sensitivity and cultural responsiveness is necessary for all faculty and staff at institutions. With community colleges having an open-door policy, we must fulfill our duty to meet students where they are and take them as far as we can while they are at our college. We are never too old to learn and adapt to the ever-changing population at [Community College]*.

Transculturation theory emphasizes respecting and valuing different cultural traditions and practices. When institutions prioritize transfer for Native American students, they should take steps to ensure that their support services and resources are culturally relevant and responsive to the needs of Native American students. By doing so, institutions can create an environment that is welcoming and supportive of Native American students and help them achieve their academic and career goals.

### *Theme #3: Consideration for Increasing Native American Faculty and Staff to Mirror Student Population*

The third theme results from participant focus group data which serves to answer research questions 2, 2a, 2b, and 2c. Having Native American faculty and staff members provides Native American students with role models and mentors who share their cultural backgrounds and experiences. This representation can increase their sense of belonging and connection to the institution. Jane shared,

> *I can probably name every Native American faculty and staff member from memory because we do not have many Native American faculty and staff, even though we do have a population of Native American students. I think it is super important to have faculty and staff who mirror our student population. It is past time for us to focus on diversity, inclusion, and equity.*

Native American faculty and staff members can provide a deeper understanding of Native American cultures, histories, and experiences. This can help non-Native faculty and staff members understand the unique challenges and opportunities that Native American students face. Native American faculty and staff members can contribute to developing courses and programs that are culturally responsive and relevant to Native American students Ashley shared,

> *My office is located near [Native American faculty member], and he is kind of from that area, and he is Native American, so he has a different rapport with the Native American students than I do. I sometimes overhear conversations he has with students, and the students are very open and honest with him. I think a lot of it has to do with the fact that he is Native American and understands the struggles of being Native American and in college.*

Ashley also shared,

*I do know that [faculty member], because he is a Native American, is really good about reaching out to the Native American students, you know, he will reach out to them and check in touch base with them. Just to make sure life's treating you fairly, so to speak. And at one time, he used to try to make sure that we could kind of get them like in his [college student success] class, you know, he would make sure that they try to get into because as he does teach, teach some college transfer class to kind of make sure they understand all the resources that really so they could connect with him. And then that way, he could kind of help them move forward.*

Furthermore, Umar shared,

*You always hear people say that they don't see race; however, how can one not see race or ethnicity when you are looking at someone? It is more important now than ever to actually see race and to ensure every student, regardless of race, is given the tools needed to succeed in college. I know what it feels like to look out in an audience or sitting at a round table and to be the only person of color, so I know what it is like for Indian students to attend a college class and feel completely out of place. It is so nice when you are not the minority in the room. I can see how having a Native American faculty or staff member on campus that Native American students can feel comfortable with and can feel like they can go to with questions or advice.*

As part of their institutional commitment, Guillory and Wolverton (2008) proposed that institutions should strive to increase the representation of Native American faculty and staff. This step not only demonstrates to Native American students that the institution values their presence

but also offers them the opportunity to connect with individuals who share their backgrounds and experiences.

Overall, having Native American faculty and staff members can help to create a more welcoming and inclusive environment for Native American students, which can ultimately lead to increased retention and success. Transculturation theory can inform efforts to hire and retain Native American faculty and staff by acknowledging the cultural differences and power dynamics in the hiring process. In the case of hiring Native American faculty and staff, hybridization could involve incorporating Native American perspectives and approaches into the curriculum and academic programs, as well as creating a more inclusive and welcoming campus environment that reflects the values and traditions of Native American cultures. Institutions could work to create a culturally responsive environment by hiring Native American faculty and staff, developing culturally relevant curricula and support services, and providing opportunities for Native American students to connect with their culture and community. The employment of Native American faculty and staff can help address issues of representation and diversity in higher education. By hiring Native American faculty and staff, institutions can create opportunities for cultural exchange, enrich the learning environment, and create a more diverse and inclusive environment for all students, which supports transculturation theory. Overall, transculturation theory provides a useful framework for understanding the complex dynamics of hiring and retaining Native American faculty and staff in higher education. By recognizing and valuing the unique perspectives and experiences of Native American cultures, institutions can create more inclusive and equitable learning environments that benefit all students and faculty.

***Theme #4: Improvement of Outcomes for Native American Student Success***

The first theme is a result of participant focus group data which serves to answer research questions 2, 2a, 2b, and 2c. Native Americans have a long history of trauma, including forced assimilation, genocide, and forced relocation. This history can lead to cultural disconnection, low self-esteem, and a lack of trust in institutions, making it challenging for Native Americans to feel connected to and succeed in higher education. In addition, institutions could build partnerships with Native American communities, tribal colleges, and other organizations to provide students with additional support and resources. These partnerships can also help create a pipeline for Native American students to transfer to four-year colleges and universities. Damian shared,

> *But most recently, we looked at our transfer students and their success. And the data revealed that transfer students weren't retained, and our success rates were not as high as our applied science students. That was kind of shocking to us, but there's reasons for it. So now we are more focused on our transfer students here at [community college]. We are changing our advising model for transfer students.*

Jane also shared,

> *I hate to say this, but I mean, I don't think that we have put a lot of or enough emphasis on focusing on our Native American or American Indian population. And that is not to mean that we won't? Right? I think we do need to do that. We need to work in that area.*

Community college transfer programs that establish partnership programs with four-year institutions have the potential to create significant opportunities for Native American students.

The colleges that participated in this study could choose to use data to monitor completion rates for Native American students and identify areas for improvement. This can help track progress, identify challenges, and make data-informed decisions to better support Native

American students. Focusing on completion rates for Native American students is a step towards achieving greater equity and social justice by ensuring that Native American students have access to the same opportunities as other students. Lee shared,

> *We are starting to disaggregate our completion data by race, ethnicity, and gender. And yes, we need to look at the Native American student population at [community college.] I feel like, a lot of times; it is a group that is forgotten about for whatever reason. We need to do better as an institution and as a system.*

Education is essential for economic mobility and completing a degree can significantly improve employment and earning outcomes. Improving completion rates for Native American students can help address economic disparities and improve economic mobility for Native American students. In addition, as the United States continues to experience demographic shifts, there is a growing need for a diverse and well-educated workforce. By prioritizing the completion rates of Native American students, it is possible to promote diversity and ensure that the workforce reflects the broader population.

Overall, faculty and staff perspectives on Native American students in college transfer programs are shaped by various factors, including cultural background, institutional context, and personal experiences. By recognizing the challenges and strengths of Native American students and providing culturally responsive support services, the community college sites from this study could better support these students in achieving their academic goals. Native American communities have a rich cultural heritage that is important to preserve. Transculturation theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the complex dynamics of improving outcomes for Native American students in community colleges. By recognizing and valuing the unique perspectives and experiences of Native American cultures, community colleges can create more

inclusive and equitable learning environments that benefit all students. Focusing on completion rates for Native American students can help ensure that Native American students can pursue higher education while staying connected to their cultural heritage.

Table 6 provides insight into the research questions for this article and their direct connection to the questions listed in the interview protocol (Appendix D) designed to collect data from faculty and staff affiliated with community college transfer programs.

**Table 6**

*Crosswalk of Faculty and Staff Interview Questions, Themes, and Research Question #2*

| Faculty & Staff Interview Questions | RQ 2: What contributes to the successful outcomes of the students who participate in a community college transfer partnership program? | RQ 2a: How do transfer partners define academic success? | RQ 2b: What support services do community college faculty and staff implement to increase Native American students' participation and persistence? | RQ 2c: How is the transfer process from a community college to a four-year university for Native American students different from other demographics? |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Q1 | X | X | X | X |
| Q2 | X | X | X | X |
| Q3 | X | X | X | X |
| Q4 | X | X | X | X |
| Q5 | X | X | X | X |
| Q6 | X | X | X | X |
| Q7 | X | X | X | X |
| Q8 | X | | | |
| Q9 | | | | X |
| T1:Prioritize Transfer | X | X | X | X |
| T2: Culturally Responsive Support Services | X | X | X | X |
| T3: Native American Faculty & Staff | X | X | X | X |
| T4: Completion Rates of Native American Students | X | X | X | X |

Note. "RQ" means Research Question, "T" means Theme, and "CC" means Community College

## Implications for Practice

This section includes the implications for practice. The implications from this exploratory case study highlight the need for higher education institutions to increase access to higher education for Native American transfer students, increase diversity among faculty and staff, and incorporate Native American perspectives and knowledge into the curriculum to improve the outcomes of Native American students in higher education. This study sought to provide higher education practitioners with implications for policy and practice serving to improve outcomes for Native American students.

### *Staff Implication for Practice #1: Increase Access to Higher Education for Native American Transfer Students*

The findings in this study revealed the need to increase access to higher education for Native American transfer students. Financial challenges, such as limited access to scholarships, grants, and financial aid, can impact Native American students' ability to afford the costs of their academic pursuits. Quincy shared,

> *I have had the opportunity to work with Native American students one on one, and it is evident that our Native American students require more assistance navigating higher education. And it is not their fault, as far as the hand they are dealt in life; some have no support system and need help from the very beginning. And my perspective is going to be different because I identify as Native American.*

Higher education institutions could take steps to increase access to higher education for Native American students, such as providing financial aid and scholarships specifically for Native American students, recruiting Native American students through targeted outreach, and providing information on financial aid, admissions, and academic programs in culturally

sensitive ways. States and legislatures have the power to pass legislation that offers tuition waivers to students who can provide evidence of tribal enrollment. This measure aims to alleviate the financial challenges of pursuing a degree (The Hunt Institute, 2022). Institutions could engage in targeted outreach and recruitment efforts to attract Native American students to their campuses. This can involve visiting Native American communities and schools, participating in college fairs and other events, and connecting with tribal leaders and organizations. Umar shared,

> *I often participate in our community outreach programs and I do think by being female and Native American I can make a connection with certain students. I am a friendly face and it means even more when the students see a woman of color in a position who can offer assistance. In my experience, students are more apt to approach a woman of color compared to a Caucasian male, when needing assistance.*

In addition, institutions can offer financial aid and scholarships specifically for Native American students. This can help address financial barriers to higher education and make college more affordable for Native American students. The availability of Native American support services, including cultural activities and connections with multicultural offices, holds particular significance. These resources play a vital role in fostering a sense of belonging for Native students on campus, reassuring them that the institution acknowledges and embraces their cultural heritage. Moreover, the presence of student organizations can assist these students in upholding their identities while being away from their homes and simultaneously aid them in navigating the complexities of being Native American in an educational environment predominantly comprising Non-Native individuals (The Hunt Institute, 2022).

### *Faculty and Staff Implication for Practice #2: Increase Diversity Among Faculty and Staff to Improve the Successful Outcomes of Native American Students*

The study's discoveries highlighted the need to augment the diversity among faculty and staff within higher education institutions to advance the favorable results of Native American transfer college students. Logan and Dylan shared the importance of a diverse faculty and staff population. Dylan shared,

> *I am one of just a couple of faculty who are of color at my institution. So sometimes I do feel as though I am singled out because there are only a small number of people of color on my campus. It is important for our schools to be welcoming and inclusive to all students and by hiring and promoting people of color, students are exposed to a more diverse institution. It's important for students to see faculty and staff who look like them. Everyone wants to feel like they are included in the mix."*

Increasing diversity among faculty and staff can create a more inclusive learning environment and provide Native American students with role models and mentors who understand their experiences. The scarcity of Native American faculty and mentors in higher education institutions can limit opportunities for Native American students to connect with role models who understand their cultural background and can provide guidance and support. The presence of Native faculty and staff members, with whom students can easily relate and find their own experiences mirrored, proves to be highly advantageous. Regrettably, akin to the scarcity of Native American students in higher education, many universities and colleges face a shortage of Native American faculty and staff, hindering the establishment of such connections for students (The Hunt Institute, 2022). Carter shared,

*With my position, I work very closely with students, and I build a rapport with the students, and it is evident that students not only want but need instructors and staff members who can relate to their own personal experiences. Unless you have experienced racism at a personal level, how can you relate to a student who is experiencing racism? Yes, you have the textbook scenarios and responses, however, until you have walked in someone's shoes, you can't truly understand their experience.*

Higher education institutions can create policies and programs to recruit and retain Native American faculty and staff actively. Institutions could prioritize hiring Indigenous faculty and staff to provide role models and mentors for Native American students. Indigenous faculty and staff can also bring unique perspectives and knowledge to the institution, enriching the academic experience for all students.

***Faculty Implication for Practice #3: Incorporate Native American Perspectives and Knowledge into the Curriculum***

The participating community colleges in this study emphasized the importance of incorporating Native American perspectives and knowledge into the curriculum as a critical way that higher education institutions can promote greater understanding and appreciation of Indigenous cultures and histories. Donald shared,

*I think it would be a great idea to include more diverse elective courses for our students to choose from that cater to the needs of our students of color, such as Native American history, African American history, and even implementing more focus on people of color in our classes. For me, I try my best to provide instruction in the classroom that is relevant to the class population and include a cultural component as much as possible so students can relate to the concept at a deeper level.*

Higher education institutions can incorporate Native American perspectives and knowledge into the curriculum to create a more inclusive and culturally responsive learning environment. Institutions can do this by offering courses in Native American studies, incorporating Native American perspectives into existing courses, and providing opportunities for students to engage with Native American communities and cultures. Institutions could create courses and programs focusing on Native American topics, such as Indigenous histories, cultures, and traditions. Institutions can offer these courses in various disciplines, including history, literature, anthropology, and environmental studies. In addition, institutions can incorporate Native American perspectives into existing courses by including readings, guest speakers, and other resources highlighting Indigenous perspectives and knowledge. Umar shared,

> *I get super excited for the month of November because it is Native American Heritage Month and I take the opportunity to wear my ribbon skirt and to share Native American facts with my students. I also try my best to do the same for African American Heritage Month and even National Hispanic Heritage Month. I want my students to know that I do care and they are more than just a body in a seat. I encourage my students to share their ethnic experiences with myself and their classmates. I have learned so much over the years from my students about their ethnic backgrounds and I continue to grow as an educator.*

Moreover, institutions could create resources for students and faculty highlighting Indigenous perspectives and knowledge. This can include online resources, library collections, and cultural centers that provide resources and support for Native American students. Furthermore, institutions could provide professional development opportunities for faculty to learn more about Native American cultures, histories, and perspectives and to develop strategies

for incorporating this knowledge into their courses. This can include pow-wow, attending Native American cultural events, workshops, seminars, conferences, and opportunities for faculty to work with Indigenous scholars and leaders. Lexus shared,

> *I feel as though we can do more as higher education institutions. For so long, higher education institutions have buried their heads in the sand on the topic of inclusivity and diversity. It is time to usher in change and to ensure the success of all students. And community colleges are the perfect institutions to usher in this new wave of change.*

By implementing these practices, higher education institutions can increase access to higher education for Native American students and create more inclusive and equitable campus environments.

## Recommendations for Future Research

This section includes the recommendations for future research that emerged from this study. These recommendations focus on further understanding the faculty and staff perspectives on community college transfer programs and the Native American students served by those programs. Understanding the experience of Native American community college transfer students from the faculty and staff perspective requires further research that explores the unique challenges, opportunities, and needs of these students in higher education.

### *Recommendations for Future Research #1*

This study highlighted the requirement for further investigation into the responsibility of faculty and staff in aiding Native American transfer students. Future research could examine the strategies that community college faculty and staff relied upon to support Native American transfer students, including the types of support offered, the challenges faced by faculty and staff in supporting these students, and the factors that facilitate or hinder effective support. Future

qualitative research focused specifically on the challenges faced by the faculty and staff could lead to a better understanding of how to improve academic outcomes and encourage success for Native American transfer students enrolled in college. Ashley shared,

> *I think as an institution, we can do more to assist the Native American students who are enrolled in a transfer program at the community college. Many times, I have to ask my Native American colleagues to assist me when I am advising or working directly with Native American students to get a better insight into the struggles or obstacles the students are facing and so I can guide them to the right resources.*

***Recommendation for Future Research #2***

This study uncovered the need to investigate the effects of cultural responsiveness training tailored to faculty and staff who support Native American transfer students enrolled at three community colleges. Future research studies could investigate the effectiveness of cultural responsiveness training designed specifically for faculty and staff who support Native American students enrolled in programs outside of transfer programs. Future research could assess the impact of cultural responsiveness training on faculty and staff attitudes, knowledge, and practices concerning Native American students. The training could focus on the development of cultural competency, increasing awareness of the unique challenges faced by Native American students, and approaches to providing strategies for building supportive relationships with these students. Tim shared,

> *Now more than ever, we should be focused on the cultural diversity of our institutions. It is our duty as higher education employees to ensure that every student has access to equitable and high-quality education. By focusing on cultural diversity, we can make sure*

*we are reaching each and every student and meeting them where they are at that very moment and then helping them become what they choose to become in the future.*

Future research focused on the collection of data related to these interventions could include additional training, policy changes, or newly recognized support services for Native American students and would contribute to an expansion of the existing literature. Through findings from future research, interventions could be identified which could address any gaps in knowledge, attitudes, or beliefs regarding supporting community college Native American students. Future research has the potential to enhance the academic and student support provided to Native American students, thereby aiding in their triumphs throughout college and after college.

***Recommendation for Future Research #3***

This study indicated a need to explore the encounters of Native American transfer students with varying academic majors. Quincy shared,

*It would be interesting to see how Native American students do in a more specific program area. Like, nursing or education, I wonder if the intended major or program of study would result in a difference in completion and retention rates of Native American students.*

Future research could explore the experiences of Native American transfer students in different academic majors, including STEM, humanities, and social sciences. Future research could investigate the challenges and opportunities faced by Native American students in different majors and how faculty and staff support these students. For example, researchers could collect quantitative data on the population of Native American transfer students, including their academic majors, GPA, retention rates, graduation rates, and other relevant indicators. This data

could be used to identify correlations and trends in the quantitative data representing Native American transfer students across different majors. Investigating the correlating factors among Native American transfer students with different academic majors could lead to identifying which programs result in improved academic outcomes and greater success for Native American transfer students in college and beyond.

***Recommendation for Future Research #4***

This study showed the need to evaluate the impact of institutional policies and practices on Native American transfer students. Future research could assess the impact of institutional policies and practices on the experiences of Native American transfer students, including transfer credit policies, financial aid, and support services. This research could investigate how these policies facilitate or hinder the success of Native American transfer students. Marcus shared, "

> *For me, it was nice going to a college where there were other Indians, so I did not feel like I was isolated, well at least isolated from other students. I did feel isolated from the faculty and staff because they were not Indian like me. That's one of the reasons I went into education so that I can be a friendly face for other Native Americans.*

Umar shared a similar experience to Marcus.

> *I was accepted to a PWI and I attended for 1 year and I transferred to [University]. I was so far from home and it was very difficult to adjust. There were only a couple of other Indians I knew and I just felt all alone. I would go home for holidays and breaks and just cry to my Mom and Dad begging them to not make me go back; eventually, they agreed for me to come back home and go to a school closer to home. None of my professors were the same ethnicity as me and I felt like I was having to be someone else. Now, when I transferred I thought it was going to be great but again I still didn't have any Indian*

*professors but at least I was close to home and had my friends and family to lean on for support. I suggest institutions have policies and practices in place to assist our Native American transfer students, especially if it is considered a PWI. Our Native students need to know that we care and we want them to succeed. We just need to provide the necessary support services.*

Institutions have an opportunity to collect data on the outcomes of Native American transfer students, including graduation rates, retention rates, and participation in campus activities. This data could be disaggregated by race and ethnicity to identify disparities and gaps. In addition, institutions could prioritize survey data collection methods to capture more data relative to the Native American transfer student population.

**Conclusion-- Faculty and Staff Participants**

Improving the outcomes of Native American students in higher education through the service of faculty and staff requires a collaborative and culturally responsive approach that acknowledges their unique experiences and challenges. To create a culturally responsive learning environment, the institutions who participated in this study have the chance to implement several key practices. First, increasing access to higher education for Native American transfer students is crucial, and institutions should actively work to remove barriers and provide support services tailored to their needs. Additionally, institutions should prioritize increasing diversity among faculty and staff to enhance the successful outcomes of Native American students, which can be achieved by actively recruiting and retaining diverse faculty and staff members who can serve as mentors and role models. Furthermore, incorporating Native American perspectives and knowledge into the curriculum is essential for creating inclusive learning environments that validate and empower Native American students.

Institutions should consider several recommendations for further investigation to address these implications for practice.

- The responsibility of faculty and staff in aiding Native American transfer students could be explored, examining specific measures they can work towards providing effective support and guidance.
- Next, the effect of cultural responsiveness training tailored to faculty and staff who support Native American transfer students is an understudied opportunity and could be relied upon to determine the impact on student success.
- Additionally, it is crucial to explore the encounters of Native American transfer students with varying academic majors, as their experiences and challenges may differ across disciplines.
- Finally, examining the impact of institutional policies and practices on Native American transfer students would offer insight into more strategic areas for improvement.

Institutions must recognize the importance of creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment that empowers Native American students to succeed. This can be achieved by providing language support and cultural competency training resources and facilitating cross-cultural exchange and collaboration opportunities. By embracing cultural diversity, institutions can support faculty and staff members' cultural resilience and well-being while fostering more inclusive and supportive learning environments for all community members.

Future research focusing on the experiences of Native American community college transfer students from the faculty and staff perspective can provide valuable insights for developing more effective and culturally responsive support services in higher education. These

insights can guide institutions in creating an environment that fully supports the academic and personal success of Native American students.

Based on the data from this study, institutions should consider the following recommendations for faculty and staff for immediate impact:

- **Cultural Sensitivity Workshops**-Led by Native American cultural experts to help faculty and staff understand the unique cultural aspects, traditions, and challenges of Native American students
- **Cultural Awareness Training**-Develop programs that explore the history, heritage, and contemporary issues facing Native American communities. This could include topics such as tribal sovereignty, treaties, and the impact of historical trauma.
- **Community Engagement Programs**-Encourage faculty and staff to actively engage with the local Native American community, participate in cultural events such as pow-wows, and build relationships to understand their needs and perspectives better.
- **Curriculum Development**-Support faculty in infusing Native American perspectives, history, and literature into the curriculum, ensuring a more inclusive educational experience.
- **Inclusive Teaching Strategies**-Train faculty in culturally responsive teaching techniques that accommodate the diverse needs and learning styles of Native American students.

- **Guest Speakers and Cultural Events-** Invite Native American scholars, artists, and community leaders to speak on campus and host cultural events to promote awareness and appreciation of Native American culture and traditions.

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## Article Three – Impact Brief –Community College Transfer Programs

This section offers an impact brief examining the potential opportunities for community college transfer programs to identify and create partnership programs with four-year institutions in support of the success of Native American students. One of the most persistent and vexing problems of the educational system in the United States is the achievement gap between historically underrepresented minority and non-minority students (Fairlie et al., 2014). Native American students often face unique challenges in pursuing higher education, including limited resource access, cultural barriers, and financial constraints. Transculturation theory was evident in the findings, the experiences of faculty seeing themselves as contributors to the student successes were offered through faculty and staff voices and were captured in the data. Community college transfer programs that seek to establish partnerships with four-year institutions have the potential to offer significant opportunities for Native American students to overcome these challenges to achieve academic success. Approximately half of all postsecondary students start college at two-year institutions (Shapiro et al., 2015).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2018), the enrollment rate of students who transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions has increased in recent years. In 2016, 36% of community college students transferred to a four-year institution within six years of enrollment, compared to 32% in 2006 (NCES, 2018). Transfer programs can increase this rate by making the transfer process more seamless and efficient. This impact brief explores the potential opportunities for community college transfer programs to identify and establish partnership programs with four-year institutions that support the success of Native American students.

Transferring from a community college to a four-year institution can be challenging for any student; however, Native American students may face additional barriers due to cultural differences, social isolation, and financial constraints. Community college transfer programs with partnerships with four-year institutions can contribute to a more accessible transition process for Native American students. Partnerships which include articulation agreements, ensuring the transfer of community college coursework to the four-year institution, and reducing the need for students to retake classes or lose credits, can generate a more seamless process. Partnership programs also have a unique opportunity to provide Native American students with access to culturally responsive support services at the four-year institution, such as Native American student centers, cultural centers, and faculty and staff who are knowledgeable about Native American cultures and histories. Such support can help Native American students feel more connected and supported as they transition to a new academic environment, increasing their chances of success.

There are a variety of transfer programs available in North Carolina. Some examples include the University of North Carolina System's Comprehensive Articulation Agreement (CAA), which allows students who complete an associate's degree at a North Carolina community college to transfer seamlessly to a UNC System institution, and the NC Community College Transfer Student Grant Program, which provides financial assistance to students who transfer from a community college to a UNC System institution (UNC System, 2020). These programs can be beneficial for both community college and university students. For community college students, transfer programs can provide a clear pathway to a four-year degree and help reduce the cost of higher education. For university students, transfer programs can increase the student body's diversity and help attract academically talented students who may not have

otherwise been able to afford a four-year degree. Students enrolled at a two-year institution are more likely to come from low-income families, be first-generation students, and be members of an underrepresented racial or ethnic group than those at four-year institutions (Radwin et al., 2013). Furthermore, low-income students are three times as likely to start at a two-year institution as high-income students (Glynn, 2019). Therefore, community colleges must provide affordable equitable access to higher education for all students.

> The primary goal of state policies for transfer should be to ensure that community colleges are a viable route to the bachelor's degree and that students who begin at community colleges can complete their educational goals with no greater difficulty than students who start at four-year colleges. (Policy Alert, 2011, p. 4)

**Guiding Research Questions**

This brief highlights the findings from two overarching research questions designed to explore the experiences of Native American students enrolled in two-year transfer degree programs representing three North Carolina community colleges and the experiences of faculty and staff who provide support services and instruction to Native American students:

**Research Question 1:** What contributes to the students' successful outcomes?

**Research Question 2:** What contributes to the successful outcomes of the students who participate in a community college transfer partnership program?

**Data Collection and Analysis**

The researcher in this study offered two options for participation after obtaining consent from student, faculty, and staff participants – a one-on-one interview or a focus group – to capture data related to the two overarching research questions. The researcher conducted the interviews and focus groups virtually using Zoom, and used a semi-structured interview protocol

with open-ended questions to encourage detailed responses. The researcher facilitated the conversations and made notes during the interviews and focus groups. After each session, the researcher reviewed the Zoom recordings and transcripts for accuracy.

The researcher used Saldana's (2015) inductive coding technique to analyze the data collected. The inductive coding process involved an iterative process of identifying and refining themes in the data. Initially, the researcher engaged in open coding, which involved identifying and labeling concepts, ideas, and themes that emerged from the data. Next, the researcher used axial coding to organize the codes into related categories and subcategories. Then, the researcher used selective coding to refine and focus the analysis on the most significant themes and patterns identified in the data. Finally, the researcher used NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software, to code and analyze the data.

**Findings – Impact Brief**

The researcher found that data collection through interviews and focus groups was essential to gather rich and detailed data directly from the participants. The information gathered through these methods provided valuable insights into the experiences and perspectives of Native American community college students enrolled in a transfer program. The researcher was able to draw conclusions and recommend further research based on the patterns and themes identified in the data. Overall, the study's methodology allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the research questions from the perspectives of students, faculty, and staff.

The first part of this brief will highlight two themes obtained from data collected from the student participants and the resulting implications.

### *Student Theme #1: Create More Inclusive and Welcoming Campus Environment for Native American Students*

Native American students in transfer programs may lack representation and inclusion in academic spaces and campus culture, which can contribute to a sense of isolation, lower self-esteem, and difficulty in forming meaningful connections with peers and faculty. Working toward creating a more inclusive and welcoming campus environment for Native American students would benefit postsecondary institutions' efforts toward inclusion. Colleges can take action toward building a culturally sensitive campus by offering cultural awareness and sensitivity training for faculty and staff, creating Native American student organizations and support groups, and providing opportunities for Native American students to share their experiences and perspectives with the campus community. Tim shared,

> *Now more than ever, it is imperative for educational institutions to focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion for all students. We must work together as an institution to ensure all students are treated fairly and equally, and all students have access to the necessary resources to succeed in their academic journey. Native American students should feel "at home" when they are on our campuses. I mean, all students should feel "at home" on our campuses.*

In addition, Cora shared,

> *Sometimes I feel like I don't belong. I feel like I am not smart enough to be in the classroom. And sometimes I feel like the instructors look down on me and I am not suppose to be there.*

**Increasing Faculty and Staff Diversity.** There are steps that community colleges can take to support and retain Native American students. One key strategy is to increase faculty and

staff diversity, particularly by hiring individuals with experience and expertise working with Native American communities. Black, Latino, and Native American students comprise approximately one-third of the college-age population; however, only ten percent of the full-time instructional faculty at US colleges are Black, Latino, or Native American (Fairlie et al., 2014) resulting in a lack of minority representation among faculty in postsecondary institutions.

Test scores, grades, high school completion rates, college attendance rates, and college graduation rates are lower for African American, Latino, and Native American students than nonminority students (Fairlie et al., 2014). Postsecondary institutions must hire more underrepresented minority instructors to decrease the achievement gap between White and underrepresented minority college students; in addition, more research using data specific to community colleges when approximately half of all students attend public universities is necessary. Community colleges are an essential component of the postsecondary education system in the United States, providing workforce training and a gateway to four-year universities for students.

**Addressing Native American Student Completion Rates**. "The increasing stratification of higher education makes transfer the most important – and perhaps the only – viable avenue [to postsecondary success] for students from underserved groups" (Handel & Williams, 2012, p. 22). Native American students have consistently lower completion rates in post-secondary institutions than their non-Native peers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Several reasons for this discrepancy include financial barriers, a lack of academic preparation, and cultural support on campus (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). To improve Native American completion rates, post-secondary institutions need to address these issues and implement strategies that support the success of Native American students. This study is relevant to community college and four-year

university leaders interested in improving transfer programs in North Carolina post-secondary institutions. Policy Alert (2011) noted that 52% of American Indian or Alaska Native students in North Carolina are enrolled at two-year institutions.

**Offering Cultural Support.** Cultural support is another critical aspect of improving Native American student completion rates. Many Native American students may feel isolated and disconnected from their culture on predominantly non-Native college campuses (Cabrera et al., 2000). In this research study, all of the Native American student participants commented on unconsciously grouping themselves with other students of color to work on class projects or form study groups. Institutions can support the success of Native American students by creating a sense of community and cultural connection on campus, such as through the establishment of Native American student centers or the inclusion of Native American studies courses in the curriculum (National Congress of American Indians, 2021).

### *Student Theme #2: Provide Support and Resources Specifically Tailored to the Needs of Native American Students*

Native American students may encounter limited access to culturally responsive support services, such as academic advising, counseling, tutoring, and mentoring. The absence of resources tailored to their needs can hinder their academic success and overall well-being. Universities and community colleges have an opportunity to provide support and resources specifically tailored to the needs of Native American students. Based on data collected from Native American community college students who participated in this study, supportive services could include enhanced academic and career counseling, financial aid and scholarship resources, and culturally relevant academic programming. After a review of literature, it was realized that the student voice was missing. The researcher observed during the data collection process that

the Native American students were transparent, yet faculty and staff shared responses from an institutional point of view specific to student services or more general in nature. Although, those observations were distinct, the needs expressed by the students overlapped with what the faculty and staff participants indicated that was necessary in order to support Native American students. Unique to this study, is the fact that only one participant from the faculty staff focus group was Native American, yet, the responses in the focus group were in alignment with the voices of the Native American students and what they identified as needed to support their success.

**Forming Partnerships.** Students expressed their desire for colleges and universities to establish partnerships with tribal communities to understand their cultural values, traditions, and educational needs. This can involve working with tribal leaders to develop programs that incorporate tribal perspectives and provide resources to help Native American students succeed. In addition, Native American students face financial barriers that prevent them from accessing higher education. Colleges and universities can provide financial assistance through scholarships, grants, and other aid specifically targeted toward Native American students. Furthermore, Native American students may need additional academic support services to succeed in higher education. Colleges and universities can provide academic support services such as tutoring, study groups, and academic advising to help Native American students achieve their academic goals. Native American students may face mental health challenges related to the unique stresses of being a minority on campus. College can provide mental health support services, such as counseling and support groups, to help Native American students cope with the stresses of college life.

**Offering Financial Support**. One effective strategy is to provide financial support through scholarships and grants specifically for Native American students (National Congress of

American Indians, 2021). Many Native American students come from low-income backgrounds and may not have the financial resources to afford tuition and other college expenses (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). By offering financial assistance, post-secondary institutions can help reduce their barrier to education and make college more accessible for Native American students.

**Preparing Students Academically.** Another important factor in improving Native American student completion rates is ensuring that these students are academically prepared for college-level coursework. This may involve providing additional support, such as tutoring and academic counseling, to Native American students as they transition to college (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). It may also involve working with K-12 schools and tribal communities to improve the overall academic preparedness of Native American students before they enroll in college (National Congress of American Indians, 2021). One student in the study stated the time commitment as a reason for attending a community college; two-year vs. four-year commitment. Robert shared,

> *My thought was going to a community college; it would basically be a two-year commitment instead of a four-year commitment. So, it was a way to give me a basic understanding if college were something I would want to pursue or would I rather just get done with my trade degree and move into the actual workforce.*

**Offering Students Personalized Guidance**. The collaboration between community colleges and four-year universities plays a crucial role in supporting students during the transfer process. Community colleges must offer personalized guidance to transfer students from the early stages, assisting them in selecting a field of study, choosing relevant coursework and extracurricular activities aligned with their intended major, identifying suitable transfer

destinations, and securing financial resources for their entire undergraduate education (Wyner et al., 2016, p. 29).

Four-year universities, and community colleges need to collaborate on defining the required course requirements for a transfer student's intended major to ensure that transfer students are adequately prepared for university-level coursework and on track to earn a bachelor's degree. Moreover, faculty and staff need to receive training on advising students who intend to transfer to a four-year university, facilitating a seamless transfer process. Post-secondary institutions should designate personnel dedicated explicitly to assisting transfer students, guaranteeing their access to the necessary resources for success at the community college level and eventual transfer to a four-year university to pursue a bachelor's degree. In the present study, faculty and staff expressed a need for additional time and resources to enhance their advising skills for students enrolled in a college transfer program. Dylan shared,

> *We have more generalized training for advising students, but I do feel like there is room for improvement with professional development related to advising. Nowadays, it is so much more than just suggesting classes, now, students need a more holistic approach, especially if the students have struggled in the past with their educational journey.*

Logan added,

> *Yes, now when advising, we have to be able to answer questions about tutoring, child care assistance, food pantry, transportation options, etc. for students. And yes, all of these things impact the lives of our students, and it is our job to make sure we equip our students with all the necessary tools and resources necessary to succeed in college and transfer.*

According to The Transfer Playbook (2016), “faculty and staff training often involved attending informal meetings with advising staff, collaborating with experienced faculty and staff in transfer advising, or conducting independent research and leveraging connections with four-year universities to ensure accurate advising” (p. 9).

**Creating an Early Alert System.** Apart from advising, faculty and staff could continuously monitor students' progress and offer feedback to those who may struggle academically, potentially impeding their attainment of a bachelor's degree. Community colleges can implement data-driven interventions tailored to students' specific needs. For example, in this study, faculty and staff emphasized the importance of an early alert system, such as Watermark Student Success & Engagement (formerly Aviso Enterprise), which allows faculty and staff to monitor students' progress and intervene promptly at the first signs of issues or concerns, such as attendance problems, low grades, or the need for tutoring.

**Taking a Holistic Approach.** Furthermore, "effective four-year colleges understand that serving transfer students requires a holistic approach – transfer students need services and support that span multiple institutional functions, and four-year universities and community colleges need to collaborate with transfer students throughout the transfer process. They must continuously monitor students' academic progress, identify potential barriers that may hinder their success, and provide assistance in overcoming these obstacles to ensure a successful transfer to a four-year university. In the present study, faculty and staff from [Community College] discussed the establishment of a new transfer center at their institution. Although the center had just opened two days before the focus group and was considered in its early stages, faculty and staff expressed enthusiasm about the necessity and potential benefits of the new transfer center for transfer students, given its dedicated team.

**Increasing Student Transfer Rates.** On a national scale, more than three-quarters of states have implemented policies to increase student transfer rates from community colleges to four-year colleges (Wyner et al., 2016). By implementing practices and policies explicitly tailored to transfer students, both internal and external stakeholders at community colleges and four-year universities acknowledge the significance of transfer outcomes and ensure the visibility of transfer programs within the higher education landscape.

### *Implications for Practice*

Providing support and resources tailored to the needs of Native American students requires a commitment to understanding their unique cultural perspectives, experiences, and needs. By working in partnership with Native American communities, colleges and universities can create welcoming and inclusive campus environments that provide the support and resources necessary for Native American students to succeed in higher education.

**Implication #1: Diverse Faculty and Staff Representation.** One of the significant challenges encountered by Native American students pertains to the inadequate representation and lack of cultural competency demonstrated by the faculty and staff within higher education institutions. Consequently, this absence of understanding and support can leave Native American students feeling isolated and unsupported in their academic pursuits. The underrepresentation of Native American faculty and staff in community colleges can deprive students of valuable mentorship and role models. The absence of faculty who understand their cultural background and experiences may hinder their sense of connection and academic success.

Higher education institutions can implement various strategies to mitigate these challenges. These strategies may involve offering cultural competency training to faculty and staff members, establishing support programs tailored for Native American students, and

promoting increased representation of Native American faculty and staff. Notably, leaders of community colleges and four-year universities must be deliberate in their efforts to recruit faculty, staff, and administrators who reflect the ethnic backgrounds of the student population that the institution serves. Citing Fairlie et al.'s (2014) research, classes taught by minority instructors exhibit a smaller minority achievement gap. For instance, the study found that minority students achieve better grades, are less likely to drop courses, pass their courses at higher rates, and are more likely to attain grades of at least a B. Moreover, these positive effects on achievement contributed to decreased opportunity gaps of up to fifty percent, ultimately influencing long-term outcomes such as course selection, major choice, retention, and degree attainment. Fairlie et al. also highlighted positive role model effects, where minority students perform better with minority instructors, and negative influences, where nonminority students perform worse with minority instructors (p. 5). It is worth noting that despite advancements made by women and scholars of color, White men continue to hold the majority of professorial positions in higher education institutions (Shotton et al., 2013). For instance, data from 2021 reveals that 75% of full-time employees within the North Carolina Community College system identified as White, whereas Native American full-time employees accounted for a mere 1% (Appendix I).

Native American faculty and staff play pivotal roles as role models and mentors for Native American students within higher education. Observing individuals who share their cultural background and occupy positions of authority and expertise enables Native American students to develop stronger connections with their studies and fosters increased motivation for academic success. Native American faculty and staff possess a better understanding of the cultural values and experiences specific to Native American students. Furthermore, they are

more adept at integrating Native American perspectives into the curriculum, resulting in a more relevant and engaging learning experience for Native American students. The presence of Native American faculty and staff in higher education instills a sense of empowerment and representation among Native American students. It validates their cultural heritage and nurtures an environment where they feel encouraged to participate actively in academic and professional settings. Moreover, Native American faculty and staff are equipped to address the unique barriers that Native American students encounter during their higher education journey. They possess the necessary cultural sensitivity to provide academic support services tailored to Native American students. Marcus shared,

> *Yes, I do feel like I do connect to the Native American students on a different level because I too have shared some of their same experiences. I know what it feels like to be "a big fish in a little pond. I can relate to what they are going through and offer my best advice from a personal and professional standpoint." They are well-versed in navigating the financial aid system, thus aiding students in accessing crucial resources.*

In addition, educational institutions could encourage faculty and staff collaboration between community colleges and four-year institutions to share best practices, exchange knowledge, and collectively support the success of Native American students. This collaboration can involve joint professional development opportunities, co-teaching initiatives, and guest lectures to create a more cohesive educational experience for students. Furthermore, community colleges can actively engage Native American student organizations on their campuses and collaborate with them to identify the needs, challenges, and aspirations of Native American students. By building relationships with these organizations, community colleges can gain insights and perspectives to inform the development of partnership programs with four-year

institutions. By actively pursuing these opportunities, community colleges can establish strong partnerships with four-year institutions specifically designed to support the success of Native American students. These partnerships can enhance the transfer experience, increase graduation rates, and provide a more seamless educational pathway for Native American students seeking a bachelor's degree.

The next part of this brief will highlight one theme obtained from data collected from the faculty and staff participants and the resulting implication.

### *Faculty and Staff Theme #1: Clear and Transparent Transfer Pathways for Native American Students*

Community colleges and universities could work together to create clear and transparent transfer pathways for Native American students. This could involve creating articulation agreements that ensure transfer credits are recognized and applied appropriately and providing support services to help Native American students navigate the transfer process. According to Jenkins and Fink (2016), most students who enroll in community colleges want to earn a bachelor's degree; however, only a small percentage of those students transfer and earn a bachelor's degree within six years. For post-secondary institutions to improve transfer outcomes, the institutions (community colleges and four-year universities) must prioritize and commit to transferring students. Transfer must be key to the institution's mission (Wyner et al., 2016). "Institutions with strong transfer pathways have leaders who consistently and continually emphasize that improving transfer outcomes is core to achieving their institution's mission" (Wyner et al., 2016, p.5).

Leaders, administration, faculty, and staff must commit to transfer outcomes and be willing to build relationships with partner institutions to ensure open lines of communication to

improve transfer outcomes. For example, community college faculty, staff, and administrators could visit local universities to develop professional relationships to foster a connection between the community college and the four-year universities. The connection between community colleges and four-year universities can lead to better curricula alignment, instruction improvement, and collaborative educational activities, benefiting all stakeholders (faculty, staff, administration, and students). For example, in this research study, faculty and staff tasked with advising transfer students for specific transfer programs expressed gratitude for the professional relationship established with the four-year university representatives. The community college faculty and staff stated that the open lines of communication allowed for ease when discussing transfer options for current students and the ability to connect the community college student with a four-year university representative, which helped foster the relationship between the community college and four-year university with a focus on improving transfer outcomes.

In addition, one staff member also discussed how the four-year university representatives initiated collaborative activities for the community college students, such as attending sporting events, campus tours, and weekend trips where potential transfer students have the opportunity to stay in the on-campus dorms, which also fostered the professional relationship between the two institutions, again with the improvement of transfer outcomes as a mission of both institutions. The four-year universities representatives also visit the community colleges several times each academic year to meet with faculty, staff, and students for a meet and greet and to allow the faculty, staff, and students to ask any questions to gain a better understanding of the transfer program with the specific institution. Improving transfer outcomes must be vital to community colleges and four-year universities' missions. Furthermore, leaders of community colleges and four-year universities must implement resources dedicated solely to transfer to improve transfer

outcomes. Faculty and staff need dedicated time to strengthen program pathways by aligning curricula and instruction specific to transfer.

"Students enter community colleges with diverse backgrounds and goals; to achieve their goals, they need clear guidance and tailored support to navigate academic decision-making at each stage of their journey" (Wyner et al., 2016, p. 13). Community colleges and four-year universities must work as independent entities while working as a team to ensure transfer students have a clear and concise pathway to transfer to a four-year university and obtain a bachelor's degree. In this study, the student interviews revealed that none of the students were aware specifically of the BraveStep program; however, students were aware of some of the other transfer programs, such as C-Step with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, PackTrac with North Carolina State University, and Pirate Promise with East Carolina University.

Furthermore, collaborative efforts between community colleges and four-year universities are necessary to create major-specific program maps for transfer students. For example, in this study, the community college participant institutions provided the researcher with examples of transfer pathways for students who intend to transfer to specific four-year universities (Appendix L) as well as university partnerships with a specific community college (Appendix K) and the requirements for BraveStep specifically (Appendix J). The pathways assist advisors in advising students on which courses to complete while attending community colleges to be prepared to transfer to a four-year university. The pathways include a sequence of courses by semester to be taken by the student to ensure the student has completed the required courses before transferring to the four-year university. In addition, the programmatic pathways should also include a pathway to jobs and careers for transfer students. Community colleges and regional four-year universities need to be responsive to local economic needs and work with

employers and economic developers to identify career fields in demand in their local economy to ensure students are prepared to enter the workforce after degree completion. Therefore, community colleges and four-year universities must periodically review and update the transfer program map to improve transfer outcomes and follow the local economy's labor market needs. Post-secondary institutions are tasked with preparing and developing students to enter the workforce area once obtaining their degree. However, community colleges and four-year universities need to be aware that some transfer students will not be able to complete a programmatic pathway prior to transfer, such as a 2+2 agreement which may lead to developing an alternative plan. The development of an alternative plan allows the institutions to adapt to the circumstances and better serve those transfer students, leading to improved transfer outcomes and student outcomes, whether it is bachelor's degree completion or entering the workforce area and meeting the needs of the labor market regionally and locally.

**Implication #1: Transfer Agreements and Articulation Agreements.** Community colleges could work towards developing transfer agreements and articulation pathways between community colleges, tribal colleges, and four-year institutions. These agreements should clearly outline the transferable credits, degree requirements, and support services available to Native American students, streamlining the process and reducing potential barriers. By streamlining the transfer process, community colleges can ensure that Native American students' hard-earned credits are recognized and applied toward their bachelor's degree. In addition, community colleges can establish and promote scholarships and financial support specifically targeting Native American students transferring from community colleges to four-year institutions. These financial resources can help alleviate the financial burden and increase access and success for Native American students pursuing higher education. Finally, community colleges can gather

data on the outcomes of Native American students throughout the transfer process. This data collection would enable the identification of areas that require improvement and facilitate measuring the effectiveness of transfer initiatives. By using this data, colleges can make evidence-based decisions and enhance transfer programs to more effectively cater to the needs of Native American students.

**Conclusion – Impact Brief**

The experiences of Native American community college students in a transfer program are complex and multifaceted. The findings of this exploratory case study highlight the importance of recognizing the unique challenges these students face and the need for tailored support and resources to promote their success. This study offers insights into the experiences of Native American community college students in a transfer program through semi-structured interviews and focus groups. It identifies areas where colleges and universities can improve support for these students. The Transfer Playbook by Wyner et al. (2016) emerges as a promising resource for educational institutions to use to improve the transfer outcomes of Native American students.

The results featured in this brief also highlighted the role of culture and identity in the experiences of Native American students. Native American students may experience a cultural disconnect between their Indigenous heritage and the dominant college culture. This can manifest in lacking a culturally relevant curriculum, limited representation of Native American history and perspectives, and a scarcity of support services that address their unique cultural needs. Student participants spoke of the importance of cultural resources, such as Native American student organizations, and the need for support that acknowledges and values their cultural identity. Betty Jo shared,

> *It would be nice to have more clubs and organizations on campus that are specific for Native American students. It would be nice to connect with other Native American students as a peer support group.*

This suggests that colleges and universities need to take a more holistic approach to support Native American community college transfer students, one that recognizes the importance of cultural identity and community support in promoting academic success. Furthermore, this study highlighted the importance of clear and transparent pathways for Native American students. Robert shared,

> *In the beginning, I took classes that I thought were in my pathway but realized too late that they were not in my pathway and would not lead to a transfer degree. Yes, I changed my major a couple of times, but overall, I felt as though there could have been a better process in place to make sure I was taking the classes I needed to transfer and eventually begin my career.*

Damian shared,

> *Sometimes it is difficult to find the information needed to share with students about transfer. It is not as quick and easy as many may seem. And it is even harder when a student has multiple ideas or options of what they want to pursue in the future. It would be great to have a "cookie cutter" sheet with the basic General Education classes that would be relevant for all transfer students and for all the credits to transfer; however, that is not the case for all students, and definitely not the case with all the four-year universities.*

Overall, this study provides valuable insights into the experiences of Native American community college transfer students and offers recommendations for improving support and

resources to promote their success. By implementing the recommendations outlined in this study, educational institutions can create a more inclusive, culturally responsive, and supportive environment that enhances the transfer pathways for Native American students, ultimately increasing their opportunities for academic success and career advancement.

**References – Article Three – Impact Brief**


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# CHAPTER 5

## Summary, Implications for Practice, and Recommendations for Future Research

Two overarching research questions framed this study. The first pertained to students' experiences, and the second pertained to the faculty and staff who serve the students. Sub-questions followed each question. The following research questions explored a community college transfer program from the student perspective (including Native American students) and the faculty and staff's perspective.

Research Questions based on the student's perspectives (those enrolled in a community college transfer program) included:

**Research Question 1:** What contributes to the student's successful outcomes?

**Research Question 1a:** How do personal and social experiences shape Native American community college students' persistence?

**Research Question 1b:** What academic strategies do Native American community college students employ to persist?

**Research Question 1c:** What do community college students view as the most supportive resources in their enrollment and transfer process?

**Research Question 1d.** How is the transfer process from a community college to a four-year university for Native American students different from other demographics?

Research Questions based on the perspectives of faculty and staff (those delivering services in a community college transfer program) included:

**Research Question 2:** What contributes to the successful outcomes of the students who participate in a community college transfer program?

**Research Question 2a:** How do transfer partners define academic success?

**Research Question 2b:** What support services do community college faculty and staff implement to increase Native American students' participation and persistence?

**Research Question 2c:** How is the transfer process from a community college to a four-year university for Native American students different from other demographics?

Despite the challenges faced by Native American students in higher education, several initiatives and programs are in place to support Native American students in higher education. The Tribal College and University (TCU) movement, for example, was established to provide higher education opportunities for Native American students in their communities (Swisher & Tippeconnic Fox, 2007). These TCUs offer associate and bachelor's degree programs and often have a strong focus on cultural and community engagement. In addition, the Native American and Alaska Native Children in School program provides grants to support the education of Native American children from early childhood through postsecondary education (U.S. Department of Education, 2023).

Much work still needs to be done to increase access to and success in higher education for Native American students. However, with initiatives like the TCU movement and support programs like the Native American and Alaska Native Children in School program, there is hope for progress and improvement. Colleges and universities need to continue to prioritize and support the education of Native American students, as it not only benefits these individual students but also enriches the campus community and contributes to the overall diversity of higher education.

## Theoretical Framework

Overall, this exploratory case study contributes to the growing literature on Native Americans' experiences in higher education. The possibilities for how student affairs'

professionals and organizations could complete their responsibilities and achieve their objectives are expanded when they understand Native American epistemologies, cultures, and social systems. The history of Native Americans and educational institutions in the United States is marked by forced assimilation and cultural suppression. Native American children were subjected to the traumatic experience of the Indian Boarding School Movement and faced discrimination and segregation in the education system for many years. In recent decades, there have been efforts to improve educational outcomes for Native American students and to acknowledge and rectify past injustices.

Transculturation theory can be a useful theoretical framework for implications and practice related to the experiences of Native American community college students at colleges and universities. Transculturation is a concept that refers to the process of cultural change that occurs when two or more cultures encounter one another (Huffman, 2011). It acknowledges the complexity of cultural interactions and how cultures can be transformed through interactions (Huffman, 2011). In the context of Native American community college students, transculturation theory can provide insights into how their experiences are shaped by their interactions with college and university cultures. This theory can be applied to the experiences of Native American students in higher education in the United States, as they often encounter a dominant Eurocentric culture that is different from their own. In higher education, transculturation can refer to how Native American students adapt to and integrate with the dominant culture of the college or university they attend (Huffman, 2011). This process can be challenging for Native American students, as they may struggle to reconcile their cultural values and traditions with those of the dominant culture.

Using transculturation theory as a framework can help colleges and universities understand the unique cultural experiences of Native American community college students and how these experiences shape their interactions with the institution. It can help institutions identify cultural barriers that may be hindering the success of these students and develop strategies to address these barriers. For example, institutions can consider incorporating Native American cultural practices and perspectives into their curricula and programming to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for Native American students. Additionally, institutions can work to recruit and retain Native American faculty and staff, who can serve as role models and provide culturally responsive support to Native American students.

Transculturation theory can also help institutions understand how Native American community college students negotiate multiple cultural identities and navigate cultural differences in their interactions with peers, faculty, and staff. By acknowledging the complexity of cultural interactions and the potential for cultural transformation, institutions can work to create a more inclusive environment that values and celebrates diversity. This can lead to greater success and retention rates for Native American community college transfer students, as they feel more supported and included in the college or university culture. Overall, transculturation theory can help institutions develop more culturally responsive practices and policies that support the success of Native American community college transfer students.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The history of Native Americans and educational institutions is marked by forced assimilation, cultural suppression, and systemic discrimination. From the early days of colonization, Native American children were subjected to various educational experiences, many designed to assimilate them into mainstream American culture and erase their Indigenous

identities. While there have been significant efforts to improve educational outcomes for Native American students and to increase access to higher education, Native American students continue to face significant challenges in educational institutions. In terms of future research, it would be advantageous to place greater emphasis on soliciting the perspectives of Native American students themselves, as in this study, and to include those who did not complete their education. Often, research has centered around the viewpoints of successful students. At the same time, insufficient attention has been given to the targeted student population, specifically, Native American students who did not continue their educational journey. By including a broader range of voices and experiences, scholars can attain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing Native American student outcomes.

The findings and implications of this study resulted in several recommendations for future research. The recommendations for research in Article One are that more research is needed on the specific challenges and barriers that Native American students face in higher education and on the experiences of Native American students at different types of higher education institutions.

For example, there is an opportunity for community colleges and BraveStep or similar programs to bridge the transfer gap for Native American students. BraveStep, a transfer partnership program with five community colleges, allows prospective University of North Carolina at Pembroke (UNCP) students to start their college careers at a community college and transfer to UNCP after completing 30 credit hours. UNCP was founded in 1887 to educate Native American teachers and is the nation's only four-year public institution founded by American Indians for American Indians. According to The University of North Carolina System

website, UNCP is a historically minority-serving institution. It has the largest population of Native American students of the 17 UNC System institutions.

Table 7 depicts the collective BraveStep Community Colleges Partner Data (2019) based on the most recent equity report published by the North Carolina Community College System Office. To de-identify the participating community colleges in the research study, the data were combined for the five community colleges with an established BraveStep partnership program at the time of the research study.

**Table 7**

*BraveStep Data – BraveStep Community College Partners*

| BraveStep Community College Partners | Total Number of Fall 2017 Curriculum Students | Number of Fall 2017 Curriculum Students Identified as Native American (Percentage) | Number of Fall 2017 Native American Students Enrolled in a Transfer Program |
|---|---|---|---|
| Combined Community Colleges | 13,519 | 1,400 (10.36%) | 218 |

*Note.* BraveStep Community College Partners Data (2019). Equity Report Identifying Access and Academic Progress Gaps in the North Carolina Community College System)

This study selected five community colleges in a transfer partnership program based on a relatively high population of Native American students, future research could focus on institutions who have low enrollment of Native American students. This effort could identify solutions to encourage the recruitment and retention of Native American students. The recommendations for research in Article Two are for more research on the long-term outcomes of Native American students in higher education, including their career paths and contributions to their communities, and more research to explore ways to increase the participation of Native American students in higher education, including improving recruitment and retention efforts.

The recommendations for research in Article Three are for more research focused on identifying best practices and effective interventions for supporting the success of Native American students in higher education and more research to examine the impact of federal and state policies on Native American student access and success in higher education. Transfer programs between North Carolina community colleges and universities are designed to provide a smooth transition for students who wish to transfer from a community college to a four-year institution. These programs can benefit students who want to save money on tuition, complete their general education requirements at a lower-cost institution, or may still need to meet the academic requirements for admission to a four-year institution.

The absence of any substantial commitment to Native American higher education during the initial two centuries of our shared history has resulted in immeasurable costs for both Native Americans and non-Native Americans. To unlock their full potential in this regard, educators must make a firm commitment to deepening the understanding of the history of Native American higher education and strengthening the dedication to Native American students. Today, Native American students face educational challenges, but many efforts are underway to support them and promote cultural preservation and revitalization in education. Suppose educators can improve the ways they serve Native American students. In that case, higher education leaders, faculty, and professionals must better understand them and move those Native American students "beyond the asterisk." Colleges and universities have a role to play in providing academic and cultural support to ensure that Native American students can thrive and reach their full potential. Overall, studying the experiences of Native American community college students in transfer programs serves as a means to advance educational equity, improve student outcomes, promote cultural affirmation, and inform policy and practice to create more inclusive and

supportive learning environments for Native American students. “We are still here” …encapsulates the enduring spirit and resilience of Native Americans, reaffirming their cultural identity, history, and connection to the land despite centuries of challenges and adversity. This statement embodies a profound sense of strength and perseverance in the face of colonization, displacement, and cultural assimilation, highlighting the determination of Native communities to preserve their heritage and contribute to society.

**Researcher Reflection**

In this reflection, I will share my personal experiences and reflections as a Native American researcher conducting a dissertation on the educational experiences of Native American students. This reflection will provide insights into my journey, challenges, and the significance of conducting research within the community.

As a Native American researcher, my study aimed to explore the educational experiences of Native American students, specifically focusing on the challenges they encounter within the education system and identifying culturally relevant strategies for promoting their academic success and well-being. The primary goal was to amplify the voices of Native American students and contribute to a more inclusive and equitable education system.

Undertaking this research as a Native American researcher has been a deeply personal and transformative journey. As a member of the community I was studying, I brought my lived experiences, cultural understanding, and perspectives to the research process. This insider perspective allowed me to establish immediate rapport with participants, as we shared a common cultural background and experiences shaped by our Native heritage.

One particular incident stands out in my memory, marking my first encounter with racial profiling. It occurred during my first-grade year when I was merely six years old. I vividly

remember the disappointment of being denied the opportunity to complete the academically gifted assessment at my elementary school. While I was unaware of racial profiling at that young age, I keenly sensed that I was being treated differently from my Caucasian peers in the classroom. The assessment was exclusively offered to Caucasian students, while students like me were inexplicably excluded. Thankfully, my parents stepped in as advocates, ensuring I had a fair chance. Eventually, I was granted permission to take the assessment, and the results placed me in the top 5% of participants. This recognition as academically gifted allowed me access to supplementary resources and activities and to work with a specialized teacher during designated resource periods each week.

Upon reflection, I realize that there have been numerous instances in my life where the color of my skin was the sole determinant in various situations. This early memory resurfaced as I embarked on my research study, listened to the stories and educational experiences of the participants, and took the time to contemplate my own journey through education. It became painfully evident that the treatment of Native American students, like myself, in education is unjustifiable. In addition, several years ago, I took part in a Privilege Walk, an experience that profoundly opened my eyes. Prior to that, I had never truly reflected upon my educational path and how it differed from those of others. Upon completing the walk, I stood alongside individuals who shared my position while others stood ahead and behind me. This was a powerful reminder that each person's educational journey varies, influenced by economic status, environment, and countless other variables. The Privilege Walk aimed to clarify the intersectionality of race, socioeconomic class, gender, and other demographic variables that shape individuals. Therefore, as educators we must strive for substantial improvements in serving our underserved minority populations within the education system. This revelation has

sparked a renewed determination within me to ensure a better future for Native American students and others who face similar challenges.

Being a Native American researcher conducting research within my community presented unique challenges and strengths. One significant challenge was navigating the balance between objectivity and advocacy. While it was important to maintain rigorous research standards, I also felt a responsibility to advocate for the needs and concerns of Native American students. Striking this balance required careful self-reflection, transparency, and continuous dialogue with my dissertation advisor.

Another challenge I faced was the potential for retraumatization among participants due to discussing past negative experiences within the education system. I recognized the need for culturally sensitive research practices and employed trauma-informed approaches to ensure participants' emotional well-being and safety throughout the research process. Creating a supportive and respectful environment allowed participants to share their stories authentically while feeling heard and validated.

In addition, another challenge I faced was the scarcity of existing literature on Native American community college students' experiences. This lack of available research meant I had to be resourceful and creative in designing my data collection methods.

Moreover, my cultural background and shared experiences as a Native American were strengths in the research process. Building trust with participants was easier as I could relate to their experiences and cultural values. My insider perspective also allowed me to ask culturally appropriate questions, interpret nuances in responses, and recognize the broader socio-cultural factors influencing the educational experiences of Native American students.

Engaging in this research provided profound insights into the resilience, wisdom, and aspirations of Native American students. Their stories highlighted the importance of cultural identity, community engagement, and supportive educational environments in nurturing their academic success. Throughout this research, I witnessed the transformative power of amplifying the voices of Native American students and centering their experiences. The findings of my research study contribute to the growing body of knowledge that challenges dominant narratives and provides a more nuanced understanding of the educational experiences of Native American communities. I hope to challenge stereotypes and contribute to developing culturally responsive education practices. The findings of this research contribute to a more accurate narrative surrounding Native American students' educational experiences and offer recommendations for creating culturally responsive and empowering educational practices.

Moving forward, I am committed to using my research as a platform for advocacy, policy change, and community engagement. I believe this research contributes to the ongoing dialogue and efforts to create a more inclusive and equitable education system for Native American students. I will continue collaborating with Native American communities, educators, and policymakers to ensure that the findings of this research are used to inform culturally relevant educational policies and practices. Additionally, I will actively seek opportunities to mentor and support other Native American researchers, promoting the representation and voices of Indigenous scholars in academia. As a Native American researcher, I am grateful and honored for the opportunity to explore this important area of study and humbled by the trust bestowed upon me by the participants. This research has allowed me to contribute to the existing body of knowledge and reclaim and amplify Native voices within academia. By centering Native

perspectives, cultural values, and aspirations, this research strives to promote equity, empowerment, and self-determination for Native American students within the education system.

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to Native American students who generously shared their experiences and wisdom for this research. I am deeply humbled by their trust and willingness to participate, and it is because of them that this dissertation has come to fruition. Their courage and resilience have been an inspiration throughout this research journey. In addition, I want to express my gratitude to the community college faculty and staff who shared their experiences and knowledge for this research. Their trust and willingness to participate have humbled me deeply, and thanks to them, this research study has been realized.

I also want to acknowledge and thank my dissertation advisor and committee members for their guidance, support, and encouragement throughout this journey. Their expertise and commitment to elevating indigenous voices have been instrumental in shaping this research. Conducting research on the educational experiences of Native American students as a Native American researcher has been a transformative and empowering experience. I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this knowledge.

Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to my ancestors, whose strength and wisdom continue to guide me. May their legacy be honored in my work to create a more inclusive and empowering education system for Native American students. I am still here. We are still here.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A

## Point of Contact Email

Dear [name of potential gatekeeper],

My name is Brittany Locklear, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Community College Leadership program at North Carolina State University. My research focuses on community college transfer partnership programs and Native American students.

I would like to conduct research on your campus to explore the personal, social, and academic experiences of faculty, staff, and Native American students associated with BraveStep, a community college transfer partnership program at your institution.

I currently have the approval to conduct this research from the IRB Office at NCSU under eIRB number 23811.

I would like to conduct this research virtually via Zoom, with your approval and possible assistance, during the Spring 2021/Summer 2021 semester. I would need [1 or 2] day(s) to conduct the focus groups (approximately 90 minutes each) with up to five faculty, staff, and students in each group.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and will have no bearing on your employment. **If you are willing to assist, please respond to this email.** I will follow up with additional details once I hear from you.

Thank you for your consideration,

Brittany Locklear, [redacted]
Doctoral Candidate
Educational Leadership, Policy, & Human Development-Community College Leadership
North Carolina State University

## Appendix B

## Informed Consent Form for Research

**Title of Study:** An Exploratory Case Study of a Community College Transfer Partnership Program

**eIRB #** 23811

**Principal Investigator(s):** Brittany Locklear [redacted]

**Faculty Point of Contact:** Dr. Carrol Warren [redacted]

---

**What are some general things you should know about research studies?**

You are invited to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate, and to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of this dissertation study is to gain a better understanding of Native American community college student experiences, specifically those who are participating in a college transfer partnership program. We will do this through meeting observations.

You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in this study. This research study poses minimal risk to anyone who chooses to participate. You may want to participate in this research because the research will lead to a better understanding of Native American community college students' experiences enrolled in a college transfer partnership program. You may not want to participate in this research if you do not wish to share any information about your experience as a Native American community college student enrolled in a college transfer partnership program.

Specific details about the research in which you are invited to participate are contained below. If you do not understand something in this form, please ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If, at any time, you have questions about your participation in this research, do not hesitate to contact the researcher named above or the NC State IRB office. The IRB office's contact information is listed in the *What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?* section of this form.

**What is the purpose of this study?**

The purpose of the study is to explore a community college transfer partnership program from student, faculty, and staff perspectives. The personal, social, and academic experiences of the stakeholders in this group will contribute to a better understanding of the community college students' transfer process for Native American students.

**Am I eligible to be a participant in this study?**

There will be approximately 10-15 participants in this study selected from a larger sample.

In order to be a participant in this study, you must agree to be in the study and must be a Native American community college student enrolled in a community college transfer program or be

involved as a faculty or staff member working in the community college transfer partnership program or general transfer studies.

You cannot participate in this study if you do not want to be in the study or you are not a Native American community college student enrolled in a community college transfer program or not a faculty or staff member working in the community college transfer partnership program or general transfer studies.

**What will happen if you take part in the study?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you may be asked to participate in meetings and/or events related to the community college transfer partnership program. I will have the opportunity to observe the meetings and/or events. A college point of contact will inform me of when and where these meetings and/or events will occur so I can attend. My role in observation will be as an observer. I will not interfere in any meetings unless you ask me a question. I will record data through field notes (no recording device will be used in the observations).

The total amount of time that you will be participating in this study will vary depending on the meetings and/or events related to the community college transfer partnership program.

## Recording and Images

If you want to participate in the meetings and/or events related to the community college transfer partnership program, you must agree to allow the observer (researcher) to record written notes. If you do not agree for the observer (researcher) to record written notes during the meetings and/or events related to the community college transfer partnership program, you cannot participate in this research. Any written notes will be maintained in a confidential manner.

## Risks and Benefits

There are minimal risks associated with participation in this research. The length of the involvement is moderate, so care will be taken to ensure that the timeframe for the focus group is not violated.

The risk involved is social/reputational. You may feel uncomfortable answering some questions in your meetings and/or events related to the community college transfer partnership program. The likelihood of experiencing anxiety or discomfort is slim, although it may be dependent on your experiences at your institution. You will likely have discussed these topics with peers, family, or college faculty/staff, thus minimizing your anxiety discussing their experiences. The steps taken to minimize these risks include allowing you to take your time with responses during the meetings and/or events related to the community college transfer partnership program. You can also withdraw participation at any point.

Preserving your confidentiality is the primary concern and every effort will be made to do so during the study (see confidentiality section below). Participants will not be identified in the

discussion of findings using real participant names. All public sharing of the study's findings and discussion will remove identifiers and replace participant names with appropriate pseudonyms.

Participating in this study can provide direct benefits such as insights that lead to new learning. The study will facilitate a better understanding of the community college transfer process for Native American students. The insights gained from the study may have useful impactful implications for practitioners and scholars at your institution and the field of higher education.

## Right to Withdraw Your Participation

You can stop participating in this study at any time for any reason. In order to stop your participation, please tell me to stop the recording of written notes during the meetings and/or events related to community college transfer partnership program and the observer (researcher) will exit the meetings and/or events. Remember, being in a study is up to you and there will be no penalty if you do not want to participate or change your mind and want to stop participating.

If you choose to withdraw your consent and to stop participating in this research, you can expect that the researcher will redact your data from their data set, securely destroy your data, and prevent future uses of your data for research purposes wherever possible. This is possible in some, but not all, cases.

## Confidentiality, Personal Privacy, and Data Management

Trust is the foundation of the participant/researcher relationship. Much of that principle of trust is tied to keeping your information private and in the manner that I have described to you in this form. The information that you share with me will be held in confidence to the fullest extent allowed by law.

Protecting your privacy as related to this research is of utmost importance to me. There are very rare circumstances related to confidentiality where I may have to share information about you. Your information collected in this research study could be reviewed by representatives of the University, research sponsors, or government agencies (for example, the FDA) for purposes such as quality control or safety. In other cases, I must report instances in which imminent harm could come to you or others.

How I manage, protect, and share your data are the principal ways that I protect your personal privacy. Data that will be shared with others about you will be anonymous.

> **Identifiable**. Identifiable data is information about you that directly links you to the data. This includes, but is not limited to, your name, e-mail, phone number, or other details that make you easily recognizable to only the researcher. Identifiable data has your real identity directly on the recording that only the researcher will have access to. Your identifying information will be removed and pseudonyms will be assigned once your participation is complete.

Data will be stored securely on a password-protected personal laptop. Electronic data will be stored in a Google Drive folder within my personal North Carolina State University Two-Factor Authentication Google Drive and external hard drive, which will be housed in a locked drawer that only the researcher can access. Unless you give explicit permission to the contrary, no reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. Individual data with identifiable details removed may be made available to the public as required by a professional association, journal, or funding agency.

**Future use of your research data**
Your information, even with identifiers removed, will not be stored or distributed for future research studies.

**Compensation**
There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

**What if you are a college student?**
Your participation in this study is not a course requirement and your participation, or lack thereof, will not affect your class standing or grades at your college.

**What if you are a college employee?**
Your participation in this study is not a requirement of your employment, and your participation, or lack thereof, will not affect your job.

**What if you Have Questions About This Study?**

If you have questions at any time about the study itself or the procedures implemented in this study, you may contact the researcher via email or phone.

**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 the NC State IRB (Institutional Review Board) Office. An IRB office helps participants if they have any issues regarding research activities. You can contact the NC State IRB Office via email at irb-director@ncsu.edu or via phone at (919) 515-8754.

You can also find out more information about research, why you would or would not want to be a research participant, questions to ask as a research participant, and more information about your rights by going to this website: http://go.ncsu.edu/research-participant

## Consent To Participate

By reviewing this consent form, I am affirming that I have read and understood the above information. I have received a copy of this form. All of the questions that I had about this research have been answered. I have chosen to participate in this study with the understanding that I may stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I am aware that I may revoke my consent at any time. By reviewing this consent form I am agreeing to participate in this study.

## Appendix C

## Student Interview Protocol

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee

Questions

1. Are you familiar with the BraveStep program? If so, how did you learn about BraveStep? If not, why are you not familiar with BraveStep?
2. What are your reasons for choosing to attend a community college and participate in BraveStep or another transfer program?
3. How did you learn about BraveStep or any other transfer programs and what do you see as the benefits/advantages to participating? Have you experienced any consequences/disadvantages?
4. How important is the ethnic background of the faculty and/or staff who provide services to you as a Native American community college student?
5. What resources are available at the community college to help you persist? Persisting in college is key to graduating. What strategies do you employ to persist or continue from one semester to the next in college?
6. What are the most important resources you have access to for academic success?

7. What are the least important resources you have access to related to your academic success?
8. Do you have opportunities to engage with other students/peers who are also Native American? If so, what are those opportunities?
9. Describe your interactions with Native American students at your community college. What about your interactions with non-Native students?
10. What role does your family play in your educational journey?
11. What does student success mean to you?
12. What barriers or obstacles do you face in your academic endeavors?
13. What advice would you give other Native American community college students?

Thanks for participating in this interview.

## Appendix D

## Faculty and Staff Interview Protocol

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

Questions

1. How are community college transfer partnerships used at your institution?
2. How are faculty and staff trained to assist students who intend to transfer to a four-year university?
3. What professional development is available to equip you to advise transfer students enrolled in BraveStep?
4. What are the benefits of BraveStep?
5. What are the consequences of BraveStep?
6. Describe the transfer process at the community college.
7. What role does socioeconomic status play in student success outcomes?
8. What strategies do you employ to assist students in the BraveStep program?
9. What strategies do you employ to assist Native American students in the BraveStep program?
10. What are the barriers or obstacles facing Native American students in higher education today?

11. What are the support services available to assist students in the transfer process?
12. How is the transfer process different for Native American students than other demographics?

Thanks for participating in this interview.

## Appendix E

## Student Pre-Questionnaire

Name _____

Date_____

1. Gender: What is your gender?
    a. Male
    b. Female
    c. Non-binary
    d. Prefer not to answer
2. Age: What is your age?
    a. 18-28 years old
    b. 29-39 years old
    c. 40-50 years old
    d. 51-61 years old
    e. 62-72 years old
    f. 73 and older
    d. Prefer not to answer
3. Ethnicity: What is your ethnicity?
    a. Caucasian
    b. African American
    c. Latino or Hispanic
    d. Asian
    e. Native American

f. Other/Unknown

g. Prefer not to answer

If Native American, please specify Native American Tribe _____

4. Education: What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?

   a. Some high school

   b. High school

   c. Bachelor's Degree

   d. Master's Degree

   e. Ph. D or higher

   f. Trade school

   g. GED

   h. Prefer not to say

5. What is the highest level of education of your mother?

   a. Some high school

   b. High school

   c. Bachelor's Degree

   d. Master's Degree

   e. Ph. D or higher

   f. Trade school

   g. GED

   h. Prefer not to say

6. What is the highest level of education of your father?

   a. Some high school

b. High school

c. Bachelor's Degree

d. Master's Degree

e. Ph. D or higher

f. Trade school

g. GED

h. Prefer not to say

7. Marital status: Are you married?

   a. Yes

   b. No

   c. Prefer not to say

8. Income: What is your household income?

   a. Less than $25,000

   b. $25,000-$50,000

   c. $50,000-$100,000

   d. $1000,000-$200,00

   e. More than $200,000

   f. Prefer not to say

9. Employment: What is your current employment status?

   a. Employed full-time

   b. Employed part-time

   c. Seeking opportunities

   d. Retired

e. Prefer not to say

10. Family & Dependent: How many children do you have?

    a. None

    b. 1

    c. 2-4

    d. More than 4

    e. Prefer not to say

## Appendix F

## Faculty & Staff Pre-Questionnaire

Name _____

Position _____

1. Gender: What is your gender?
    a. Male
    b. Female
    c. Non-binary
    d. Prefer not to say
2. Age: What is your age?
    a. 18-28 years old
    b. 29-39 years old
    c. 40-50 years old
    d. 51-61 years old
    e. 62-72 years old
    f. 73 and older
    g. Prefer not to say
3. Ethnicity: What is your ethnicity?
    a. Caucasian
    b. African American
    c. Latino or Hispanic
    d. Asian
    e. Native American

f. Other/Unknown

g. Prefer not to say

If Native American, please specify Native American Tribe _____

4. Education: What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?

   a. Some high school

   b. High school

   c. Bachelor's Degree

   d. Master's Degree

   e. Ph. D or higher

   f. Trade school

   g. GED

   h. Prefer not to say

5. Work history: How long have you been employed in higher education?

   a. 1-5 years

   b. 6-10 years

   c. 11-15 years

   d. 15-20 years

   e. 21-25 years

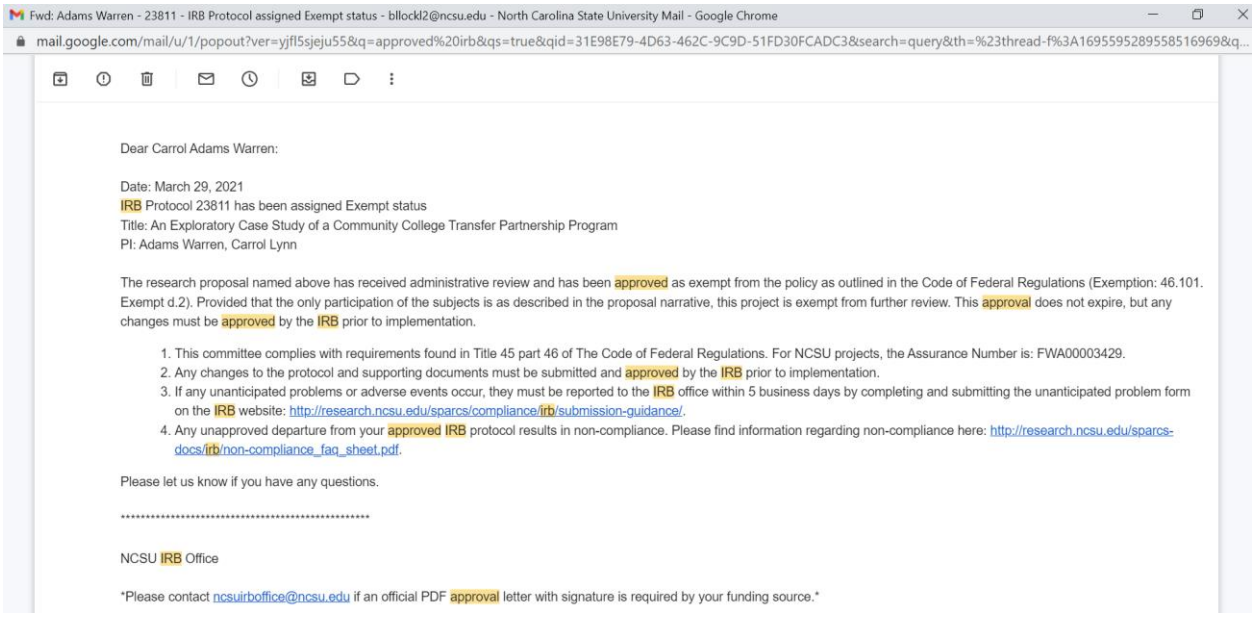
   f. 26-30 years

   g. More than 30 years

   h. Prefer not to say

# Appendix G

# Approved IRB


Fwd: Adams Warren - 23811 - IRB Protocol assigned Exempt status - bllockl2@ncsu.edu - North Carolina State University Mail - Google Chrome

mail.google.com/mail/u/1/popout?ver=yjfl5sjeju55&q=approved%20irb&qs=true&qid=31E98E79-4D63-462C-9C9D-51FD30FCADC3&search=query&th=%23thread-f%3A1695595289558516969&q...

Dear Carrol Adams Warren:

Date: March 29, 2021
IRB Protocol 23811 has been assigned Exempt status
Title: An Exploratory Case Study of a Community College Transfer Partnership Program
PI: Adams Warren, Carrol Lynn

The research proposal named above has received administrative review and has been approved as exempt from the policy as outlined in the Code of Federal Regulations (Exemption: 46.101. Exempt d.2). Provided that the only participation of the subjects is as described in the proposal narrative, this project is exempt from further review. This approval does not expire, but any changes must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

1. This committee complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NCSU projects, the Assurance Number is: FWA00003429.
2. Any changes to the protocol and supporting documents must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.
3. If any unanticipated problems or adverse events occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days by completing and submitting the unanticipated problem form on the IRB website: http://research.ncsu.edu/sparcs/compliance/irb/submission-guidance/.
4. Any unapproved departure from your approved IRB protocol results in non-compliance. Please find information regarding non-compliance here: http://research.ncsu.edu/sparcs-docs/irb/non-compliance_faq_sheet.pdf.

Please let us know if you have any questions.

**********

NCSU IRB Office

*Please contact ncsuirboffice@ncsu.edu if an official PDF approval letter with signature is required by your funding source.*

## Appendix H

### Student Participant Pseudonyms

| Pseudonyms | Description |
|---|---|
| **Earl Lowry** | Dr. Earl Lowry is a native of Robeson County. Dr. Lowry was the fourth Lumbee medical doctor. He attended to four US presidents and all the Joint Chiefs of Staff during WWII. He signed Gen. George Patton's death certificate and tended to the famed US general during his last days following a car accident in June 1945 after the fighting ended in Europe in WWII. Dr. Lowry was the son of the late Rev. Fuller Lowry and Jessie Hatcher Lowry. After graduating from the University of Chattanooga in 1927, Lowry spent two years as a science instructor in North Carolina, and later at Vanderbilt University, where he received his medical degree in 1933. He received four years of surgical training at St. Thomas Hospital in Nashville before entering the U.S. Army Medical Corps in 1937.<br><br>In a medical career that spanned more than three decades, his accomplishments include, service in World War II, commanding the 195th General Hospital in France, receiving the "Legion of Merit Award" for his contribution in Washington D.C. as the assistant executive director of the Office for Dependents Medical Care, an innovative program used as the model for Medicare. He also received the Distinguished Alumni Award from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga in 1999.<br><br>He was the past commander of the American Legion in Des Moines, Iowa, and a member of the Civil War Roundtable.<br><br>***NOTE: In 1924, he received a high school diploma from what is presently known as the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. Before 1926, the school, then Croatan Normal School, provided primary and secondary education to Robeson County's Native American children. In July 2007, the Heritage Walk was dedicated to serve as a permanent monument to all of the university's graduates from 1905 to 1954. Dr. Lowry was honored by having his name engraved on a brick in the Heritage Walk walkway in front of Old Main, the oldest building on the campus. |
| **Robert Oxendine** | Mr. Robert Oxendine from the Evans Cross Roads community fought with the Merrill Marauders South East Asia group in 1944. He received the Purple Heart. |
| **Clifton Oxendine** | Top historian because of the history he wrote during the time in which he wrote it without many resources in the early 1930s. He |

| Pseudonyms | Description |
|---|---|
| | was an educator and a historian who wrote greatly about the history of our people and our university. Dr. Cliff graduated from the old Indian Normal School in 1924 along with Dr. Earl Lowry, among others, and the two Lumbee greats went to Illinois to McKendree College. Dr. Cliff played football there and returned to teach at Indian Normal after graduating from McKendree a couple of years later. He was the first Lumbee to earn a master's degree, graduating from Peabody College, now Vanderbilt, in 1933. Dr. Cliff is the one who coined the term "Old Main" for our landmark building at UNCP. |
| **Betty Jo Hunt** | The late Betty Jo "Jo Jo" Hunt (1950-1996) was the first Lumbee woman awarded a law degree. Hunt helped contribute to awareness and recognition of the Lumbee through her positions on the Senate Select Committee for Indian Affairs, the Indian Health Service, the National Indian Education Advisory Council, and the American Indian Policy Review Commission. |
| **Helen Maynor Schierbeck** | Dr. Helen Maynor Scheirbeck '57. Helen was born into the Lumbee tribe of North Carolina. After earning her History and Political Science degree at Berea, she became a prominent civil rights advocate for American Indians. Scheirbeck founded the American Indian Higher Education Consortium and organized the Capitol Conference on Poverty. She served as President Carter's Chair of the Indian Education Task Force, was Director of the American Indian Office of Head Start, and was instrumental in the passage of the 1968 Indian Civil Rights Act. Scheirbeck also advocated for the opening of the National Museum of the American Indian and later served as their Director of Public Programs. In her work, Dr. Scheirbeck said, "The country needs to understand the struggle of Indians to be Indians. Every tribe had a trail of tears." |
| **Kathleen Revel** | Dr. Kathleen Revel, the first Lumbee woman doctor, was a "WAC" nurse during the war. She became a doctor about two decades after the war in 1964. Her cousin, Dr. Martin Brooks, became only the second Lumbee doctor in Robeson County in 1956. Dr. Brooks and Dr. Revel were the fifth and sixth Lumbees to become medical doctors. |
| **Cheryl Ransom Lowry** | Dr. Cheryl Ransom Locklear is a Dentist at Ransom Locklear Dental Services specializing in General Dentistry in Red Springs. She was the first Lumbee woman dentist and the first American Indian woman accepted into the dental school at UNC Chapel Hill. Dr. Locklear also has more than 20 years of experience in realty. She was also the first Miss Lumbee, selected in 1967. |

| Pseudonyms | Description |
|---|---|
| **Debbie Butler** | Debbie Butler, one of the most beautiful Lumbee women ever, was a Hollywood actress more than 50 years ago. She worked with Max Baer Jr., aka "Jethro Bodine," on the set of the Beverly Hillbillies, one of the many appearances she made on network sitcoms, which also included several appearances on the popular sitcom "The Munsters." Debbie's real name was Dinah Butler. She grew up in West Lumberton and attended Magnolia High School before moving with her family to Baltimore in the mid-1950s. She graduated from Baltimore's Patterson High School in 1956 and began an acting career shortly thereafter. She was a woman well ahead of her time. While her people still faced severe discrimination back home, she represented the Lumbees on the Hollywood movie screens. At the height of her fame in the 1960s, she did some movies, including a couple of movies with Elvis Presley, and later sang backup with Marvin Gaye. Debbie was tragically killed in February 2006 after she was struck by a car in New York City. She was featured on the cover of the March 2006 issue of Native Visions in a tribute story. |
| **Cora Dale Locklear Homan** | Cora Dale Locklear Homan, Lumbee James Bond CIA woman<br>One of the most fascinating Lumbees ever -- women or men -- was the late Cora Dale Locklear Homan. She left Pembroke in the early 1950s and attended college in Nebraska where she was recruited to work for the Central Intelligence Agency. Homan spent 30 years working for the CIA in a "secretarial" position but also did covert operations. She is believed to have taken part in the rescue of the Dalai Lama from Tibet in the spring of 1959, smuggling orders from the American Embassy, where she worked in India to Tibet where CIA operatives helped lead the young Buddhist religious leader to freedom from communist Chinese in the spring of 1959. Homan grew up on Pine Street before leaving Pembroke. Her brother RJ Locklear was one of the first Lumbees to serve as a sheriff's deputy in Robeson County. Her brother-in-law, James Quintin Locklear, was a World War II pilot and flew relief missions during the Berlin Air Lift in 1948. Homan lived with JQ Locklear and his wife, Suzie, while she attended college in Nebraska. |

# Appendix I

## NC Community Colleges Employee Headcounts by Race/Ethnicity


Note: Retrieved from NC Community Colleges Dashboard

https://public.tableau.com/shared/8DTQM3D7D?:display_count=y&:origin=viz_share_link&:embed=y

# Appendix J

## BraveStep Requirements

# BraveStep

BraveStep students should base their course selection on the degree pathway for their desired major at UNCP. (Add URL for degree pathways)

## General Education

**English Composition (6 Semester Hours)**

| | |
|---|---|
| ENG 111 Writing & Inquiry | 3 |
| ENG 112 Writing/Research in the Disciplines | 3 |

**Humanities/Fine Arts (Select 2 courses from at least 2 different disciplines – 6 Semester Hours)**

| | |
|---|---|
| ART 111 Art Appreciation | 3 |
| ENG 231 American Literature I | 3 |
| ENG 232 American Literature II | 3 |
| ENG 241 British Literature I | 3 |
| ENG 242 British Literature II | 3 |
| HIS 111 World Civilizations I | 3 |
| HIS 112 World Civilizations II | 3 |
| HIS 131 American History I | 3 |
| HIS 132 American History II | 3 |
| MUS 110 Music Appreciation | 3 |
| MUS 112 Introduction to Jazz | 3 |
| PHI 215 Philosophical Issues | 3 |
| PHI 240 Introduction to Ethics | 3 |

**Social/Behavioral Sciences (Select 2 courses from at least 2 different disciplines – 6 Semester Hours)**

| | |
|---|---|
| ECO 251 Principles of Microeconomics | 3 |
| ECO 252 Principles of Macroeconomics | 3 |
| PSY 150 General Psychology | 3 |
| SOC 210 Introduction to Sociology | 3 |

**Math (Select 1 course – 3-4 Semester Hours)**

| | |
|---|---|
| MAT 143 Quantitative Literacy | 3 |
| MAT 152 Statistical Methods I | 4 |
| MAT 171 Precalculus Algebra | 4 |

**Natural Sciences (Select 1 course - 4 Semester Hours)**

| | |
|---|---|
| BIO 111 General Biology I | 4 |
| CHM 151 General Chemistry I | 4 |
| PHY 110/PHY 110A Conceptual Physics & Lab | 4 |

**Academic Transition (1 Semester Hour)**

| | |
|---|---|
| ACA 122 College Transfer Success | 1 |

**Physical Education (1-2 Semester Hours)**

*Take at least one physical activity course

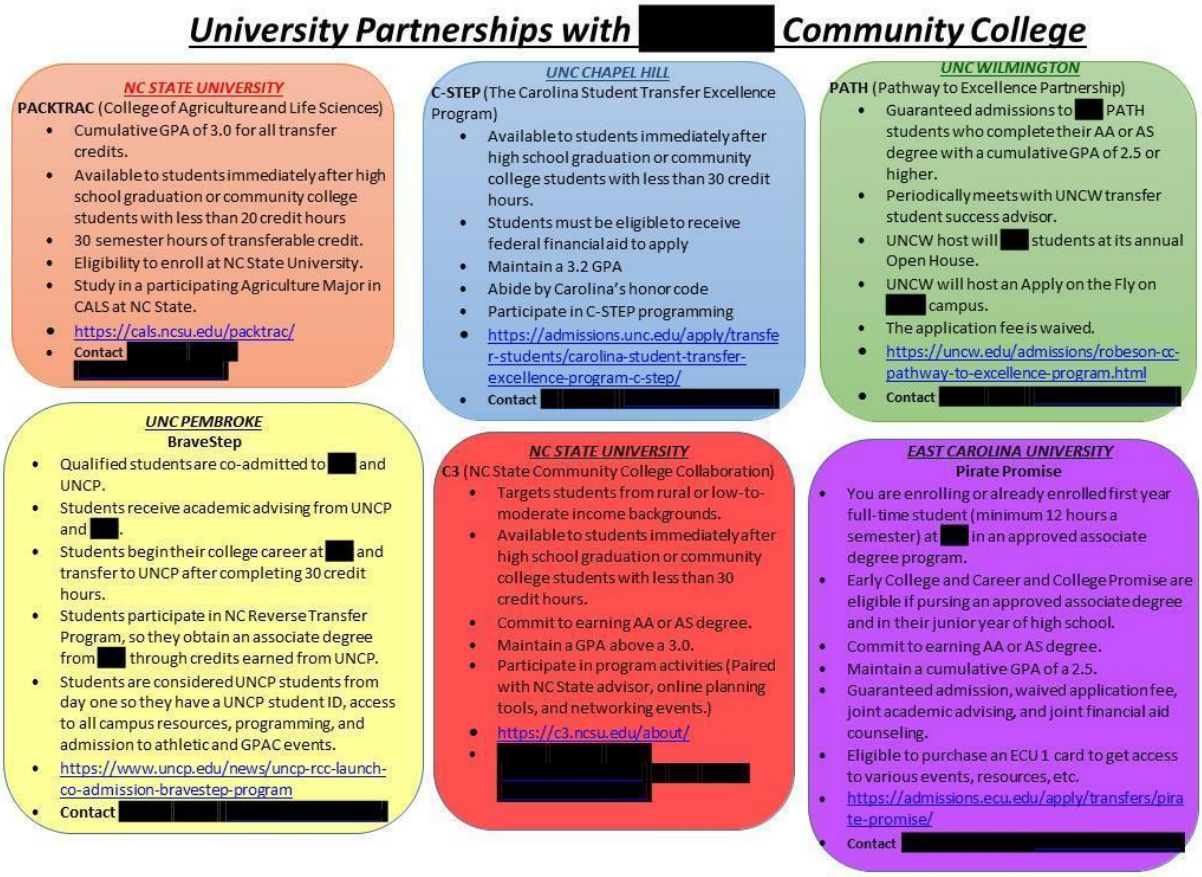
| | |
|---|---|
| PED 110 Fitness and Wellness for Life | 2 |
| PED 120 Fitness Walking | 1 |
| PED 117 Weight Training | 1 |
| PED 118 Weight Training | 1 |

## Other Hours (Select 1 Course 3-4 Semester Hours)

| | |
|---|---|
| BIO 112 General Biology | 4 |
| CHM 152 General Chemistry II | 4 |
| MAT 172 Precalculus Trigonometry | 4 |
| PSY 241 Developmental Psychology | 3 |
| SOC 213 Sociology of the Family | 3 |
| SOC 220 Social Problems | 3 |

## Appendix K

## University Partnerships with [Community College]




# New Partnerships

- **Fayetteville State University (10K Degree)**
- The 10K Degree is designed to create an affordable pathway for prospective college eligible graduates of [redacted] Community College to pursue a four-year degree at FSU online with the total average "out of pocket" cost of $10,000, including the Associate Degree.
- Contact: [redacted]

# Appendix L

## University Studies

### Transfer Programs

The University Studies Program is designed for students enrolled in the Associate in Arts (A.A.), Associate in Science (A.S.), Associate in Engineering (A.E.), Associate in Fine Arts (A.F.A.), Associate in Arts in Teacher Preparation (A.A.T.P) or Associate in Science in Teacher Preparation (A.S.T.P.) degree that want to continue their education as juniors at a university. Please use the links on the left to access your degree requirements.

The transfer programs offered at [redacted] fall under Comprehensive Articulation Agreements or Uniform Articulation Agreements between the North Carolina Community Colleges and universities of the UNC system. For a list of Articulation Agreements, please go to Transfer Resources. On that Transfer Resources page, you will also find other useful information that will help you transfer to a UNC university.

#### East Carolina University Pirate Promise Agreement

East Carolina University (ECU) and [redacted] signed a co-admission agreement, the Pirate Promise Agreement - , that offers qualified [redacted] students guaranteed admission to ECU. The requirements to apply for Pirate Promise include completion of the degree at [redacted], carrying a minimum of 12 credit hours per semester, and a cumulative 2.5 minimum GPA. View a complete list of requirements and students benefits of the Pirate Promise Agreement.

*Please note that the Pirate Promise Program is not associated with the [redacted] or NC Promise.*

#### UNC Pembroke BraveStep Program

The BraveStep program · creates a pathway for prospective UNCP students to begin their college career at [redacted] and transfer to UNCP after completing at least 30 credit hours. Qualified students will be co-admitted to [redacted] and UNCP and have the opportunity to use UNCP campus facilities and participate in co-curricular activities. These students will participate in North Carolina's Reverse Transfer Program so they can obtain an associate degree from [redacted] with the credits earned from UNCP.

#### UNC Chapel Hill C-Step Program

If you are particularly interested in transferring to UNC-Chapel Hill and are early in your degree with us, please read about the C-STEP program to see if you qualify.

#### UNC Wilmington Pathway to Excellence Program

This program is a partnership between UNC Wilmington and [redacted]. It is a pathway for guaranteed admission · to UNCW for students completing an Associate of Arts, Associate of Science, or Associate of Engineering with a cumulative GPA of at least a 2.5 (on a 4.0 scale) in transferable, college-level coursework from [redacted]. *Guaranteed admission to the university does not*

*constitute admission to a professional school or specific program.* Students entering the pathway will be expected to indicate their plan by submitting their letter of intent to UNCW Transfer Admissions. A digital letter of intent is also available and can be submitted online. As part of the Pathway to Excellence Guaranteed Admission, UNCW also offers Transfer Merit Scholarships of $1,500 to $3,000 to Associate in Arts and Associate in Science students.

If you have questions, contact the Transfer Student Success Coordinator at UNCW.

### North Carolina State University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS)

[redacted] students who intend to earn their Associate degree and who are interested in pursuing a major in agriculture or life sciences at North Carolina State University, must successfully complete the Associate in Science at [redacted] by taking the courses listed here - .

S[redacted] students who want to transfer into selected programs at CALS can also apply to the PackTrac program. Note that Packtrac only accepts first-semester community college students who have completed less than 20 credit hours of college work.

### Other Transfer Opportunities

- [redacted] has transfer partnerships with private colleges and universities. To learn more, go to the Private College Transfer page.
- [redacted] also offers Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S.) degrees that will transfer into university-designated baccalaureate degree programs under bi-lateral agreements. For more information, please go to Applied Science Transfer Agreements.
- Students can also earn Bachelor's and Master's degrees from two universities (UNC-Pembroke and St. Andrews University). For more information, go to Earn a Bachelor's or Master's.

## Contact Information [redacted] Campus

### Academic and Program Information

[redacted]

### Associate in Engineering Degree Program

[redacted]

### Associate in Fine Arts in Theatre

[redacted]

Associate in Fine Arts In Visual Arts

[redacted]

Associate in Fine Arts in Music

[redacted]

Associate in Teacher Preparation

[redacted]

C-STEP Program

[redacted]

CALS and PACKTRAC Program

[redacted]

## Contact Information [redacted] Campus

[redacted]

# Appendix M

## Transfer Articulation Agreements

[redacted] has articulation agreements with several colleges and universities. Articulation agreements are arrangements between [redacted] and other colleges and universities to offer credit for coursework completed at [redacted] An articulation agreement specifies the terms of the partnership and what is necessary for a student to transfer with ease.

Keep in mind...

- If you do not see your desired major or college, you should visit your advisor to find out more information about transferring.
- It is strongly recommended that you complete the degree before you transfer. If you have not completed your degree or other terms of the articulation agreements you may lose credits for some courses that you have completed. Research has proven that transfer students who complete an associate's degree are more successful at obtaining a bachelor's degree. Remember, once you graduate from [redacted], you have already earned a college degree which could mean better employment opportunities while earning your bachelor's degree. You can list the associate's degree on your resume right away!
- In some cases, an articulation agreement may specify automatic admissions upon completion of an associate's degree at [redacted]. However, some colleges may have additional admissions requirements. When an articulation agreement is in effect, a university is more apt to recognize the student's previous work and offer an easy transition to the university.

The table below highlights the articulation agreements and guides that are specific to the transferability of [redacted] A.A.S. programs:

| [redacted] | TRANSFER COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY | ARTICULATION AGREEMENT |
|---|---|---|
| AA,AS | Coker University | BS/BA in Various Degrees (Human Services, Criminal Justice, Business Admin) |
| AA | Coker university | BA in Early Childhood Education & Elementary Education |
| AA, AS, AE | East Carolina University | Pirate Promise Partnership |
| AA, AS, AAS | Lees-McRae College | Guaranteed Admission Program |
| AA, AS, AE | NC A&T | The Aggie Plus Program |
| AA, AS, AE | UNC Wilmington | Pathway to Excellence Partnership |
| AA | Gardner Webb University | BS in Elementary Education |
| AA | UNC Pembroke | BS in Elementary Education |
| AA | The Citadel | BS in Business Administration |
| AE | Excelsior College | BS in Electrical Engineering Technology |
| AE | Excelsior College | BS in Nuclear Engineering Technology |
| AE, AS | UNC Charlotte | BS in Engineering Technology |
| AA, AS | Pfeiffer University | BS in Health Administration |
| AA, AS | St. Andrews University | BA in Elementary Education |
| AA, AS | Western Governors University | BA/BS in various Education Degrees |
| AA, AS, AAS | Franklin University | 3 + 1 Transfer Agreement |
| AA, AS, AAS | UNC Pembroke | Dual Enrollment Agreement/Reverse Transfer |
| AS | The Citadel | BS in Business Administration |
| AAS (*various degrees*) | UNC Greensboro | 2 Plus/AAS Degree Transfer Agreement |
| AS - Pre-Pharmacy | Wingate | Doctor of Pharmacy Program |
| Various Degrees | Wingate | Gateway to Wingate Program |
| Accounting | Fayetteville State University | BS in Acounting |
| Accounting | Gardner Webb University | BS in Accounting |
| Accounting & Finance | Grand Canyon University | BS In Accounting |
| Accounting | UNC Pembroke | BS in Business Administration: Management |

| [redacted] | TRANSFER COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY | ARTICULATION AGREEMENT |
|---|---|---|
| Accounting & Finance | The Citadel | BS in Business Administration |
| Accounting | Western Governors University | College of Business - Various Degrees |
| Air Conditioning, Heating, & Refrigeration | East Carolina University | BS in Industrial Technology |
| Associate in Science - Pre-Pharmacy | Wingate University | Wingate School of Pharmacy - Pre-Pharmacy Pathway |
| Business Administration | Coker University | BS in Busines Administration |
| Business Administration | Gardner Webb University | BS in Business Administration |
| Business Administration | Gardner Webb University | BS in Entrepreneurship |
| Business Administration | Grand Canyon University | BS in Business Administration - Applied Management |
| Business Administration | Pfeiffer University | BS in Business Management and Leadership (BMAL) |
| Business Administration | The Citadel | BS in Business Administration |
| Business Administration - Marketing | The Citadel | BS in Business Administration |
| Business Administration - Public Administration | The Citadel | BS in Business Administration |
| Business Administration | UNC Pembroke | BS in Business Administration: Management |
| Business Administration | Western Govenors University | College of Business - Various Degrees |
| Computer Engineering Technology | East Carolina University | BS in Industrial Technology |
| Computer Engineering Technology | NC A&T | BS in Information Technology |
| Criminal Justice | Coker University | BS in Criminology |
| Criminal Justice | Columbia College | BS in Criminal Justice |
| Criminal Justice | Fayetteville State University | BS in Criminal Justice |
| Criminal Justice | Gardner Webb University | BS in Criminal Justice |
| Criminal Justice | Grand Canyon University | BA in Government - Legal Studies |
| Criminal Justice | Pfeiffer University | BS in Criminal Justice |
| Criminal Justice | UNC Pembroke | BS in Criminal Justice |
| Criminal Justice | NC Wesleyan College | BA in Criminal Justice |

| [redacted] | TRANSFER COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY | ARTICULATION AGREEMENT |
|---|---|---|
| Early Childhood Education | UNC Pembroke | BS in Birth-Kindergarten |
| Early Childhood Education | UNC Wilmington | BS in Education of Young Children |
| Electric Utility Substation & Relay | East Carolina University | BS in Industrial Technology |
| Electric Utility Substation & Relay | Excelsior College | BS in Electrical Engineering Technology |
| Electric Utility Substation & Relay | Excelsior College | BS in Technology Management, Electrical Technology |
| Electronics Engineering Technology | East Carolina University | BS in Industrial Technology |
| Electronics Engineering Technology | UNC Charlotte | BS in Engineering Technology |
| Elementary Education (AA) | Coker University | BS in Elementary Education |
| Healthcare Management Technology | Gardner Webb University | BS in Healthcare Management |
| Human Services Technology | Coker University | BS in Psychology |
| Human Services Technology | Gardner Webb University | BS in Human Services |
| Human Services Technology | Lees-McRae College | BAAS in Human Services |
| Human Service Technology | Mount Vernon Nazarene University | BS in Social Work |
| Human Services Technology | Queens University | BS in Human Services |
| Human Services Technology | UNC Pembroke | BS in Sociology |
| Human Services Technology | UNC Wilmington | BS in Social Work |
| Industrial Systems Technology | East Carolina University | BS in Industrial Technology |
| Industrial Systems Technology | UNC Charlotte | BS in Engineering Technology |
| Information Technology | East Carolina University | BS in Industrial Technology |
| Information Technology - Cyber Security | Excelsior College | BS in Cyber Security |
| Information Technology - Cyber Security | NC A&T | BS in Information Technology |
| Information Technology - Cyber Security | Gardner Webb | Computer Science Cyber Security |

| [redacted] | TRANSFER COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY | ARTICULATION AGREEMENT |
|---|---|---|
| Information Technology - Cyber Security | Western Governors University | College of Information Technology - Various Degrees |
| Information Technology - Software & Web Dev. | NC A&T | BS in Information Technology |
| Information Technology - Support | NC A&T | BS in Information Technology |
| Information Technology - Support (Healthcare) | NC A&T | BS in Information Technology |
| Information Technology | Western Governors University | College of Information Technology - Various Degrees |
| Information Technology Support | Excelsior College | BS in Information Technology |
| Mechanical Engineering Technology | East Carolina University | BS in Industrial Technology |
| Mechanical Engineering Technology | Penn State University | BS in Plastics Engineering Technology |
| Mechanical Engineering Technology | UNC Charlotte | BS in Engineering Technology |
| Mechatronics Engineering Technology | East Carolina University | BS in Industrial Technology |
| Nursing (ADN) | Aspen University | BS in Nursing |
| Nursing (ADN) | Carolina's College of Health Sciences | BS in Nursing |
| Nursing (ADN) | Gardner Webb University | BS in Nursing |
| Nursing (ADN) | Gardner Webb University | ADN to MSN - Bridge to Professional Adv. Nursing |
| Nursing (ADN) | Grand Canyon University | BS in Nursing |
| Nursing (ADN) | Pfeiffer University | BS in Nursing |
| Nursing (ADN) | UNC Pembroke | BS in Nursing |
| Nursing (ADN) | Western Governors University | RN to BSN |
| Nursing (ADN) | Western Governors University | RN to MSN - Education |
| Nursing (ADN) | Western Governors University | RN to MSN - Leadership |
| Nursing (ADN) | Western Governors University | RN to MSN - Nurse Informatics |
| Nursing (ADN) | Winston-Salem State University | BS in Nursing |

[redacted]

| | TRANSFER COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY | ARTICULATION AGREEMENT |
|---|---|---|
| Software & Web Developer | Western Governors University | College of Information Technology - Various Degrees |

## Explore Your Opportunities

VIEW PROGRAMS

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| Office 365 | Reset | Email | Donate |

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