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American Indian Experiences in Natural Resources Degree Programs

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Graduate Student Research Conference

Abstract

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The purpose of this research is to examine the educational experiences of American Indians in natural resources and related degree programs. This research will attempt to describe the experiences of American Indians in natural resources degree programs; to observe their initial goals; to identify factors that positively and negatively influence their educational experiences and progress toward their educational goals; and to evaluate the degree to which experiences and factors reflect common themes versus more individualized person-specific factors. With respect to factors that may influence educational experiences, while the research will remain open to factors identified by the respondents as influential, special attention will be focused on the effect of traditional culture on their learning; and the impact of the educational frameworks in their degree programs. The research design developed for this dissertation project is guided by two distinct but compatible research paradigms: an indigenous research methodology and hermeneutics. The population of interest in this research consists of participants in the educational process of American Indians in natural resources, which includes natural resource degree-seeking students, graduates and educators at TCUs and non-native institutions. Participants will be self-identified as American Indian. They are all either currently working on completing a natural resources or related degree or have completed a natural resources or related degree. They have completed their degrees at TCUs, non-native universities, or a combination of the two types of institutions. Among the potential participants that have completed their degrees some are currently working as faculty at non-native universities, some are faculty at TCUs, and some work in natural resource agencies. There are a total of thirty potential participants. The pool of potential participants

consists of an equal number of females and males. The potential participants represent fifteen different tribal affiliations. Each individual's stories and experiences in natural resources degree programs will be explored through the use of in-depth interviews. The goal of analysis will be to find commonalities and differences among interviews without sacrificing context. Higher education has been striving towards increasing diversity. Considering this goal, literature providing insights into American Indian successes in higher education can help institutions further develop their diversity plans. For example, an exploration of American Indian experiences in higher education can identify factors that either foster or impede the completion of their degree programs to inform institutions in the development and implementation of policies and practices that foster American Indian degree completion. Unfortunately the literature on American Indians in higher education primarily utilizes quantitative data but neglects including the voice and experiences of the people themselves. There are very few examples of prior research on American Indian's experiences in higher education.