

## **Factors Influencing the Retention of American Indian Students in College**

**Elizabeth Fandry, Psychology, University of Minnesota-Duluth**

Dr. Suzanne Griffith, Department of Educational Leadership

### **Authors Note**

This research paper was done with the supervision and guidance of Dr. Suzanne Griffith. Dr. Griffith is a Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and works closely with the First Year Experience Committee.

### **ABSTRACT**

*Over the past several decades, it has been found that American Indian students have one of the lowest retention rates of any ethnic group in higher education. The purpose of this study is to identify which factors of students' experience correlate most with success (retention) in college. A survey was mailed out to American Indian students at 2 Midwestern universities that included questions on three different areas that have been found to affect retention: Support systems (3 questions), Ease of transition to college (3 questions), and Academics (3 questions), along with questions indicating GPA, institution attended, and where the student was the fall after their first year of college. A large percentage of returning students indicated they had family support and an ease of making friends at college. There were no participants who had dropped out of college.*

### **Introduction**

For many years, a high school diploma was believed to be a solid ticket to middle class; however, even President Obama believes today's job market requires a bachelor's degree to be employable (Superville, 2010). And while 95% of high school students report motivation to attend college and earn a bachelors degree, a staggering 1 in 5 college students will drop out prior to their second year of college ("Why College Freshman," 2007). Over the past several decades, it has been found that American Indian students have one of the lowest retention rates of any ethnic group in higher education. At both of the universities involved in this study, there are multicultural centers available to assist American Indian students with education, but the support of these centers does not seem to be enough to keep some of them in school. While the factors believed to influence these American Indian students the most in their decisions to remain in school or to drop out may be similar to those affecting any other group of students, this study hopes to identify which factors most greatly influence this particular group of students. Such information would be helpful in supporting American Indian students stay enrolled in higher education.

### **Purpose and Significance of the Study**

American Indian high school graduates have one of the lowest college retention rates of any ethnicity group (Reddy, 1993). Currently, there is little research about American Indian undergraduate experiences, mostly due to American Indians being one of the smallest and most underrepresented groups in higher education (McClellan, Fox, & Lowe, 2005). The purpose of this study is to identify which factors of students' experience correlate most with success (retention) in college. If there are factors that have a stronger statistical relationship with success in college, the findings can be reported to each of the universities multicultural centers. In return, the multicultural centers will know what aspects of students' background and experience can be mostly closely monitored to ensure the student receives support where it is most needed.

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the term "American Indian" refers to students who identify themselves as being racially or culturally American Indian, regardless of tribal membership, blood quantum, or connections to the American Indian community. Since literature has different terms for the

race, American Indian, Native American, and Indigenous will all be used to refer to the same group. Success will be operationally defined as remaining enrolled in college past the first year of college.

### **Review of the Literature**

The purpose of this study was to isolate factors that contributed to success for American Indian students in college. Since success was defined as retention in college through the second year, it was important to review what the literature has found contributes to retention of college students. Although this study focuses only on American Indian students, it is important to note that many of the factors will be relevant to college students in general, and therefore, much of the literature will not focus solely on American Indian students.

For the 2007-2008 school year, only 66% of students enrolled in college returned to the same institution for their second year of college (Bushong, 2009). In a report done on college retention rates for NCAA Division II schools, it was found that only 44% of White college students graduated within six years (Suggs, 2001). Even worse, only 24% of American Indian students were able to graduate within six years (Suggs, 2001). In order to review why these retention and graduate rates are so low, the first thing that must be reviewed is factors in retention that are applicable to all ethnicities. Second, the literature review will look at factors in retention that are applicable to minorities and ethnicities other than White. Last, the literature review will focus on factors that have been found to impact solely the American Indian population.

In a policy report done for the American College Testing, Lotkowski, Robbins, and Noeth (2004) surveyed the importance of retention for college students, and the factors involved in retention. The policy report emphasizes the importance of addressing both academic and non-academic factors that affect retention. The study was done with four university campuses with students who were attending full time. Academic factors included in this study were high school grade point average, first year college GPA, rigor of high school courses compared to college courses, course load, and value of content for first year courses. The non-academic factors studied include stress levels, time management skills, utilization of support systems on campus, ability to make friends, and comfort in and out of class. The strongest academic predictors of college retention included first year college GPA, Socio-Economic Status, and ACT scores. The strongest non-academic predictors for college retention included family support, comfort in and out of class, social support systems (Ex: writing support, multicultural center, tutoring center). The results of the study supported the idea that retention is not solely based on academic factors, but also on the non-academic factors present in a student's life. The researchers found that many students who were able to master the academic portion of university life by maintaining a high GPA and taking a full course load with rigorous classes were also the same students who experience higher dropout rates. The report indicates that a university will most likely experience higher retention rates if they make not only academic centers (ex: writing centers and tutoring centers) available to students, but also centers to support students and their individualities (ex: disability services, multicultural center, women's center).

In a study report by Hodum and Oneida (1994), the traits of colleges that were successful and unsuccessful at retaining students were examined. Specific factors researched for the report include ease of transition from high school to college, comfort within the new educational setting of college, High School GPA in relation to College GPA, College GPA and its relation to retention, and minority/non-minority status of students. The research collected information on the role that support centers played in the retention of students, and also the role an introduction to college course would play in determining whether the student remained enrolled at that particular college through the first year and into the second. Concerning GPA, the researchers found that a higher GPA in the first year of study led to a higher possibility of that student remaining through the second year. Additionally, a student with a high GPA in high school was more likely to have a high GPA in college. Researchers also found that students who were more connected to campus through support centers also had a higher chance of succeeding in college. The researchers concluded that the most prevalent factor in retention for students was that schools that offer services and support for students to receive the most support and satisfaction from school have a much higher retention rate than those that solely focus on resolving the issue of retention.

In a report by Ishanti and Snider (2004), the longitudinal effects of college preparation programs was examined by looking at students' preparedness for college, aptitude scores, and student background characteristics. The survey consisted of roughly 4,500 students matriculated into four-year institutions. Students participated in a survey which asked dichotomous questions about the students' decision to attend, and stay enrolled in, college. Of the answers data received, the highest predictors of college retention were preparedness for college courses and family support. Preparedness for college was measured by asking if the student had been involved in: advanced placement courses, ACT preparation program, or college preparatory programs. Students involved in any of these programs were 33% less likely to drop out of college than those who had not participated in a related program. Students who often conversed with their parents about attending college, and whose teachers talked with the parents about their child attending college were 22% less likely to drop out of college than those with parents who did not socialize with their child about attending college. The study also reported the retention of specific minority groups. Asian American students were 32% less likely to drop out than Caucasian students, while Hispanic, Black, and Native American students were 32%, 32%, and 42% more likely to drop out than Caucasian students. The study also found that the highest risk for college dropout was between the first and second years of college.

At Florida State University, a new model has been tested by researcher Angela Provitera McGlynn (2008) for the retention of minority students. This model is aimed at increasing the retention of minority students through academic, social, and personal support. In order to bring these three factors together into one experience for minority students, Florida State University created the CARE program, which offered a summer learning experience to bridge the academic gap between high school and college, a program for minority students to plan for college with their families, an introduction to the college campus and surrounding areas, and the opportunity for the student to familiarize themselves with on campus support systems like tutoring and multicultural centers. The CARE program also helped organize on-campus events for the students so they could meet other like them and make friends more easily, and made sure to assign advisors that were capable of interacting comfortably with the student. In an in-depth analysis of the program, McGlynn found that the overall highest predictor for retention at Florida State University was academic engagement. Students were also more likely to stay enrolled if their parents were involved in and supportive of the student's decision to enroll in college. McGlynn found that while students who enter the CARE program at Florida State University have average SAT scores 300 points below the average student, students enrolled in the CARE program are more likely to return for a second year of college than those not enrolled in the CARE program.

### **Factors Identified in the Literature**

The first factor relating to success in college that was examined is family connections. Jackson and Smith (2001) conducted a study that was based on interviews with American Indian students. Jackson and Smith found that the most significant theme that emerged from the study was "Family Connections", which includes both family pressure and family support. There were both negative and positive views when students were interviewed on family support. Several of the participants in the study indicated that family members thought they would be acculturated to white society by leaving the reservation and attending a primarily white institution. Another concern for parents is that the students are leaving behind their responsibilities to family members. On the positive side of the spectrum, several students indicated they were the first person in their family to attend college and their families were proud of them.

Tate and Schwartz (1993) looked at improving the retention of American Indian college students in professional programs. In this study, American Indian students in professional programs (defined as nursing, teacher education, law, medicine, and social work) were surveyed to identify factors that challenged them in their education. One of the meaningful findings of this study is the impact family support had on the retention of students in the programs being studied. They found that 65.5% of students felt that family obligations sometimes interfered with their education.

Another background factor that has been found to affect American Indian student's success in college is feelings of acceptance. Acceptance can be defined as ease of making friends, comfort in class, and comfort outside of class. Huffman (2001) conducted a study on American Indian students and perceived acceptance into the college and university culture. The foundation of the study is set upon the idea that there are two groups of American Indian students in college: Estranged students and transculturated students. Both groups are considered to be culturally traditionally American Indian, but the transculturated group has been able to overcome the alienation they face. This study found that although American Indians may hold on strongly to their traditional American Indian ways, they can still achieve in college with the support of family, campus counselors, and college advisors. The study also found that students indicated a strong preference for minority counselors. The researchers suggested this was due to the fact that counselors who were an ethnically similar to students were more readily accepted by the students. The researchers did note, however, that being ethnically similar has been found to be less important than the students' perception of the counselor being culturally sensitive to the students' needs.

Gilbert (2000) conducted a study on the first year experience and persistence of American Indian students at one predominantly White four year institution. The study discussed how the Nizhoni Academy provided college level curriculum to students on the Navajo, Hopi, and other reservations and tried to "bridge the gap" between reservation high schools and college. In efforts to better prepare Native American students from the Nizhoni reservation school, Northern Arizona University and the Navajo and Hopi tribes formed a partnership to support precollege services that would support students on or near the reservations who would be attending college. The program's goals were to create a "bridge" from the low classroom expectations in high school to the rigor and academic challenges of college. This bridge program became known as the Nizhoni Academy, a 5 week rigorous college preparatory program that stressed the importance of study skills, goal setting, ACT preparation, and cultural recreational activities. The results of a post-test to measure the success of the program indicated significantly better results in Mathematics ( $t = 12.71$ ,  $df = 134$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and English ( $t = 15.03$ ,  $df = 130$ ,  $p < .001$ ). At the end of the study, students were also given a survey where they could indicate their feelings on the program. Overall, students indicated they had a better knowledge of the careers they were going to pursue, and better knowledge of the academic rigor expected of them in pursuing these careers.

One study done that closely resembled this research project in terms of what was being identified was by Hill, Jackson, and Smith (2003) and looked academic persistence of Native American students. The participants were 15 college students who had grown up on reservations. In one-on-one interviews, these students were asked questions that could be grouped into one of three categories: Socio-Cultural Factors (ex: sense of ethnicity, family interactions, and family support), Academic Factors (ex: High School preparation and career goals), and Personal Factors (ex: Employment, Age, and Characteristics). The results of the research provided much insight into what helps a Native American student "persist" in college. Family support was reported as being a frequently reoccurring factor, and many students noted the reason they were so successful in college was due to support of their family members. Many students also noted a reason for their success was in part due to the Multicultural Programs on campus (comparable to UMD's AILRC and UWS's Multicultural Center) and the strong academic and social support they provided to Native American students. Aside from factors that helped them succeed, most of the participants expressed they did not feel as if their high school education prepared them for the academic rigor of college.

In a report done by Guillory and Wolverton (2008), the factors that influence American Indian student retention were studied. The main factors studied in this project were financial support, family support, cultural and social support, and academic preparation. These factors were looked at in terms of "persistence factors" (if they helped a student persist through college) and "barriers" (if they were detrimental to a student's retention). If a student had adequate funding, it was looked at in terms of a "persistence factor," and researchers found that American Indian students without a lack of funding were much more likely to continue on with their studies than students whose funding was a "barrier". As far as family support, the responses were dichotomous. Either the student experienced strong family support and found it to be essential to their education, or the student experienced family opposition to college

education and found it extremely difficult to persist in college without that support. Another important finding for Guillory and Wolverton (2008) was that average age of an American Indian college student was much higher, and therefore students were more prone to being not only students, but also parents. The researchers expressed the need for on-campus daycare centers that could meet the needs of the students who were also parents.

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that contributed to success for American Indian students in college. Since success is being defined as retention in college into the second year, it is important that each specific question on the survey addresses a factor in retention that has been found to be relevant in the literature review. All of the questions asked were aimed at answering the research question: “What factors contribute most to the success or failure of American Indian college students?”

### **Participants**

Participants for this study were chosen randomly by different means for each institution. At the University of Wisconsin – Superior, the primary investigator was given a database of students attending the institution that had identified their ethnicity as American Indian. From this database, fifty students were randomly chosen to participate by selecting every third student until 50 were identified. At the University of Minnesota Duluth, the researcher gave 50 participation packets to the directors of the American Indian Learning Resource Center to be mailed to 50 random students in their database of students who identified themselves ethnically as American Indian.

### **Instrumentation**

The study involves measuring chosen factors that have been shown to affect success in college for American Indian students. Specific factors that were reviewed included perceived acceptance into college and university culture, perceived difficulty of courses, and feelings of preparedness for college. The factors to be studied were chosen from a review of the literature. Since most of the literature shows significant differences between Caucasian and American Indian students when it comes to factors such as family, support, finances, and feeling prepared for college, these were also included.

The survey included 11 questions, the first nine questions were likert-type responses with the available response choices being strongly disagree, disagree, no opinion, agree, and strongly agree. The included topics were student support systems (3 questions), Ease of transition to college (3 questions), and Academics (3 questions).

The last two questions on the survey were multiple choice questions. The tenth question asked the first year GPA, with the choices being 0.00 – 1.00, 1.01 – 2.00, 2.01 – 3.00, and 3.01 – 4.00. The last question, the eleventh, asked where the students were in the fall after their first year of school, with possible responses being “Second year of college”, “Transferred to a different College”, and “No longer enrolled in college”.

(For a copy of the Survey see Appendix A, for a copy cover letter see Appendix B, and for a copy of the survey consent form Appendix C).

Also in the packet were a cover letter and a copy of the survey consent form. These forms were developed in compliance with the ethical standards for research and the institutional review board. The cover letter is meant to describe the research to the participants to help them understand why the research could provide valuable information to both the participants and the researcher. The cover letter also provides an easy to understand scope of the research project, and asks the participant for help by completing the survey if they feel comfortable doing so. There was a survey consent statement added to the end of the survey as well. The survey consent form stated that since it would be impossible to identify who was returning the survey, there was no risk, and by returning the survey the participant was implying their consent to participate in the research project. The final piece included in the packet was a return envelope provided by the researcher so that returning the survey would be easy and free of charge to the

recipient. The return envelopes were addressed so they would be returned to the UW-Superior McNair Scholar's Program Department.

The information included in the packet was reviewed by faculty at both the University of Wisconsin – Superior and the University of Minnesota Duluth. In addition, all information included in the packet was approved by the Institutional Review Boards for both University of Wisconsin – Superior, with the University of Minnesota Duluth review going through the main campus of the University of Minnesota. The institutional review boards at both schools are aimed at assuring there is no risk to the students participating in the study. This study was approved by both institutional review boards as no risk was posed to the students.

(See Appendix D for a copy of the University of Wisconsin – Superior IRB approval letter, and Appendix E for a copy of the University of Minnesota IRB approval letter).

### **Procedure**

In the packet that was mailed either directly to students enrolled at UWS or indirectly to students by the UMD Center were three portions. The first portion was the Survey consent form from the University of Minnesota Duluth confirming that the study held no risk for the participant. The second portion was a letter from the primary investigator addressing the reason for the survey included, why it was important for the recipient to return the survey, and an advanced “Thank You” for participating in the study. The third portion of the packet was the survey and a return envelope (See Appendix A, B, and C for a sample of the packet materials).

### **Results**

The main concern of this study was to identify and isolate factors that contribute to the success (retention) or failure of American Indian college students. The research question asks if there is one factor that correlates most with the retention of American Indian college students.

Results are based on the survey responses received in the summer of 2010 from American Indian students who had attended two regional universities for their freshman year. In this section their responses are presented in tables but the possible meaning of the responses are presented in the Discussion section.

Twenty one out of a potential 100 students responded to the survey. Eight of these 21 students were from the University of Wisconsin Superior while the remaining 13 students were from the University of Minnesota Duluth. No students who dropped out after the first year of college responded to the survey. It was hoped that there would be a return of surveys from these former students so a comparison between students still enrolled after the first year of college and students who decided not to return after their first year could be made. Table 1 shows the frequencies and percentages of participant responses to questions on the survey.

All 21 respondents returned to college the following year, although four of the 21 respondents had transferred to another institution. Their GPAs were distributed such that three were in the 1.01 – 2.00 average; eleven were in the 2.01 – 3.00; and seven were in the 3.01 – 4.00 average for the first-year GPA.

Table 1  
*Survey Response Frequencies*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
Student Felt Family Support			3 14%	4 19%	14 67%
Student Felt Prepared to Enter College		6 29%	3 14%	7 33%	5 24%
Transition From High School to College was easy		8 38%	7 33%	4 19%	2 10%
High School Courses Prepared Student for College		8 38%	7 33%	5 24%	1 5%
It Was Easy for the Student to Make Friends		2 10%	3 14%	10 48%	6 29%
Student Felt Comfortable Asking Questions in Class	1 5%	5 24%	4 19%	6 29%	5 24%
Student Felt Comfortable Asking Questions out of Class	3 14%	3 14%	2 10%	7 33%	6 29%
Student Felt First Year Courses Had Valuable Content		9 43%	4 19%	6 29%	2 10%
Student Utilized Support Centers	5 24%	3 14%	3 14%	6 29%	4 19%
	.01 – 1.00	1.01 – 2.00	2.01 – 3.00	3.01 – 4.00	
First Year GPA		3	11	7	
	Remained	Transferred	Dropped out		
Location of Student in Fall after First Year	17	4			
	UW – Superior		UM Duluth		
University Attended	8		13		

Table 2 looks at the Mean, Median, and Mode for each possible response to individual questions on the survey. The highest means were found in “Student Felt Family Support” and “It was Easy for the Student to Make Friends.” The lowest mean was found in “High School Courses Prepared Student for College.”

**Table 2**  
*Survey Response Mean, Median, and Mode*

<b>Mean, Median, and Mode Answers for Each Surveyed Question</b>										
	Student Felt Family Support	Student Felt Prepared to Enter College	Transition From High School to College was easy	High School Courses Prepared Student for College	It Was Easy for the Student to Make Friends	Student Felt Comfortable Asking Questions in Class	Student Felt Comfortable Asking Questions out of Class	Student Felt First Year Courses Had Valuable Content	Student Utilized Support Centers	First Year G.P.A.
Mean	4.52	3.52	3.00	2.95	3.95	3.43	3.48	3.05	3.05	3.19
Median	5	4	3	3	4	4	4	3	3	3
Mode	5	4	2	2	4	4	4	2	4	3



Table 3 shows the bivariate correlations between factors (individual questions on the survey), with \* representing a correlation that is significant at the 0.05 level, and \*\* representing a correlation that is significant at the 0.01 level.

		Correlations								
		Student Felt Family Support	Student Felt Prepared to Enter College	Transition From High School to College was easy	High School Courses Prepared Student for College	It Was Easy for the Student to Make Friends	Student Felt Comfortable Asking Questions in Class	Student Felt Comfortable Asking Questions out of Class	Student Felt First Year Courses Had Valuable Content	Student Utilized Support Centers
Student Felt Family Support	Pearson Correlation	1								
	Sig. (2-tailed)									
	N	21								
Student Felt Prepared to Enter College	Pearson Correlation	.357	1							
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.113								
	N	21	21							
Transition From High School to College was easy	Pearson Correlation	.334	.471*	1						
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.140	.031							
	N	21	21	21						
High School Courses Prepared Student for College	Pearson Correlation	.038	.536*	.597**	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.870	.012	.004						
	N	21	21	21	21					
It Was Easy for the Student to Make Friends	Pearson Correlation	.183	.164	.054	.262	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.428	.478	.815	.199					
	N	21	21	21	21	21				
Student Felt Comfortable Asking Questions in Class	Pearson Correlation	.389	.422	.481*	.497*	.584**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.081	.057	.027	.022	.005				
	N	21	21	21	21	21	21			
Student Felt Comfortable Asking Questions out of Class	Pearson Correlation	.314	.261	.522*	.396	.358	.857**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.166	.252	.015	.075	.111	.000			
	N	21	21	21	21	21	21	21		
Student Felt First Year Courses Had Valuable Content	Pearson Correlation	.092	.059	.140	.053	.205	.171	.245	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.662	.799	.545	.819	.372	.459	.285		
	N	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	
Student Utilized Support Centers	Pearson Correlation	.288	.214	.400	.147	.292	.630**	.802**	.341	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.205	.352	.072	.526	.200	.002	.000	.130	
	N	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

## Discussion

For the purpose of the Discussion, Table 1 (found in the results section) was augmented so the responses from each question were easily distinguishable from disagreeing to agreeing. The responses for “Strongly Disagree” were combined with those from “Disagree;” similarly, the responses from “Strongly Agree” were combined with those from “Agree.” By doing this, it is easier to see what factors were helpful and which were not.

By looking at Table 4, it is clear that the majority of participants (86%) felt they had family support. Other factors that, when combined, appear to be prevalent are: “It Was Easy for the Student to Make Friends” at 76% agreeing; “Student Felt Comfortable Asking Questions out of Class” at 61%, and “Student Felt Prepared to Enter College” at 57% agreeing. Only one factor showed a larger percentage of participants that disagreed than agreed: “Student Felt First Year Courses Had Valuable Content” at 43%. It was expected that participants who felt asking questions inside of class would also feel comfortable asking questions in class, and that is apparent in Tables 4 and 7, with percentages of 53% and 61% respectively.

Table 4 amplifies the percentages of students who felt their high school coursework did not prepare them for college work, with 38% of participants indicating they strongly disagreed or disagreed that their high school courses prepared them for college. Thirty-three % of the students responded ambivalently to this question, possibly meaning they felt prepared in some areas and not in others. Both Not Prepared and Neutral are greater than the 29% who felt prepared. This would seem to indicate that more can be done to prepare students, however these are the students who **did** return despite 71% not agreeing that high school prepared them. While it is speculative, it may well be that those who did not return also did not feel prepared and may have found more of these factors on the Disagree side than those who returned.

If such a large percentage did not feel prepared why then did they return? The other responses may help to explain this finding.

Table 4 *Combined Survey Response Frequencies*

	Strongly Disagree and Disagree	No Opinion	Agree and Strongly Agree
Student Felt Family Support		3 14%	18 86%
Student Felt Prepared to Enter College	6 29%	3 14%	12 57%
Transition From High School to College was easy	8 38%	7 33%	6 29%
High School Courses Prepared Student for College	8 38%	7 33%	6 29%
It Was Easy for the Student to Make Friends	2 10%	3 14%	16 76%
Student Felt Comfortable Asking Questions in Class	6 29%	4 19%	11 53%
Student Felt Comfortable Asking Questions out of Class	6 29%	2 10%	13 61%
Student Felt First Year Courses Had Valuable Content	9 43%	4 19%	8 38%
Student Utilized Support Centers	8 38%	3 14%	10 48%

While most students did **not** feel that high school prepared them, the majority still Felt Prepared to Enter College, Felt they had Family Support, found it Easy to Make Friends, and felt able to Ask Questions In and Outside of Class. Certainly the strongest agreement is with Family Support. Numerous studies (citations/dates) have mentioned this factor as repeatedly one of the dominant factors influencing student retention, especially among American Indian students. In fact, looking at the correlations, Family Support reached significance with Transition to College Was Easy and High School Courses Prepared Student for College at the .05 significance level.

The correlations also show that when students reported the Transition to College was Easy, they also felt high school prepared them and that they were comfortable asking questions in, and out, of class. If comfort asking questions can be interpreted as “active participation” then these were the students who also used the Support Centers, or who were able to seek out what was needed, either socially or academically.

Table 5 *Combined Survey Response Frequencies Grouped for Support/Social Systems*

	Strongly Disagree and Disagree	No Opinion	Agree and Strongly Agree
Student Felt Family Support		3 14%	18 86%
It Was Easy for the Student to Make Friends	2 10%	3 14%	16 76%
Student Utilized Support Centers	8 38%	3 14%	10 48%

Table 6 *Combined Survey Response Frequencies Grouped for Preparation for College*

	Strongly Disagree and Disagree	No Opinion	Agree and Strongly Agree
Student Felt Prepared to Enter College	6 29%	3 14%	12 57%
Transition From High School to College was easy	8 38%	7 33%	6 29%
High School Courses Prepared Student for College	8 38%	7 33%	6 29%

Table 7 Combined Survey Response Frequencies Grouped for Academics

	Strongly Disagree and Disagree	No Opinion	Agree and Strongly Agree
Student Felt Comfortable Asking Questions in Class	6 29%	4 19%	11 53%
Student Felt Comfortable Asking Questions out of Class	6 29%	2 10%	13 61%
Student Felt First Year Courses Had Valuable Content	9 43%	4 19%	8 38%

In Tables 5, 6, and 7, the response frequencies from Table 4 have been sorted into three groups; Support/Social Systems factors, Preparation for College factors, and Academic factors. By looking at the data in such a way, it is easier to see similarities in the frequency percentages within each group. For the Support/Social Systems group, two of the three factors have a strong percentage of answers in the “agree” category. In the Academics group, two of the factors have a high percentage of answers in the “agree” category, and one factor (Value of Freshman Courses) has a lower percentage at 38%. In the group for factors that involve college preparedness, two factors have a similar low percentage (Transition was Easy and H.S. Preparation), while one is on the high end (General Preparation). It is almost contradictory that two factors have a low percentage of agreement, while the other has a relatively high percentage of agreement.

A large percentage of students indicated that they disagreed with the statement “I felt my first year courses had valuable content”. There are two possible explanations for this. The first is that although there was no “drop out” group to compare with, there are indications that the perceived value of content in the first year courses could contribute to American Indian student retention or perhaps student retention in general. If students enrolled in courses with little perceived value, students may not want to continue their education. Another feasible explanation can be seen by studying the bivariate correlation table (table 3) found in the Results section. For GPA, and possible averages from .00 – 1.00, 1.01 – 2.00, 2.01 – 3.00, and 3.01 – 4.00, the average was 3.19. This could be interpreted to say that if courses had little value, they would also be easy courses, and easy courses could easily lead to a higher GPA for the student.

One factor that presented a high percentage of agreements that was unexpected was “Student Felt Prepared to Enter College”. This is in contrast with much of the literature (Gilbert 2000), which stated there were numerous cases where the student failed to remain in school due to the feeling of unpreparedness for college life. However, since there was no response from the “drop out” group in this study, there is no comparison group and therefore no way to tell if participants at the universities in the this study felt any more or less prepared than those who did not come back for their second year of school.

Again, it is speculative but interesting to note that among this limited group of respondents, these students returned for more college in spite of the lack of value perceived in their course work, the difficulty with the transition, and the perceived lack of high school courses preparing them. Offsetting these potential problems is the strength of Family Support, the Ease in making friends, and the comfort in asking questions in and out of class. Campus support centers for American Indian and First Nation students seem to be helpful for approximately half of the group, meaning that these centers could potentially increase their support with the transition to college. This also could be happening but so subtly that students are unaware of how its presence has assisted.

### **Limitations**

This study has several limitations. Since the survey was created specifically for this study, there was no test for reliability or validity, and therefore the validity of the survey must be questioned. Additionally, if a follow-up study was to occur, more steps would be taken to increase the validity of the survey. While the present questions are limited, an additional question that might help would be one aimed at identifying if the student had a strictly traditional American Indian upbringing or a completely acculturated upbringing. Another factor to study would question whether or not the students who found making friends easy made friends who were also American Indian, or whether they were other students in general attending college.

Other areas that might be added to future studies include age of participant, whether or not they were a parent, and whether or not they lived on campus. Age of a participant could affect whether or not they felt prepared for college since they had more life experience, and how they felt their high school courses prepared them for college since it might have been several years since they had a high school course. Additionally, there is a possibility that older students would be more likely to have children, which would completely alter how they viewed the retention factors studied.

Finally, whether or not the participant lived on campus would be assessed. If a student did live on campus, they might have more access to student organizations, sports of any kind, residential gatherings, and more opportunities to socialize in general. Not only would this affect the ease of making friends for the student, it would increase the possibility of finding a relationship between Ease of Making friends and retention.

Although there are limitations, this pilot study still allows us to draw some conclusions.

### **Conclusion**

Although the data set of this research project is skewed due to the fact there is no “drop out” group, there are several inferences we can draw from the data obtained. It is evident that with the American Indian students that chose to participate in this study there are areas that indicate potential meaning for American Indian student retention. These areas are family support, preparedness to enter college, value of content for first year courses, and how participants felt their high school courses prepared them for their first year college courses.

Family support was the first and biggest indicator of importance for the students who participated in this study. Although we cannot draw any conclusions as to how the “drop out” group would have responded to perceived family support, we do know that the results for the remaining students is in line with previous research. The previous research shows that family support is extremely important for American Indian students, particularly this group because many American Indian parents do not have a college education and are not familiar with the post-secondary education system. Also, the literature could lead to an explanation that students who were not enrolled for a second year of college were not enrolled due to a lack of feeling parental support (Guillory & Wolverson, 2008).

Fifty-seven percent of participants indicated they felt prepared to enter college. Although we cannot compare this to another group to draw conclusions, it is important to note that the findings on preparedness to enter college in this study contrasted with those found in past studies. Gilbert (2000) found that students who experienced an overall feeling of lack of preparedness were more likely to drop out.

Findings on the feelings of “value of content” for first year courses are also important to note. We could not conclude that the value of content had a direct effect on college retention or first year GPA, but the correlations found between these factors is significant enough to be studied further in a follow-up study. Perhaps the majority of college students do not feel their freshman courses were of much value; frequently freshmen cannot take courses in their major until they have taken general education courses. Making sure that some courses are of high value in freshman year might help retain more students.

The findings on how participants felt about the ease of the transition from high school to college, though not statistically significant, are important. Only six participants agreed or strongly agreed that they felt they had an easy transition from high school to college. Although all 21 participants were obviously able to get through the transition and return for a second year, it could play an important role in American

Indian student retention. The low number of participants in this study who experienced an easy transition from high school to college falls in line with that of previous research, which indicates difficult high school to college transitions may play a major part in whether the student returns for the second year of school.

It is important to note that none of the findings in this study can be seen as statistically significant due to the lack of a comparison group. Rather this study can serve as a pilot for both campuses on what might be studied in greater depth. Since many of the findings in this study fall in line with previous research, it is suggested that variables which appear to have significance in this research project be considered for use in a follow-up study.

## REFERENCES

- Bergstrom, A. (2009, May). *Retention of American Indian students in teacher education*. Retrieved from [http://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/51911/1/Bergstrom\\_umn\\_0130E\\_10313.pdf](http://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/51911/1/Bergstrom_umn_0130E_10313.pdf)
- Bushong, S. (2009). Freshman retention continues to decline, report says. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com.libpdb.d.umn.edu:2048/article/Freshman-Retention-Continue/42287/>
- Cole, J.S., & Denzine, G.M. (2002). Comparing the academic engagement of American Indian and white college students. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 41(1), Retrieved from <http://jaie.asu.edu/v41/V41I1A2.pdf>
- Dingman, S.M., Mrocza, M.A., & Brady, J.V. (1995). Predicting academic success for American Indian students. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 34(2), Retrieved from <http://jaie.asu.edu/v34/V34S2pre.htm>
- Gilbert, W.S. (2000). Bridging the gap between high school and college. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 39(3), Retrieved from <http://jaie.asu.edu/v39/V39I3A3.pdf>
- Guillory, R.M., & Wolverton, M. (2008). The Journal of higher education. *It's About Family: Native American Student Persistence in Higher Education*, 79(1), Retrieved from [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal\\_of\\_higher\\_education/v079/79.1guillory.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_higher_education/v079/79.1guillory.html)
- Hodum, R., & Oneida, M. (1994). An Examination of college retention rates with a university 101 program. Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED380036.pdf>
- Huffman, T. (2001). Resistance theory and the transculturation hypothesis as explanations of college attrition and persistence among culturally traditional American Indian students. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 40(3), Retrieved from <http://jaie.asu.edu/v40/V40I3A1.pdf>
- Ishanti, T., & Snider, K. (2004). Longitudinal effects of college preparation programs on college retention. *Proceedings of the 44th annual forum of the association for institutional research*, <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED491012.pdf>
- Jackson, A.P., & Smith, S.A. (2001). Postsecondary transitions among Navajo Indians. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 40(2), Retrieved from <http://jaie.asu.edu/v40/V40I2A2.pdf>
- Jackson, A.P., Smith, S.A., & Hill, C.L. (2003). Academic persistence among Native American college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 44(4), Retrieved from [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal\\_of\\_college\\_student\\_development/v044/44.4jackson.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_college_student_development/v044/44.4jackson.html)
- Lotowski, V, Robbins, S, & Noeth, R. (2004). The Role of academic and non-academic factors in improving college retention, Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED485476.pdf>
- McClellan, George S., Tippeconnic Fox Mary Jo (Comanche), & Lower, Shelly C. (Navajo). "Where We Have Been: A History of Native American Education," *New Directions for Student Services*, no. 109, Spring 2005: 7-15
- McGlynn, A. (2009). Proven pathways to success for minority students. *Education Digest: Essential Readings Condensed for Quick Review*, 74(9), 42-45. Retrieved from ERIC database.
- Reddy, M. A. (Ed.). (1993). *Statistical record of native North Americans*. Washington, D.C: Gale Research.



- Simpson, M. (2005). The Renaissance of American Indian Higher Education: Capturing the Dream. *Educational Studies*, 37(2), 166-171. doi:10.1207/s15326993es3702\_5
- Superville, D. (2010, May 9). *Obama: education a responsibility of all*. Retrieved from <http://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory?id=10597107>
- Suggs, W. (2001). Graduation rates at NCAA division II colleges. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com.libpdb.d.umn.edu:2048/article/Graduation-Rates-at-NCAA-Di/33414/>
- Tate, D.S., & Schwartz, C.L. (1993). Increasing the retention of American Indian students in professional programs in higher education. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 33(1), Retrieved from <http://jaie.asu.edu/v33/V33S1INC.htm>

APPENDIX

Appendix A.....Survey Consent Form  
Appendix B.....Letter from the Research to the Participant  
Appendix C.....Survey  
Appendix D.....University of Wisconsin – Superior IRB Approval Letter  
Appendix E.....University of Minnesota IRB Approval Letter

Appendix A

**McNair Scholars Program**

*University of Wisconsin – Superior  
Belknap and Catlin  
P.O. Box 2000  
Superior, WI 54880*

**Survey Consent Form**

**Purpose:**

The Purpose of the Study is to identify factors that contribute to (or hinder) success for Native American students in college.

**Procedure:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to answer up to 11 questions regarding your first year experience of college and return it to the my advisor at UW Superior where it will be added with other responses to help identify contributing factors.

**Benefits/Risks to Participant:**

By providing information about your first year experiences steps can be made to support present and future Native American students to succeed in college. There is no risk or any direct benefit involved but your time will help others who follow you.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study/Confidentiality:**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary: you may choose to stop at any time or to skip any questions with which you are uncomfortable. Choosing not to respond will result in no loss or penalty. Your name will never be connected to your survey or responses. Information that would make it possible to identify you or any other participant will never be included in any sort of report. Because of the anonymous nature of this survey **DO NOT PUT YOUR NAME ON IT**. The data will be accessible only to those working on the project and will be destroyed at the end of the study.

**Contacts and Questions:**

If you have questions you may contact Elizabeth at 715-661-2743 or [fand0021@d.umn.edu](mailto:fand0021@d.umn.edu) or Dr. Suzanne Griffith at 715-394 8316 or [sgriffit@uwsuper.edu](mailto:sgriffit@uwsuper.edu).

**Statement of Consent:**

**I have read the above information. I am comfortable with proceeding. I understand I can call and ask any questions I had regarding the survey. By responding to the survey and returning it I am implying my consent to participate.**

**Follow-up:**

Both campuses will be provided with a copy of the study's findings. Interested participants can choose to contact either the American Indian Studies Center at UMD or the First Nations Program at UW-S campus for information regarding the report.

**(Note: You must be 18 years of age or older to participate in this study.)**

***Thanks for your participation!***

## Appendix B

Date, [date was hand-written in]

Hi, my name is Libby and I am member of the Oneida Tribe. I am writing to ask you to participate in a study I am doing on Native American students' experiences as freshmen in college. I am currently a junior at UM-Duluth and participating in the McNair Scholars Program at UW-Superior. As a Native American student I know what my freshman experience was like but I have often wondered how it was for others and what challenges and supports others had.

I am working with the UM-D American Indian Studies Program and the UW-Superior First Nations Program. They have helped me generate a list of potential participants to reach out to and you are one of them. I would very much appreciate your taking 5-8 minutes to complete the enclosed brief survey. Your participation is voluntary. All responses are confidential. No names will be used in any report.

What I hope to do is make the freshman experience more successful for Native students and to help both campuses improve their support of Native American students. **YOU CAN HELP.** Your responses on the returned survey may boost efforts at these two (and possibly other) campuses. The study has been reviewed to insure that there is no risk for participating.

The returned surveys are being sent to my supervising professor who will not read them but will secure them for me to open. After I enter the responses all surveys will be shredded. But I do need your assistance. If you are interested please read the enclosed Consent and then complete the survey and mail it back as soon as possible. Thank You and Miigwech

Appendix C

**Please answer the following by circling the most accurate answer:**

1. My family supported my decision to go to college.  
     Strongly Disagree    Disagree    No Opinion    Agree    Strongly Agree
2. I felt prepared entering college.  
     Strongly Disagree    Disagree    No Opinion    Agree    Strongly Agree
3. I experienced an easy transition from high school to college.  
     Strongly Disagree    Disagree    No Opinion    Agree    Strongly Agree
4. I felt my high school courses prepared me for my college courses.  
     Strongly Disagree    Disagree    No Opinion    Agree    Strongly Agree
5. It was easy for me to make friends at college.  
     Strongly Disagree    Disagree    No Opinion    Agree    Strongly Agree
6. I felt comfortable asking questions in class.  
     Strongly Disagree    Disagree    No Opinion    Agree    Strongly Agree
7. I felt comfortable talking to my professors/teachers outside of class.  
     Strongly Disagree    Disagree    No Opinion    Agree    Strongly Agree
8. On Average, the content of my first year courses was very valuable.  
     Strongly Disagree    Disagree    No Opinion    Agree    Strongly Agree
9. I utilized the support systems available to me on campus. (Ex: American Indian Learning Resource Center, Multicultural Center, Tutoring Services)  
     Strongly Disagree    Disagree    No Opinion    Agree    Strongly Agree

**Please answer the following by circling the most accurate answer:**

10. What was the range of your first year GPA:  
     0 – 1.00            1.01 – 2.00            2.01 – 3.00            3.01 – 4.00
11. Where were you in fall after your first year of college:  
     Second Year of College    Transferred to a Different College    No Longer Attended College

**All questions will be kept confidential. Thank you for your help.**

Appendix D

April 13, 2010

TO: Elizabeth Fandry, Student Researcher  
Dr. Suzanne Griffith, Faculty Advisor  
FROM: Jim Miller, Coordinator  
Institutional Review Board for Protection of Human Subjects

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Expedited Status Determination for Research Involving Human Subjects: IRB #562 Factors Influencing Native American Students' College Success.

Your research proposal, IRB #562 Factors Influencing Native American Students' College Success, has been determined to meet the guidelines for expedited status. The readers were Bruce Kibler and Deborah Augsburger. Data collection is approved for now through October 31, 2010. Should collection need to extend beyond that date, you will need to resubmit your protocol to the IRB for an extension.

The purpose of the Institutional Review Board is to review research projects conducted by UW-Superior students, faculty, and staff to ensure that ethical practices and protocols with regards to use of human subjects are followed. Retain this memorandum with your research protocols. Please note that you must follow the proposal submitted to and agreed upon by this committee. If you change protocols or practices, or if data collection is expected to extend beyond the approved date, you must return to the committee for review of the modifications or extension.

Good luck in your research endeavor.

Cc: Provost/Vice Chancellor Markwood  
IRB Members:  
Deborah Augsburger  
Elizabeth Blue  
James Geidner  
Bruce Kibler  
Dave LaBore  
William Simpson

Jim Miller  
[University of Wisconsin-Superior](http://www.uw-superior.edu)  
P.O. Box 2000, Belknap & Catlin Streets  
Superior, WI 54880  
715/394-8396

Appendix E

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Twin Cities Campus

Human Research Protection Program  
Office of the Vice President for Research

1328 Alford Johnson Hall Building  
421 Delaware Street S.E.  
46017-0150  
Minneapolis, MN 55455  
Phone: 612-625-4661  
Fax: 612-625-4661  
E-mail: [hrp@research.umn.edu](mailto:hrp@research.umn.edu)  
Website: <http://www.umn.edu/hrp/>

May 5, 2010

Elizabeth M Fandry  
236 W. St. Marie Street  
Duluth, MN 55803

RE: "Factors Influencing Native American Students' College Success"  
IRB Code Number: 1004P80373

Dear Dr. Fandry

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) received your response to its stipulations. Since this information satisfies the federal criteria for approval at 45CFR46.111 and the requirements set by the IRB, final approval for the project is noted in our files. Upon receipt of this letter, you may begin your research.

IRB approval of this study includes the consent form received May 3, 2010 and recruitment materials received May 3, 2010.

The IRB would like to stress that subjects who go through the consent process are considered enrolled participants and are counted toward the total number of subjects, even if they have no further participation in the study. Please keep this in mind when calculating the number of subjects you request. This study is currently approved for 100 subjects. If you desire an increase in the number of approved subjects, you will need to make a formal request to the IRB.

For your records and for grant certification purposes, the approval date for the referenced project is April 12, 2010 and the Assurance of Compliance number is FWA00000312 (Fairview Health Systems Research FWA00000325, Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare FWA00004003). Research projects are subject to continuing review and renewal; approval will expire one year from that date. You will receive a report form two months before the expiration date. If you would like us to send certification of approval to a funding agency, please tell us the name and address of your contact person at the agency.

As Principal Investigator of this project, you are required by federal regulations to:

- \*Inform the IRB of any proposed changes in your research that will affect human subjects, changes should not be initiated until written IRB approval is received.
- \*Report to the IRB subject complaints and unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others as they occur.
- \*Respond to notices for continuing review prior to the study's expiration date.
- \*Cooperate with post-approval monitoring activities

Driven to Discover™

Information on the IRB process is available in the form of a guide for researchers entitled, *What Every Researcher Needs to Know*, found at <http://www.research.umn.edu/irb/WLRNK/index.cfm>

The IRB wishes you success with this research. If you have questions, please call the IRB office at 612-626-5654.

We have created a short survey that will only take a couple of minutes to complete. The questions are basic, but will give us guidance on what areas are showing improvement and what areas we need to focus on:

<https://umsurvey.umn.edu/index.php?sid=36122&lang=um>

Sincerely,



Christina Dobrowolny, CIP  
Research Compliance Supervisor  
CD/pm  
CC: Suzanne Griffith