SUPPORTING NATIVE AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS WHO ATTEND A TRIBAL COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY OR A MAINSTREAM HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION: A SCOPING REVIEW

by

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Dedication

This is dedicated to my wife, Judy, and my children. This accomplishment would not have been possible without your patience, support, and countless sacrifices. You encouraged, stood by, and lifted me up in times of doubt. This work is as much a testament to your love and belief in me. Thank you for everything.

I would also like to dedicate this to my late father, SFC Robin R. Bedell, and my late daughter, Cody Bedell. Both of you have inspired and motivated me to be kind and humble and to appreciate everyone I am surrounded by.

Finally, I would like to extend my gratitude to my colleagues and students, who provided me with the inspiration and drive to reach the finish line. Their energy and passion reminded me daily why I chose this path and motivated me to keep pushing forward. Chi Miigwech (thank you) all for helping me achieve this dream.

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Abstract

Native American college students face many challenges when pursuing a higher education credential. Whether Native American students decide to attend a Tribal College and University, or they choose to go to a mainstream higher education institution, success rates are impacted by their upbringing. The campus culture at Tribal Colleges and Universities and mainstream higher education institutions contribute to the failure or success of earning a college credential. To determine if Native American students who attended a Tribal College and University before attending a mainstream higher educational institution were more successful than Native American students who attended a mainstream higher educational institution, a scoping review was conducted. Thirty studies met the final inclusion criteria. The available resources, community support, connection, cultural support, family support, lack of culture, and separation outcomes are synthesized to provide guidance for future research.

Keywords: *Tribal colleges and universities, mainstream higher education institutions, American Indian, Native American, student success*

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Introduction

Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) are higher education institutions chartered by tribal governments and are primarily located on federal trust territories known as reservations. There are 35 accredited TCUs spread throughout 15 states and serve students from more than 250 federally recognized Indian tribes (American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 2022). TCUs are public institutions that serve primarily Native American students. In Fall 2021, the student body at TCUs were nearly 80% Native American (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2023). TCUs create a space incorporating family and culture, whereas mainstream institutions do not include traditional Native American values in campus life and courses (Rousey & Long, 2001). Rousey and Long (2001) noted that the primary goals of the mission statement of the TCU they studied included culture and language. For example, the tribal college in this study includes the following goals to meet its mission: (1) To develop the human resources of the Spirit Lake Nation necessary to meet its overall manpower need; (2) To help preserve the Sioux language and Dakota heritage through academic curriculum.

Students at tribal colleges can learn how to adjust to the academic demands of higher education through rigorous academic support programs and student services programs while learning how to prepare for cultural and social differences when preparing to transfer to a mainstream higher education institution. (Rousey & Long, 2001). While TCUs add values such as culture, language, and tradition to their mission and vision, mainstream higher educational institutions often lack the provision of Indigenous values as part of its mission and vision statements.

Enrollment

Native American students' enrollment at higher education institutions has declined over the last several years. According to the Postsecondary National Policy Institute (2023), Native American students comprised 0.7% of all postsecondary enrollment in 2021. Since Fall 2010, the overall enrollment of Native American students has decreased from 196,000 to 121,000, which is a 38% decrease. Undergraduate enrollment experienced a 40% decrease from 179,000 to 107,000, while an 18% decrease occurred in graduate student enrollment (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2023). In Fall 2021, 77% of Native American students attended public institutions, with 45% attending a four-year institution and 32% attending a two-year institution, which included Tribal Colleges and Universities (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2023).

Researchers Simi and Matusitz (2015) investigated why Native Americans struggle to stay enrolled in mainstream higher education institutions. The researchers discovered that Native Americans have a difficult time concentrating on academic studies when they feel offended by culturally insensitive comments, have family obligations, and struggle being away from their culture and traditions. In addition to feeling offended by culturally insensitive comments, family obligations, and the struggle to be away from their culture and traditions, Native American students often face financial barriers (Bertumen et al., 2014). Culturally traditional Native American students from reservations have extreme difficulty transitioning to college (Huffman, 2018). Native American students often face significant obstacles to completing their academic studies, especially when transitioning from the Indigenous teaching method to the Western teaching method when attending a mainstream higher educational institution. Native students often come from under-sourced school

systems located on reservations in very rural locations (American Indian College Fund, 2023).

Barriers for Success

Students often have anxiety about moving away from home and attending college. Native American students are also concerned about how their peers respond to their ethnic identity (Rodriguez & Mallinckrodt, 2021). Adelman et al. (2013) found only about half of Native Americans who attend major colleges and universities complete the first year when compared to 70% of the general population. Struggling with cultural identity and language contributes to the disparity and incompletion rate of Native Americans attending colleges (Adelman et al., 2013). “Cultural conflict within white institutions by post-secondary Native American students and its relationship to academic success is a construct that appears to be closely related to the degree of adherence to traditional values and traditions and it has also been the focus of much scholarly inquiry.” (Mosholder & Goslin, 2013, p. 314*)*.

Financial Difficulties

American Indian/Alaskan Native undergraduates cited financial difficulties, family obligations, getting a job, inadequate reading or study skills, and not being interested as reasons for dropping out or withdrawing from college (Lee et al., 2010). The National Native Scholarship Providers (2022) reported Native American college students encounter significant financial challenges to prevent the ability to enroll and graduate from college. Moreover, the National Native Scholarship Providers (2022) reports many students come from low-income families, with some reporting annual incomes under $20,000, which can be a factor in determining what college they can attend or if they can attend.

Isolation

Researchers Tachine and Yellow Bird (2017) found Native students feel less connected to the campus because of social isolation, being disconnected from family, financial burdens, exam times, and negative racial encounters. Native students who leave their communities to pursue a college degree may be seen as giving up their culture by their families as they learn different cultures and ways of life (Jackson et al., 2003). Frequently, Native American students have to learn how to live in a contemporary world that is unknown to them, especially as they make the transition from living on an Indian reservation to an area that is entirely new to them, resulting in the feeling of isolation and self-doubt (Native Hope, 2023).

Challenges and Supports in Higher Education

Sinclair (2020) found transitioning to a mainstream university consisted of negative and positive aspects. The negative aspects are homesickness, financial issues, and not being prepared. The positive elements included the ability to benefit their communities, developing relationships with faculty, staff, and other students, and traveling to experiences.

Native American students need time to adjust to being independent since they are accustomed to living with others, sharing experiences with community members, and being immersed in their culture (Schooler, 2014). Native American students must also learn how to navigate a college campus, develop relationships, and build trust with university administration, faculty, staff, and other students (Schooler, 2014). Furthermore, support from university leaders is needed to help Native American students feel welcome on campuses (Stewart-Ambo, 2021).

"Most postsecondary institutions, however, have yet to effectively engage American Indian student and Native nations, as demonstrated through the low enrollment, retention, completion rates, lack of campus support services, and absent external relations with tribal

governments and organizations" (Stewart-Ambo, 2021, p. 460). Burk (2007) found university officials need to learn about Native American culture to understand behaviors such as being silent and not actively participating in class activities taught by elders in Native American communities. "Non-Native teachers may misinterpret classroom behaviors that are deemed appropriate in a tribal community, as uncooperative or uncommunicative" (Burk, 2007, p. 7).

Colleges must find strategies to improve the education experience outcomes for Native American students (M. N. Thompson et al., 2013). Some suggested interventions are enhancing coping strategies, creating an inclusive environment, and building community connections between tribal communities and academic institutions (M. N. Thompson et al., 2013). Guillory's (2009) study found Native American students, state representatives, and university officials had different perceptions about the factors and barriers to degree completion. In this study, Native American students cited various barriers, such as financial burdens, missing home, and not having adequate resources to stay connected to their culture, which resulted in a poor college experience. In contrast, state representatives and university officials cited financial barriers and lack of academic preparation at the K-12 level caused obstacles to learning. K. A. Thompson et al. (2020) found Native American students described success as balancing academic studies, family, and work, practicing a healthy lifestyle, and eventually giving back to their communities. Researchers Akee and Yazzie-Mintz (2011) found that Native American students involved with culture are less likely to take a break from college.

American Indian students who participated in Native and non-Native university support programs performed better than students who did not join university-sponsored support programs (Belgrade & Loré, 2003). Even though programs may exist on campus, Native

American students may still withdraw from college to put their family and community ahead of their own needs (Belgrade & Loré, 2003). Several factors, such as skill development, family and peer support, and a culturally sensitive school environment, can contribute to completion rates at mainstream institutions. Spirituality, which varies among Native students, is an essential source of strength in helping students focus and complete their academic work (Jackson et al., 2003). In addition, new students to a mainstream institution have success when paired with a Native American mentor at an institution (Mosholder & Goslin, 2013). "Through collaborative partnerships that give equal status to stakeholders, needs-based, culturally responsive, relevant, and quality academic programs can be developed by traditionally Eurocentric colleges that serve American Indian/Alaskan Native students." (Campbell, 2007, p. 35). Students realized being ready for college required a change in their mindset. In addition to changing their mindset, keeping the end goal in mind helped them become successful students (Schmidtke, 2016). Students indicated they were successful due to the helpful nature of the campus, especially the academic advisors. Schmidtke (2016) found that if the institute made it clear that it was committed to students, the students had a better chance of succeeding. Surviving on a university campus requires navigating questions concerning native heritage from non-native students. If non-native students are not aware of Native American heritage, they fall back on what is taught in textbooks. Navigating questions about Native American culture and traditions can be complicated and stressful, which is attributed to fitting in on campus (Masta, 2018).

Purpose

As identified by the literature review, the number of Native American students earning a college credential is low when compared to other ethnic groups. Tribal Colleges and

Universities (TCU) were established to provide educational opportunities such as vocational training, associate degrees, and bachelor's degrees (American Indian College Fund, 2023). Furthermore, Tribal Colleges and Universities incorporate tribal culture and language to provide a sense of belonging to students who attend a TCU (American Indian College Fund, 2023). According to the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (2022), there are 35 accredited tribal colleges and universities throughout the country. This systematic review aimed to determine whether a student who attends a TCU is more likely to succeed at a mainstream higher education institution as a transfer student instead of starting their college career at a mainstream higher education institution. Using keywords, the researchers identified and synthesized the available research that included Native American students who attended tribal colleges and universities to expand upon the current studies and to identify gaps in existing research. Ultimately, the authors plan to provide guidance to tribal colleges and mainstream institutions to suggest methods on how to incorporate changes that will allow and help Native American students successfully complete their higher education goals.

Method

The present systematic review followed the Preferred Item for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for the Scoping Reviews (Tricco et al., 2018). The review aimed to understand better if Native American students who attended a Tribal College and University before attending a mainstream higher educational institution were more successful than Native American students who attended a mainstream higher educational institution. The author was interested in identifying any article that included students who attended a Tribal College and University and transferred to a mainstream higher educational institution. The author was also interested in identifying any articles that included students

who identified as Native Americans who attended a mainstream higher education institution without attending a Tribal College and University. As such, to be included in this review, the article had to meet the following inclusion criteria: (a) tribal colleges; (b) tribal college students; (c) tribal colleges earned credentials; (d) written in English; (e) could not be a thesis or dissertation, as they do not undergo the peer review process.

Search and Screening Procedures

The authors conducted an electronic search of two databases to identify articles for review. To complete the electronic search, the authors met with a senior librarian with expertise in search methodology to identify databases with the maximum number of articles related to the study's purpose. The following databases were utilized: EBSCOhost Eric and Ethnic NewsWatch. The following search strand was entered into EBSCOhost Eric: (DE "American Indian Education" OR "American Indian Students" OR "Native American Students" OR "Indigenous populations" OR "Alaska Natives" OR "American Indian Reservations") OR (TX "Indigenous" OR "Native american*" OR "Alaskan native*" OR "American Indian*" OR "First Nations") AND (DE "Academic achievement" OR "Student Attitudes" OR "Educational Attainment" OR "Student Transfer Rates") OR (TX "Academic achievement" OR "Academic success" OR "Student success" OR "College Graduation" OR "Degree attainment") AND (DE "Tribally Controlled Education " OR "American Indian Education" OR "Minority serving institutions") OR (TX "American Indian Higher Education Consortium " OR "AIHEC" OR "Tribal Colleges and Universities " OR "TCU" OR "Bureau of Indian Education " OR "BIE" OR "Indian Controlled Schools" OR "Tribal Colleges" OR "Tribally Controlled Education" OR "Minority Serving Institutions " OR "MSI" OR "Reservation American Indians" OR "Tribal schools"). The search strand was limited and

required to meet the following conditions: (a) must be peer-reviewed; (b) publication years between 2003-2024; (c) must be academic journals; (d) must be written in English.

The second database, Ethnic NewWatch, utilized the following search strand: (((MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Native North Americans") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Inuit") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Native peoples") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Metis")) OR ("Indigenous" OR ("native american" OR "native americans") OR ("alaskan native" OR "alaskan natives") OR ("american indian" OR "american indians") OR "First Nations")) AND (((MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Academic achievement") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Academic degrees")) OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Academic readiness") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("College graduates"))) OR ("Academic achievement" OR "Academic success" OR "Student success" OR "College Graduation" OR "Degree attainment")) AND (MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Tribal Colleges & Universities") OR ("American Indian Higher Education Consortium " OR "AIHEC" OR "Tribal Colleges and Universities " OR "TCU" OR "Bureau of Indian Education " OR "BIE" OR "Indian Controlled Schools" OR "Tribal Colleges" OR "Tribally Controlled Education" OR "Minority Serving Institutions " OR "MSI" OR "Reservation American Indians" OR "Tribal schools"))) AND (stype.exact("Scholarly Journals") AND la.exact("ENG") AND pd(20030101-20240219)). The search strand was limited and required to meet the following conditions: (a) must be peer-reviewed; (b) publication years between 2003-2024; (c) must be academic journals; (d) must be written in English.

The initial electronic search produced 691 articles after the duplicates were removed from the databases by the electronic system Covidence. All titles and abstracts were organized within Covidence. All authors independently read the titles and abstracts to determine if they

met the eligibility criteria. If the article met the inclusion criteria, the authors selected the article to be included in the full-text review. After completing the title and abstract screening, 82 articles met the inclusion criteria and moved to the full-text review. The interobserver agreement for the title and abstract coding was 92%.

Eighty-two articles were identified for a full read. The researchers read all the articles in their entirety to determine if the inclusion criteria were met. The same procedures listed above were utilized in the complete reading phase. The interobserver agreement for the full-read coding was 87%. After completing the full-read phase, 30 articles met the inclusion criteria and are included in this review (see Figure 1).

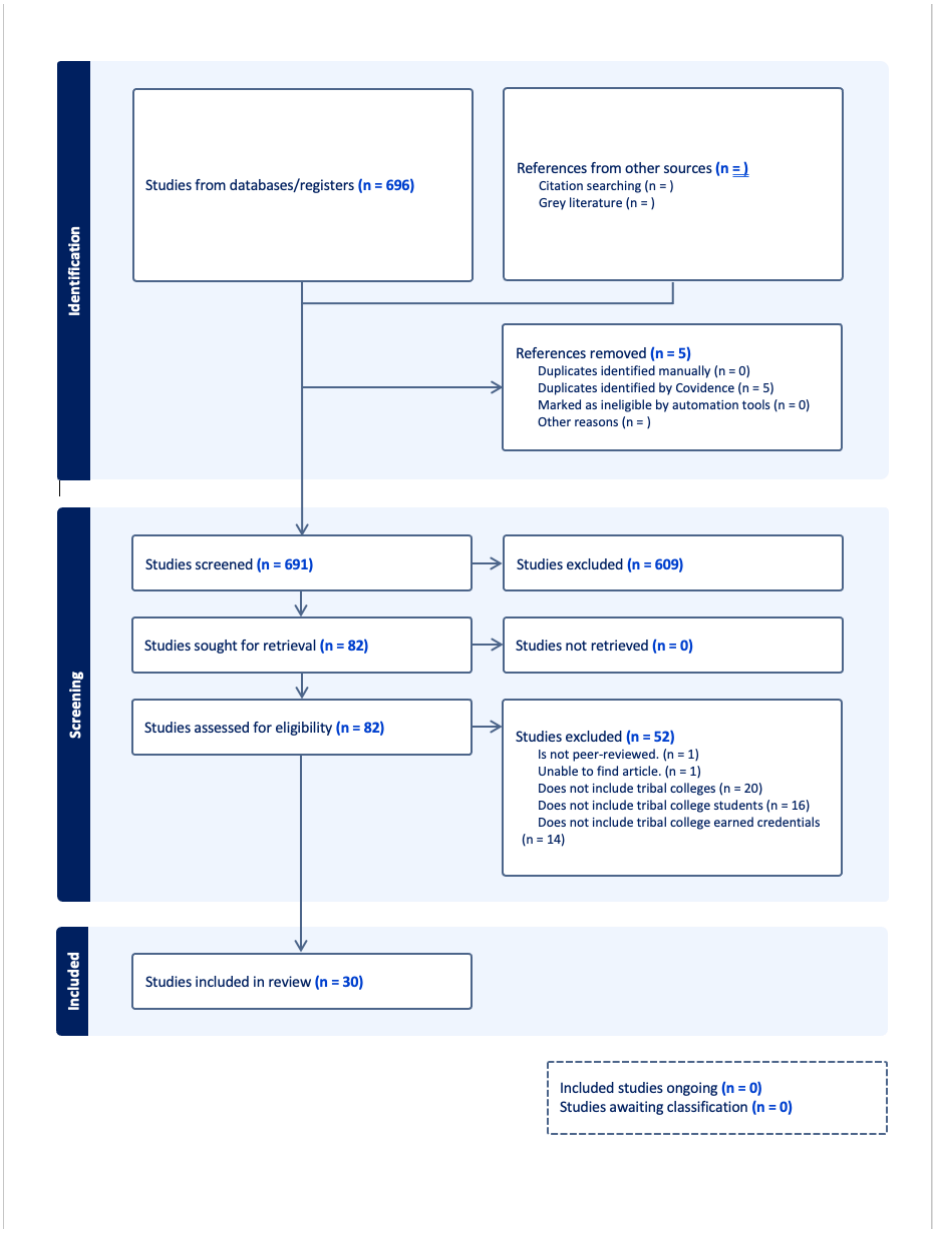
Data Charting and Synthesis

The author read each article two times to gain a solid understanding of the studies that have been conducted on Native American college students in both Tribal Colleges and Universities and mainstream higher education institutions. During the review process, the researchers did not identify any previous systematic reviews involving Native American students; however, the lack of results could result from not using the proper keywords to identify systematic reviews during the search process. For the current review, the author looked for emerging patterns during the second reading of the thirty articles that met the inclusion criteria. Once the patterns were recognized, the author sorted the articles based on themes that were consistently identified in the articles. Each article was coded based on the following themes: available resources, community support, connection, cultural support, family support, lack of culture, and separation. A table was created to categorize each article into the appropriate theme to provide a thorough understanding of the findings in each article.

Once the articles were categorized in a table, the author was able to organize each theme based on a number of instances to support each theme to provide a broad picture of what supported the successful completion of higher education credentials or what reasons were identified that prevented the successful completion of a higher education credential.

Figure 1.

Covidence PRISMA flow diagram



Results

After the initial electronic search produced 691 articles, the authors read each title and abstract individually to determine if the articles met the defined criteria. If the articles met the inclusion criteria, the authors selected 82 articles for a full-text review. Each author read the articles fully to determine if they met the inclusion criteria. Thirty articles met the inclusion criteria and were included in this review. After a second reading by the primary author, seven overarching themes were identified in the thirty studies included in this scoping review. The articles were categorized into seven themes, with some touching on multiple themes (see Table 1). The themes identified are available resources, community support, connection, cultural support, family support, lack of culture, and separation.

Themes

The author read each article that met the inclusion criteria two times to identify keywords and phrases that appeared repeatedly across each article. The author compiled a list of keywords and phrases to determine the number of instances each keyword and phrase appeared in the articles included in the systematic review. Based on the number of cases in which each keyword and phrase appeared in the articles, the author defined seven themes to encompass the keywords and phrases. Once the themes were identified, the author categorized the articles. As the author categorized the articles, a couple of the articles overlapped into different themes.

Table 1

Characteristics of reviewed studies

Identified Theme	Authors	Article Title	Key Outcomes
Available Support (10 articles)	Bordelon and Atkinson (2020)	A Pathway for Native American Students to Access a Mainstream University for Social Work Education	Participants wanted a balanced partnership between a TCU and a mainstream university. Financial concerns. Guidance and social support to sustain efforts throughout the social work degree program.
	Flynn et al. (2012)	An Emergent Phenomenon of American Indian Postsecondary Transition and Retention	Institutional Barrier - Lack of information, lack of resources on campus. Social dimension - finding ways to connect to campus.
	Ward et al. (2014)	Mentored Research in a Tribal College Setting: The Northern Cheyenne Case	Mentored research helped students improve their academic performance, which helped them transition into four-year institutions.

	DeLong et al. (2016)	Nurturing Student Success in Tribal Colleges	Tribal colleges help students transition to college-level work, as many students are not prepared for college-level work. TCUs prepare students for the rigor of college work, which instills confidence in their learning skills. All students (non-native or native) are supported in a welcoming and inclusive environment.
	Merisotis and McCarthy (2005)	Retention and Student Success at Minority-Serving Institutions	TCUs, along with HBCUs and MSIs, provide more support for students than mainstream institutions.
	Motl, et al. (2018)	Persistence at a Tribal University: Factors Associated with Second Year Enrollment	Academic support. Programs that prevent suspension or dismissal of students.
	Al-Asfour and Bryant (2011)	Perceptions of Lakota Native American Students Taking Online Business	Online courses. Learning Management System training
		Courses at Oglala Lakota College (OLC)	
	Hooker (2011)	Small Peer-Led Collaborative Learning Groups in Developmental Math Classes at a Tribal Community College	Small peer-led collaborative groups help students with completion rates than those who did not participate in collaborative groups.
	Keith et al. (2016)	Barriers and Strategies for success for American Indian College Students: A Review	Strategies implemented on campuses to address barriers and assist students with positive academic experiences.

	Shotton et al. (2007)	Stories of Success: Experiences of American Indian Students in a Peer-Mentoring Retention Program	Peer mentoring.
Community Support (Four articles)	Okagaki et al. (2009)	American Indian College Students' Ethnic Identity and Beliefs about Education	Support from the entire community.
	Jaumot-Pascual et al. (2023)	"I can do data for my people": experiences of giving back for Native undergraduates in computing	Mentoring from community. Giving back to the community.
	Ahem and Licht (2020)	On Citizenship and Democracy: Journal of American Indian Higher Education	Whole community support to accomplish goals.
	C. Brown and Lavish (2006)	Career Assessment with Native Americans: Role Salience and Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy	Giving back to their communities. Creating connections between education and community.
Connection (Three articles identified)	Lasher and Good (n.d.)	College experiences of the eastern band of Cherokee Indians	There were significant differences between tribal and nontribal college students regarding their overall experience as positive, their feelings of community connectedness, and separation and alienation.
	Fong et al. (2021)	Indigenous Cultural Development and Academic Achievement of Tribal Community College Students: Mediating Roles of Sense of Belonging and Support for Student Success	Tribal college students who felt like they belonged had a positive impact on their academic performance. Tribal colleges that recognize cultural identities seemed to support student success.

	Martin (2005)	Serving American Indian Students in Tribal Colleges: Lessons for Mainstream Colleges	Students feel more connected to an institution when a TCU and mainstream institution work together.
Cultural Support (Seven articles)	D. Brown (2003)	Tribal Colleges: Playing a Key Role in the Transition from Secondary to Postsecondary Education for American Indian Students	Students recommended going to a TCU before going to a four-year institution to learn about culture. Students thought collaboration about culture between TCUs and non-TCUs aided students who transferred.
	Talahongva (2008)	A Good Education? Students judge tribal colleges by many criteria: Journal of American Indian Higher Education	Tribal college students look at cultural philosophy and commitment shown by a college before deciding what school to attend.
	Talahongva (2010)	Power to the People: Tribal activists transform communities.	Discusses the importance of culture on tribal communities and tribal colleges.
	Coulson-Johnston et al. (2022)	A Document Analysis of Community College Published Scholarship about Native American Students and Tribal Colleges and Universities	Tribal Colleges provide culturally relevant opportunities to aid in Native American students' success.
	Williams and Shipley (2018)	Cultural taboos as a factor in the participation rate of Native Americans in STEM	Recommendation of institutions and educators creating a more open, welcoming environment that learns about tribal cultures and how they relate to STEM programs.
	Horwedel (2021)	Culturally Congruent Care: Salish Kootenai College's Registered Nursing Program	The tribal college program allows students to finish RN programs due to incorporating traditional knowledge in the program while having smaller

			classes and a low student-teacher ratio.

	Umbhau (2010)	Tribal college scholars value culture, language: Journal of American Indian Higher Education	Students who attended and graduated from TCUs have goals of pursuing higher degrees upon graduation. TCUs help them build confidence in themselves.
Family Support (Five articles)	Nguyen et al. (2019)	Drawing Inspiration from American Indian Student Success Frameworks: The Role of Family	TCUs have family-friendly campuses to which families are supported along with the students.
	LaRose and Gonzales (2020)	Nurturing the Wakanyeja Early Learning Centers at Tribal Colleges: Journal of American Indian Higher Education	TCUs prepare and educate college-age students and help develop children whose parents attend a TCU.
	D. Brown (2003)	Tribal Colleges: Playing a Key Role in the Transition from Secondary to Postsecondary Education for American Indian Students	TCUs allow students to remain close to home and their families.
	Waterman (2012)	Home-Going as a Strategy for Success Among Haudenosaunee College and University Students	Students did better if they were close to home so they could travel there on weekends. Students also felt a responsibility to home, so it was important to be close to home.
	Stewart-Ambo (2020)	Higher Education for California Native Nation Building: A Retrospective on College Experience and Completion	Having family support to finish studies. Encouragement from fellow tribal members.
Lack of Culture (Three articles)	Stewart-Ambo (2020)	Higher Education for California Native Nation Building: A Retrospective	Classroom hostility - were concerned about being singled out in classes because of being Native.

		on College Experience and Completion	Classroom invalidations - students felt course content did not accurately reflect on Native history.
	Hunt and Oyarzun (2019)	Online Learning Perspectives of Native American Students	Students wanted Indigenous knowledge in the classroom while being able to identify themselves to their peers.
	Makomenaw (2012)	Welcome to a new world: experiences of American Indian tribal college and university transfer students at predominantly white institutions	Examines the relationship between the participants' interaction and engagement with their campus and their successful transition to a PWI.
Separation (Two articles)	Lasher and Good (n.d.)	College experiences of the eastern band of Cherokee Indians	There were significant differences between tribal and nontribal college students regarding their overall positive experience, their feelings of community connectedness, and their feelings of separation and alienation.
	Stewart-Amb o (2020)	Higher Education for California Native Nation Building: A Retrospective on College Experience and Completion	Classroom hostility - were concerned about being singled out in classes because of being Native. Classroom invalidations - students felt course content did not accurately reflect on Native history.

Available Resources

Ten of the thirty articles included in this scoping review found that the availability of campus resources helped Native American students feel connected to the institutions they attended. Out of the ten articles reviewed, one focused on the negative impact of insufficient

resources to support Native American students. Flynn et al. (2012) found the lack of information and resources on campus prevented students from feeling connected with college campuses. Al-Asfour and Bryant (2011) found that when TCUs offer online courses, the success rate of students who may not be able to attend on-campus classes is improved. DeLong et al. (2016) found tribal colleges help students prepare themselves to engage in college-level work by providing resources such as mentoring and tutoring that are available for free to all students enrolled at their institution. Likewise, Merisotis and McCarthy (2005) discovered Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), and Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) provide more support for students than mainstream institutions. Motl et al. (2018) found that TCUs do not have definitive academic thresholds for suspension or dismissal of students for not achieving high academic grades. Instead, TCUs provide resources to help struggling students become successful while attending college.

Ward et al. (2014) found that campuses with mentoring programs proved to be a critical attribute in helping Native American Students who attended TCUs and mainstream institutions improve their academic performance, which helped prepare students to transition into a four-year institution. Ward's research supported research conducted by Shotton et al. (2007), in which the researchers found peer mentors who made students feel comfortable had the most significant impact on student's academic standing while developing a sense of belonging on campus. Keith et al. (2016) findings implied that peer mentoring programs helped Native American students feel connected to their professors and peers. Hooker (2011) found small peer-led collaborative groups help students with completion rates than those who did not participate in cooperative groups. Bordelon and Atkinson (2020) found colleges that

offer cohorts of Native Americans and non-Native Americans promoted the success of Native Americans who attended a mainstream university.

Community Support

Four articles reported Native American students focus on the support they can provide to their communities after they obtain a higher education credential. Native American students believe a good education will help secure a promising future and an opportunity to help their communities grow (C. Brown & Lavish, 2006). Giving back to the community in which they reside is a part of the beliefs held by Native American students, which helps students stay culturally connected to their communities (Jaumot-Pascual et al., 2023). Okagaki et al. (2009) found Native American students believe their education should not only provide an opportunity for themselves but also a means for them to serve their communities. Ahem and Licht (2020) found that when Native American students and Native communities are united, they can advocate for and promote their communities, cultures, TCUs, and way of living to non-Native communities.

Connection

Many articles included a sense of connection to measure whether Native American students were successful at a Tribal College and University (TCU) and a mainstream higher education institution. Three articles focused on the understanding of feeling culturally connected to the institution they attended. Students who enroll at a tribal college are more academically successful when their cultural beliefs are incorporated throughout the campus and the courses (Lasher & Good, n.d.). Fong et al. (2021) reported tribal college students who felt like they belonged positively impacted their academic performance, and tribal colleges that recognized cultural identities seemed to support student success at a Tribal College and

University. Martin (2005) found tribal colleges that work with mainstream higher education institutions to develop programs that support Native American students contribute to academic success on their campuses. Furthermore, Martin (2005) highlighted a successful example of a tribal college and higher education institution that worked together to implement a mentoring program for students who transferred to a mainstream institution from a tribal college, which aimed to improve the student's first-year experience. "During the program's first year, all twenty-one students who had enrolled for the fall semester returned for the spring" (Martin, 2005, p. 83).

Cultural Support

Seven articles revealed cultural support played a critical role in whether Native American students successfully obtained a credential at a Tribal College and University (TCU) and a mainstream higher education institution. D. Brown (2003) found students recommend attending a tribal institution before attending a four-year institution to build confidence while maintaining cultural identity throughout their studies. Talahongva (2010) found tribal colleges help Native American students obtain their educational goals and the importance of having a TCU in Tribal communities. Coulson-Johnston et al. (2022) found that tribal colleges that provide culturally relevant opportunities contribute to students' success. Native American students look for cultural philosophy and commitment from a higher education institution before determining what college to attend (Talahongva, 2008). Colleges that incorporate Native American culturally relevant classes allow students to feel connected to culture and have a higher success rate of completion than colleges that do not include culturally relevant classes (Umbhau, 2010). Horwedel (2021) found that incorporating traditional knowledge into a program while having smaller class sizes kept students engaged and allowed them to complete

their programs. Williams and Shipley's (2018) research supported Horwedel's findings that TCUs and mainstream institutions that include tribal cultures in studies keep Native American students engaged while attending college.

Family Support

Five articles found family support as a primary contributor to student success in Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCU) and mainstream higher education institutions. American Indian students who attended a culturally responsive TCU while providing a family-friendly campus allowed students to focus on their studies (Nguyen et al., 2019). LaRose and Gonzales (2020) found that tribal colleges that offer support for families help build the foundation of success for the entire family. "They offer an education centered on Indigenous values and knowledge, which not only helps the parent succeed academically but also sets the stage for their children's future academic success" (LaRose & Gonzales, 2020, p. 1). D. Brown (2003) found that students who can remain close to home and family and have cultural components in their curriculum successfully achieved their academic goals.

Moreover, collaboration between TCUs and four-year institutions is critical to creating a welcoming environment for Native American students (D. Brown, 2003). Furthermore, Waterman (2012) found Native American students did better if they could travel home on weekends since the students included in the study indicated they felt a responsibility to be close to home to support their families and community. Native American students in California have a similar success rate when they have family and community support from their tribal nation, which also includes students' belief in giving back to their communities (Stewart-Ambo, 2020).

Lack of Culture

Three articles included in the study highlighted why Native American students do not succeed in an educational environment. In the same study that found Native American students succeed by being close to their communities, Stewart-Ambo (2020) also found that institutions that do not have relevant studies on American Indian topics tend to leave students feeling disconnected from their cultural roots and communities. Furthermore, Stewart-Ambo (2020) also found students felt disconnected if courses with American Indian topics did not accurately reflect Native American History. Studies found Native American students who attended courses online also wanted to have American Indian content in their courses to help them stay connected with their Native American heritage (Hunt & Oyarzun, 2019). In addition, Native American students who did not have classes that included Native American topics were not able to identify with their peers in online courses (Hunt & Oyarzun, 2019). While Makomenaw (2012) focused on finding attributes that contributed to the success of Native American students attending Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) after transferring from a Tribal College and University, the study revealed several factors contributed to the success and non-success of American Indian students at a PWI. Makomenaw's (2012) study found that PWIs who do not have a good understanding of Native American culture struggled to keep American Indian students engaged while attending their institution.

Separation

Two articles found separation from community and family affected Native American students who either attended a Tribal College and University or a mainstream institution. Lasher and Good (n.d.) found that when students felt separated or alienated from their culture, families, and tribal community, they did not do as well as the students who were connected to their

culture, family, and tribal communities. "When Native American students go away from their tribal communities and embark upon college, they take their tribal identification and cultural values with them but are also expected to join into an institution with its own unwritten rules and often unspoken rules that represent the dominant culture" (Lasher & Good, n.d., p. 3). Students who experience hostility and invalidity in an educational setting can create a sense of separation from the campus in Native American students may or may not leave the campus (Stewart-Ambo, 2021).

Discussion

Tribal Colleges and Universities and mainstream higher education institutions provide an opportunity for Native American students to achieve their academic goals. However, several factors were identified that impact the college completion rate of Native American students. Overall, limited research is available to understand if Native American students who attended a Tribal College and University before attending a mainstream higher educational institution were more successful than Native American students who attended a mainstream higher educational institution. The results from this review represent the thirty articles that met the eligibility criteria and highlight the current research on this topic. The main themes discovered in this review are available resources, community support, connection, cultural support, family support, lack of culture, and separation. A summary of these findings is included in the following paragraphs.

While higher education institutions have available resources for students who attend their campuses, this review highlighted several resources needed to help Native American students succeed at a Tribal College and University (TCU) and a mainstream higher education institution. DeLong et al. (2016) and Ward et al. (2014) found mentoring programs are critical

to aiding student success. Moreover, mentoring and peer mentoring programs not only help students develop relationships with peers but also help the students create a bond with the campus, faculty, and staff, which is an essential factor for success. Moreover, students who participated in support programs that were offered performed better than students who did not participate in programs that were available on campus (Belgrade & Loré, 2003).

Based on the peer-reviewed literature, Native American students who take advantage of available resources will most likely develop the skills needed to be successful at a TCU and mainstream institution. However, Native American students need to feel a sense of connection to the campus to feel comfortable utilizing the available resources. The literature noted Native American students are successful at TCUs since they incorporate Native American culture, language, and traditions into the academic curriculum while embedding these values throughout the campus (Fong et al., 2021). However, not all mainstream colleges and universities have programs available to support Native American students. Furthermore, not all mainstream colleges and universities have any knowledge about the cultures and values Native American students grow up with. Mainstream colleges and university leadership recognized the need to establish better programs and provide resources specifically to help Native American students. Burk (2007) noted non-Native faculty may misinterpret classroom behavior demonstrated by Native American students as disrespectful. Mainstream institutions that understand Native American values provide an opportunity for Native American students to connect with the campus, staff, and peers (Stewart-Ambo, 2020).

As noted throughout the study, Native Americans come from communities that are proud of their culture, traditions, and values. Students who leave their community to attend college find it challenging to adapt to their new environment, especially without the support of

having their families nearby, which can have an impact on the college they select (Lasher & Good, n.d.). Native American students look for higher educational institutions that allow them to keep their cultural identity close to heart (D. Brown, 2003). Students who attend TCUs have an opportunity to practice their traditions while continuing to learn more about Native American values. Moreover, students who enroll in mainstream institutions that acknowledge their cultural identities seem to support academic success (Fong et al., 2021). Acknowledging cultural identities and having programs to support Native American students not only helps students succeed in college but also helps students take what they learn back to their communities. Native American students who successfully earn a college credential will most likely go back to their communities to help their communities grow and become stronger (C. Brown & Lavish, 2006).

There is a lack of partnerships between Tribal Colleges and Universities and mainstream higher education institutions. As noted in the literature, university leaders acknowledge that there is insufficient communication and program development between TCUs and mainstream institutions. Mainstream institutions that work with TCUs to develop programs that support Native American students contribute to the success Native American students have on their campuses (Martin, 2005). TCUs that work with mainstream institutions allow TCUs to develop the support needed for students to be academically and emotionally prepared for a mainstream institution. However, since most TCUs are located in rural areas, distance from neighboring mainstream institutions can impact any partnerships to develop programs between institutions. Throughout this review, researchers found college campuses that do not have an understanding of Native American values leave Native American students feeling disconnected from the campus, their peers, and professors (Makomenaw, 2012).

However, higher education institutions with programs allowing Native Americans to practice and share their culture have a higher success rate of completion than colleges that do not have culture embedded on their campus (Umbhau, 2010). Colleges must work together to find strategies to improve the educational experience for Native American students (M. N. Thompson et al., 2013).

There is an overarching theme that Tribal Colleges and Universities provide the culturally rich educational experience needed to help Native American students grow academically and personally while preparing for the academic rigor required to succeed. The research identified several reasons why Native American students have a low completion rate when compared to other ethnic backgrounds but did not specifically identify whether TCUs or mainstream institution programming impacted the completion rates. More studies need to be conducted to truly understand all the factors affecting Native American college student success rates across the United States. Thirty of the 696 articles initially found during this review were included in this study. However, not all of the articles in this study provided enough information to determine if Native American students who attended a Tribal College and University before attending a mainstream higher educational institution were more successful than Native American students who attended a mainstream higher educational institution. In addition, the peer-reviewed literature available about Native American students attending a TCU or a mainstream institution is very limited. Furthermore, there is very limited research that follows a Native American student who graduated or transferred from a TCU to a mainstream institution.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are a couple of recommendations that come to light after analyzing the results of

this systematic review. Although there is literature to support the deficiencies and strengths of the programs to support Native American students at Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) and mainstream higher education institutions, there is not enough research that follows the academic careers of Native American students who transfer to a mainstream higher educational institution after earning a credential at a TCU. Moreover, there is not enough research to illustrate how TCUs and mainstream higher educational institutions work together to provide adequate resources for each other. TCUs can learn from mainstream institutions about the campus culture while providing education about tribal cultures and traditions Native American students bring to their campuses. The authors suggest tribal colleges, tribal communities, and mainstream institutions work together to conduct research on Native American students who complete a degree at a TCU before transferring to a mainstream institution. Designing a methodology that tracks the experiences Native American students have from the moment they commit to and attend a TCU to capture reasons why they are unsuccessful or successful in their studies. Moreover, this research must continue when the student transfers to a mainstream institution to capture the factors that affect the unsuccessful or successful completion rate. This research will help both college systems build programs that support Native American students. Finally, the collected data could be used as a resource to help TCUs and mainstream institutions build partnerships that will allow both institutions to learn from each other and support each other better.

Considering the desire to capture the lived experience of Native American students, perhaps phenomenology methodology can be used to explore and interpret the human experience (Jeffery & Noll, 2017). According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenology is "The building block of human science and the basis for knowledge" (p. 26). In addition, Creswell

and Poth (2018) state, "…a phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (p. 153). Using various qualitative techniques such as key informant interviews using semi-structured questions, observations in the participants' learning environment, focus groups, and student-kept journals can bring into focus the experiences Native American students have while attending college. Capturing the lived experience of Native American students can have a significant impact on programs that are developed or modified on college campuses.

Tribal Colleges and Universities and mainstream institutions have the opportunity to work together to build a higher education system that supports Native American students while learning about the behaviors and factors that affect students inside and outside the classroom. Additional research is needed to effectively understand what types of partnerships are currently available between both institutions. Learning about existing programs to support Native American students throughout their academic careers will help researchers suggest ways to strengthen programs at both institutions. Additionally, researchers can use the collected data to determine if new programs are needed to fully support Native American students on campuses throughout the United States.

Autobiographical Statement

I am a proud member of the Bay Mills Indian Community, rooted deeply in the traditions and values of our people. Living in Northern Michigan, I am surrounded by a culture that values resilience, education, and community. These principles have shaped my journey and guided me toward a career dedicated to education, technology, and community development.

I began my academic journey at Haskell Indian Jr. College and then moved to Bay Mills Community College, earning an Associate of Applied Science in Computer Information Systems. My early interest in technology led me to pursue a Bachelor of Science in Information Technology and Security from Baker College. Later, I deepened my knowledge by earning a Master of Arts in Educational Technology and an Education Specialist degree from the University of Michigan-Flint. I am working toward my doctorate in Education Administration, a journey I will complete in November 2024.

Professionally, I have been fortunate to wear many hats. My career began in technology as the Information Technology Director for the Intertribal Council of Michigan. This role allowed me to witness firsthand how technology can bridge gaps and create opportunities for underrepresented communities. Returning to Bay Mills Community College as faculty and later as Chair of the Computer Information Systems department, I discovered my passion for education. In 2018, I embraced a new challenge as Tribal Manager for the Bay Mills Indian Community, a role that strengthened my leadership skills and my commitment to serving our people. In 2020, I was honored to step into the role of President and CEO of Bay Mills Community College.

Ultimately, I am just a guy trying to make a difference in education.

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