Characteristics of collaborative community college and tribal partnerships: A qualitative study

by

Robin L. Wessels DeMott

A.S., Fort Scott Community College, 1988
B.S., Kansas State University, 1990
M.A., University of Illinois-Springfield, 2003

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Community College Leadership
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2026

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the characteristics of successful partnerships designed to contribute to student success at Native American-Serving Non-Tribal Institutions (NASNTIs) in New Mexico. This study examined the organizational factors that participants believe help the partnerships succeed in providing services to Native American students. Overall, this study was designed to uncover common themes and patterns across successful community college and tribal partnerships.

This study employed a generic qualitative design to explore partnerships among three community colleges and the three Native American tribes they serve. Generic qualitative inquiry investigates people's reports of their subjective opinions, attitudes, beliefs, or reflections on their experiences, of things in the outer world. It can be selected as the methodological approach when the researcher has a body of pre-knowledge/pre-understandings (categories or subcategories of information) about the topic that he or she wants to more fully describe from the participants' perspective (Percy et al., 2015, p. 78).

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with key individuals from each community college and tribe in the identified partnerships and analyzed the data using the Critical Success Factors (CSFs) theoretical framework and the Eight I's conceptual lens outlined by Kanter (1994). This study provides data for community college and tribal partnerships by documenting best practices in Native American student success.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to my parents, grandparents, and ancestors, whose commitment to education, knowledge-sharing, and survival spanned generations and took many forms beyond formal schooling. Their understanding of learning as responsibility, continuity, and cultural endurance informs both the spirit and methodology of this work.

My study is dedicated especially to my maternal grandmother, Ruth Marentha Jones Pruett, and my great-grandmother, Ferole Beatrice Smith Jones, whose lives stand at the intersection of perseverance, education, and service. After raising eight children in the early 1900s in rural Illinois—without electricity or running water—Ferole enrolled at Western Illinois State Teachers College and taught in one-room schoolhouses throughout Knox County.

Following her husband's death, she later taught in Chicago's inner-city schools and was eventually named Chicago Teacher of the Year. Although none of her eight children and only a few of her grandchildren pursued higher education, her life made clear that education is not solely measured by degrees, but by its capacity to uplift communities and create access for others.

This work also honors the Native American ancestry of my maternal grandfather, John Andrew Pruett, son of Stella May Dugger Pruett, who was the daughter of Chlorinda Barnes Dugger, who was the daughter of Faithann Walker, who was a member of the Cherokee Nation.

This research is grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing that prioritize relational accountability, lived experience, and the transmission of knowledge through story, memory, and community. Indigenous scholarship has long existed outside Western academic structures, and this dissertation recognizes those intellectual traditions as foundational rather than supplementary.

In that context, this study also acknowledges a connection to Kansas State University. Eve Ball (1890-1984), in 1918, earned a bachelor's degree in education from Kansas State Teachers College of Pittsburg and, in 1934, a master's degree in education from Kansas State University. She was only one year away from completing her doctorate at the University of Kansas. Ball taught elementary and secondary education in Kansas, Texas, and New Mexico, later teaching history and literature at Kansas City Junior College and the College of Artesia (Robinson, 2003, p. 204).

Ball moved to Ruidoso, New Mexico, in 1942 and became a respected chronicler of Mescalero Apache history. Her work exemplifies respectful, Indigenous-centered research. For more than three decades, she recorded Apache oral histories, ensuring that Apache voices remained authoritative in the telling of their own histories. Her seminal work, *Indeh: An Apache Odyssey*, and her legacy as documented in *Apache Voices: Their Story of Survival as Told by Eve Ball* by Sherry Robinson, serve as methodological touchstones for this study—demonstrating that scholarship can function as preservation, advocacy, and reciprocity (Robinson, 2003, Chapter 27).

Ball was a prominent 20th-century oral historian and author, renowned for documenting the histories of Apache tribes in the American Southwest. She was affectionately referred to as "the old white lady with many stories." Ball interviewed Apache elders and preserved their accounts. Notably, I graduated from high school the same year Ball passed away, and in 1990, I earned my bachelor's degree in mass communication from Kansas State University (KSU).

Through ancestral lineage, Indigenous intellectual tradition, and scholarly kinship—including a shared connection to KSU—this dissertation affirms that research is not merely an academic exercise, but a continuation of Indigenous presence, voice, and self-determination.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

When college leaders discuss the success rates of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students, Native Americans are often excluded from the conversation. The sample size of Native students in higher education is simply too small (Oxendine, 2019, p. 24). While it was reported in 2008 that higher education enrollment for Native American students had more than doubled in the previous 30 years, increasing from 76,100 in 1976 to 181,100 in 2006 (NCES, 2007), Native American college students nonetheless remained less likely than their peers to enroll in college (DeVoe et al., 2008). Only 17% of Native American students continue their education after high school, compared to 60% of the United States population. Undergraduate and graduate enrollment among Native Americans aged 18 to 24 is declining (Native American Students in Higher Education, 2019).

There is historical and ongoing concern with the underrepresentation of Native Americans among college graduates in the United States (Tierney et al., 2007; United States Department of Education, 2009). Studies that focus solely on the persistence and completion rates for this population are fewer in number than those for students who identify with other racial and ethnic groups. This research study explored community college and tribal partnerships, best practices, and how these might support retention and success at Native American-Serving Non-Tribal Institutions (NASNTIs) in New Mexico.

NASNTI designated institutions are accredited, public or private non-profit colleges with at least 10% undergraduate Native American enrollment that are not tribal colleges. These institutions receive federal funding under Title III of the Higher Education Act to improve student support, faculty development, and academic programs. NASNTIs differ from Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) because their designation is based on student demographics

rather than a mandate from a tribal nation. They often serve rural, remote areas, offering critical support to Indigenous students attending non-tribal institutions

Figure 1 illustrates the locations of the 37 designated NASNTIs at the start of this study in 2023. These NASNTIs are located across 10 states. Collectively, these institutions enroll 12% of the nation's Native American undergraduates, confer 14% of associate degrees to those students, and confer 10% of bachelor's degrees to those students (*Native-serving Institutions Initiative,* n.d.).

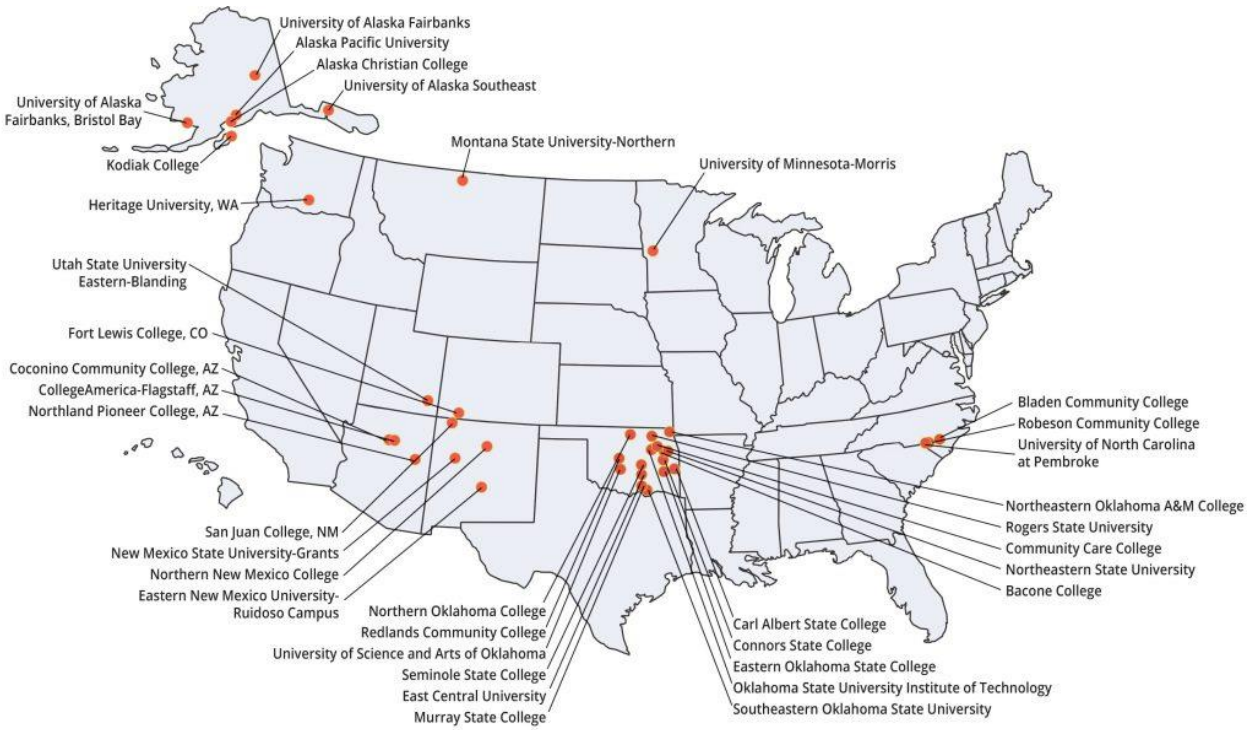

Figure 1.1: Map of Native American-Serving Non-Tribal Institutions
Image Attribution: WICHE.edu

According to Falkenstern and Rochat (2018), NASNTIs are one group that should be addressing the needs of Indigenous students in a culturally responsive manner. The NASNTI designation was created in 2008 by the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965. NASNTIs are higher education institutions with undergraduate student populations comprising

10% or more Native American or Alaska Native students who qualify for Title III under the United States Department of Education. Title III provides financial support for institutions serving low-income populations. These institutions are usually in rural areas adjacent to tribal reservations (Falkenstern & Rochat, 2018).

Native American students comprise less than 1% of the United States undergraduate and graduate student population, compared to nearly 94 million, or 43%, of Americans ages 25 and over who have a college degree of some type (J. Bryant, 2021a). White Americans make up the overwhelming majority of those who hold college degrees, accounting for nearly three-quarters of the college-degree-holding population. BIPOC individuals combined make up less than 30% of the population 25 and older who have earned a college degree (J. A. Bryant, 2021b) and of those Native American students who do attend college, only "41% of first-time, full-time Native American students attending four-year institutions beginning in 2012, graduated within six years, compared to 62% for all students" (J.A. Bryant, 2021b, page 1).

Native Americans earn 0.7% of all associates, bachelor's, and advanced degrees conferred (United States Department of Education, as cited in the Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 2005-2006). Most Native American students attend two-year institutions—typically within the tribal college system (*Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac*, 2005-2006). These Native American students are attending and graduating from community colleges at significantly lower rates than their non-Native American peers. These students are often excluded from research because they comprise such a small portion of the student body. The numbers tell part of the story: recent data from the Postsecondary Policy Institute show that less than 10% of Native Americans receive their associate degree, and only 16% attain a bachelor's degree or higher (J. Bryant, 2021a).

Institutions of higher education have increasingly been required to be accountable not only for enrollment but also for retention, completion, and addressing barriers to student success (T. Bailey, 2017). Community colleges nationally are focused on closing the completion gaps of all students. Native Americans have continued to be the lowest performing demographic, yet few studies exist on the success of Native American students in community colleges.

One of the most marginalized and underrepresented groups in higher education today is Native American students (Ginder & Kelly-Reid, 2013). In addition to this, first-generation, low-income Native American college students face numerous challenges in their academic careers. For example, they are more likely to be older, employed, face financial difficulties due to lack of financial aid, and be subject to higher chances of dropping out of school due to work or family demands (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Low-income, first-generation Native American college students are almost four times more likely to drop out of school than students who are neither low-income nor first-generation college students.

Statement of the Problem

Data support the fact that Native American students are not persisting in their educational pursuits and not graduating from institutions of higher education at the rate of students from other racial/ethnic groups (Cunningham & Parker, 1998; United States Department of Education, 2009). Native Americans make up just 1.7% of the United States population. However, in New Mexico—the focus of this study—they comprise a significantly larger share of the total population. Native Americans are 10.6% of the New Mexico population. The 2012 *New Mexico Kids Count Special Report* noted 23 tribal communities in New Mexico, comprising 19 Pueblos, three Apache communities, and the Navajo tribe, which span five reservations across eight counties and cover more than 2 million acres (Hollis, 2012, p. 3). Tribal-serving colleges in New

Mexico are making inroads in solving these problems and are strengthening relationships with their Native American partners. Little research has been done that highlights the results of these efforts or describes the best practices they employ.

In only four of the tribal communities in New Mexico does a greater percentage of youth (ages 18 to 24) than those in the state have either a high school diploma or a higher level of education. In Santa Ana and Pojoaque, nearly 90% of youth have a high school diploma or higher. These rates are predominantly based on the number of youth who graduated from high school; many fewer young Native Americans living in the Pueblo or reservation communities attend or have attended a college or university. Only Pojoaque (34%), San Ildefonso (33%), and Zuni (31%) come close to meeting New Mexico's enrollment rate (35%) for youth ages 18-24 in higher education. In four tribal communities, the percentage is exceptionally low; for example, only 2% of youth in Tesuque and 4% in Mescalero are enrolled in education programs. When the data for Native American youth living outside tribal community boundaries are considered, the enrollment rate rises to 27% for all Native Americans aged 18 to 24 living in New Mexico as a whole, and 35% for those in Albuquerque. This may indicate that enrollment rates are lower in Pueblo and reservation communities because the young people are no longer living at home and are attending higher education institutions located outside the Pueblos or reservations (United States Department of Education, 2009). However, there is a notable lack of research that highlights effective recruitment strategies and approaches for meeting the needs of Native American students in New Mexico.

New Mexico College Demographics

To support this study of college and tribal entities within New Mexico, it is necessary to become familiar with statistics specific to this state in order to understand the full study context.

Twenty-six percent of adults in New Mexico hold a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 31.5% in the region and 30.3% in the nation. New Mexico has a slightly higher proportion of adults without a high school diploma, with over 15% compared to 14.4% regionally and 13% nationally (New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee Meeting, 2019).

According to the United States Department of Education (2018), college enrollments increased nationally by 28% for undergraduate students and 38% for graduate students from 2000 to 2016. More New Mexicans are seeking a postsecondary education today compared to 2000, with a 19% increase, or 9,818 more students (New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee Meeting, 2019). New Mexico is home to seven four-year public colleges and universities, eight two-year independent community colleges, and ten two-year branch community colleges (part of one of the four-year state universities). New Mexico is also home to four tribal colleges.

By institution type, independent community colleges experienced the highest level of growth, followed by the branch community colleges. Given the composition of the student body at two-year colleges, the increase in nontraditional students has fueled much of this growth, but it has also contributed to substantial declines in enrollment since 2011, with a decrease of more than 20%. The two-year independent community college enrollment declined at a level similar to that of four-year institutions, both losing more than 4,700 students (New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee Meeting, 2019).

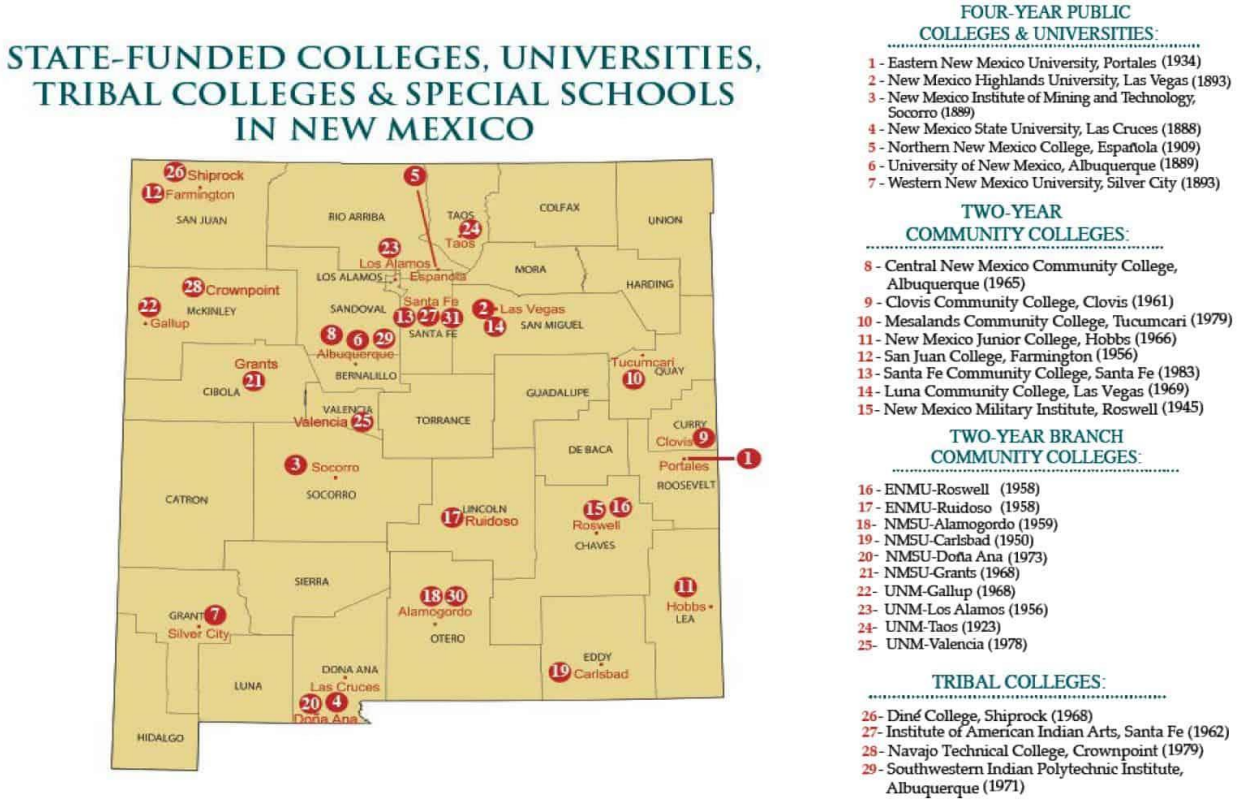

Figure 1.2: State-Funded Colleges, Tribal Colleges, and Special Schools in New Mexico
Image Attribution: New Mexico Higher Education Department

Native American students are more likely to attend public versus private institutions of higher education. Eighty percent of Native American students attended public two- or four-year institutions in 2014. Seventy-eight percent of all students at Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) in 2010 were considered Native American, a percentage that has increased annually, with just under 9% of all Native American college students attending a TCU in the fall of 2010 (*Native American Students in Higher Education*, 2019, p. 1).

Approximately 43.6% of all Native American students enrolled in higher education are enrolled in associate degree-granting institutions, as opposed to 31.4% of white students (NCES, n.d.). This is due in part to Native American students' poor academic preparation. Additionally,

Native American students have been more likely than white students to have social risk factors that lead to low academic preparation for college (low parental education, language other than English spoken at home, limited learning opportunities at home, and poor teacher perceptions) (Freeman & Fox, 2005). Average SAT and ACT scores for Native American students have been significantly lower than average scores for white students (Freeman & Fox, 2005). Inadequate academic preparation has likely precluded Native American students from enrolling in baccalaureate degree-granting institutions that often have selective admissions, compared to open admission for community colleges.

Table 1.1:

Mescalero Apache School versus New Mexico

Area	Household Income	Poverty
Navajo Tribe	$28,927	98.21%
Mescalero Apache Tribe	$30,474	33.6%
Picuris Pueblo	$38,750	14.3%
Acoma Pueblo	$61,765	1.9%
Lincoln County	$44,939	16.9%
Otero County	$45,032	15.5%
New Mexico	$51,243	16.8%
United States	$64,994	11.4%

Twenty-five percent of Native Americans currently live in poverty, making the cost of postsecondary education a significant factor in the choice of institution (Pew Research, n.d.). Another reason Native American students are more likely to attend associate degree-granting institutions is the college's proximity to tribal reservations. Tribal colleges, predominantly associate degree-granting institutions, are typically located on tribal reservations or near Native

American communities. Additionally, community colleges are often situated closer to tribal reservations than baccalaureate degree-granting institutions (United States Census, 2010).

Table 1.2:

Demographics Comparison of New Mexico and Mescalero Apache Tribe

Demographics	State of New Mexico	Mescalero Apache Tribe
Median Household Income	$51,945	$30,474
Median Home Value	$180,900	$54,464
Percent Living in Poverty	16.8%	33.6%
Average Household Size	2.5 people	3.3 people
Single Parent Households	8.2%	12.6%
Unemployed Adults	5.1%	18.5

New Mexico has approximately 228,400 Native American citizens, which represent nearly 10.9% of the state's entire population. There are 23 tribes located in New Mexico: 19 Pueblos, three Apache tribes (the Fort Sill Apache Tribe, the Jicarilla Apache Nation and the Mescalero Apache Tribe), and the Navajo Nation, and a considerable urban Indian population which is also served by the New Mexico Department of Indian Affairs Department. The 19 Pueblos are comprised of the Pueblos of Acoma, Cochiti, Isleta, Jemez, Laguna, Nambe, Ohkay Owingeh, Picuris, Pojoaque, Sandia, San Felipe, San Ildefonso, Santa Ana, Santa Clara, Santo Domingo, Taos, Tesuque, Zuni, and Zia. Each tribe is a sovereign nation with its own government, lifeways, traditions, and culture; and each tribe has a unique relationship with the federal and state governments.

The 23 tribes in New Mexico are actively engaged in preserving their indigenous languages, religion, culture, the environment and in promoting quality education and healthcare for all members, especially their youth and elders. Economic development strategies focused

upon these goals is important to tribal leadership, as is homeland security and housing for their communities (Indian Affairs Department, n.d.).

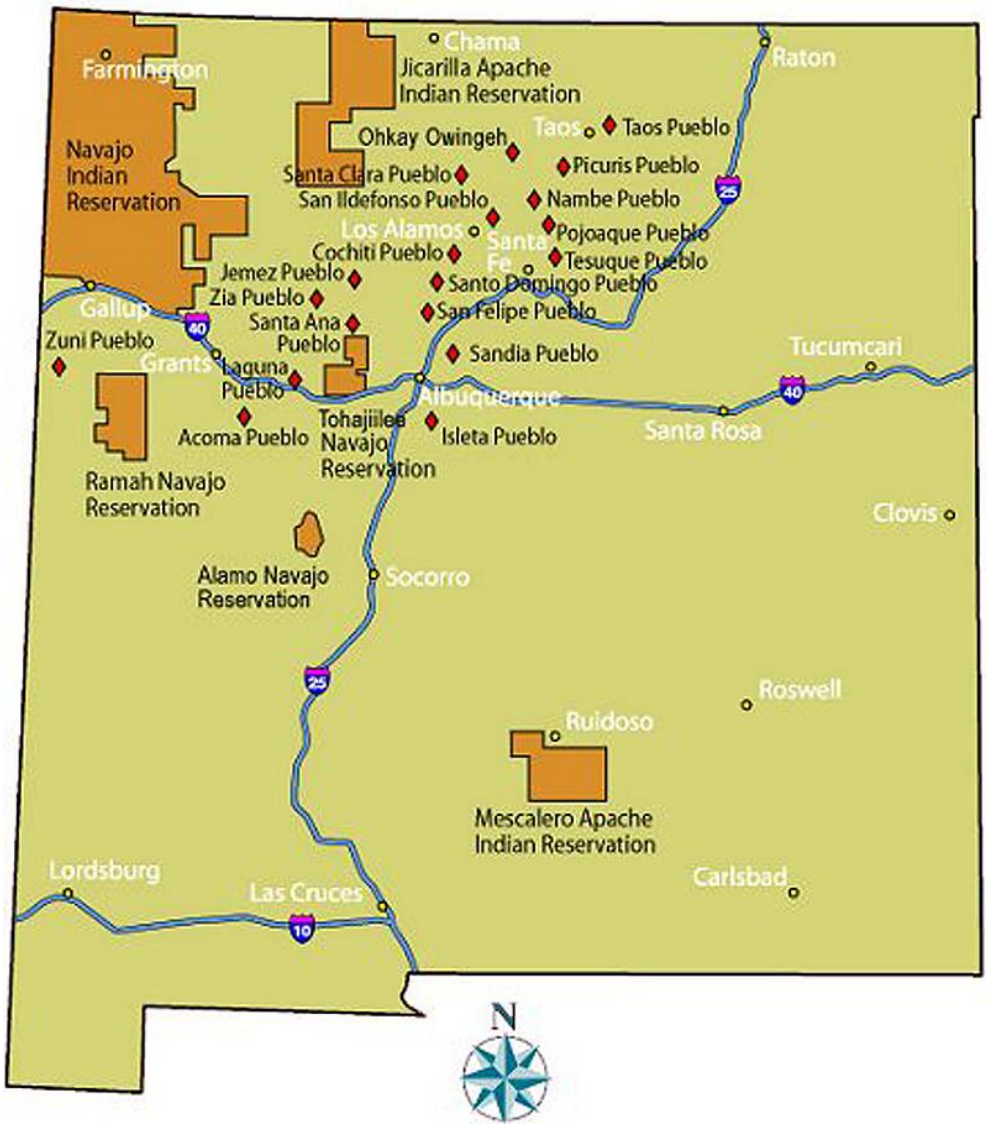

Figure 1.3: New Mexico Pueblos and Reservations

Image Attribution: New Mexico Department of Health

One of the tribes based in New Mexico is that of the Mescalero Apache. The Mescalero have historically been underserved in academia, with low percentages graduating from high school, attending college, and earning degrees (City-data.com, 2022).

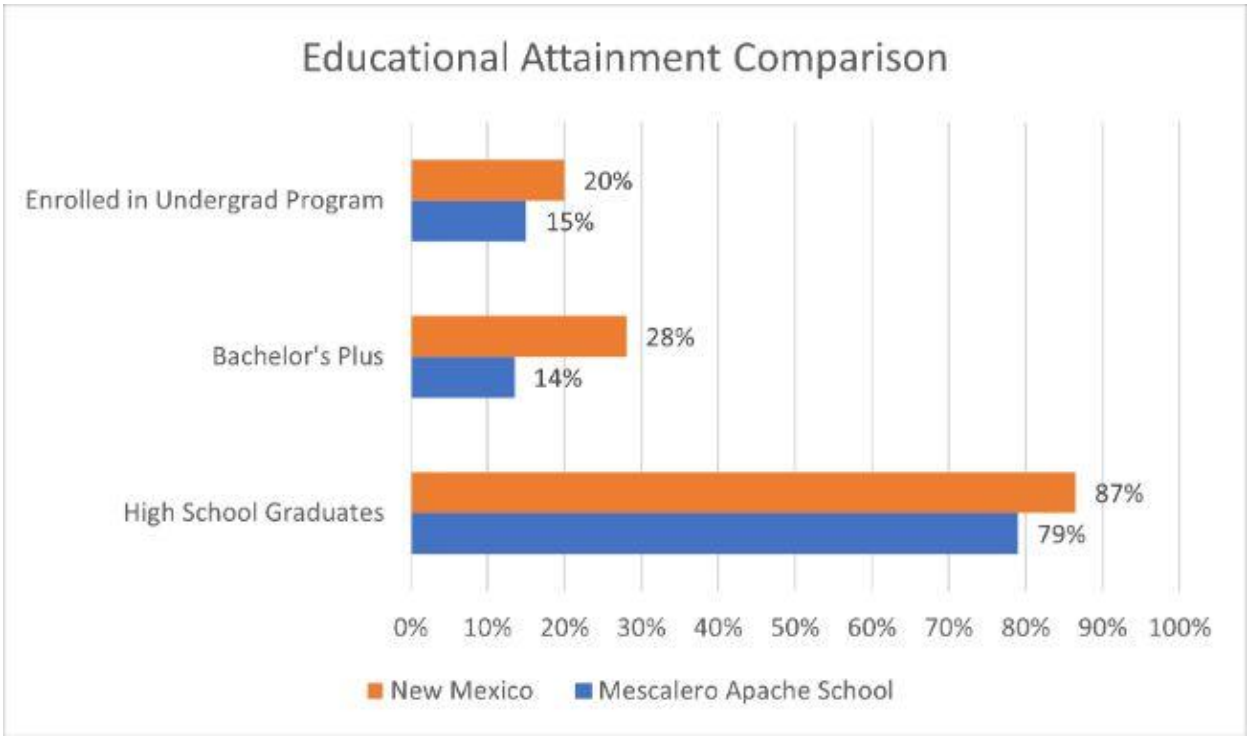

Figure 1.4: Educational Attainment Comparison

The Bureau of Indian Education – through the Albuquerque Education Resource Center – operates the Mescalero Apache School, which serves grades K-12. All of the school's approximately 640 students (175 in high school) are Native American and 100% qualify for free or reduced lunch. While the school has an extremely low student-teacher ratio of 7:1, only about 55% of students graduate in four years. Additionally, proficiency is rated low in both reading (6%) and math (4%), according to Niche Public School Review (2022).

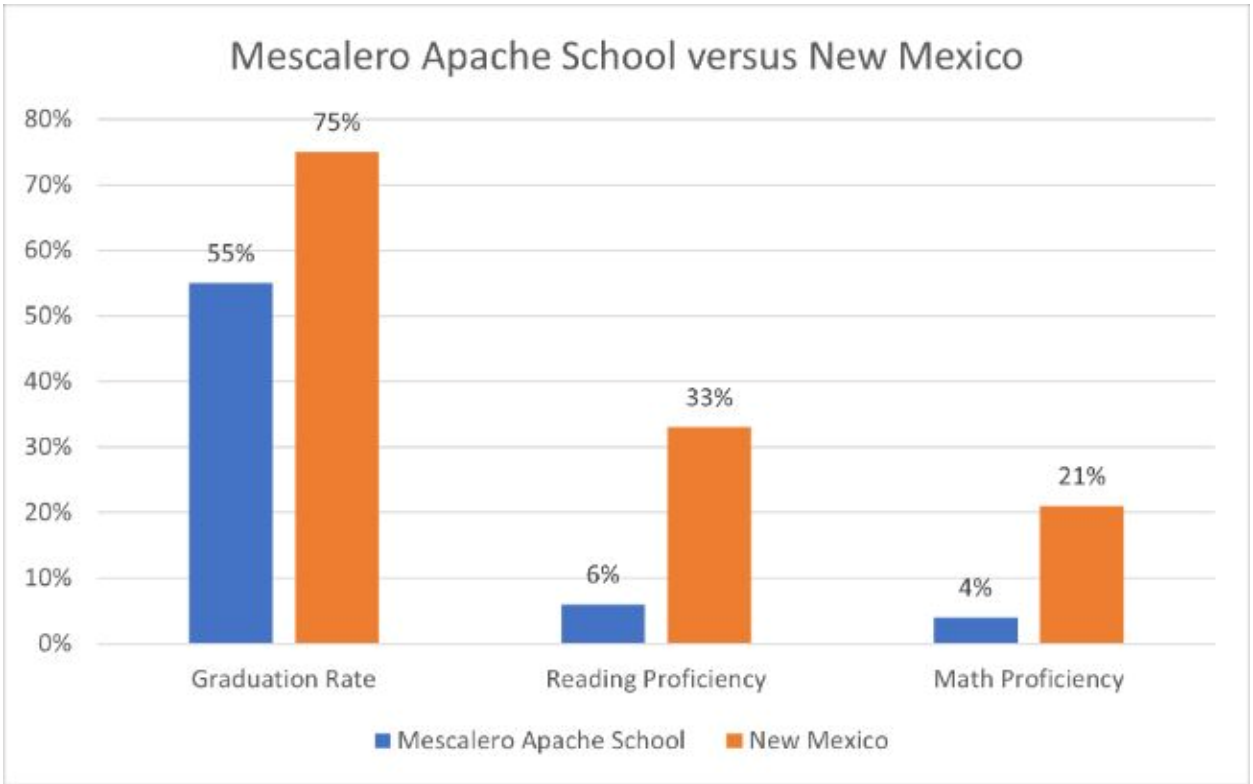

Figure 1.5: Mescalero Apache School versus New Mexico

The Mescalero people are disadvantaged in a number of ways, including having high rates of unemployment and poverty, low educational attainment, larger family sizes, and high levels of single-parent households. These statistics are important for the colleges and communities discussed in this study because research has shown that students living in poverty consistently face more educational challenges than their peers. Nationwide, 19% of children under age 18 live in poverty, 24.4% attend high-poverty schools, and more minorities – including Native Americans – attend high-poverty schools than their white counterparts. Impoverished students have fewer resources at school and at home and may lack access to computers or the internet (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2022).

Background of the Problem

Colleges in the United States have difficulty recruiting and retaining Native American students (Neugin, 2019). Native American students have lower enrollment and graduation rates in college than any other ethnic group in the country. Of the Native American students who do enroll, only 39% graduate in six years. Native American students are not only often excluded from research they are also less likely to have family members who have attended college. College enrollment for Native Americans ages 18 to 24 continues to decline. In 2000, 30% of Native Americans between the ages of 25 and 29 acquired at least an associate or bachelor's degree. In 2017, that percentage fell to 27% (Neugin, 2019).

According to the Census' American Community Survey, in 2021, 1% of the total United States population identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native. Among American Indian or Alaskan Native residents aged 25 or over, only 15.4% had earned a bachelor's degree or higher. This rate is up from 13.4% in 2010, but falls short of the national rate of 32.9% (Dale, 2022).

According to Dale (2022), in fall 2020, Native American students made up 0.6% of all postsecondary enrollment. In 2020, 22% of the 18 to 24-year-old Native American population were enrolled in college compared to 40% of the overall United States population. Since Fall 2010, Native American enrollment has declined from 196,000 to 123,000, a 37% decrease. Undergraduate enrollment declined from 179,000 to 107,000, a 40% decrease. Graduate enrollment declined from 17,000 to 14,000, a nearly 18% decrease. Native American students are much more likely to attend public versus private institutions of higher education. In Fall 2020, 83% of Native American students attended public institutions: 45% attended public four-year institutions, 38% attended public two-year institutions. Nearly 80% of the Fall 2020

enrollment at Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCU) were Native American students (Dale, 2022).

Baker-Sontilli (2014) found that over the last 20 years, Native Americans were the group least likely among all ethnic groups to enter and complete college. In addition, Native Americans have the lowest college graduation rate of any ethnic group. For every seven white students who get a bachelor's degree, only one Native American will earn a bachelor's degree (Schmidtke, 2009). Pewewardy and Frey (2004) pointed out that Native American students are among the least represented groups in the academic environment.

In New Mexico, approximately 32.49% of Native Americans live in poverty. Of these, more than 5% are considered to be living in extreme poverty. The high poverty rate among Native Americans in New Mexico is due primarily to historic factors, systemic bias, lack of natural resources, and a limited ability to utilize available resources due to strict land development regulations. Inequality in education, healthcare access, and employment are major contributing factors to the poverty in the "Land of Enchantment" (Native American Poverty by State, 2022).

The shortage of formally educated Native Americans presents a problem because tribal communities depend on well-educated graduates to help alleviate chronic issues that persist within (Collard & Reynolds, 2006; Lomay & Hinkebein, 2006; Austin, 2005; Yurkovich, 2001). Formal education is highly valued by tribal communities (Calsoyas, 2005; Larson, 2009; Yurkovich, 2001) and is needed to help overcome public health problems that disproportionately affect Native American communities. Further, the community needs to have well-educated leaders to negotiate critical societal, educational, legal, and political issues. Without leadership that is culturally aware, racially concordant, and innately sensitive, reservation communities

continue to fall behind in quality-of-life services such as adequate healthcare, greater employment opportunities, and improved social standing (Barksdale, 2009; Gone, 2009; Perna, 2007; Portman & Garrett, 2005).

A gap remains in the data needed to determine the best practices for partnerships between community colleges and tribes that improve student success and completion. At this time, it is unknown which programs and support services are needed to assist Native American students, and how the colleges' and the tribe's processes and policies support student success.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the characteristics of successful partnerships between community colleges' and the tribes' they serve, which are designed to contribute to student success at Native American-Serving Non-Tribal Institutions (NASNTIs) in New Mexico.

Research Questions

The following research questions were created to guide this study:

1. What are the characteristics of successful partnerships between community colleges and tribal governments?

2. What are the best practices found in community college and Native American tribal partnerships that are designed to contribute to student success?

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

This study used the critical success factor (CSF) theory as a theoretical lens (Rockart, 1979). Critical success factors are "the limited number of areas in which satisfactory results will ensure successful competitive performance for the individual, department, or organization" (Bullen & Rockart, 1981, p. 7). These factors were originally developed to define specific information needed by business chief executive officers to focus on crucial information required

to be successful in meeting operational and strategic goals (Rockart, 1979). Specific CSFs may vary across situations, organizations, industries, and time (Alpern, 2020). An exploration of CSFs served as this study's theoretical framework.

This study applied Kanter's Eight I's (1994) as the conceptual lens for analyzing the case study partnerships between community colleges and their local tribal governments. By studying partnerships and business alliances in the global supply chain, Kanter (1994) explored which CSFs were commonly used for collaborative advantages. Collaborative advantage is the benefit received by the partners beyond what they would receive working alone (Pinnington et al., 2020). Kanter's work with CSFs led to the development of the Eight I's: Individual Excellence, Importance, Interdependence, Investment, Information, Integration, Institutionalization, and Integrity. This conceptual lens was applied by Alexander (1997) to community college interorganizational partnerships involving community colleges, businesses, and community stakeholders, which demonstrated its applicability to successful community college partnerships. More recently, this framework was applied by Stegeman (2021) in a study between community college partnerships and economic development organizations, demonstrating its application to more recent successful community college partnerships. As Roberts and Hyatt (2019) stated, a conceptual framework is a "lens through which your research problem is viewed" (p.105).

Methodology

This study employed a generic qualitative design that explored partnerships between three New Mexico community colleges and the three New Mexico Native American tribes they serve. A qualitative design enables the researcher to explore how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam, 2009).

Generic qualitative inquiry investigates people's reports of their subjective opinions, attitudes, beliefs, or reflections on their experiences, of things in the outer world. It can be selected as the methodological approach when the researcher has a body of pre-knowledge/pre-understandings (categories or subcategories of information) about the topic that he or she wants to more fully describe from the participants' perspective. Generic qualitative inquiry is a useful approach when attempting survey research that includes qualitative elements in a mixed design. Indeed, this approach is appropriate when a fully qualitative survey approach is desired. Actually, researchers considering any study of people's subjective "take" on actual external happenings and events should consider generic qualitative inquiry as their approach (Percy et al., 2015, p. 78-79).

Delimitations and Assumptions

This study was delimited to partnerships between three NASNTI-designated community colleges and the three recognized tribes within New Mexico. The research focused on the partnerships and elements of the community college programs, policies, and practices that were perceived to contribute to the partnership and the students' success. The theoretical framework was delimited to Kanter's Eight I's. An additional delimitation is the size of the sample, as only three colleges and three tribes will be studied. The researcher assumed the interviewees were truthful about their programs, policies, and practices that are perceived to contribute to the success of the partnership.

Significance of the Study

The educational story of Native American students in the United States is often told with an adverse context using data showing deficiency, failure, and negative trends (Kanter, 2011; Wang & Gordon, 1994). Although attrition of these students in higher education is a noted fact,

there is unknown information about these factors and forces that influence Native American students' decision to persist in earning their degree. There is a lack of research pertaining to the higher education experience of Native American students in research databases (Reyhner & Dodd, 1995).

In the United States, public and private institutions of higher education offer support systems with the purpose of encouraging Native American students to obtain a college degree or credential. However, the efficacy of these support systems and the effect on Native American students is not readily understood. Some studies have concluded that fewer than 12% of Native American students have graduated from high school (Brayboy & Castagno, 2011; Ting & Bryant, 2001). In addition, studies show that Native American students are the lowest among all minority groups to persist to graduation (Aragon, 2002; Freeman & Fox, 2005; Hunt & Harrington, 2010).

This study is valuable because it examined partnerships between community colleges and local tribal governments and provides critical information and best practices that will help college and tribal leaders understand the elements that help them best support the success of Native American students at the selected New Mexico community colleges. Successful partnerships could provide a model to be replicated by other institutions. Any findings that established critical success factors (CSFs) in working partnerships could affect student enrollment, retention, and completion. Additionally, it is designed to inform tribal partnerships that positively address the goals and mission of each organization and provide improvements for Native American student completion. The narrative of the college administration and tribal governments can inform the leadership of higher education institutions that assist Native American students in attaining their educational goals.

Definitions of Terms

Acculturation – The process through which a person or group from one culture comes to adopt the practices and values of another culture, while still retaining their own distinct culture (Cole, 2011).

Assimilation – Minority immigrant groups coming to adopt the culture of the majority and thus becoming like them in terms of values, ideology, behavior, and practices. This process can be forced or spontaneous and can be rapid or gradual (Cole, 2017).

Belonging – In higher education, belonging is becoming a popular concept. More and more institutions are discussing and seeking ways to create belonging for their diverse student clientele. In higher education research, belongingness is defined as "the need to belong" (Alejandro et al.2020, p. 680) and sense of belonging is often referred to as an "individual's sense of belonging to a particular group and his or her feelings of morale, associated with membership in the group (Cabrera et al, 2016, p.67). Frequently, "integrating into the campus environment is viewed as a requirement for belonging (Tinto, 1987). The logic goes: if students integrated, they then have a sense of belonging, and *bam!* they will persist and graduate with a degree. Brené Brown (2017), a scholar known for her work on vulnerability and shame, writes that "we want to be part of something," and in her book *The Gifts of Imperfection*, she writes, "Because true belonging only happens when we present our authentic, imperfect selves to the world, our sense of belonging can never be greater than our level of self-acceptance" (Brown, 2020. P. 26)

Collaborative Advantage – The incremental gain attributed to outcomes that could not have been achieved by either of the individual organizations alone (Pinnington et al., 2020).

Colonization – "The process by which a people exploit and/or annex the lands and resources of another without their consent and unilaterally expand political power over them" (Porter, 2005, p. 108).

Critical Success Factors (CSFs) – The limited number of areas in which satisfactory results will ensure successful competitive performance for the individual, department, or organization. CSFs are the few key areas where "things must go right" for the institution to flourish and for goals to be attained (Bullen & Rochard, 1981, p. 7).

First-generation – A college student coming from a home in which neither of his/her parents/guardians has completed a bachelor's degree (Ginder & Kelly-Reid, 2013).

Institutional dynamics – Components that characterize the culture, values, beliefs, or systematic behaviors of an individual or an institution (Hardegree, 2007).

Leadership influence – The capacity of a leader or group of leaders to alter or transform the actions of others (Lynch, 2009).

Native American/Native/Indigenous – The term "Native Americans" or "Indians" refers to the Indigenous peoples in North America within the boundaries of the present-day continental United States, Alaska, and the island state of Hawaii (Oxendine, 2019). These terms are also defined by individuals whose parentage, clan relationship, kinship pattern, individual tribal affiliation, or blood quantum meets the eligibility requirements set forth by the tribal government, who can claim this identity (Horse, 2005). The terms Native American, Native, and Indigenous are used interchangeably throughout this study.

Native American-Serving Non-Tribal Institution (NASNTI) – A postsecondary institution that is not affiliated with American Indian and Native Alaskan tribes and receives federal discretionary funding to improve and expand its capacity to serve Native American

students. These institutions of higher education have a Native American undergraduate student enrollment of at least 10% and are not Tribal Colleges or Universities (White House Initiative on American Indian/Alaska Native Education, n.d.). NASNTIs are authorized under Title III, Parts A and F of the Higher Education Act, which provides grants and related assistance to enable these institutions to improve and expand their capacity to serve Native Americans (United States Department of Education, n.d.).

Persistence – Achieving academic standards as set forth by the institution and the ability to adapt to the collegiate environment and to adjust to life within the educational setting. (Tinto, 1993).

Racism – Historical, systemic, and ideological manifestations of power to serve, maintain, and protect white privilege (Haynes Writer, 2008).

Retention/Retention Rate – The percentage of new first-year students that enroll in the same school the following year. The retention rate refers specifically to freshmen students who continue at the same school for their sophomore year of college (Burrell, 2019).

Small Rural Community College – A college is considered rural if its campus is in a town with a population of less than 25,000 people. Rural campuses are located in the country, often near farms and wilderness areas, and usually near a small town.

Sovereignty – Sovereignty, in its simplest form, means supreme authority or power within a specific territory. It's the right of a country to govern itself and its people, without interference from other countries. While tribal sovereignty is limited today by the United States under treaties, acts of Congress, Executive Orders, federal administrative agreements, and court decisions, what remains is nevertheless protected and maintained by the federally recognized tribes against further encroachment by other sovereigns, such as the states. Tribal sovereignty

ensures that any decisions about the tribes with regard to their property and citizens are made with their participation and consent (*American Indian Education Foundation (Aief) - Providing Support for Indian Education Throughout the United States - American Indian Education Foundation*, n.d., para. 2).

Student Success – For the purpose of this study, "success" has multiple meanings. Student success will be measured by retention and completion rates—two of the traditional benchmarks. But success will also be defined as the ability of Native American students to "walk in both worlds," maintaining their belief systems while meeting the expectations of white society (Wenzlaff, 1996). It is important to clarify the meaning of success as it applies to the Native American students. As with other students in higher education, success means achieving academic goals and graduating from the institution. In addition, the indigenous approach to success includes students' ability to achieve academic success while maintaining a strong sense of their tribal and cultural identity (Larrimore & McClellan, 2005).

Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) – Colleges and universities chartered by tribal governments. Tribal identity is the core of every TCU, and they share the mission of tribal self-determination and service to their respective communities (Waterman et al., 2018, p. 7).

Tribal-Serving Institutions (TSIs) – Colleges that have been identified and recognized by serving Native American students (*Native-serving Institutions Initiative*, n.d.). The American Indian College Fund serves 34 accredited tribal colleges with 75 campuses located in 13 states in the Southwest, the Northwest, and across the Great Plains from Kansas and Oklahoma to Minnesota and the Dakotas—which serve a combined annual enrollment of nearly 22,000 students. Tribal colleges and universities provide higher education opportunities, most on or near reservation lands. Known for their academic programs, culturally-relevant curricula, and familial

student care – tribal colleges allow students to further their careers, attain an advanced degree, or better support their communities.

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed and introduced the study and the research questions that guided it, along with its potential contribution to the literature. Critical success factor theory was introduced as the theoretical lens for guiding this study, along with Kanter's Eight I's, which was used as a conceptual framework.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 of the dissertation provides a context for the study, including the background of the problem, the statement of the problem, the research questions, and the significance of the study. Chapter 2 is a literature review of the research problem that informs this study. The literature review includes persistence theories that inform the role of the institution, empirical and theoretical studies on persistence in the community college context, and literature on Native American student persistence in higher education. Based on the literature reviewed, a theoretical framework for the study is presented. Chapter 3 describes the study's research design, the study's setting and participants, as well as data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 presents the study's facts and findings, and description of the partnerships. Chapter 5 will present the researcher's interpretation of the study, and discussions of the findings related to the research questions, conceptual framework, and literature, implications for practice, recommendations for further research, and conclusion.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

This literature review and analysis illuminate the research topic by examining the scholarship of the Native American experience at the point where it intersects with higher education. Relatively few studies have focused on the success rates of Native American students in higher education, despite the importance of those two factors in gauging a college's overall success. This lack of attention might simply be due to the low number of Indigenous people in college; according to data from the National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES] (2010), Native American students accounted for only 1% of the total enrollment at mainstream institutions of higher education. This review examined the literature surrounding several issues that are considered important if Native American students are going to achieve at rates comparable to other groups.

In New Mexico, there are 28 Minority-Student Serving Institutions (MSIs), including four Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs). TCUs in New Mexico include Diné College, Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA), Navajo Technical University (NTU), and Southwest Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI). The purpose of TCUs is to serve and prepare Native American students through the incorporation of language, culture, and traditions within higher education curricula. In 2022, the total number of Native American students served in higher education, adult education, and dual credit programs was 13,433 (Rodriguez et al., 2023, p. 2). This included:

- 1,721 Native American students enrolled at TCUs
- 7,983 Native American students enrolled at public colleges and universities
- 1,188 Native American students enrolled at private post-secondary institutions and vocational programs

- 1,158 Native American students enrolled in adult education programs
- 1,383 Native American students enrolled in the dual credit program.

Additionally, this chapter highlights the significance of community colleges to Native Americans and to the New Mexican tribal communities they serve. It examines Native education through a historical lens, which brings into focus many issues that contribute to the Native American's unique academic experience: first-generation student challenges, a sense of belonging, acculturation, assimilation, Indigenous "ways of knowing," tribal colleges and universities, tribal college leadership, college leadership and student success, degree completion, and culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies and sovereignty. These concerns are addressed as a framework for understanding how the cultures of the tribe and of the college campus combine to erect systemic obstacles in the student's path.

The examination of the literature includes a brief review of the historical background of Native American students in higher education and pays particular attention to the retention of Native American students. Many of the Native American student issues are like other underrepresented groups—stemming from well-documented periods when the United States government established boarding schools and forcibly placed tribal people in those institutions. To understand the current issues and needs facing Native American college students, it is necessary to understand how their educational history has unfolded.

Emphasis is given to the interaction of Native Americans with the United States government in the 1800s and to educational reform in the 20th century. The extant literature on factors that contribute to Native American college students' success will be analyzed, as well as the literature dealing with factors that hinder their retention during their first year of college. The focus will be on first-generation college students and their unique needs. Attention will be given

to social, cultural, personal, and institutional factors affecting first-generation Native American college students.

The sources examined in this literature review include histories, journals, dissertations, and media articles, organized by theme. The chapter concludes with an exploration of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that have guided this study.

Overview

A review of the literature indicates that Native American students experience career challenges and barriers that adversely affect students and their persistence to graduation (Hoffmann et al., 2005). The lack of research pertaining to Native American students' success has been cited in numerous studies (Guillory, 2009; Harrington & Harrington, 2011; Smith, 2012). This presented a problem for the researcher in that finding current information and data pertaining to Native American students' success rates proved to be a challenge.

Historical Background

To understand the literature, it is important to accurately describe the troubled history of Native Americans in this country. Shotton et al. (2013) effectively summarized the history of Native Education in the United States. Efforts by the Spanish to formally "educate" the Indigenous people of the Western hemisphere began as early as the 1500s (Wright, 1988). In the 1600s, plans to build a college for Native people were discussed in what is now Virginia (Carney, 1999). In 1650, Harvard's charter was "rewritten to include" the education of Native youth, after prompting by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, established by Boyle Fund, targeting Native people (Carney, 1999, p. 25). Various treaties and legislation, such as the Northwest Ordinance, included educational provisions for Native people. However—and this is fundamental to understanding the Native plight—education was interpreted through a European

lens, not recognizing the Indigenous knowledge systems already in place. Educational policy became one of "kill the Indian in him, and save the man" (Adams, 1995, p. 52), and its purpose was to replace Native culture with white Christian values as a tool for removal to obtain land (Adams, 1988; Carney, 1999). Native children were taken from their homes, sometimes willingly and sometimes not, to attend boarding schools that inculcated a Christian, vocational education. Children were abused and lacked food and comfort; many ran away, while many others became ill and died (Adams, 1995). These boarding schools were run not by Native American communities but by the church and federal government (Adams, 1995) and are not to be confused with tribal colleges or the tribal college movement. Today, many Native college students have a parent or grandparent who attended one of these schools. This is a legacy from which Native students experience education (Shotton et al., 2013, p. 12).

The literature indicates that Native American students in higher education still demonstrate tendencies influenced by the three historic eras; the colonial era (Indigenous resistance to colonial efforts), the federal era (Federal Indian law through policy), and the self-determination era (the movement by which Native Americans sought to achieve restoration of tribal community self-governance, cultural renewal, reservation development and educational control).

Brayboy (2005) noted that, as white colonial society began moving west, there was a persistent effort to relieve Native American populations of their human, social, cultural, environmental, and economic capital and change those Native Americans who survived the physical genocide to be more like those who held power in the dominant society. While there was increased awareness of the violent genocide that had occurred, there is a lack of awareness as to how that genocide has persisted to this day. In many ways, this genocide continues by the

very people who are unaware of it. As Patrick Wolfe (2006) discussed, questions of genocide are not far removed from discussions concerning settler colonialism (pg. 387). According to the United Nations' convention, under Article Two, the act of genocide becomes more specifically defined, and whether this act is committed in time of peace or war, it is seen as a crime under international law:

> In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; forcibly transferring children of the group to another group (United Nations, 1994, p. 2).

The term "genocide" has often been referred to as the physical destruction of Native peoples, but not necessarily the cultural, linguistic, and philosophical destruction. "Throughout American history, the agonizing discourse concerning Indian/white relations is spoken of as 'conflict,' or 'assimilation,' or 'postcolonial' in nature, but never as 'genocide.' As the 20th century closed, it seems obvious that genocide, in the matter of Indian/white relations in America, has not been just a matter of physical extermination. It has been broadened to include the concept of "ecocide," the intentional destruction of the physical environment needed to sustain human health and life in a given geographical region (Cook-Lynn, 2007, p.187). The term "ecocide," or the killing of the physical environment, refers to both the physical and spiritual environment of native cultures. Thinking about genocide in the context of education

helps one view genocide as not specifically a conflict of violence. It is the elimination of people and their physical and spiritual worlds.

An examination of the literature leads to a better understanding of the underlying cause of Native American resistance to schooling and the educational empowerment Native Americans are striving to achieve. The American School Board Journal (2007) created the timeline for the history of Native American Education. Table 4 depicts the timeline and the relationship between the federal government and the Native Americans' educational needs.

One important report that was left out of the Native American Education timeline is the 1969 Senate Report 91-501, commonly known as the Kennedy Report, which was published by the Special Subcommittee on Indian Education of the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare. Titled "Indian education: A national tragedy, a national challenge," it said: "The dominant policy of the federal government toward the American Indian has been one of coercive assimilation," and the policy "has had disastrous effects on the education of Indian children."

With the emergence of ethnic minorities into the American political scene, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) modified Indian policy to serve the growing self-determination of Indian people. Congress encouraged the educational structure to be responsive to the needs of, and under the direction of, the Indian people themselves.

Boarding schools made a number of curriculum changes and instituted all-Indian school boards. Indian Studies programs appeared in colleges, private foundations increased financial aid, and private companies were tapped for the first time (*American Indian Education Foundation (Aief) - Providing Support for Indian Education Throughout the United States - American Indian Education Foundation*, n.d.).

In the context of non-religious, non-governmental Catholic boarding schools, this continues to contribute to the trauma for Native Americans.

Tribal History

Because the current educational and social plight of Native Americans is linked directly and inextricably to their history, it is important that this study includes a brief survey of each tribe's characteristics and influence. These summaries are not exhaustive, but rather intended to provide cultural context for the study.

Mescalero Apache Education and History

Native Americans have lived in the Sacramento Mountain region for 12,000 years. The first people, known as Paleo-Indians, lived in the area surrounding the mountains. Later, native people called Mescalero Apache made their homes in the surrounding desert and Sacramento Mountains. The Apaches roamed the mountains and deserts, constantly moving from one place to another in search of wild plants and animals. Throughout their history, the Apache were threatened by various peoples—Spaniards, Mexicans, Americans, and other Indian groups. To protect themselves and their territory, they became talented fighters. However, years of raiding and conflict led to confinement in government reservation areas (*Native Americans of the Sacramento Mountain Region Display*, n.d.).

Today, the world of the Apache is a combination of the old and the new. They are working to find modern ways of improving their lives. But they also look to the past. From their rich history of struggle and survival, the Apache continue to draw strength and pride.

Ball et al., (1988) discussed the Apache school experience. Ball et al. interviewed many Apaches and learned through their oral histories before oral histories were considered popular. Talking to survivors of an event to get their stories is considered essential for writers today, but

when Eve Ball was talking to Apaches living on the Mescalero Reservation, the legitimacy—and popularity—of oral history was decades away, and Indian people were still, in the eyes of the dominant society, second-class citizens (Ball et al., 1988, p. 203).

While the reservation was established in 1873, the Mescalero Apache School was not established until 1884. A long, crude adobe building was erected that included a dining room, a kitchen with a basement for storage, and baths. On either side was a dormitory, one for girls on one side and one for boys on the other. A disciplinarian was employed to preserve order for the day and to sleep on one of the cots in the boys' quarters. A matron stayed with the girls (Ball et al., 1988, p. 219). The primary function of the instructors was to teach the children to speak English and to establish habits of cleanliness. The pupils were required to make their beds, wash their clothes, and do a few light tasks in the preparation and serving of meals (Ball et al., 1988, p. 219).

The problem was getting the students to attend. Very few Apache parents permitted their children to be taken from their homes. Many lived long distances from the village. They used many devices for concealing their children, but eventually nearly all between the ages of seven or eight and 16 were rounded up and incarcerated in the boarding school. Many of them were taken forcibly (Ball et al., 1988, p. 219).

In 1892, Andrew Atchison became the superintendent, and his wife became the primary teacher. They found that the school was hated and feared by the Apaches. The children were granted no summer vacation, as it was feared they would revert to their old ways. However, by 1893, it was demonstrated that the school children were doing creditable work by an exhibit of letters and drawings sent to the World's Fair in Chicago (Ball et al., 1988, p. 221).

Each year, an additional grade was added until the school consisted of all six primary grades. Some of those who completed the elementary courses were sent away for advanced instruction at Albuquerque, Phoenix, Riverside, St. John's, Fort Lewis, Haskell, and Carlisle. In 1893, there were 94 children of school age enrolled and 529 members of the tribe on the reservation. The Atchisons' recorded students ranging in age from six to 22 years of age in the third grade (Ball et al., 1988, p. 221). Over the years, the Mescalero Reservation has had several Indian Affairs agents. The effectiveness of the agents' leadership styles and their ability to garner the trust of the tribe, along with the eventual tribal leadership, negatively impacted the educational process of the tribal members.

Navajo Nation Education and History

The Navajo Nation extends into the states of Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico, covering over 27,000 square miles. *Diné Bikéyah*, or Navajoland, is larger than 10 of the 50 states in America (Navajo History, n.d.). The Navajo Nation is one of North America's most renowned and well-known Native American tribes. They were at the center of many conflicts and events in the 19th and 20th centuries. The Navajo originally referred to themselves as the *Diné*- meaning "the people." They became known as the Navajo only after interacting with European settlers (Native Hope, 2022). As the European settlers began expanding further west, the Navajo adopted many of the traditions and technologies of these white pioneers.

As of 2021, the Navajo tribe is the largest federally-recognized tribe in the United States. Out of about 190,000 Navajo living in the United States, 146,000 are on reservations. The largest Navajo population is located in the Four Corners region, where the states of New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and Utah meet. The largest reservation is shared with the Hopi Pueblo reservation in Arizona, and there are three other large reservations in New Mexico.

Although the Navajo never raided white settlements as extensively as the Apache, their raiding was serious enough to cause the United States government in 1863 to launch a military effort against them. The ensuing campaign resulted in the incarceration of about 8,000 Navajo. This four-year captivity left a legacy of bitterness and distrust that remains relevant to this day, as it shapes Navajo belief and policy when it comes to all interactions with majority-white enterprises such as education.

The Navajo resemble other Apachean peoples in their general preference for limiting centralized tribal or political organization, although they have adopted pan-tribal governmental and legal systems in order to maintain tribal sovereignty. In 2023, many Navajo continue to live a predominantly traditional lifestyle, speaking the Navajo language, practicing the religion, and organizing through traditional forms of social structure. In March 2023, the United States Supreme Court heard oral arguments in the consolidated cases *Arizona v. Navajo Nation* and *Department of the Interio*r *v. Navajo Nation*, in which the Navajo Nation argued in part that the federal government was obligated under treaties dating from the mid-19th century to address the tribe's water needs beyond its current limited access to tributaries of the Colorado River. On June 24, 2023, the Supreme Court ruled against the Navajo Nation in favor of the United States government (Scotusblog, 2023).

According to the Census Bureau, the Navajo Nation has over 42,000 students enrolled, with roughly 3,000 high schoolers graduating annually and 3,200 receiving college degrees. As of 2018-2022, 77.4% of residents 25+ have a high school diploma, while 8.6% hold a bachelor's degree or higher. Major institutions include Diné College and Navajo Technical University.

Table 2.1:

Navajo Nation Education Data

Education	Total	Female
Less than high school	19%	18.2%
Master's Degree	3%	3.1%
No schooling completed	3%	3.9%
Some college but no degree	28%	28.4%

Zuni Pueblo Education and History

The Zuni are a Pueblo Indian group and speak the Penutian language. They are believed to be descendants of the prehistoric Ancestral Pueblo, known as the Anasazi. Zuni traditions depict a past in which their ancestors emerged from underground and eventually settled at the tribe's present location. When Pueblo tribes first encountered Spanish colonizers in the 16th century, the Zuni were living in Hawikuh and five or six other towns. Collectively these towns came to be called the Seven Cities of Cibola, host to a rumored empire of gold that was sought by Coronado and other conquistadors.

In 1680, the Zuni and other Pueblo tribes defeated the Spanish through the Pueblo Revolt. The tribes retained their independence until 1691, when the Spanish reconquered the area. The Zuni society is organized through kinship and includes 13 matrilineal clans. Like other Pueblo peoples, the Zuni are deeply religious and have a complex ceremonial organization. Many Zuni have chosen to adopt only some parts of modern American life and to maintain much of their traditional culture, which impacts how they choose to interact with white society, including their partnerships with educational entities. Based on 2023 data, the population of the Zuni Pueblo Census Designated Place (CDP) was 6,132. While the CDP, or the town center, has a population

of approximately 6,100–6,200, tribal counts or broader, older estimates sometimes place the total population of the Zuni Tribe/Reservation at or above 10,000 (Zuni Pueblo Data Commons, n.d., para. 1).

Native American Education Timeline

Table 2.2:

Native American Education Timeline

Year	Actions & Legislation Affecting Native American Education
1771-1879	Federal government signs nearly 400 treaties with Indian nations and tribes, creating trust agreements and promising that the government will provide technical, agricultural, medical, and education services.
1870s	Government begins building its Indian boarding school system, often using deserted army bases. The most infamous one, the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Penn., was based on the belief that it was necessary "to kill the Indian and save the man."
1887	General Allotment Act or Dawes Act allowed the government to survey American Indian land and divvy up sections to individual tribe members, with the surplus going to non-Indians.
1928	The Institute for Government Research (now known as Brookings Institute) released the Merriam Report, a comprehensive look at the condition of American Indian life, and determines the federal government is providing inadequate services.
1934	The Indian Reorganization Act stopped the allotment process and provided American Indians with more power to govern and determine their futures. The

	Johnson O'Malley Act, also passed in 1934, allowed the government to contract with states to provide educational services.
1950	Impact Aid legislation compensates public school districts with nontaxable federal land within their school boundaries. American Indian parents were supposed to have a say in how these funds were used.
1950-1965	The Elementary and Secondary Education Act encourages more tribal and parental involvement and, overall, offers more aid for disadvantaged children.
1968	President Johnson calls for the establishment of American Indian school boards at federally managed and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools.
1972	The Indian Education Act established the Office of Indian Education, now under the Department of Education and provides funds for pre-K to college.
1975	The Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance act authorizes the government to contract with tribes for the operation of BIA and Indian Health Service programs.
1978	Education amendments states "it shall be the policy of the BIA in carrying out the functions of the Bureau, to facilitate Indian control of Indian affairs in all matters relating to education." President Carter signs into law the Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act.
1990	The Native American Languages Act protects the "status of the cultures and languages of Native American," and makes it federal policy to "promote the rights and freedom of Native Americans to use, practice and develop their language."

2002	The Office of the White House Initiative on Tribal Colleges and Universities (WHITCU) implements Executive Order (EO) 13270 signed by President George W. Bush ensures Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCU) are fully recognized and have the same access to federal programs as other institutes of higher education.
2003	The New Mexico Legislature passed the Indian Education Act (Chapter 22-23A NMSA 1978), which mandates that public schools provide equitable, culturally relevant learning environments, materials, and opportunities for American Indian students. The act focuses on improving educational outcomes, maintaining native languages, and fostering tribal involvement through the Indian Education Division (IED) of the Public Education Department (PED). It includes requirements for collaborating with tribal entities and higher education institutions to support student transition, alongside the creation of the Indian Education Advisory Council (IEAC).

Until the 1960s, Native American children were sent to boarding schools away from their families. They were not allowed to speak their native language, wear their traditional clothing, or even use their own names. Psychologically, Native Americans are still influenced by centuries of being treated differently by the majority culture. Schools remained an uncomfortable place because public education had not succeeded in helping Native American children feel they belonged. What we experience today is still a legacy in the 2026 day and age.

Trafzer (2000) discusses the Merriam Report that was completed in 1928 under the direction of the Institute for Government Research, W.F. Willoughby appointed Lewis Merriam to chair the study that investigated the condition of Indian tribes under the control of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Experts in health, education, Indian policy, and economics spent seven

months visiting reservations. From the Merriam Report, reformers were given a foundation for improvement and a greater reason to rally for change (Hale, 2002). The Merriam Report revealed startling data and statistics about the substandard performance of public officials who were serving the needs of Native Americans. The report focused on the need for a broader curriculum, better school facilities, and more qualified teachers. The report also suggested more nutritious foods be served and to abolish child labor (Trafzer, 2000).

The literature of the history of Native American education is one that illustrates the tensions between two cultures, one physically capable of controlling the other. The effects of that imbalanced relationship reverberate on college campuses today.

Based on the work of Dr. Cornel Pewewardy (2002), a prominent scholar in Indigenous education, the literature and history of Native American education is deeply rooted in a settler-colonial framework Pewewardy describes this history as a deliberate, imbalanced relationship, where mainstream educational institutions were designed to facilitate sociocultural domination, replacing Indigenous languages and cultures with Euro-American, monocultural thinking. Pewewardy's analysis of this history and its modern repercussions includes tensions between cultures, physical control of schools, educational trauma and survival. He argues that the historical imbalances continues to manifest as modern educational inequalities, including high dropout rates, lack of culturally relevant curriculum, and the use of harmful Native-themed mascots in schools.

In essence, Pewewardy views the history of Native education not merely as a narrative of the past, but as an ongoing colonial influence that educators must actively work to dismantle in order to create safe, equitable learning spaces for Indigenous students today.

Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs)

Hale (2002) pointed out that the Civil Rights movement of the late 1960s changed a generation of people and their attitudes toward different cultural groups and the need to support and celebrate these differences. This change in attitude gave many tribes and native communities the opportunity to develop organizations to help improve educational opportunities. Tribal colleges were established to meet the needs of Native Americans who lived on reservations, which were far from urban areas where most mainstream colleges and universities are located (Cole & Denzine, 2002).

HeavyRunner and DeCelles (2002) explained the inception of tribal colleges as a self-determination movement. From this movement, President Jimmy Carter signed the Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act of 1978 into law. This law allowed TCUs access to federal funding that was previously unavailable to them.

Although research suggests that TCUs were a culturally appropriate form of higher education for Native Americans, not all researchers agreed. Szasz (1974) was critical of federal policy and of the BIA for perpetuating disparity in Native American education. She argued that mainstream institutions of higher education should be responsible for providing culturally appropriate education for Native American students. Whitehorse (1992) later concurred with Szasz's criticisms and stated that "an embedded notion was that Indian students could only satisfy cultural education needs in tribal colleges, that they had to divest themselves of cultural considerations to attend mainstream colleges" (p. 36).

Presently, there are 32 fully accredited TCUs in the United States, with one formal candidate for accreditation. Three are in associate status. According to the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), these TCUs offer 358 total programs, including

apprenticeships, diplomas, certificates, and degrees. These programs include 181 associate degree programs at 23 TCUs, 40 bachelor's degree programs at 11 TCUs, and five master's degree programs at two TCUs (United States Department of Education, n.d.).

Located mainly in the Midwest and Southwest, TCUs serve approximately 30,000 full- and part-time students. According to fall 2010 enrollment data, 8.7% of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) college students were attending one of the 32 accredited TCUs. AI/AN students accounted for 78% of the combined enrollment of these institutions (United States Department of Education, n.d.). The percentage of AI/AN students attending TCUs is increasing each year. According to a study by the National Center for Education Statistics, the number of AI/AN students enrolled in TCUs increased by 23% between 2001 and 2006 (United States Department of Education, n.d.).

TCUs are both integral and essential to their communities, creating environments that foster American Indian culture, languages, and traditions. They are often the only postsecondary institutions within some of our Nation's poorest rural areas. TCUs serve a variety of people, from young adults to senior citizens, AI to non-American Indians. They also serve as community resources for crucial social services and add hope to communities that suffer from high rates of poverty and unemployment. And overall, TCUs have developed programs where students are achieving. The American Indian College Fund reports that 86% of TCU students complete their chosen program of study, while fewer than 10% of AI/AN students who go directly from reservation high schools to mainstream colleges and universities finish their bachelor's degree (United States Department of Education, n.d.).

While New Mexico community colleges are not Tribal Colleges, understanding Tribal Colleges and how they function as community resource centers is generally similar to

understanding community colleges. Some Tribal Colleges sponsor art and cultural programs and serve as community forums for addressing issues relevant to the local community (Cunningham & Parker, 1998). The institutions also offer literacy classes, childcare services, and High School Equivalency (HSE) education and training, and other such services that can significantly aid community members in their daily lives (Cunningham & Parker, 1998). Selden (2004) stated that Tribal College leaders have committed themselves to working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to address many of the health issues that persist in tribal communities.

Pavel et al., (2001) found that Tribal Colleges seek to build leadership within and around the communities they serve. Efforts to empower tribal members to determine their own direction as a tribe builds a strong community and can attract more students to tribal colleges. Talahongva (2008) found that students who live on or near a reservation choose to attend tribal colleges for the convenience of the college location, so institutional officials recognize the importance and value of maintaining familial and tribal ties. To that end, Tribal Colleges operate under policies that grant students flexibility in those areas of their lives (Martin, 2005). Students also select tribal colleges for their culturally rich curricula and services that assist with matriculation (Boyer, 2008). Cultural sensitivity notwithstanding, tribal curricula still include standard functions such as recruitment and retention, advising, and developing and mentoring faculty (Pavel et al., 2001). It is imperative for college leaders to understand these factors if they are to lead their colleges in their service to Native communities.

Tribal College Leadership

Many leaders look to develop new talent that can serve both the tribal and non-tribal constituencies with an innovative approach. Filemyr (2009) discussed the model that a particular Tribal College adopted to create new leadership opportunities for students, with tribal and

college leaders creating internships and work-study opportunities for students to provide practical learning and leadership opportunities.

Phillips (2005) highlighted a leadership program called LEAD21, Linking Research, Academics, and Extension for the 21st century. This program was sponsored by a college and university consortium that operated within federal mandates to create educational opportunities in agriculture, biology, and social science. The program was developed to strengthen leadership skills and values for tribal colleges operating through land grants. Tribal College leaders increased their knowledge of effective governance practices, improved interpersonal communication skills, and developed problem-solving and collaboration strategies through this program.

Wendall Chino's Mescalero Apache Tribal Leadership

Any study of the Mescalero educational system must include a discussion of Wendall Chino, given his importance to the tribe's growth and its academic relationships as well as his influence in Washington D.C. Born in 1923, Chino served as the president of the Mescalero Apache Nation most of his life. Before he was born, his parents were freed by the United States Army after they had been incarcerated as prisoners of war. Their options were to either move to Oklahoma or to New Mexico. They chose the 720-square-mile Mescalero Reservation in the Sacramento Mountains in New Mexico, located 200 miles south of Albuquerque. The reservation was established in 1873 and was home to 4,000 Apaches (*Wendall Chino [1923-1998] Biography*, n.d.).

Half Chiricahua and half Mescalero, Chino was born on the reservation, the fifth of 11 children. His great, great-grandfather on his mother's side was the Mescalero Chief San Juan. On his father's side, Geronimo was his great granduncle (Robinson, 2000). Little is known about

Chino's early life beyond his educational experience. He attended the Santa Fe Indian School in New Mexico and, later, Central College in Pella, Iowa, and the Cook Christian School in Phoenix, Arizona. In 1951 he graduated from Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan. That same year, he was ordained as a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church. After ordination he returned to the reservation.

When Chino was only 28 years old, he was elected chairman of the Mescalero tribal governing committee, the reservation's highest elected office. He held the post until 1965 when the tribe changed its constitution and adopted a council form of government that would be headed by a president. Chino easily won the first presidential election and was subsequently re-elected 16 consecutive times, serving in that role until he died in 1998 (*Wendall Chino [1923-1998] Biography*, n.d.).

In all, Chino served as president for 43 years. He proved to be an innovative leader who would successfully develop and diversify his tribe's business pursuits. Intent on securing tribal sovereignty, he helped preserve his people's heritage and at the same time led the tribe into the 20th century. During his presidency, he advanced the notion of "red capitalism," which essentially meant that Native Americans should make their own decisions regarding their tribal lands and business affairs. He often worked the United States legal system to force the government to honor the treaties it had established with Indian nations.

The Mescalero Apache Tribe is different from many others in its tribal economic self-sufficiency. This difference was summed up by Chino himself, saying, "The Zuni make jewelry, the Navajo make blankets, and the Apache make money." (*Wendall Chino [1923-1998] Biography,* para. 15). In working to achieve his vision of "red capitalism," Chino helped provide his people with a level of economic growth never before experienced by any other Native

American tribe. Essentially, the reservation became a small business empire. In addition to business enterprises, Chino also helped establish schools, a hospital, and a health center (*Wendall Chino (1923-1998 Biography*, para. 12).

Chino placed value on not just primary and secondary education, but also higher education, as well as service to the tribe and all Native Americans. C.L. Sonnichsen (1973) discussed that since the late 1960s, the tribe committed itself to a long-range objective, the idea of replacing every white man on the reservation with an Indian trained for the job. This would require academic preparation and partnerships with area colleges. Yet in the spring of 1972, only 19 members of the tribe were in college, up from merely five members in college in 1957. Sonnichsen (1973) proposed that the tribal members needed a stronger sense of belonging to succeed as college students.

The Relationship Between Tribal Governance and Education

The three tribes examined in this study—Mescalero Apache, Navajo Nation and Zuni Pueblo—may be different historically and culturally, but they hold in common the fact that their governance and social outlook have influenced the evolution of their approach to education. The Mescalero tribe's view of education has changed throughout the years. Ball et al. (1988) devoted an entire chapter of the book on Apache history specifically to Apache schools. Most of the early Mescalero Reservation Indian agents were, in the words of C.L. Sonnichsen, "weak or wicked" (Farmer, 2017, p. 131). However, one of the most successful agents, William Henry Harrison Llewellyn, started work on June 16, 1881. He came to the Southwest from Nebraska, and fortunately he had his own constructive ideas about Indian management. He was polite, considered the welfare of the tribal members, and didn't hesitate to apply discipline when he

believed the Mescaleros deserved it. The Mescaleros respected him and gave him the name "Tata Crooked Nose," because of his prominent nose with a Roman hook (Farmer, 2017, p. 131).

Llewellyn increased the school year for Mescalero children. Instead of five months per year, school went in session for a full term to give the full benefit of the teachers who were there and to give them the best opportunity for education that the reservation could provide. The first Mescalero children went to Indian boarding schools in Albuquerque, and Llewellyn had two log houses built as a start toward better housing. Unlike Stottler, who appeared 15 years after his arrival, Llewellyn was not a martinet. He never applied overbearing, preemptory force to make the Mescaleros adopt the ways of Indah (white men) (Farmer, 2017, p. 132).

Using his "force or pressure" approach, on the other hand, Agent V.E. Stottler, "Tata Loco," required every "adult Indian" to work six days on a two-mile, four-foot-wide ditch to bring water to the agency school farm (Farmer, 2017, p. 140). Stottler required every Apache child to go to school, and if the parents or maternal grandmother resisted, supplies were denied, and the grandmother was put in jail, her rations cut off until she, too, agreed the child must go to school. In an effort to eradicate Mescalero culture, Stottler forbade tribal dances and ceremonies. He intended to eliminate all rations except for beef and clothing within two years and all beef within another two years. He forbade *tiswin* production (an alcoholic beverage) and public drunkenness (Farmer, 2017, p. 140).

Lieutenant Stottler believed he had forced the Mescaleros into "a prosperous future and independent self-support," that eventually the reservation boundary would no longer exist, and that they would be absorbed into white culture. But as soon as he retired in June 1898, the Mescaleros began, with few exceptions, to return to their old ways, some still living in tipis, at

least in the summer, as late as 1950. No known examples of Mescalero blanket weaving exist, and only a few Mescaleros own sheep (Farmer, 2017, p. 140).

According to Farmer (2017), one of Stottler's proudest metrics of success was the requirement that every Indian child on the reservation between the ages of five and 18 attend the reservation boarding school. He and the rest of the bureaucracy believed that the surest method for destroying Indian culture was separating the child from its parents and then providing the child an education in Anglo language beliefs, along with manual skills and some ability to read, write, and do simple arithmetic. The model for educating Indian children came from Richard Henry Pratt, an army officer who retired on the brigadier general's list in 1904. Pratt established the Carlisle Indian Industrial School at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, in 1879. By 1900, virtually every Indian boarding school in the United States used Pratt's educational approach. In the last years of Pratt's career, he became embroiled in a major dispute with the BIA and was forced to retire in 1904. However, his model for compulsory education was also used with African Americans, Puerto Ricans, Latinos, Pacific Islanders, Asian Americans, and Mormons. His forced cultural destruction was called "cultural genocide." The death rate for Indian boarding-school students was about three times that of the general population (Farmer, 2017, p. 142).

The Navajo Nation, likewise, has experienced a difficult journey in regard to educational partnerships with white-majority institutions. Today, the Navajo people strive to sustain a viable economy for an ever-increasing population that now surpasses 250,000. In years past, Navajoland often appeared to be little more than a desolate section of the Southwest, but it was only a matter of time before the Navajo Nation became known as a wealthy nation in a world of its own. The discovery of oil on Navajoland in the early 1920s promoted the need for a more systematic form of government. In 1923, a tribal government was established to help meet the

increasing desires of American oil companies to lease Navajoland for exploration. The Navajo government has evolved into the largest and most sophisticated form of American Indian government. The Navajo Nation Council Chambers hosts 24 elected delegates representing 110 Navajo Nation chapters. This system gives the Navajo a voice that is more influential than smaller, less organized tribes when it comes to partnering with non-tribal organizations.

According to C.L. Sonnichsen, in 1933, when John Collier became the commissioner, he created the Civilian Conservation Corps with a separate branch for the Indians (1979, p. 268). The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. The Indians were not obliged to accept this help. The well-meant assistance was not to be crammed down their throats. If they wanted it, well and good. As a matter of fact, 73 tribes, including the Navajos, voted to reject the Act. Collier thought the rejection was due to "energetic campaigns of misrepresentation carried on by special interests which feared that they would lose positions of advantage and…spread extreme and bizarre falsehoods concerning the effects of the act" (1979, p. 269-270). A Mescalero delegation attended the meeting in 1934. In education, Commissioner Collier made his ideas felt. The obsolete boarding school, established to protect children from adverse home influences, had to be dismantled. Community day schools under specifically trained teachers took their place, and a strong effort was made to open white public schools to Indian children. On the reservations, the educational program was organized to include adult training and to make the school building, for practical purposes, a community center. Of all the tribes in the Southwest, or even in the national, the Mescaleros profited most by the New Deal (1979, p. 270-271).

In contrast, the 19 Pueblos of New Mexico belong to a loose confederation called the All Pueblo Council of Governors, which makes joint political decisions on behalf of all of the tribes. Each Pueblo also has its own local government, with laws, police, and services—just like a small

country. Each of the 19 pueblo tribes is a sovereign nation. In the past, the Pueblo Indians had a theocratic government. That means that the head priest or *cacique* was also the town chief. Today, each Pueblo still has its own *cacique*, but he is primarily a religious leader. Most Pueblos are now led by an elected governor and tribal council (Bigorrin, n.d.).

Pueblo people have preserved their identity in the face of multiple colonizing nations, and today, as always, value their identity and traditional ways of life. When it comes to education, Pueblo beliefs and actions are still guided by Pueblo Core Values, which include love, respect, compassion, faith, understanding, spirituality, balance, peace, and empathy. Celebrations and ceremonies are continued throughout the year, maintaining the connection to Pueblo communities, ancestors, and to the Earth (Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, n.d.)

College Leadership and Student Success

College presidents face ethical dilemmas regularly. Ethical issues arise daily, and leaders must resolve them, sometimes without a clear demarcation between ethical and unethical (Nevarez & Wood, 2012). Wallin (2007) observed that ethical issues are widespread due to socioeconomic changes, and it can be a challenge to determine an honest response. Wallen also noted that an ethical campus culture begins with the college president because the leader sets the tone. Wallin further states that it is not sufficient for a community college president to be a strong, well-connected, and intelligent leader—a successful president must also be an ethical leader. Wallin defined ethics as an examination of rational justification of moral judgments (p. 34).

Values are critical to every culture because they define beliefs. Wallin (2007) notes that values set forth what the institution holds to be right about its mission and purpose in community

colleges. According to Denison et al. (2004), values define what is meaningful and describe an institution's character.

Community college presidents take on a significant responsibility, especially on sensitive issues such as student success and a taxpayer's return on investment (Wallin, 2007). According to Bailey et al. (2015), community colleges enroll almost half of the nation's undergraduates in higher education, taking in over 10 million students a year. State budget problems, unfunded pension obligations, and heightened scrutiny present ethical dilemmas for community college presidents (Wallin, 2007). There has been an increase in unethical behavior in higher education, such as corruption and improper behavior by college leaders (Chambers & Ransom, 2016).

The concept of ethical leadership and the idea of improving ethical behavior in community colleges and higher education is essential to this study, as ethical behavior by the college and the tribal government will strengthen the partnership, as ethics are fundamental to student success and the well-being of universities and colleges (Anderson & Davies, 2000; Johnson, 2006). Hallinger (2011) notes that educational leaders have an indirect but measurable effect on students' academic achievements. When college leaders act ethically, it results in positive outcomes individually and for the institution (Weng, 2014; Zhu et al., 2015).

Baker (2012) noted that recent student success initiatives have placed an extra burden on community college presidents because of low completion rates, the length of time students take to graduate, and the lack of workforce readiness. Baker explains that community college presidents experience pressure from state and national policymakers to dramatically increase the number of degree and certificate completers. Therefore, community college presidents grapple with challenges that require that they carefully develop their professional ethical identities to lead effectively (Vaughn, 2006). Community college presidents must assure their mission of

providing open access, affordability, and convenient locations, as community colleges are essential to educating diverse students who otherwise may not have had higher education opportunities (Hagedorn, 2010).

Researchers have argued that ethical leadership practices by educational leaders significantly impact student academic achievement (Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Waters & Cameron, 2007). Marks and Printy (2003) note that when transformational and instructional leadership coexist as a unified form of leadership, student achievement increases considerably. And yet, others have not found a connection between ethical leadership and student success. Robinson et al. (2009) explained that transformational leadership focuses on the relationships between leaders and followers. In contrast, college leadership focuses on the business of educational institutions—the latter is likely to have a strong effect on students' academic performance.

Cohen et al., (2013) suggest that community colleges require good leadership because they have the responsibility to develop curricula that will serve their communities' social, economic, and educational needs. Cohen et al. further stated that some community colleges are more successful than others in affecting student learning outcomes because of good leadership (p. 135). Influential leaders are ethical, flexible, decisive, honest, bold, goal-oriented, and concerned about others (p. 136). Nevarez and Wood (2012) define ethical decision-making as "the process by which established standards of behavior are used by leaders to approach, evaluate and construct decisions" (p. 108). Trevino et al. (2006) refer to an ethical decision as "individual behavior that is subject to or judged according to generally accepted moral norms as behavior" (p.952). Wood and Nevarez (2014) state that a leader's ethical behavior can serve as a guiding framework for managing and transforming community colleges' complexities. To

develop decision-making in a community college, a leader should consider the intersection of leadership and ethics. In a meta-analysis, Witziers et al. (2003) found a weak correlation between leadership practices and student achievement.

Because Community Colleges are so closely connected to their local communities, the leadership must tap into the American Association of Community Colleges' (AACC) leadership competencies. According to AACC's Resilient by Design, one great strength of community colleges is their local ties and their responsiveness to local needs. These needs, even beyond those of an evolving workforce, are changing and becoming more diverse. Communities are increasingly divided along political lines, and collaboration and dialogue across those divisions have become rarer, which makes community needs more difficult to diagnose and address than in the past (National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, 2025, p. 25).

The fourth edition of the AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders outlines specific competencies for every level of position in the college, from faculty and entry-level positions to managers, executive positions, and the chief executive officer. The manual is a tool for college personnel for leadership development. The document for aspiring community college leaders identifies the leadership competencies, behaviors, and knowledge and understanding required as they progress to the next position within the institution. The competencies are categorized into the following areas: institutional and cultural awareness; governance, local, state, and federal policy; advocacy; student success; leadership; institutional transformation; fiscal planning and resource development; partnerships and collaboration; and communication (Royal, 2022).

There are some studies that highlight the importance of critical leadership and teaching in higher education (Barrett & Breyer, 2010; Hassan et al., 2018); however, few are done at the

community college level (Nevarez & Wood, 2010) and less are from the perspective of Native American students. Ethics continue to play an important role, because if the educational system does not listen to the voice of Native American students, low retention rates will likely reflect this issue as Aaron Payment, chairman of the Saul St. Marie Tribe of the Chippewa Tribe of Michigan points out, "The first Americans have become the last Americans" (Camera, 2015, p. 5).

Completion/Degree Attainment of Native American Students

According to the Postsecondary National Policy Institute (PNPI) (2019), completion rates for Native American students fall below those of their white counterparts. Only 23% percent of first-time, full-time Native American students attending four-year institutions beginning in 2008 graduated within four years, compared to nearly 44% for white students. Forty-one percent of Native American bachelor's degree-seeking students graduated within six years, compared to nearly 63% of white students. In 2017, 27% of Native Americans attained an associate degree or higher, compared to 54% of white students. Between 2000 and 2017, the percentage of Native Americans aged 25 to 29 who had attained at least an associate or bachelor's degree dropped out. In 2000, 30% of Native Americans aged 25 to 29 had attained at least an associate or bachelor's degree. In 2017, that number fell to 27% (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2019).

The literature indicates several reasons why Native American students face unique challenges in traversing the landscape of higher education. First, it is difficult to track accurate college participation rates for Native American students as they are not tracked at all attainment levels. Secondly, Native American students are more likely to need and receive federal financial assistance than white students. Further, in 2011 and 2012, 85% of Native American students received some type of federal grant aid, compared with 69% of white students. Another point is

that as many as 62% of Native American students take out some kind of federal student loan, compared to 56% of white students. Additionally, Native American students are 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. Finally, Native American students are also less likely to have family members who have attended college. In 2017, 21% of Native American children under 18 years of age lived in a household with a parent who completed a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 52% of white households (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2019).

Themes identified in the literature discuss Native American students and their persistence or lack of persistence to graduation (Bryant, 2021). The lack of Native American success is one trend that reoccurs throughout the literature. Two important concepts underrepresented in the literature are cultural identity and community collaboration. As explained by Waterman et al., (2018), sometimes even when you come with a good heart and a clear mind, you cannot help but trip over your own cultural biases and limitations, which relates directly to Delorian (1991), who observed, "The thing that has always been missing in Indian education, and is still missing, is Indians" (p. 13).

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Data from the National Student Clearinghouse (2023) point out an inequity in persistence and completion rates of racially and ethnically diverse students, especially African-American students. To address issues of enrollment, retention, and completion among African-American students on college campuses, colleges have emphasized the need for culturally relevant supports and interventions, suggesting that culturally relevant supports to enhance positive identity development and coping skills among African-American students might improve student effort

and academic- and college-completion outcomes. One such intervention is culturally responsive teaching (CRT). Deborah Manning's dissertation case study (2019) of the Community College of Baltimore County described one institution that embraced CRT with a variety of professional development supports to aid the faculty's use of CRT practices in the classroom. In the study, four themes about the impact of CRT emerged: CRT promotes a shift to a learning environment, increases student engagement, requires consistent reinforcement, and encourages a change in institutional culture. The study identified the application of CRT pedagogy as a promising approach to assist racially and ethnically diverse students on college campuses in adjusting to an environment where they are vastly underrepresented in both their culture and socioeconomic status (Manning, 2019).

Manning determined that effective instruction must take into account the cultural norms and learning styles that have influenced previous learning behaviors among racially and ethnically diverse students. CRT calls for positive perspectives on parents, families, and the diverse experiences students bring to the learning environment (Banks et al., 2004). Positive perspectives rely on cultural sensitivity and culturally mediated instruction. Cultural sensitivity depends on the teacher's knowledge of the cultures represented in the classroom and their ability to translate this knowledge into effective instructional practice (Manning, 2019, p. 16).

Colleges should consider applying Manning's findings when serving Native American students. Adding culturally sensitive training for faculty and staff would be a way to enhance training practices for colleges that serve Native students, just as it is crucial to provide campus safety and cybersecurity training. Given the harsh history of Native Americans in the mainstream education system, college leaders should adopt the tenets of CRT when providing a campus support structure for Indigenous students.

In addition to Manning, Ladson-Billings' 1995 work on culturally responsive pedagogy is of significant importance in the field of education, particularly in the context of multicultural and diverse learning environments. Ladson-Billings (1995) emphasized the need for pedagogy to be culturally relevant, meaning it should relate to the cultural context of the students. This approach helps students accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge the inequities perpetuated by schools and other institutions. This is especially relevant in a study that explores Native American student success through the partnerships between tribes and community colleges. Culturally responsive teaching is a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically, while using cultural references to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Ladson-Billings' work provides information to college instructors on how to create inclusive learning environments that respect and value the diversity brought by Native American students. By acknowledging and incorporating Native American students' cultural backgrounds into teaching practices, Ladson-Billings' culturally responsive pedagogy promotes educational justice. It ensures that all students, regardless of their cultural or linguistic background, have access to quality education.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

Culturally sustaining pedagogy is a strengths-based instructional approach that centers and sustains the cultural and linguistic identities, experiences, and ways of knowing of diverse students, families/caregivers, and communities. This approach recognizes that culture is a dynamic set of values, beliefs, and practices that varies across students' social identities (related to gender, sexuality, disability, socioeconomic status, geographical location, and time period). Educators adopt culturally sustaining pedagogies so that culturally and linguistically diverse students might leave schools with a sense of pride in themselves, a sense that they belong at

school, and have access to meaningful postsecondary pathways (National Center of Education Evaluation, Regional Education Laboratory Pacific, n.d., para. 1).

Culturally sustaining pedagogies are inherently dynamic approaches. They meaningfully center the communities and identities of students by affirming and uplifting their perceptions and experiences and incorporating their expertise into classroom practices. Therefore, what is culturally sustaining will vary across different communities and contexts. Despite this variance, four common elements tend to emerge across teachers implementing culturally sustaining pedagogical practices. The four common elements include: centering dynamic communities and their languages, practices, and knowledge; including student and intergenerational community agency and input; supporting positive relationships with the land and the people of the land; and providing structured opportunities to contend with internalized oppressions (National Center of Education Evaluation, Regional Education Laboratory Pacific, n.d., para. 2).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy is a model that focuses on multiple aspects of student achievement and supports students to uphold their cultural identities. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy also calls for students to develop critical perspectives that challenge societal inequalities.

Gloria Ladson-Billings proposed three main components of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: (a) a focus on student learning and academic success, (b) developing students' cultural competence to assist students in developing positive ethnic and social identities, and (c) supporting students' critical consciousness or their ability to recognize and critique societal inequalities. All three components need to be utilized (Ladson-Billings, 2023, para. 1-2).

Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education

Culturally Responsive-Sustaining (CR-S) Education was developed from many years of research in asset-based pedagogies that recognize that cultural difference (including racial, ethnic, linguistic, gender, sexuality, and ability) should be treated as assets for teaching and learning rather than as deficits. This approach to education counters dominant narratives about difference as deficits or as characteristics of students and families that should be remediated or assimilated (Paris, 2012).

Using this approach to education, all families are believed to have cultural capital, or knowledge, abilities, and networks, that can, and should, be leveraged in classrooms. While schooling has traditionally privileged the capital of families from dominant backgrounds, CR-S positions educators to acknowledge, value, and leverage the wealth of knowledge found in communities that have been marginalized (Paris, 2012).

The term culturally sustaining requires that our pedagogies be more than responsive of or relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of young people—it requires that they support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence. Culturally sustaining pedagogy, then, has as its explicit goal supporting multilingualism and multiculturalism in practice and perspective for students and teachers. That is, culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling (Paris, 2012).

Sovereignty

Native American scholar Pewewardy defines sovereignty through the lens of Indigenous nationhood, emphasizing that it is an inherent, pre-existing right to self-govern rather than a

power granted by a settler state. He emphasizes the need for Indigenous communities to have control over their own educational systems, curriculum, and knowledge production to combat Western-centric assimilation. And that sovereignty is expressed through the continuation of Indigenous languages, cultures, values, and worldviews. He differentiates Native identity from mere race-based classification, emphasizing that it is a political status based on nationhood (Pewewardy, 2008).

Native American sovereignty is the inherent right of indigenous tribes to self-govern, existing as "domestic dependent nations" within the U.S. federal system. This means tribes have the power to establish their own governments, set their own citizenship, make laws, and operate their own police and court systems, while being recognized as having a unique political status, rather than a racial or ethnic one. While this power is inherent, it is limited by federal laws, treaties, and court decisions.

Key aspects of tribal sovereignty

- **Self-governance:** Tribes have the authority to create their own government structures, determine their own citizenship requirements, and make their own laws and policies.
- **Law enforcement and courts:** Tribes can establish and operate their own police forces and court systems to handle both civil and criminal matters.
- **Economic control:** This includes the right to regulate their own economy, tax, license, and manage their own land and resources.
- **Unique political status:** Tribal members are citizens of their own nation, the United States, and the state they live in. This status is recognized by the U.S. Constitution and has been upheld by the Supreme Court for over 160 years.

- **Limitations:** While inherent, tribal sovereignty is limited by treaties, acts of Congress, executive orders, and court decisions that have been made over time.
- **Federal trust responsibility:** The U.S. government has a trust responsibility to protect tribal sovereignty and the rights of Native Americans.
- **Cultural preservation:** Sovereignty is also tied to the right to preserve and protect cultural heritage, including sacred sites and ancestral remains.

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

As part of this literature review, the researcher examined four constructs and selected two to support a robust study of best practices between community colleges and tribal entities. After carefully examining all four, the researcher selected the Critical Success Factor theory and Kanter's Eight I's.

Critical Success Factor Theory

Critical Success Factor (CSF) theory states that success is based on focusing on a limited number of key areas (Rockart, 1979). This theory was originally developed to define specific information needed by business executives to be successful in meeting operational and strategic goals (Daniel, 1961; Rockart, 1979). Specifically, CSFs are "the limited number of areas in which satisfactory results will ensure successful competitive performance for the individual, department or organization" (Bullen & Rockart, 1981, p. 7). CSF theory has been used in a variety of organizations, industries, and functional areas: business, information technology, project management, government, energy, customer service, and education (Alexander, 1997; Alpern, 2020; DePrima, 2018; Kayanan, 2012; Osei-Kyei & Chan, 2018; Rockart, 1979; Rodríguez-Segura et al., 2016; Trkman, 2010; Warriner, 2005).

Specific CSFs vary across situations, industries, and time, within the same organization and across different organizations (Alpern, 2020). One study on sustainable universities found their CSFs to be communication, sufficient time, identification of goals, making sure that the right people are at the table and heard, an unbiased attitude, personal strength and persistence, starting on time, stimulate positive feelings, a strategy with a goal, support of top-management, tangible objectives, and finding out what people care about (Disterheft et al., 2015, p. 16).

Schofield (2013) examined the university-industry knowledge transfer and found the CSFs were understanding customer needs, common goals, understanding intellectual property issues, focus on clear translation, and early technical scoping. Rodríguez-Segura et al., (2016) argued that developing a complete list of CSFs that meets the needs of all situations and organizations is impossible. Lehman (2016) similarly suggested that each organization and situation must develop its own unique set of CSFs. When CSFs are identified and defined, and when progress toward goals is monitored and managed, there are fewer challenges, and the ability to meet goals is more successful.

Kanter's Collaborative Advantage

Despite the difficulty in identifying common CSFs for all situations, Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1994) observed that organizations in partnerships and alliances across countries and industries in supply chain management had developed similar CSFs related to collaborative partnerships. This led to collaborative advantages for each organization. Additional research by Fawcett et al., (2008 and 2012) indicates that collaboration between organizations that identified and linked complementary capabilities across the supply chain led to superior performance for those organizations. Pinnington et al., (2020) defined the idea of collaborative advantages that can be gained through partnerships as the incremental gain attributed to outcomes that could not

have been achieved by either of the individual organizations alone. However, the level of collaboration between organizations needed to gain a market advantage has been achieved by relatively few companies in the supply chain management area (Fawcett et al., 2012; Min et al., 2007), which demonstrates the difficulty of forming a successful collaboration. As Inkpen and Tsang (2005) noted, strategic alliances build trust through behavior and social capital, and to facilitate knowledge transfer, each partner within the alliance must behave in a way that signifies trustworthiness. Organizations must also recognize that cooperation and knowledge-sharing can enhance their positions, because the existence of an alliance, in and of itself, does not guarantee knowledge transfer (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005).

For successful ventures between community colleges and their educational partners, CSFs may assist in understanding what helps create these successful partnerships (Kanter, 1994). Kanter (1994) observed that institutions often are not structured to support collaboration, particularly in the United States. Capozzoli (2020) similarly noted that activities such as learning, research, and the efficient functioning of an organization can be hindered by departmental silos, bureaucratic units, and other organizational structures, which may also act as barriers to interorganizational partnerships.

The CSFs identified by Kanter (1994) in building advantageous partnerships are Eight I's: Individual Excellence, Importance, Interdependence, Investment, Information, Integration, Institutionalization, and Integrity. These CSFs may have differing measures of success depending on the organizations and their alliance goals, but they exist in all successful partnerships and provide each organization with a collaborative advantage. Kanter (1994, p. 100) defines "the Eight I's that create successful We's" as a true partnership incorporating the following criteria:

Individual Excellence – Strong organizations, each with something valuable to contribute to the partnership, approaching the relationship intent on creating a positive outcome.

Importance – Prioritizing the relationship as one that will fulfill a major strategic objective with long-term goals and a strong desire to make it work.

Interdependence – Complementary skills between the partners, with a need for one another's strengths to accomplish the important objective.

Investment – Partners give tangible demonstration of the importance of the relationship through financial or other resource commitments to the other partner.

Information – Open communication between partners, including sharing information critical to the success of the goals, such as technical data, evolving situations, and possible issue areas.

Integration – Tangible linkages between partners to ensure a smooth working relationship at all levels, from the board to the operators, among many individuals. Each partner seeks to both teach and learn from the other.

Institutionalization – The relationship is formally recognized by each partner, a decision process is clear, and responsibilities are explicitly stated. The alliance is embedded within each organization and can continue beyond the initial work groups.

Integrity – Both partners are honorable in their dealings with one another in ways that build and enhance trust while reinforcing the mutual importance of the alliance.

Alexander (1997) applied this framework to interorganizational partnerships between community colleges, businesses, and community stakeholders. Although Alexander did not find each of Kanter's Eight CSFs in the relationships studied, the majority were present. Kanter's work is based on partnerships whereas Alexander's (1997) research focused on a triad

relationship between community colleges, specific employers, and various community stakeholders. A triad relationship was not expressly discussed by Kanter (1994) and may have hindered Alexander's ability to uncover the three CSFs not identified.

Other Theories Considered

Vincent Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure recognizes that students enter college with individual traits, abilities, and commitments, and that developing student commitment to the institution and to college success requires integration into the college experience. This longitudinal process begins early and continues throughout the college experience. According to Tinto, effective retention programs share three principles:

(1) The principle of community and belonging "ensures the integration of all individuals as equal and competent members of the institution" (p. 36). There is an emphasis on frequent and rewarding contact with both faculty and other students. On a residential campus, the contact continues from the classroom to the residence hall, but for students who live away from campus, that interaction must be built into the classroom. This theory explains why there might be a disconnect, particularly among commuter students, at community colleges.

(2) The principle of commitment and self-efficacy states that effective retention programs are marked by a commitment to the students and their welfare. The underlying values and commitments of the institution reveal a student-centered focus that is evident in the attitudes of those working there (Tinto, 1990).

(3) The principle of perceived value suggests that students are motivated when they see worth in the information they are receiving. "Education, not retention, is the primary principle of effective retention" (Tinto, 1990, p. 38), and the primary function of the

university is the education of its students. Committed faculty serve as the model through which students develop their own necessary commitment and involvement in the educational process. The commitment should be evident both in and out of the classroom.

Building on the work of Tinto, Brown and Kurpius (1997) found significant relationships between persistence and better high school preparation. They suggested that Native American students need to receive more training in study skills and college preparation. Hoover and Jacobs (1992) argued that Native Americans do not receive adequate preparation from their high school counselors regarding planning for postsecondary education and careers. They proposed that this leaves these students ill-prepared to successfully navigate postsecondary education. Other studies suggested that better preparation with study skills and career development will lead to greater persistence among Native students (Sakiestewa, 1996).

Shotton et al. (2013) discussed how incorporating native culture into student affairs explains how culture-based programs help to provide authentic, contemporary representations of Native people. Programs and events offered from this perspective can be beneficial for all who participate, allowing students and university personnel to engage with the Native community in ways that fit their already busy lives, in a fun, educational, and inclusive manner. Further, the authors suggest that, to establish a stronger connection with Native students, student affairs practitioners need to expand their tribal knowledge of the students and communities they serve. Doing so demonstrates a commitment to Native students and provides a better perspective for their stories.

Shotton et al.'s (2103) recommendations for connecting with Native students include the following:

- Be authentic, humble, sincere, and patient in building trusting relationships.

- Be a teacher and a student; do not be afraid to learn.
- Provide mentoring programs that provide students with encouragement and support, taking into account each student and his or her cultural orientation.
- Work to help your institution become more accommodating to students' spiritual development needs.
- Keep in mind that Indigenous students (and faculty and staff) need their own cultural space on campus.
- Have more than one staff serve Native American students, at least one male and one female.
- Involve Native faculty and staff in programming and events.
- Remember that extended families are important to Native student success.
- Use the four R's of respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility in your work with Native students (p. 47-49).

Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) rely on these best practices and others to improve the academic performance of Native students (Boyer, 1992), such as emphasizing strong connections with family, community, and cultural identity (HeavyRunner & Marshall, 2003; Ortiz & HeavyRunner, 2003; Waterman, 2007).

One of the few studies that specifically examined Native American retention was a 2020 study by Remillard, which explored factors affecting the retention and completion of first-generation Navajo students at a New Mexico community college. Remillard used Tribal Critical Race theory (Tribal CRT) when analyzing data. Tribal CRT evolved from Critical Race theory and focuses specifically on the experiences and perspectives of Native American peoples. In the same way that CRT focuses on the experiences of racism as its central tenet, Tribal CRT focuses

on the experience of colonization and the resulting disenfranchisement of Native American people. Beyond Remillard, however, little attention has been given to the retention topic as it applies to Indigenous students.

This gap may be due to cultural bias. Perna and Thomas (2006) point out that the notions of success as highlighted by mainstream society are characterized by common indicators that can be quantifiably measured. Common indicators include access to postsecondary education, retention rates, grade point averages, and degree attainment. Frequently, these measures are used to leverage accountability and are often aligned with policy and practitioner interests, rather than those of underrepresented community interests (such as developing a language revitalization program or other culturally relevant curricula). The authors indicate that there needs to be a critique of the traditional view of success and a reconceptualized notion of what "success" is from a Native American standpoint that will allow for a definition of "success" that goes beyond quantitative metrics, as "Researchers who ignore these complexities are operating with a blind spot about what constitutes the newly emerging American college student" (Rendon, 2006, p. 1)

As emphasized by the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NECLA) (2011), each culture defines success differently. Post-secondary success is often referred to in terms of mainstream expectations for employment, advanced degrees, and/or training leading to employment (NECLA, 2011). This assumes there is only one definition of success, and that all students, regardless of ethnicity or background, must conform to this definition if they aspire to be successful.

The researcher also explored the Family Education Model (FEM) that was developed by HeavyRunner and DeCelles (2002). FEM recommends supporting an extended family structure in order to amplify a Native American student's sense of belonging in college. This reduces

feelings of resentment from family members who blame the student for being away from home and increases the student's persistence. The model recommends having a specialist who not only advises on college matters but also assists with family and community issues, further supporting the family-oriented approach. Traditional retention models do not adequately consider the unique family, political status, tribal affiliation, language, customs, and traditions of Native American students. According to Guillory and Wolverton (2008), replicating extended family structure in the college culture enhances a Native American student's sense of belonging and can lead to higher retention rates.

For the FEM model to work effectively, the intervention-based approach calls for maintaining a sense of family both in college and at home (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008). The percentage of school-aged American Indian/Alaska Native children whose parents' highest educational attainment was a bachelor's degree or higher in 2011 was 19%, compared to 48% of their white counterparts (Aud et al., 2012). Involving a student's parents is crucial to their success. This enables parents to provide better support for their students during the college process, even if they have not attended college themselves.

Some theorists have recommended that Native Americans reject schooling because it destroys their culture and communities, and yet others insist it is the only way that Native Americans can protect their lands and communities (Reyhner & Eder, 2004). An increasing number of Native Americans who are entering colleges and universities intend to return to their communities to teach in and administer in their own schools and colleges. Those who succeed have discovered what works in Native American education and are expressing their ideas in words and acts (Reyhner & Eder, 2004).

Kanu (2006) suggested that the low success rates of Native American students are due to the college's lack of cultural knowledge. This lack of cultural knowledge and an absence of awareness in the school environment might be factors in the underperformance of Native American students. Some researchers have advocated for the inclusion of native cultural awareness training in school curricula (Cajete, 2000), as they believe that Native American students are more motivated to learn when their cultural affiliation is valued in the classroom (Kanu, 2006).

Guillory's 2009 qualitative study on retention strategies for Native American college students recommended that institutions of higher education create programs that allow Native American students to maintain a strong connection between the campus community and their tribal community. Cultural identity becomes a significant factor contributing to increased college retention. One researcher states, "University programs which directly connect Native American students to the native communities prove successful for both recruitment and retention" (Guillory, 2009, p. 18). Wetsit (1999) believed that several values were prominent and common throughout most native populations: time management, goal orientation, sharing versus materialism, being versus doing, humility versus arrogance, harmony with nature, the importance of tradition, and the reverence for elders. By paying attention to these family values, colleges will be better equipped to provide for the needs of Native American students.

Most Native American students who want to attend college must leave the reservation and their community. This separation from family may be a key factor contributing to student retention (Guillory, 2008). Selden (2004) found that the barriers that inhibit Native American students include geographic isolation and the demands of school. In Seldon's study, the researcher learned that family members often resented students for being away at college. Seldon

confirmed another point of the HeavyRunner and DeCelles study (2002), acknowledging that grandmothers are the most important retention specialists because they possess the authority within the family unit to fulfill the advising/counseling role. In addition to family and extended family, a student's support system also includes the tribal leaders. Clark (2022) found that as universities offer more services, and as Native Americans work as providers in these service positions—helping other Indigenous students—the attitude of Native American students might change.

Tachine, in her 2022 book, Native Presence and Sovereignty in College, specifically centered on Navajo students, suggests institutions measure success on how the Native communities measure success (p. 179-180). In 2019, she led the writing of an initiative supported by the American Indian College Fund titled *Declaration of Native Purpose in Higher Education: an Indigenous Higher Education Equity Initiative*. The document was based on convening a coalition of Native and non-Native advocates, students, and educators to discuss ways to increase visibility and promote college access and success for Native students. She outlines eight declarations for universities and colleges to take up as strategies to support Native students (American Indian College Fund, 2019).

1. We believe that Native American students have a right to higher education and to attend any college or university of their choice.
2. We believe that colleges and universities have the duty to recognize and acknowledge that college campus reside on the original homelands of Indigenous peoples.
3. We believe that colleges and universities have the duty to incorporate Indigenous knowledge for Native students to survive and thrive.

4. We believe in the inherent right of all Native students to have a place on college campuses that fosters their sense of belonging and importance in their campus community.
5. We believe that colleges and universities have a duty to make visible, to advocate for, and to empower Native students' degree attainment.
6. We believe that colleges and universities have a duty to cultivate an ethic of care in supporting Native peoples by listening, learning and engaging with Native students, staff, and faculty.
7. We believe that senior leadership at higher education institutions must make a commitment to do system-level work that benefits Native students' college degree attainment.
8. We believe colleges and universities have the responsibility to uphold tribal sovereignty by generating meaningful government-to-government relationships with tribal nations and tribal colleges and universities (Tachine, 2022, p. 179-180).

Transculturation theory was also reviewed. It is a framework for understanding tribal identity and academic success. One qualitative study examined factors associated with the persistence and attrition of Native students attending a predominantly non-Native college. Transcultural theory refers to the process by which Native students journey through mainstream-dominant educational institutions while building on his/her tribal identity and heritage and simultaneously learning the cultural nuances necessary to thrive and succeed. During the transculturation process, students come to rely on and expand upon a strong tribal identity to anchor their personal values, direction, and goals (Huffman, 2010, p. 87).

Transculturation theory is distinct from other theoretical perspectives on Native American education found in the literature in at least two important ways. First, this theory was specifically developed to understand Native American educational experiences, particularly academic success in mainstream, dominant educational institutions. In other words, transculturation theory was not designed to examine the educational experiences of other minority groups and was subsequently applied to Native American students. Rather, transculturation theory evolved as an attempt to examine the manner in which Native students encounter and engage mainstream-dominant educational settings. Second, transculturation theory attempts to explain why Native American students persist and succeed rather than why they do not. This is an important distinction, as scholars have heavily focused on the factors associated with the lack of academic success among Native students. Transculturation is the key concept in this theoretical perspective, referring to the process by which a Native student navigates a mainstream-dominant educational institution while building on their tribal identity and heritage, and simultaneously learning the cultural nuances necessary to thrive and succeed. During the transculturation process, the individual comes to rely on and expand upon a strong tribal identity to anchor his/her personal values, direction, and goals (Huffman, 2010, p. 88).

For cultural discontinuity thinkers, cultural dissonance is actually a form of cultural conflict that eats away at the self-esteem, self-worth, and even sense of purpose and identity of Native students (Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003; Sanders, 1987). Ultimately, the cultural conflict resulting from cultural incongruence is the leading reason for the lack of academic achievement among Native American students at all levels of the educational system (Reyhner, 1992; Romero-Little, 2010; Ward, 2005). Indeed, leading Native American education scholar Jon Reyhner (1992), in unflinching criticism of schools serving Native children, has argued that

Native students drop out because their needs are not being met, teachers are not culturally aware, and their parents are denied involvement (Huffman, 2010, p. 91).

For cultural discontinuity scholars, in order to correct the lack of educational success, schools must adopt culturally responsive approaches to education, most notably culturally appropriate pedagogy and relevant curriculum (Demmert, 2011; Gregory, 2013; Van Hamme, 1996). Lovelace and Wheeler (2006) go so far as to argue that teachers need to recognize the responsibility to bridge cultures for their Native students and become cultural mediators. Further, they must proactively create cultural continuity between the learning that occurs in the homes of minority students and the learning that takes place in their classrooms. They must adopt flexible teaching techniques that accommodate the ebb and flow of communication styles and patterns among all students in the classroom. Unfortunately, strict curricular and pedagogical requirements resulting in mandated standardized testing and a common curriculum frustrate such teaching agility suggested by Lovelace and Wheeler. Further, the lack of teacher training required to recognize, understand, and work with culturally diverse learners constitutes a serious problem (Moeller, Anderson & Grosz, 2012; Morgan, 2009).

Chapter Summary

The literature on the educational retention and success of Native American students strongly suggests that cultural factors play a primary role. A great deal has been written about the lack of cultural awareness on college campuses. Some of the challenges or barriers identified in the literature include a lack of college readiness, poor study skills among students, insufficient financial support, and the need for greater cultural awareness at institutions of higher education.

This chapter began by highlighting the obstacles faced by Native American students, following a discussion of the history of Native American education that laid the foundation for

understanding how many of these barriers came to be. That history is one marked by cruelty, racism, and an open and well-documented attempt at cultural genocide. Each tribe's history and leadership were examined, followed by a review of Tribal Colleges and Universities and the evolution of the Native American education system. The researcher examined the inherent link between college leadership and student success, then explored how college leadership must be culturally aware to be applied equally to all demographic groups.

Four theoretical and conceptual frameworks were reviewed for their suitability to guide this study. Of these, those selected were Critical Success Factor and Kanter's Eight I's. This study is designed to address the gaps identified during this part of the research process. One such gap is that relatively little research has been conducted on the persistence rates of Native American students. Little is known about why Native American students achieve higher grades in elementary school through high school, as well as higher scores on assessment exams, yet they do not continue to persist to graduation (Freeman & Fox, 2005). Additionally, there is a need for studies that explore the understanding of culture and tribal traditions, family and community, as well as the challenges faced by the Native American population in pursuing a degree or certificate from a community college. The way a support system can replicate the extended family and community, as well as enhance a student's sense of belonging, was also studied, and will help to improve Native American students' pursuit of higher education (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008).

Based on the theories presented in this literature review, this study will examine the characteristics of successful partnerships aimed at enhancing student success at Native American-Serving Non-Tribal Institutions (NASNTIs) in New Mexico. Chapter 3 will explain

the methodology used to describe the characteristics of the partnerships between colleges and tribes that lead to the success of Native American students.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

This chapter is an overview of the study's purpose, research questions, methodology, and theoretical and conceptual frameworks. It explains the rationale for the selected research design and describes the study's participants, the study setting, and the interview protocol. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the data collection and analysis processes, quality, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and the study's limitations.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the characteristics of successful partnerships between community colleges and the tribes they serve, which are designed to contribute to student success at Native American-Serving Non-Tribal Institutions (NASNTIs) in New Mexico.

Research Questions

The study investigated those partnerships at the New Mexico NASNTIs through the following research questions:

1. What are the characteristics of successful partnerships between community colleges and tribal governments?

2. What are the best practices found in community college and Native American tribal partnerships that are designed to contribute to student success?

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

The theoretical lens that guided this study is the critical success factor (CSF) theory, which states that success is based on a number of specific but limited key areas (Rockart, 1979). CSFs are "the limited number of areas in which satisfactory results will ensure successful competitive performance for the individual, department, or organization" (Bullen & Rockart,

1981, p. 7). This theory has been applied to study businesses, governments, public-private partnerships, and various other organizations and partnerships to analyze success (Alexander, 1997). The CSF theoretical framework is suitable for this study, as it focuses on the most critical areas for leading successful partnerships (Rockart, 1979) and has been applied to a diverse range of organizations over the past 40 years.

The conceptual lens used to construct the CSFs for data collection and analysis is Kanter's Eight I's (Kanter, 1994), which include Individual Excellence, Importance, Interdependence, Investment, Information, Integration, Institutionalization, and Integrity. The researcher applied Kanter's eight criteria for successful collaborative partnerships in a manner similar to Alexander's (1997) analysis of the triad relationship between community colleges, businesses, and community stakeholders, as well as Stegeman's (2021) application of CSFs to community college partnerships with economic development organizations. The study will focus on partnerships between community colleges and their local tribes. Kanter's Eight I's informed the questions posed to key personnel from each institution and the tribes. The interview questions can be found in Appendices C and D.

Research Design

A qualitative researcher is concerned with "understanding of how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam, 2009, p. 23). For this reason, a qualitative approach was used for this research study. This study provided the researcher with an opportunity to interact and observe using multiple data sources. Qualitative research is a process by which interviews, narratives, environmental observations, the researcher, researcher's field notes, photographs, and other data are synthesized to answer a question or explain a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

A qualitative approach does not reduce individuals to statistics; rather, it draws upon the words, actions, and lived experiences of others to tell the story of their personal journey through their lives (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Using a qualitative approach allowed the views of the individuals involved in the study to be fully explored (Bogdan & Biklien, 2007). Qualitative studies are appropriate when the research questions seek to gain an in-depth description of a phenomenon (Yin, 2018). As Lochmiller and Lester (2016) have noted, qualitative data yield detailed, thick, robust, descriptions, with the ability to capture personal perspectives and experience. As Yin (2018) noted, "how" and "why" questions are traditionally indicative of the case study method; any method is appropriate in exploratory studies using "what" questions.

A generic qualitative inquiry was selected for this study, as it aims to investigate people's reports of their subjective opinions, attitudes, beliefs , or reflections on their experiences, of things in the outer world (Percy et al., 2015, p. 78). The generic qualitative inquiry was chosen as the methodology for this study because the researcher has a body of prior knowledge and preunderstanding about the topic that I want to be able to more fully describe from the participant's perspective. This study enabled the researcher to understand the decisions made by community college leaders and tribal members that contribute to student success at Native American-Serving Non-Tribal Institutions (NASNTIs) in New Mexico.

The rationale for choosing a qualitative approach is not in question, but increasing numbers of researchers are relying on the concept of flexibility and openness in the generic approach as justification for its use (Chenail et al., 2011; Cooper & Endacott, 2007).

Seeking depth of experiences with individuals who live through them could very well be phenomenological research, but the generic approach offers researchers the opportunity to develop questions and ideas for topics that can be differentiated at a higher level of inquiry

(Bellamy et al., 2016; Prosek & Gibson, 2020). The intention of generic methods includes representation of a broad range of ideas, beliefs, and experiences, thus making the choice practical for counselor educators as they seek to know more about people's lives through what occurs in the real world and not bounded by internal psychological meanings (Aguas, 2021; Bellamy et al., 2016; Caelli et al., 2003; Percy et al., 2015). When research questions are more exploratory in nature or when there are limitations in obtaining data, a generic approach, however, can be useful (Kahlke, 2014).

It has been suggested that the generic qualitative research design is most appropriately applied when other research designs are ill-equipped to align with the research topic being investigated (Percy et al., 2015). However, many researchers contend that this tendency to view studies broadly is by design, thereby intentionally refusing to align with any single design (Kahlke, 2014). As a result, "generic qualitative studies can draw on the strengths of established methodologies while maintaining the flexibility that makes generic approaches attractive to researchers whose studies do not fall neatly within a particular established methodology" (Kahlke, 2014, p. 39).

Because a generic qualitative study maintains a sense of flexibility that other designs do not, it is not viewed as having the foundation on which to build a credible study (Caelli et al., 2003). Conducting a generic qualitative research study includes a similar merit, a certain trustworthiness, transferability, and credibility like other established qualitative designs such as phenomenology or a narrative design, and can stand as a fully acceptable and respected methodology in today's world of research, a contention that has been challenged in the past (Kahlke, 2014). Despite the general acceptance that all qualitative research assumes multiple realities, a generic design is still bound to theory, quality data collection, and data analysis

(Anderson, 2017; Caelli et al., 2003). What motivated the researcher to study the topic involves a need for congruence to align the assumptions of methodology and theory and obtain a credible and trustworthy analysis (Bellamy et al., 2016; Rose & Johnson, 2020).

Whereas the generic qualitative design is now clearly recognized as a format that can enlighten researchers about the perceptions of an individual's reality, the relationship between the researcher and that which is being researched, the roles and values present in the study, and the method used during the research process (Levitt et al., 2017, 2019). Due to the increasing popularity of the generic qualitative design, this study's findings include significant and informative results yielded by this process.

In fact, Brake and Kelly (2019) noted that a generic approach is especially appropriate when there is little foundational literature on the topic. Ongoing discussions about the methodology aligned with the phenomena will strengthen selections for qualitative research in general. Generic qualitative research allows for enough flexibility to explore multiple realities that exist but vary depending on environment and culture (Bellamy et al., 2016; Florczak, 2017). Some of the flexibility comes in the analysis of data (Brake & Kelly, 2019). More than just asking for participants to tell their story, as in phenomenology (Florczak, 2017), generic methodology provides for more specific questions in addition to the research question, so the data provides descriptions of meaningful details about the outward experience.

The researcher conducted multiple interviews across three participating colleges and the three New Mexican recognized tribes with whom they work. The study reviewed the tribal election and appointment processes, the education subcommittee processes, and the policies, processes, and practices of the colleges and the tribes. By examining the tribal election process, the researcher gained valuable insight into how leadership turnover impacts collaboration

between the college and the tribe. The researcher was interested in understanding the individual parts, the relationships among them, and how they function as a whole (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017).

Siedman (1998) stated that the most important method a researcher has to investigate the experiences of another in an educational setting is through the interview process. In education, "interviewing is probably the most common form of data collection in qualitative studies" (Merriam, 2009, p. 86). This generic qualitative study enabled the researcher to conduct a comprehensive exploration of potential factors contributing to student success at Native American-Serving Non-Tribal Institutions (NASNTIs) in New Mexico.

Study Setting

The three institutions participating in this study were selected based on the following criteria:

1. The institution is a New Mexico independent community college or a university branch community college, in which the population of Native American students exceeds the state's average.
2. The institution is a Native American-Serving Non-Tribal Institution (NASNTI).
3. The institution maintains a formal partnership with at least one Native American tribe.

Three community colleges in New Mexico meet those criteria. The tribes that were included in this research are those maintaining partnerships with the three selected colleges: Eastern New Mexico University – Ruidoso Branch Community College and the Mescalero Apache Tribe; San Juan College and the Navajo Nation; and the University of New Mexico –

Gallup, which serves the Navajo Nation and Zuni Pueblo Tribe. The presidents of the three colleges approved to be named in the study.

Initial contact with the participating colleges occurred through networking with colleagues, educators, doctoral program instructors, and other researchers. The researcher received written permission to conduct the study at each institution and Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Kansas State University. The interview participants were anonymized, and all names were replaced with codes, ensuring that no study findings could be traced to individual interviewees or the institutions at which they work.

Table 3.1:

Study Participant Colleges and Associated Tribes

Community College	**City, State**	**Tribal Affiliation**	**Fall 2022NA Headcount**
Eastern New Mexico University (ENMU)-Ruidoso Branch Community College	Ruidoso, N.M.	Mescalero Apache Tribe	101
San Juan College Independent Community College	Farmington, N.M.	Navajo Nation	2,019
University of New Mexico (UNM)-Gallup Branch Community College	Gallup, N.M.	Navajo Nation Zuni Pueblo Tribe	1,177

Study Participants

The individuals best equipped to describe the characteristics of college and tribal partnerships were those responsible for developing, deploying, and overseeing each partnership's programs and processes. This includes staff members and executives from various offices at each college and tribal headquarters. All participants—college and tribal leaders and staff—had insights to offer regarding the partnerships' perceived strengths and weaknesses. The researcher anticipated conducting between three to four interviews across the three colleges and three tribes selected for this study. One of the colleges has partnerships with two of the tribes.

According to Creswell (2005), a minimum of three to 15 participants is sufficient to achieve saturation in basic qualitative research. While the researcher conducted 16 interviews in total, 13 were with college leaders and seven were with tribal members. Six interviews were done in person, and 10 were done by Zoom or Teams software for recording and transcription. Some of the tribal members were either employed or served on one of the college's board of directors.

The participants in this study included relevant college and tribal administration members, tribal liaisons, and staff members from the colleges, as well as tribal council leaders, tribal education coordinators or directors, staff members, and administrators from the participating institutions. Snowball sampling is also known as chain sampling or network sampling. Snowball sampling begins with one or more study participants and then continues based on referrals from those participants. This process continues until either the desired sample size is reached or a saturation point is achieved (Simkus, 2023).

The researcher used purposeful and snowball sampling. According to Lunenburg and Irby (2008), sampling for qualitative research is almost always purposeful (p.176). The sampling

procedures used for this study were criterion sampling and snowball sampling (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). Criterion sampling involves selecting participants who meet some criterion (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008).

Instrumentation

The instrumentation for the study included the researcher's observations, as well as the protocols and questionnaires used during the interviews. Interview questions were semi-structured in design allowing for modifications during the process. The questions for the college representatives and the tribal members were similar, with only slight wording changes, depending on the interviewee's specific workplace and role. The questions are found in Appendices C and D.

In-person, face-to-face interviews were an important part of the data collection process for establishing the researcher's credibility with the college and tribal leadership. Tribal liaisons proved likely to be important individuals to interview, as well as a review of memorandums of understanding (MOUs), Tribal resolutions, and the college's policies, procedures, and practices.

A pilot interview was conducted to test the interview questions and ensure the necessary information was collected. "Interviewing is necessary," states Merriam (2009), "because a researcher cannot always observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world" (p.88). At times, interviewing is the only way to get data (Merriam, 2009). Kanter's Eight I's were matched to the interview questions to illustrate their connection to the themes. Coding was used to categorize and itemize the data within categories and compare them to facilitate theoretical connections (Maxwell, 2013).

The pilot interview process allowed the researcher to practice asking questions and evaluate the interview questionnaire, increasing the researcher's confidence in the instrument.

The pilot interview allowed the researcher to test question clarity and gauge interview timing, identify, and address potential methodological challenges before the main study. The researcher was able to identify confusing, redundant questions, and allowed the researcher to practice active listening skills.

Data Collection and Data Sources

Before beginning research, formal permission was obtained from Kansas State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and from officials at the participating institutions, as required. Each potential participant received a description of the study and an explanation of why they had been asked to participate in an interview. With their permission, further information was provided, including a written summary of the research protocols, a consent form, and potential interview dates. Sample invitation letter for community college leaders, Appendix A, and sample invitation letter for tribal leaders, Appendix B. Informed Consent Form is Appendix E. The interview dates were flexible to best match each participant's schedule. The data for this study were collected from community college and tribal leaders using semi-structured, one-on-one interviews directed to probe the specific CSFs outlined by Kanter (1994).

Data collection in this approach typically uses methods that elicit people's reports on their ideas about things outside themselves. Instead, it requires semi- or fully-structured interviews, questionnaires, surveys, content- or activity-specific participant observation, and the like. The core focus is external and real-world, as opposed to internal and psychological. (Even the attitudes and opinions in opinion polling are valued for their reflection on the external issues.) (Percy et al., 2015, p. 79).

By and large, generic qualitative data collection seeks information from representative samples of people about real-world events and processes, or about their experiences. The generic

qualitative study is designed to get a broad range of opinions, ideas, or reflections. Occasionally, a small, non-representative, but highly informed sample can provide rich information about the topic. However, as with all qualitative inquiry, if the sample is transparently and fairly representative of the target population or is clearly information-rich about the topic, readers may be persuaded to apply the findings to similar people or situations outside the sample itself (Percy et al, 2015 p. 29)

The interview questions were pre-structured based on the pre-knowledge of the researcher, with opportunities for "tell me more" kinds of questions. The researcher developed the interview questions based on prior knowledge of the college and tribal partnerships.

Zoom and Teams software were used to produce verbatim transcripts of each interview. These transcripts were entered into an Excel spreadsheet and coded by the researcher, which assisted in managing the data and in coding and identifying patterns and themes.

Merriam and Tisdall (2016) strongly suggest that the researcher create an inventory of the data set that might include a list of terms used in the interviews, notes, documents shared, and anything related to the data collection process. This was done as part of the data collection process.

Data Analysis

Merriam and Tisdall (2016) describe a process of data analysis in a qualitative study as repetitive and always changing. Even when all data have been collected, there remains much processing, refining, and verifying to validate the process. The goal of this study's data analysis was to establish themes and provide a meaningful discussion of the findings that contribute to the body of knowledge and literature.

Marczyk et al., (2005) suggested three steps be used when analyzing qualitative research interviews: data preparation, analysis, and interpretation. Creswell (2014) elaborated upon this approach and suggested that qualitative data analysis involves a linear approach with an interactive design that includes three steps: organizing and preparing data, reading and/or looking at all data. Through Kanter's framework, the researcher provided analysis and eventual answers to the research questions. As the themes arose that seemed beyond the scope of Kanter's Eight I's, the researcher analyzed those independently and provided a narrative for their contribution to the study's findings.

The researcher's interview questions (see Appendices C and D), along with an alignment table (see Appendix E), are provided to show how the interview questions aligned with Kanter's Eight I's: Individual Excellence, Importance, Interdependence, Investment, Information, Integration, Institutionalization, and Integrity.

Thematic analysis involves searching across a data set –be that a number of interviews or focus groups, or a range of texts –to find repeated patterns of meanings (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 86). The researcher used a hybrid process, analyzing the data with a theory-driven deductive thematic analysis, using Kanter's Eight I's. This process involved applying the pre-existing coding frame, theory, or model to the qualitative data to structure findings. The deductive process was done to develop themes solely from the raw data using Kanter's framework, a top-down approach to organize the data into existing categories.

The hybrid approach allowed for new, unexpected themes to emerge (inductive) alongside the structured I's. Deductive thematic analysis using Kanter's Eight I's involved applying the pre-established theory of empowerment and organizational structure and strategic change as a rigid framework for coding and interpreting qualitative data. The researcher

specifically examined manifestations of the eight structural power factors to analyze behavior, empowerment, and power dynamics in a top-down manner within the partnerships.

The following six steps were used in the deductive thematic analysis process. The researcher defined the theoretical framework and research questions, then created a list of themes and subthemes expected to be found, based on prior research or theory. The researcher then read all transcripts, field notes, and documents multiple times to become deeply familiar with the content before analysis. The coding process included applying codes to the data. The researcher read the data again and highlighted intuitively excerpts, sentences, phrases, or paragraphs that appeared meaningful and matched the predetermined themes.

The coding was done manually by creating a spreadsheet listing the research questions, Kanter's Eight I's, and the collected data. A new code from a similar community college partnership study conducted in 2021 was reviewed for alignment to additional themes. The coded data were reviewed to ensure they fit the predefined themes. The researcher checked whether the themes were supported by the data; similar themes were merged, and irrelevant ones were removed. Finally, the researcher defined the final themes and gave them clear, descriptive names.

The findings were written, using data extracts (quotes) to support how the data mapped to the theoretical framework. The four themes that emerged were 1) Foundation of Trust and Sovereignty, 2) Cultural Relevance and Epistemology, 3) Reciprocity and Community Engagement, and Institutional and Political Barriers.

The key difference in using the deductive analysis process is that the analysis structure is created before looking closely at the data, whereas inductive analysis develops themes from the data.

While the researcher used predetermined themes from Kanter's Eight I's during data analysis, the researcher remained open to new themes emerging from the thematic analysis. The theoretical thematic analysis was driven by the theory, and the predetermined themes were located in the research questions. For example, trust, proximity from the tribal reservation to the college, access to transportation, scholarships, child care, as well as longevity of leaders at the college, the tribal council, or the tribal education directors were additional themes that were identified.

The researcher approached this analysis in two phases. In the first phase, after preparing the data, the researcher assigned the data units to the predetermined themes derived from Kanter and Stegeman's previous research and theories.

In phase two, the researcher returned to the data and worked with data units and patterns that did not seem to fit the eight pre-determined categories. The themes that were derived from this analysis were found in previous research by Stegeman (2021). A new pattern and theme emerged from the data during the data analysis process: multiple levels of interaction between tribal members and college personnel. Multiple levels of interaction was a critical success factor found in a previous study by Stegeman (2021). Additionally, new themes were identified in this study that had not been previously reported in the literature, including: tribal cultural relevance and awareness; proximity, convenience, and access; and longevity of leadership.

Study Quality

The role of the researcher is to recognize the potential for bias and the need to maintain the integrity of the study throughout the process. Creswell (2014) states that the two key elements for the researcher to maintain in all phases of the qualitative study are objectivity and truthfulness. In addition to these two elements, the researcher is responsible for the data

collection and analysis of a qualitative study (Creswell, 2009). The researcher must acknowledge and be mindful of personal bias and prejudice.

The researcher was mindful of the need for transparency. The research study is described in a manner that is easy to understand, and all participants in the interviews will have a clear grasp of the study's scope and importance throughout the process. A quality study must be reliable and valid. Merriam (2015) discussed the issues with validity and reliability in qualitative research and offered strategies for safeguarding the trustworthiness of the findings. Users of the research should be able to have confidence in incorporating the findings in their own work and practice.

Tracy's 2010 "Eight Big-Tent Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research" provides a comprehensive framework for assessing the quality of qualitative research:

1. **Worthy Topic**: The research topic should be relevant, timely, significant, and practical. This study meets that definition, as it explores a current and important topic in higher education.
2. **Rich Rigor**: This refers to the depth, complexity, and scope of the research. It involves diligent and nuanced data collection, sampling, and analysis processes. This study will ensure a high level of academic excellence as it analyzes the partnerships between community colleges and tribal governments.
3. **Sincerity**: This involves transparency about the research process, challenges, and biases. It also includes self-reflexivity about the researcher's role and potential influence on the research. The researcher is including a reflexivity statement and is mindful of the need for objectivity.

4. **Credibility**: This involves conducting the research in a way that builds trust with the reader. This study will include rich, robust, and intricate descriptions of the context and participants
5. **Resonance**: The findings should deeply resonate with readers and offer insightful interpretations that bring new understanding or evoke emotions as the research explores the factors contributing to the success of Native American students in New Mexico.
6. **Significant Contribution**: This research study will contribute a meaningful dialogue to the topic of Native American student success.
7. **Ethics**: The researcher outlines a way to proceed in an ethical manner, considering all moral aspects and treating all participants with respect.
8. **Meaningful Coherence**: The research process, findings and implications will form a coherent whole.

Data Validity

Lincoln and Guba (1986) established arguments on how an interpretation can be credible. One method is to characterize trustworthiness, which can be described as internal validity (credibility), external validity (transferability), reliability (dependability), and objectivity (neutrality). Another way is to understand and make sense of an interpretation and have confidence in the interpretation. This can be done through observation, especially in body language, tone of voice, and the appearance of how important a thought, statement, or experience is to the interviewee. For this study, ensuring validity was done by contacting the interviewees for further comments, when descriptions or clarification were needed when transcribing the data. Member checks involve taking preliminary data analysis back to the participant to ensure the researcher's interpretation aligns with what the participant conveyed (Merriam & Tisdall, 2016).

Creswell (2014) suggests peer examination and member checking be conducted to affirm accuracy and credibility of the findings, while Merriam and Tisdell (2015) recommend possible pilot interviews to test the research questions. Similar case studies reviewed suggest that the feedback may prompt the researcher to organize demographic questions in a particular format.

Ethical Considerations

Reflexivity is acknowledged as an integral part of the research process. The researcher brought biases, values, and experiences to this study and acknowledges that these elements can influence the research process and the interpretation of the findings if care is not taken to maintain objectivity throughout. The researcher took care to ensure that all data interpretations were grounded in the participants' experiences rather than the researcher's preconceptions.

The researcher took steps to protect human subjects, to reduce conflicts of interest and biases, and to mitigate these effects on the study. Interviewee privacy, data storage, and confidentiality were maintained. The researcher employed close monitoring to ensure that there were no breaches of ethical protocol at any time during this study, and pseudonyms were used to ensure the privacy of interviewees. The researcher reviewed and required that the individuals sign a conflict-of-interest form, and the interviewees were allowed to withdraw at any time. All participants were informed of their rights/permission to withdraw from the study at any time. The researcher obtained the participants' permission to digitally record audio and video of the session, as well as an exact transcription—all of which was used to aid in ensuring the context of the exchange was accurately depicted in the study. All information gathered during the study was stored on an encrypted USB drive, where it will be kept for a minimum of five years.

In Native American society, there is a high value placed on cultural truth (Trachtenberg, 2002). It was critical the researcher worked to maintain the delicate balance of cultural

sensitivity and the researcher's perspective. The researcher offered to send a copy of the transcriptions to the participants. Member checking is an important ethical consideration.

Limitations

Humans make meaning of their experiences in life, which allows for interpretation to make sense of the data (Anderson, 2017; Rose & Johnson, 2020). There often becomes a perceived need to justify qualitative analysis through a sense of objectivity and responsibility, which in a generic design means the researcher is influenced by reading, discussions, and subjective beliefs (Brown, 2019; Rose & Johnson, 2020). Trustworthiness continually comes to the forefront of discussions around any type of qualitative research, but certainly around the generic approach that promotes exploration and flexibility (Bellamy et al., 2016; Rose & Johnson, 2020).

The findings of this study may be transferable among community colleges with characteristics similar to those of the colleges sampled in this research. The interviewees' responses were limited by the parameters of their role at their college or within their tribe and by their knowledge of the educational partnership between the college and the tribe. Each response was naturally limited by each participant's personal work ethic and leadership style. In the event that interviews were conducted remotely, there were potential limits on how much non-verbal communication could be received. Limitations outside the researcher's control that arose are documented as the study was conducted.

Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed the methodology of this generic qualitative study, including how the institutions and participants were selected, how data was collected, secured and managed, and how the researcher analyzed the data using the theoretical lens of critical success factors

(CSF) theory and the conceptual lens of Kanter's Eight I's to ensure the study's overall validity. This chapter also discussed ethical considerations and the study's limitations.

Chapter 4 - Research Findings

Overview

The chapter begins with a review of the study participants, the findings, the identified themes, and the unexpected results. The researcher then presents an analysis of the data using the conceptual theory of critical success factors (CSFs) aligned with Kanter's collaborative advantage (1994), Eight I's in partnerships, as well as one additional CSF uncovered in a similar community college study, and three additional CSFs found in this study between community colleges and Native American Tribes. Overall this study discovered 12 CSFs for community college and tribal partnerships.

This research study explored community college and tribal partnerships, best practices, and how these might support retention and success at Native American-Serving Non-Tribal Institutions (NASNTIs) in New Mexico.

Study Participants and Partnerships

The researcher studied four partnerships across the three New Mexico community colleges that have the Native American-Serving Non-Tribal (NASNTI) designation: Eastern New Mexico University (ENMU)-Ruidoso Branch Community College and the Mescalero Apache Tribe; San Juan College and the Navajo Nation; and the University of New Mexico (UNM) Gallup Branch Community College and the Navajo Nation and Zuni Pueblo Tribe. San Juan College is an independent community college that serves several tribes, but only the Navajo Nation is a federally recognized tribe in New Mexico. ENMU-Ruidoso and UMN-Gallup are both branch community colleges of a New Mexico University System.

San Juan College (SJC) is located in Farmington, New Mexico, which is located in the very northwest corner of the state, and is known for its energy production. SJC, the oldest community college in the study, was founded in 1956. It has an enrollment of over 9,000 students, with 22% being Native American students. SJC has six schools and offers 140 programs of study. SJC serves the Navajo Nation and has worked in partnership with the tribe for many decades.

Eastern New Mexico University (ENMU)-Ruidoso Branch Community College is located in Ruidoso, New Mexico, and is in the southeastern part of the state. It is a tourist community known as the “playground of the southwest.” Ruidoso is a year-round mountain resort destination in the Sierra Blanca mountains known for its cool mountain air, winter skiing, and high-stakes horse racing at Ruidoso Downs, home of the All-American Quarter Horse Racing Futurity. It is popular for outdoor activities, including fishing, hiking, and golfing, as well as a lively local arts scene

In contrast to SJC, ENMU-Ruidoso is the youngest community college in the state. It has been an instructional center of ENMU, which is based in Portales, since 1991. In 2005, residents of the Ruidoso area went to Santa Fe to appeal to the legislature to make it a branch community college. ENMU-Ruidoso has 1,300 students, and while it is the youngest community college in the state and this study, it is the fastest growing, with an enrollment growth of 59% in the last five years. Ten percent of the enrollment is Native American. ENMU-Ruidoso has a partnership with the Mescalero Apache Tribe.

The University of New Mexico (UNM) Gallup is also a branch community college and is located in Gallup, New Mexico, which is also in the northwestern part of the state. Gallup is known as the "Indian Capital of the World" due to its rich Native American culture, significant

Navajo, Zuni, and Hopi influence, and vibrant, authentic art markets. Located on historic Route 66, it is celebrated for its stunning red rock landscapes, the annual Red Rock Hot Air Balloon Rally, and its history as a filming location for classic Westerns. UNM Gallup has an enrollment of 1,800, of which nearly 1,200 or 67% are Native American students. UNM Gallup has partnerships with both the Navajo Nation and the Zuni Pueblo Tribe.

New Mexico has 23 federally-recognized tribes, including 19 Pueblos, the Jicarilla Apache Nation, the Mescalero Apache Tribe, the Fort Sill Apache Tribe, and the Navajo Nation. Each of these nations is a sovereign entity with its own government, traditions, cultures, and laws. The Pueblos are known for their unique art, while the Apache tribes have a history rooted in nomadic traditions and the Mescalero Apache were one of the first to have a casino, and the Navajo Nation is known for their blanket weaving.

The interviews were conducted with leaders at three New Mexico community colleges recognized as Native American-Serving Non-Tribal Institutions (NASNTIs) and grant recipients. The three tribes they serve are the Navajo Nation, the Mescalero Apache Tribe, and the Zuni Pueblo Tribe.

Among the 16 participants, the majority were senior executives, including presidents, vice presidents, directors, department heads, or counselors, who were defined as those reporting to the ultimate leader of the organization or those leading a department.

All Tribal members are registered with a single New Mexico-registered tribe. The seven tribal members who were interviewed held various positions at tribal enterprises, were employees, or affiliated with one of the three community colleges. To protect participants' confidentiality, colleges are identified by numbers (1 through 3).

Six of the 16 interviews were conducted one-on-one in person, which allowed the researcher to more easily recognize nonverbal cues. All interviews, whether conducted in-person or virtually, allowed the interviewer to ask follow-up questions tailored to the individual being interviewed. The interview protocols and questions can be found in Appendices C and D, along with the Interview Question Alignment Table to Kanter's Eight I's, Appendix E.

Table 4.1:

Study Participants

Community Colleges	3
Tribal Partnerships	4
College Leaders Interviews	13
Tribal Member Interviews	7
Total Interviews	16

Results are presented by critical success factors (CSFs), beginning with Kanter's (1994) Eight I's, which serve as the conceptual framework for the study, followed by the additional CSFs uncovered during the research. Within each of the CSF sections below, the researcher presents quotes from participants that represent data from multiple interviews.

Findings

Four core themes emerged from this study of New Mexico community colleges and tribal partnerships foundation of trust and sovereignty, cultural relevance, community engagement, and barriers. Within each of these four themes are additional sub-themes.

Foundation of Trust and Sovereignty

One specific question asked if there was trust in the relationship of those involved in the partnership; however, trust was mentioned a few times in each interview, even without being

asked. Trust was brought into the conversation by most of the interviewees before the researcher could get to the specific question about trust.

> One college leader even mentioned mistrust between the tribe and the college when programs were put together without including tribal members in the development of the program. The college developed a Native American initiative as an enrollment recruiting strategy without talking to tribal members about what they needed or wanted for educational services.
>
> One tribal member talked about how trust has been built over the last few years by the current college president he works with, and the relationship has grown beyond a professional relationship to a personal friendship.

Acknowledging Tribal Sovereignty

Successful partnerships on both sides with the college and tribe, acknowledgment of the tribal sovereignty recognizes the legal and political status of Tribal nations. College leaders discussed hosting powwows on campus, Native American princess pageants, as well as culturally relevant events and training for college personnel.

Building Trust Over Time

Collaboration between the college's employees and tribal members has often required extended timelines to establish cross-cultural relationships and overcome historical mistrust.

> The college leader who talked about mistrust between the partnership when a recruitment strategy was developed by the college without including tribal members. However, over time, trust was built within the partnership, which resulted in institutionalizing an MOU as the preferred training provider.

One tribal leader noted that the relationship with college personnel has developed into a lasting one, extending beyond the college to families. College leaders and tribal leaders all discussed the increased importance of engagement between and within each entity. Another tribal leader who worked at one of the colleges discussed how her college president now included tribal members who are employees of college on her cabinet.

Acknowledging History

Partners must recognize the historical role of research and education as tools of oppression in Indigenous communities to create a path forward. The evidence in the data demonstrates that the colleges and the tribes value education and acknowledge the history of education for Native Americans.

Cultural Relevance and Epistemology

Indigenous Ways of Knowing

Partnerships are most effective when they integrate Indigenous knowledge, languages, and values into the curriculum and research.

One college leader talked about how much the college puts an emphasis on cultural relevance, incorporating the tribe's traditions and relevant community examples in the curriculum, which has deepened student engagement.

One of the tribal members interviewed said, " There is a genuine desire on the part of the college to not be colonial. Cooperation is the culture of the college."

Cultural Context in Evaluation

Results and data must be interpreted within the community's cultural context rather than through a strictly Western lens.

One of the college leaders describes the college as a nationally-recognized leader and community-focused, regionally specific, and culturally vibrant education. “Our efforts speak to those two things.”

All of the college leaders at all three colleges talked about how important it is to create a sense of belonging on campus, especially Native American and Hispanic students. Several discussed the importance of creating an inclusive environment.

Storytelling as Methodology

Shared narratives and story-sharing are frequently cited as vital practices for framing experiences and strengthening relationships.

In the past, storytelling was not as valued as a study methodology as it is today. Three of the tribal members discussed how elders and former tribal leaders valued education, not just primary and secondary education, but also higher education. One even quoted a former tribal leader who said, “the tribe committed itself to a long-range objective, the idea of replacing every white man on the reservation with an Indian trained for the the job.”

Reciprocity and Community Engagement

Mutual Benefit

Research and educational initiatives must provide tangible benefits to the Tribal community, ensuring the partnership is not one-sided.

The mutual benefit of the partnerships to the tribes and the colleges is evident in the recent growth of Native American enrollment, retention, and completion that can be seen in all three of the colleges serving their area tribes.

All three colleges either employ tribal members or have tribal members serving on their college board of directors, program advisory boards, community advisory committees, or

community resilience committees. Similarly, the tribes include college personnel at their events, activities, and education committee meetings.

Community Presence

It is essential for non-Native partners to spend time in the community and become familiar with local customs before beginning collaborative projects. Mutual benefit and community presence go hand-in-hand.

College personnel are often seen on the reservation teaching classes, attending meetings, patronizing tribal enterprises, and more. College leaders and tribal members are involved at many levels, including advising on program development, cultural training, Native American cultural events, community celebrations, and college fairs. Community presence was mentioned by every individual interviewed, whether it was a college leader talking about how involved they are with the tribe or a tribal member talking about how the college is involved in the tribal community. Community presence leads into the subtheme of engagement.

Engaged Involvement

Partnerships often function best when they are characterized by "engaged involvement," where Tribal traditions remain central to the mission.

In these partnerships, tribal members serve on the college board of directors and the college foundation board of directors. In the tribal schools college teachers are teach numerous subjects such as cybertechnology.

One college offers a summer initiative for tribal dual credit students and professional development for tribal school teachers.

Institutional and Political Barriers

Bureaucratic Friction

Differences in organizational structure—such as complex university bureaucracies versus more flexible but potentially politically volatile Tribal college structures—can inhibit collaboration.

The evidence of barriers is found in leadership, specifically longevity of leadership not only at the colleges, but also with the tribal election processes and length of terms. The three college presidents have been at the college for one to two decades. The tribal election processes definitely impact friction when there is turnover; however, most tribal education directors are appointed rather than elected.

Funding and Leadership

Sustainable partnerships require flexible funding and preparation for leadership turnover to maintain long-term stability. Specifically, in New Mexico, colleges receive state funding for serving Native American students; however, one of the colleges in the study has had to work with the New Mexico Higher Education Department to remind them that the college serves Native American students.

Unexpected Results

A few unexpected results of the study surprised the researcher. For instance, the similarity of the results across the partnerships between the college leaders and tribal members was noteworthy. The colleges were all in New Mexico, however, in different regions of the state and serving different tribes, and did not work together on tribal relations and Native American student success. Despite serving different tribes with distinct cultures and community practices, each college leader and the tribal members identified parallel aspects of the critical success

factors driving their partnerships to meet strategic goals, objectives, and missions, and to strengthen their working relationships. And all participants emphasized the cultural relevance and awareness, access to educational services of the colleges, and the trust that had been developed over time between individuals from each entity, as well as the mutual willingness to be actively engaged in each other's business, creating a positive and meaningful relationship.

From a national replication perspective, the community-building between the college and tribal leadership serves Native American students, the tribe, and its members. This bodes well for college leaders who want to regenerate or initiate programs in their region.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the research questions for this study, the methodology, interview data collection, and study participants. The researcher presented the data from the generic qualitative study of partnerships between New Mexico community colleges and the New Mexico-recognized tribes they serve. The findings are organized according to the conceptual framework of this study, which explains the 12 CSFs identified in all of these partnerships. The study uncovered a total of 12 CSFS, the CFSs outlined by Kanter's Eight I's (1994), one critical success factor, which was found in Stegeman's study, multiple areas of interaction, and three new additional CSFs were present in all of the New Mexico community college/tribal partnerships in this study.

The other three CSFs found in the research address research question two, as they are consistent with the community colleges and tribes in this study. The three additional CSFs found in this study were 1) tribal cultural relevance and awareness, 2) proximity, convenience and access, and 3) longevity of leadership. These three factors will be discussed in Chapter 5, along with evidence supporting these findings.

Chapter 5 provides an overview of the research, further analysis of these findings in relation to the research questions, with detailed analysis of each of Kanter's Eight I's, implications for NASNTI community colleges and the Native American tribal partnerships, recommendations for future research, and the researcher's conclusions.

Chapter 5 - Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter begins with an overview of the research, purpose, and research questions, a discussion of the study findings related to research questions, findings that address each research question, a discussion of findings related to the conceptual framework and discussion of findings related to the literature, their implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and the researcher's conclusions.

Research Overview

Only 17% of Native American students continue their education after high school, compared to 60% of the United States population. Undergraduate and graduate enrollment among Native Americans aged 18 to 24 is declining (Native American Students in Higher Education, 2019).

This research study explored community college and tribal partnerships, best practices, and how these might support retention and success at Native American-Serving Non-Tribal Institutions (NASNTIs) in New Mexico.

According to Falkenstern and Rochat (2018), NASNTIs are one group that should be addressing the needs of Indigenous students in a culturally responsive manner. The NASNTI designation was created in 2008 by the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965. NASNTIs are higher education institutions with undergraduate student populations comprising 10% or more Native American or Alaska Native students who qualify for Title III under the United States Department of Education. Title III provides financial support for institutions serving low-income populations. These institutions are usually in rural areas adjacent to tribal reservations (Falkenstern & Rochat, 2018). (It should be noted that this NASNTI designation was eliminated since the start of my study and data collection.)

Native American students comprise less than 1% of the United States undergraduate and graduate student population, compared to nearly 94 million, or 43%, of Americans ages 25 and over who have a college degree of some type (J. Bryant, 2021a). White Americans make up the overwhelming majority of college graduates, accounting for nearly three-quarters of the college-educated population. BIPOC individuals combined make up less than 30% of the population 25 and older who have earned a college degree (J. A. Bryant, 2021b) and of those Native American students who do attend college, only "41% of first-time, full-time Native American students attending four-year institutions beginning in 2012, graduated within six years, compared to 62% for all students" (J.A. Bryant, 2021b, page 1).

Native American students are attending and graduating from community colleges at significantly lower rates than their non-Native American peers. These students are often excluded from research because they comprise such a small portion of the student body. The numbers tell part of the story: recent data from the Postsecondary Policy Institute show that less than 10% of Native Americans receive their associate degree, and only 16% attain a bachelor's degree or higher (J. Bryant, 2021a).

Institutions of higher education have increasingly been required to be accountable not only for enrollment but also for retention, completion, and addressing barriers to student success (T. Bailey, 2017). Community colleges nationally are focused on closing the completion gaps of all students. Native Americans have continued to be the lowest performing demographic, yet few studies exist on the success of Native American students in community colleges.

Located within driving distance of almost every community in the United States, is a community colleges that can provide access to low-cost, universally accessible education and training to all adult learners (Baime, 2019). Traditionally focused on building middle-skills

workers, community colleges assist employers in filling a labor gap not usually satisfied by university graduates (Holzer, 2016). Over half of all jobs in the United States are middle-skills jobs, and middle-skills jobs are evolving from routine jobs. Many of these jobs have been shifted offshore or primarily automated and reduced to low-skills jobs, to "newer" middle-skills jobs requiring more technical, administrative, or communicative skills (Holzer, 2015, April). These new, middle-skills jobs often go unfilled due to a mismatch of labor supply and demand by geography or a dearth of qualified, skilled candidates (Tovar, 2020).

Understanding successful community college and tribal partnerships may attract more Native American students. However, the researcher found no studies examining partnerships between community colleges and Native American tribes. The focus of this study was to explore and research the best practices of partnerships and report on the traits and characteristics of community college/tribal partnerships that have successfully attracted and retained Native American students.

By institution type, two-year independent community colleges experienced the highest level of growth, followed by the branch community colleges. Given the composition of the student body at two-year colleges, the increase in nontraditional students has fueled much of this growth; however, it has also contributed to substantial enrollment declines since 2011, with a decrease of over 20%. The two-year independent community college enrollment declined at a level similar to that of four-year institutions, both losing more than 4,700 students (New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee Meeting, 2019).

Purpose and Research Questions

The data collected during this study of New Mexico Native American-Serving Non-Tribal Institution (NASNTI) designated community colleges and the tribes they serve answered

both research questions, with results presented through the lens of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that underpin the partnerships in this study. The research centered on answering the following two research questions:

1. What are the characteristics of successful partnerships between community colleges and tribal governments?

2. What are the best practices found in community colleges and Native American tribal partnerships that are designed to contribute to student success?

The findings of this generic qualitative study reveal a consistent and compelling portrait of how community colleges and tribal governments in New Mexico construct and sustain partnerships that meaningfully support Native American student access, retention, and completion. Across all four partnerships examined, spanning three NASNTI-designated community colleges and three federally recognized tribes, the data demonstrate that successful collaborations are characterized by a shared commitment to cultural respect, finding opportunities that provide mutual benefit, and long-term relationship-building. When viewed through the conceptual lens of Critical Success Factor (CSF) theory, there is a remarkably high degree of alignment with the factors Kanter identified as essential for durable and productive alliances. In addition, a CSFs emerged from this study that aligns with a similar partnership study between community colleges and economic development entities. Three new CSFs emerged from this study that extend Kanter's framework in ways uniquely relevant to community college and tribal partnerships.

Discussion of Findings Related to Research Questions

The data collected during this study answered both research questions. The results are presented through the lens of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that underpin the

partnerships in this study. The research centered on answering the following two research questions:

Research Question #1

Research question #1 is what are the characteristics of successful partnerships between community colleges and tribal governments?

The characteristics of partnerships between community colleges and Native American tribes that attract, retain, and complete Native American students were analyzed using the critical success factor theory, specifically focusing on those identified by Kanter (1994) in collaborative partnerships worldwide. The study demonstrates that Kanter's Eight I's, plus additional CSFs, were part of the partnerships in this study.

Table 6 summarizes the findings of what community colleges and the tribes believe they bring to the partnership, as well as their joint perspective on their work in the CSFs. Responses from the colleges were remarkably similar within each CSF, indicating the universality of these CSFs in building and maintaining partnerships with Native American tribes among the research participants. Tribal responses were similarly consistent among interviewees.

Table 5.1:

Summary of Findings of RQ1 by CSF of each College's and Tribe's Contribution to the Partnership

Critical Success Factors	Community College	Native American Tribe	Joint Perspective
Individual Excellence	Cultural diversity, cultural education, and cultural community values	Academic expertise, fostering lasting relationships	Mutual respect for each other and value community relationships

Importance	Partnership fulfills the college's strategic mission and goals	Partnership fulfills the tribes desire to educate members	Enrollment and diversity
Interdependence	Shared governance	Collaborative approach	The right people at the table
Investment	Scholarships, resources, grants, accessibility	Scholarships and accessibility	Resources and access NASNTI grant
Information	Recruiting information, education	Cultural events	Open Communication
Integration	Serve on each other's boards and committees	Involved in Community	Relationships
Institutionalization	Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)	Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)	Preferred Training Provider, Communication at every level
Integrity	Trust and relationships	Trust, Cultural Awareness	Trust in Partnership
Additional CSFs from Stegeman's Study: Multiple Areas of Interaction	Serve on multiple boards, attend when invited	Local Community Rebuilding Initiatives	Partnership at every level

Research Question #2

The second research question is what are the best practices found in community colleges and Native American tribal partnerships that are designed to contribute to student success?

Best practices are essential for partnerships to succeed. In this study, the researcher found two additional critical success factors for the NASNTIs to have successful partnerships with their local tribe is how geographically close the college is located to the reservation, the tribal high school, or the tribal enterprises, and how well the colleges do at providing education and training on-site at the tribal headquarters, schools, chapter houses and tribal businesses.

Additionally, the longevity of college leadership, tribal councils, and tribal education directors affects the success of the partnership between the college and the tribe, which, in turn, influences Native American student enrollment, retention, and completion.

Table 7 summarizes the findings of what community colleges and the tribes believe they bring to the partnership, as well as their joint perspective on their work in the CSFs. Responses from the colleges were remarkably similar within each CSF, indicating the universality of these CSFs in building and maintaining partnerships with Native American tribes among the research participants. Tribal responses were similarly consistent among interviewees.

Table 5.2:

Summary of Findings of RQ2 by CSF of Best Practices in College and Tribal Partnerships

Critical Success Factor	Community College	Joint Perspective
Tribal Cultural Relevance and Awareness	Cultural awareness training for faculty & staff	Shared value in cultural awareness
Proximity, Convenience, and Access	Geographically close proximity to the reservation	Access to education for under-resourced students

	Decisions can be made at each level to serve tribal students, not just the President	
Longevity of Leadership	Longevity of college leaders in working with tribal council members and tribal education directors (TEDs) Longevity of tribal members elected to tribal councils Serve on each other's board of directors and advisory committees Support from every level of employee, not just the President	Trust and relationships are developed over time at many levels

Individual Excellence

"Individual Excellence – Both partners are strong and have something valuable to contribute to the partnership. Their motives for entering into the relationship are positive (to pursue future opportunities), not negative (to mask weakness or escape a difficult situation)" (Kanter, 1994, p. 100).

Individual excellence was the third most cited CSF in interviews. All participants discussed their respect for their partners in terms of the value they bring to the partnership. Both partners discussed the contribution of the other organization and their continued work together, based on the respect they have for each other's entity. Several college leaders and tribal members emphasized the importance of cultural diversity, education, awareness, and community values. In

all partnerships, both partners discussed the contributions that each brought to the partnership, in particular, resources, such as services, funding, technology, facilities, and more.

Colleges

All interviewees talked about the need for workforce training, customized training, short- and long-term academic certificates and programs, and the expertise of the colleges and the ability of the college to respond quickly and fulfill the training needs and requests of the tribe. These offerings include everything from a five-week Commercial Driver's License (CDL) certificate to four-week leadership trainings, manager and supervisor training, and an introduction to computers, as well as associate degree or certificate programs. The mention of scholarships continued to come up, whether it was student scholarships from the tribe to tribal members or scholarships from the colleges' foundations available to tribal members, as well as tribal enterprises awarding scholarships to tribal students.

> A leader of College 1 said, "Aside from cultural diversity. Tribal members are very hard-working people; they have unique views of the world, and their perspective on history is valuable. Their knowledge and history make our college better." (personal communication.
>
> A leader of College 2 said, "The close location of the college to the tribe's reservation, along with understanding the tribe's culture and valuing their traditions. Such as the coming-of-age ceremony or the blessing walk and run."

Tribes

Tribal members discussed the increased attention colleges have given to cultural sensitivity, awareness, education, and scholarships. All tribal members emphasized that college employees at every level work to bring the right people to the table to make the necessary

decisions that enable the timely development of training and programs. The colleges' ability to bring stakeholders together was seen as a strength of the partnerships, as well as the colleges' follow-up and follow-through with programming to offer what the tribes need for their members.

> One tribal member associated with College 1 said, "The relationship is strong. The College invited one of our elders to 'smoke out' the college. They value our culture and consider our tribal members as colleagues. There is a lot of participation at every level. It's a very positive relationship."

In Native American cultures, "smoking out" often refers to ceremonial smudging with sacred herbs (such as sage, cedar, and sweetgrass) to cleanse spaces, people, or objects of negative energy, and carrying prayers to the Creator via smoke; it's a profound spiritual practice, not just literal smoke, connecting to deep traditions. It is prayer and communication. Smoke is seen as a messenger, carrying prayers, gratitude, and intentions to the spirit world. It's also seen as a cleansing or purification for a space, a person, or an object, removing negativity and inviting positive energy. (*Indigenous Corporate Training, Inc.*, n.d.).

> One tribal member who is also a college leader said College 1 "brings academic expertise, curriculum design, excellent faculty, student support services, including free tutoring, a qualified counselor, and technology expertise and resources. The College also handles grant management and ensures that new programs meet accreditation standards.

Importance

"Importance – The relationship fits major strategic objectives of the partners, so they want to make it work. Partners have long-term goals in which the relationship plays a key role (Kanter, 1994, p. 100)."

Both the college leaders and tribal members talked about the college's mission, vision, and the organizational strategic objectives that drive the initiatives and partnerships by working together. Similarly, a major objective of each tribe is to provide college education and training for their tribal members.

Colleges

All three of the college presidents cited their mission statements.

One said, "It is the College's mission to prepare people to achieve their educational and professional goals in a context of respect for the traditions and values of the many groups it serves. And our vision is that we will be a nationally recognized leader and community-focused, regionally specific, and culturally vibrant education."

Another one said, "This partnership fulfills our college mission to enhance the lives of our students and the communities we serve now and into the future. And, one of the strategic objectives is to increase enrollment and completion rates for underserved populations, particularly low-income and Native American students."

Another said that one of the college's mission, vision, and five strategic objectives is to close outcome gaps.

Tribes

Tribal members all discussed the importance of all that the colleges did and do to create a sense of belonging, provide more Native American cultural awareness training for faculty and staff, improve family support, as well as provide more student success support, along with expanding and creating options and opportunities that breakdown access barriers such as transportation, child care, housing, food insecurities and all basic needs. One tribal member who was also a college employee explained that when the college implemented a case-management

model for student advising, also known as intrusive advising, outcome gaps improved significantly.

> A Tribal member associated with College 1 said, “The last five years, the college has prioritized or significantly improved its cultural awareness, working to connect to the tribe. The College's focus is on the educational needs of our tribal members.

Interdependence

Interdependence – The partners need each other. They have complementary assets and skills. Neither can accomplish alone what both can do together (Kanter, 1994, p. 100).

Partnerships between New Mexico community colleges and tribal nations are deeply interdependent, focusing on tailored educational pathways, cultural relevance, and shared economic development. Colleges provide accredited vocational training, such as CDL and healthcare, while tribes ensure curricula honor sovereignty, language, and local workforce needs.

This critical success factor relates to the respect that each participant discussed regarding the Individual Excellence of their partner, as well as the Importance of the work being done through the partnership between the college and the tribe. Understanding how the two rely on each other to accomplish their goals, they recognize the overall value of the partnership. Understanding their interdependence increases the critical significance of the partnership to the colleges and the tribes.

These partnerships are considered mutually beneficial by both the college and the tribe, contributing to the success of Native American students who often return to their tribe to benefit other tribal members and their communities. The tribes look to the community colleges as their preferred education and training providers, and both the colleges and the tribes work to provide the necessary funding through grants and scholarships for the tribal students.

All three colleges provide workforce development training, and the tribes use these programs to build their own tribal economic development strategies and to increase the workforce within their respective tribes.

Colleges

All three colleges not only provide training and classes on tribal land, but also on their college campuses. By integrating the tribe's community knowledge and on-reservation space with the college's infrastructure, cultural and logistical barriers were removed. Relationships, trust, and communication were all discussed, even the longevity of leadership in working with tribal councils, which have elections every two years. All have memorandums of understanding (MOU) agreements between the college and each tribe, or they are in progress. These agreements provide continuity for the partnership and the services being provided to tribal students.

> One college leader even went on to say that "our decision-making centers on shared governance with the tribe." The college consults with tribal leaders, tribal education directors, and the tribal council about courses, scheduling, financial constraints, and community needs.
>
> Another interviewee said it is a collaborative approach that is built on trust. Success comes from shared goals, not from red tape. And, decision-making is informal except for the MOU and the resolution passed by the tribal council.
>
> Another said that the success factors include transparency, mutual respect, flexibility, and cultural awareness. Trust, respect, and relationships were mentioned by almost every college leader during the interviews.

Tribes

The tribal members see their interdependence with the colleges as providing the knowledge and expertise from the college for education and training. Tribal members all recognized the work that the colleges do in creating a sense of belonging and raising awareness of the tribe's cultures and traditions. The tribal members also recognize that the colleges have invited them to the table for input and feedback on decisions regarding the services needed for their tribal members. They recognize and value the trust and relationships that have been built over time. One tribal member stated that the open communication, how the college makes tribal students feel welcome, equal, valued, and belong, is what has created the success in their partnership.

> A tribal member associated with College 1 said, "Because we are investing in the tribal employees, we are getting out of our own way. The workforce training that is provided to tribal employees is better for them, our economy, and they stay in their jobs. It empowers our team members. It gives tribal members a different mindset. People feel appreciated."
>
> Another tribal leader who is associated with College 1 and is considered a college leader said it is a collaborative approach that is built on trust. Success comes from shared goals, not from red tape. Additionally, decision-making is informal, except for the MOU and the resolution passed by the tribal council.

Investment

Investment – They show tangible signs of long-term commitment by devoting financial and other resources to the relationship (Kanter, 1994, p.100).

All of the partnerships studied between the community colleges and the tribes they serve invested some type of resources in their relationship. Investment was the second most mentioned

of Kanter's Eight I's. For some partnerships, there were significant financial investments by the college and staff, or knowledge and information resources invested by the tribe. In some relationships, the investments were only college employee information capital by the college and the tribe. The difference in types of investments by the college or tribe was generally based on strategic objectives or the college's ability to obtain the Native American-Serving Non-Tribal Institution (NASNTI) grant. Investment was the second most cited critical success factor among the partnerships.

Two of the colleges and tribal partnerships have an ongoing memorandum of understanding (MOU) that outlines the partnership agreement that their particular college is their preferred training provider for the tribal members. One of these partnerships that had the MOU led their tribal partner to pass a resolution by the tribal council to further solidify the investment of the tribe in the partnership. The third college/tribal partnership was in the process of developing an MOU between the two.

Colleges

Community and proximity to the tribes were mentioned by almost all interviewees. The colleges all discussed that the tribes were part of their community. Accessibility, as well as geographically close proximity to the tribes, were mentioned. The colleges have all made it a top priority to invest in the relationship with the tribe. The investments were financial, facilities, furniture, computers, internet service, time, specifically face-to-face, in-person meetings, continual follow-through on discussions, regular meetings, and updating of the MOU agreement. The colleges even mentioned how important it is to stay in close communication to "keep their foot in the door" with the tribe.

A leader at College 2 said, “Relationships require an investment in time for in-person meetings, inside tribal knowledge, and knowing tribal culture. Learning to read body language, making an effort to drive two to three hours for meetings and recruiting events. Leading by example, the college demonstrates its commitment to care.”

Another leader at College 1 said, “We have found that offering culturally relevant services and removing barriers is key. Collaboration and Trust are vital. Tribal leaders informed us that many potential students simply could not commute, so delivering classes on tribal land immediately addressed a longstanding access gap. By listening to tribal members and leaders, we chose programs that aligned with local workforce needs, for example, Hospitality and Early Childhood Education. Including cultural awareness in the curriculum also showed respect for Tribal heritage.”

One College President discussed how the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that was presented to the Tribal Council ultimately resulted in a Resolution passed by the Tribal Council. The Tribal Education Director, the Tribal Subcommittee on Education and Community, and the Tribal High School were involved in the development of the MOU.

Tribes

Tribal members all recognized the college's commitment and investment in serving their people and providing essential services and education, including scholarships, housing, food, family support, childcare, advising, transportation, cultural training, and awareness. One tribal council, after approving the MOU agreement, passed a resolution designating the college as the preferred training provider for their tribe to formalize the partnership and ensure continuity of services and communication.

> A tribal member associated with College 1 stated that tribal support for students in workforce development training is an investment in them as tribal members. They are paid to attend work and class, and childcare is provided. Even GED students are paid to go to classes.

Information

Information – Communication is reasonably open. Partners share information required to make the relationship work, including their objectives and goals, technical data, and knowledge of conflicts, trouble spots, or changing situations (Kanter, 1994, p. 100).

All interviewees discussed the frequency and nature of meetings and communication between the college partnership and the tribe(s). As discussed later in Other Success Factors, participants in this study spend a considerable amount of time together at events and activities across their service areas. Many individuals on both sides of the partnership serve on the same boards, task forces, and attend the same meetings. They also present to one another's boards and advisory council meetings and participate in community development, rebuilding, and resiliency meetings and activities.

Members of the colleges and the tribes interact in various ways, which all interviewees say promote open communication both informally and formally.

Colleges

Constant and continued communication is key in sharing information with the tribe. In all four partnerships among the three colleges, all discussed their level of involvement with the tribe(s). When a tribal member invites a college representative to a meeting, an event, or a meal, there has been great value in attending when invited. All three colleges maintain close

communication and meet regularly with tribal leaders, including tribal education directors, tribal council members, and tribal school leaders.

> One leader at College 1 said, "We make our own connections individually and then we share the information internally at the College."
>
> Another leader at College 1 said, "Each person on staff develops their own personal/professional relationships with tribal members, including our high school dual credit specialists, as well as senior administrators."

Tribes

Tribal members and leaders, whether they are employed by the college or not, are in some cases on the college board of directors, foundation boards, and presidents' cabinets. Tribal members feel valued and included from the top administration of the college to staff members. Tribal members all recognized that college leaders and representatives at all levels value the relationship, communication, and information that is made available to them. One even mentioned that the connections are not only made from college leaders to tribal leaders, but also individual connections at every level within the college and the tribe.

> One tribal member mentioned that "typically tribal members communicate directly with the college; however, as a manager at a tribal enterprise where training is provided by the college, I am able to attend meetings at the college and provide input. Communication happens at all levels between tribal members and college personnel."
>
> A tribal member who is also a leader at College 2, said, "We don't have a formal communication channel with tribal members; when we do, it is through workforce development programs due to specific tribal training needs. We don't have a tribal

liaison. It's informal with the dean of students and the Native American Center director, and the academic departments. We examine the success rates of completers."

One leader at College 2 discussed how several years ago, the administration began a new practice of working to expand the college-going culture at commencement. We have our daycare children, preschoolers, and college graduates walk in the ceremony together. It is a per-kindergarten to college example in full view for the entire audience to see.

Another College leader who is also a tribal member discussed a new practice that was put in place of a case-management model of advising students. That practice along with the Institutional Research Office providing dynamic key performance indicators (KPIs) and dashboards available to all student advisors and college leadership.

A third practice at College 2 that was implemented was that, "we don't put it on the student ot apply to graduation. Breaking structural barriers, we look for who is eligible. We do the graduation application with them."

Integration

Integration – The partners develop linkages and shared ways of operating so they can work together smoothly. They establish broad connections among many people at various organizational levels. Partners become both teachers and learners (Kanter, 1994, p. 100).

Integration was the number one critical success factor mentioned by all interviewees. Close collaboration between college leaders and tribal council members, and tribal members being involved, whether employed by the college or elected to serve, or being asked to serve on the college boards, foundations, and advisory committees. Partly why integration was mentioned so often is because of the Native American Centers on the college campuses and the cultural awareness that happens on the campuses.

Colleges

The college leaders all discussed the importance of collaboration with tribal members, particularly with tribal education directors (TEDs), tribal school counselors, teachers, principals, and superintendents. All of the colleges work to provide recruiting opportunities and culturally relevant events for tribal students and members of the college and tribal communities.

College leaders discussed the importance of meeting the students in their comfort zone, at their school, either at a college and career fair or by their advisors or counselors bringing them to the college for a college tour or recruiting event. All of the college personnel interviewed emphasized the importance of building personal relationships with tribal members and the trust that accompanies these relationships, as well as the influence of word of mouth on students' decisions to attend the college.

The colleges all discussed targeted strategies to build relationships with tribal members, and there is a constant open line of communication; however, not just communication, but also the importance of college personnel to listen. Cultural awareness seemed to be the most frequently discussed aspect when it comes to integration between the tribe and the college.

> One college interviewee discussed the various types of collaboration being met with tribal leaders, council, and administrators; school partnerships through dual credit classes and events; and program-specific coordination, such as launching new programs like hotel, restaurant, and tourism management, as well as training for employees of tribal enterprises.
>
> A leader at College 1 said, “We have learned that community-driven initiatives succeed when tribal members help shape the programs, enrollment, and retention improve. And, cultural competence is vital. Providing culturally relevant teaching and a real

understanding of tribal traditions fosters trust and student success. Paying attention to logistical barriers is critical. Simple issues, such as transportation, can drastically limit educational access; hence, offering classes on tribal land is essential."

One college leader said, "There is a genuine desire on the part of the college to not be colonial. Cooperation is a key aspect of the college's culture. It is our responsibility to open the door, but it is not our responsibility to push someone through the door."

Tribes

Tribal members regularly attend events hosted by the college and the tribe and vice versa. The integration of tribal members involved with the college is similar to the integration of college personnel involved with the tribe. Two of the colleges have Native American Centers that specifically provide very directed, targeted services and events for Native American students. The Navajo Nation has Chapter Houses as a part of its governance structure. Each Chapter House serves its local community, much like a city council.

One tribal leader who is also a leader at one of the colleges said, "The tribal members are advocates for tribal students." (personal communication, May 27, 2025).

Another tribal leader said, "The relationship existed, but then it fell away. Seeing that made it a priority for both the college and the tribe."

Another tribal leader said, "The relationship is strong between the college and the tribe. The College has had one of our elders smoke out the college. There is a lot of participation at every level between tribal members and college personnel. It is a very positive relationship."

A tribal member who is a leader at College 2, said, "We are ready to have an even stronger relationship with the tribe. We have data on student success that we would like

to provide, but we don't know whom to provide that data to within the tribe. The data is ready to provide, but I don't know who to give the information to."

Institutionalization

Institutionalization – The relationship is given formal status, with clear responsibilities and decision processes. It extends beyond the particular people who formed it, and it cannot be broken on a whim (Kanter, 1994, p. 100).

Of all the critical success factors identified by Kanter (1994), Institutionalization had the least complete application to these partnerships. All three of the NASNTI community colleges and the three tribes studied have strong connections, and all have a formal, written agreement or memorandum of understanding (MOU) between them, or it is in the works. However, as discussed, each serves on the other's boards and advisory committees, all have frequent, open communication among partners, and all have tremendous respect for the individual excellence brought to the partnership between the college and the tribe(s).

While Institutionalization was the least mentioned or appeared to have the least application from the data to the partnerships, this might be the "I" to focus on for all of the colleges and the tribes. When reviewing academic program offerings, only one of the colleges offers Native American certificates and degrees. The one independent community college offers an Associate of Arts degree in Native Studies and an Associate of Applied Science degree and certificate in Tribal Energy Management Studies.

Neither of the two branch community colleges in the study offers Native American classes, certificates, or degrees; however, the university systems that they are a part of do have Native American Centers at their main campuses, but not a center at the branch college. One of

the university systems in the study has offers bachelor's, master's, and doctorate degrees in Native American Studies.

Colleges

While MOUs exist between each college and tribe, which formalizes the relationship, the relationship is also institutionalized by college personnel having clear responsibilities in managing the relationship with the tribe and specific tribal members and entities. Additionally, the longevity of college leaders in their roles and the trusting relationships that have been built over time have also institutionalized these relationships.

> One college leader said, "It is a formal partnership, governed by written agreements and integrated into our NASNTI-funded grant, but it remains collaborative and flexible in daily practice."
>
> Another college leader said, "The relationship is both formal and informal. It is formal when necessary, but also informal. I see people having lunch at get-togethers, etc."

Tribes

Tribal council members are elected every two years, which results in constant turnover in tribal leadership, however, the tribal education directors (TEDs) are appointed employees of the tribe, which, for the most part, has also created stability in the partnerships and relationships between the college administration and the tribe, even though there may be a change in tribal council leadership.

> One tribal member said, "it is a formal business relationship, it is through a business setting. However, it is common to use our personal phone for work business purposes."
>
> There are formal caveats and some informal ones. Everything is mostly informal; the key is building trust. Having indigenous voices serve on the leadership team is vital to the

continual relationship between the college and the tribe. College 2 had tribal members on the top leadership/executive team.

Integrity

Integrity – The partners behave toward each other in honorable ways that justify and enhance mutual trust. They do not abuse the information they gain, nor do they undermine each other (Kanter, 1994, p. 100).

A significant amount of trust has been developed over time between each community college and its respective tribe. This trust is demonstrated through the open sharing of information regarding services, programs, funding, technology, equipment, and each seeks input regarding strategic objectives, priorities, programming, and activities. As Inkpen and Tsany (2005) noted, strategic alliances build trust through behavior and social capital, and to facilitate knowledge transfer, each company in the alliance must behave in a way that signifies trustworthiness. Organizations must also recognize that cooperation and knowledge-sharing can enhance their positions, because the existence of an alliance, in and of itself, does not guarantee knowledge transfer (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005).

Colleges

While trust and relationships are what fuel the integrity of the partnership, the fragility of the relationship was also brought up. Trust, respect, constant communication, and cultural awareness are the underpinnings of the partnership's integrity.

A college leader from College 1 said, “Trust has formed over time through consistent fulfillment of promises. We delivered the planned on-reservation classes and provided the necessary technology resources. Through open communication, being transparent with updates on progress, challenges, and solutions, as well as through cultural trainings, by

requiring staff to learn about the native culture and language, we showed our genuine commitment to honoring tribal identities."

A leader from College 2 said, "There is trust. I think that the trust could be easily broken because of history and the relationship between Non-Natives and Native Americans. It is a delicate relationship. Balance and the delicate environment that I must always be aware of when I'm in those conversations."

A leader at College 3 said, "There is trust just by working together over the years. The Foundation is a big help with scholarships. Our College Board and Foundation Board are both diverse."

Tribes

Tribal members all agreed that trust existed between them and the college, but it could easily be broken because it is a fragile relationship/partnership. The need for a delicate balance over time, with consistent fulfillment of promises and transparency.

One tribal member said, "The trust started with the MOU presented by the college leadership, with tribal council buy-in, and the college President pushing to build trust. The trust of leadership of both entities filters down to the staff of both entities."

Another tribal member said, "There is a trust, and it has been developed over time with the college president and external affairs. They are familiar faces on the reservation and at the college. However, in the past, tribal members have seen some who have been fly-by-night people coming and going from the college."

A third tribal member said, "It has taken continuous communication to develop trust in our relationship and in the partnership. It takes someone who knows how to get to the

bottom of making it happen. The college personnel I work with and I have developed trust. We are transparent about what we each want."

A fourth tribal member said, "We must understand and respect their native culture. We have to help students be comfortable. For example, when there is an eclipse or someone in their family has a coming-of-age ceremony, students won't come to class." (personal communication."

Other Success Factors in Participant Partnerships

Three other additional factors were identified in this study between the NASNTI community colleges and tribes: 1) Tribal cultural relevance and awareness, 2) proximity, convenience, and access, and 3) longevity of leadership.

Tribal Cultural Relevance and Awareness

The four college partnerships in this study, with the tribes they served, involved a great deal of responsibility on the part of college personnel to understand and value the tribal culture of the students they were serving. Hosting pow wows, cultural awareness training for faculty and staff was discussed by almost all interviewees, whether they were tribal members or college personnel. One tribal member even mentioned that when they toured the campus, there was a significant amount of Native American artwork throughout campus, and that she knew the college valued her tribal culture and traditions. Nontribal college personnel discussed the strong sense of family and support that is needed for students to be successful. Several college leaders discussed the land acknowledgments included in events and graduation ceremonies. Others mentioned a blessing spoken at the start of ceremonies in Native American languages, before the blessing is spoken in English, or even a welcome to the audience.

Others spoke about being invited to the tribes coming-of-age ceremonies and feast events hosted by the tribal council or individual tribal members. Regularly being invited and attending tribal cultural celebrations and hosting them on the college campus, and even one college president learned the tribe's language and gave the entire commencement ceremony address in the Native American language of the tribe their college served.

Colleges

A leader at College 1, when asked, what do you think the tribe has uniquely been able to contribute to the partnership said, "The Tribe provides on-site classroom space, guidance on cultural practices and cultural training for our faculty and staff, and direct access to potential students who might otherwise never visit the campus. Their willingness to promote these educational offerings locally created momentum and trust."

Another college leader's response was, "Cultural diversity and cultural education, and awareness."

Yet another leader said, "Cultural community values, meaning our community is very diverse. Tribal involvement is very diverse. Tribal involvement in the area has a history that bridges our community with tribal and educational values. Examples include having a Tribal blessing given by a Tribal member at our college Commencement Ceremony and our recent grand opening celebration, among others. These opportunities ultimately lead to more collaborations with the tribe."

A leader at College 2, who is also a tribal member, mentioned that their college's Native American Center hosts various events, including specific Native American cultural events and recruitment events such as a Miss Indigenous Pageant and an annual Powwow.

One college leader, when asked what they have learned from the relationship your college has developed with the tribe, stated that there are open lines of communication between the college and the tribe, but still some sense of uncertainty among tribal students. They don't truly feel welcome on campus. A stronger sense of belonging is missing.

A third college leader, when asked the same question, said "the tribal customs and history are so important to them and their people, and how they cherish their customs, family, and traditions."

Another college leader responded that the tribe wants to provide opportunities for its tribal members. I have learned about the tribe and gained more patience and understanding. I've learned the value of learning about another culture, and their sense of family and community is impressive.

When asked to describe the decision-making process and what factors have influenced successful relationships and outcomes within this partnership, one college leader said, "Cultural awareness on behalf of the college faculty and staff has influenced the success between the partnership and outreach."

When asked what programs, policies, and practices at the college helped attract new students from the tribe to the college and build a successful partnership with the tribe, a leader at College 2 said, "We try to be involved with the tribe to know what they are doing and what is important to them. We are involved in their fair and parade. We invite them to our on-campus cultural events. We host a traditional tribal game that is an integral part of Navajo Culture. Students butcher a sheep on campus, process the meat. I attend their school Future Farmers of America (FFA) events. I've learned about the

tribe's practices and customs, such as bringing a gift when you are invited to attend an event."

One college leader discussed the emphasis the college has put on cultural relevance by incorporating the tribe's traditions and relevant community examples in the curriculum, which has deepened student engagement.

Tribes

A tribal member who is affiliated with one of the colleges said, "The college is dedicated to the tribe and being culturally aware. There is really good outreach on behalf of the College."

One tribal member who works at one of the colleges said, "It is important that college faculty and staff respect our tribal culture. It helps students to be comfortable."

Another tribal member who is also a college leader said, "mu college offers classes on weaving, and we have Native Studies as an academic program, as well as some language classes. The college has a smudging policy implemented for lighting sage on campus. Smoking only pertains to sage where there is a designated place and time for smudging."

Another tribal member talked about the number of cultural trainings and the cultural awareness of college personnel. "The college and the tribe both offer community meals, and there are now more events with one another. Breaking bread together is vital. Not just all business all the time. We have holiday community events together. The college hosts the commencement ceremony on tribal land, which is very meaningful and vital to the partnership."

Proximity, Convenience, and Access

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Native American students attend associate degree-granting institutions due to the college's proximity to tribal reservations. Tribal colleges, predominantly associate degree-granting institutions, are typically located on tribal reservations or near Native American communities. Additionally, community colleges are often situated closer to tribal reservations than baccalaureate degree-granting institutions (United States Census, 2010).

Because proximity, convenience, and access are such major issues, the colleges provide education and training not only on the college campus, but also at the tribal headquarters or the empowerment center, at tribal enterprises for their employees, as well as at the tribal high schools for dual credit classes. One college regularly attends the Navajo Chapter Houses for recruiting events. Another college offers college and career fairs at the tribal high schools, as well as dual-credit classes. A third college offers on-site manager training, allowing tribal students/employees to receive pay while in class and also have daycare provided.

Colleges

> A college leader from College 3 said, "Again, proximity, but I'll share with you we were just awarded the NASNTI grant about a year and a half ago, and then about the same time of the grant award occurred President Nygren, who is the Navajo Nation President, he was on our campus and had a town hall meeting on our campus. I was able to share with him that we'd been awarded the grant, and so, because of that interaction with him, I'm working on getting an endowment from the Navajo Nation to extend the funding for the grant once it runs out or if the federal government decides to pull all of our NASNTI grant."

A leader from College 1 said, “The Proximity to the tribe’s reservation and the college’s presence at the tribal school.”

Another college leader said, “Proximity to the tribe’s reservation, enterprises, and schools.

Another college leader said, “Convenience and access: onsite classes mean students do not have to worry about commuting, which removes a major barrier. Cultural validation: having culturally relevant material and having staff trained in our tribe’s history and traditions make students feel more at home. Ongoing support: mentoring, career guidance, and personal counseling give students the practical and emotional backing needed to persist.”

Another college leader said, “Definitely, now that we are shifting to a lot of CTE (career and technical education) programs, the tribe is thriving with short-term, get-to-work-fast training. Increasing dual credit offerings in pathways. Tribal students can take classes anywhere, but now they choose College 1. They choose us because we are geographically close and provide immediate responsiveness.”

Another college leader said, “The potential to bring both parties together through understanding and education. Also, technology support, such as when the Foundation provided hotspots during the floods. Also, the information communication, like testing and being more available and accessible to Native American students.”

Another college representative said, “Opportunity for success and multiple conversations have allowed us to expand HSE (high school equivalency) and non-credit training on the reservation. And, access to cultural awareness for staff and faculty. Both parties consider

each other in their day-to-day operations. We know when to show up and know when to leave."

Tribes

A tribal member associated with College 1 said, "The accessibility and geographically close proximity to the local programs and classes, but also workforce development, and the College's focus on our tribal members. Over the last five years, the college has prioritized and improved its cultural awareness, working to connect with the tribe."

One tribal member said, "Support services of the Native American Center on campus, along with the number of classes, Tribal colleges compete, but College 2 is in a non-native environment; however, it offers a diverse experience. Also, because of the reservations' remoteness, it is closer to attend geographically than a Tribal College."

Longevity of Leadership

The longevity of college leadership and personnel, as well as that of tribal council members and tribal education directors, was mentioned by tribal members and college personnel at every level.

Each of the three Native American tribes in this study has different election cycles and term lengths for their tribal councils, and the longevity of college presidents and leadership at each of the three colleges in this study varies. Tribal Education Directors (TEDs) are appointed or hired by the tribal administration or tribal councils.

The Navajo Nation Election Administration is responsible for all elections conducted within the Navajo Nation. The Navajo Nation Presidential Election is conducted every four years for the President, Vice-President of the Navajo Nation, the Navajo Nation Council, and the Election Board (n.d., Navajo Nation Elections section).

The Navajo Nation Chapter Election is conducted every four years for the positions of the Chapter Officers (President, Vice-President, and Secretary/Treasurer), Grazing Committee members, Land Board members, School Board members, Farm Board, Election Board, and Kayenta Township Commission (n.d., Navajo Nation Elections section).

Zuni Pueblo tribal council members serve four-year terms. The council, along with the Governor and Lieutenant Governor, governs the Zuni people. Council members comprise a Governor, a Lieutenant Governor, and six council members. Council members serve four-year terms (Native American Advancement, Initiatives & Research, n.d., Pueblo of Zuni Community Profile section).

The length of the term for the Mescalero Apache Tribal Council is two years for each of the eight council members. The council consists of eight members elected at-large from the tribe's membership. Every year, four members are up for re-election. Elections are held annually, with one-half of the council members (four members) up for re-election each year. The Mescalero Apache Tribal President is also elected for a two-year term (n.d., Mescalero Apache Tribe Constitution section).

Due to the possibility and frequency of turnover of tribal council members and college presidents, this is a critical success factor for the partnerships in this study. One college president is in the fifth year of presidency, another in their fourteenth year, whose predecessor had been there for many, many years, and the third college president has been at the college for over four years.

Colleges

A leader at College 1 said when asked if there is trust within your partnership with the tribe, how has that trust been developed said, “Trust. Continuity of leadership at the College and

tribal members are each willing to listen. Say what you do and do what you say. Listen and learn."

A leader at College 2, when asked the same question, said, "There is trust just by working together over the years. The College Foundation is a big help with scholarships. Our College Board and Foundation Board are both diverse."

Another college leader at College 1 said, "Leadership longevity at the College has been vital to our partnership with the tribe. The current president has had the best relationship with the tribe since I have worked here. Same with the Vice President, that person's longevity with the college has positively impacted the partnership."

Another college leader, when asked, What do you think your college has uniquely been able to contribute to the partnership said, "A good baseline for education, not just that it's a lasting relationship beyond college, it goes into career and family. We've developed lasting relationships with Native American students from dual credit, and then seeing them move on into leadership in the tribe."

Another leader, when asked how those contributions worked together in this partnership, said, "It's all relationships and longevity. I've been at the college for ten years. First, I worked in the workforce and then at college. It's generational now. Last year, I had a family that took classes. The mother was a student of mine, then her daughter took classes, and now the granddaughter is taking dual credit classes."

Tribes

One tribal member and leader said, when asked, Why do you think the college or their personal relationship with the tribe was able to attract new students to your college, said, "Pathways and program options that are available at the college, such as nursing, fire science,

and more offerings over the years. I'm thankful for the college president and his longevity in the higher ed administration and our ability to establish and develop the relationship with the tribe."

Critical Success Factors in Participant Partnerships

This study was guided by critical success factors (CSF) identified by Kanter (1994) as common across partnerships that resulted in collaborative advantage for each organization. The critical success factor theory states that success is based on focusing on a limited number of key areas (Rockart, 1979), and critical success factors are "the limited number of areas in which satisfactory results will ensure successful competitive performance for the individual, department or organization" (Bullen & Rockart, 1981, p. 7). CSF theory has been used in a wide variety of studies of organizations, industries, and functional areas: businesses, information technology, project management, government, energy, customer service, and education (Alexander, 1997; Alpern, 2020; DePrima, 2018; Kayanan, 2012; Osei-Kyei & Chan, 2018; Rockart, 1979; Rodríguez-Segura et al., 2016; Trkman, 2010; Warriner, 2005).

Specific CSFs vary across situations, industries, and time (Alpern, 2020). In a study related to university-industry knowledge transfer (globally), the CSFs include understanding customer needs, common goals, understanding intellectual property issues, focus on clear translation, and early technical scoping (Schofield, 2013). Disterheft et al. (2015), in another study on sustainable universities, found that CSFs included: communication, enough time, identification with goals, making sure that the right people are at the table and heard, non-judging attitude, personal strength and persistence, starting on time, stimulate positive feelings, strategy with a goal, support of top-management, tangible objectives, and to find out what people are caring about (p. 16).

Overall, research suggests that when CSFs are identified and defined, monitoring and managing the progress toward goals can become less challenging and the overall achievement of goals can be more successful. Therefore, understanding the CSFs in collaborative partnerships that are achieving their goals may allow other organizations to achieve similar successes by building and managing these same CSFs.

Schofield (2013) examined university-industry knowledge transfer and found that the CSFs included understanding customer needs, common goals, understanding intellectual property issues, focusing on clear translation, and early technical scoping. Rodríguez-Segura et al., (2016) argued that developing a complete list of CSFs that meets the needs of all situations and organizations is impossible. Lehman (2016) similarly suggested that each organization and situation must develop its own unique set of CSFs. When CSFs are identified and defined, and when progress toward goals is monitored and managed, there are fewer challenges, and the ability to meet goals is more successful.

Kanter's Collaborative Advantages

Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1994) observed that groups of organizations in partnerships and alliances across a variety of countries and industries in the business supply chain had developed some similar CSFs related to collaborative partnerships that led to collaborative advantages for each organization. Additional research indicates that collaboration by organizations that identify and link complementary capabilities across the supply chain leads to superior performance for those organizations (Fawcett et al., 2012; Fawcett et al., 2008). This idea of a collaborative advantage gained through partnerships has been defined as the incremental gain attributed to outcomes that could not have been achieved by either of the individual organizations alone (Pinnington et al., 2020).

This study examined partnerships between three New Mexico community colleges and three New Mexico recognized tribes that successfully attracted Native American students to their colleges through the lens of Kanter's Eight I's (1994). One of the colleges had a partnership with two of the tribes. The CSFs identified by Kanter (1994) in building advantageous partnerships are Individual Excellence, Importance, Interdependence, Investment, Information, Integration, Institutionalization, and Integrity. These CSFs may have differing measures of success, depending on the college and the specific expression of the individual CSFs, but they were present in all successful partnerships that gave each organization a collaborative advantage, as studied by Kanter.

Kanter (1994) observed that institutions often lack the necessary structures to support collaboration, particularly in the United States. For this reason, the researcher sought to understand whether partnerships between community colleges and Native American tribes that have successfully attracted students to their colleges demonstrate Kanter's critical success factors within these partnerships.

Alexander (1997) applied this framework to community college interorganizational partnerships between community colleges, businesses, and community stakeholders. Although Alexander did not find all of Kanter's eight CSFs in the relationships studied, the majority were present. Kanter's (1994) work is based on partnerships, whereas Alexander's (1997) research focused on a triad relationship among community colleges, specific employers, and various community stakeholders. A triad relationship was not expressly discussed by Kanter (1994) and may have hindered Alexander's ability to uncover the three CSFs not identified.

This study, however, identified all eight CSFs across the four partnerships studied, as found by Kanter (1994). Additionally, other CSFs not identified by Kanter were present across

all or most of the partnerships, possibly due to the specific types of relationships between the college personnel and the tribal members in this study. Below is an analysis of the research data for this study.

Discussion of Findings Related to Conceptual Framework

Kanter's Eight I's Present Across All Partnerships

All eight of Kanter's CSFs were evident across the partnerships, though with varying degrees of emphasis. Individual Excellence was demonstrated through the expertise, cultural humility, and service orientation of both college personnel and tribal leaders. Participants consistently described their partners as competent, trustworthy, and deeply committed to the shared goal of improving educational outcomes for Native students.

As a result, in this study, partners describing each other as competent, trustworthy, reliable, etc., allows the partnership to build and focus on outcomes rather than focusing on whether the other partner will live up to their commitments. All efforts are focused on helping students achieve their educational goals

Importance was reflected in the intentional strategic alignment between institutional missions and tribal priorities. Colleges emphasized their responsibility to serve the communities within their geographic and cultural footprint, while tribes emphasized education as a pathway to workforce development, self-determination, and community well-being. As a result, the partners value each other, serving and working together as a priority.

Interdependence emerged as a defining feature of these partnerships. Colleges relied on tribes for cultural guidance, access to students, and community legitimacy, while tribes relied on colleges for academic expertise, workforce training, and program development. Neither entity

could achieve its goals without the other. This interdependence continued to enable each partner to build even deeper trust and reliance.

The interdependent nature of these partnerships was further illustrated through the shared goals and programs that emerged directly from collaboration between the colleges and the tribes. Participants described joint initiatives such as workforce development programs aligned with tribal employment needs, culturally responsive advising structures, and cohort-based pathways designed specifically for Native American students. In several cases, academic programs were co-developed to address local labor shortages while honoring tribal values, including certificates in healthcare, education, and skilled trades that allowed students to remain within their communities while completing coursework. These programs would not have been possible without the exchange of knowledge and authority between the college and the tribe, underscoring the extent to which each partner relied on the other to accomplish shared educational and economic goals.

Investment was evident in the form of financial resources, personnel time, technology, facilities, and a consistent physical presence. Colleges invested in on-site instruction, advising, and workforce training; tribes invested in scholarships, facilities, and employee participation. These investments in each other again built trust, but also the interdependence of the relationship.

Information flowed freely and frequently between partners. Regular communication, formal and informal, was essential to maintaining trust, coordinating programming, and responding to emerging needs. Many participants described communication as constant, multi-layered, and relationship-driven. As a result, the additional CSF Stegeman identified in her study of multiple areas of interaction and similarly in this study community college leaders serve

on multiple boards, they attend meetings and events when invited by their tribal partner, the college leaders and tribal leaders work together on local community rebuilding initiatives such as forest fire and flood recovery with the joint perspective of being partners at every level. While every relationship sometimes includes communication lapses, these seemed few and far between in these partnerships. Open sharing of information helped make this a reality.

Integration was the most frequently cited CSF. Tribal members served on college boards, advisory committees, and leadership teams; college personnel attended tribal ceremonies, community events, and chapter meetings. Integration created a sense of shared ownership and blurred the boundaries between institutions. The college leaders and tribal leaders serve together on community recovery and rebuilding after disasters and emergencies, and work together with entities such as the legislature and FEMA, to name a few.

Integration extended beyond formal structures and was embedded in the everyday practices of the partnerships. Participants consistently emphasized the importance of physical presence and relational engagement, noting that college leaders and faculty regularly attended tribal events and community meetings, while tribal representatives served in visible and influential roles within the college. This level of integration fostered mutual accountability and helped dismantle historical mistrust between institutions. Rather than functioning as separate entities connected only by agreements, the college and the tribe operate as interwoven partners with shared responsibility for student success.

Institutionalization was present but less fully developed than other CSFs. While all partnerships had memorandums of understanding (MOUs) or resolutions in place, much of the relationship still depended on personal relationships and leadership continuity. Nevertheless, the presence of formal agreements provided stability amid political turnover. These agreements

clarified each party's roles and responsibilities and kept the partnership moving forward even as personalities and leadership roles changed.

Although personal relationships played a central role in sustaining these partnerships, participants acknowledged that formal structures were essential for long-term stability. MOUs, resolutions, and institutional policies helped codify expectations, delineate roles, and protect the partnership from disruption due to leadership turnover or political change. Several participants noted that institutionalization provided continuity during periods of transition and ensured that commitments to Native American students remained embedded within the college's strategic priorities. While these formal mechanisms did not replace the relational foundation of the partnerships, they functioned as safeguards that reinforced accountability and enabled the partnerships to endure beyond individual champions.

Integrity was foundational. Trust, earned over time through transparency, follow-through, and cultural respect, was repeatedly described as both fragile and essential. Participants emphasized that trust could be easily damaged due to historical trauma and past experiences with extractive or colonial educational practices.

Discussion of Findings Related to Literature

In addition to the eight CSFs identified by Kanter (1994), Stegeman (2021) in her study regarding partnerships between community colleges and economic development organizations, also a multiple-case study, identified three additional success factors: 1) multiple areas of interaction between partners, 2) executive decision-maker as a single point of contact, and 3) flexibility, speed, and agility by colleges. One of Stegeman's three CSFs was identified in this study, specifically multiple areas of interaction between partners.

The CSFs found in Stegeman's (2021) study regarding partnerships between community colleges and economic development organizations found three additional success factors: 1) multiple areas of interaction between partners, 2) executive decision-maker as a single point of contact, and 3) flexibility, speed, and agility by colleges. Multiple areas of interaction between partners CSF was also identified in this multiple-case study.

Multiple areas of interaction between partners arose frequently in this study due to the high level of integration between college personnel and the tribes, council members and registered tribal members and, and vice versa. All interviewees highlighted the individual excellence of the college leaders and the tribal education directors. The flexibility, speed, and agility of colleges were similarly a CSF in these partnerships between the community colleges and the tribes.

Additional CSFs Identified in this Study

Beyond Kanter's Eight I's, the study identified three additional CSFs that were present across all partnerships and appear to be uniquely important in the context of community college–tribal collaboration.

Tribal Cultural Relevance and Awareness

Cultural relevance was not merely an enhancement but a prerequisite for partnership success. Colleges that invested in cultural awareness training, incorporated tribal traditions into campus life, and demonstrated respect for tribal sovereignty were more successful in attracting and retaining Native students. Examples included land acknowledgments, Native American blessings at ceremonies, smudging policies, Native American artwork on campus, and participation in tribal cultural and community events. It is evident that the tribal members are appreciative when college leaders not only communicate openly about the tribe's election

processes but also invite college personnel to tribal council inauguration ceremonies and family celebrations, such as coming-of-age ceremonies. Respecting one another's cultural traditions and practices, and valuing how important these traditions are in passing them on to the next generation, as well as preserving the tribe's language, is vital to the tribe maintaining its sovereignty.

Proximity, Convenience, and Access

Geographic closeness and the ability to deliver programs on tribal land were critical. Many tribal members face transportation barriers, family obligations, and work schedules that make commuting difficult. Colleges that offered on-site classes, dual-credit programs, workforce training at tribal enterprises, and recruiting and advising at chapter houses saw higher engagement and enrollment of Native American students. Proximity also fostered the I's of Interdependence, investment, and integration.

Longevity of Leadership

Leadership stability, both within the colleges and within tribal education offices, was a major determinant of partnership strength. Long-serving presidents, vice presidents, deans, and tribal education directors were repeatedly credited with sustaining trust, navigating political turnover, and maintaining continuity of services. Participants emphasized that relationships, not structures, were the true backbone of the partnership.

Convergence of Findings Across All Sites

Despite differences in geography, tribal culture, and institutional structure, the partnerships exhibited strikingly similar characteristics. This convergence suggests that the CSFs identified in this study are not idiosyncratic but represent a replicable model for community

college–tribal collaboration. The consistency of the findings also reinforces the applicability of Kanter's framework to educational partnerships, even though it originated in the business sector.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study indicate actions for community college leaders and local Native American tribal leaders who wish to strengthen their collaborative efforts in providing academic degrees and certificates, as well as, workforce training to Native American students in their communities, with the goal of strengthening the partnership, increasing enrollment, retention, and graduation rates. The partnerships described by the participants in this study are effective at attracting new students of all ages to the colleges, increasing workforce training and education, improving Native American student enrollment, retention, and completion, and improving the communities served by the community college. Although this study is qualitative and, therefore, not necessarily extensible to other partnerships, the similarities between the partnerships suggest the actions discussed below.

Community Colleges

The findings of this study indicate that Native American student success is significantly enhanced when colleges:

- build culturally grounded relationships with tribes
- remove logistical barriers to access
- invest in long-term, trust-based partnerships
- integrate tribal voices into institutional decision-making
- provide workforce-aligned programs that meet tribal economic needs
- demonstrate respect for tribal sovereignty and cultural identity

These practices collectively create an environment in which Native American students feel valued, supported, and connected, conditions that research consistently links to persistence and completion.

All community colleges in this study were recognized for their ability to take swift action, innovate in their approach to workforce and academic program development, and remain agile in addressing the needs of tribal students. These traits started with direction from the highest level of leadership to react quickly. All colleges in this study offer a high level of workforce development, leadership and management training, associate degrees, and certificates, with direct access to the college president and the authority to make timely decisions regarding college services. Where possible, these colleges seek to include faculty and staff in cultural awareness training to ensure relevant knowledge about the cultural and community practices of the tribes they serve.

Colleges looking to replicate these partnerships should set an objective of fostering a sense of belonging on campus and providing training on the reservation or at tribal enterprises. Additionally, the colleges should work to get tribal leaders, tribal students, and Native American alumni at the table when creating programs, activities, practices, and events to build trust.

College leaders need to be aware of tribal election processes, term lengths, and timelines. In addition, the colleges should expect their board members, administration, and staff to engage with the tribal community beyond the college campus and classrooms, and be prepared to partner with the tribal leaders, schools, and enterprises. Being involved with the tribe from the level of tribal council to family ties and relationships, traditions vary within the sub-bands. This is meaningful to tribal members when they realize college personnel care about them, their

families, their traditions, and more. This is a critical and key step in the relationship between college personnel and tribal members.

For example, the Mescalero Apache tribe officially consists of three distinct Apache sub-bands: the Mescalero, Lipan, and Chiricahua Apache. One of the most traditional and sacred ceremonies practiced by the Mescalero Apache is the puberty rite ceremony. It is a four-day "Rite of Passage," a ceremony that marks the transition of an individual from one stage of life to another, from girlhood to womanhood. A young girl celebrates her rite of passage with family-prepared feasts, dancing, blessings, and rituals dating back hundreds of years. It emphasizes her upbringing, which includes learning her tribal language and instilling, from infancy, a sense of discipline and good manners (Our Culture, n.d.).

It is said that this ceremony was given to the Apache people by White Painted Woman. When her people, the Apache, were hard pressed by evil monsters, White Painted Woman reared a son to destroy those creatures and to make the earth inhabitable for mankind. She is the model of heroic and virtuous womanhood. For the duration of the rite, the young girl dresses and acts like White Painted Woman. The girl is never referred to by her name, but is known as White Painted Woman.

All three Apache sub-bands share the "Ndé" (The People) identity, belief in the White Painted Woman, similar puberty rituals, and use of wickiups, and all three bands hold a deep reverence for the Apachean creation story, involving Changing Woman and the "Killer-of-Enemies."

The young girl, referred to as the "maiden," no matter which Apache sub-band she belongs to, is dressed in a buckskin dress that she will wear for the next eight days. Her attendant or the medicine woman supplies her with a length of reed that she must drink from for eight

days, not allowing water to touch her lips. It is also forbidden for her to scratch herself with her fingernails. A wooden scratcher is provided that must be used for the same length of time. The girl is urged to no talk much, to heed what is said to her, and to maintain a dignified manner. By the end of the fourth day, every possible experience, even sleep and the old age stick, has been mentioned in songs and prayers for a long life and good fortune for the young maiden and for the Apache people. However, the styles of the moccasins, beading, jingles, and colors may vary across sub-band traditions (Our Culture, n.d.).

College personnel should attend the tribe's events, ceremonies, celebrations, feasts, powwows, and election inauguration ceremonies. The partnership should establish ongoing communication channels, meetings, and status updates to build trust among participants and focus on the common goal of improving the community.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate strong alignment between Kanter's Eight I's of Collaborative Advantage and the lived experiences of the partnerships examined in this study. Each critical success factor was not only present but operationalized in ways that reflected the unique historical, cultural, and political context of community college–tribal relationships. The consistency with which these factors appeared across cases suggests that Kanter's framework provides a useful lens for understanding collaborative effectiveness in this context. The emergence of additional critical success factors further indicates that partnerships serving Native American communities may require expanded conceptual models that account for sovereignty, cultural continuity, and community-centered definitions of success.

Tribes

The Native American tribes that wish to replicate the successful partnerships in this study should engage with their local community college and work to develop skills-building programs

with the college to support the needs of their tribal economies, workforces, and the training and education of their tribal members. As noted by all tribal members in this study and discussed in the literature, numerous barriers to attending college include the need to create access and inclusivity, eliminate barriers, be culturally aware and sensitive, foster a sense of belonging on campus, and provide student and family support.

In addition, the Native American tribal members should expect to engage with the community college staff beyond the college campus and classroom. They should expect to get involved in the college and its academic program and workforce decision-making processes, whether by attending college events, seeking election to the college board of directors or the college foundation board of directors, seeking employment at the college as a faculty or staff member, or joining a program advisory board.

Tribal Councils work to do all that they can as tribal leaders to remove barriers to their members and students attending college classes, dual credit classes, workforce training, and even high school equivalency classes. The tribal leadership's encouragement and support of their members, families, and youth’s education builds a stronger workforce for the tribe and strengthens the tribe's resilience and sovereignty.

Recommendations for Future Research

Using this study as a starting point, developing a qualitative study on a larger population of community colleges and tribal partnerships in other states or multiple states may help further distinguish the critical success factors in these collaborative partnerships, thereby improving, growing, and enhancing Native American student enrollment, retention, and completion.

This study focused on partnerships between community colleges and specific tribes; however, in some areas, state-level influence may also impact local activities. It may be valuable

to study how state- and tribal-level policymakers, such as legislatures, community college systems, and associations, incentivize CSFs within the collaborative advantage partnership model at the regional or statewide level.

New Mexico K-12 cultural education requirements emphasize culturally and linguistically responsive (CLR) instruction, bilingualism, and tribal heritage. Legislation mandates that schools must provide a curriculum reflecting student diversity, integrating local culture and language, particularly through the Bilingual Multicultural Education Act (BMEA) and Bilingual Multicultural Education Programs (BMEP) , and Native American language/culture certification. Perhaps a study on how Native American college students might benefit from New Mexico passing legislation to mandate this for Higher Education Institutions as well.

Additionally, a study exploring partnerships between Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) and their local tribes may yield interesting findings, particularly regarding cultural awareness and relevance, sensitivity, and tribal student leadership development.

Conclusion

This study examined community college and tribal partnerships, seeking best practices and finding that their characteristics are strikingly similar across the four partnerships. The research revealed that these productive community college/tribal partnerships are staffed with collaborative, innovative, ethical, and service-oriented professionals who focus on improving their communities through both their individual work and the collective efforts of the partnership. Community colleges can serve tribal members by delivering quality education and training. The tribes encourage their students to attend the community college for every level of education provided, including; high school equivalency (HSE) education, workforce training,

certificates of completion and occupational training, associate of applied science (AAS) degrees, associate of science (AS) and associate of arts (AA) degrees, further developing their tribal members' knowledge and skills. Building trust and respect seem to be critical success factors, and may be among the best practices identified in this study and in these community college/tribal partnerships. Building trust and developing relationships takes time and investment from both college and tribal leadership. There must be genuine interest from both parties. Trust and respect are essential in these relationships, with each entity valuing its partner's knowledge and expertise. For tribes without strong support for education, these college/tribal partnerships may be the most viable solution for inclusive educational attainment of Native American students. This study identifies the primary critical success factors for establishing effective partnerships.

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Appendix A – Sample Invitation Email to Community College Leaders

Greetings, colleague!

My name is Robin DeMott. I am a doctoral candidate at Kansas State University's Community College Leadership Program. I am conducting a dissertation study that seeks to document best practices of community college and tribal partnerships that affect Native American students at [college name]. You have been identified as someone who can provide valuable insight in this area. I am asking you to consider participating in a brief interview.

The Internal Review Board at Kansas State University overseeing human subject research has given me permission to contact you directly. This proposed Teams interview will focus on your knowledge of your institution's student services processes, specifically the outreach, onboarding, and advising experience. The session will consist of approximately twenty (30) questions and take no more than one hour of your time. We will schedule this interview at a day and time that matches your busy calendar.

Your participation is totally voluntary. Your name will not be included in the study and all responses will be anonymous. You may elect to opt out at any time prior to or during the interview.

To accept or to decline this request, please reply to this email or call me directly at 309-368-7786. I hope you will consider this effort to inform strong practices in this critical area for the benefit of the work we do as community college educators. Thank you so much for your consideration.

Sincerely, Robin DeMott

robindemott@outlook.com

309-368-7786

Appendix B – Sample Invitation Email to Tribal Leaders

Greetings, colleague!

My name is Robin DeMott. I am a doctoral candidate at Kansas State University's Community College Leadership Program. I am conducting a dissertation study that seeks to document best practices of community college and tribal partnerships that affect Native American students at [college name]. You have been identified as someone who can provide valuable insight in this area. I am asking you to consider participating in a brief interview.

The Internal Review Board at Kansas State University overseeing human subject research has given me permission to contact you directly. This proposed Teams interview will focus on your knowledge of your institution's student services processes, specifically the outreach, onboarding, and advising experience. The session will consist of approximately twenty (20) questions and take no more than one hour of your time. We will schedule this interview at a day and time that matches your busy calendar.

Your participation is totally voluntary. Your name will not be included in the study and all responses will be anonymous. You may elect to opt out at any time prior to or during the interview.

To accept or to decline this request, please reply to this email or call me directly at 309-368-7786. I hope you will consider this effort to inform strong practices in this critical area for the benefit of the work we do as community college educators. Thank you so much for your consideration.

Sincerely, Robin DeMott

robindemott@outlook.com

309-368-7786

Appendix C – Community College Interview Protocol and Questions

Thank you for taking the time today to speak with me about your work with your local Native American tribe(s). As you know from our initial correspondence, I am conducting research on partnerships between community colleges and New Mexican Native American tribes that you serve.

Before we start, I want to make sure you know that this interview is entirely voluntary. You can stop the interview at any time, and you can withdraw from the study at any point with no questions asked. You can also request a review of any information from this interview that might be used in the study.

I would like to video and audio record this interview. All recordings will be kept confidential and in a secure location, accessible only to me. Are you ok with recording this interview?

I would like to ask you questions regarding the partnership you have with your local Native American tribe(s). All your answers will be confidential and included anonymously in this study. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

1. Tell me about your role at the college. (Individual Excellence)
2. Which tribe have you worked with to bring new students to your college? (Information)
3. How do you interact with the tribe and who do you work with primarily? (Integration)
4. Tell me about the students you influenced or attracted to the college? (Integration)
    a. What was the process that brought the student to enroll at the college?

5. Why do you think the college or their personal relationship with the tribe was able to attract new students to your college? (Investment)

    a. What do you think the tribe has uniquely been able to contribute to the partnership? (Individual Excellence)
    b. What do you think your college has uniquely able to contribute to the partnership? (Individual Excellence)
    c. How did those contributions work together in this partnership? (Interdependence)
6. Was this partnership important to the ability of your college to fulfill one of its major strategic objectives?
    a. Which one?
    b. How? (Importance)
7. How did the college prioritize building a relationship with the tribe and members? Perhaps there is something in your strategic plan, vision, actions, etc.? (Investment)
8. What financial or other resources did each partner invest in this partnership? (Investment)
9. How did you work toward an agreement on this? (Investment)
10. How did/does your college communicate with the tribe? Is one person responsible or the lead? (Information)
    a. What sort of information do you exchange with one another?
    b. Which methods have you found to be most effective?
    c. Would you be open to sharing examples of any of the correspondence to contribute to this research?
11. Who from the tribe is involved in this partnership? (Integration)
12. What have you learned from the relationship your college has developed with the tribe? (Integration)

13. Describe the decision-making process. What are the factors that have influenced successful relationships and outcomes within this partnership? (Interdependence)
    a. Would you describe this partnership as informal or formal? (Institutionalization)
14. If there is trust within your partnership, how has that trust been developed? (Integrity)
15. How long did it take to build a trusting relationship? (Investment)
16. What programs, policies, and practices at the college helped attract new students from the tribe to the college and build a successful partnership with the tribe? (Institutionalization)
17. Are there other things that we have not discussed that you believe contributed to the success of this partnership? (Information)
18. Are there safety nets that you have found that are important in supporting students within the partnership? (Integration)
19. What are the factors that influence the enrollment and retention rates for Native American students enrolled at the college? (Individual Excellence)
20. What are the students' perceptions or the factors related to the partnership that influence their ability to stay at the college until degree completion? (Importance)
21. Who else do you recommend I speak with at your college or with the tribe? (Information)

Appendix D – Tribal Interview Protocol and Questions

Thank you for taking the time today to speak with me about your work with XXXXX (Community) College. As you know from our initial correspondence, I am conducting research on partnerships between community colleges and their local tribe(s) that have successfully attracted students to the college.

Before we start, I want to make sure you know that this interview is entirely voluntary. You can stop the interview at any time and you can withdraw from the study at any point with no questions asked. You can also request to review any information from this interview that might be used in the study.

I would like to video and audio record this interview. All recordings will be kept confidential and in a secure location, accessible only to me. Are you ok with recording this interview?

I would like to ask you a few questions regarding the partnership you have with XXXX (Community) College. All your answers will be confidential and included anonymously in this study. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

1. Tell me about your role with the tribe. (Individual Excellence)
2. Which college have you worked with to bring new students to the college? (Information)
3. How do you interact with the college and who do you work with primarily? (Integration)
4. Tell me about the students you influenced or attracted to the college? (Integration)
    a. What was the process that brought the student to enroll at the college?
5. Why do you think the college or the relationship with the tribe was able to attract new students to your college? (Investment)

    a. What do you think the tribe has uniquely been able to contribute to the partnership? (Individual Excellence)
    b. What do you think your college has uniquely able to contribute to the partnership? (Individual Excellence)
    c. How did those contributions work together in this partnership? (Interdependence)
6. Was this partnership important to the ability of your tribe to fulfill one of its major strategic objectives?
    a. Which one?
    b. How? (Importance)
7. How did the tribe prioritize building a relationship with the tribe and members? Perhaps there is something in your strategic plan, vision, actions, etc.? (Investment)
8. What financial or other resources did each partner invest in this partnership? (Investment)
9. How did you work toward an agreement on this? (Investment)
10. How did/does your tribe communicate with the college? Is one person responsible or the lead? (Information)
    a. What sort of information do you exchange with one another?
    b. Which methods have you found to be most effective?
    c. Would you be open to sharing examples of any of the correspondence to contribute to this research?
11. Who from the tribe is involved in this partnership? (Integration)
12. What roles do they play in building the relationship? (Integration)

13. What have you learned from the relationship your tribe has developed with the college? (Integration)
14. Describe the decision-making process. What are the factors that have influenced successful relationships and outcomes within this partnership? (Interdependence)
    a. Would you describe this partnership as informal or formal? (Institutionalization)
15. If there is trust within your partnership, how has that trust been developed? (Integrity)
16. How long did it take to build a trusting relationship? (Investment)
17. What programs, policies, and practices at the college helped attract new students from the tribe to the college and build a successful partnership with the tribe? (Institutionalization)
18. Are there other things that we have not discussed that you believe contributed to the success of this partnership? (Information)
19. Are there safety nets that you have found that are important in supporting students within the partnership? (Integration)
20. What are the factors that influence the enrollment and retention rates for Native American students enrolled at the college? (Individual Excellence)
21. What are the students' perceptions or the factors related to the partnership that influence their ability to stay at the college until degree completion? (Importance)
22. Who else do you recommend I speak with the tribe? (Information)

Appendix E – Interview Alignment Table

Literature findings	Interview questions	Research questions	Frameworks	Methodology
Completion/ Degree Attainment of NA Students (PNPI, 2019; Bryant, 2021; Waterman et al., 2018; Delorian, 1991). **College Leadership and Student Success** (Nevarez & Wood, 2012; Wallen 2007; Baker, 2012; Cohen et al., 2013). Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (Manning, 2019)	**Community College Leader Interviews** (See interview protocol and questions) Individual Excellence 1, 5b Importance 6, 18 Interdependence 5c,13 Investment 5, 7, 8, 9 Information 2, 10, 16 Integration 3, 4, 11, 12, 17 Institutionalization 13a, 15 Integrity 14	RQ1. What are the characteristics of successful partnerships between community colleges and tribal governments?	**Critical Success Factor Theory** (Rockart, 1979; Bullen & Rockart, 1981; Daniel, 1961; Alpern, 2020; Schofield, 2013; Lehman, 2016) Kanter's Eight I's Theory (Kanter, 1994; Fawcett et al., 2008 & 2012; Pinnington et al., 2020; Min et al., 2007; Inkpen & Tsang, 2005; Capozzoli, 2020)	**Qualitative:** Generic qualitative design Semi-structured interview protocol
Tribal Colleges (Cole & Denzine, 2002; HeavyRunner and DeCelles, 2002; Szasz, 1974) **Tribal College Leadership** (Filemyer, 2009) **Relationship btwn Tribal Governance and Education** (Ball, 1988; Farmer, 2017; Bigorrin, n.d.).	**Native American Tribal Leader Interviews** (See interview protocol and questions) Individual Excellence 1, 4, 4a, 4b, 16 Importance 5b, 17 Interdependence 4c, 11 Investment 6, 14 Information 2, 7a,15 Integration 3, 8, 9, 10 Institutionalization 11a, 13 Integrity 12	RQ2. What are the best practices found in community college and NA tribal partnerships that are designed to contribute to student success?	**Critical Success Factor Theory** (Rockart, 1979; Bullen & Rockart, 1981; Daniel, 1961; Alpern, 2020; Schofield, 2013; Lehman, 2016) Kanter's Eight I's Theory (Kanter, 1994; Fawcett et al., 2008 & 2012; Pinnington et al., 2020; Min et al., 2007; Inkpen & Tsang, 2005; Capozzoli, 2020)	**Qualitative:** Generic qualitative design Semi-structured interview protocol

Appendix F – Informed Consent Form

PROJECT TITLE: Characteristics of collaborative community college and tribal partnerships: A multiple-case study.

PROJECT APPROVAL DATE: 1/24/2024	**PROJECT EXPIRATION DATE:** 4/30/2026	**LENGTH OF STUDY:** 398 days

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:	Dr. Terry Calaway, KSU Professor of Practice
CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):	Robin DeMott, KSU doctoral candidate
CONTACT DETAILS FOR PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS:	Robin DeMott; robindemott@outlook.com; (309) 368-7786
IRB CHAIR CONTACT INFORMATION:	Lisa Rubin, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224; Heath Ritter, Acting Associate Vice President for Research Compliance, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.
PROJECT SPONSOR:	Kansas State University

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:

The purpose of this study is to explore the characteristics of successful partnerships designed to contribute to student success at Native American-Serving Non-Tribal Institutions (NASNTIs) in New Mexico. This study will examine the practices that interviewees believe help the partnerships succeed in providing services to Native American students.

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED:

Data collection will be conducted through interviews. Each potential participant will receive a description of the study and an explanation of why they have been requested to provide an interview. With their permission, further information will be given to them, including a written summary of the research protocols, a consent form, and potential interview dates. These dates will be flexible so as best to match the schedules of each participant. Those participants are the source of the study's data. Each interview will last no more than one hour, allowing sufficient time for all protocols to be followed and all questions to be answered to the satisfaction of the participant. The interview participants will be made aware in advance of the nature of the study. The researcher will have informed the participants how their particular college was selected. When the participant is clear on the background and purpose of the study, the interview will begin. All interviewees will be asked to reply to the same set of opening questions, creating as much consistency as possible in each session, but otherwise the conversation will be open-ended.

The researcher will provide all relevant contact links and obtain the participants' permission to digitally record audio and video of the session, as well as an exact transcription—all of which will greatly aid in ensuring the context of the exchange is accurately depicted in the study. The researcher will take notes during the interview to provide additional commentary.

RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED:
No risks or discomforts are anticipated.

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED:
This study will provide data for community college and tribal partnerships by documenting best practices in Native American student success.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY:

The participant's identity will be known to the researcher but will never be used in the study. All participants will be assigned an alpha-numeric code for the study. Data will be stored on an encrypted USB drive, which will be locked in a safe for a minimum of five years, after which point it will be destroyed. The data will be permanently wiped with Drive Wiper or similar software, and then the physical disk will be eradicated according to industry standards. Only the researcher will have access to the external drive which contains the data, which will be encrypted with a randomly generated password rated "strong" by Enpass Password Manager. Here is an example of a password rated "strong:" _CBRg/-~V*dky&vK6=#5/G
The information or biospecimens that will be collected as part of this research will not be shared with any other investigators.

Terms of participation: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

PARTICIPANT NAME:			
PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE:		**DATE:**	
WITNESS SIGNATURE:		**DATE:**	

Appendix G – IRB Active Letter April 1, 2025

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

Office of Research Integrity, Compliance and Security

TO: Margaretta Mathis
Educational Leadership
Manhattan, KS 66506

Protocol Number: IRB-12188

FROM: Lisa Rubin, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 04/01/2025
RE: Approval of Your Proposal Entitled, "Characteristics of collaborative community college and tribal partnerships: A multiple-case study."

Federal regulations stipulate that human subjects protocols can be approved by IRB's for only one year, and require "continuing review" and approval to continue past the expiration date.

On the basis of the IRB "continuing review," your project is classified as follows:

Active. The activity is pending or in progress, and there have been no changes that have occurred or are contemplated that would affect the status of human subjects.

EXPIRATION DATE: 05/17/2027

If the activity persists, it will be eligible for continuing review several months prior to the new expiration date.

Electronically signed by Lisa Rubin on 04/01/2025 4:10 PM ET

203 Fairchild Hall, 1601 Vattier St., Manhattan, KS 66506 | 785-532-3224 | fax: 785-532-3278 | comply@k-state.edu