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**Four Winds Across Three Campuses
Indigenous Community Building in Higher Education**

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Abstract

Four Winds Across Three Campuses Indigenous Community Building in Higher Education

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This study examines how Indigenous people build communities in higher education settings. This focus frames the impact of connectivity on identity development through a correlation between cultural accessibility and improved post-secondary success for this population. The research centers on three institutions: The University of Texas at Austin, Southeastern Oklahoma State University, and Queen’s University. Separate chapters are dedicated to each campus in order to emphasize the great variation of Indigenous identity across the North American continent and to reflect various opportunities for manifestations of cultural connectivity. Research is also included concerning each university’s relationship to the wider Indigenous communities of the regions in which they sit. This includes exploration of the institutions’ relationships with local nonprofit organizations, tribal governments, and initiatives which seek to include outside Indigenous voice in campus affairs.

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Introduction

It was November of 2006 as I walked across the campus of Texas State University, San Marcos. This was on one of those beautiful Fall days where the sky is clear, but there is a chill to the air if you stay too long in a shadow. It was my fourth year of study as an undergraduate music major, and I had just left a jazz ensemble rehearsal to trek to the LBJ Student Center for lunch. The Texas State campus sits on a massive hill which serves as an unofficial start of the Texas Hill Country stretching to the west. The music building is located near its northeast base. This long climb provides the campus breathtaking views of the surrounding region while also ensuring students come away from their education with incredible calf muscles.

Centered in the campus is Alkek Library, an imposing building of white rock located approximately three-quarters of the way up the hill. The ground level of the library features a wide, open-air passage that serves as a gateway between the western and eastern sections of the university, with the student center as the first building on its elevated side. As I climbed the stairs to the pass, I began to notice the sound of drumming bouncing off of the architecture. While subtle at first, it grew louder the higher I climbed. The drum was steady as a heartbeat.

After passing through the library, I began to hear singing going along to the rhythm. The voices were fast and high in the style of the northern traditions of Turtle Island. Feathers and bright regalia could soon be spotted moving across the balcony of the student center. I had stumbled across the university's Celebration of the People, a powwow festival organized by the campus' Native American Student Association.

Having grown up a Choctaw in Southeastern Oklahoma, powwow was a regular part of my childhood. Every year we would travel to the capital grounds of Tuskahoma for the tribe's Labor Day festival, which is the largest dancing arena I remember from my youth. However, my

family moved to Central Texas in my early teens, and I had not heard powwow drums in over a decade. Yet the dances, regalia, and people at this campus celebration felt familiar. I spent the afternoon roaming through the vendors and watching the ceremony. Even with years of disconnect from tribal culture, I would have been impossible not to have felt the power of Intertribalism in this space.

I joined the university's Native American Student Association in the following weeks. The next year saw our group coordinate a conference and then another Fall powwow. These projects proved remarkable opportunities for our members to grow familiar with the wider Intertribal community of Central Texas, as elders from two Native nonprofit organizations, the Indigenous Cultures Institute and the Four Winds Intertribal Society, served as our advisors. I have been honored to have many of these individuals grow into mentors and adopted family over the past decades. For a Choctaw far from Choctaw Country, these relationships have been central to my sense of Native connectivity.

There is power in space, how communities access that space, and how culture can manifest. This day taught me that a university can serve as a great foundation for Indigenous voice and community building. This would be my first time experiencing this feeling, but it would be far from the last. I will always be grateful for those northern drum beats drawing me into ceremony on a chilly day in November.

Overview

This study explores Native American community building and identity development in higher education settings. Universities serve as great catalysts for individual and collective empowerment, and though Indigenous people face many challenges with post-secondary access and completion, we also possess great opportunity for success. This work aims to highlight these

stories. It does so through research based on the experiences of individuals at three institutions: The University of Texas at Austin, Southeastern Oklahoma State University in Durant, Oklahoma, and Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario.

Identity is an essential element of both our understanding of self and relation to our environments. It is a co-constructed phenomenon; community is born out of a shared sense of identity and individual identity is able to influence the wider community (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). Identity development largely occurs in higher education by exposure to new responsibilities, knowledge, and social circles. However, the success of these experiences is largely dependent on the development of positive community support structures (Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003). While this is true for all students, Native post-secondary persistence is particularly dependent on engagement with other Indigenous people during these formative years (Youngbull, 2018). Understanding how to improve Indigenous college success therefore benefits from understanding how to build Indigenous campus communities. Through healthy communities, students are better able to connect with and develop aspects of their own Native identities to the benefit of both self and the collective.

Recent decades have seen many parts of Indian Country investing in education as a pathway towards community empowerment. A result of these efforts is that Indigenous students are matriculating to college at a higher rate than ever before (Youngbull, 2018). However, there remains a need to improve higher education access and experience among the First Nations. This is evident by the fact that enrollment for American Indian and Alaskan Natives was only 19% in 2016, compared with 42% for Whites, 39% for Hispanics, and 36% among Black populations (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Additionally, Native Americans and Alaskan Natives have the lowest post-secondary persistence rates of any ethnic group

(Lopez, 2018). These statistics are challenging, but there are many bright spots in Indigenous education developing across Turtle Island. It is worth taking the time to tell the stories as a means of cultivating narratives of Native American success.

This work is structured into seven chapters. The current chapter will outline the purpose of this study, define terminology, examine critical assumptions on Native education, and provide previews of later chapters. It will also discuss my positionality as a researcher in relation to the institutions involved in data collection. The second chapter consists of a literature review examining scholarship in relation to the history of Native education, Indigenous identity, and identity's relationship to community. It will then explore how research on identity and community relate to literature on the higher education experience. The third chapter will outline the Indigenous methodologies used to guide this work, including the ontological and epistemological assumptions incorporated into my research. These topics will be supported by discussions on a community-based approach that privileges Indigenous voice, the incorporation of Native story, and the limiting of damage narratives. Chapters four, five, and six will be devoted to telling stories collected from The University of Texas at Austin, Southeastern Oklahoma State University, and Queen's University, respectively. Finally, chapter seven will provide an opportunity for discussion and closing thoughts.

Purpose of the study

The driving mission of this work is to benefit the various communities involved in the research. This includes the Indigenous university communities, tribal groups, and nonprofit organizations featured in chapters four, five, and six. Education is a great benefit to Indigenous people, and while western higher education systems prove a challenging environment for this population, we are able to move forward by claiming these spaces through the expression of

our Indigenous values and perspectives. The hope is that this work will contribute to ongoing efforts to cultivate such efforts within these institutions.

The second purpose of this study is to provide a perspective on Indigenous higher education for the benefit of scholars and outside practitioners. The enrollment of American Indian college students has more than doubled over the past 30 years (Youngbull, 2018). It is therefore beneficial for institutions, professors, and student service personnel to gain insight into Indigenous campus experiences. Transforming the underlying assumptions of institutional culture is critical to transforming the institution itself into a space that is safe and supportive of Indigenous people (Lipe, 2018). The stories and experiences included in this work are not universal to Native American experience, and they should not be considered directly applicable to other peoples. However, they may be able to help generate questions and insights for campuses across Turtle Island.

Four winds

The concept of the Four Directions is important within many Native American traditions (The University of New Mexico, 2020). Lakota culture, for instance, understands the world as being made-up of Four Directions, with each having its own meaning and symbolism. There can be variation among interpretations, but the North is often seen to represent trial and subsequent cleansing; East stands for wisdom and learning to live a good life; South represents warmth and growth; and West signifies the end of life (St. Joseph's Indian School, 2020). Meanwhile, the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi people see the East as the direction of birth and rebirth; the South is a place of youth, physical strength, vigor, and preparation for the future; the West embraces connectivity to nature and the spirituality of physical beings; and the North is a place of wisdom and survival (Pokagon Band of Potawatomi, 2020).

I am not from either of these communities, and I do aim to claim these traditions as my own. However, this work aims for Intertribal inclusivity, and their addition to the conversation is a means of acknowledging other Indigenous traditions who hold the Four Winds as meaningful. From my view, the concept of the Four Winds reflects the building of Intertribal communities drawn across the geographic and cultural variation of the three universities centered in the research. Not only do these campuses represent distinct parts of Turtle Island, but each are a hub that connects Indigenous people from across the continent.

I have a dear friend and mentor named Paula Taylor. She is a Comanche elder and the retired Chairwoman of the Four Winds Intertribal Society, a non-profit-based Indigenous community I have been a member of since my youth. In the Spring of 2019, Paula and I were chatting at a society powwow on the cliffs of Lake Belton. A powwow is a Native American festival that features arts and craft vendors; Indigenous food such as fry-bread, turkey legs, and buffalo burgers; and a central ceremonial circle of Native dancing, drumming, and singing. It is a celebration of culture that has proven a powerful means through which Indigenous people have built community in this part of the world.

While the drums were playing in the background, Paula and I discussed the concept of the Four Winds. In her own words: “I have heard this all my life. If you listen to the winds, they will guide you. It is the knowledge from the north, the south, the east, and the west. We are all different, but we all come together as one. The tribes across the country have their own ways; they have different customs; but we are still one people. My walk is my own, and each individual has their own way of entering the circle. This is guided by the four winds. There are so many different parts to us, but if we listen, somehow those winds will give us the strength and show the way. If we just will listen”

I have titled this work based on a belief in this message. I place a great deal of emphasis on balancing the beautiful variation of Native American people with a message of connectivity. We have much to gain by building bridges across Indigenous communities while maintaining respect for our distinctions. I also believe in allowing spirit and tradition to guide our actions. Shawn Wilson described research as a form of ceremony for Indigenous people (2008), and I have worked hard for this particular ceremony to be guided by the proper spirit and the collective wisdom of my elders and community.

Three campuses

The first campus included in this piece is my home institution, The University of Texas at Austin, a tier-1 research university located in the heart of the state. The borders of the campus sit less than a mile from the Texas Capitol building and is surrounded on all sides by one of the fastest growing cities in the nation (Zehr, 2015). The university hosts approximately 52,000 students, though only 0.1% of this body self-identifies as Native American (University of Texas at Austin, 2020). While our numbers are small, Indigenous students have formed an extremely active, close-knit community. The university's Native American make-up is notable in its large representation of Indigenous individuals from LatinX, Latino/a, and Hispanic backgrounds, though there are also many members with northern tribal heritage. Indigenous activity on campus is largely organized around its Native American and Indigenous Studies academic program, which is distinct among similar programs across the continent due to its focus on cross-hemispheric Indigeneity. This can be seen reflected in its student and faculty representation, its programs and activities, and its coursework. This characteristic is one of our community's great

strengths and will feature in an ongoing message in this work about expanding Native American identity and building bridges between Indigenous people.

The second institution discussed in this work is Southeastern Oklahoma State University, a regional institution in my homeland. It is located in the City of Durant approximately 20 miles north of the Red River, which designates the state's southern border with Texas. The university enrolls just over 5,000 students, approximately 28% of which are of Native American descent (Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2020). Southeastern benefits from strong connections with multiple Native American tribal governments, though the most significant of these relationships is with the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. The tribe's governmental headquarters is also located in Durant, approximately ten miles away from the campus. While higher education in Oklahoma has spent the last decade struggling due to state austerity measures left-over from the Great Recession, the university benefits from a symbiotic, long-running relationship with the tribe. This chapter will include interviews and research drawn from both the university and the Choctaw Nation's educational offices in order to examine this partnership.

The final institution researched in this work is Queen's University, a medium-sized school located in Kingston, Ontario. The campus sits on the shores of Lake Ontario near the entrance of the St. Lawrence River, approximately half-way between Montreal and Toronto. Queen's is home to a student population of just over 25,000, 3.2% of which identify as Indigenous (Queen's University, 2020). While its very name hints at the institution's colonial legacy, recent decades have seen an intentional and significant effort by administration to build opportunities for Indigenous students through policy and programming. Queen's offers a separate admissions process for Indigenous students as well as several areas of study specific to this population, including The Indigenous Policy and Governance Studies and The Indigenous

Teacher Education Program. Additionally, Queen's University operates a committee known as The Indigenous Council composed of students, university personnel, and representatives from the Indigenous communities of Ontario. This group's goal is to assist with critical decision making concerning Native students. These programs represent a strong push in university policy, which will allow this chapter to partially focus on the campus' Indigenous community building in relation to institutional intentionality.

The University of Texas at Austin, Southeastern Oklahoma University, and Queen's University were chosen as sites for the study because they present three very distinct environments for Indigenous community-building and identity development. My goal in this work is not to compare or contrast but to frame each campus' chapter as a singular exploration of the various ways in which Indigenous community, identity, and culture manifest. Additionally, by including a university on First Nations' land in the north, an institution focused on southern Indigeneity, and an institution in the heart of Indian Country, this work is able to emphasize a theme of Indigenous connectivity crossing the borders of colonial states.

There is an interesting conversation to be had concerning each institution's founding in relation to its Indigenous population cultivation. While the University of Texas at Austin was founded in 1883 (University of Texas at Austin, 2020), it did not have a Native American and Indigenous Studies program until 2006 (The University of Texas at Austin College of Liberal Arts, 2021). As discussed in chapter four, there is a distinct impression among students that despite this program's efforts, the university as a whole is not supportive of Indigenous people. Meanwhile, Southeastern Oklahoma State was founded in 1909 as Southeastern State Normal School (Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2020), and its history has been characterized from the beginning by strong a relationship with tribal culture. Though there are several

examples of this relationship that will be addressed in chapter five, it will suffice for now to share that the university's first yearbook from 1911 was titled *Holisso*, which translates to "book" in the Choctaw language (Southeastern State Normal School, 1913). A historic and contemporary examination of this relationship will be included in this chapter.

Finally, we have Queen's University. It is the oldest higher education institution on this list, having been established in 1841 through a Royal Charter issued by the United Kingdom's Queen Victoria (Queen's University, 2021). As described by Dr. Donato Santeramo, Professor and Head of the university's Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures, the university has made in increased effort to cultivate its Indigenous population over the past five years. These years have been impactful, as evident by the many forms of academic and social support resources provided to Indigenous students throughout the university's programs and policies.

Each of these three universities possess a distinct story. Their histories are critical to understanding their efforts in building Indigenous opportunity. It is presumed that Indigenous student body representation and proximity to a Native land base impact the amount of interest an institution shows in cultivating this population. This will be explored in the research. For now, it is safe to say that some of these institutions are further along than others in their support of Native students but that each could benefit from an examination of these efforts.

Benefits of education

As described by Joy Culbreath, retired Director of Education Programming for the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma: "Education makes the difference in the lives of people. It changes what you are, what you can be, what you'll become" (J. Culbreath, personal communication, March 28, 2017). There are many individual, community, and cultural benefits to educational attainment. While these benefits are in no way limited to economic outcomes, it is

notable to Indigenous communities that college attainment has grown increasingly important to long-term financial stability (Mitchell, Palacios, & Leachman, 2014) (Hout, 2012). Annual earnings in prime working years rise by approximately 20% for each level of education achieved (Lewis & Diamond, 2015). Over the course of a lifetime, college graduates earn approximately one million dollars more than high school graduates and one and a half million more than those without a high school degree (Lewis & Diamond, 2015). Critical to recent decades is the fact that those with only a high school degree are more prone to the negative effects of recessions (Paulsen & Pessau, 1989).

We have known for decades that increased access to post-secondary education acts as a catalyst towards the erosion of traditional class structures (Trow, 1970). It is therefore a critical tool for the building of an Indigenous middle class. Education leads to the improvement of family conditions across generations (Bouman & Nidiffer, 2004), which has major implications for low-income college students who are often the first in their families to attend college (Paulsen & St. John, 2002). There is a direct correlation between increased educational attainment and improved health, decreased divorce rates, and contributions to the functioning of one's community (Hout, 2012). Educational achievement is therefore a powerful tool for economic and social stability.

While the financial impact on individuals and communities is important, we cannot ignore the social, cultural, and identity-based benefits of educational achievement. Orfield (2002) discusses how "Observing success within the boundaries of our own experience clarifies the possibilities and processes of social advance and stimulates healthy competition and ambition." It can prove incredibly powerful for a Native young person to witness parents, aunts, uncles, and others from their community gain degrees. Success inspires ambition, and

opportunity creates opportunities across generations (Drier, Mollenkopf, & Swanstrom, 2014). Post-secondary success can serve as a great catalyst towards the empowerment of the Indigenous collective. According to Moses (2002), education is among the most essential contributors to the strength and success of a people. Indigenous people therefore have a great deal to gain by improving our ability to form meaningful campus communities as a catalyst towards our peoples' empowerment. We have the right to use education in order to preserve, maintain, and build upon Indigenous identities and ways of knowing.

Problem statement

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), higher education enrollment for American Indian and Alaskan Natives in 2016 was only 19%, compared to 42% for Whites, 39% for Hispanics, and 36% among Black populations. Once on campus, Native American freshmen graduate at only 61% the rate of white students across flagship universities (Gerald & Haycock, 2006). Enrollment for American Indian college students doubled between 1980 and 2008 (Devoe, Darling-Churchill, & Snyder, 2008), which parallels increased representation for minority students across the board (Townsend, 2009). However, a troubling trend in this data shows that attainment rates for young American Indians between the ages of 25 and 29 are actually lower (16.9%) than for those over the age of 30 (21.6%) (Lumina Foundation, 2013), which indicates that Indian Country is losing ground on this issue.

Understanding enrollment and access are critical, but there are many aspects to the changing landscape of Indigenous higher education attainment that remain un-researched (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solorzano, 2009). This may be both a cause and consequence of the fact that there are very few programs in research-one institutions that are led by Indigenous faculty (Lipe, 2018). The minimal representation of Indigenous scholars in academic leadership is

perhaps a reflection of minimal Indigenous student populations. To make matters even more convoluted, the current legal environment has resulted in the co-option of the tools once used by institutions to address inequalities in higher education, such as affirmative action (Garces & Gordon Da Cruz, 2017), thus making it more difficult to increase Native and other under-represented student populations.

It is critical to understand Indian Country's low higher education attainment in relation to the ongoing effects of colonization. Race is a central aspect of colonial capitalism (Stoler, 2002) and has long been employed as a tool for genocide and theft (Wolfe, 2006). Colonized populations are racialized in specific ways that mark and reproduce the unequal relationships developed by European Whites to benefit their own social position (Wolfe, 2011). Public education has a long history of serving as a colonization tool in North America, and as a result, it has most often been at odds with Indigenous cultural and educational needs (Calderón, 2014).

As described by Native academic Bryan Brayboy (2005), western education institutions prove a challenging environment for Native youth due to the fact that racism is so deeply engrained that it is almost invisible. While there are institutions of higher education on Turtle Island with long histories of successfully serving diverse populations, including historically black colleges and universities and Tribal colleges, most of North America's post-secondary systems remain dominated by western-European epistemologies and structural frameworks. As a whole, U.S. higher education was built to cater to students of White western backgrounds. Settler colonization is a structure not an event (Wolfe, 2006), and that structure continues to stack the deck against educational attainment for people of color.

Students from low socio-economic backgrounds tend to have fewer options and lower success rates in post-secondary institutions (Walpole, 2003), and minorities overall have a

disproportionally high representation of low-income students (Paulsen & St. John, 2002). Native Americans have the highest poverty rate of any ethnic group in the United States (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2004), and reservations and tribal lands remain among the poorest regions in the country (Sandefur, Rindfuss & Cohen, 1996). Similar issues face First Nations people in Canada. Nine out of ten of the nation's communities which experience the highest rates of crime are Indigenous, as are ninety-two of its one hundred poorest communities (McMahon, 2014). The most challenged communities are in remote regions disconnected from industry, whereas the most successful are in more populated areas, which better allows the formation of social and economic connections to their surrounding communities (McMahon, 2014). The unemployment among Indigenous people is double the national average, and approximately a third of this population is on some form of social assistance (Mahon, 2014). Isolation, depression and substance abuse are common within these communities (McMahon, 2014), and half of all of Canada's Indigenous youth live below the poverty line, with rates as high as 64% in some regions (McMahon, 2014).

Native American communities are plagued by violence, substance abuse, and health problems rooted deep in conditions caused by generations of economic disadvantage, family disorganization, and personal malaise (Sandefur, Rindfuss & Cohen, 1996). Neoliberal politics often frame such disparities as consequences of individual defect (Wilson, 2015). However, this is a narrative of convenience which reinforces the problematic structures of colonialism by leaving them unproblematicized (Gerrard, Rudolph, Sriprakash, 2017). In order to understand these issues through a macro or mezzo lens, we must look beyond the individual to understand them within the context of the wider world in which economic disparities sit. Colonization and racialization are central to this discussion.

The racial achievement gap, or the differences in test scores, GPAs, and completion rates between White and minority students (Lewis & Diamond, 2015), is a direct result of the transfer of wealth and social capital across generations within White families. This system has been systemically supported by the nation's political, social, cultural, and educational institutions. Postsecondary education access becomes racialized through the ideological values of merit and equal opportunity (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015), which are co-opted by White families who are able to provide greater access to resources that can assist in college preparation. The effect is that our colleges and universities are set-up to recycle privilege (Berrey, 2015). The U.S. has one of the lowest escape rates out of poverty of any nation in the industrialized world (Drier, Mollenkopf, & Swanstrom, 2014). However, education has proven to be one of the most effective tools for minorities to escape poverty (Orfield, 1988). It is therefore essential to examine and problematize access to these systems. However, admissions is not the only issue concerning access. We must also take time to explore the experiences of Indigenous students on campus in order to understand challenges in access and educational success.

As described by Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 'research' is among the most problematic words among Indigenous people (2012). She goes on to describe how scientific research is implicated in some of the worst atrocities of historic colonialism, and there remains a "powerful remembered history" for many colonized communities in regard to western scholarship. Academia has preserved aspects of Native culture and history, but many tribal people and Native scholars are not comfortable with how this work has been done, particularly concerning how Natives are presented and when sacred aspects of the culture are shared (Champagne, 1998). If not outright damaging to Indigenous communities, there are cross-generational questions about whether the work being done on Native people is relevant to

their needs (Deloria, 1969). This context makes it difficult to convince an Indigenous student that higher education is able to effectively serve them and that their community-based values and beliefs will be respected. This challenging relationship between Indian people and higher education led to a growth in Tribal colleges in the latter 20th Century, which are defined as institutions that are formally sanctioned by one or more tribal government (Brown, 2003). These institutions were developed with the goal of building self-determination by using education as a catalyst for young leadership (Campbell, 1990). While Tribal colleges are a powerful tool for many parts of Indian Country, their capacity is limited, and we must continue efforts to transform mainstream institutions in order to improve access for Indigenous people across the continent.

Fowler (2013) argues that education institutions usually reflect the culture of the White middle class, and students from outside of this group have the double task of learning both the cognitive material and an unfamiliar cultural code in order to be successful. While we are beyond the “Assimilation Era” of Native American education which characterized the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, assimilation remains a reality on the campuses of most contemporary post-secondary institutions (Windchief, 2018). Research has shown that successful students typically either come from the dominant culture or assimilate to it (Chambers, Huggins, Locke, & Fowler, 2014). This aligns with higher education research which shows that scholars of color often feel the need to conform to White culture in dress and mannerisms in order to be successful (Scheurick & Young, 1997). The problem with assimilation, as described by Moses (2002), is that it is inherently oppressive in its requirement that people of color change their identities in order to participate in the dominant culture. Such devaluation of culture is damaging to a healthy sense of self and community connectivity.

Our culture often frames state-sponsored education as a structure of social progress, while the reality is that it often serves as a key source of structural oppression (Sojoyner, 2017). Schools create and enforce hegemonic discourse and dominant ideologies (Urrieta, 2018), and our very notion of scientific literacy is built upon cultural assimilation and acculturation (Higgins, 2016). Much of academia remains limited to the Enlightenment's scientific method, which only recognizes knowledge that is produced through rigorous, systematic method (St. Pierre, 2017). Even the social sciences grew highly quantitative and positivist in the 20th Century due to an aspiration for scientific authority and expertise (Andrews, 2015). Academic systems such as peer review have the habit of privileging certain voices while silencing others (Todd, 2016).

Most western academic disciplines are either antagonistic to other knowledge systems or have no methodology for their incorporation (Smith, 2012). Indigenous knowledge is rarely seen as legitimate on its own terms but must instead be negotiated in relation to pre-established modes of inquiry (Hunt, 2014) and filtered through White scholars and epistemologies (Todd, 2016). Indigenous people in this environment often have to negotiate the dissonances between their traditions, values, and the increasingly complex world in which we live (Minthorn & Chavez, 2015).

Research question

This project's research question asks: How are Indigenous communities built in higher education settings, and what are their impact on the development of Indigenous identities among students, faculty, and staff? To explore this question, I have crafted a selection of sub-questions to guide inquiry. These questions do not apply to all campuses and communities involved, but

they instead serve as a topical map to guide exploration of the primary research question. They include:

1. How do Indigenous identities develop in higher education settings in relation to Indigenous community and knowledge systems?
2. How is a campus Native community influenced by its surrounding Indigenous community or its proximity to Indigenous land-bases?
3. How are students, faculty, staff, and institutions able to cultivate environments supportive of Native American community and identity?
4. What are the important elements of the Indigenous knowledge systems being developed at each institution?
5. How significant are cultural events, such as powwows, in the development of community?

The questions pertaining to students, faculty, staff, institutions, and the wider community aim to frame our understanding of Native campus community building at the micro (individual), mezzo (institutional), and macro (regional) level. Additionally, the exploration of the relationship between a campus and its regional Indigenous community assumes both significance and opportunity for bridge-building and connectivity between these sects. The question concerning the importance of campus events resulted from conversations with a campus community leader expressing interest in learning more about this issue. As this individual's role is largely focused on Native American student support, I assume his interest in this topic relates to how best to structure his programming. Finally, the question concerning Indigenous knowledge systems aims at understanding how specific community needs and attributes shape the coursework, scholarship, and ways of thinking being developed at each institution. Together,

these questions have guided my thinking and research methodologies in order to understand how these pieces fit together in the formation of community and the development of Indigenous identity.

Terminology

Throughout this piece I will use the terms Native, Native American, Intertribal, Indigenous, First Peoples, and Indian. Not one of these terms are perfect, but I have seen them each used effectively and with good spirit during my time in Indigenous communities. “Native American” has long been the most prominent term in the English lexicon used to describe the pantheon of Indigenous people from the western hemisphere, though its history and use seem most specific to the United States. The term is a politically correct counter to the long, problematic history of using the term “Indian.” “Native American” is wobbly from an ontological standpoint due to the fact that it defines the Indigenous people of these continents in relation to an Italian explorer and therefore European colonialism. However, it also has a long history of being used with pride and confidence by Indigenous people. I personally feel comfortable with this language. While my experience is that “Native American” is mostly used for tribal groups from North America, textually, it can represent many aboriginal people from the hemisphere. I will therefore use it flexibly, unless I am aware of a community that specifically avoids this label.

I am also happy to use the term “Indian.” As described by Calderón (2016), “Indianness refers to the centering, or privileging, of indigenous ways of knowing; histories; maintaining relationships with lands, resources, and peoples; and making claims regarding nature.” This description is powerful in its tying of Indigeneity to past and present. It is true that the term has a ridiculous history ranging from Columbus’ famous gaffe to its use in 20th Century television

and dime-store novels to reinforce clichés. I have personally seen a room full of Chickasaws roll their eyes and groan as an outsider began talking about “Cowboys and Indians.” However, I have also worked several powwows that use the term “Indian Market” to designate their craft booths; I have heard my elders discuss what it means to be Indian and to walk the Red Road; and I remember being an excited kid competing in the State of Oklahoma’s Indian Student Art Show. Personally, I feel comfortable with this term while being willing to acknowledge its many imperfections.

“First Nations” also occasionally works its way into this work’s vocabulary. This term is more common among our Indigenous Canadian cousins, but I have always appreciated its symbolism. “First Nations” links Indigenous people to originalism, and therefore emphasizes legitimacy through connectivity with land better than some alternatives. However, it must also be acknowledged that there are other Indigenous identities in Canada beyond this term, including the Inuit and Métis. These names are more specific to particular populations, similarly to “Native American,” so I am apt to use “First Nations” when speaking in broad strokes.

The term that requires the most in-depth discussion is perhaps “Indigenous,” as it so heavily ties into this work’s effort to build bridges with LatinX Native people. It is also the preferred term used on the campus of Queen’s University. It should also be acknowledged that the term ‘Indigenous’ is not bounded to the western hemisphere. While it emerged in the 1970s through the activism of North America’s American Indian Movement and Canadian Indian Brotherhood (Smith, 2012), it has grown into a term used to describe people across the globe. Niezen (2003) uses ‘Indigenous’ to define people from all corners of the planet who possess primary attachments to land and culture. By his definition, they are “traditional” people with lasting connections to ways of life that have survived “from time immemorial.” While this

definition is imperfect in its emphasizes on Indigenous people being culturally and historically stagnant, it is useful in placing emphases on rights and legitimacy being based on the connectivity of land and people.

I have moved in southern Native American circles where “Indigenous” is used as a term of identity in itself. This is a contrast to Niezen’s definition above, which uses the term as a non-specific cultural descriptor rather than as an ethno-cultural identification. It is not uncommon in Central Texas for an individual of LatinX, Hispanic, Latino/a heritage who recognize their Native ancestry to call themselves “Indigenous” in the same way Choctaw and Cherokee may call themselves “Native American.” It may in fact be more significant than this comparison, as many LatinX Indigenous people were detribalized through the process of colonialism and may not know their tribal names. For this reason, I accept ‘Indigenous’ as a form of ethno-community identity and capitalize it in the same way that I would capitalize “Native American,” “Black,” or “White.”

“Intertribal” is a term linked to “Native American.” Through my years in the Central Texas Indigenous community, it has come to represent the great pantheon of Turtle Island’s First Peoples. It is true that the tribal designation in this term may be understood as only referring to government recognized tribes, which would problematically leave-out the continent’s countless detribalized populations. However, I am of the belief that governmental recognition does not define the legitimacy of an Indigenous people, tribe, or whatever other term may be used for a collective. I therefore use the term to reflect connectivity between Native American, Indian, First Nations, and Indigenous people of the Americas with an intentionality towards building bridges across these identities. There is a time to acknowledge the beauty and power of variation, and then there is a time to build the collective.

The final term to acknowledge is “Turtle Island,” which I use throughout this work to designate North America. From claw to tail, the continent is shaped like Grandfather Turtle, who represents wisdom and patience among several Intertribal traditions. While there are a few Indigenous scholars I could point towards who use this term, such as Hudson (2016), my reason for using this title is based on my personal Intertribal community experience. It is a commonly understood term among contemporary Native people, and its use emphasizes on our long-standing relationship to this land beyond the limitations of colonialism.

Methodology overview

The three universities involved in this work have been studied through perspectives and methods shaped by an overarching Indigenous approach. This has been done through a qualitative lens, which allows an exploration of how participant perspectives shape and are shaped by their physical, social, and cultural contexts (Maxwell, 2013). A description of my methodological design is outlined in chapter three. While there are aspects of Western and global research methodologies incorporated into this work, my approach aims to center knowledge systems from the Native people of Turtle Island. As I am a Choctaw walking this path, I have called chapter three my *hvchik*, which translates to “satchel” in my peoples’ language. These pages are an outline of the Indigenous methodological toolkit picked-up throughout this study.

I aim to treat the Indigenizing of my research as an ongoing process rather than as a destination, as advocated by Davidson, Shotton, Minthorn, & Waterman (2018). Critical to this process includes the development of an ontology, or my stance on the nature of reality, and my epistemology, or my perspective on how I have come to know reality (Creswell, 2018). Each has been crafted through the guidance of my Native elders, my community experience, and the

works of other Indigenous scholars. I must also acknowledge the incredible members of my dissertation committee, all of whom have provided feedback on the development of this project through previous coursework. Their guidance and support have been critical in finding this study's path.

A central aspect of the Indigenous methodology used in this work is the privileging of Indigenous voice. Research that is inclusive of Indigenous voice helps legitimize Indigenous knowledge, which allows for the revitalization and restoration of identity and value systems, (Chilisa, Major, & Khudu-Petersen, 2017). This study aims to privilege Indigenous voices by treating participants as collaborators rather than as simply sources of data, as advocated by Jackson and Mazzei (2012). It also continuously asks "For whom is this work being done," as advocated by Smith (2012). As discussed more in depth in my methodology chapter, both of these approaches are supported through an emphasis on relationship building.

The techniques through which I interpret and incorporate story are also heavily featured in my Indigenous methodology discussion in chapter three. As described by Minthorn and Chavez (2015), "Story is essential to all peoples in order to convey vision and purpose of their lived experiences." Story is a means through which we find and construct meaning (Johnson-Bailey, 2004), and along with oral histories and elder wisdom, it is a critical aspect of Indigenous research (Smith, 2012). My years of experience in Indian Country have shown that the meaning and power of story are deeply embraced by Native American people. I therefore aim to be ever-conscious of how story is used when examining our communities.

Tribal Critical Race Theory is the primary theoretical framework used to guide this work. Critical Race Theory is largely focused on the study of race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), which will be useful in understanding the nature of Indigenous students and

communities in relationship to higher education institutions. Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) builds upon the framework of CRT by applying the epistemologies and ontologies specific to Native American communities (Brayboy, 2005). It is therefore useful in emphasizing Indigenous worldviews in the development and practice of this study.

To briefly recap, this work's Indigenous methodological structure will center on incorporating Native story, privileging Indigenous voice, benefitting the communities involved, and limiting damage narratives. Supplementing these tent-poles will be aspects of three methodologies from social science research. These include techniques involved in phenomenological, ethnographic, and narrative research. A phenomenology attempts to describe common meaning for participants based on their lived experiences (Creswell, 2018), which will serve to emphasize common experiences of what it means to be Indigenous on each campus. An ethnography aims to interpret shared patterns in values, behaviors, beliefs, and language through extensive field work (Creswell, 2018). The depth of my involvement and embeddedness greatly varies across the three sites, but there are aspects of an ethnographic approach present in each through my hyper focus on relationship building. Finally, there is Narrative Inquiry which understands participants as storytellers who construct meaning through stories as a way of sharing their perspective. The researcher then works to interpret these meanings (Kramp, 2004). This aspect of Narrative Inquiry is highly beneficial to Native American research due to the degree to which story sets the foundation of Indigenous ontologies (Hunt, 2014).

The methods used to collect data will primarily take the form of interviews with research participants. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, these communications have been limited to phone and online discussions since March of 2020. In-person observations are a powerful means to gain insight on community. They also assist in relationship building. Unfortunately,

future observations will be limited to digital events. While I have history on the campuses of both Southeastern and UT Austin, I was unfortunately unable to visit Queen's University due to the pandemic.

Significance and scope

This work aims to sit within the wider body of Indigenous higher education scholarship while contributing to under-researched topics on the impact of community connectivity in relation to identity development and educational success. As is often the case with Native American research, many scholars have focused on history. Adams (1995), for example, conducted a thorough exploration of the Native American boarding school experience in his book *Education for Extinction*. Concerning more contemporary issues, there are Native American researchers increasingly focused on Indigenous experiences in higher education settings (Brayboy, 2018). It is a small but growing field.

There are several academics who have compiled the work of Native authors on educational topics, such as Devon Mihesuah, whose 1998 book, *Natives and Academics*, focuses on issues of academic research and writing on American Indians. Robin Starr Minthorn has served as editor for similar compilations. Two of her recent works include the 2018 book, *Reclaiming Indigenous Research in Higher Education*, which she co-edited with Heather Shotton, and her 2015 book, *Indigenous Leadership in Higher Education*, which she co-edited with Alicia Fedelina Chavez. Additionally, there are authors such as Shawn Wilson (2008) and Jo-ann Archibald (2008) who have produced incredible work on the development of Indigenous-based methodologies. In short, research on Indigenous education is in a period of great momentum. Some authors have examined community and belonging, such as Bryan Brayboy in his 2005 piece "Hiding in the Ivy: American Indian Students and Visibility in Elite Educational

Settings.” However, there has yet been a deep dive of research specifically focused on the intersection of Indigenous education, identity, and community-building. This work hopes to add these pieces to the conversation.

This work has respect for the great variation of Indigenous identity and experience. As such, it does not seek to provide answers for any and all Indigenous higher education circumstance. Its scope is bounded to the three university communities from which these stories are drawn. However, the hope is that these stories can assist other practitioners and scholars interested in improving Indigenous higher education experience. These stories and applications are not directly translatable to any other campus, but the hope is that they help raise questions and considerations for communities interested in similar issues.

Positionality

It is important for researchers to be self-conscious about our roles in relation to both how we collect data and the impact of our work (Ragin, Charles, Nagel, & White, 2004). A critical aspect in this reflection is an understanding of our positionality in relation to the communities, lands, and organizations involved in our research. I have been fortunate in having a great variation of intimacy with the three universities, the tribal government, and the nonprofit organizations from which this study’s data is being collected. This has resulted in a corresponding variation in the application of the research paradigm used in this work. As can be seen through the examples below, one of the great beauties of theory is watching the many ways in which it is able manifest.

From a Western perspective, research has historically prized objectivity (Shotton & Minthorn, 2018). This is particularly the case for those scholars working in a positivist orientation (Ghaffar-Kucher, 2014). However, contemporary qualitative researchers

soundly reject the idea of the outside researcher without an agenda (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). The researcher is part of the social world we study and consequently impact and are impacted by community interactions (Maxwell, 2013). Our interpretations flow from our personal, cultural, and historic experiences (Creswell, 2018). It is therefore important to be aware of the impact of these experiences.

More important to this study is that Indigenous methodologies more fully embrace the positional relationship between the Indigenous scholar identity and the study of Indigenous issues (Shotton & Minthorn, 2018). Relational ways of knowing and being are critical to Indigenous experience and are therefore critical to how we engage in research. Community connectivity is central to this process. As described by Native academic Bryan Brayboy (2018), "...positionality, within an Indigenous framework, is not solely about an individual. Rather, it is connected to an individual in relation to others and to place." With this consideration, there remain important protocols and community-focused practices to maintain. This varies from community to community, and Indigenous scholarship acknowledges that insider research requires the same level of ethical consideration and respect as outsider research (Smith, 2012).

Of all involved, Queen's University is the institution which is most disconnected from my personal experience. I can safely say that I did not know anything about the university prior to this study. There is a richness in its inclusion by the fact that the campus pushes me outside of my comfort zone as a scholar in order to freshly experience a new Indigenous community and culture. Critical to my own growth is the fact that researching a Canadian institution has provided a wonderful opportunity to learn more about our Indigenous cousins to the North.

The University of Texas at Austin is the institution where I have the most experience and am most embedded in community issues. I was a graduate student in its School of Social Work

from 2010 to 2012, I have served as a staff member in its School of Music since 2014, and this study is being conducted for my doctoral dissertation in the College of Education, where I have been a student since 2016. Additionally, I am a member of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Program and an active contributor to the Native American and Indigenous Peoples Association, both of which feature heavily in the research. For this campus, I can be considered a full-participant researcher due to my role as both an investigator and a functioning member of the community (Glesne, 2006).

The discussion on UT Austin will be heavily supplemented with research on the Miakan-Garza Band of Coahuiltecan, an Indigenous community in Central Texas. I currently serve as Programs Manager in the Miakan-Garza's nonprofit arm, the Indigenous Cultures Institute, which I have held since 2007. This role has been a central avenue through which I have engaged with the Intertribal community of central Texas and has been critical to my own Indigenous identity development. The Miakan-Garza elders Maria Rocha and Dr. Mario Garza, whose voices are included in the chapter on UT Austin, have long been my relations and mentors. Creswell (2018) discussed advocacy research as a means of using scholarship as a tool for reform in an effort to benefit the lives of participants. I am proud and open about calling myself an advocate for the Miakan-Garzas, the Intertribal people of Central Texas, and our campus Indigenous people as a work through this project.

My positionality in relation to Southeastern Oklahoma State University is more nuanced. While I have only set foot on the campus a few times in the past decade, the institution is significant to my family history and a few vibrant childhood memories. My uncles Greg Pyle, Tom Homerding, Todd Homerding, and Tye Homerding are each graduates of the university. My mother, Janet Pyle, also received her degree from Southeastern, and while I was quite young

during these years, I have distinct memories of family walks across campus. We lived in a white house on 5th Street during this time, which was located only a few blocks away from campus. The house had two platforms on either side of the front porch entryway where my sister Sarah and I used to pretend to be statues to passing cars. The university has proven important to my family, and my return to this part of the world is of no small significance to my identity. Research on Southeastern's Native American community will be supplemented by interviews with educational staff from the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. I am a member of the tribe, and while the past decades have seen my work focused on the Intertribal community of Central Texas, being Choctaw is the center of my Indigenous identity. I am of mixed heritage with my Choctaw blood coming from my paternal line. From the earliest I can remember, my father and grandmother instilled a sense of pride in being Choctaw through story and practice.

Also of note to my collaboration with the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma is that my uncle Greg Pyle served as the tribe's Principal Chief from 1997 to 2014. As our peoples' elected leader during a period of dramatic expansion in business opportunity and programming, Chief Pyle was greatly responsible for the building of Choctaw educational programs. He was incredibly proud of this work and firmly believed in the importance of education for our people. While this family connection and my own identity as a Choctaw does admittedly create research bias, this bias is not blind or detrimental to the quality of my work. This work's methodology focuses on a strengths-based narrative where assets and opportunities are emphasized (Hepworth, Rooney, Rooney, Strom-Gottfried, & Larsen, 2010). As such, I would be telling these stories in a positive light regardless of my positionality. Fortunately, this effort is made easy by the fact that the success of the tribe's educational efforts stands on their own and does not require spin.

I recognize that my research engages with an important part of Chief Pyle's legacy, and I aim to be respectful of this consideration as I move through these spaces. While my last name often declares my relationship to a former chief, I have been intentional about following the proper channels and building my own relationships throughout my tribal outreach. I first began my conversations with the Choctaw Institutional Review Board in the Spring of 2017, and after extensive conversations and revisions, I was granted permission to conduct research with tribal offices in November of 2020. Few could argue I was given an easy pass, and having come through the other end of this process, I am glad to know the degree to which my tribe protects itself when engaging with scholars.

Summary

The current chapter has served as an introduction to this work by outlining the purpose of this study in relation to the benefits of education and Indigenous barriers to post-secondary equity. It has examined the research questions guiding this work and defined important terminology used throughout. While I have provided a brief preview of the methodologies guiding my scholarly approach, this discussion will be greatly expanded in chapter three. Finally, with respect to Native relational ways of knowing and being, I have shared an in-depth discussion of my own positionality and connectivity to the people, community, lands, and institutions involved in this work.

Now that we have a sense of the project, the next chapter will explore the research foundations on which it has been built. This will be accomplished through an in-depth literature review focused on Indigenous identity, community, education, and knowledge cultivation. The goal of this chapter is to provide the reader perspective on the systems of knowledge used to frame this project's design. Additionally, it describes the rationale of how my work fits within

this incredible collection of scholarship. Hopefully, it will be more of a rhyme than a cacophony.

Literature Review

The following chapter will take the form of a literature review exploring various topics significant to this study. It is the foundation of research that has served to shape my thinking on Indigenous higher education experience. There is a strong connection between issues of identity, community, and knowledge cultivation. These pages seek to outline those connections through a mingling of researchers whose work I have heavily relied upon and admired.

Literature methodology

The following pages outline the collection of literature used as a foundation of this study. This research was largely collected through the syllabi of courses I attended during my doctoral study at the University of Texas at Austin. These included classes from both the university's Educational Leadership and Policy and Native American and Indigenous Studies programs. Additional research was conducted through the University of Texas at Austin libraries system and Google Scholar, with a focus on peer reviewed journal articles associated with Native Americans, education, identity, and community building. System searches included phrases such as "Native American post-secondary completion," "Indigenous higher education success," and "Native American community building." Similar searches were conducted through specific journals associated with this topic, such as the Journal of Critical Race Inquiry and the Journal of American Indian Education. Research was also reviewed through database sources such as the National Center for Education Statistics and various foundation, tribal, and governmental reports. Finally, my research was supplemented through Native American news sources such as Indian Country Today.

As described by Franklin-Phipps (2017), literature reviews are composed of texts that often gain legitimacy through a closed, self-legitimizing system. Parallel to this concern is the

tendency for western academics to limit themselves to western writers and ontologies (Todd, 2016). In contrast to these practices, this literature review will focus on research compiled from books and peer reviewed journal articles from Indigenous scholars and other scholars of color, supplemented by research from the mainstream academic community. As advocated by Todd (2016), my work will be intentional about using Indigenous voices as often as possible when exploring Indigenous issues in an attempt to provide clarity, perspective, and to increase our representation in academia.

Literature focusing on Native American higher education is both limited and niche. This segment of the student population has long been seen as being too small to attract many scholars (Youngbull, 2018). However, Indigenous higher education research is a growing field, and the modern era has seen an increase in the number and talent of Native academics (Brayboy, 2018). Even with these gains, I have yet to see a work that connects Indigenous student success with the cultivation of identity and community. This work therefore seeks to fill-in a portion of this gap.

Purpose of literature topics

For a literature review to be useful, its focus should be linked to important issues within the study. How are Indigenous communities built in higher education settings, and what are their impact on the development of Indigenous identities among students, faculty, and staff? To explore these questions, I have structured a literature review that cycles through and connects different associated topics. It will begin with a discussion of the history of Native American education, as understanding a contemporary phenomenon requires understanding its relationship to the past. I will then move into an examination of several manifestations of Indigenous identity. To understand various identities in relation to a space, we must have some understanding of the identities themselves. However, it is important to note that this chapter

does not mean to serve as an exhaustive list of Native identities specific to the continent but to instead discuss those most salient to this work.

The next section will focus on the connection between identity and community. As will be seen, the two are symbiotic. Healthy identity depends on healthy relations, and healthy community depends on a healthy sense of identity. This section will be supplemented by an in-depth discussion on Intertribalism, or the building of communities across different populations of Native America.

The fourth section of this chapter will discuss issues of Indigenous identity and community development specific to higher education settings. It will examine research linking community connectivity to Native educational success and how mainstream institutions are often a challenging environment for this work. It will then frame these topics within a wider discussion on higher education diversity. This conversation will be closely linked to the fifth and final section of research, which focuses on the development of Indigenous knowledge systems. For this work, knowledge systems are defined as ways of thinking and knowing developed through both scholarship and practice. This work assumes that the development of a healthy Indigenous community on campus allows for the development of healthy Indigenous identity, and that this combination serves as a powerful catalyst towards the advancement of Indigenous knowledge.

History of Native American Education

The history of Native American education is a complex topic about which to write. It is difficult to summarize educational experience prior to colonization, as it existed in innumerable forms as a reflection of innumerable cultures across the hemisphere. Then there are the histories of the period of colonization where education was used as a tool of oppression, which is a topic

that has been highly researched elsewhere. Parts of this history will be included in the following section as a framing device. However, a deep dive into this topic is beyond the scope and mission of this work. Instead, the structures of colonial boarding schools and assimilation will serve here as a departure point. The destination is the growth in self-determinism that characterized Indigenous education in the latter 20th and early 21st centuries. While significant challenges remain today, the overarching history presents a transition away from damage narratives into a narrative of opportunity and empowerment. There have been great advancements made in Native American education over the last century, but history has shown that continued success must be guided by the people, values, and cultures of the communities which any education systems attempt to serve.

There are important limitations to this section that must be acknowledged. The first is that conversations on pre-contact, community-based education is minimal. This topic is beyond both the scope of this work and my expertise. Traditional Indigenous education often includes a mixture of observation and practice, family and group socialization, oral teachings, and participation in community ceremonies and institutions (Historica Canada, 2017). The ways in which these practices manifest are as varied as the countless Indigenous communities across the continent. However, land, family, and community have great impact from past to present. The second limitation is that the history presented is primarily bounded to the United States and Canada, while there are many other peoples' in the hemisphere whose Indigenous histories are important to this story. However, I have limited my analysis to the two states in which the studied universities sit in order to manage the length and focus of this chapter. Linked to this is the third limitation to address, which is that much of this history is analyzed through the laws of colonizing states. This point is conscious of Vine Deloria's argument that paternalism has long

dominated the government-Indian relationship (1969). However, Indigenous people exist outside of these parameters, and community voice and perspective matters in the telling of our histories.

Exploring these stories is a wonderful opportunity for future research. For now, I attempt to address this limitation by emphasizing the transition from paternalism towards self-determinism in Native education as the chapter progresses. Education in the late 19th and early 20th centuries can largely be understood as actions done towards Indians by the state, while the late 20th and early 21st see a greater emphasis in Indian self-determination. Native voice returns to guide educational destiny far too late in history, but once it does, the story transitions in powerful ways.

The 19th Century

The 1800s proved incredibly consequential for the relationship between the Indigenous people of Turtle Island and the continent's colonial states. Relocation efforts were prominent in the early and middle of the century as White settlers from the coasts invaded Indigenous land, often forcing the removal of Native groups to Indian Territory in present day Oklahoma (Calloway, 2004). The latter part of the century features multiple Indian wars involving tribes such as the Shawnee, Seminole, Cheyenne, and Apache and the U.S., Canadian, and Mexican governments (Calloway, 2004). It was also during this period that the colonial governments took devastating liberties in the dismissal of previous treaties with Native communities. As evident from the 1903 Supreme Court Case *Lone Wolf V. Hitchcock* where the court found that Congress has the right to change the terms of treaties without tribal consultation (Barker, 2011), the standards and values of colonial law often prove shallow as a consequence of greed and ethnocentrism.

There is much to gain by examining this history. However, the focus of this analysis is on education, so the subject of war and treaty violations are largely outside its scope when not directly related to education. Additionally, these stories are told so regularly that they are too often the only stories known by non-Native people (Tuck & Ree, 2013), and I have minimal interest in retreading on analysis which has been done by so many other scholars. With respect to the minimization of damage narratives, these events are mentioned briefly because they are critical to understanding the development of legal and cultural knowledge systems which impacted 19th Century Indigenous people. They help describe the context through with Native education systems developed in the 19th Century, but they will not be lingered upon.

European-style education for Indigenous youth in Canada dates back to the early 1600's when Catholic missionaries established schools in New France (Historica Canada, 2017). This set a pattern for church involvement in Indigenous education that dominated through the early 20th Century. However, it was not until the 19th Century that Indigenous education grew formalized and systemic through state-controlled efforts. In the 1830s, administration of these programs became the jurisdiction of the Secretary of State for the colonies, which allowed for the transfer of funds to churches, resulting in the building of mission residential schools for Indigenous youth (Historica Canada, 2017).

The 1867 British North America Act, which was later repatriated as the Constitution Act in 1982, provided for the division of powers between Canada and the provinces. This resulted in provincial jurisdiction over all students within their boundaries (Historica Canada, 2017). First Nations children living on reserve are the exception due to the Canadian Constitution designating the federal government with responsibility for Native services, including education (Steward, 2006). The Canadian government, on behalf of the Crown and in collaboration with the

church, spent much of its history controlling all aspects of education for First Nations students with little input from parents or their communities (Steward, 2006). By the year 1900, 64 residential schools existed across Canada (Historica Canada, 2017). The primary goal of these institutions was to “civilize” Native people through Christian conversion and a disconnection from traditional customs (Historica Canada, 2017). The results of these practices were generations of cultural trauma and dislocation for Indigenous people (Historica Canada, 2017).

State-controlled Native American education in the United States shares many unfortunate parallels with Canada. Its early years were managed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Established in 1824, the BIA is the oldest bureau of the United States Department of the Interior (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2016). Its educational mission focused on erasing the Native identity for the children under its jurisdiction. Through its efforts, children were removed from their communities, often forcibly, and sent to Indian boarding schools where they were not allowed to wear their traditional clothes, practice their religions, or speak their own languages (Calloway, 2004). The motto “kill the Indian and save the man” became the guiding principle for U.S. actions towards American Indians during this era (Brayboy, 2005). In 1877 Congress appropriated \$20,000 to Indian education, most of which went towards the BIA boarding school program. By 1900, this amount had risen to three million (Calloway, 2004).

Early 20th Century

1921 saw the passage of the Snyder Act in the United States, which increased appropriations for Native education, health services, and community infrastructures (Albuquerque Public Schools, 2016). Critically, this law also recognized Native Americans as citizens of the United States for the first time (Albuquerque Public Schools, 2016). Concerning

higher education, the Snyder Act led to the creation of four tribal colleges in 1923, which were funded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2016). Though Native people had been enrolled in universities such as William and Mary, Harvard, and the University of Pennsylvania as far back as the 17th Century (Brayboy, 2018), these were the first higher education institutions specifically created for this population (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2016).

The United States' 1934 Indian Reorganization Act later proved critical to Indigenous education in that it allowed the teaching of Native history in BIA schools (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2016). This new policy was in significant contrast to previous federal policy, which focused on assimilating Natives into western culture (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2016). Additionally, the law served to promote self-governance of Native reservations by their residents (Deloria, 1969). While much work remained to be done, this law served as a major catalyst towards Indigenous self-determination for the time.

The mid-20th Century saw several important steps for Indigenous people across the globe. World War II instilled a growing recognition that Indigenous people have a right to the protections and benefits of international law, resulting in greater activism and engagement with global bodies (Niezen, 2003). Within the United States, the 1944 GI Bill provided some form of higher education access to over two thousand American Indians (Brown, 2003). This period served as a major catalyst in the ongoing effort of increasing Indigenous post-secondary access across the nation.

Late 20th Century

The Canadian government began closing its residential schools in the 1970s (Historica Canada, 2017). While it continues to run education institutions for aboriginal communities, these are more akin to mainstream schools (Historica Canada, 2017). As described

by sections 114-122 of the 1985 Indian Act, these institutions are housed under the Minister of Indian Affairs through the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs (Steward, 2006). They are authorized to “establish, operate and maintain schools for Indian children” (Steward, 2006). In 2010, there were 518 schools on First Nations reserves which were managed by the Canadian government (Laboucane, 2010).

Indigenous education in the United States continued to struggle, as evident by the 1969 report of the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Indian Education titled “Indian Education: A National Tragedy,” which assisted in bringing national focus to the issue (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2016). Quality education access is a continuing challenge today for many Indigenous communities, but this was the period when we began to see change. The 1960's and 70's saw new initiatives in Native education as a result of the growing movement in among Native people towards self-determination (Calloway, 2004). As the tribes grew empowered through economic development, their members became more involved in activism and self-representation. Greater focus was put on how Native history was told and the degree to which Native people were involved in the academic study of their communities. During this period, there became an uneasiness with scholars and anthropologists involved in research that rarely benefitted the Native communities involved (Champagne, 1998).

As a result of President Johnson’s War on Poverty, the nation saw significant growth in the number of university-housed Indian centers as institutions grew invested in addressing the poverty issues of Indian Country (Deloria, 1969). The landmark Indian Education Act of 1972 established the Office of Indian Education and the National Advisory Council on Indian Education in the United States. Among the effects of this law included the authorization of several competitive grant programs for both Native children and adults (U.S. Dept. of Education,

2016). Additionally, this program proved highly successful in increasing the number of American Indians with post-secondary degrees (Swisher, 1998). This was soon followed by the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975, which gave authority to federally recognized tribes to contract with the BIA for the operation of bureau-funded schools (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2016). This period saw tribal communities begin to take control of how and where their children were taught, which paralleled the dramatically changing legal and cultural experience of North America's tribal and Indigenous people.

The Navajo Nation established the Navajo Community College in 1966 (Navajo Nation, 2016). Now known as Diné College, this institution was the first higher education institution controlled by a tribal government (Navajo Nation, 2016). The purpose of the college was to create an educational setting that incorporated Navajo values both in the classroom and in its administration. It preceded a large growth in tribal higher education institutions during the remainder of the 20th century (Calloway, 2004) as a response to the belief that mainstream higher education institutions were failing Native youth (Gonzalez, 2012).

Tribal colleges are defined as institutions of higher education that are formally sanctioned by one or more tribal government (Brown, 2003). While open to everyone, Tribal colleges must have at least 51% enrollment of American Indian and Alaskan Native students to maintain federal funding (Sanders & Makomenaw, 2018). Among their most common traits include geographic isolation, having Native Americans making-up their governing board and a majority of their faculty, small student bodies ranging from 75 to 800 students, a chronic lack of resources, and a student population pulled from their surrounding Native communities (Peace, 2016). The early tribal colleges were promoted by tribal leaders with the intent of building self-determination among their people by using education as a catalyst for young leadership

(Campbell, 1990). These institutions are typically small, grass-roots colleges and universities (Campbell, 1990), but they still adhere to typical national collegiate accreditation standards (Campbell, 1999).

1978 saw the passage of the Tribally Controlled Community College Act in the United States, which provided federal funding for these institutions (Calloway, 2004). Passed under the Carter Administration, this law is estimated to have supplied tribal schools with approximately 80% of their annual budgets (Mihsuah, 1992), thus dramatically increasing their capacity. The results of this investment were evident twenty years later at the end of the 1996-97 academic year when tribal colleges awarded 1,016 associate degrees, 88 bachelor degrees, and 7 masters degrees (Campbell, 1999). Despite these successes, Native American colleges and universities continue to operate with minimal resources. They are the nation's most underfunded institutions of higher education, and receive approximately 40% less than what mainstream colleges receive from government sources (Campbell, 1999).

Today there are 37 tribal colleges spread across Indian Country (Bureau of Indian Education, 2016) which serve thousands of Native people, including many first-generation students (Campbell, 1990). These institutions have an 86% completion rate (Heitkamp, 2016), and many of their students who go on to attend mainstream higher education institutions claim that this would not have been an option without their tribal college experience (Brown, 2003). Tribally run colleges and universities emphasize traditional cultural values (Campbell, 1990) while allowing their students close-proximity to their families and friends (Brown, 2003). In this way, they provide a more welcoming environment to a population group largely unaccustomed to post-secondary systems.

Contemporary Indigenous education

The contemporary landscape for Indigenous education on Turtle Island is a complex, interconnected system of tribal governments, state governments, federal systems, non-governmental organizations, and advocacy groups (Calloway, 2004). In Canada, there is not a single federal education department, nor is there a nationally integrated education system (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2017). Instead, provincial and territorial governments manage their own elementary, secondary, and post-secondary educational systems (Schools in Canada, 2017). Despite a changing landscape for Aboriginal people, the legacy of educational and social disempowerment remains. 90% of Native youth do not have access to childhood education programs (Laboucane, 2010), over half of the country's Native population has not finished high school, and only 6% have attained a post-secondary degree (McMahon, 2014). National studies have drawn direct correlations between lower educational attainment for Canada's aboriginal population and socioeconomic status, parent educational attainment, use of Indian language in the home, and geographic location (Hull, 1990). Interestingly, Native people living off of reserves have made significant gains in education achievement, while those attending federally funded schools have stagnated (McMahon, 2014).

In the United States, policy on Indigenous education is largely implemented through the Bureau of Indian Education, which resides under the Bureau of Indian Affairs within the Department of the Interior (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2016). Formerly known as the Office of Indian Education Programs (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2016), this division collaborates with Tribal nations on the management of 183 schools and dormitories which serve approximately 42000 elementary and secondary students (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2016). The BIE also

provides funding for the nation's tribal colleges and universities (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2016). As described by a high-ranking representative of the Bureau of Indian Education who requested not to be named, the Bureau receives money from Congress to distribute to schools through a formula based on student size. However, there is limited analysis on the results of these funds. This official described how the Bureau analyzes data on student reading and math scores as well as absenteeism because these are the metrics of interest to Congress. There is no effort to track campus culture or student connectivity to curriculum. The official explained that education is an extremely small aspect of the Department of Interior's work, and there is minimal interest in further research beyond government requirements.

While many federally recognized tribes receive funding through BIE programming, many also manage their own education programs. The growth in these initiatives parallels a growth in industry and economic opportunity in many parts of Indian Country. Tribal governments have grown more sophisticated and have become more focused on self-sufficiency over the past few decades (National Congress of American Indians & The Department of the Interior Office of Indian Energy and Economic Development, 2007). Education has proven to be one of the most significant investments made by tribal communities as a result in these increased resources.

In addition to managing tribal schools and colleges, many tribal nations also run very active programs that promote K-12 and post-secondary education. One example is the Navajo Nation Department of Diné Education, which runs scholarship and financial assistant programs, a library, an annual science fair, and a traditional language program (Navajo Nation, 2016). A second example of a successful tribal education effort comes from the Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma, which manages a grant and scholarship program for Chickasaw students pursuing a post-secondary degree, a grant program specifically for text books, and their Chickasha

Holiton (honors) program, which incentivizes academic success and educational achievement for Chickasaw students (Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma, 2016).

The tribes are a form of Native American community recognized by federal governments of the continent's colonized states (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2016), and while they are important connectors of people and culture, there are many Indigenous people on Turtle Island existing and building community without this recognition (Ramirez, 2007). This topic will be explored in depth later in this chapter, but for now, I will note that community does not require the structure of a government or institution. My years of community work have witnessed detribalized Indigenous people effectively building educational opportunities through non-profit organizations. Examples include the Four Winds Intertribal Society's scholarship program and a summer camp for Indigenous youth managed by the Indigenous Cultures Institute. Native nonprofits often serve as a hub for Indigenous people to connect and build relationships outside of a Native land base (Ramirez, 2007). They can serve as a powerful means of connectivity and advocacy for Indigenous education outside of the Tribal system.

A final note on contemporary Indigenous education is to acknowledge the state of affairs on higher education campuses. Direct recruitment of Native students through an admissions policy is largely blocked in the United States due to the Supreme Court case *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978). This case required institutions to shift the focus of race-conscious policies away from addressing ongoing discrimination and towards a focus on promoting diversity (Garces, 2014). Despite this limitation, the latter decades of the 20th Century saw many universities across the country begin to offer a greater variety of coursework on Native Americans, developing programs centered on Indigenous studies, and providing platforms for student organizations and student leaders to grow and flourish (M. Garza, personal interview,

November 18, 2017). Though the law limits opportunities for institutions to recruit Indigenous students, there is still great opportunity to cultivate a campus climate that is supportive of people of color. As described by Lipe (2018), the goal of these efforts should be to transform institutions into spaces where we feel safe bringing our histories, knowledge, systems, languages, and worldviews.

Understanding history provides meaningful insight into both present and future opportunity. This chapter has so far focused on examining history as a means of framing the interconnectivity of this literature review's themes. Now that a foundation is set, the chapter will move forward with a conversation on the theoretical perspectives used to frame this work. It will then explore issues related to Indigenous identity, followed by a discussion of identity in relation to community. The next section will discuss issues related to community building in higher education settings before closing with an examination of the possibilities made available through this cacophony.

Theory

Theory is a powerful tool for organizing one's research approach, which consequently impacts the literature reviewed. They are perspectives which can help guide what we look for and where. Theory is also a form of literature research in itself, as it is most often drawn from the works of other scholarship rather than being built from the ground-up for a particular study. Now that we have set a foundation for Indigenous education through an analysis of history, and before moving into research of specific topics related to my research questions, I will discuss the theoretical pillar of Tribal Critical Race Theory used to frame this work. This conversation will be limited to a brief introduction, and my theoretical framework will be expanded in chapter three.

As described by Delgado and Stefancic (2012), Critical Race Theory (CRT) is largely focused on the study of race, racism, and power. Research through a Critical perspective is characterized by the involvement of the people the work seeks to assist (Capper, 1995), and CRT recognizes people of color as holders and creators of knowledge rather than being seen as deficient in their forms of knowledge (Bernal, 2002). This approach recognizes that members of a group are better able to communicate aspects of their communities than outsiders (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). It is helpful in examining the experiences of people of color in mainstream universities as their racialization in such settings often fluctuates based on the interests of the dominant group (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) builds upon the framework of CRT by applying the epistemologies and ontologies specific to Native American communities (Brayboy, 2005). Central aspects to the theory are the understanding that colonization is endemic to society and that Indigenous people “occupy a liminal space that accounts for both the political and racialized nature of our identities” (Brayboy, 2005). Additionally, TribalCrit holds that tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Native people (Brayboy, 2005). By incorporating Native worldviews into our research and practice, Indigenous communities will be better equipped towards self-determinism and revitalization.

Indigenous Identity

Native identity on Turtle Island is a complex topic that spans across innumerable lands and peoples. There is no single definition of what it means to be Native American, and I will not attempt to create one. Instead, I will use the following section to examine various forms of identity significant to this study. I do not personally identify with many of the communities

discussed here, and I do not attempt to present myself as owner or expert of these cultures. This section is simply a collection of insights meant to provide context for the stories that appear in later chapters.

It will begin by defining identity before moving into a conversation on Indigenous authenticity. It will then provide a brief overview of the social and political landscapes for Indigenous people in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. This framing is imperfect in that it excludes several other countries on the continent, there is only so much space in a chapter, and these are the three Indigenous land-bases most relevant to this study. This section will close with an examination of detribalized Indigenous identities which exist beyond the recognition of colonial states.

Defining Identity

Identity can be defined as a complex organization of thoughts, feelings, memories, and experiences that a person evokes as a platform for action and response (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007). It is a particular product of historically specific practices of social regulation (Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn & Walkerdine, 1984). In other words, identity is formed by experience and therefore a significant connector of past and present. The development of identity is a critical way in which individuals give meaning to their experiences and their transformations over time (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). It is a prior condition of adult participation in social life (Calhoun, 1994).

Critical to our understanding of identity is that it is neither simple nor stationary. It is always relational, incomplete, and in process (Grossberg, 1996). Important to this study is the argument that identity is developed through the stories we tell ourselves and about ourselves, and these stories will change over time as our understanding of self changes throughout our lives

(Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). New experiences, such as leaving home to attend college, change our stories and propel identity. Indeed, higher education is a powerful catalyst for identity development as it allows dramatically increased exposure to new settings, people, and ideas. If identity is constantly developing based on experience, higher education is a means of shifting experience into overdrive.

As Stone (2012) argues, culture can be as critical to success for a people as food and water. This point is essential to this work as culture is a powerful means of building identity. Cultural is integral to self-formation, and individuals have access to the cultural legacy of the collective through engagement with others (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). An example of this is how our elders teach us the traditions around ceremony or how to move around the powwow circle. To quote Niezen (2003), “Culture is a verb, not a noun, a process, not a thing in itself.” The creation of culture is done through the actions of both the community and the individual. There is a dynamic, powerful, and transformative relationship between the practices of real people and the structures of society, culture, and history (Ortner, 2006).

Considering these analyses, a healthy sense of identity is essential for a healthy community. There are several characteristics that contribute to an empowering cultural identity, including an understanding of one’s race and ethnicity, one’s connection to a cultural community, and one’s sense of worth in relation to cultural dignity (Moses, 2002). Such cultural confidence can be built by engaging community members in identity discourse through cultural practices such as narrative, ritual, proverbs, songs, and traditions (Chilisa, Major, & Khudu-Petersen, 2017). Critical to education is that recognizing one’s own experience in an endeavor is an important part of success (Windchief, 2018). We know that person-to-person connectivity is critical to positive first year experiences for Indigenous students (Keene, 2018). It therefore

reasons that such a reflection of Indigenous identity depends on the building of healthy Indigenous community.

Indigeneity is an identity grounded in evidence, testimony, and collective memory (Niezen, 2003). Across the globe, it is largely framed within a background of three conceptual frameworks: human rights, collective rights, and the rights of original peoples (Bowen, 2000). Any scholarly definition of Indigeneity will inevitably see some manifestations left out of the conversation. As already noted, the following discussion on variations of Native identity is not meant to be definitive but is instead meant to reflect those groups and issues most applicable to this study.

Authenticity

In 2015, I traveled windy Hill Country roads to reach the shores of Lake Medina outside San Antonio, TX in order to visit my long-time friend, Ray Duncan. Ray is a member of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma who grew-up on the tribe's reservation. Before retirement, he spent a career in the military, which included several years building Native cultural programs for the enlisted. Since his retirement, Ray has served as a leader of the Four Winds Intertribal Society, a Native-serving non-profit in Central Texas. As we sat around a campfire near the water, Ray told me the story of how he was once asked at a powwow what it means to be American Indian. His response was, "I have no idea. I've been around Indian people my entire life, but I have no idea. All I can tell you is what it means to be Cherokee and from my people."

Identity is constructed and situated within a flow of contending cultural discourses (Calhoun, 1994). The practices of individuals occur within power networks that spread and intersect into discourse and practice (Youngblood Jackson, 2013). Identities are often understood as a result of marking difference and exclusion, rather than being the result of

identical, naturally occurring unity (Hall, 1996). Such social boundaries are objectified forms of categorization and classification that we use every day in society to separate “us” from “them” (Carter, 2018). They are also a means of determining cultural authenticity. Decisions on who belongs to an identity is often an exercise of power (Urrieta, 2018), which can be seen in the hands of both the community itself and outside forces, such as the governments of the colonizers. This point is closely linked to the issue of Indigenous blood quantum, which will be discussed shortly.

Tradition is a construct that function within and is anchored to specific contestations of power (Barker, 2011). Within Native communities, there are interesting examples of this tension in the frustration of tribal members when tribal governments advance racist, sexist, homophobic, or extremely conservative religious perspectives (Barker, 2011). The result can be that those individuals questioning a tribal council are painted as being anti-Indian or anti-sovereignty (Barker, 2011). Another example is the condescension of some federally recognized tribal members towards non-recognized Indigenous people (Ramirez, 2007). Vine Deloria Jr., and elder of Native scholarship, wrote in 1969 that the future of Indian affairs would be characterized by a struggle between those who have traditionally dominated Indian Affairs and “those of the new movement.” The past fifty plus years have seen this prediction come to pass in continued arguments over identification cards, values, and authenticity.

There are many ways in which to define Native American authenticity. I am partial to Deloria’s (1969) emphasis on a healthy sense of humor. However, more critical to the core of the aboriginal people of Turtle Island is a connection to Indigenous community through heritage and ongoing, deep relationships. Family lineage and blood matters as a means of forming this

connection, but these elements alone are inadequate. Native authenticity can take an endless variation of forms, but connectivity with others is essential to its cultivation.

Society struggles in speaking and teaching about culture in ways that affirm its fluidity (Ngo, 2010). While blood and parentage largely determine belonging in Indigenous communities (Niezen, 2003), the Indigenous communities themselves have great variation. As described by Mihesuah (1998), "...there is no one Indian voice." Across Turtle Island, and indeed the entire western hemisphere, there are countless Indigenous cultures with their own culture, values, and histories. This work does not aim to minimize the variation of our lived experiences but instead attempts to explore critical parallels across communities who possess aboriginal connection to lands and peoples. There is no single all-encompassing Native narrative, but there are parts of the stories which rhyme.

Physical make-up is an interesting and often challenging aspect of Indigenous identity. Physicality is a powerful means of tying a person to a people. However, degrees of blood are not the only means of defining heritage, nor have they always been primary. For example, Cherokee identity in the early 18th Century was based on birth or adoption, rather than skin color, race, or language (Sturm, 2002). However, the laws of the colonizing states have shaped our understanding of Indigenous identity based its own recognition of these identities. A primary consequence is that degrees of Indian blood have come to be seen as equating to cultural identity (Barker, 2011).

In the U.S., the 1887 General Allotment Act based the rights to Indian land and tribal membership on blood quantum (Ramirez, 2007). The goal of this law was the "civilizing" of Native people through the dissolution of collective identity by forcing community members to live on individual allotments of land (Wolfe, 2006) (Ramirez, 2007). Modern blood quantum

calculations remain largely based on records from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but there are serious concerns about the accuracy of these old records (Ramirez, 2007) as many Indians at the time refused enrollment due to concerns of assimilation (Sturm, 2002). Any form of state-structured identification has its imperfections, but we must be extremely wary when moving through the political legacies of programs designed with the distinct goals of genocide and extinction.

Contemporary Native communities continue to grapple with intersectional racial identities. For example, research conducted in northern Oklahoma has shown a tendency for Native people to avoid intermarriage with Hispanics based on a perception of this population as a lower-class minority (Sturm, 2002). Additionally, anti-black racism is prevalent in Indian Country. This is despite a significant population of Black Native Americans across the continent and the fact that many parts of Indian history show deep connections to Black communities. This tension between Indigenous and Black populations has been cultivated through a federal recognition policy designed to keep these communities distant (Klopotek, 2011), which has resulted in Black Indians being among the most marginalized Indigenous identities on Turtle Island (Sturm, 2002).

For some Native Americans, there is a tendency to understand community members as belonging to two categories: “full bloods” and “mixed bloods.” The latter are often associated with cultural loss (Sturm, 2002). There are legitimate issues to discuss in relation to mixed-blood Indians such as myself who can pass for White. For instance, a light skin allows for race-shifting where an individual is able to emphasize their White or Indian identity in order to maximize social power (Sturm, 2011). Todd (2016) for example, is an Indigenous academic who has discussed being able to access professional spaces because she is not read as being a

person of color. Issues of heritage in relation to authenticity are challenging, and we must move through them with honesty and a willingness to listen rather than assume.

One of the many problems with emphasizing blood among Indigenous people is the degree to which it defines identity through physicality over community and cultural engagement. Blood is an important connector of heritage, but cultural identity is lost without community engagement. Critically, since tribal identification is often based solely on degrees of Indian blood, there are concerns over the future of tribal sovereignty as blood continues to thin (Sturm, 2002). Native Americans marry outside their ethnic group at higher rates than any other population (Sturm, 2002), so questions of authenticity in relation to blood will be important to future understanding of Indigenous identity.

Indigenous U.S.

This work has discussed tribal entities at several points in relation to Native American identity, but before proceeding, it is helpful to examine the meaning of this designation in the United States and its importance to both political opportunity and social identity. The U.S. Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 confirmed the right for Indigenous people to be recognized as both citizens of the United States and Tribal nations (Bruyneel, 2007). There are 567 federally recognized tribes in the U.S. (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2016) which exist as “domestic dependent nations” in relation to the federal government (Kauanui, 2005). Precedence for these relationships was established through various treaties and court cases during the early years of the republic (Calloway, 2004).

Tribes possess all powers of self-government except for those relinquished under treaty with the United States Governments, those that Congress has expressly extinguished, and those that federal courts have ruled are subject to existing federal law or are inconsistent with

overriding national policies (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2016). Tribes possess the right to form their own governments (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2016). They also have the ability to make and enforce both civil and criminal laws, to tax, to establish and determine tribal citizenship, to license and regulate activities within their jurisdiction, and to exclude persons from tribal lands (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2016). The primary role of the tribe is to ensure as beneficial a life as possible for its members (Deloria, 1969).

Blood quantum is the measure often used to determine tribal enrollment, but while modern application of this metric may be understood as a form of honoring tribal sovereignty (Sanders & Makomenaw, 2018), the system remains deeply flawed due to the number of excluded individuals and communities. This issue poses one of the great challenges of Indigenous identity in the United States. For many, both within and outside Indigenous communities, federal recognition and associated degrees of blood are perceived as the benchmark for Native American authenticity.

Indigeneity exists in a great many forms (Klopotek, 2011). As with other identities, it is constructed amid a flow of contending cultural discourses (Calhoun, 1994). Across the continent exist numerous people whose Indigeneity goes unrecognized by the colonial states (Ramirez, 2007). This lack of recognition requires these communities to live without the limited protections and benefits available to recognized tribes under the law (Klopotek, 2011).

Our blood, history, culture, and relations define us as Indigenous. These is more powerful than having our family names listed on a government registration. As described by Calderón (2016), “Indianness refers to the centering, or privileging, of indigenous ways of knowing; histories; maintaining relationships with lands, resources, and peoples; and making

claims regarding nature.” Higher education is a powerful platform on which to debate, cultivate, and share these discussions.

Indigenous Canada

The Indigenous people of Canada have their own distinct set of issues concerned with blood, identity, and state relations. Combined, Canada’s Indigenous people make-up 4.2% of the total population (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017). It is notable that this group grew by 20% from 2006 and 2011 compared to 5% for non-Native Canadians, which makes this population the youngest and fastest growing in the country (McMahon, 2014). According to a federal government study comparing Aboriginal communities to the United Nations’ Human Development Index, Canada ranked eighth across the globe in regard to quality of life (McMahon, 2014).

Indigenous identity in Canada was first legally defined by the state through the 1876 Indian Act, though this law has been updated through the years (Vowel, 2016). Status Indians are those recognized under this law whose names are listed on the Indian roll, which is administered by Indian Affairs (Vowel, 2016). A 2003 report of Canada’s Auditor General noted there were 614 First Nations in the country (Steward, 2006). Much like the rest of the continent, Indigenous Canadians exist outside the definitions of the state. This framing is included here as it is a means through which modern identities have been shaped, but it is critical to note that colonial laws do not provide the complete story.

Métis is a term used for individuals who are neither fully First Nations nor non-Indigenous (Vowel, 2016). As a form of identity, it highly relies on kinship over blood (Vowel, 2016). Though the term Métis predates this event, it was officially recognized in section 35(2) of the Canadian Constitution Act of 1982 (Vowel, 2016). Then in 2016, the Canadian Supreme

Court affirmed that the Métis were to be included in section 91(24) of the 1867 Constitution Act (Vowel, 2016). As a form of identity, Métis provide interesting parallels to the terms Indigenous and Intertribal due to the variation of backgrounds they encompass, as discussed in chapter one.

The final Canadian Indigenous identity to be discussed here are the Inuit, though I do not mean that these three groups represent all Indigenous people of the country. They are discussed here simply due to their prevalence. At 60,000, the Inuit represent 0.2% of the nation's total population (Vowel, 2016). According to the Canadian constitutional division of powers, the federal government is responsible for this population, though they are not subject to the Indian Act (Vowel, 2016). The late 1970s saw the creation of a blood quantum of 25% for Inuit recognition, though this was changed in 2010 to where this identity is gained by direct descendant from a person who is Inuit. Three quarters of Inuit live in their homeland of Inuit Nunangat, where they comprise a majority of the population (Vowel, 2016).

Indigenous Mexico

Mexico was home to several advanced cultures before Spanish colonization in the early 16th Century. These include but were not limited to the Olmec, Toltec, Teotihuacan, Zapotec, Maya, and Aztec (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017). The genetics of contemporary Indigenous Mexicans shows that their ancestors were very distinct groups that mixed remarkably little (Weintraub, 2014). During the 20th century, the nation's Indigenous population grew steadily in absolute numbers, even as it declined as a total percentage of the country (Hamel, 2008). Since the federal government does not track ethnicity of its populace, Indigenous people are measured by the national census as speakers of the 62 surviving Indigenous languages (Hamel, 2008). Nationally, 0.8% of the population speaks only an Indigenous language (Hamel, 2008).

During their three centuries of rule prior to independence (1519-1810), the Spanish built a hierarchical society through both the Church and Spanish language dominance (Hamel, 2008). After independence in 1810, the new Mexican-born bourgeoisie pursued a strategy of assimilation and dissolution of indigenous people in an effort to construct a unified, homogenous nation (Hamel, 2008). This resulted in the destruction of indigenous communities, a dramatic reduction in the indigenous population, and a loss of traditional languages (Hamel, 2008). This troubling legacy expanded in 1921 as the newly formed Ministry of Education began a campaign focused on the promotion of cultural and linguistic homogenization. Teachers were sent across the country to remote Indigenous villages in order to replace Indigenous identity with identities of the west (Ramirez, 2007). Race is a product of social thought, and a society's dominant culture tends to racialize different minority groups at different times in response to shifting needs (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Despite recent decades of advocacy, Indigenous populations in Mexico have yet to attain the formal recognition and legal tools available to tribally recognized groups to their north.

In the modern era, 15% of the Mexican population self-identifies as Indigenous (United Nations, 2011), making this the largest Native population on the continent (Hamel, 2008). The majority of this population is in the southern portion of the country (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017), and in certain regions, Indigenous people are actually the majority (United Nations, 2011). This is the case in the southern state of Oaxaca where 56% of people self-identify as Indigenous (United Nations, 2011). These communities are often characterized by geographic isolation, resulting in the experience of being disconnected from the language, technology, and culture of other regions of Mexico (Cengal, 2013). As described by a United Nations study (2011), the largest challenges for the region's Indigenous communities include land

and territories disputes, control of natural resources, administration of justice systems of the larger state, internal displacement, bilingual education, language, migration and constitutional reforms.

The movement for Indigenous rights in Mexico received a push in 1994 as a result of the Zapatista insurgency in Chiapas. This effort pressured regional governments to offer multicultural rights in order to negate concerns over active social movements or insurgencies (Rios, 2014). Since this time, Mexico has seen the slow deconstruction of colonial cultural hegemony, allowing more room for multiculturalism and indigeneity (Hamel, 2008). Still, the rights and engagement of Indigenous communities greatly varies across the nation's states (United Nations, 2011).

Identity and community

As described by Stone (2012), all societies are composed of individuals who are psychologically and materially dependent and connected through emotional bonds, traditions, and social groups. While different cultures emphasize autonomy versus relational notions of self to varying degrees (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998), evidence consistently shows that our lives are significantly shaped by our social identities and connections (Steele, 2011). The following section will discuss this phenomenon in order to convey the degree to which healthy community allows for healthy identity development. In order to connect this topic to Native American communities, the discussion will bleed into an examination of Intertribalism, or the building of diasporic Indigenous community as a catalyst for identity building. This section will close with a discussion on urban Indian community building, which most often takes Intertribal forms.

Identity is very much concerned with how people come to understand themselves through the social and cultural worlds in which they participate and how they relate to others within and outside of these worlds (Urrieta, 2018). Self-making as individuals constructs self-making collectivity (Urrieta, 2009), and engagement with the collective transforms the self (Youngblood Jackson, 2013). Community is born out of a shared sense of identity and individual identity is able to influence the wider community (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). Through this relationship, both the individual and community develop. It is all very circular and fabulous. An individual's engagement to community is therefore key to this process as identity grows dialogical in moments of expression, listening, and speaking with other community members (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998).

In exploring the connectivity between the individual and the collective, Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain (1998) developed the concept of the figured world. This term is defined as "...a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others." This description is a meaningful way to understand the development of collective identity. The authors went on to discuss how figured worlds provide the contexts in which social relationships are conducted, but interpretations and the desire to participate in cultural activities vary from person to person. This last aspect will be critical to consider once this work shifts to stories from the three campus communities in chapters four, five, and six. The Indigenous individuals interviewed have varying levels of engagement with these communities, which allows a complex consideration of the impact of their activities.

All societies are composed of individuals who are connected to social groups (Stone, 2012), but bonds between family and community are particularly strong among Native American

people (Brayboy, 2005). Significant to this study is how the importance of these bonds impacts Indigenous students who leave their communities to attend a university. Generally, many tribal communities and students promote the return of members pursuing postsecondary education to their respective tribal communities following graduation (Stewart, 2018). In their research on Native higher education experiences, Nelson (2018) described how an overwhelming number of study participants understood their return as being expected. Tribal communities certainly have a vested interest in encouraging their tribal members to return after college in order to help build capacity and community opportunity (Nelson, 2018). However, we must not dismiss a student's bonds to community and the impact of homesickness.

Intertribalism

Per Hall (1996), "...identification [can be] constructed on the basis of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation." The resulting solidarity from group identification makes it easier for individuals to face the risks and uncertainties of collective action (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). When individuals organize around certain issues or events, it can result in more intimate forms of shared identity (Urrieta 2006). Purpose and shared culture can both serve as powerful catalysts towards community building. While there is no one Indian experience, there are historic, contemporary, and spiritual connections between Turtle Island's First Peoples. Intertribal is a term taught to me by my elders to represent this larger category of collective Indigenous identity.

It is important to emphasize that Intertribalism does not equate to uniformity. Every collective identity is open to both internal subdivision and incorporation into a larger category of identity (Calhoun, 1994), and it is incorrect to assume that all members of a group are uniform in

their identities (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). There are always internal tensions and inconsistencies among a collective's group members (Calhoun, 1994). As previously noted, this variance can often manifest through the different degrees of community and cultural engagement (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). There is no one Indian voice (Deloria, 1998), nor is there one Indian experience. This applies to individuals within in a Tribal group, individuals within an Intertribal group, as well as individual Indigenous communities within the wider pantheon of Native American identification. Each Intertribal entity has the capacity for innumerable variety of opinion and cultural practice.

Intertribal community building exists in various forms across the continent. Such bridges are essential considering that American Indians and Alaska Natives represent only 1.7% of the United States' population (Diller, 2011). By necessity, Indigenous people from across different tribes come together to build community in regions that do not host large tribal populations. Powwow has been an important means for this work (Ramirez, 2007). According to Dr. Mario Garza, a friend, mentor, and founder of the Sacred Springs Powwow, these festivals largely developed in the latter half of the 20th Century as a means of honoring Native veterans returning from World War II and the Vietnam War. Ramirez (2007) discussed the impact of these events in that they allow Indians to come together in order to "...claim sacred territory, temporarily transforming dominant spaces such as school gymnasiums and athletic fields into a safe world, where [a] sense of identity, culture, health, and well-being are supported."

Intertribalism is the building of cross-community Native relationships among people throughout the hemisphere's four directions who are drawn together on pathways paralleling the four winds. I propose that Intertribal connectivity is particularly salient to higher education institutions because they are often situated away from Indigenous land

bases, or perhaps because multiple land bases are funneling-in students to a campus. To push this idea a degree further, colleges and universities can be gathering spaces for Indigenous people from all across the globe in order to share our cultures, experiences, and knowledge. They are spaces where Intertribalism can reflect the great vibrancy and variation of our many interconnected cultures.

Urban Indians

In 1969, Vine Deloria Jr. wrote that “...urban Indians have become the cutting edge of the new Indian nationalism.” Today, approximately half of the Native population resides in urban areas (Diller, 2011). The U.S. cities with the largest Native American populations include Anchorage, Alaska; Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Phoenix, Arizona; Los Angeles, California; and New York City, New York (Schwartzkopf, 2013). In consideration of the growing urban Indian experience, it is increasingly important to consider this mobility in relation to collective identity. Perhaps this is even more critical to the conversation of Indigenous community building in higher education institutions because, unless they are tribally run, the nation’s colleges and universities are generally located in urban settings distant from tribal land bases.

Ramirez (2007) offered the term “hub” to describe the gathering of Native Americans in urban settings in order to support notions of culture, community, identity, and belonging when separated from tribal land. The hub is therefore a cultivator of relational identities, which are built through behavior as indexical of claims to social relationships (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). These communities are most often intertribal, or composed of individuals from various Indigenous backgrounds, and in this collective space, there is opportunity for profound and thoroughgoing differences in the identities of those taking part in these systems (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998).

Though participating in a mixed culture, urban Natives are not living in exile without a culture (Ramirez, 2007), but are able to build community through shared senses of identity and belonging. This can be accomplished through various means, including phone-calling, e-mailing, memory sharing, storytelling, ritual, music, style, Native banners, and other symbols (Ramirez, 2007). Recollet (2015) offers a powerful discussion of the use of flash mob round dances and spatial tags in urban settings in order to create awareness of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women social media campaign. Urban Indians exist as cultural beings actively working towards social change within the dominant society (Ramirez, 2007). As we bring our knowledge into urban hubs, we engage in cultural interaction, rebuild community, and increase our belonging, all of which serve as catalysts towards the transformation of dominant society and culture (Ramirez, 2007).

Education and Indigenous identity

As described by Joy Culbreath, retired Director of Education Programming for the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, “Education makes the difference in the lives of people. It changes what you are, what you can be, what you’ll become” (J. Culbreath, personal communication, March 28, 2017). According to Moses (2002), it is among the most essential contributors to the strength and success of a community. The latter 20th and early 21st Centuries experienced a great period of reclamation for Native American identity and culture, and education has proven a major catalyst towards this phenomenon. Identity development is strongly influenced by the emergence of new networks of relationships (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). Higher education provides Indigenous people the opportunity to expand our relationships, knowledge, and world experience.

The following section will examine education as a tool for Indigenous identity development. It will begin with a discussion on Native educational success in relation to community relationships and space. This includes exploring connectivity to Indigenous people from the wider region in which a university sits, community as a support for educational persistence, and the challenges posed to Indigenous students attending mainstream institutions. This section will then move into a wider conversation on higher education diversity in order to frame these issues within the larger industry context. Finally, this section will discuss Indigenous self-determinism in education as a bridge into the next discussion on the building of Indigenous knowledge systems.

Community and Native educational success

As previously noted, bonds between family and community are particularly strong among Native American people (Brayboy, 2005). It stands to reason that these connections are essential to cultivating a healthy educational experience. Indeed, research has shown that relationships to home, campus, and tribal nations are central to navigating the freshman year transition for Native students (Keene, 2018). Additionally, family support, engagement with a campus' Native community, and the maintenance of spiritual practices have been identified as factors influencing American Indian students' post-secondary persistence (Youngbull, 2018).

In order to fully understand the experiences of Native students navigating their college years, we must see the relationships they form, hold, and negotiate as being central (Keene, 2018). Place is more than the physical location but is also composed of the relationships that form in the setting (Nelson, 2018). Relationships are therefore a means of understanding interpretations of campus space. Native Americans bring their own senses of culture, community, identity, belonging, and rootedness with them when they travel (Ramirez, 2007). It

is therefore critical for these attributes to find a home and connection on campus through a shared cultural community.

Different students respond to university settings in different ways. Indigenous people apply strategies ranging from being as visible as possible to being as invisible as possible (Smith, 2012). A means to analyze the different approaches is to consider them in relation to critical mass, which proposes that minorities are better served in environments where their communities have better representation (Park & Liu, 2014). A higher population of a minority group alleviates issues of tokenization or isolation and helps to combat other negative effects of an unbalanced ration (Park & Liu, 2014). Representation matters, and numbers may well be an important factor when considering a campus' capacity for Native American community building.

This study is greatly concerned with not only the cultivation of an Indigenous community on campus but also a campus' relationship to the wider Indigenous community of the region in which it sits. Whether it be composed of a small, loosely connected urban population or a rural population with a larger Indigenous representation, the wider region provides additional opportunities for students to connect with Native culture. Its significance to students is assumed to relate to the level of Indigenous engagement on campus and the degree to which this satisfies the need for Native connectivity. A campus community is one layer of many communities stacked upon themselves. It is a figured world within a figured world with all individuals, places, and relationships being interconnected. I have yet to find a study that specifically explores the dynamic between an Indigenous campus and the wider Indigenous region, and it is my goal is for this work to add this conversation to the literature.

There are strong connections between identity, community, and space. There is a challenge then when we consider that space is one of the privileges of whiteness (Rankine,

2019). Whiteness is seen as the default and people of color as being supplemental, often for the benefit of Whites. It has been argued that there is a need to shift the framing of state-sponsored education as a redemptive structure of social progress to an understanding of education as a key source of support for structural oppression (Sojoyner, 2017). This point is critical to acknowledge, but we must also emphasize efforts of transformation. Educational institutions have the potential to oppress and marginalize as well as to emancipate and empower (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Our work as researchers, practitioners, and advocates is to reinforce the latter. With respect and appreciation for all of the communities of color who are working to transform higher education, we must be ever conscious of the fact that it is the institution's responsibility to change. This labor too often rests on the shoulders of the historically disempowered.

Nearly all institutions of higher education have managed to forget, erase, ignore, dishonor, and disrespect the truth they reap benefits and resources from their positioning on Indigenous ancestral homelands (Lipe, 2018). When an institution is built on foundations of inequity with respect to Indigenous people, a culture of silence and erasure becomes normalized to the point where other ethnic groups suffer (Lipe, 2018). Education can be seen as something not to be trusted among Indigenous students (Windchief, 2018). The reasons are a mix of both history and contemporary experience, but it is the responsibility of a university to work to change this narrative.

Some degree of intersectional experience is a reality for all individuals, including Native Americans in higher education. Identity is always a process of becoming (Urrieta, 2018), and in the modern era, identities have grown increasingly fragmented due to multiple construction across often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices, and positions (Hall, 1996).

American Indian students being viewed as the ‘romantic others’ by their classmates and administrators (Brayboy, 2004), for example, may not be the most harmful of narratives at first sight. However, the work of countering such stereotypes is labor that a first-year freshman does not need. Native students must simultaneously walk in the worlds of western academia and their own cultural and familial epistemological backgrounds. As such, shapeshifting is an important skill for those living and working on the nation’s mainstream higher education campuses (Hunt, 2014). This ties back into Ramirez’s discussion of the urban Indian experience, as individuals who moved to cities from reservations having to navigate alien environments while maintaining their Native identity.

Higher education diversity

Postsecondary institutions have largely embraced the need for racially and ethnically diverse student bodies due to the documented benefit of enhanced critical and complex thinking skills, improved cross-racial understanding and cultural awareness, and better preparation for employment and leadership in an increasingly diverse and global workforce (Garces, 2014). However, while most institutions have a degree of intentionality in minority representation, there is an expectation that these efforts should not threaten the status of white people (Berrey, 2015). Those in power are typically quite intent on keeping their power, and the integration of people of color into white dominated organizations continues to be profoundly political (Berrey, 2015). Whiteness grants legal rights and privileges, and time has allowed the expectation of these privileges to be further affirmed, legitimated, and protected by the law (Harris, 1993).

Recent decades have seen the co-option of legal tools once used to address inequality, such as race-conscious admission policies in higher education, in order to preserve white privilege (Garces & Gordon Da Cruz, 2017). Instead, many institutions have embraced

conversations of diversity in place of race, which allows courts and policy makers to avoid the barriers of race and class that affect students (Bell, 2003). As a result, those institutions that are actually committed to recruiting Native students face significant legal and administrative barriers to these efforts. The idea of diversity has grown increasingly trendy in the field of higher education. However, action and effect have not kept up with this shift in values.

The politics of diversity has become more about image management than serving as a tool for change (Ahmed, 2006). It aims not to break down structural obstacles to racial progress but instead focuses on low-stakes affirmation of cultural difference (Berrey, 2015). As described by Ahmed (2006), diversity could be described as “...a politics of feeling good, which allows people to relax and feel less threatened, as if we have already “solved it” and there is nothing else to do.” Engagement with diversity programs allows White people to feel tolerant, cosmopolitan, and free from any potential guilt from racism due to their openness to minority culture (Berrey, 2015). However, diversity programs have the common habit of reinforcing cultural identity as being exotic, quaint, and curious, but still “other,” which has the effect of maintaining power hierarchies by positioning boundaries between “Us” and “Them” (Ngo, 2010).

Diversity programming is not useless. There is a power in individuals having the opportunity to see their own culture in a space that was not built with them in mind. For an Indigenous student who has moved off of a tribal land base to attend a mainstream institution, seeing a campus powwow might hold a great deal of meaning. However, we must always keep in mind who these initiatives are meant to serve.

Addressing issues of equality and inclusion requires attending to the critical relationship among power, race, and identity (Garces & Gordon Da Cruz, 2017). Diversity can be

meaningful, but it is not an adequate tool on its own. The effectiveness of diversity is dependent on being placed alongside equality in order to associate the political and legal challenge to inequalities with the celebration of culture (Ahmed, 2006). In order to provide real opportunity for diverse students, educational programs, curricula, and systems should be designed with an awareness of the meaning students give to their interaction with the institution (Dowd & Bension, 2015).

Western culture and education are built upon a Eurocentric binary between dominant White culture and less-than-human Indigeneity, and the deconstruction of this system should be among the highest priorities of democratic public education (Snaza, Applebaum, Bayne, Carlson, Morris, Rotas, Sandlin, Wallin, & Weaver, 2014). We must name the barriers which perpetuate racial inequality rather than hiding these practices through color-blind frameworks (Garces & Gordon Da Cruz, 2017). We must embrace the challenge of how to talk about race in education settings and the racialization of educational opportunity (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015). These challenges seem large, but evidence suggest that small, feasible changes in classrooms and in policy can dramatically reduce the racial achievement gap (Steele, 2011). The counter to this system wherein public schools include the histories, experiences, and intellectual insights of all groups of people would be a great benefit to the success of the many diverse communities which compose our student bodies (Ramirez, 2007). This approach aligns with the tenants of multiculturalism, which, according to Berrey, 2015), calls for the “...equal esteem of the world’s cultures and societies on grounds that those cultures are morally equivalent.”

Our goal is to transform higher education institutions into spaces where Indigenous people and other communities of color are easily recruited as students, staff, and faculty and where we feel safe bringing out histories, knowledge systems, languages, worldviews and

practices into curricula and practice (Lipe, 2018). We must learn and reinforce how to approach difference with respect, which beyond education, is a much-needed skill in the wider culture in which our institutions sit (Ramirez, 2007). Engagement with multiculturalism and diversity is a big task, because human culture is so vast, complicated, and interwoven. Our educational institutions do not have the capacity to teach about every culture on the globe. They do, however, have the ability to teach how to engage with difference by putting aside condescension and embracing curiosity and respect. Students of color are powerful holders and creators of knowledge, and there is much to be gained by building spaces where this knowledge is cultivated.

Developing Indigenous Knowledge Systems

The final section of this chapter examines the building of Indigenous knowledge systems. For this work, knowledge systems are defined as ways of thinking and knowing developed through both scholarship and practice. The lines of this literature review assume that the development of healthy Indigenous communities on a campus allow for the development of healthy Indigenous identities, and that combined, we access great opportunities for the cultivation of Indigenous knowledge. A campus knowledge system can be seen reflected in the articles written by students and faculty, in the types of courses offered, and the priorities of student organization initiatives. A community-based university knowledge system may have as much variation as commonality, as it is formed by individual thinkers. However, as a reflection of the culture of the Indigenous people at that institution, a knowledge system may should be attuned to the culture and needs of its population.

The inclusion of Indigenous knowledge systems is fundamental to refashioning higher education in ways that are compassionate, innovative, integrative, inclusive, and focused on the

collective good (Shotton & Minthorn, 2018). This section will discuss their importance as a tool for countering assimilationist ways of thinking. This will be followed by a discussion on self-determinism in Indigenous education as a counter to assimilation, and therefore, a promoter of Indigenous knowledge cultivation. This section will then move into an examination of common characteristics of Indigenous knowledge systems before closing with a discussion of how they are cultivated through practice.

Countering assimilation of thought

Within mainstream academia, what counts as theory is often a reflection of power of the one doing the theorizing (Franklin-Phipps, 2017). Foucault argued that how people are understood and how knowledge is constructed about people is a function of power (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Put more succinctly, the exercise of power creates knowledge and knowledge constantly induces effects of power (Foucault, 1980). We always bring tradition with us into the new, and it is very difficult to think outside our training, which, in spite of our best efforts, normalizes our thinking and doing (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013)

Colonialism, class, heterosexuality, and masculinity remain significant influencers on the building of culture (Gerrard, Rudolph, Sriprakash, 2017). Western scholarship often insists itself to be the only valid form of knowledge (Smith, 2012). For much of the 20th Century, social scientists grew highly quantitative and positivist in an effort to increase perceptions of authority and scientific expertise around their work (Andrews, 2015). As such, the truth accepted within systems of power grew narrow. Even the practice of citations in scholarship can be highly political (Franklin-Phipps, 2017), as there is power in whose voice is considered to be authoritative. Academic institutions can grow stale and stuck, and it is critical for scholars to

look beyond the traditions of the academy that were designed without many of us in mind (Franklin-Phipps, 2017).

Indigenous voice has long been excluded from the field of higher education scholarship (Davidson, Shotton, Minthorn, & Waterman, 2018) (Cook-lynn, 1998). Native knowledge is rarely viewed as legitimate on its own terms but must instead be filtered through western academic structures (Hunt, 2014). As such, Indigenous students face the added burden of finding ways for curriculum to be relevant to their lives (Windchief, 2018). Additionally, the strong bonds of Indigenous communities (Brayboy, 2005) places great importance on community and elder voice within Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies. However, if they do not hold degrees, these voices are rarely taken seriously by mainstream academia (Miheuah, 1998). Vine Deloria Jr. wrote in 1969 that academia's experts "...paint us as they would like us to be." A half century later, we continue to fight for the voices of our own communities to be centered in Native research.

Assimilation remains present in mainstream higher education (Windchief, 2018). However, young Indians refuse to accept white values as eternal truths (Deloria, 1969), and it is important that institutions provide space for these conversations. Leaving colonial limitations on knowledge systems untouched analytically has the effect of leaving them unrecognized and unproblematized (Gerrard, Rudolph, Sriprakash, 2017). Deconstruction is often understood as a struggle between rival perspectives (Wojciehowski, 1995). However, at its best, it is less about dismantling and replacing the dominant than it is about the preservation of tradition through a constant engagement with tensions and omissions (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). It is a means of breaking through stagnation. For Indigenous people to be successful in this work, we must be the ones driving the development of our own knowledge.

Self-determinism and Indigenous education

As described by Moses (2002), the two main conditions of self-determination are that persons have a positive social context from which to make choices about their lives and that they are able to maintain or develop an authentic cultural identity. Education systems play an important role in whether or not students become self-determining in a meaningful way (Moses, 2002). Institutions are able to cultivate a secure sense of authenticity through cultural identity and a favorable social context within which to make important life choices (Moses, 2002). However, representation and voice matter in this work.

Santamaria (2013) argued that educational leaders of color have a greater understanding of inequality in education and are perhaps more equipped to build opportunities for students of color. This proves problematic due to the racialized nature of higher education leadership, which continues to privilege Whites. For example, only two scholars of color have ever served as presidents of Ivy League institutions (Park, Keller, & Williams, 2016). In Canada, there are some university Native studies departments who are entirely staffed by non-Indigenous faculty (Wilson, 2008). This phenomenon is a severe limitation for both these departments and the students they serve. Throughout history, tribal communities have shown great resilience and the capability to fight for the improvement of our circumstance. Our greatest successes, whether through industry, politics, or education, have come when our own people, traditions, and values drive these efforts (Campbell, 1999).

Characteristics and practice

Indigenous knowledge systems, like Indigenous people, can take innumerable forms. Smith (2012) describes Indigenous knowledge as centering on ethics, wellness, and leading a good life. She goes on to discuss how Indigenous people create philosophies which connect

them to both the environment and each other. Relationships to land are important to Native people, as even those of us disconnected from our community's land base find great meaning in how homelands are centered in community identity. A similarly phenomenon develops between a college student and a campus, as this experience is largely defined by positive or negative stories and the ability to build bonds with others.

Across Indigenous academia, relationships and connectivity seem to be central to understanding Native knowledge systems. Indigenous scholars often aim to advance collaborative research that is inclusive of our communities' voices, thereby revitalizing both identities and values systems while legitimizing Indigenous approaches to knowledges (Chilisa, Major, & Khudu-Petersen, 2017). This aligns with Wilson's (2008) argument that the development of an Indigenous research paradigm allows for the use of methods and forms of expression whose validity are judge by Indigenous people. Indigenous research works within and transforms Indigenous traditions by balancing a respect for difference with an emphasis on interconnection (Morgensen, 2012).

The form and function of language is a critical topic to the nature of knowledge systems. Indeed, writing has proven an important means through which Indigenous identities have been revitalized (Niezen, 2003). There is a reality that those of us who write and speak in English are always hybridizing Indigenous knowledge (Hunt, 2014). Language shapes thinking, and there is a true limitation to deconstructing western epistemologies while still being limited to western language. However, as Cajate discussed, the Indigenous process involves a constant building upon earlier realities (Higgins, 2016). The languages of the colonizers may be a characteristic of many Native communities, but that does not mean we are unable to push beyond its limitation

through engagement with tradition and community. Even in English, we can move Indigenous knowledge forward.

Indigenous community building requires a focus on Indigenous values, including a respect for culture, traditions, land, and all living things (Ramirez, 2007). This work requires challenging those systems built and supported by colonialization, but there are many exceptional individuals already engaged in the process across the hemisphere. An example of this are the efforts within the Pan-Maya movement to produce experts on language and culture from within its own community to contrast trends in outsiders attempting to serve as owners of these cultural resources (French, 2010). There are also Indigenous scholars such as Charlotte Davidson, who incorporate their peoples' ways of knowing and being into their academic work. Davidson (2018) describes how her Diné heritage understands learning modalities as not being limited to heuristic or methodological tools but that these efforts are understood as a means of restoring order to the world. Such expressions of knowledge add a richness to community-specific research efforts.

As discussed by Ramirez (2007), "Indigenous peoples sharing their past and contemporary experiences is a process of bringing back together or re-remembering... the Native social body that has been torn apart by colonization." Such effort can take many forms. On a spiritual level, Individuals learn Indigenous knowledge and philosophy by connection with ancestors through song and prayer, leading to a spiritual un-mapping of the white world and a reconnection to the physical and spiritual reality of our belonging (Ramirez, 2007). Tuck and Yang (2014) discussed how the use of art in Indigenous academic work allows for the decoding of power and the un-coding of communities, thereby resulting in a training of our intuition

around academic work. Each of these examples presents powerful means for Native people to engage in knowledge cultivation in order to connect with their own people's ways of being.

Indigenous people are increasingly engaged in international platforms and cross-cultural conversation, and the production of Indigenous thinking allows a wider, more complex, and richer conversation (French, 2010). The 21st Century has seen an incredible growth in the number of talented and diverse Native scholars (Brayboy, 2018). There is also an increasing segment of non-Indigenous scholars engaging with Indigenous thinking (Todd, 2016), which can be done effectively on the condition that these individuals are willing to step beyond the position of 'expert' in order to serve as witness or listener (Hunt, 2014). We must all learn to express Indigenous thinking through the embodied expressions of stories, laws, and songs bound within Native self-determination (Todd, 2016).

As described by Maria Rocha, a friend, mentor, and elder of the Miakan-Garza band of Coahuiltecos: "By engaging with our traditions, we are better equipped to absorb knowledge." Positive identities require a supportive setting in which to grow, and there is much opportunity for higher education to serve this role. We are living in a period of great reclamation among Native Americans in regard to our culture, community, and educational opportunity, but to take advantage of this momentum, we must prioritize our own knowledge systems as the driving force of these efforts. This work requires a strong, supportive community of Indigenous thinkers and scholars. The story is changing, and our institutions are changing along with it. We must continue our work to ensure higher education is a place where all students are able to develop their cultural identities, take part in community, and cultivate knowledge built upon voices from their traditions.

Summary

This chapter has attempted to outline the literature framework supporting this research. Its purpose has been to examine how this study's premise, research questions, and goals fit within the wider fields of scholarship on education and Indigeneity. It began with an examination of the history of Native American education before exploring issues of Indigenous identity most relevant to this study. It then emphasized the connectivity of identity to community before setting these concepts within the boundaries of higher education. The goal is for the reader to gain a sense of how each of these foundations forms as a support for Native campus experience.

Now that we have a sense of this project in conversation with the works of other scholars, we will move onto the means through which the study will be conducted. The following chapter is an examination of the methodologies used to guide this work. It will emphasize the importance of framing any examination of Indigenous people by privileging Indigenous voice while outlining the study's research paradigm, theoretical framework, methodological approach, and the specific methods used to collect data.

Methodological *Hvchik*

Research benefits from good planning. How we think about an issue influences how we understand its story. It is therefore critical to consider the knowledge systems in which we frame our work. Strategies for pursuing and then shaping research highlight and add context. The voices of participants are the source of new stories in research, but knowledge systems are a means through which they are found and understood. A methodology is similar to a compass in that it does not tell us everything about the path in front of us, as a map would. Instead, it points, and we go searching.

The development of scholarship requires a constant examination of power and effect (Gerrard, Rudolph, & Sriprakash, 2017). The techniques and philosophical framework of this project have been designed in a way that centers Indigenous knowledge systems. It is a patchwork of Native scholarship, academic techniques from the world of education, and elder wisdom from the communities in which I have been involved. I think of this section as my Indigenous toolkit for working through issues of Indigenous education. It is my *hvchik*, or satchel in the Choctaw language, and it is meant as a container to hold various trinkets and ideas picked-up over the course of this research.

This project's research question asks: How are Indigenous communities built in higher education settings, and what are their impact on the development of Indigenous identities among students, faculty, and staff? The following is a dive into the methodological tools and perspectives used to explore this question. It will begin with a discussion on the centering of Indigenous ways of being in through methodology, followed by an exploration of this work's ontological and epistemological foundations. These sections will be heavily influenced by Indigenous story, which will be discussed in-depth. Next, I will outline the theoretical

framework applied before examining the methods used to gather data. This chapter will end with a brief discussion on project's validity and limitations.

An Indigenous approach

This work seeks to be embedded within Indigenous ways of knowing and being. It aims to center Native voice, tell Native stories, find ways to benefit the communities involved, and limit damage narratives. I discuss many communities outside of my own identity which I attempt to approach with the respect of a learner. I am neither expert nor owner of their experiences. Indigenous knowledge systems, like Indigenous people, exist in great variation. This work does not attempt to define a central Indigenous experience. Instead, the Native voices included should be understood as storytellers and guides. My role is to weave them together into new forms of meaning.

As described by Davidson, Shotton, Minthorn, & Waterman (2018), the concept of Indigenizing a system is not meant as a destination but as an ongoing process. This process can take many forms, but it often aligns with a few common principles. Smith (2012) describes Indigenous research as being focused on self-determination through a centering of transformation, decolonization, and healing. The empowerment and strengthening of those involved must be a central aspect of both form and consequence.

Davidson, Shotton, Minthorn, & Waterman (2018) argue that Indigenous research methodologies allow greater focus on 'premodern sensitivities,' which they describe as praying, singing, dancing, beading, weaving, and other culture-centered faculties. I fully agree that the incorporation of these elements is vital to the Native worldview and therefore vital to the practice of Native research. However, I disagree with the 'premodern' label, which seems to reinforce the idea of Native people being stuck in time. Cultural tradition maintains validity in the 21st

Century while also maintaining the right to progress. Tradition reflects the poetry and power of culture.

In his book *Research is Ceremony*, Shawn Wilson (2008) makes the point that many Indigenous paradigms understand knowledge not as something to be owned but as something that belongs to the cosmos. He makes the point that our role as Indigenous scholars is simply that of interpreters. These pages fit within wider manifestations of meaning. Hopefully, they include a few meaningful interpretations to add to the mix.

Privileging Indigenous voice

Conceptual frameworks used in indigenous-centered methodologies benefit from ontological and epistemological assumptions born from the cultures, histories, and philosophies of Indigenous people (Chilisa, Major, & Khudu-Petersen, 2017). As advocated by Todd (2016), Indigenous voice is central to understanding Indigenous issues. Words do not exist outside discourse and practice. They are laden with theory, values, history, culture, politics, and power (St. Pierre, 2013). As such, Indigenous voice is most knowledgeable about and best able to deconstruct issues critical to the Native educational experience.

I am not against using non-native voices and authors in support of my research. There are many non-Indigenous writers that I very much enjoy and whose work is a great benefit to this field. I will later discuss my strategy for incorporating outside knowledge systems. However, Indigenous voice must remain centered. The remainder is supplemental.

Indigenous methodologies advance collaborative research that is inclusive of Indigenous voices as a means of revitalizing identities and values systems (Chilisa, Major, & Khudu-Petersen, 2017). It is also a great legitimizer of Indigenous approaches to knowledges (Chilisa, Major, & Khudu-Petersen, 2017). Members of our community are best equipped to pursue

Indigenous research partially due to the fact that we are able to counter the nonsensical romanticism which often represents Native Americans in the western zeitgeist (Deloria, 1998). Additionally, Wilson (2008) argues that the development of an Indigenous research paradigm allows for the use of methods and forms of expression whose validity are judge by Indigenous people themselves. Indigenous people are better able to cut through the fog of misconception to present deeper insights from our communities. The result is the strengthening and reinforcement of our knowledge systems.

Community centered research

As described by Stone (2012), all societies are composed of individuals who are psychologically and materially dependent and connected through emotional bonds, traditions, and social groups. Nowhere is this more true than in Indigenous communities. Engaging in Indigenous research requires connectivity. Relationships are key, as described by Shawn Wilson (2008) in his statement that “Research by and for Indigenous peoples is a ceremony that brings relationships together.” This echoes of both Windchief (2018) and Brayboy (2018) in their emphasis on relationship building as being key to how we approach Indigenous scholarship.

Wilson goes on to acknowledge the great variation in Indigenous knowledge systems, but he emphasizes a commonality in how Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies understand relationships as being able to shape reality. By understanding research as a ceremony of relationality, he acknowledges research as a means to build bridges between the cosmos and the self. Relationships are therefore closely connected to ontology.

There are many benefits to a relationship approach to research, which can also be described as a community-building approach to research. Most importantly, relationships are critical to a healthy spirit, and Indigenous scholars have the opportunity to build and strengthen

our relational circles when working in Native communities. If done correctly, our participants also have the opportunity to connect with and learn the views of other Indigenous people involved in the work. This will be a goal of this project, as it allows opportunity to connect higher education communities across Turtle Island. Additionally, research that is inclusive of Indigenous voices has the ability to revitalize and restore lost identities and value systems, thereby working to legitimize Indigenous knowledge (Chilisa, Major, & Khudu-Petersen, 2017). Strong relationships allow for the building of collaborative wisdom through an ongoing, self-affirming experience.

This is not a simple approach. Taking the time to build trusting relationships within Native communities can take years (Wilson, 2008), but it is essential to Native ways of knowing and being. For this project, I was fortunate to be able to begin building relationships early in the process and to spend the subsequent years relying on relationships already formed. At UT Austin, I have long-standing connections with the Intertribal community of Central Texas, which allowed me access to interviews with Indigenous non-profit leaders. As a university student and staff member, I have been active in the campus Indigenous community independent of my research. Both of these experiences allowed for high levels of trust and connectivity critical to my work in this chapter.

For Southeastern Oklahoma State University, the story is a little more specific to this research initiative. While my family has a long history with the university and the region, I have not lived in Oklahoma for several decades. Therefore, my relationship building required a more intentional approach. It began by meeting with staff of the campus Native American Institute in 2017 for a class project. Conversations continued, I had the opportunity to meet additional staff and faculty, and I was able to build both trust and quality relationships over the subsequent years.

I received permission from Institute in 2019 to involve the campus in my dissertation research, which allowed me to pursue approval from Southeastern's Institutional Review Board in early 2020. This agreement approved the inclusion of interviews conducted to satisfy previous coursework, thereby allowing the study to span several years of conversations.

My research at Southeastern will be supplemented by conversations with the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (CNO), of which I am a member. Notably, my outreach and relationship building with the tribe took the longest amount of time to cultivate. This process involved extensive dialogue with several of the tribe's educational offices as well as members of its Institutional Review Board. Considering the challenging history of academia's relationship with Native American communities, I appreciate that my people are protective of how we are researched. My understanding is that, unlike university IRB offices, the CNO IRB will maintain ongoing conversations about what for publication and presentation. This effort took time, it had its challenging moments, but it has resulted in a stronger relationship where questions have been resolved and trust has been built.

A critical aspect of Indigenous research is taking the time to ask "For whom is this work being done" (Smith, 2012). The academy has a self-serving history, and too often there is a significant disconnect between the goals of researchers and the communities being researched. It is not uncommon for those involved to see no benefit. Quality Indigenous research requires reciprocity (Keene, 2018). In my conversations with participants and institutional representatives, I attempt to center the question of how this work can help their communities. The goal with this approach is to treat participants as project collaborators rather than as simply sources of data, as advocated by Jackson and Mazzei (2012). I believe in this approach, but

these conversations sometimes feel more aspirational than practical. I worry that my collaborators may be too busy to deeply engage with these questions.

A critique of academia is that finished scholarships often proves inaccessible to the communities being studied due to the paid firewalls of academic journals and the pretension of scholarly writing. I admit that I am often guilty of the latter. As writers, we must use the voices where we feel comfortable and which express our passions, but quality Indigenous research benefits from plain language as a means of demystifying knowledge (Smith, 2012). We must be mindful of relationships from start to finishing, meaning that the Indigenous communities in the center of a work must shape the work. Throughout this process, and particularly upon its completion, I will address accessibility by ensuring that the communities involved have easy access to these materials.

A community driven approach to research is a critical aspect of Indigenous scholarship, but my experience is that it is also a common aspect of how our communities interact outside of academia. When we gather for project meetings for the Indigenous Cultures Institute, everybody from elders to young children are present in the circle and have the space to speak. The youth have opportunities to share their thoughts and are asked questions, which allows them to understand themselves as valued members of the group. However, as is appropriate in Indigenous communities, the conversation always starts with the elders.

We live in a rapidly changing world. Advances in culture and technology can be beneficial, but there is a need for engagement with the traditions of the past and their continuing effects (Gerrard, Rudolph, & Sriprakash, 2017). In quoting Cajete, Higgins (2016) makes the point that the Indigenous process relies upon a constant building upon earlier realities while simultaneously addressing the needs of our times. I am by no means arguing that our elders are

limited to the past, but for the younger generations, they are our most effective teachers of tradition. The practices of the Indigenous Cultures Institute reflect the Indigenous values of shared leadership and a focus on community voice. Though not universal, they are common from the ivory tower to the powwow grounds for Native practitioners. These values will be central as I engage with members of the various communities involved in this study.

Qualitative approach

This study will be conducted through a qualitative approach, which involves in-depth research seeking detailed knowledge of specific cases in order to understand how a phenomenon occurs (Ragin, Nagel, & White, 2004). This type of research is intended to help better understand the meanings and perspectives of the people involved in the study, how these perspectives shape and are shaped by their physical, social, and cultural contexts, and the specific processes that are involved in maintaining or altering these phenomena (Maxwell, 2013). A qualitative approach is appropriate for an Indigenous community-centered study as the perspectives and voices of the community are designed to shape not only the findings but the process.

The goal of qualitative research is very often uninterested in deriving predictions across cases (Ragin, Nagel, & White, 2004). Instead, it focuses on understanding details about each site or individual studied (Creswell, 2018). Again, this fits well with this study's research approach due to my emphasis on variations within Indigenous identity. This work involves three sets of stories bounded by the three campuses involved. Not a single set can be said to represent the issues, characteristics, and identities of the entirety of Native America. Instead, each can be seen as its own community dealing with its own issues. Each study may add context and ideas to

consider that may benefit other Indigenous higher education settings, but this work is not meant or able to represent the full sum of Native higher education experience.

Stewart (2018) discussed how her work aims to push beyond the traditional boundaries of quantitative research in order to “...conceptualize a study that coincided with my worldview as a Native woman.” I appreciate her intent to center her own positionality, which is essential for bringing our whole selves to our work. I have attempted to do something similar in this piece where the tools and terminology of western scholarship are treated as subordinate to an overall Indigenous framework. The primary means through which this is accomplished is a centering of Indigenous voice, which is supported through efforts to decolonize the process of the study. While I have criticism of decolonization as it defines this work in relation to colonization rather than standing on its own, this approach remains a useful way for thinking about Indigenous research.

Decolonization

Colonialism continues in the everyday lives of people through language, values, customs, borders, and positions of power (Glesne, 2006). For Indigenous communities, education systems have served as the major agency for imposing colonialism. Historically, this took the form of religious and residential schooling and continued through secular schooling (Smith, 2002). For Indigenous scholars, a critical manifestation of colonization is the primacy of a “scientific” perspective in research (Wilson, 2008), which can lead to an expectation of work driven by statistics over narrative and resolute truth over a comfort in conflicting perspective.

Decolonization has been defined as a critique of the dominance of Euro-Western knowledge (Chilisa, Major, & Khudu-Petersen, 2017) and aims to disturb the metaphysics of colonial rule (Morgensen, 2012). While I agree that both of these issues are present and

prominent in Indigenous work, I hesitate to spend too much time defining Indigenous knowledge systems in relation to the west. They do not require western knowledge systems to exist, but at the same time, we cannot ignore the centuries of tension present since the Age of Imperialism. At some point, we have to shift the conversation to a focus on the language of possibility. This may be redundant, but framing decolonization as a process offers intentional steps away from colonization (Smith, 2012).

Tuck and Ree (2013) offer a criticism of decolonization in that, while recent decades have seen the approach embraced by the social sciences, this work rarely goes beyond the conceptual or metaphorical. This is valid and is linked to the wider issue of the disconnect between academia and the communities studied by scholars. However, without an intentional effort to recognize and problematize colonialism in research, it remains untouched (Gerrard, Rudolph, & Sriprakash, 2017). This work will have no shortage of criticisms concerning the continuing legacy of colonization while attempting to maintain focus on the future.

Decolonization can be seen a two-prong process which includes the deconstruction of neo-colonial structures and a reconstruction that centers Indigenous, diasporic, and other postcolonial ways of knowing (Higgins, 2016). Such a reconstructed approach can take innumerable forms, as it can be birthed from innumerable cultures, peoples, and perspectives. Potential contributors for post-colonial or Indigenized knowledge systems include languages, proverbs, folktales, stories, songs, music, taboos, artifacts, cultural and lived experiences, themes, Indigenous centered conceptual frameworks, methods, and processes of analysis not easily obtainable from western methods (Chilisa, Major, & Khudu-Petersen, 2017). In this work I focus on Indigenous voice, centering Indigenous communities, and a heavy emphasis on Indigenous story.

Incorporating Western thought

Decolonization should begin by exposing how settler colonial knowledge regimes have shaped social science research (Calderón, 2016). The globalization of knowledge and Western culture work to reaffirm the West's view of itself as the center and arbiter of legitimate knowledge (Smith, 2012). Indigenous researchers often have to define themselves in relation to dominant scholarship systems, while those working in these dominant systems seemingly have no need for such a justification (Wilson, 2008). Western scholarship holds strong bias towards economic and political analysis (Champagne, 1998), and it too often relies on certainty, as evident by the prominence of positivism since the Western Enlightenment Era (St. Pierre, 2013). It is often dismissive of cultural interpretation (Champagne, 1998), which will be heavily centered in my community-based research approach.

Wilson (2008) offers a criticism of decolonizing research methods by restructuring western approaches in ways that can be useful in Indigenous research. His argument is that this approach is ineffective due to an inability to separate the underlying epistemologies and ontologies of these paradigms. Related to this is Smith's (2012) discussion of how post-colonialism continues to leave out Indigenous people and has therefore been circumvented as a strategy for reinforcing the privilege of non-Indigenous academics. Both of these criticisms are valid and provide important cautions for those of us attempting to engage in Indigenous research.

My instinct is to maintain the freedom to incorporate aspects of Western and non-Indigenous thought when it is complimentary to the work. Indeed, the references of this work include scholarship from Western traditions, New Zealand's Maori culture, and the African diaspora, among others. I am conscious of Wilson's (2008) argument with such an approach that it gives away much power of Indigenous research paradigms to require them to be justified by

dominant paradigms. I attempt to address this issue by flipping the dominance. My work aims to center Native American knowledge systems, learned through both Indigenous scholarship and my community experience, while allowing other systems to serve as supplements.

Deconstruction is not simply about dismantling and replacing the dominant but is instead focused on preserving tradition through engaging with tensions and omissions (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Scholars benefit from cultivating the capacity to build methodologies that harmonize with older systems of thought passed through time (Davidson, Shotton, Minthorn, & Waterman, 2018). Indeed, even Indigenous methodologies are often a mix of more common approaches mixed with Indigenous practices (Smith, 2012), which can produce an endless variation of results depending on the practitioner. The blending of traditions raises an interesting question about how non-Indigenous scholars attempt to work with Indigenous knowledge systems in that they risk losing sight of how this work embodies expressions of stories, laws, and songs (Todd, 2016). For outsiders attempting to engage with Indigenous ontologies, there is the possibility of becoming unhinged, uncomfortable, or stepping beyond the position of ‘expert’ in order to assume the role of witness and listener (Hunt, 2014). While I come from a Native background, there are several communities involved in this study of which I do not identify. I will attempt to maintain the humility of the learner in these cases.

I am of mixed heritage and possess training, experience, and blood from both Western and Native American cultures. My childhood through my present have been defined by walking through both worlds. Additionally, I have had the opportunity to learn from the religions and philosophers of Buddhism and Hinduism, among others, which I began exploring with zeal in my late teens. I do not claim these traditions for my own, but I appreciate insights drawn from them over time. Each of these experiences has shaped my perspective and may have opportunity

to manifest in my academic work. This is unavoidable, often beneficial, but should be an issue of which critical scholars are ever conscious. When working in Indigenous communities, Indigenous knowledge must be central. I have a willingness to draw from various traditions, but Indigeneity must be the anchor tying this work to the communities it attempts to serve.

Research paradigm

If a paradigm can be understood as a set of beliefs that guide our actions, a research paradigm is composed of the beliefs that guide our choices as researchers (Wilson, 2008). It is the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs research (Maxwell, 2013). Research paradigms are composed on ontologies, or views on the nature of reality; epistemologies, or views on the type of knowledge that can be generated and its justification standards; and methodologies, the disciplined approaches used to generate knowledge (Taylor & Medina, 2013). It is critical for the research to be ever conscious of this process, otherwise methodologies can grow mechanized and reduced to simply methods, process, and technique (St. Pierre, 2013). Rather than being stumbled upon, these systems are constructed (Maxwell, 2013). They must fit the needs of the study, and for Indigenous paradigms, the communities being served.

There is great variation in available research paradigms. It is less helpful to think of them comparatively where one paradigm is superior to the other than it is to think about how useful it may be in the production and examination of unique knowledge (Taylor & Medina, 2013). Indigenous methodologies demand an interrogation of colonial academic procedures (Morgensen, 2012) due to the supremacy colonial academia places on itself. Ways of thinking, much like ways of being, have unlimited variation in opportunity to manifest. Existence is filled with habits, but variation is just as expected a rule. Within the human race, there are seemingly

endless spectrums of identity, gender, skin color, belief, art, music, philosophy, and spirituality. Different cultures have capacity to be both profound and damaging. With time, and depending on its significance to a population, the ideas that support these characteristics can grow into societal beliefs. Human behavior sits within a culture, and that culture is shaped by human behavior. Often times, the difference between damage and divinity comes down to how a belief translates to practice.

Indigenous research paradigms have existed for millennia, though their expression and acceptance in mainstream academia is only a recent phenomenon (Wilson, 2008). They are characterized by an appreciation for Indigenous history and worldviews, which allows Indigenous people to focus on the future while maintaining a grounded view of the past (Wilson, 2008). While the dominant paradigms of western scholarship commonly understand knowledge as individual in nature, Indigenous paradigms often see knowledge as belonging to the cosmos. Researchers are therefore only interpreters of knowledge (Wilson, 2008). This speaks to the significance of connectivity among Native people, and for my own work, it heightens my consciousness of the fact that I am the steward and not the owner of the stories I share.

Ontology and Epistemology

Ontology can be understood as the study of being (Crotty, 1998). It is a stance on the nature of reality (Creswell, 2018) or the aspect of a theoretical perspective which embodies a certain understanding of existence (Crotty, 1998). Indigenous ontologies may be composed of multiple realities defined by the relationship one has with a truth (Wilson, 2008). There is no singular reality but rather different sets of relationships that make-up reality (Wilson, 2014). Connectivity to land, place, and people is therefore central to Indigenous views of existence.

Hunt (2014) describes how within her work she replaces the concept of Indigenous ontologies with story. This links with Wilson's description above in that story is the way in which we make meaning of our experiences (Minthorn & Chavez, 2015). It is also a powerful tool for shaping our relationships. Story is therefore an essential element to Indigenous world views and will be expanded upon in this chapter as a central part of my methodological framework.

Linked to ontology is the concept of epistemology, which is the theory of knowledge embedded in a theoretical perspective (Crotty, 1998). If ontology is a stance on the nature of reality, epistemology is how the researcher comes to know reality (Creswell, 2018). A critical aspect of Indigenous epistemologies is a holistic and inclusive worldview and a connection to the nature world through ancestral story (Lipe, 2018). Furthermore, Indigenous scholars commonly understand epistemology as co-constructed knowledge based on relational ways of knowing and being that are learned by community members through community engagement (Calderón, 2016). The stories, values, and culture that one finds through an elder telling stories remains an important way that our communities share its co-constructed knowledge.

Beyond post-secondary scholarship, these issues have great impact in the lives of Indigenous people. Dr. Mario Garza, a mentor and elder in my community, once shared the following statement concerning public schooling: "Not all the children conceptualize the same. Indigenous children tend to be more circular in the way that they conceptualize and understand things. Western society is strictly linear, and that's the way that all their school systems teach." Our educational systems are meant to empower, but too often they have limited impact for those from various ontological and epistemological backgrounds. A critical theorist works to critique and disrupt these distorting ideologies and to situate the experience and perspectives of those often left out of the conversation (Glesne, 2006).

One of my favorite means of bridging ontology and epistemology when exploring Indigenous higher education is through critical realism. This framework combines ontological realism, or the belief that there is a real world that exists independently of our perceptions, with epistemological constructivism, which states that our understanding of the world is constructed rather than a purely objective perception of reality (Maxwell, 2013). Critical realism can be seen as a bricolage since it combines two seemingly incompatible elements (Maxwell, 2013). The benefit of this approach is that it acknowledges that there are definite realities at higher education institutions which Indigenous people must engage with, while at the same time, how we approach these realities as a people is often guided by our shared cultural values and experiences. This fits with Calderón's (2014) description of how Indigenous epistemologies are forms of co-constructed knowledge based on relational ways of knowing and being.

Story

This work heavily relies on story as a tool for research, as is appropriate within Indigenous methodologies. As described by Minthorn and Chavez (2015), "Story is essential to all peoples in order to convey vision and purpose of their lived experiences," but it is perhaps particularly essential to Native American identity. Stories preserve memory, prompt reflection, connect past to present, and help to imagine a future (Kramp, 2004). Story is how much of our knowledge within the community has been collected and shared, and it is therefore a prime example of the co-constructed nature of cultural knowledge systems. Storytelling, along with oral histories and the perspectives of elders, is a critical aspect of Indigenous research (Smith, 2012).

I am a firm believer in the transformative power of cultural art forms, which are capable of communicating in very different ways than scientific data analysis. We regain our history,

language, identity, and pride by digging into our cultural roots and making art out of our findings (Anzaldúa, 1993). Through storytelling, we have the potential to ignite the imagination of our youth and their desire to remain connected to community (Ramirez 2007). Art is a powerful tool for inspiring and connection a community around mission, purpose, and community. This phenomenon is not limited to story, as music can be a form of showcasing the experience of Indigenous people (Chilisa, Major, & Khudu-Petersen, 2017). The same could be said of poetry, film, the visual arts, and any means of allowing a researcher to look beyond the calculated approach of Western research.

As a scholarship tool, using art to think and feel through theory allows the decoding of power and the un-coding of communities, resulting in the training of our intuition around academic work (Tuck & Yang, 2014). Franklin-Phipps (2017) wrote about how art, movies, film, and poetry should be seen as equal to traditional research texts rather than subordinate to them as these mediums allow us to see through the opaqueness of academic work. Similarly, Taylor and Medina (2013) describe the arts in educational research as a means of nurturing alternative modes of reasoning. They go on to discuss how the growth of postmodern research paradigms have allowed more opportunity for the arts in academic work, which has an enriching influence on critical research. Of course, this academic work is approached from an Indigenous approach which more centrally features story and therefore does not need such legitimization, but it is nice to see other paradigms recognize these benefits.

My primary experience in the arts as a tool for Indigenous revitalization has been under the mentorship of Maria Rocha, a dear friend, adopted family member, and Executive Director of the Indigenous Cultures Institute. The Institute manages an annual summer camp in San Marcos, Texas which promotes Indigenous experiential learning at no charge for youths between the ages

of nine and thirteen. Maria shared with me the following story about her experience with a camp attendee: *One of our children said that when she learned these songs in another language, [she] knew what these songs meant [and] that she knew what she was singing. She was talking to us about spirituality and god. She said: "I never felt that before, but when I was singing, all of a sudden I felt it. I knew what you were talking about with spirituality because I felt it."* [We aim to incorporate] songs, theater, visual arts, [and] whatever medium that [helps] the child connect so that they feel that other level.

Indigenous methodologies are interwoven through histories and contemporary realities (Tachine, 2018). Legends and story are ways in which social groups share cultural heritage (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996), and for Indigenous people, metaphor has served as a powerful teaching tool (Wilson, 2008). They are a means through which we relate to others, share knowledge across generations, analyze life circumstances, and seek solutions for the future (Tachine, 2018). As a research tool, we understand humans as storytelling organisms who individually and socially lead storied lives (Connelly & Clandin, 1990).

Storytelling is a means through which we find and construct meaning (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). Therefore, a scholarly pursuit of story can be a pursuit of both individual and collective meaning. This is true for both the participant and the researcher, as how we think about story in our data influences the sorts of data we collect and how they are interpreted (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Native scholars such as Wilson (2008) and Tachine (2018) have written about the importance of interpreting Indigenous stories in a way which maintains respect and connectivity to Indigenous culture. Indeed, Wilson argues it more appropriate from an Indigenous perspective that he treats his role as more of a storyteller than that of a researcher.

For people of color, counter-storytelling, or the sharing of experiences often left out of mainstream dialogue, can serve as a powerful tool for challenging hegemonic discourse (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Either through omission or the over-representation of damage narratives, the reality of Native Americans lived experience is rarely accurate in mainstream scholarship. A focus on counter-storytelling allows for a reframing. As scholars, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, we have a responsibility to break-down simplistic, long-standing narratives built of ethnocentrism, colonialism, and racism. Responsibly sharing the wealth of wisdom in Indigenous story is a powerful place to begin this work.

It should be noted that there are limitations to story. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) note that writing narratives creates a challenge for the researcher in portraying the complexity of ongoing stories and warns against the instinct to wrap everything up with a happy ending. A similar argument is made by St. Pierre and Jackson (2014) about academic writers who feel the need to find a theme in their research regardless of how the data flows. I would argue that Indigenous story-based methodology emphasizes meaning making, and therefore we should embrace forming themes and quality narrative flow. However, the views of the participants and community must be central in this process. Themes cannot be disregarded or reshaped for the sake of convenience, and participant and community feedback are central to affirming their validity. This is a place where good storytelling has to be balanced with community responsibility.

Finally, I will note that stories gathered from participant interviews are typically limited to chapters focused on data analysis. For example, I save quotes from University of Texas students until the chapter on the University of Texas. However, some participants in this study have also served as long-time mentors, including Dr. Mario Garza and Maria Rocha, and their

voices have had great impact in shaping my perspectives on Indigeneity. As such, I allow space for quotes, stories, and insights from several of my elders to be peppered throughout these opening chapters.

When dealing with Indigenous research, the scholar and storyteller take on great responsibility over the use of collected data. There are stories from Native communities that I cannot share and stories that I will not share in an academic paper. This relates to Tuck and Yang's (2014) discussion about how some experiences already have their appropriate home within a community and giving them to the academy is more an act of removal than respect. Within academic research, there are broad concerns about the power of the knowledge we create and its effects (Gerrard, Rudolph, Sriprakash, 2017). This is critical to the present discussion as there is a particularly challenging history in the relationship between researchers and Indigenous communities. Academia has preserved aspects of Native culture and history, but many tribal people and Native scholars are not comfortable with how this work has been done, particularly concerning how Natives are presented and when sacred aspects of the culture are shared (Champagne, 1998).

The way research, human subject protocols, and publishing are governed tends to territorialize knowledge as property and researchers as claim-stakers (Tuck & Yang, 2014). For Indigenous people, there is often unique knowledge that should never be commercialized (Smith, 2012). There are songs that should not be told outside of ceremony, artifacts that only belongs in sacred spaces, and stories that should be limited to family. When and how stories are shared requires the researcher to take on the responsibility of continuous dialogue with individuals and communities about what to share and how. Even with these permissions in place, I do not own

the stories included in this work. They belong to the tellers, their families, and their communities. I am simply a steward.

Theoretical framework

Theory is a critical tool for research. While a theoretical assumption is a simplification of the world, it can be a useful tool for clarifying and explaining how phenomenon work (Maxwell, 2013). Theory is simply a framing device (Ragin, Nagel, & White, 2004). By linking the empirical to the theoretical, researchers are able to use theory to make sense of evidence and to use evidence to refine theory (Ragin, 1992). Theory helps shape one's thinking about the process of research, from initial topic exploration to data collection, and finally, writing. The following section outlines the theoretical pillars used to frame this work.

As described by Delgado and Stefancic (2012), Critical Race Theory is largely focused on the study of race, racism, and power. They go on to discuss how racism is an ordinary characteristic of culture and that the system of racial ascendancy serves to reinforce dominance. This makes racism difficult to address as the dominant group holds great influence in society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) and has little influence in changing a system from which it benefits. How minority groups are racialized may fluctuate based on the shifting needs and interests of the dominant (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Such a shift can be seen in the portrayals of Native Americans from the mindless savage representations in mid-20th Century westerns to the more contemporary portrayal of Indians as sacred, New Age beings. Both depictions are disconnected from the realities of Native life but represent a remarkable contrast in the values being imposed by the dominant society.

Research through a Critical perspective is characterized by the involvement of the people the work seeks to assist (Capper, 1995). This connects with my goal of centering Indigenous

voice throughout my research process. Critical Race Theory recognizes people of color as holders and creators of knowledge rather than being seen as deficient in their forms of knowledge (Bernal, 2002). This approach recognizes that through their different histories and experiences, members of a group are more familiar with issue concerning their people and therefore better able to communicate these issues than outsiders (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Linked to this, and specifically beneficial to Indigenous epistemologies, is the fact that CRT recognizes the importance of storytelling to analyze the myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms of a culture (Ladson-Billings, 2000). By focusing on their own experiential knowledge, a Native researcher is able to gain insight into their experience through their own narratives, testimonials, and oral histories (Bernal, 2002).

Tribal Critical Race Theory builds upon the framework of CRT by applying the epistemologies and ontologies specific to Native American communities (Brayboy, 2005). Its inclusion is therefore critical in this study's goal of centering Indigenous experience in both study design and the collaborative roles of participants. Some central aspects to the theory are the understanding that colonization is endemic to society and that Indigenous people "occupy a liminal space that accounts for both the political and racialized nature of our identities" (Brayboy, 2005). Through this framing, Brayboy centers Native American experience within a theoretical view specific to Native Americans.

Tribal Critical Race Theory holds that tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Native people (Brayboy, 2005). Brayboy adulates these aspects of Native ontology, which helps shift the dialogue on Indigenous lifeways from deficit towards empowerment. Additionally, his focus on the future is both action oriented and hopeful. By incorporating Native worldviews into our

research and practice, Indigenous communities will be better equipped towards self-determinism and revitalization. These are the primary goals of this research.

Methodology

The following section outlines the methodological framing of this work. A methodology can be defined as the strategy, plan or action, process, or design behind the choice of methods (Crotty, 1998). While there are aspects of traditional social science methodologies that are linked to my work, I attempt to approach this piece from an Indigenous approach complied through cultural practice. It could be argued that the discussion on limiting damage narratives could have been included in my epistemology, literature review, or various other sections, I instead frame it here as being critical to my overall methodological strategy.

Limiting Damage Narratives

A critical issue concerning Indigenous research is examining how to write about historic and contemporary atrocities. Our communities face very real challenges that continue through the violent process of colonization. As described by Morrill and Tuck (2016), “Settler colonial societies are haunted by the host of gone peoples...” There are very real challenges in Indian Country, but also problematic is the fact that damage narratives are too often the only stories told about Indigenous people (Tuck & Ree, 2013).

Most of western culture understands Native Americans as impoverished, struggling with substance abuse, missing, and murdered. While these stereotypes are not wrong in varying degrees within different Indigenous communities, they are far from the complete story. It is counterproductive trying to empower a community by focusing on its deficits. Calderón (2016) acknowledges this point when discussing how being limited to stories of pain and damage effectively works to maintain the settler colonial structures at the root of community problems.

Concerning education is the phenomenon where institutional racism leads to “monovocal” stories about low educational achievement and attainment for students of color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), which can train the expectations and efforts of teachers, institutions, and the students themselves. Within post-secondary scholarship, researchers may be more inclined to focus on negative aspects of Indigenous people when the work is done by non-Indigenous researchers and there is limited guidance from the communities being researched (Wilson, 2008).

Tuck and Yang (2014) discussed the analytic practice of refusal, which involves an active resistance to stories of pain and humiliation, thereby blocking the settler colonial focus on this aspect of Indigenous story (Tuck & Yang, 2014). They go on to argue that a prominent form of refusal is to resist the urge to study the social problems of people and to instead study institutions of power. I appreciate this argument due to the fact that it frames institutions as being responsible for the labor required for change. This consideration will be maintained in my work, though with my community-driven approach to this project, the gaze of this research must be primarily centered on the Indigenous people that make-up these communities.

To balance these concerns, my work focuses on a strengths-based approach to Indigenous communities, wherein hopes, dreams, talents, and capacities are emphasized in order to communicate a focus on the future (Hepworth, Rooney, Rooney, Strom-Gottfried, & Larsen, 2010). Earlier chapters do discuss challenges such as poverty and cultural disconnect in order to better understand the circumstance faced by Native higher education students. However, these discussions have been limited and framed as points of departure. For example, the discussion on the history of Native American education can be seen as a progression away from assimilationist policies of the state towards the towards self-determination of Indian communities around their own educational needs. Emphasizing the strengths in Indigenous education is not too difficult,

as Turtle Island is filled with incredible communities and individuals creating powerful opportunities for Native young people. This work seeks to highlight these stories in order to alter the narrative of Indigenous identity and to provide insight into how to cultivate similar success.

Purpose of three sites

Three higher education institutions were chosen as the primary sites of this study. As the project has been structured, this will take the form of three separate studies tied together by my research questions and the themes of community, identity, and Indigenous knowledge cultivation. One of the primary goals of this approach is that it allows the work to emphasize the great variation of Native American experience on the continent. Too often Indigenous heritage is only seen through the lens of cultural clichés, which are themselves often misrepresentations of plains culture (Ramirez, 2007). In order to counter this phenomenon, this work aims to present three varying Native American communities located across the continent, which are themselves composed of various Native people from across the globe.

An additional inspiration for including three sites came from Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain's 1998 book *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds*. In this piece, the authors place great focus on the construct of the figured world, which they describe as "...a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others." In exploring the concept of the figured world, the book's chapters focus on the authors' various research topics as seen through this theoretical lens. There are chapters on female community dynamics in Tibet, courtly love from Europe's middle ages, and

contemporary alcoholics anonymous communities. Each topic is used to explore the interconnectivity of the individual and larger group in relation to cultural development.

The book sets-up the theoretical context of the figured world in the beginning and then uses various research sets to show the many ways in which the theory can manifest. I found this a beautiful and powerful means of conveying how theory can serve as a guide through the innumerable distinctions of human nature, which is itself incredibly applicable to my focus on Indigenous variation. Finally, I will note that I chose the approach of the three campuses because this premise makes for a book I would personally like to read, and that seemed a good reason for me to take on its writing.

The University of Texas at Austin, Southeastern Oklahoma University, and Queen's University were chosen as sites for the study because they present three very distinct environments for Indigenous community-building and identity development. UT Austin is a tier-1 research institution whose Indigenous students represent a cross-hemispheric array of Indigenous identity. The community is small, but extremely close-knit. Southeastern is a small state university which is located on a Native land base. The campus' historic ties to the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma make for a fascinating exploration of a state and tribal institutional partnership. Finally, there is Queen's University, which includes the examination of a relatively young, intentional push by campus administrators on the recruitment and support of Indigenous students. The inclusion of an institution in Canada also allows for the work to lean into the theme of Indigenous connectivity crossing the borders of colonial states. An additional bonus of these three institutions is that they provide a tiered variation in their student population, with UT Austin's student body at approximately 52,000, Queen's University at approximately 22,000, and Southeastern at approximately 7,000.

This paper does not seek to compare and contrast by focusing on dichotomies of large versus small student bodies or degrees of Native representation. Such an approach has limited use. Instead, I will attempt to frame the stories of the participants interviewed as different points on the spectrum of Indigenous higher education experience. There is a reality that these institutions are set in dramatically different social, state, and financial circumstance, and some comparison will be unavoidable. Higher education is an incredibly hierarchical industry, and academic quality is often defined in relation to other institutions (Winston, 1999). However, the questions of this study are concerned with how each institution serves its Native population. These are issues better understood through the voices of the community than a comparison of endowment or population size. These differences make for interesting variations across the three stories, but each story is framed as a singular exploration of the way in which Indigenous community, identity, and culture manifest.

There is significant variation in the research timelines of each institution. This is due to differences in when I was able to gain access as well as an intentional attempt to manage such a sizeable project. Research at the University of Texas at Austin began in 2017, culminated in the Fall of 2020, but will involve follow-up interviews into the Spring of 2021. Research at Southeastern began in earnest in 2019, though a few interviews were completed in 2017 during my early outreach to the institution. I expect the research at Southeastern to be mostly resolved by the Spring of 2021. Finally, research at Queen's University will begin in the Spring of 2021 and be completed by the end of the year. These differences in in time impact my thinking about each campus and will result in varying depth of story and insight. I imagine that there will be a corresponding variation of page length for these three chapters.

Methods

Research methods are defined as the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyze data (Crotty, 1998). If a methodology is a strategy (Cortty, 1998), methods are its means of implementation. The following section will outline the methods used in this work. It will begin by discussing the overarching strategy used to provide flexibility across my various sites. It will then discuss the actual means of data collection, the project's timeline, the shaping of interview questions, and how the collected data has been analyzed.

A less structured approach

According to Shotton and Minthorn (2018), Indigenous methods are fluid by nature. They describe them as being “constantly evolving.” In my experience as a young scholar, a willingness to be flexible allows greater attunement to the needs of the community and the process. Though to analyze this more critically: perhaps flexibility simply allows more opportunity for attunement. The ethics of the implementation may depend on the scholar. I greatly appreciate Glesne's (2006) visual arts analogy when discussing research methods. They describe how, like painting, it is useful to study the great masters in order to learn and practice technique, but once a skill is acquired, one should feel free to revise and adapt based on one's “own persuasions...” Ulmer (2017) made a similar analogy between writing and dancing with a description of how both “... involve preparation and play; mostly occur offstage; demand occasional performances; and offer modes of moving, thinking, and being.” As skills and perspectives grow, art forms from the gallery to the scholarly journal benefit from flexibility, variation, and a conscious effort towards growth.

I approached this project greatly reliant on limberness, which has proven essential to its success. The fact that I am working in different communities and on different campuses has to

allow for variation. My positionality within each community and varying degrees of access also guarantee the need for flexibility in my approach. Since the project runs from 2017 to 2021, my abilities and toolset as a scholar have developed over time. Examples of this include how I track data and incorporate it into writing, which have both greatly benefitted from recently acquired skills with Microsoft Word Styles. How I review interviews has transitioned from personally transcribing them to using professional services. Finally, having to move most of my data collection onto Zoom and away from in-person interviews has been a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. From the beginning of the project in 2017 to its end in 2021, the world has experienced a great deal of fluctuation and stress. Flexibility has been a requirement of our shared struggle.

Concerning interviews, I have enjoyed flexibility in the nature of the conversations and the topics long before the crisis. Considering that most participant conversations were ongoing, I was able to tailor questions to different individuals based on previous conversations and relational knowledge. At times, I would ask the same question in different ways and on different days to see if they lead to new paths of insight. My questions most always linked to an overall set of themes, including community, personal experience, and campus connectivity. However, other times I would follow-up with a tangential remark because it seemed interesting regardless of expected application to the study. I specifically think here of Santiago from the UT Austin chapter, who had a talent for brilliant tangents.

Maxwell (2013) discusses how design in qualitative research is an ongoing process and how we must be continuously conscious of how it is influenced by its environment. Similarly, Childers (2012) referred to qualitative research as being “...forward moving, backward thinking, rhizomatic, iterative, and emergent endeavor, itself constantly on the move.” This

description makes research sound both fabulous and flexible. Other benefits to less-structured methodological approaches include: that they can provide a greater breadth of data (Fontana & Frey, 2000); allow conceptual frameworks to emerge in the field (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014); and allows an understanding of people's lives beyond lenses of static identity and fixed patterns (Childers, 2012). Franklin-Phipps (2017) discussed how "figuring out how to do research while doing it might produce another kind of research." Personally, it also produced a few moments of divine madness. I recall at least one occasion where I found myself cackling like Frederick Frankenstein while writing this chapter.

Greater flexibility can also have its drawbacks. It is a common and not incorrect argument that structured methods allow for greater comparability of data across individuals, which can benefit internal validity (Maxwell, 2013). However, validity in this work is primarily reliant on feedback from the Indigenous communities involved. I argue that correctly capturing meaning from individuals and the collective community is the primary concern for truth in Indigenous storytelling.

Data collection

Data has been primarily be collected through interviews with research participants, observations of programs and events, and analysis of resources of the different institutional and community contexts. These include each institution's website as well as books and journal articles on institutional history and contemporary issues. Additionally, participant interviews have been supplemented with written communications. These may be used to clarify or confirm a previous statement or to ask new questions where the research would benefit from a thought-out response from the participant. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews have been limited to phone or digital conversations since March of 2020.

The current pandemic severely limited data collection through in-person observations. My goal would in a normal year would be to travel to each institution in order to attend Indigenous campus gatherings, meet community members, and to gain a sense of the physical space involved in the research. This type of immersive research is beneficial as it allows firsthand insights into how participant action is linked to what is discussed in interviews (Glesne, 2006). Unfortunately, my home institution's COVID-19 travel restrictions remained in place during data collection, nor did I want to create risk for the communities involved.

I will incorporate a variety of sampling techniques to select participants to be interviewed. Identifying individuals will begin by sampling for range, which Small (2009) described as identifying and pursuing individuals from sub-categories within the group being studied. In this study, the sub-categories include Indigenous students, faculty, and staff from the different institutions involved and their surrounding communities. To an extent, this approach could be considered homogeneous sampling, which focuses on individuals with similar demographic or social characteristics (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). However, there is a little discomfort with this perspective because, while Indigenous identity could be considered a category of social characteristic, this work's epistemological stance emphasizes the great variation of Indigenous experience and background. This point may be a matter of semantics, but its inclusion allows an opportunity to continue referencing this critical issue.

In order to successfully recruit participants, I primarily relied on reputational case selection and snow-ball sampling. The former creates access to individuals based on the recommendation of experts (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014) while the latter asks current interviewees to recommend other participants (Small, 2009). Both methods are appropriate for Indigenous community-based research as both rely on the relationships built between myself, the

recommender, and the recommended. The experts described in reputational case selection included the faculty and staff leaders of a campus Indigenous community, such as Dr. Marlin Blankenship of Southeastern Oklahoma State University's Center for Student Success.

Timeline

This project's timeline featured overlapping research at each institution. This was due to both my time constraints as a researcher with a full-time job as well as a desire to compartmentalize in order to better organize the focus of my analysis. Research at The University of Texas at Austin began in the Spring of 2018, though these early interviews were related to class projects rather than being specific to my dissertation. As the topics discussed in these papers lead to the development of my current research questions, I feel comfortable including this data. Use of these early interviews has been approved by the university's Institutional Review Board. My research efforts at UT Austin hit their peak during the Spring and Fall of 2020.

My research at Southeastern Oklahoma State began in earnest during the Summer of 2020. This work continued through the Spring of 2021. My supplementary research with the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma centered in the Spring of 2021. Finally, my research at Queen's University began in the Spring of 2021 and was completed by the end of summer.

Interview questions

Patton (1990) describes qualitative interviewing as beginning with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit. Seidman (2006) makes the argument that the ability to symbolize experience through language is central to human experience. Our goal as interviewers then is to cultivate a process that allows the expression of perspective through dialogue. The social sciences are flush with techniques, tools,

and approaches for doing this work, but as a Native American practitioner, I have the added benefit of Indigenous relational ways of knowing and being as guides. From this perspective, both the researcher and the participant are storytellers, and my role is to pass along their stories while adding my own insight.

The process was framed through an interview guide approach, which outlines a set of issues or questions to explore before interviewing begins (Patton, 1990). This allowed me to shape my questions to the themes of my research questions, including but not limited to community, Indigeneity, and campus experience. While I was able to craft questions across varying participants to maintain connection to my central themes, the approach allowed for flexibility to continue on a theme beyond standardization. This was accomplished by incorporating an informal conversational interview approach, which allows for the spontaneous generation of questions based on the natural flow of the interaction (Patton, 1990). Such flexibility created room for the exploration of unforeseen issues brought-up by the participant while also contributing to a relaxed, conversational dialogue more conducive Indigenous relationship building. A challenge with this kind of flexibility can be seen in Patton's (1990) description of how collecting the same information from each participant helps minimize issues of legitimacy and credibility. While valid, I feel this issue would be more applicable if my work were focused on a holistic interpretation of a campus experience. While examining common perspectives is involved, my goal is to lean into individual stories from participants, whether that entails commonalities or tensions.

The questions aimed for broad responses through the grand tour approach, which encouraged participants to ramble on, thus providing great opportunity for investigating many aspects of an experience (Spradley, 1979). Questions were aimed at understanding a

participant's personal experience as well as exploring that participant's understanding of the wider cultural experience of a community. For instance, I often asked students what their experience has been like on campus as well as asking their impression of how Indigenous people commonly feel about that campus. Both approaches are fairly common in ethnographic work (Spradley, 1979).

Data analysis

Working with data is in many ways the fun part of research, and while coding and analyzing, it was a great benefit to examine the perspectives of my participants through my own positionality as a Native researcher. Data is not a simple thing but is connected to various political structures and discursive variations (Koro-Ljunberg, MacLure, & Ulmer, 2018). How data is collected, compiled, and used must be examined through a lens attuned to community ethics and interpretation. This work is challenging but essential.

Data analysis is more than coding and organizing themes, and it is more effective when theorization accounts for the myriad complexities of its subjects (Childers, 2012). Linked to this is the argument from Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) that conducting analysis concurrent with data collection assists in the ways in which we think about data and may influence what data needs to be collected moving forward. Blurring the lines between data collection and analysis may result in less transparency in the development of findings than we may find in quantitative work (Ragin, Charles, Nagel, & White, 2004), but it seems to allow for the flexibility and community-attunement required for Indigenous methodologies.

My technique for coding combines traditional social science research techniques with my own training and preferences as a writer. Coding creates labels in order to connect meaning within by categorizing and clustering similar data chunks (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014).

Holistic coding, for example, applies a single code to a large unit of data rather than analyzing it line by line (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). This was accomplished in my work through the use of topical headings used to categorize literature, participant responses, and my own interpretations. The use of bullets under each topical heading allows for the easy reorganization of ideas within a category. Additionally, I used color coded text to delineate hypothesis coding, which links data to my emphasized assumptions and themes. Creswell (2018) advises that coding should not be too elaborate a process. This work relies on a system which suits my needs as a writer while also allowing enough structure to organize a project of this scale.

Participants

This project included interviews from twelve individuals associated with UT Austin, six individuals associated with Southeastern Oklahoma State University, and six individuals associated with Queen's University. This variation was based on access and time, which also impact the length and significance of each institution's contribution to the overall work. For instance, research at the University of Texas at Austin was ongoing between 2017 and 2021, while the research at Queen's University was limited to 2021. As such, UT Austin was the longer chapter due to a deeper dive into campus stories.

The composition of participants varied across institutions, depending on both access and story focus. For example, much of the conversation at UT Austin is about student experience, and therefore students make up the majority of participants. Meanwhile, the conversation at Southeastern Oklahoma State University is largely about the institutional partnership between the campus and the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. Queen's University also had an institutional focus. While student voice was included, the majority of individuals interviewed represented faculty and staff of these two organizations.

Maxwell (2013) discussed how ethics should be involved in every aspect of research design. Nowhere is this more critical than in the protection of participants. Prior to conducting an interview, I have taken time to talk-through the project's informed consent form with all participants. They later had opportunity to review their responses chosen to be included in the study. This was intended to help ensure that these statements correctly portray the participant's intended meaning. Transcripts of interview recordings were processed by a private company. Upon completion of the project, these recordings will be destroyed, as will any unused sections of the transcript. For individuals whose identity will be kept confidential, their real name and identifying information will be kept separate from data.

The confidentiality of participant names will was handled delicately. While western scholarship values anonymity, Indigenous-based research benefits from a more open approach as a means of creating community accountability (Wilson, 2008). I appreciate this in theory, though I have concern for the protection of Indigenous students who are already at a disadvantage in Western educational systems. All students were therefore be required to use a pseudonym. Meanwhile, the real names of staff and faculty from the institutions involved were used. Their role is to provide the voice of the institutions, and it is therefore critical to have an idea of their names, titles, and positions within these organizations.

This work incorporated participant feedback in ways uncommon in western scholarship. Maxwell (2013) discusses how the incorporation of theory held by participants is often neglected. In a community-driven Indigenous approach, we should be able to provide space for the theory and the worldviews of participants in our methodologies when this is particularly impactful. While interview quotes are typically limited to the chapter on findings, some participants in this study have a long history in shaping my own Indigenous identity, ontology,

and epistemology. This includes Dr. Garza and Maria Rocha, who have spent years as my mentors and elders. While their story and quotes feature heavily in the University of Texas at Austin chapter, I have also sprinkled bits of their wisdom throughout this and previous chapters. This attunes with my community-driven research approach by reflecting how these elders have not only shaped our campus community at UT Austin but also my own personal journey.

Evaluation, trustworthiness, and validity

It has been argued that there is limited consensus on the standards for validity and credibility in qualitative research (Ragin, Nagel, & White 2004). It is the constant work of the researcher to examine what is true and whether a story is being told correctly. As an Indigenous scholar, I feel comfortable trusting the oral tradition in this process. Verisimilitude, or the appearance of truth, can be appropriate criteria in narrative work (Kramp, 2004) and is therefore a credible means of working in the oral tradition. The stories I share contain the truth of the storyteller, and I attempt to be direct around when a story represents an individual's truth or that of the wider community.

An important means of evaluation is soliciting feedback from participants (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). This was a critical application in my search for validity as it centers the focus on community voice. Participants were provided the opportunity to review data drawn from their interviews and how this information fits within the wider narrative. By this means, the community served as my primary judge on the validity of this research.

There are numerous tactics for evaluating meaning from data. It is helpful to be intentional about how they are incorporated. Once a chain of evidence creates a narrative, there are several ways for it to be problematized. This study relied on triangulation, or the use of different methods as a check on each other (Maxwell, 2013). This was done by comparing

participant interviews to other forms of data and by hosting group interviews over Zoom where participants can share and compare their thoughts with others. Additionally, I took time to explore negative evidence and rival explanations, as advocated by Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña (2014). If a story does not fit a wider narrative, is it an outlier or another area of interest to explore? Either way, it may prove an interesting part of the discussion.

Perhaps my greatest tool for managing validity threats is the long timeline of the project. Extended observations and repeat interviews allow a researcher better opportunity to understand truth as relayed by participants (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). My interview procedure often had me asking the same question in different ways and on different days. This allowed participants opportunity to respond to a prompt from a different frame of mind, which resulted in parallels or differentiation. Both results are useful to the work. Hosting several interviews with a participant over the course of an academic year allowed for a deeper dive into rich data while also creating opportunity for the relationship building critical to Indigenous, community-based research.

Limitations

There are several limitations of this work that are important to discuss. It has been noted that writing Indigenous scholarship in English rather than Indigenous language is a hybridization of Indigenous knowledge and therefore allows for a limited Indigenous perspective (Hunt, 2014). This is a reflection of the great power of language and the degree to which it is laden with theory, values, history, culture, and politics (St. Pierre, 2013). Additionally, there is a problem in writing down stories in that it makes it very difficult to change them as we gain new insights (Wilson, 2008). The written page is stagnant while lived realities are fluid. This is a limitation that seems inescapable without ongoing research. However, the most critical

limitation to explore is perhaps generalization, as it is the most tempting to the author and the reader.

Generalization refers to the ability to extend research conclusions beyond the boundaries of the institutions and communities involved in a study (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). As previously discussed, my work hyper-focuses on the great variation of Indigenous experience. These stories do not attempt to represent all of Indigenous higher education experience. I appreciate Keene's (2018) argument about their own research when stating that "I do not wish to draw upon the students' experiences as a means to generalize the entire population of Native college-enrolled students. I in fact hope for the opposite. I hope to highlight the particularities and importance of each individual student experience, with the hope of illuminating broader themes and thoughts that may resonate with a larger population." I would aim for a similar goal. The facts and realities present in the communities involved do not directly translate to all Indigenous people. However, there is hope that some ideas drawn from this work will be beneficial to other efforts aimed at improving Native college experience.

Summary

This chapter has aimed to outline the methodological framework used to guide this work. It has outlined an approach that aims to incorporate various Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies, and the specific methods used have been created through a Native, community driven approach. These paradigms have been supplemented by select methodologies from mainstream social science research. Now that an outline of the nature of the study has been presented, the following chapters will outline the research and analysis collected at each institution. This will begin with a chapter on The University of Texas at Austin, followed by a chapter on Southeastern Oklahoma State University, and then a chapter on Queen's University.

The University of Texas at Austin

On Labor Day 2020, there was a gathering of Indigenous students from the University of Texas at Austin, representatives from the Central Texas Native American community, and allies. This event took place on the grounds of the university's J.J. Pickle Campus, which is located a few miles north of the main campus. Within the campus sits the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory, which houses one of the largest "collections" of Indigenous remains in the country. These individuals had been pulled from the earth over many years from various burial sites across the state.

The event was described as a "ceremonial teach-in." It was organized by the Miakan-Garza Band of Coahuiltecan, a local Indigenous group, in order to raise awareness for a repatriation campaign aimed at reburial of their peoples' ancestors being held by the university. After four years of procedural maneuvering, the university had denied a request to return these individuals to the earth earlier that summer. This decision would prove a powerful catalyst towards advocacy and community building among the Indigenous people of the campus and the wider region.

It was a sunny, blue sky evening. While there was a strong wind cutting through the Central Texas heat, we were deep into the dry season for our part of the world. The grass had turned mostly brown and would crinkle under foot. I was able to count seventy-seven people who braved these conditions to attend, including several students and community members wearing Indigenous regalia. The bright colors and feathers of their ceremonial clothing caught the attention of passing vehicles, who would slow down to catch a curious glimpse. Additionally, representatives from the local affiliation of National Public Radio, the campus newspaper, and additional media outlets were on-site conducting interviews.

The ceremony opened and closed with a traditional call to the Four Directions. At the center of the gathering sat an alter that included flowers, musical instruments, and three cardboard boxes representing the ancestors being honored. The ceremony featured danza, drumming, singing, several speakers, and prayer. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the event organizers stressed the importance of social distancing and the wearing of face masks, and the crowd proved respectful of these guidelines.

The speakers included several students from the university. One spoke about how his pride in attending the University of Texas at Austin as a first-generation college student had been diminished by the institution's response to this situation. Additionally, three leaders from the campus' Indigenous student organizations, Jennifer, JW, and Nita, spoke. In preparation for their portion of the program, I accompanied this group on a trek away from the main ceremony to drive deep into the center of the Pickle campus so that their interviews could be live-streamed in front of the facility holding the Miakan-Garza's ancestors. Their voices were passionate and eloquent, and it struck me that this event provided us all remarkable opportunity for both spiritual and educational growth.

The maintenance of Indigenous values and relationships are critical to an empowered Indigenous people. I have experienced through my years of involvement in the UT Austin community how a focus on reciprocity, a respect for elders, and supporting those struggling in challenging circumstance are central to the campus' Indigenous ethos. Connectivity is often birthed through a shared purpose. This story will show that one should never underestimate the power of student voice and that a garden can grow in a desert with a little intentionality. Relationships are central to a positive Indigenous education, and a shared mission can serve as a great builder of both relationships and community.

Chapter overview

The following chapter explores the experiences of Indigenous people at the University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin). It is drawn from stories provided by the institution's Indigenous students, faculty, and staff, as well as Native representatives from the surrounding Central Texas region. This is a community I have known for years due to my roles as a university student, staff member, and long-time advocate in the region. I can attest from personal experience supported by the narratives of the study's participants that, while Indigenous representation at UT Austin is small, it is an incredibly vibrant, close-knit, and collaborative community. The impact of its bonds surpasses academics to where members rely on each other for social, cultural, and spiritual support. Ours is a powerful example of the importance of community and connectivity for Indigenous people in a large institution designed without us in mind.

The UT Austin Indigenous community is remarkable in both its epistemological focus and its emphasis on relationship building. Ours is a program which emphasizes cross-hemispheric and global Indigenous experiences, and we have great representation among North, Central, and South American cultures. As such, Indigenous scholarship at the university allows for critical dialogues expanding beyond the traditional academic discourse concerning Native American identity. Also notable is the relationship that has formed between the university's Indigenous community and the regional Indigenous community through partnerships with Native-serving nonprofit organizations. Due to the small representation of Indigenous people on campus and a lack of support from central administration, these groups serve an important role as cultural connectors and hubs for identity development among our students.

The UT Austin Indigenous community often struggles with visibility and the acceptance of its cultural values. As will be discussed later, Native students face a great many challenges on

campus. However, there are a great many talented individuals and collectives doing incredible work to improve our circumstance. The past several years have seen momentum in the community through the cultivation of the Native American and Indigenous Studies program and several avenues of student advocacy. This chapter shares a portion of this story through the lived experiences of its participants.

The chapter will begin by describing the students, faculty, staff, and community leaders who took part in this study. It will then provide an overview of the campus, including a brief history and an analysis of its Indigenous representation. The next section will detail the activities of the Native American and Indigenous Studies (NAIS) program, including its academic structure, community culture, and student organizations. This will be followed by a discussion on the campus' focus on expanding Indigenous identity and our role as a hub of cross-hemispheric scholarship. After this exploration of NAIS is the primary connector of Indigenous community at UT Austin, the chapter will move into an examination of the challenges faced by Indigenous students on campus. This will be followed by an analysis of how Indigenous students understand the university as being supportive of our population. The next section will focus on the community's relationship to the wider Indigenous community of Central Texas. This includes a recent case of advocacy by a local Indigenous group in collaboration with the campus community regarding the return of university-held Native remains. The chapter will close with a brief analysis.

The participants interviewed for this chapter represent a wide spectrum of university experience, including that of students, faculty, staff, and outside community members. There are individuals who have been involved with the university for over thirty years and some who had been on campus for less than a year during the time of our conversations. As is the case with all

institutions in this study, participants who are faculty, staff, or who represent outside organizations have given permission to use their actual names and titles. All student participants have been provided a pseudonym in respect for the vulnerability of young Indigenous scholars in higher education settings.

Representing a staff perspective is Dr. Lee Walters, a member of the Blackfeet Nation and retired Associate Director from the division of Housing and Dining. Dr. Walters spent over thirty years working in higher education, beginning on campus as a maintenance person before rising to a leadership position. He also served for several years as the CEO of the local nonprofit organization, Great Promise for American Indians, which manages the Austin Powwow. Dr. Walters' experience is therefore well positioned to provide both an institutional and community-based Native perspective.

Representing the faculty is Dr. Luis Cárcamo-Huechante, an Associate Professor in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese and the Director of the Native American and Indigenous Studies program (NAIS). He comes from the Mapuche people and is originally from a small village in Chile. Dr. Cárcamo-Huechante been a UT Austin faculty member since 2009, and his research interests include Latin American literature and cultures with a focus on hemispheric Indigenous studies. His perspective has provided valuable insight into the history, mission, and future direction of the NAIS program.

This study includes three graduate students with varying academic concentrations at UT Austin, though all are members of the NAIS graduate portfolio program. The first is Jennifer, who identifies as Indigenous from Guerrero, Mexico from both Nauhuatl and P'urhepecha descent. She is a doctoral student and a Co-Chair of the Native American and Indigenous Peoples Association graduate student organization. She began her degree in 2017, and we spoke during

her third year of study. The second student is Santiago, who identifies as both Chicano and Native American from Chiapas, Mexico. He is a master's student and holds an undergraduate degree in Native American Studies from the University of Oklahoma. Santiago began his degree during the Fall of 2018, and we spoke during his second year of study. Finally, there is Tony, who self identifies as an Indigenous migrant from the state of Guanajuato, Mexico. He is a doctoral student, though he completed a master's degree just prior to his PhD and has been on campus since the Fall of 2016.

This study includes the voices of four undergraduate students, all of whom participate in the NAIS undergraduate certification program. They include Cristina, who identifies as part of the Indigenous diaspora from Mexico. Though she has since graduated, she attended UT Austin from 2015 to 2020 with a focus on Anthropology, Government, and Mexican American Studies. Cristina spent her last few years on campus as the Director of Operations for the Native American and Indigenous Collective (NAIC) undergraduate student organization. The second undergraduate is JW, who identifies as both White and Mohawk. She is a fourth-year political communications major who also serves as an active leader of NAIC. The third is Victoria, who identifies as a detribalized Native from a displaced Indigenous borderlands community whose family identifies as Chicano and Hispanic. She was an active contributor to NAIC, and we spoke while she was pursuing a bachelor's degree in Mexican American and Latina/o Studies and English. Finally, there is Nita, a fellow Choctaw and NAIC officer, who was a fourth year Business and Pre-Medicine student at the time of our conversation.

The remaining study participants include representatives from nonprofits who serve the Central Texas Indigenous community. Their inclusion is meant to build insight into the relationship between the campus and Indigenous people from the wider region. They include

Robert Bass and Haunani Bass, who serve as the Executive Director and Administrative Assistive, respectively, for Austin-based Great Promise for American Indians. There is also Dr. Mario Garza and Maria Rocha, who serve as the Chair of the Board of Elders and Executive Director of the Indigenous Cultures Institute, located in San Marcos, Texas. As I am a staff member of the Institute, Dr. Garza and Maria Rocha have long served as my relations and mentors. Both organizations have a deep history of engagement with the campus NAIS program, and their impact on the student population will serve as a major feature later in this chapter.

Institutional overview

The University of Texas at Austin was founded in 1883 and serves as the flagship campus of the University of Texas System. It is a R-1 research institution which has been ranked 14th among the nation's public schools (University of Texas at Austin, 2020). Its population included 51,832 students in the Fall of 2018 (University of Texas at Austin, 2020), making it one of the largest higher education institutions in the country. Sitting just north of downtown Austin, Texas, its campus is a city within a city; a world of learning, arts, and culture centered in the froth of one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the country.

The campus is often called the 40 Acres, which references its early land allocation (Goldstone, 2006). Though the reality is that the university has long grown beyond this track into north and east Austin. It is a sprawling space with a mix of classic, early-20th Century, and modern architecture. Without an attentive eye, it can be difficult to tell where the campus ends, though the culture of the space feels insulated in many ways from the surrounding city.



Illustration 1: The University of Texas at Austin campus

At over twenty-three billion, the University of Texas system of schools holds the third largest endowment among U.S. higher education institutions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). An endowment is an investment fund maintained for the long-term benefit of the institution (Sherlock, Gravelle, Crandall-Hollick, & Hughes, 2018), so these numbers reflect UT Austin's status as one of the wealthiest post-secondary institutions in the world. In 2019, the university allocated \$160 million from its endowment fund to provide free tuition for low-socioeconomic students (Najmabadi, 2019). While this is a positive step, there remains important criticisms in the world of higher education about endowment hoarding and the degree to which wealthy institutions use them to build prestige when students receive only a small percentage of their benefits.

Austin is the capital of Texas, and the university is located just four blocks from the grounds of the state legislative building. The state government, the city and the university each have a long, problematic history concerning racial justice. Notable to UT Austin's story is how the School of Law's racial exclusion policies in the mid-Twentieth Century led to the *Sweatt v. Painter* Supreme Court case of 1950, which successfully challenged the separate but equal racial

segregation policy of U.S. education systems (Goldstone, 2006). More recently, the university made national headlines in 2017 due to the removal of Confederate general statues on campus after years of campus advocacy. Then in 2020, the Longhorn Band marching ensemble gained great attention when student members refused to perform the school song, The Eyes of Texas, at football games due to a problematic racial history.

The Austin city has seen a dramatic growth in population since the 1970's (Zehr, 2015). Across the interstate from campus sits several east Austin neighborhoods which long-held traditionally African American and LatinX populations (Fernandez, Martin, Shelby, & Choi, 2013). However, recent decades have seen wealthier inhabitants move-in at high rates, which have swept away the community and social structures of neighborhoods, schools, and business centers once held by the city's people of color (Zehr, 2015). The university has played a role in this transformation, which can be seen directly in its facility expansion into East Austin, but also as its wealthy students search the area for lodging. Meanwhile, several segments of its student population struggle in this new reality as students of color lose access to the cultural anchors of these lost communities, and low-income students must struggle to survive in a city with the highest level of rent increase of any major metropolitan area over the past decade (Norwood, 2019).

Numerous additional stories dot the racial history of UT Austin, and like many higher education institutions across the world, the campus continues to struggle with a nuanced and often dark legacy. UT Austin is a place of great art, architecture, philosophy, and science. In ways it is built well, and there is good work being done on its campus. I have spent years on the 40 Acres as a master's student, a doctoral student, and a long-time staff member, so I clearly see value in the institution. However, it is essential that our community continues to grapple with

the history and continued practices of the university as a space of colonization and oppression. The heart of this chapter is not to tear down UT Austin but to problematize and contribute to efforts aimed at inclusion, equity, and the empowerment of those communities long under-represented.

The campus Indigenous population

The Fall 2020 student profile shows that American Indians of Alaskan Natives represent 0.1% of the university's student body (University of Texas at Austin, 2021). With 51,832 students enrolled (University of Texas at Austin, 2020), these numbers would imply scarce opportunity for Indigenous connectivity without a degree of intentionality. Also notable is that Austin is located in Travis County, where self-identifying Native Americans represent 0.46% of the population (Social Explorer, 2019). A point about invisibility in relation to these numbers was made by Tony who noted that, "We're in almost 2020 and there's still questions of whether or not Native Indigenous students exist on campus." Linked to this is a point made by Dr. Walters in that he was only able to "...locate two other Indians..." during his time serving on the university's Staff Council. It is also important to note that since Texas is home to the fourth largest and fastest growing Native American population among the states (Census.gov, 2020), there is a disconnect between the capacity and actual accessibility for Native American representation on campus.

According to Dr. Cárcamo-Huechante, head of the Native American and Indigenous Studies program, it is important to consider the historic experiences of Indigenous people in society and how this relates to the small Indigenous presence at the university. Related to this are important questions on the accuracy of UT Austin's numbers, as many students with Indigenous heritage may not be recognized or self-identify as such. This point was made by

doctoral student Jennifer who shared that, "...it has been difficult for a lot of native people to simply identify because of the tension that there is with the federal government not recognizing them. That tension that exists is not only with the federal government but also within UT in that it doesn't have the spaces for community that allows for this."

It is useful to consider the issue of Indigenous representation through the concept of Critical Mass, which proposes that minorities are better serviced in environments where they are well represented, therefore alleviating the effects of tokenization and isolation (Park & Liu, 2014). As discussed by several students, the UT Austin campus can be challenging for Indigenous students due to our lack of representation. Victoria discussed a disconnect between her hopes and experience as a student when sharing that, "I came here and I was really excited about the opportunities, but I was still in a vast amount of culture shock that affected me at a very deep, personal and spiritual level... I came here and I was like, 'There's a lot of white people!' It was just really scary." On a similar note, Jennifer voiced frustration in the "systematic" way in which UT Austin serves as a "pipeline" for White people at the exclusion of people of color. A consequence of this reality was expressed by Santiago in his disappointment in no longer "...being around a lot of Indian people and Indian values..." compared to his time at the University of Oklahoma.

Identity is very much concerned with how people come to understand themselves through the social and cultural worlds in which they participate and how they related to others within and outside of these worlds (Urrieta, 2018). Higher education should provide great opportunity for identity development, as students spend several years being exposed to new ideas and opportunities. This study proposes that a healthy sense of Indigenous community is central to Indigenous identity development. While Indigenous students at UT Austin have worked to build

their small numbers into a closely-knit community, as will be discussed later in this chapter, the work is made more challenging by the underrepresentation of Indigenous students on the 40 Acres.

I had the opportunity to discuss Indigenous representation at UT Austin with Dr. Lee Walters, who spent years attempting to recruit Native students to the university in both his staff role and his position with the local nonprofit organization, Great Promise for American Indians. He would often travel to states with significant Native American populations, such as Oklahoma and New Mexico. When speaking with local young people, he regularly encountered the self-perpetuating problem that Indigenous students are hesitant to attend school at UT Austin due to the perception of minimal Indigenous representation on campus compared to other regions. Dr. Walters shared that the response to his recruitment efforts was often: "...no, there's no Indians around there..."

Dr. Walters also spoke about the concern of homesickness for Indigenous students. He shared that there is often a perspective in Native American communities where "...you need to be at home. You don't need to go to school. You need to be at home with your elders." Dr. Walters further discussed how Native American students desire continued engagement with their traditions, which is problematic for a location such as UT Austin because there is not "...a whole lot of opportunity for our people to keep culture going." He also noted that the football rivalry between UT Austin and the University of Oklahoma can be a barrier for some potential Indigenous students from that state. Finally, Dr. Walters discussed that Indigenous people often feel intimidated coming to a large campus in a large city, especially if they come from rural and reservation backgrounds. He shared that he has known several students over the years that came

to UT Austin but returned home before degree completion due to feeling overwhelmed on a campus with over fifty thousand students.

Such cultural disconnect was discussed by several student participants as being problematic for Native American recruitment. Santiago emphasized an image problem for UT Austin and a perception that "...there's nothing about it that in any way says this is a Native student's school." Tony echoed this point as well and later stated that one of the challenges of being Indigenous on the campus is that you have to "...willingly go into a space where you may not find a lot of people who understand your background..." Such a realization was experienced by Nita who shared a story from her first few weeks on campus. She described how she was "...so excited to come to UT. I had this idea that UT was going to be so diverse [and] would have a lot of Native students. I could not find [Native groups advertising among the student groups]. I can vividly remember going back to my dorm and crying and being so upset... It was like all of my naive mindsets were just crumbling and I was realizing that UT isn't what I thought it was and what it claims to be."

Native American and Indigenous Studies

Much of the community of Indigenous people at UT Austin is built through activities of the Native American and Indigenous Studies program (NAIS). Housed in the College of Liberal Arts, the program provides a cross-discipline concentration of study focused on Indigenous peoples and topics. Students can pursue either an undergraduate certification or a graduate portfolio, depending on their enrollment status, as supplements to their primary degrees. However, it is clear from the narratives below that the benefits of NAIS go far beyond coursework. Several participants spoke about a deep sense of community, connectivity, and identity development gained through their participation.

Overview

The NAIS graduate portfolio and undergraduate certificate allow students concentrations in Indigenous-oriented coursework. They offer cross-sectional access to departments which may be outside their primary fields of study, including but not limited to Education, Anthropology, History, and Law. The undergraduate program requires the completion of fifteen hours of NAIS-approved coursework, the master's Portfolio requires nine, and the doctoral program requires twelve (The University of Texas at Austin, 2021). Despite vocal interest from multiple participants, UT Austin does not yet offer an undergraduate or graduate major specific to Indigenous Studies. However, beginning in 2020, NAIS partnered with the Department of African & African Diaspora, Asian American Studies, Latina/o Studies, LGBTQ Studies, and Women and Gender Studies to offer a new interdisciplinary major in Race, Indigeneity & Migration (The University of Texas at Austin, 2021).

Native American and Indigenous Studies at UT Austin is led by Director Luis Cárcamo-Huechante. who shared in our conversations how the values of community must be community learned, which echoes how connectivity to a people is critical to Indigenous ways of being. He went on to discuss how community engagement among Indigenous people should not be done for the sake of professional profit, but that it should aim towards deeper, meaningful relationships. These are values which he discussed as important to bring to the classroom space so that "...Indigenous ways of [relating] to the environment and to others [can] be materialized and experienced in the pedagogic setting." He further discussed how Indigenous students and faculty benefit from building cross-departmental endeavors in order to promote a "...cross-fertilization within an academic institution..."

NAIS history

Native American and Indigenous Studies at UT Austin was founded in the fall of 2006 by a collection of cross-disciplinary faculty. This included James Cox from the English Department, Loriene Roy from the School of Information, Pauline T. Strong from Anthropology, Shannon Speed from Anthropology, and Gerald Torres from the School of Law (UT Austin NAISA, 2014). This community of faculty grew as new instructors became affiliated due to their research interests or if they taught a class listed in the graduate portfolio or undergraduate certification. These offerings became available to students in 2007 and 2009, respectively (UT Austin NAISA, 2014). The 2006 founding committee recognized that the research of their students and faculty affiliates largely focused on the United States, Mexico, the Caribbean, Central America, and South America. They therefore decided that the program would feature an emphasis on cross-hemispheric Indigeneity (UT Austin NAISA, 2014).

Much of this history was learned through conversations with Dr. Cárcamo-Huechante. He described how a primary strategy for this early period was to transition NAIS from an initiative into a center. Within the university's academic structure, initiatives are considered the first tier of scholarly collectives. It is followed by programs, centers, institutes, and then departments. In order to raise their visibility, the program applied and was approved to host the 2014 conference of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association. During this same period, the program was granted office space in the College of Liberal Arts.

Along with these strides come a leadership change when the long-time Director of NAIS, Dr. Shannon Speed (Chickasaw), left for UCLA in the summer of 2015. Dr. Cárcamo-Huechante agreed to serve as Interim Director beginning that Fall. As a part of this transition, the College of Liberal Arts upgraded the status of NAIS from a research initiative to a program,

which became official in April 2016. With this designation came a more structured annual budget, greater prestige, and improved opportunities for its academic community. Since taking the reigns of NAIS, Dr. Cárcamo-Huechante has continued building opportunities with a focus on cultivating community among its students, staff, and faculty. The program is in a period of great momentum, and it is important to consider that we have reached this point through the time, energy, and leadership of many contributors over these past decades.

Beyond academics

Though the establishment of NAIS at UT Austin was firmly rooted in academics, it is clear from study participants that its importance has moved beyond the benefits of the certificate and portfolio program. NAIS has grown to be a critical social and communal gathering space for Indigenous people at the university. Particularly for the students, it serves as a support structure in a higher education environment in which many feel uncomfortable. Santiago shared that, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, he would often spend his time between classes hanging out in the NAIS lounge. He went on to criticize UT Austin for being an unwelcoming environment because it takes itself too seriously, whereas NAIS served as a meaningful space for him because it "...is more concerned about being a community." Similar points were made by other students, including Jennifer who shared that a 2017 discussion as a prospective student with Dr. Cárcamo-Huechante made her feel confident in being able form Indigenous connections on campus, which impacted her decision to attend UT Austin.

Community culture

When asked about the culture of NAIS, several participants emphasized that the community is not a single homogenized group but that it is composed of many different Indigenous people with great variation of backgrounds. This echoes of Mihesuah (1998)

statement that "...there is no one Indian voice." Dr. Walters shared his understanding of how most non-Indigenous people do not understand the degree of variation among Indigenous cultures. Maria Rocha shared that the campus' Native American community has evolved over the years to reflect a great variation of Indigenous backgrounds. Several students made similar comments. Their prevalence indicates a high degree of awareness within our community for the respect of Indigenous variation.

In discussing the great variation of Indigenous representations, Dr. Cárcamo-Huechante spoke about the interconnection between group and individual identity. He shared that while there are broad principles that connect Indigenous people, it is "...better to speak from the specific position through which you come from and the people you come from." He described how the building of the intellectual, cultural, and educational project of NAIS benefits from a variation of individuals who are able to bring their own backgrounds and Indigenous experiences to the process. Due perhaps to its geography, the intentionality of its leadership, or perhaps simply because of the make-up of its community, NAIS at UT Austin is a profoundly intertribal community. The vibrancy of this variation is one of our greatest strengths.

In discussing NAIS, most participants described the community as being friendly and supportive. Jennifer discussed how the people she has met through the program are approachable. She also shared that the community has a healthy sense of humor, which Vine Deloria described as essential to any effort of Native American activism (Deloria, 1969). Santiago discussed how the Indigenous students of NAIS are friendly and always greet him in a way reminiscent of his undergraduate experience with Native students at The University of Oklahoma. Santiago also shared positive experiences with NAIS faculty, including Director

Cárcamo-Huechante, who he described as being “affirming” when they first met to discuss the graduate portfolio.

Beyond friendliness, participants shared that NAIS’ culture is generally more supportive compared with the primarily competitive culture of the wider university. This included Jennifer, Nita, and JW, who specified in great detail that members of NAIS truly want each other to succeed. Victoria described how “[the] friends that I have, the colleagues that I have [through NAIS] really are empowered by each other and really rely on each other spiritually and emotionally.” She also spoke about the challenge in navigating the university, and that her time at UT Austin would have been easier had she found NAIS earlier in her program.

A topic closely linked that this culture of support is reciprocity, which was independently brought-up by multiple participants. Jennifer discussed that in her role as a student leader, she has been grateful in the degree to which others are willing to contribute. An example given was how attendees at events she has organized have been willing to stay behind to help close down the gathering space. These moments of “giving back” are important, and they show the degree to which reciprocity intertwines into the ethos of the NAIS community. According to Dr. Cárcamo-Huechante, it is a critical topic to consider not only for social organizers and activists, but it should also guide Indigenous approaches to scholarship. He described that our work should rely on the “...Indigenous principles of humility, respect, and attention towards others...”

Student organizations

NAIS serves as the central hub for multiple student organizations. This includes the undergraduate group, the Native American and Indigenous Collective; the graduate group, the Native American and Indigenous Peoples Association; and finally, there is the campus Aztec dance group, Danza Ollinyolotl. Each group has their own culture, priorities, and participants,

though there is a great deal of cross-collaboration and community building. While the university's Indigenous students may be small in number, these groups have been incredibly active over the past several seasons in the work of community building and advocacy.

Building an “active and robust” student community was an intentional effort on the part of Dr. Cárcamo-Huechante during his first term as Director of NAIS between 2016 and 2020. He described how it is “...critical to have a faculty ready to support the process of student leadership formation; not to supervise it or direct it, but rather to support it...” and that it is “...important that that process emerges from the student body and within its own collective terms as the result of their own collective processes.” This mentorship model, which relies on trust and building confidence among students, greatly parallels the teachings of my own mentors, Dr. Mario Garza and Maria Rocha. There is great opportunity in building-up others by trusting their voices and decision making. While these characteristics may be common in good mentorship across social, cultural groups, the elder who guide while empowering others is a powerful pathway towards Indigenous ways of being.

Among the student organization is Danza Ollinyolotl, the campus Mesoamerican dance group. As described on its web page, the groups goal is to be “...an inclusive safe space where we want to learn and help strengthen each other holistically. Mind, Body, Heart, Spirit” (UT Austin NAIS, 2021). Tony discussed the distinction of the UT group in that it is one of the few danza collectives in the country that have been established as an official campus organization. However, he cautioned that the goal of Danza Ollinyolotl is not to help the university present themselves as diverse. Instead, he emphasized that the group comes together for the purpose of community solidarity. In his own words, it is one way to show that “...we've always already been here, and that these legacies are prayers that are now being answered.”

The second Indigenous student group at UT Austin is the Native American & Indigenous Collective (NAIC). Housed in the university's Multicultural Engagement Center, NAIC aims to serve Indigenous undergraduates on campus. It was formed by the fusion of the Longhorn American Indian Council, which held a closer association with North American tribal culture, and the Native American & Indigenous Student Assembly, which focused on LatinX Indigenous students. The organization has been described as a collection of individuals with a great variation of backgrounds and experiences who have come together to build community. JW discussed how the group has participants "...from different schools, different majors, and different aspirations...", which links to a point made by Nita about how it is beneficial in the space of NAIC "...to collaborate with people who have similar experiences and identities..." but who are involved in different academic traditions. Nita went on to say that her involvement with the organization has allowed her feel at home and at peace. She described how she felt as though she "...belonged just knowing that there was a room full of people that were indigenous..."

This appreciation of solidarity and cultural connectivity through NAIC was shared by other participants. Cristiana, for example, stated that "...when I started seeing [NAIC members] in class, it was really comforting to know that if I felt a certain way about a class, I could go talk to them and my feelings [would] be validated... So, I felt much happier after. I felt like I found home whereas the first three years, I felt like I was floating around. And when I found [NAIC], this is where I belong and where I should be."

The third Indigenous student organization at UT Austin is the Native American and Indigenous Peoples Association (NAIPA). This group was officially registered with the university in the Spring of 2020 with the goal of serving as a sister organization to NAIC in order to serve Indigenous graduate students. I am fortunate to have served this group as a community

liaison since the summer of 2020, and during that time, I have witnessed an extraordinary collection of young scholars use it to advocate and build Indigenous solidarity. It not a simple thing to maneuver through bureaucracies such as UT Austin as either an individual or an organization, but members of NAIPA have traversed this terrain while gaining several accomplishments in an extremely short period of time.

One of the primary leaders of NAIPA is study participant Jennifer, who also served as a main advocate for its registration as an official campus organization. She described the benefits of registering the group with the university's Student Services office in that it allows greater structure and improved opportunities for recruitment. However, she shared several challenges in this process and that a tremendous amount of work was required, which she described as "draining." When asked about her experience working with the central administration, she stated: "It has been a nightmare."

People of color are often faced with structural forms of institutionalized oppression (Urrieta, 2018). Jennifer's story is a powerful example of the bureaucratic hurdles faced by Indigenous students in higher education. We are fortunate that she is an extremely capable, organized, and persistent doctoral student, but one must wonder how many underrepresented student organizations do not cross the finish line. Students, and particularly students of color, have a great many other things to worry about during their time on a university, and few have experience successfully navigating large bureaucratic systems. Whether by improving access or increasing support, UT Austin would do well to improve this situation.

Impact on identity

Native American and Indigenous Studies at UT Austin is a small program, but it is clear that it has great impact on the lives of its students. It is a cultural hub and often a life-line for

Indigenous people who feel lost and alone on a massive campus. Several students spoke about how NAIS provided them direction, including Jennifer who described how the program's courses helped shape understandings of her identity. Victoria made a similar statement that her experience with the undergraduate certificate program "...radically helped my ways of thinking and sense of belonging... [and shaped] my identity as a scholar; as a person of color; and as a woman." Tony shared how the classes he took in the program "...allowed me to put into words what I was feeling; what I was thinking; what I was dreaming..." and to "...think beyond what I thought I could in the confinements of academia."

In discussing the benefits of higher education for Indigenous people, Dr. Cárcamo-Huechante shared his view that there is "...something paradoxical in the sense that we come to school and we learn from this environment, [which] enables us to have a better grasp of what it means to be Indigenous... I think higher education offers us the opportunity to get tools from the colonial society, which if you use them in the proper way with your sense of being Indigenous, it can broaden your view about where you come from, where you are arriving at, and interaction between these worlds." This dynamic between Indigenous identity and mainstream educational culture can produce great opportunities, but this can be a difficult balance. Doing so successfully requires a cultural anchor, and NAIS has strengthened over the years in its capacity to serve this role. It is a source of support and community while also driving critical conversations around the nature of Indigenous identity.

Expanding Indigeneity

As discussed by Klopotek (2011), Indigeneity exists in a great many forms. There is no one Indian voice (Mihesuah, 1998). Higher education is a great catalyst for identity development and is well suited as a setting to explore variances of Native American existence. Many of this

study's participants, including Dr. Walters, Victoria, and Dr. Cárcamo-Huechante acknowledged that it is important to respect such variation when engaging with Indigenous people. Based on my experience with Indigenous communities, I believe that a heightened awareness of intertribal variation is common in the Indigenous ethos, but in a setting such as UT Austin, there is extraordinary opportunity to create dialogue around this variation in relation to long-running perceptions on Native authenticity.

A distinction of UT Austin's Indigenous community is its focus on cross-hemispheric Indigeneity and a high representation of scholars with LatinX, Hispanic, and Latino/a backgrounds. As noted in the previous discussion on the history of Native American and Indigenous Studies at the university, this was recognized by its founders as a defining focus on the program (UT Austin NAISA, 2014). Today, one of NAIS' greatest and most distinct traits is the degree to which it builds bridges across Indigenous cultures who have long been divided by the borders of colonial states. Identity is constructed amid a flow of contending cultural discourse (Calhoun, 1994), and many of the world's Indigenous people have struggled to preserve their identities in the face of colonialism, racism, and eurocentrism. UT Austin's Indigenous community has proven a powerful space to challenge problematic assumptions and to engage in the critical work of identity reclamation.

The Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 confirmed the right for Indigenous people to be recognized as both citizens of the United States and tribal nations (Bruyneel, 2007). There are 567 federally recognized tribes in the U.S. (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2016) which exist as "domestic dependent nations" in relation to the federal government (Kauanui, 2005). However, across the continent, there are numerous communities whose Indigeneity goes unrecognized by the colonial states (Ramirez, 2007). It has been estimated that these "detrribalized" Native people

represent between one third and one half of the Indigenous population in the United States (Barker, 2011).

Unrecognized Indigenous people exist in the same colonial and racial order as recognized tribes, though they have little formal recourse for the protection of their culture, values, and sovereignty (Klopotek, 2011). U.S. colonialism has attempted to rob Indigenous people of the power to determine their own identity (Wright, 2018), and LatinX communities have been among those most impacted by this insidiousness. However, there is much more to identity than the determinations of a colonizing culture. Calderón (2016) discussed how “Indianness refers to the centering, or privileging, of indigenous ways of knowing; histories; maintaining relationships with lands, resources, and peoples; and making claims regarding nature.” By this definition, I have known many powerful practitioners of Indigenous ways of being who do not define their Native American validity through a federal identification card.

LatinX Indigeneity

There is a prominent and ongoing history of Indigenous people being labeled Hispanic and Latina/o through the influence of social history and politics (Ramirez, 2007). This issue is particularly interesting in Texas, which is home to one of the longest continually inhabited sites in North America (Texas State University, 2020). However, the descendants of the site’s ancestors remain in the region under the designation of Hispanic (Indigenous Cultures Institute, 2020). Additionally, immigration has brought greater variety of LatinX Indigenous people to Texas from across the hemisphere. This issue was addressed by Dr. Cárcamo-Huechante when discussing how recent years have seen a substantial increase of the Mayan presence in Houston and Central Texas, as well as an influx of Native families from Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala.

Identity issues pertaining to LatinX Indigenous people was a topic discussed by several study participants, especially as many self-identify through related terms such as “Hispanic,” “detrribalized,” and “Latin American.” A common issue expressed was a loss of history and identity. Tony discussed how Indigenous people in Texas “...live in diaspora; [we] live in a transnational imaginary where because of [the] attempted decimation of our lineage, of our people, [and] of our medicine, a lot of us don't know... whose people we originate from.” Similar concerns of identity loss were expressed about Indigenous experience in Mexico. Jennifer, for example, noted that it can be problematic to self-identify as Indian because “...you don't know who's listening. You don't know who's watching and how you're going to be treated.” Victoria, who was an undergraduate at the time of our interview but has since become a Graduate student, shared that her family faced the pressures of assimilation and “...had to adopt certain values that were imposed on them.” As a result, the family’s Indigenous lineage was kept secret. She described this as being difficult for her growing up, and that “...it wasn't until I came to UT that I understood the severity of what all of that meant; and the depth of what that meant; and understood that other people also have these experiences where their families kept secrets because they didn't want to be outed or didn't want to die...” She shared that she was grateful for NAIS as a space to “...dig deeper into your history and be who you are.”

As a member of a federally recognized tribe, I attempt to approach conversations of LatinX Indigenous identity as a student and ally. Over the years, I have had the opportunity to learn about this movement from my mentors, Dr. Mario Garza and Maria Rocha, who are themselves members of the Miakan Garza Band of Coahuiltecan, an Indigenous Hispanic group. As described by Maria, many Hispanic families still hold relationships to ancient Indigenous knowledge through the stories they tell, the foods they eat, and their ceremonial lifeways. Maria

described how the mission of the Maikan/Garza's nonprofit organization, the Indigenous Cultures Institute, is to "...awaken awareness among the Hispanic people..." and that academia is a powerful platform for this work due to its ability to build credibility.

Dr. Garza and Maria noted that a cultural understanding of Indigeneity has shifted, and since the 1970s, "more people are comfortable identifying as Indigenous people." When I asked why they believed this to be the case, they responded that both spirituality and education have played significant roles. Maria discussed that ceremonial opportunities and a thirst for spiritual connectivity have drawn many towards their people's Indigenous traditions. In another conversation, Maria even noted that the ceremonies held by the Miakan/Garzas has proven a powerful means of building relationships with university students who have gone on to lead various programs in the Indigenous Cultures Institute. Concerning education, Maria noted that part of this cultural shift is due to the fact that universities across the nation have increased and improved the way that they teach about Native Americans during the latter half of the 20th Century. She noted that she has seen professors at UT Austin and UT San Antonio who teach on issues concerning Indigenous Hispanics. Maria described this as an important shift compared with previous decades when Indigenous Hispanic culture was "underground," whereas now, advocacy for Indigenous Hispanic identity gains credibility through academia.

The founding faculty of Native American and Indigenous Students at UT Austin decided in 2006 that cross-hemispheric Indigeneity would be a focus of the program (UT Austin NAISA, 2014). This decision set a foundation upon which we have continued to build. This was noted by Dr. Cárcamo-Huechante during a NAIS gathering in May of 2019 where he discussed our community's distinction among comparable programs across the country due to this focus. LatinX Indigeneity manifests through the scholarship of our students and faculty, but it is also

visible in programmatic choices. For example, many of the courses approved for the NAIS undergraduate certificate and Graduate portfolio are specific to Indigenous issues of Latin America. Some courses are even conducted in Spanish, as was the Wednesday evening program of 2020's Indigenous People's Week celebration.

We can see throughout NAIS the various ways southern Indigeneity is present and impactful, and several student participants expressed that this has made them feel supported in their academic, social, and emotional growth. For example, Jennifer discussed how her first "...encounter to this Indigenous community was mainly [with] people from Latin American. And so maybe that's why I felt comfortable, because in many instances I was able to speak Spanish." She then compared this to her master's program at Stanford University, where English was the dominant language, and whose community was mainly composed of North American tribal groups. Santiago also made a positive comparison between NAIS and a former institution. He completed his undergraduate at the University of Oklahoma, where he described a "rhetorical head-nodding" towards LatinX Indigenous groups as an acknowledgement that they exist. However, as a self-identifying Native American from Chiapas, Mexico, he has described his experience in UT Austin's NAIS program as being "wonderful" and meaningful for his personal identity development.

Santiago expanded on his experience at the University of Oklahoma in stating that, while there are both Latinos and Indians on campus, "...they don't interact at all..." and that there is "...no intersection of those two groups." He shared an appreciation for NAIS in its willingness to acknowledge and examine those intersections. An example he provided is how he once self-described as "Mestizo" to a professor, who then problematized this term as a tool of the colonial state to minimize questions of Indigenous identity. The professor instead asked him to share

about his people. Santiago stated that this conversation was “meaningful” in that it allowed him in that moment to escape the binary of either being an enrolled Native American or being non-Indigenous. Furthermore, he described how, as someone from Latin America, “...it’s nice to be represented... [in NAIS because] it gives me a way to think about myself and my set of experiences without having to try to fit into the experiences of the Northern Plains people.”

NAIS as a catalyst for personal identity development proved a fairly common theme among participants. A second story to share comes from Jennifer, who describes how her undergraduate and Graduate education did not feature a significant connection to an Indigenous community. She reasoned that this was partially due to growing up “...in a community where we don’t openly say we are Indigenous because of all the colonial processes we have undergone...” However, during her time as a doctoral student at UT Austin, Jennifer has served as a primary leader of the Native American and Indigenous Peoples Association Graduate student group. Despite her previous cultural disconnect, Jennifer grew into an active, engaging, and inspiring leader of the campus Indigenous community within the fertile grounds of the NAIS community.

When asked about how UT Austin has impacted how she sees herself as a Native person, Jennifer responded that the impact has been significant. This she described as being because she has been “...able to interact and talk to other Indigenous people who come from similar backgrounds...” She discussed how NAIS has been a productive place to problematize the notion learned from her family’s community in Mexico that Indigenous identity requires the speaking of Indigenous languages. This she again credits to having colleagues at UT Austin with similar experiences who are willing to question these positions, which eventually inspired her research focus and dissertation topic.

As described by Deloria (1969), “All groups must come to understand themselves as their situation defines them and not as other groups see them.” Native authenticity can take an endless variation of forms, but connectivity with others is essential to its cultivation. Higher education is a powerful catalyst for this work. Through lectures, seminars, and events, UT Austin is a setting able to challenge pre-conceived notions of identity and to provide space for communities which have been traditionally left out of the conversation. While society at large struggles to speak about culture in ways that affirm its fluidity (Ngo, 2010), the Indigenous community on this campus has committed to a culture of acceptance and respect for variation.

Building bridges

Identity is constructed and situated within a flow of contending cultural discourses (Calhoun, 1994). In discussing the cacophony of identities at UT Austin, Dr. Cárcamo-Huechante shared that it is “...essential to build not only a program but also [to bridge] the multiple dimensions or layers of identities [representing the] territories of the southwest.” This intention was also noted by Santiago, who shared that there is a great “...desire to bridge communities at UT, and I see that a lot in interactions with other people.” This statement, along with comments from several other participants, reflects how a respect for variation seems central to the ethos of the campus Indigenous community.

Due to the NAIS program’s focus on LatinX Indigeneity, several participants were asked about how they understand the dynamic between community members from southern and northern traditions. JW noted that she was one of the few individuals from a northern tradition involved in NAIC when she first joined, but that their representation had grown over time. She stated that there is now a good “...balance of American Indian and LatinX Indigenous people” and that “We all want each other to succeed.” JW also noted that NAIC members were

intentional about ensuring representation from both the North and the South at the group's events so that "...everyone kind of feels connected and represented." Santiago and Jennifer expressed a similar sentiment. Santiago made the interesting observation that much of the iconography used by NAIS for programming and decoration is specific to the plains and coastal North American groups, which he described as the result of these cultures being "...over-represented of the generic Indian discourse." This harkens to Ramirez's (2007) argument that Indigenous authenticity is often understood through the cultural characteristics of the plains tribes since these are the representations which have long filled western media.

Jennifer framed the Intertibial connectivity being built at UT Austin between northern and southern Indigenous people as critical to the future of Indigenous affairs. She shared how she sees "...it as something that is going to unite forces..." and that because of the pain and oppression which often characterizes Indigenous experiences, it is important to "...find opportunities to collaborate and help our cousins..." One area what Jennifer noted that the NAIS community could be better on this front is in its outreach to Black Indigenous people. Black Indians are among the most marginalized Indigenous identities on Turtle Island (Sturm, 2002), and they are too often left out of the conversation (Klopotek, 2011). Jennifer discussed how, in the age of Black Lives Matter, it is critical to build solidarity with Black Indigenous communities and to support other people of color more broadly.

The Indigenous community at UT Austin is a space which holds great respect for variations of culture. Dr. Cárcamo-Huechante discussed the benefits of this environment, which allows relationships among students from various Indigenous backgrounds and a "cross-fertilization and the building of common ground for everyone." Maria Rocha described the beauty of such relationships among Native people who are able to "...bring different people

together in an academic setting, [which allows] more discussion about the relationships to ancient knowledge, the relationship to ancient traditions, and our relationships to each other as the original people of the Americas.” According to Dr. Cárcamo-Huechante, NAIS aims to “facilitate” such conversations as a program aimed across the borders of colonial states. He went on to discuss how American Indian academic centers at most other universities focus on the experiences of tribal communities in the United States and that our cross-hemispheric focus at UT Austin allows great opportunities for the NAIS program to be a central point in a growing field of scholarship focused on global Indigeneity.

Challenges for Indigenous students

The University of Texas at Austin is a campus that poses great challenges for Indigenous students. The insular nature of Native American culture can prove an uncomfortable fit in an environment so shaped by western academic culture. Student participants in this study voiced concerns of loneliness, invisibility, racism, and a disconnect between their community values and those of the institution. While this study focuses on a strength-based approach to Indigenous higher education, we must not ignore the challenges faced by a community. The hope is that, once acknowledged, our community’s strengths can serve as catalysts towards improvement. The following section outlines the concerns of Indigenous students about their experience on the Forty Acres.

The pandemic

The first issue to address is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is not a challenge limited to our campus nor even our Indigenous community, as closures and lost opportunities have been common across the world of higher education throughout 2020 and 2021. The UT Austin section of this study began in 2018, so much of it was completed prior to

the pandemic. Though this is not the context in which I expected to complete this work, acknowledging its impact on our students has provided valuable insight into community building in an age of crisis.

Several students expressed disappointment in the loss of physical connectivity as programs, courses, and events moved online through the UT Austin-sanctioned Zoom program. Jennifer discussed how, prior to the pandemic, she would spend a great deal of time in the NAIS communal space "...reading or doing homework or just getting some tea. That definitely changed, and I didn't keep in touch with a lot of people that I would see often there." She later shared that the online NAIS graduation ceremony in the Spring of 2020 was an opportunity to see many friends she had not spoken with in months. JW mentioned a similar disappointment in no longer seeing her peers in class, which she described as "weird." She shared that she felt "...disconnected from everyone, in a sense, because not everything can be captured through zoom. It just doesn't feel as personal." She described that her "...relationships have kind of been decimated."

Nita shared a story of specific programming loss due to the pandemic. She had been working through the NAIC undergraduate student organization on a campaign titled "Radical Action: March for MMIW, Black and Brown Indigenous Peoples, and 2SLGBTQIA+." Its goal was to build awareness around the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls movement as well as violence against Two Spirit and Black Indigenous people. These issues have been growing topics in Indian Country in recent years as communities have grappled with high rates of violence against these groups. Nita described the NAIC initiative as gaining great momentum, which required her to apply "...so much energy and time and love and work..." Once the pandemic hit, it "...wiped out that semester long project..." as energies, allies, and funding

redirected as a result of the pandemic. I have known many students over recent years, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, who lost similar opportunities.

The academic impact of the pandemic must also be acknowledged, as many students struggled to maintain focus or adapt to digital coursework. Tony and Santiago each spoke about the stress of being forced to adapt to the new form of online learning. Nita discussed having to return home to a rural region with poor quality internet access, which made her work extra challenging. Jennifer, Tony, and JW each spoke about screen exhaustion due to the amount of time spent on a computer throughout the week. This is linked to a point made by JW about how the new format of classes required additional hours on a computer due to an increased need to teach herself the material. These experiences were shared by Santiago, who described an ambivalence about committing to academic work while there was such stress in the world, which resulted in him taking an incomplete in one of his classes in Spring 2021.

There were a few positive comments about the pandemic experience among UT Austin's Indigenous students. Jennifer spoke about how she appreciated that she no longer had to travel to campus every day, and that she was able to "...stay home and be calm while doing my reading." She also shared an appreciation for a particular professor, who expressed great concern for her students' well-being and provided flexibility on assignment schedules. Santiago noted a similar gratitude for how certain professors responded to the pandemic and that NAIS faculty allowed a greater focus on "...staying alive and surviving..." while the faculty in his home department were more inclined to maintain their original, pre-pandemic syllabus plans.

The COVID-19 era altered our educational experiences in dramatic and often painful ways. As will be discussed later in this chapter, the UT Austin Indigenous students faced these challenges while implementing a significant community-building and advocacy initiative. Crisis

often spurs innovation, and our collectives were able to continue the critical work essential to identity and community development. The impacts of the pandemic will be felt long into the future, but for people of color, such an experience rests upon a pre-existing myriad of challenges and barriers to educational success.

Cultural disconnect

The world of higher education often proves an unfamiliar culture for Indigenous students. This requires them to spend energy understanding and managing a cultural divide (Steele, 2011) while also learning course material. This was discussed by Dr. Cárcamo-Huechante when he stated that “I think the major challenge is to always remain loyal and engaged with the Indigenous principles and values that you learned on the road of your life...” A similar point was made by Dr. Walters when sharing that the best advice he would give a Native student would be to “...be true to yourself. No matter what, be true to yourself and then to family, because that’s what we’re about.” These campus elders each emphasized that successful Indigenous education requires the maintenance of one’s community culture.

Several students shared examples of how the environment of UT Austin is antagonistic to expressions of Indigenous values. JW shared a frustration that university rules do not permit wearing Native regalia during graduation ceremonies. Santiago voiced complaints about how academia’s version of professionalism is often code for western, White culture and that he has received negative responses in his home department when applying non-western epistemological approaches. Victoria spoke in depth about how the Indigenous values of elder relationships and responsibility towards the land are not issues that the administration is willing to learn from or support. She also shared a frustration that she is in need of a counselor, but there are not options

for providers available through the university's mental health services who have experience with Indigenous populations.

Dr. Lee Walters and I held multiple conversations on the disconnect between academic and Indigenous culture. He shared that in his experience, there are a great many misconceptions and a lack of understanding from those in higher education who have not spent time with American Indians. One issue he emphasized is the importance of trust for Native people. He described how reservation culture values transparency and that "...when someone tells me this is what is going to happen, then that's what we do." Unfortunately, he has seen many American Indians in large higher education institutions who were "...promised a thing, but when they get here, they don't get what was promised." Dr. Walters linked this experience to the historic relationship between Native American communities and the federal government as they both contribute to narratives in Indian Country that representatives of western institutions are not to be trusted.

Loneliness

An additional thread of research from this study sees loneliness as a common concern among UT Austin's Indigenous student population. I have come to understand from my years of experience living and working in Indigenous communities that Native people can be insular by nature. Dr. Walters noted a similar perspective in that "...Native Americans have a way of just keeping to themselves..." Loneliness is problematic for all students, particularly in the socially-distanced age of COVID-19, but it seems to have been a prominent concern for Indigenous students long before 2020.

Several student participants voiced experiences of isolation prior to the pandemic. Santiago shared that he typically prefers to sit by himself in public spaces on campus. Jennifer

described how she did not enjoy attending events in her first two years on campus due to being timid. She expressed discomfort in the manner in which academic culture breeds an “aggressive” competitiveness where strangers need to show-off how much they know. Jennifer shared that she “...never felt safe in those spaces, so I would just leave.” Cristina expressed that her first two years on campus were characterized by being “...scared or not engaged...” and that she felt “angry” and unwelcome. She then countered that her experience at UT Austin changed when she became connected with the NAIS program, which allowed her to “get involved,” to experience a “good sense of community,” and feel “welcomed.” Victoria expressed a similar experience of finding the NAIS program after already completing multiple years of her degree and how this dramatically improved her life on campus. She stated that “I needed to be with community and have a sense of community to make it feel like I was going to succeed.”

Homesickness seems a major factor contributing to Indigenous students’ experiences of loneliness. Dr. Walters discussed how family serves a particularly important role in Native American culture and that he has known several Indigenous students who began at the university only to return home due to missing their communities. He described how some of these students shared an inability to relate to campus and that others have struggled with alcohol abuse. Dr. Walters understood much of this as the result of homesickness. He recalled a story of a former student who expressed feelings of being lost in large classes filled with hundreds of students. The student shared that he felt insignificant, which led to his withdrawal.

This feeling of invisibility on campus was shared by several participants, which likely contributes an overall experience of loneliness. JW described the inadequate representation of Native students and the low funding levels of the NAIS program as “disrespectful” and “...indicative of how UT sees Native students, if they even see us at all.” Nita expressed a

similar frustration about an experience sharing her Native heritage on campus and receiving the response: “Oh, you still exist?” There may be no better portrayal of invisibility as a manifestation of institutional racism than such a glib dismissal of one’s identity.

Perhaps due to this level of invisibility, both Nita and Victoria expressed experiences of tokenism. Nita discussed a “...pressure to perform and to be everybody’s Native friend...” and to help with assignments related to Native people. Victoria shared frustration with similar experiences and that she has had to grow comfortable turning down requests to help on history projects and language pronunciations that are made due to her reputation as a Native student. She linked this conversation as an example of how “Just because UT really prides itself on diversity does not mean that it is inclusive.”

Racism

Identity discomforts exist on a great many levels in higher education settings, and as described by the students, racism is not an uncommon experience at UT Austin. JW discussed problematic portrayals of Indigenous people through coursework and discomfort with how non-Indigenous colleagues discuss these issues. An example she provided included a British professor who wished the class a happy Columbus Day and then dismissed her concerns raised about the holiday. In another class on cultural studies, she felt discomfort that the only week devoted to Native American culture focused on the traumatic experience 19th and 20th Century boarding schools. This insight harkens to Tuck and Ree’s (2013) criticism that western culture too often only understands Indigenous experience through the lens of pain and oppression. Another example of problematic portrayals of Indigenous people comes from Santiago, who shared that he has experience anthropology courses where “...Native people are just presented as archaic and old and fundamentally unknowable.” The fact that the academy continues to rely on

outdated perceptions on Indigenous ways of being seems a significant contributor to the disconnect between educational institutions and our people.

When not problematically portrayed, there is also the concern of Indigenous omission. This issue was expressed by Santiago when sharing that he has taken diversity courses that did not include any mention of Native people. He described how faculty grew defensive when he spoke about racism in the curriculum due to the “negative presence” of Indigenous representation. In our conversations, Santiago shared that he understands UT Austin to be “couched in a kind of liberalism” that allows for conversations about racism on the condition that the authority is not challenged in the process.

Academic disconnect

The omission of Indigenous history, culture, and values serves as a prominent challenge for Native people in higher education who are struggling to find meaning in a curriculum not designed with us in mind. Dr. Mario Garza describes this inability to relate to education as a significant reason why students withdraw. Several student participants shared experiences with this disconnect, including Victoria who spoke about not being understood by professors when discussing non-Western philosophical concepts around land and relationships. JW shared experiences where the Indigenous knowledge and stories she brought to a space were not treated with the “...same weight in a colonial setting...” as western paradigms. Additionally, Santiago expressed frustration at the labor required to explain the concept of settler-colonialism to colleagues.

Tony described experiences of academic disconnect and omission as being “violence” faced by Indigenous students because we always have to constantly be “defending” and “...justifying the way we come to understand the world.” He further described this labor as

being “exhausting.” He provided an example of a White professor who stated that understanding the world and theory requires reading. Tony countered that “...it’s a disservice to say that people who do not read are theory-less...” and that he has members of his family who are unable to read in their Native language. He described that the professor’s response was avoidance by quickly moving on from the topic.

The academic disconnect experienced by Indigenous people in higher education is a source of great frustration and labor. However, this effort and a focus on maintaining our community values in the face of institutional culture is critical to our success. As described by Dr. Cárcamo-Huechante, it is essential that we “...honor and always be practicing the Indigenous principles and values that we learned from our grandparents, our parents, our families, [and] our peers in the communities from which we come. We need to embrace that, but at the same time we need to be open to learn about the ways in which the non-indigenous environments work at all levels: symbolically, institutionally, socially, politically, culturally. That’s a major challenge... because you need to be able to be a good student in multiple worlds. The challenge is then... you need to be probably much more studious than others, because you need to put together these multiple, at times disjointed worlds through which you’re moving.”

Institutional support of Indigenous people

In understanding the experiences of Indigenous people on a university campus it is important to consider the actions of Indigenous individuals and collectives but also of the institution itself. Too often, creating change in a problematic environment for people of color rests primarily on the labor of people of color, rather than being understood as the responsibility of the institution. The ethics of this are problematic, as it is another example of educational access being divided along racial lines. The practicalities of institutional support as well as the

perception of institutional support for a population group can serve as powerful barometers of student satisfaction. It is therefore worthwhile to spend time exploring the degree to which Indigenous participants believe UT Austin is supportive of their community.

The feedback is not good. As a whole, there is a perception among students that the university does not care about us or our issues. Many feel as though promoting Indigeneity is a fight against the university rather than a collaboration with the university. It is important to note that students did highlight several divisions within UT Austin that they feel were important, which we be discussed later in this section. There are also variances on this topic from staff and faculty when compared to students, but the overall narrative paints the campus as a whole as being uninterested in this segment of its population.

When asked about this topic, Nita did not believe it to be "...supportive whatsoever." Tony went so far as stating that UT Austin is "...trash when it comes to helping Native Indigenous students." Santiago acknowledged that the existence of the Native American and Indigenous Studies program could be argued as a sign of institutional support, but he countered that existing is inadequate if a program is understaffed and under supported. He went on to say that the NAIS community has "...come together and found ways in the institution to support themselves and the people they care about..." despite the university rather than in concert with it. JW made a similar observation that the programs, events, and accomplishments of NAIS and its student groups "...are things that we kind of created for ourselves..." though she expressed frustration that these were simply the "crumbs" of what is available at the institution.

It is obvious from my many conversations with study participants that Indigenous students at UT Austin do not feel that the university is in their corner. Many suggestions were made for ways that this relationship could be improved, such as increasing funding and

improving the visibility of Indigenous issues. However, I would highlight a comment made by Jennifer when asked what UT Austin needs to do to better serve Indigenous students. Her response was that "...they need to listen. They need to listen to what we as students have to say because there is no one who can better voice what we need." This point speaks to the wish for reciprocity raised by Victoria. It would also help address the concerns of invisibility brought up by Nita, Cristina, and Tony. There is power in being heard, and Indigenous students at UT Austin have engaged in great advocacy over the past several years to ensure their voices matter.

Supportive divisions

The general consensus from participants is that, while the university as a whole is structurally challenging for Indigenous populations, there are bright spots on campus. These include various faculty, staff, and individual departments which have proven supportive. As described by Tony, Indigenous students have "...found little crevices throughout UT to build and mold those spaces for ourselves..." This effort was the result of both self-advocacy and the effort of allies who have proven critical to Indigenous student success on campus.

There was great consensus among the Indigenous students involved in Native American and Indigenous Studies (NAIS) that the program has cultivated a positive, supportive culture. Santiago, for instance, contrasted NAIS with the wider university in that the program "...is far more invested in thinking with and for others... and I think that's represented in the NAIS project of being very caring and trying to create community." Santiago, JW, and Tony each described NAIS as being supportive of students, with Tony adding that their administrative team has "...moved so many mountains for us..." Jennifer made similar comments about NAIS support for Indigenous students, but to return to the theme of a lack of support from central on Indigenous issues, she argued that the university is not adequately supportive of NAIS.

Another example of a department highlighted as being supported of Indigenous issues is the division of Housing and Dining. Several stories were shared by Dr. Lee Walters, based on his career as an Associate Director in this unit. The division has over twelve hundred employees, making it one of the largest employers on campus. Dr. Walters described having leadership that provided great support for cultural promotion, and during his time there, he helped develop a resident hall museum on Native American heritage, classes on Indigenous cooking for their chefs, and several cultural activities for the dorms. It is notable that these were not simply displays of culture, which is trendy in academia. They were cultural sharing opportunities led by a Native American of Blackfeet heritage who was empowered by institutional leadership. Housing and Dining is therefore an example of how a department whose mission is not specific to any single cultural group is still able to support and create opportunities for people of color.

Several other supportive divisions were mentioned by participants during the course of our conversations. Nita spoke positively about the Multicultural Engagement Center, which houses NAIC. She described their team as the undergraduate student organization's "biggest allies." Jennifer provided several examples, including the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, Latina/o Studies, Women and Gender Studies, and the Department of Curriculum and Instruction in the College of Education. Tony also spoke positively about his experience in the College of Education through their Cultural Studies in Education program. As a doctoral student in the College of Education's Educational Leadership and Policy (ELP) program, my personal experience has been similarly positive. While it is unfortunate that we only have a single faculty representative with knowledge of Indigenous issues, which reflects the aforementioned drought of Indigenous faculty on campus, I have found my student and faculty colleagues incredibly open to these conversations. I would describe the ELP program as

supportive, but I have had to search other departments across the university to find the elder Indigenous scholars who have served as my guides. This story reflects a running theme at UT Austin that there exists “crevices” of support for Indigenous people, but it takes both labor and institutional knowledge for them to be accessed.

Relationship to the wider community

Critical to this study is an examination of the relationship between each institution’s Indigenous community and the wider Indigenous communities in which they sit. As understanding Indigenous connectivity is a primary goal of this work, this avenue allows exploration of the ways in which the Indigenous people beyond a campus’ border provide support and opportunities for cultural engagement. For some institutions, such connections may serve as a life-line for Indigenous students disconnected from their families and communities. At the very least, such an examination provides insight into the degree to which an institution values a relationship with the Indigenous people of the land on which it sits.

There are three federally recognized tribe in the state of Texas (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2016), though none have a land base near the university. As described by Maria Rocha, Executive Director of the San Marcos, Texas based Indigenous Cultures Institute, “There is not one cohesive Native American community [in Central Texas] that can be interpreted as one Intertribal community. There are several loosely associated Native American communities... centered around nonprofits and special programming about Native American culture and issues, all working autonomously.” Maria went on to describe how the Native American and Indigenous Studies program actively “...encourages linkages between UT’s Indigenous students and Native communities in this area...” by sponsoring internships in local nonprofits and inviting their representatives to present on campus.

The most active Indigenous organizations in Central Texas include the nonprofits Great Promise for American Indians and the Indigenous Cultures Institute (ICI). It is important to note that these are not the only Indigenous community groups in Central Texas. Other examples include the Central Texas Chickasaw Community Council, the Four Winds Intertribal Society, and the San Antonio Powwow. Tony also mentioned engagement with the International Indigenous Youth Council based in Austin, and Jennifer mentioned positive experiences with Indigenous people at the Red Salmon Book Store. This study does not aim to dismiss other groups doing positive work in the community, but it recognizes that ICI and Great Promise have the longest, most substantial relationships to the campus. As discussed by Director Cárcamo-Huechante of Native American and Indigenous Studies, the program's partnerships with these groups provides a "...mirroring of life; not only on campus but statewide. We have many students who come from these different dimensions of community from these different experiences in Texas."

Great Promise for American Indians

Great Promise for American Indians is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization whose mission aims to "...preserve the traditions heritage and culture of American Indians, and to support the health and education needs of their youth and families..." (Great Promise for American Indians, 2021). The organization's headquarters is located in Austin, Texas approximately one and a half miles north of the UT Austin campus. Among their activities include educational programming, school presentations, and regular community potlucks. Their largest program is the Austin Powwow, which has been recognized as the largest single day powwow in the nation.

I had the opportunity to speak with Robert Bass, the Executive Director of Great Promise, as well as his wife, Huanani Bass, who provides administrative support to the organization. I

have known them for years as long-time advocates and leaders in the Central Texas Intertribal community, and their experience adds a rich insight into this work. Robert described community building among Native Americans as a central goal of Great Promise. He discussed how, due to the fact that there is not a Native-land base in the region, most Native people in the area live disconnected from their home communities. Therefore, Great Promise tries to "...build an atmosphere where people feel belonging here in Austin." When asked about ways to successfully engage Native communities, both Robert and Huanani spoke about the sharing of arts and culture. Robert also described the organization's weekly potluck as an important mechanism for this work, as it allows people to "...come and talk and know that there's other Native people around." Huanani expressed a hope that university students attend these events as they provide an environment filled with Native families, children, and elders which may remind them of "...where they're coming from and what their family taught."

Great Promise has had relationships with several university powwows in the region including those at UT Austin, Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas, and Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas. However, Southwestern is the only event that is still ongoing. According to Dr. Lee Walters, who is retired staff at both the university and Great Promise, powwow at UT Austin has a history dating to at least the 1990's. Unfortunately, this event has not been held since the Spring of 2017. Robert expressed a degree of disappointment about this fact and a hope that this aspect of Indigenous culture could return to campus in the future.

Robert shared that, from his view at Great Promise, the UT Austin Indigenous community has seen an increase in representation from Central and South America and a corresponding decrease in representation from the North American tribal traditions. He noted that there is "...value in sharing and connecting with all of the Western Hemisphere's Indigenous

cultures...,” but he expressed concern about the “...disappearance of the North American cultures.” He did acknowledge appreciation for Dr. Luis Cárcamo-Huechante due to his willingness to be exposed and learn powwow culture as an Indigenous person outside this tradition. I also know from my conversations with Dr. Cárcamo-Huechante that he has interest in bringing powwow back to campus in the future. However, for the time being, Great Promise’s involvement with UT Austin’s Indigenous community is limited due to both the capacity of the nonprofit’s administrative team and the current lull in powwow culture.

The lack of powwow binding Great Promise to UT Austin does not mean that the organization does not still serve an important role for Intertribal students. Robert discussed how, “Most of the Native kids that we come into contact [with] are... away from their culture and they want to rediscover their culture... We have a lot of kids that have had very little exposure to their tribal heritage. So, one [goal for the organization] is taking traditional culture and introducing it to the larger society, and the other one is introducing [individuals] back to the culture they’ve been separated from. We find in Austin that this part is much more important.” One way that Great Promise serves this role is by providing volunteer and internship opportunities for UT Austin students. The internship was described as a fulfilling, friendly, and comfortable feeling by study participant JW, who served in this role during the 2019-2020 Academic Year. As she described it, I just felt like I was hanging out with family...” which helped her “...connect more with my American Indian heritage.”

Great Promise for American Indians has a long and mutually beneficial history of partnering with UT Austin’s Indigenous community. While there is a current lull in this relationship due to a lack of focus on powwow culture at the university, all parties have expressed interest in working to better cultivate communities of northern, Intertribal people on

campus. Great Promise should have a voice in this effort. However, since it is a small nonprofit organization, this relationship must maintain a focus on reciprocity so that all parties reap community growth from these efforts. As reciprocity is central to the ethos of Native American and Indigenous Studies at UT Austin, this seems an attainable goal.

Indigenous Cultures Institute

The second of the two most active Native American organization in Central Texas is the Indigenous Cultures Institute, a 501(c)3 nonprofit whose mission is to “...preserve the cultures of the Native Americans indigenous to Texas and northern Mexico while maintaining our covenant with sacred sites” (Indigenous Cultures Institute, 2021). The organization was founded in 2006 by members of the Miakan-Garza Band of Coahuiltecans, Dr. Mario Garza and Maria Rocha. I began with the organization as a volunteer in 2007, served as its Programs Manager from 2010 to 2020, and am currently its Financial Officer. This has allowed an inspiring view of continuous growth in both its programs and community impact. The organization’s ongoing projects include advocacy for the repatriation and reburial of Indigenous remains, managing a week-long Indigenous arts summer program for local youth, hosting the annual Sacred Springs Powwow fall festival, managing the Nakum academic journal, and coordinating several additional educational and outreach efforts across the state.

The Indigenous Cultures Institute (ICI) has a long-running, collaborative relationship with UT Austin. This partnership is a natural fit, given the epistemological focus of the program. ICI’s mission is to cultivate the heritage of communities Indigenous to Texas and northern Mexico who have long been labeled “Hispanic.” Meanwhile, the NAIS program has a heavy focus on cross-hemispheric Indigeneity and has a significant population of LatinX scholars, so

there is a clear mission overlap between the groups. However, more important to its cultivation is the degree to which each side engages in relationship building and reciprocity.

Maria Rocha described several ways in which the organization is included by the NAIS community, including being "...invited to present lectures, speak at symposiums, attend performances, set up tables at conferences, hire interns for ICI's Indigenous Arts Summer Encounter, solicit volunteers for the Sacred Springs Powwow, and provide blessings and invocations at the beginning of events." In discussing the role of ICI on campus, Tony stated that it is important "...for us as Native Indigenous students at UT Austin to make sure that we are honoring the peoples who have protected this territory for millennia." Similar statements were made by Jennifer and JW. This perspective shows both a high level of responsibility and respect for Indigenous legacy too often missing in the world of higher education.

Several students have become involved with the Institute over the years through both volunteer and paid positions. The organization's summer Encounter, which provides a week of Indigenous programming for free to San Marcos area youth, is staffed by several students and alumni. This includes Tony, who serves as Director of the program. Tony described how he was originally introduced to Dr. Garza and Maria Rocha by a friend, began volunteering for the summer program, was invited back as a paid instructor, and eventually promoted to a leadership position. Dr. Garza described such collaborations as being beneficial to students, especially if they are in training as educators as the Institute is able to provide them experience working with young people through Indigenous pedagogy.

Another example of a strong relationship built through the ICI and NAIS collaboration comes from Jennifer. She grew familiar with the elders through their engagement with campus, and in 2021, she began volunteering for the organization's grant writing team. She soon

expressed interest in the Institute's Coahuiltecan language program, and she has since been appointed as its Program Coordinator. It is a position that will provide great opportunities for a young academic, and as described by Jennifer, "I don't think that would have been possible if I had not heard that it was possible through other students and seeing [the elders] on campus on a regular basis."

The many volunteer positions made available to NAIS students are an important service provided by the Miakan-Garza elders, but they are not the limitation of their support. As described by Maria Rocha, having students engage with ICI "...connects them again and again and again with that Indigenous culture [and] it's very important to provide the sustenance of the spirit that they need in order to keep working on their studies. If they become lonely and alone and feel isolated, ...they start to shut down." Maria described this as being critical to Indigenous students who are far from home and that "...it's our job to fill that gap [and] to be their substitute family while they're away, because we have a responsibility to their parents and grandparents to take care of them here..." Dr. Garza shared that some of the ways in which they aim to create this supportive structure is by having community meetings at their home and providing meals. This aims to cultivate an environment that reminds students of their family environments with laughing and joking "...so that there's a place where they can relax, even if it's just for a couple of hours, to feel like they're not alone." Maria expanded that they also believe in helping students who may be in trouble with examples such as buying tires for their car or providing rides to work. Additionally, they host ceremonies where students are invited, which allows them a sense of "spiritual support." Finally, the Miakan-Garzas aim to support the student organizations with financial donations and by providing free presentations at their events.

Neither UT Austin nor Central Texas as a whole has a large Indigenous population. For many reasons already discussed, Indigenous students who travel to our campus often feel lonely and disconnected from their cultures. The campus is unable to fill the spiritual and cultural needs of its Indigenous students on its own, and the Miakan-Garzas have played a critical role in filling that gap. These feelings were shared by several participants, including Jennifer, Tony, and Victoria. JW expanded by acknowledging that the Miakan-Garzas are not "...from my tribe [but], I think it means just as much to have someone who's willing to teach you and be there for you." As described by Maria Rocha, "In our world, it isn't about the university and the community... We see ourselves as connected to these young people and part of their community and they see us as part of their community."

Repatriation advocacy

Recent years have seen an important test of UT Austin's relationship with the Central Texas Native American community concerning university-held Indigenous remains. This is an issue which centers the Indigenous Cultures Institute and the elders of the Miakan-Garza band as they have fought for their ancestors to be returned to the earth. This effort also included an advocacy push by the university's Indigenous students, who spoke, organized, and proved passionate support of these Indigenous elders who have long-served UT's Native community. While this issue will not be resolved by the time this dissertation is published, it serves as a powerful and hopeful story of Indigenous advocacy in higher education.

To understand this case in context, we must first look at the history of Indigenous grave robbing on the North American continent, which began as a fusion of scholarship and commerce. For hundreds of years, Indigenous bodies have been collected without permission by westerners from battle grounds, reservation cemeteries, and ancient mounds (Thomas, 2000) for the sake of

building both private and academic collections. U.S. founding father Thomas Jefferson even wrote about how claiming Indian skulls and bones was fair game for scientific inquiry (Thomas, 2000). Franz Boas (1858-1942) who is widely regarded as “the Father of American Anthropology,” spent years collecting skulls from the Indigenous people of the Northwest Coast (Thomas, 2000). Boas turned this practice into a speculative business venture by stealing remains in order to sell them to hungry collectors at universities and museums. This practice continued in various forms through the 20th Century, and today there are thousands of Native American ancestors residing in storage boxes and display cases for the sake of institutional prestige (Thomas, 2000).

1990 saw the passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), a federal law that guides the repatriation and disposition of Indigenous remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony (National Parks Foundation, 2021). This law sought to foster “...dialogue between museums and Indian Tribes and Native Hawaiian organizations and to promote a greater understanding between the groups” (National Parks Foundation, 2021). All federal agencies, governments, and non-governmental agencies which receive federal funds are subject to the rules of NAGPRA (National Parks Foundation, 2021). This law allows for lineal descendants, recognized Native American tribes, and Native Hawaiian organizations to submit requests to claim remains and objects associated with their history (National Parks Foundation, 2021). It does not require agencies to consult with non-federally recognized Indigenous groups. However, the NAGPRA Review Committee conducts a review process which permits non-recognized groups to partner with agencies for repatriation and disposition (National Parks Foundation, 2021).

Approximately 3,500 Native American remains have been removed from Texas and are held by institutions across the country, according to the NAGPRA database (Indian Country Today Press Pool, 2020). Of those, over 2,400 are currently held by UT Austin (Indian Country Today Press Pool, 2020). These individuals are stored at the university's Texas Archeological Research Laboratory's repository warehouse (TARL) located at the J.J. Pickle Research Campus. This satellite campus sits in Austin approximately seven miles north of the main campus. The facility is the largest archeological repository in Texas (Texas Archeological Research Laboratory, 2021) and is housed under UT Austin's College of Liberal Arts. Its collection of Indigenous remains is used for research by the staff of TARL, faculty and students of UT Austin, and scholars from outside the UT Austin system (Texas Archeological Research Laboratory, 2021). This research can involve the alteration and even destruction of these remains, when approved by TARL (Texas Archeological Research Laboratory, 2021).

“Collections” such as UT Austin's remains a problematic blight for contemporary higher education systems. There is a long history of distrust between Native American communities and researchers, and grave robbing through Anthropology is one of the prominent manifestations of the injustice at the heart of this relationship (Thomas, 2000). It is an example of the degree to which Indigenous values and beliefs are dismissed in the wake of eurocentrism and greed. As described by Dr. Mario Garza of the Miakan-Garza band of Coahuiltecan, “We believe that when a person is buried, they depart on their spiritual journey. When they are unearthed, their spiritual journey is interrupted, and they are suspended in agony. It is our obligation as indigenous people to return our ancestors to Mother Earth so they can proceed to the Great Mystery of the Cosmos” (Indian Country Today Press Pool, 2020). In my conversations with Dr. Garza, he spoke about being mortified at the university's practice of renting and destroying the

bodies of his ancestors in order to make money. He described this as one example of how institutions are willing to dismiss the humanity of Indigenous people, especially if the Indigenous people in question do not follow Christian beliefs concerning death.

Miakan-Garza repatriation efforts

The Miakan-Garza Band of Coahuiltecs have been involved in repatriation advocacy for over 30 years. They trace their lineage to the bands of Coahuiltecs that resided in Texas and northern Mexico prior to Spanish arrival. Critical to the rules of NAGRPA is the fact that they are not a federally recognized Native American tribe, though they were recognized by the 83rd Texas Legislature due to their “immeasurable contributions to the State of Texas” (Indigenous Cultures Institute, 2020). Prior repatriation efforts of the group included participating in the establishment of the Comanche Cemetery burial grounds at Fort Hood in 1998 and the 1999 repatriation of almost 200 remains at the Mission San Juan in San Antonio, Texas (Indian Country Today Press Pool, 2020).

In 2016, the Miakan-Garza band partnered with Texas State University and the City of San Marcos to establish a repatriation cemetery. This site would serve to rebury seven individuals previously held by the university who were returned to the group (Indian Country Today Press Pool, 2020). This collaboration was the result of a request submitted to Texas State University by the Miakan-Garza’s in 2014. The evidence provided by the Miakan-Garza’s showed that these “culturally unidentifiable” remains shared group identity with their people. This evidence was accepted by the university, the NAGPRA review committee, and the Secretary of the Interior, resulting in their reburial.



Illustration 2: The Miakan-Garza repatriation cemetery

UT Austin request

The Miakan-Garza's submitted a request to UT Austin in March of 2016 for three of their ancestors that were being housed in the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory. These individuals were unearthed near their tribal center in Hays County and had been held by the university for over sixty years. The years after this request featured a great variety of bureaucratic procedure and road blocks. Though this effort began with a letter, it would culminate in a flurry of student advocacy, community outreach, and national headlines. Before understanding the friction and collaboration between the institution and the local Indigenous people, it is beneficial to examine the procedural response. The following description was compiled from records and emails provided by the Miakan-Garza band.

After the Miakan-Garzas March 7, 2016 letter, the university responded on April 12th that their legal department wrote the state's federally recognized tribes to ask permission to consult with the Miakan-Garzas. These tribes later objected to the partnership while not actually

claiming affiliation with the remains. This response is problematic as their objection is not that they have rights to these remains but that they do not accept the legitimacy of a non-federally recognized group such as the Miakan-Garzas. This is an old problem in Indian Country and echoes of a statement by Native elder-scholar Vine Deloria in 1969 that the future of Native affairs will feature a struggle between those who have traditionally dominated power and those of the new movement (Deloria, 1969).

In December of 2017, UT Austin requested the Maikan-Garza provide a letter of support for a grant the university was pursuing to further study their “culturally unidentifiable” remains for possible identification. The Miakan-Garza response on January 8, 2018 expressed concern about the delay of their request and that their ancestors continued to be studied and possibly destroyed. The next year featured continued bureaucratic delays. In February of 2019, the Miakan-Garzas wrote the university twice requesting a meeting on the issue, to which the university responded that they are consulting with their legal department on how best to move forward.

On March 18, 2019, Dr. Mario Garza and Maria Rocha of the Miakan-Garza band met with Dr. Brian Roberts, who then served as Director of the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory. At this meeting, Dr. Roberts requested time to find a solution on this case. In October of 2019, Dr. Roberts stated to the university’s newspaper, the Daily Texan, that there were conflicting claims for these three remains which needed to be resolved among the tribes before the university could proceed. When the Miakan-Garza’s requested information on which tribes had filed additional claims in November 2019, they were instructed by Dr. Roberts to find this information through an open records request. As a result of this request, the UT Austin Legal Department provided letters from the Alabama-Coushatta and Caddo tribes of Texas in

December 2019. Neither group claimed the remains, but both objected to the Miakan-Gazas receiving them for reasons immaterial to NAGPRA law. The Miakan-Garza responded that these letters confirm the lack of additional claims on these three remains and repeated their request for reburial. Dr. Roberts responded that they are now required to run their responses through UT Legal due to the open records request he advised they pursue.

Denial

On June 3, 2020, Dr. Brian Roberts wrote the Miakan-Garzas denying the request to repatriate the remains of their ancestors. According to his letter, this was due to the university being unable to identify a shared group identity between the ancestors and the Miakan-Garza Band. After four years of bureaucratic maneuvering, the university chose to ignore the precedent set by Texas State University, the NAGPRA review committee, and the Secretary of the Interior. In discussing this decision, Dr. shared that this is an example why it is problematic that "...it is the collector with defines if the information you provided fits their requirement of cultural affiliation." Despite the fact that their people have continuously lived in the region for over 14,000 years, their request was denied based on the university's legal right to discriminate based on their lack of federal recognition.

In the wake of this denial, the Miakan-Garzas began an advocacy effort to build support on this issue. This began with a letter from Dr. Mario Garza to UT Austin Interim President Jay Hartzell on July 13, 2020 and then again on September 21, 2020. In these letters, Dr. Garza stressed that the university's "...collections of indigenous remains for research is no longer considered justifiable..." and that neither "...the ancestors nor their families gave permission for their bodies to be unearthed and studied..." His arguments speak to the wide disconnect between academic and Indigenous cultural values.

During this period, the Miakan-Garzas also began a social media campaign and news media outreach effort. One result was the publication of an article in *Indian Country Today*, a nationally recognized news source covering Indigenous issues. The article, published on August 20, 2020, did not paint the university in a positive light and framed the issue as that of a small Indigenous group arguing for their rights against a large institution. As described by Maria Rocha, the response to this campaign was larger than they expected. She described how “...So many people from the public we're posting on our Facebook page and on our Instagram about the atrocity of holding remains... [and] now we know that sentiment is out there.”

The next stage of this effort included the live-streamed advocacy event described in this chapter's opening. The event took place on Labor Day 2020 from 6:00-8:00pm on the grounds of the J.J. Pickle Research Campus, which houses the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory facility holding the ancestral remains. This event was described as a “teach-in ceremonial demonstration and featured danza, drumming, singing, and several speakers. The entire program was live-streamed over social media. There were seventy-seven individuals in attendance, including Indigenous students from the university, representatives from the Central Texas Native American community, and community allies. The COVID-19 pandemic required the crowd to social distance and wear masks, but those in attendance were respectful of these guidelines. The evening was a powerful moment filled with story, testimonial and prayer, and it did a great deal to raise awareness for this campaign.



Illustration 3: Return the Remains Teach-in event

Student advocacy

Indigenous students at UT Austin took an active role in advocating for the return of the Miakan-Garza's ancestral remains. The band's elders were well known among the NAIPA and NAIS student groups due to their long-time involvement in the Native American and Indigenous Studies community, and many students had grown connected to Dr. Mario Garza and Maria Rocha. As described by JW, "...the elders have given so much to me personally... [so] it felt like something that needed to be done for them... there's not enough that we could give to them that would repay them for all the work that they've done." Awareness on the repatriation issue among the students grew after UT Austin denied their return. From this decision rose a belief among the students that they needed to defend their community elders.

I had the opportunity to view this advocacy as a member and community liaison of the graduate student group, the Native American and Indigenous Peoples Association. While I am also a long-time relation of the Miakan-Garzas, I can say that this issue was independently

brought to the top of NAIPA's agenda independently by the group's leadership team. The organization had been newly established in 2020, and advocacy on this issue proved a powerful mechanism for the students to come together. It essentially provided an early mission around which to organize, which created excitement, energy, and activism among our members. This effort also provided opportunity for an early collaboration between NAIPA and the undergraduate group, the Native American and Indigenous Collective (NAIC). Over time, the boundaries between these groups blurred to where we felt as two pieces of a single community.

NAIPA formed an advocacy sub-committee at the start of the Fall 2020 semester, which was specifically focused on the repatriation issue and would partner with NAIC on strategy. Among its efforts included an information and communications plan, building campus allies, and a letter signing campaign. This letter was released on September 23, 2020 and allowed both university affiliates and outside representatives to add their names as co-signers. It stated that the use of Indigenous remains in research was "...inappropriate and at odds with The University of Texas's intellectual obligations to its students, faculty, staff, and the greater Austin community that it serves." Additionally, it urged the following: "1) That the ancestral human remains are repatriated or returned to the Miakan-Garza Band for reburial without further delay. 2) A timely return of the ancestral remains, including a plan and timeline of how and when the institution plans to execute the aforementioned request. 3) A commitment by The University of Texas to publicly acknowledge ongoing settler colonial legacies and practices, and a commitment to their dismantling as part of a larger reevaluation of its approach to diversity and inclusion. 4) A commitment and plan by the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory (TARL) to develop open dialogue and mutual exchange with Indigenous community members and elders." Within weeks, this letter would collect four hundred and thirty-three UT Austin student

signatures, as well as signatures from twenty-one student organizations, and one hundred and eleven community members.

Involvement in this effort provided the students with a powerful sense of passion and, in some cases, personal connectivity. When I asked what the issue meant to her personally, Jennifer described a strong connection to her own Indigenous identity. She explained how the struggle of the Miakan-Garzas as a non-federally recognized tribe "...spoke to my own experiences [and how] we are in this together. It really grounded me; not only as a scholar but as a human being..." Several participants also spoke of the discomfort of attending UT Austin as an Indigenous person knowing it houses this problematic legacy. JW was troubled by "...living and going to class on a campus that's just kind of haunting [while] knowing that you're disrespected." She went on to say that it was important to take action for the sake of current and future Native students so that we do not "...let stuff like this slide."

The repatriation advocacy of UT Austin's Indigenous students continued to grow across campus. By mid-September, these efforts caught the attention of members of the President's Student Advisory Committee (PSAC), a student organization who serve to consult and advise university leadership on campus issues. On Saturday, September 19th, the Indigenous student organizations received an invitation from PSAC to present on this issue at their meeting with Interim President Jay Hartzell that coming Friday. The next several days were a flurry of activity as we worked to plan a thirty-minute presentation. This included zoom meetings every evening from Sunday through Thursday to decide on discussion topic, finalize a script, and then practice this script. This team of Graduate and undergraduate students put in a tremendous amount of work during an incredibly busy time of the year, but these efforts resulted in a polished, thought-out, and impassioned argument in support of repatriation.

The meeting was held at 9:00am on Friday, September 25, 2020. In attendance were representatives from PSAC as well as three representatives from the NAIC undergraduate group and six representatives from the NAIPA Graduate group. Those in attendance representing the administration included Interim President Dr. Jay Hartzell, Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students Dr. Soncia Reagins-Lilly, Interim Executive Vice President and Provost Dr. Daniel Jaffe, and Vice President for Legal Affairs Jim Davis. While this audience inspired plenty of nervousness among our team, our week of preparation allowed us to go into this conversation with a strong foundation and air of confidence.

Our presentation began with a land acknowledgement presented by a member of NAIC. This was followed by an opening statement by Nita. I then spoke about how this issue has impacted UT Austin's Indigenous student community, which was largely drawn from my dissertation research. JW followed this by discussing the university's relationship with Indigenous people and how this issue will make it difficult to retain and recruit Indigenous students and faculty. A representative of NAIPA then provided context on this issue by discussing the history of Indigenous grave robbing and then shared examples of how other institutions of higher education have are dealing with this issue. These examples included Texas State University, Berkeley, and Yale. A representative from NAIC then discussed the legal arguments and how NAGPRA allows repatriation for non-federally recognized tribes. This was followed by a representative from NAIPA framing this case within a global context and the United Nation's Declaration on Human Rights. I then discussed the importance of the Miakan-Garzas to our Indigenous campus community and how they serve as cultural connectors to students who may be far from home. A representative from NAIPA then discussed the struggles of UT Austin's Indigenous community and our need for support. Jennifer then outlined our

advocacy efforts and letter writing campaign with a subtle promise to continue this work.

Finally, a member of NAIPA shared closing remarks before JW offered a list of next steps.

Within half an hour, our team provided a clear, impassioned framework of not only the ethical and cultural justification for returning these remains, but critically, we also outlined why this issue proved so important to our campus community. Indigenous people are struggling on the UT Austin campus, and our message that day was that the university could help support this segment of its student population by supporting those Indigenous communities in the region who have long provided us support. The Miakan-Garza's message on the need for repatriation is the most important argument in this story. However, one should never underestimate the power of student voice. As described by Jennifer, "...I left [the meeting] with this sense that when we come together as Indigenous students from Abya Yala [the Americas]; from Turtle Island [North America], we can make admin listen to us. And that was powerful."

This meeting was held on September 25th at 9:00am. At 4:00pm, Interim President Hartzell sent a letter to Dr. Mario Garza of the Miakan-Garza band. In it, he stated: "We are committed to honoring your cultural and religious perspectives, while continuing to follow the established legal procedures outlined in federal law." He went on to describe that "...the university will promptly seek authority from the National Park Service to allow the remains identified in your letter to be reinterred. We plan to do so by requesting a recommendation from its Native American Graves and Repatriation Act Review Committee that would enable us to offer the remains promptly for reburial."

Moving forward

While first impressions of this text indicate a happy ending, as is often the case in higher education, bureaucracy and procedure have slowed resolution and dulled celebration. Little

action has been taken since the Fall of 2020, though the Miakan-Garza's remain optimistic. Dr. Garza shared that he is pleased with the appointment of Deb Haaland as the nation's first Indigenous Secretary of the Interior. Since NAGPRA is under the jurisdiction of Interior, he is hopeful that this will lead to repatriation policy more in-tune with the realities of Indigenous communities. More pertinent to the UT Austin case is a change in leadership. Effective January 16, 2021, Dr. Fred Valdez replaced Brian Roberts as the Director of the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory (The TARL Blog, 2021). Dr. Valdez is Indigenous faculty member from the university's Department of Anthropology, has extensive research in Mesoamerican culture, and is an affiliate of Native American and Indigenous Studies (The TARL Blog, 2021). Dr. Valdez has met with the Miakan-Garzas since his appointment, and while Dr. Garza questioned how supportive the university may be of an internal push for repatriation, both he and Maria Rocha expressed gratitude and hope due to Dr. Valdez's philosophy on repatriation.

Many questions remain about the future of Indigenous repatriation at UT Austin. However, it is clear that this experience has had great impact on our Indigenous student community. Jennifer described the NAIC and NAIPA activism as resulting in a "...beautiful network... created across territories and languages." JW discussed how this effort helped our group bond and that "...we've all grown together." This work pushed us and allowed the formation of relationships critical to our growth in Indigenous ways of being.

By engaging in activism on this issue, Indigenous students at UT Austin received critical training in activism, organization, communications, and leadership. The repatriation of the Miakan-Garza's ancestors allowed a powerful mission around which our student groups were able to organize and unite. One lesson learned from this is the degree to which having a purpose can serve as a catalyst for community building. Throughout it all, our team maintained focus on the

Indigenous values of respect, reciprocity, and healing. The Miakan-Garza Band of Coahuiltecas has proved a meaningful guide and source of inspiration.

Analysis

The University of Texas at Austin is a space of both great challenge and opportunity for Indigenous students. It is an institution that in many ways remains entrenched in the legacies of colonialism and White supremacy, and many participants voiced discomfort at the racialized atmosphere through which they must move. However, within UT Austin there exist many individuals, social groups, and departments which have proven supportive of the Native segment of the student population. Within these spaces, there are fascinating and powerful conversations taking place. The UT Austin Native Indigenous community may be small in numbers, but it has shown itself to be close-knit, critically supportive of its people, and in a period of great momentum.

This chapter has attempted to share stories of UT Austin's Indigenous community from the lived perspectives of its students, faculty, staff, and community relations. It has examined issues of Indigenous representation on campus and the challenges posed by minimal visibility. It then explored the Native American and Indigenous Studies program, including both its role as a hub for Indigenous relationships on campus and its status as a cross-hemispheric promoter of Native connectivity. Next it examined the challenges faced by Indigenous people on campus before providing an analysis of how the university supports this population as both a centralized entity and through notable units. Once these core issues of the campus community were laid out, the chapter expanded into a conversation of the interplay between UT Austin's Indigenous people and the wider region. This included its collaboration with multiple regional nonprofit organizations and a critical issue of remains repatriation around which the community coalesced

in the Summer and Fall of 2020. By interweaving these narratives and topics, this chapter portrays a community of great variation and simultaneous connectivity. Momentum for this small section of the university's student population is growing, and we must continue to work to ensure Indigenous voice matters in its future.

Improving Indigenous experience at UT Austin

Dr. Cárcamo-Huechante described how the "...challenge for non-indigenous higher education institutions is to provide a space for us to contribute what we can and to contribute to this environment." The sense gathered from student participants and my own experience is that our community is working hard to make such contributions, though there are few entities on campus in support of these efforts. However, the data shows several additional avenues to improve the situation. The first and most critical relies on the degree to which Indigenous relationships serve as a life raft on campus. It would be of great benefit to intentionally cultivate this phenomenon, which links to a suggestion provided by Dr. Walters where the university would build a program in order for experienced Native students to mentor those who are new to campus. He discussed how this could help address the problem of homesickness experienced by Indigenous young people at UT Austin by cultivating older students to be sources of trust and comfort. Interestingly, such a program exists at Queen's University and will be discussed in chapter six.

Another avenue for cultivating Indigenous connectivity for our students is by strengthening the campus' relationship to Indigenous people outside the Forty Acres. We know from student narratives that engagement with the Indigenous Cultures Institute and Great Promise for American Indians are important avenues for their identity development. Finding more opportunities for collaboration and for the campus to support these groups could prove an

important outlet for the future. For ICI at least, much of the future of this relationship rests upon the resolution of the repatriation case. The university following through on reburial would be a powerful sign that it respects Indigenous values.

The next recommendation for improving Indigenous experience at UT Austin is to improve our visibility. Several participants spoke about how it took years to find the NAIS program and that their campus experience dramatically improved once they did. For a Native student who feels lost among a sea of cultural disconnect, a campus powwow or Indigenous Cultures Week celebration can prove an important doorway into new relationships. However, events scattered throughout the academic calendar are only so impactful. Students such as JW, Tony, Santiago, Victoria, and Jennifer emphasized that the creation of a center of Native American and Indigenous studies or a major in the field would be important steps towards meeting community needs. Tony and Victoria also emphasized the need for staff at the university who are knowledgeable about Indigenous populations, the inclusion of which would likely correspond to the creation of these institutional structures.

The UT Austin Indigenous community is not short on either challenges or opportunities. In this period of momentum, there is a notable effort by its students and NAIS leadership to ensure that Indigenous values guide the future. As described by Tony, “Collectively I think that's what we're trying to do is just to keep carrying on that prayer and that work that has been done here into the future. We may not see it in our lifetime but it's that idea that we know that this will help those generations that are yet to come.” Such reflections of responsibility and reciprocity are central to the ethos of our campus Indigenous community. There is much work ahead, but the spirit and values of those presently guiding the way inspire great confidence.

Southeastern Oklahoma State University

“Education makes the difference in the lives of people. It changes what you are; what you can be; what you’ll become.” -Joy Culbreath, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

This chapter explores the experiences of Native Americans at Southeastern Oklahoma State University, a regional post-secondary institution centered in the post-removal homelands of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. The university benefits from a large Native American student population comparable to most state institutions across the country, and tribal culture is woven into many aspects of campus life. The university has significant representation from Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee, and several other regional Native American communities, and it has cultivated long-running, collaborative relationships with multiple tribal governments. Much of this chapter focuses on these relationships, which prominently highlight this study’s concern with a campus Indigenous community’s relationship with the wider Indigenous community in which it sits.

This topic is of particular interest to this case due to a long-diminishing level of student activity on the Southeastern campus and the heightened impact of the wider community on Indigenous student identity development. Native American culture is prominent in this part of the world, and the Choctaw Nation is the tribe with the greatest visibility. As described by study participant Dr. Marlin Blankenship, it is difficult to tell where the cultures of the university and the Choctaw Nation end and the other begins. The community building of the campus and the tribe are two parts of the same story, and I have therefore treated them as such through my research approach. This chapter relies heavily on administrative practitioner perspectives in order to understand the history and contemporary programmatic manifestations of this relationship.

This chapter will begin with a brief description of the participants interviewed for this portion of the study. It will then provide an overview of Southeastern Oklahoma State University (Southeastern), including its history and an analysis of its student population. The chapter will next explore important aspects of the culture on campus, including a growing focus in online learning and the visibility of Native American people. It will then discuss how the institution serves Native American students. This section will begin with a broad discussion on Native student characteristics as described by study participants. The assumption is that these perspectives will provide insight into the types of programs being developed to serve this population. This section will then focus on activities of the campus Native American Student Association, curriculum that has been developed for Indigenous populations, and a description of the activities of the Native American Institute, a campus office which serves as the primary hub for Indigenous activity at Southeastern. The final section of this chapter will explore the post-secondary educational efforts of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and how its cultural and economic initiatives have impacted both the university and the wider region.

Participants

The participants in the study are primarily composed of staff from both Southeastern and the Choctaw Nation. This combination allows for a focused insight into the nature of the long running partnership between the university and the tribe. There is unfortunately only a single student voice included in this chapter, as recruiting students proved challenging for this portion of the study. My efforts involved dispersing electronic fliers, emails, and outreach through the campus administrators and participants already involved in the study. My analysis led to several reasons for the minimal return from these methods. The first is that Native American students at Southeastern can be insular by nature, which will be discussed in the section of this chapter

devoted to student characteristics. Even as a member of the Choctaw Nation originally from these tribal homelands, I may not have had the cultural capital as an outsider to the university. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic negated my ability to visit campus, so there were no in-person opportunities to meet students and build relationships. Finally, the campus has been characterized by minimal student activity long before the pandemic, which makes it a challenging environment in which to connect through pre-established student relationships. The lack of student voice is disappointing, but it allows this chapter to focus instead and an administrative perspective on Indigenous community connectivity and the institutional partnerships which center in this story.

Among the participants from Southeastern is Dr. Marlin Blankenship, who serves as Executive Director of the campus Center for Student Success. This office sits over the Native American Institute in the university's organizational structure, and Dr. Blankenship has a long history of involvement with Indigenous issues on campus. He is a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and grew up in the region. Dr. Blankenship attended Southeastern as an undergraduate, left the area after college, and eventually returned to campus as a staff and faculty member. His contributions to this study provided both a fascinating view of the institution from an administrative perspective and great insights into Indigenous student success. The hours we spent philosophizing over Native education were a highlight of this experience.

Also representing a staff voice from Southeastern is Lauren Rowland, who serves as Director of the campus' Native American Institute. Director Rowland began her career in the K-12 public education system but described a growing appreciation for the relationship building and student impact that is possible in higher education. While she is originally from Durant, Director Rowland left the city in 2003 and returned in 2015. Since joining the Southeastern

staff, she has taken an active role in the planning and strategy of Native American initiatives on campus, including managing the staff of the Institute and coordinating the opening of the new Semple Family Museum of Native American Art.

The final administrative voice at Southeastern is Dr. Bruce King, who previously served in Director Rowland's position as head of the Native American Institute, which was then known as the Native American Center. I had the opportunity to speak with him on a visit to campus in March of 2017, which provided my first introduction to the important work being done in Native education at Southeastern. The lone student voice in this study belongs to Rebecca, a twenty-year-old junior in the university's nursing program. She is a member of the Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma and involved in the tribe's school-to-work program, which provides work experience in Native American focused job placements.

Representing the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma is Jim Parrish, a tribal elder who served as Executive Education Director and Senior Director of the School of Choctaw Language. He has since retired from these positions, effective July 2021. Director Parrish is a third-generation graduate of Southeastern and holds both an undergraduate and master's degree in education, as well as a school superintendent certification from the university. As a long-time resident of Durant, he was able to provide stories of the university ranging from attending basketball games on campus as a child to his time as an undergraduate in the early 1970's. My conversations with Director Parrish provided valuable insight into the Choctaw Nation's relationship with the university and how the institution connects to the tribe's educational mission.

Also representing the Choctaw Nation is Mrs. Joy Culbreath, retired Director of Education Programming for the tribe. Director Culbreath was a driving force in the building of Choctaw education programs during the tribe's economic expansion of the 1990's and 2000's.

She was able to share examples of collaborative efforts with the university, as well as insight into various Choctaw education initiatives. These included stories about the development of the official Choctaw language dictionary and the tribe's extensive efforts providing support for K-12 education in the region.

The final research participant in this chapter is Tim Tallchief. Mr. Tallchief is a member of the Osage Nation and a retired professor and administrator from the University of Oklahoma's College of Public Health. This role involved significant relationship building between university, tribal, and state entities as a response to the growing movement of tribal governments managing health services for their members. His inclusion is an opportunity to gain insight into the wider higher education landscape of Oklahoma. Additionally, his extensive experience working with Native American college students in the state has provided valuable insights into this population group.

Institutional overview

Southeastern Oklahoma State University (Southeastern) opened its doors in the summer of 1909 (Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2021). It was originally known as Southeastern State Normal School, and its founding purpose was to educate teachers for service in Oklahoma's public education system (Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2021). It has grown far beyond this original mission to now house fifty-one undergraduate majors and thirteen graduate programs. The Spring of 2020 saw 4,722 students enrolled through a combination of online and in-person courses.

My family lived a few blocks from the campus during my early childhood while my mother pursued her Bachelor of Science degree. The large majority of my uncles are also Southeastern graduates. I had the opportunity to return to the university in March of 2017 while

in the region conducting research and visiting family. The campus consists of approximately twelve blocks surrounded by a residential area to the South and West and mostly woodlands to the North and East. It is nicknamed the “Campus of a Thousand Magnolias” (Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2021), though it was too early in the season for them to be in bloom. However, the campus’ Redbud trees added some much-appreciated color to the grey Spring morning.

The majority of Southeastern’s buildings are red-brick and date to the mid-20th Century. It has more modern structures, such as the Student Union and the Admissions and Recruitment Office Welcome Center, but the heart of campus feels of higher education Americana. Southeastern’s football stadium is tiny compared to the Big 12 Conference schools, but its Department of Music boasts a top-quality recital studio. Also of note is the Native American Institute nestled near the center of campus, which I had the opportunity to tour. That day, the Institute and the Student Union seemed the only spots of activity on an eerily quiet campus. The cracked walkways are unfortunate reminders of the state’s educational divestment, but the red brick buildings fit perfectly into the green of an Oklahoma Spring. The campus is in need of upgrades but is unquestionably beautiful.



Illustration 4: Southeastern Oklahoma State University campus

Southeastern is located in the city of Durant, which sits just across the Red River border of Texas and Oklahoma. It is approximately ninety miles north of Dallas and one hundred and fifty miles south, southeast of Oklahoma City. It is a growing city of over 17,000 residents (Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2021). This growth is largely fueled by economic development from the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, which is the largest employer in the region (Dean, 2019). The tribe’s headquarters and its flagship casino are both located less than four miles from campus on the south side of the city. Durant sits in Bryan County, which is one of eleven counties making up the post-relocation Choctaw homeland, and Native American and Alaskan Native makes up 14.76% of its population (Social Explorer, 2019). The tribe has long had significant impact in shaping the culture and community of the region.

The state landscape

Higher education in Oklahoma has faced serious struggles over the past decade. Its funding has proven a low priority of the state government for years, which has resulted in large

budget cuts, the elimination of classes and programs across institutions, and a general stagnation in student growth (Hoke, 2019). Oklahoma's 2018 funding appropriation for public higher education was \$773.6 million, which was \$41.2 million less than what was appropriated in 2001 (Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, 2019). The state has been ranked 50th across the country in the percentage of change in state higher education support from 2012 to 2017 (Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, 2019).

These trends have proven a challenging environment for many colleges and universities, including Southeastern. However, while the state divests, many Native American nations have prioritized education funding. A recent study has shown that tribal governments had a combined \$12.9 billion economic impact on the state in 2017, including \$14,256,693 devoted specifically to education (Dean, 2019). Tim Tallchief shared a view as a long-time higher education professional that he has witnessed "...a lot more of our Indian youth coming out of high school and going to higher ed rather than just going out and getting a job. I think that the fact that the tribes are supporting our students so strongly... [is] increasing the number of our students that are coming out with degrees..." As will be discussed later in this chapter, Southeastern Oklahoma State University serves as an important vehicle in this trend.

Student population

4,722 students enrolled at Southeastern in the Spring of 2020, and among this group, 51% were first-generation students (Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2021). As described by both Dr. Blankenship and Director Jim Parrish of the Choctaw Nation, the university's student body has long been characterized by a high percentage of individuals who are the first in their family to attend college. The average student age is 28.2, and the university has a freshmen retention rate of 62.7% (Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2021). Dr. Blankenship

shared that the university's undergraduate population has seen a decline in recent years, which corresponds to an overall decline in enrollment among post-secondary institutions in the state.

Native American students represent 28% of Southeastern's student body, and it is ranked seventh in the nation for graduating this population (Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2021). Dr. Blankenship spoke about how the largest representation of Indigenous students are Choctaw, followed by Chickasaws and Cherokees. The Chickasaw numbers are largely the result of Durant sitting near the boundaries of the Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma, which has long-running cultural and historic ties to the Choctaws. As described by Dr. Bruce King, the cultures of these two groups have had the greatest impact in shaping this region of Indian Country. However, he emphasized that Southeastern's reputation as a hub for Native American education means that the campus is not limited to the regional groups and that it also hosts many Indigenous students from across the country.

Student retention was a topic about which several administrator participants spoke in-depth. Dr. King discussed how students of color tend to withdrawal in higher rates compared with White students, which he connected to perceptions among students that they do not have adequate support systems and have few individuals on campus with whom they can identify. Dr. King emphasized how this phenomenon is particularly prevalent among first generation students who face "unique obstacles" to post-secondary success. He discussed a cycle where new students experience a honeymoon period during their first weeks on campus. They are meeting new people during this time, the weather is pretty in Southeastern Oklahoma, and the academic rigor of coursework is still mild. However, after several weeks, students begin feeling the pressure of assignments; they may face financial trouble due to inadequate budgeting, or they begin feeling homesick. Dr. King described this as being a critical time for retention efforts

when he encourages staff to closely monitor students so that resources can be provided when needed. It seems largely due to such Native American specific services that the Native retention rate of 62.1% is slightly higher than the overall university rate of 61.8% (Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2021). While these numbers are extremely close, it is significant to see the rates of people of color higher than the overall average.

As with most institutions of higher education, the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 and 2021 has had a significant impact on the Southeastern campus. Due to the university's large focus on online learning, it was better positioned than some when switching to remote work. This fact also likely diminishes its role as an incubator for the virus, as fewer students have been concentrated on campus compared with previous decades. Dr. Blankenship noted that the university's confirmed cases "...have been relatively low," though he has had both students and staff members quarantine at different points during the year. When asked about his impression of the mood of students in relation to the pandemic, he described them as being "angsty" and "stressed out." Many college students across the globe, including myself, can relate to these descriptors.

Campus culture

All participants spoke of the Southeastern campus as being a comfortable space. Undergraduate student Rebecca noted an appreciation for its small size, which results in "...everyone knowing everyone else." She linked this to her ability to easily connect with fellow Chickasaw students, especially those in her program of study. A smaller, more intimate campus likely feels more welcoming to a student from the rural regions of Oklahoma when compared to the major universities in the state. Southeastern is unquestionably less intimidating than a campus such as The University of Oklahoma, which hosts tens of thousands of students.

However, its small student body of 4,722 contributes to certain challenges. As described by Director Lauren Rowland and Dr. Marlin Blankenship, one of those challenges is a significant dearth of social activity.

Director Rowland discussed how the campus' Native American Institute strives to build relationship-building opportunities for students. However, she noted that there are only "...a few students that trickle in... looking for social connections..." Director Rowland described how the Institute has grown largely "transactional" over time with students primarily utilizing its academic support services. She and Dr. Blankenship both noted that this social disengagement was not limited to its Native Americans but was common across the campus' population groups.

Social activities, student organizations, and campus events are typical routes for building university communities, but the impression given by Native American Institute staff is that only a small percentage of the university's student population engages in community building activities beyond the classroom. Considering this study's focus on community connectivity, this minimal student activity was a major point of focus in conversations with administrators. It would be easy to presume a correlation between the university's relatively small student population and its minimal campus activities. Fewer students likely result in fewer student groups. However, Dr. Blankenship described how the present circumstance has not always been the standard and that "...ten years ago, the university seemed bustling with activity and students compared to how it feels now." Director Rowland expanded on this by noting how the past two to three years have seen a particular "waning" of student activity.

One insight offered by Dr. Blankenship on this topic is that the "...economic pressure on students, which requires them to work while attending school," limits their engagement levels. He was referencing the high poverty rate of the region in which the university sits, but his point

also links to the fact that the campus' average student age is 28.2 (Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2021). Older students are more likely to work while pursuing their degrees and are more likely to live off of campus. On this point, Dr. Blankenship noted that once a student leaves the grounds, it is "...hard to get them to come back for activities and events." This trail of analysis expresses how the particulars of Southeastern's student body seem a major factor contributing to the stillness of campus life.

Another significant issue impacting Southeastern's minimal student activity is the degree with which it has invested in online learning. Approximately 50% of enrolled student hours are taken online, and there are twelve undergraduate majors that are entirely remote (Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2021). The university's investment in online education over the past decade parallels the time frame over which student activity has decreased, as noted above by Dr. Blankenship and Director Rowland, and therefore seems a primary contributor to this phenomenon. As described by Dr. Blankenship, "...if students are spending less time on campus, there is less opportunity to engage with campus culture." He then discussed how this changing environment requires the institution to consider new approaches to building community among its constituents and that it will need to reconsider its understanding of student cohesion.

It is interesting to consider this environment's impact on Indigenous students, who are deeply dependent on cultural connectivity for educational success. Bonds between family and community are particularly strong among Native American people (Brayboy, 2005). Prior research has shown that Native American post-secondary persistence is greatly impacted by high levels of family support, engagement with a campus' Native community, and the maintenance of spiritual practices (Youngbull, 2018). Since the typical university is not located near an

Indigenous land base, conversations on Indigenous higher education success are often concerned with those resources which allow Indigenous people to access or substitute these critical cultural needs on campus. An active student organization is one such support structure.

However, Southeastern Oklahoma State University is centered in a Native American land base. Its Indigenous students from the local region are able to engage with their culture by visiting home, cooking with their grandparents, and through the prominent visibility of the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations. This point was acknowledged by Dr. Blankenship through a story about visiting coffee shop in town where he "...looked over and saw a group of our Native students hanging out. I watched, and it dawned on me that they have created their own community outside the geographic boundaries of the university." By this analysis, an active Native American student community at Southeastern may be less critical to a healthy sense of identity for most students than it is for Indigenous students attending college in Austin, Texas or Kingston, Ontario.

Native visibility

Southeastern Oklahoma State University has long embraced its connection to Native American culture and the regional tribal communities. This is evident by the fact that its first official yearbook from 1913 is titled "Holisso" (Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2021), which translates to "book" in the Choctaw language (Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Education Department, 2016). This title is evidence of the great impact the tribe has had on the university from the beginning, even in comparison to other Indigenous communities served by the institution. The yearbook carried this title into the late 1940's when it was renamed the "Savage" after the school's former mascot.

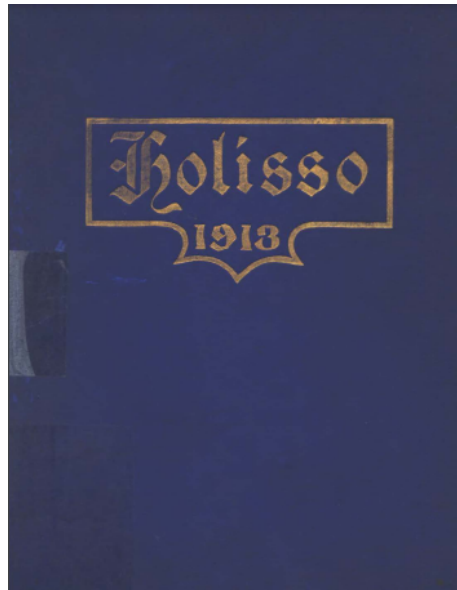


Illustration 5: 1913 Southeastern yearbook
(Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2001)

Native Americans have had a significant presence on campus from its beginning, and though the growth in Native American focused services greatly expanded in recent decades, it has long provided opportunity for community building among Indigenous students. Director Parrish described how there was not yet a university center for Native Americans during his time as an undergraduate in the 1970's, but that he "...ran around with a lot of kids that were Native American..." and that "...being a small university, you pretty well know almost everybody..." This analysis links to the previous discussion of how the region's Indigenous heritage bleeds into campus culture and that Native connectivity has traditionally existed more as a default than an intention. However, the intention has grown more distinct over time, which paralleled the expanded economic and cultural impact of tribal governments in the region.

Dr. Blankenship shared that a focus on Native American culture at Southeastern is more significant now than during his time an undergraduate student. He stated that he did not have

“...any awareness of anything Native at Southeastern...” at that time. In comparison, he spoke about how there is now a “...thread of Native that exists under the surface across campus in a way that it didn't 20 years ago.” He described this transition as beginning in the mid-2000’s with the designation of a Native American book collection in the library. Since that time, the push for Native American visibility experienced “waxing and waning,” but that the success of these efforts grew through the promotion of campus cultural events and the increased involvement of Native students in program planning. Over time, Dr. Blankenship stated that “...the Native world, the Native community, [and] the Native population became a center point on campus.” This Indigenous cultural prominence can be seen today in the university’s promoted events, curriculum, communications, and iconography.

An interesting and nuanced example of Native American representation at Southeastern can be found in the story of its mascot, which was the “Savage” for most of the university’s history. Director Rowland described positive memories of this mascot being accompanied by a “tomahawk chop” and singing at sporting events. However, the “Savage” name was changed in May 2006 in response to a 2005 decision by the National Collegiate Athletic Association. This decision prohibited the display of abusive racial, ethnic, or national origin mascots at all championship competitions (KTEN, 2006). In response, university officials chose the new mascot name “Savage Storm.” In 2014, the university added the character of a buffalo named “Bolt” to the mascot as the result of a university-wide competition (Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2021).



Illustration 6: Southeastern Mascot

The discussion on Southeastern’s mascot fits within an ongoing, mainstream conversation about cultural iconography in sports. The term “savage” is particularly problematic, as it has long been used to designate Indigenous people as being culturally, technologically, and spiritually inferior. It denotes a subhuman existence with a legacy intertwined in colonialist insidiousness. Its use as the mascot of Southeastern is a meaningful reflection of the emphasis on Native American culture at the university throughout the majority of the 20th Century. However, there are more powerful and positive ways in which Indigenous people are visible on campus.

An exciting recent development in Native American cultural promotion on campus was the opening of the Semple Family Museum of Native American Art in the Fall of 2021. Planning the facility was largely managed by Lauren Rowland, Director of the Native American Institute. She described this as an example of how Native initiatives on campus often route through her office due to the cultural association, but she still stressed that this project was a communal effort across departments and staff. This was partially due to the fact that the university did not have funding “...tucked away to be able to get this off the ground...,” so a large part of her effort required organizing professors and students as volunteers. In this sense, the coordination of this project was an act of community building. The result will be a

permanent home for an extensive collection of Native American Art (Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2021) which Director Rowland hopes will inspire future generations of Indigenous creators.

With 28% of its student body made-up of Native Americans, Southeastern provides remarkable opportunity for community connectivity for this population compared with most public higher education institutions. This is reflected in a statement from Rebecca about how she interacts with other Natives every day. She noted familiarity with all of the fellow Chickasaw students in her program and that she works with several other Native students through her campus job. Dr. Blankenship shared a related insight that Indigenous engagement is far from being limited to Native-specific programming and curriculum. Instead, one may interact with Native Americans who are advisors, tutors, faculty, and staff involved in various fields across the university. It is an institution embedded in the heart of Indian Country, which can be seen reflected in both subtle and significant ways throughout campus.

Serving Native students

Dr. King noted that the wider community of Southeastern Oklahoma State University is greatly supportive of the Native American presence on campus and that the institution's leadership had made relationship building with the tribes a "top priority" during his time as an administrator. Some notable manifestations of Indigenous outreach include curriculum focused on Native issues, the growth of the campus' Native American Institute, and initiatives aimed at retention and academic support specific to this population. Southeastern's emphasis on cultivating Native American students can be seen in the strategic messaging of its website, which uses various Indigenous iconography and prominently provides information on its tribal relationships. These messages signal to Native applicants that the university is attuned to their

people and cultural values. As noted by Rebecca, this perception that Southeastern offered "...a lot of opportunities for Native American students..." was an important reason that she chose to attend the institution.

The tribes also do a great deal to serve and support students during their time at Southeastern. These activities are made possible due to the strong relationships cultivated between the university and the regional Native American governments. For example, Rebecca shared that she first visited the university during her junior year of high school while attending a camp managed by the Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma. The experience was positive enough that it contributed to her decision to attend the institution.

Rebecca's story shows why it is critical to develop positive associations between Indigenous communities and educational institutions. Related to this is a discussion with Director Parrish who spoke about how the Choctaw Nation places great emphasis in recognizing the accomplishments of students. This is done through awards and honors in order to reinforce a sense of pride in their work. He spoke about how it is critical to let students know that the university and their tribes care about them and their success. Since feelings of community connectivity are critical to Indigenous retention (Youngbull, 2018), such efforts can serve as a powerful means of improving Native educational opportunity.

Native student characteristics

There were several conversations during my research at Southeastern focused on characteristics of the institution's Native American students. The assumption in this approach was that the practitioners involved would have insights into different cultural aspects of this segment of the student population, which would allow greater understanding of how it could best be served. It is critical to note a respect for variation and that not all Indigenous students fit into

the descriptions below. These are simply patterns of cultural identity. While academic inquiry would typically have these descriptors bounded to this segment of the study, several of the topics parallel insights of the wider Intertribal community I have learned in my years working with Indigenous people. Therefore, my stance is that these cultural characteristics are neither universal nor limited to the Southeastern campus.

The first characteristic to discuss which has implications for practice is that Native Americans can often be reserved by nature. This descriptor came from Dr. King who went on to discuss how Native students tend to be quiet and avoid eye contact until they feel comfortable with a relationship. Dr. Blankenship made a similar note that Native students often need to gain confidence and that they sometimes need "...somebody to give them permission to be themselves." This can be a challenge in a university setting because, as described by Director Parrish, "...sometimes our kids are so timid that they don't know what they don't know." This echoes a point by Dr. King that Native students often will not communicate when they are struggling. He then noted that it critical for staff to build relationships and trust in order to effectively serve this population, but that these relationships take time and that students "...need to know a little about staff before they open up."

Linked to this reserved nature is the challenge of Native students navigating academic culture. This issue was discussed by both Dr. King and Dr. Blankenship as a critical issue of which practitioners need to be aware. Dr. Blankenship linked it to the need to help Native students build organizational skills around assignments and due dates. Dr. King discussed the importance of knowing the cultural cues and social norms of academics. An example he provided was an experience with a guest lecturer who attended one of his classes. The students used his first name when asking questions, as they were accustomed to doing. The individual

held a doctorate degree, and after he left, Dr. King advised his students to use this title in future situations as this was the norm in academic culture.

A second characteristic important to understanding Native American students is the already discussed importance of family. This is a topic that features prominently in both the literature and practice. As described by Dr. Blankenship, "...the strength of the Native community is community..." and this begins with the home. Rebecca, for example, noted that she travels the hour trip to her family home in Ardmore, Oklahoma at least once every two weeks.

In discussing the importance of family, Tim Tallchief noted that institutions which aim to effectively serve Native American students must be conscious and accommodating of these traditional support systems. He described them as being "...essential to help these kids succeed." According to Dr. King, this kind of cultural consciousness involves staff being "...respectful of the role of family and elders in the lives of these students." He went on to say that the institution must work to support students as they transition onto campus, especially if they come from a "...more traditional family life." He stated that there are many students who grow depressed due to missing their family, but "...if you can get students through [their first] four to six weeks, we've got them..."

In discussing the importance of family and its impact on practice for Native Americans, Dr. King shared a powerful story about a former student. He once had a young man enrolled in his English class who he described as being clever, a good writer, and able to "...see things in a unique way." The student was attending the university as a non-degree seeking student, and after the two grew familiar, Dr. King asked him why. His response was that he did not want to

attain a degree because his parents did not attend college, and he did not want them to think that he believed himself better than his family.

The critical role of family in Indigenous identity makes Southeastern a powerful educational opportunity for the Native American land base on which it is centered. As described by Joy Culbreath, retired Director of Education Programming for the Choctaw Nation, members of the tribe have grown more comfortable with leaving the region over time to attend other universities. However, there remains an instinct to stay due to both the pressures of family and discomfort with the unknown. Having our youth leave for their education is a means of strengthening our people, but it can also lead to population and cultural dispersal.

In the modern era, approximately half of the Native American population resides in urban areas and half in rural areas (Diller, 2011). Since reservations and tribal lands are among the poorest regions of the country (Sandefur, Rindfuss & Cohen, 1996), growing accustomed to a university town and its economic opportunities can limit the desire to return home once a degree is completed. Education broadens the horizons of Native youth and provides them new, exciting opportunities. However, the concentration of an Indigenous population is a powerful promoter of identity. It allows us to easily share our traditions, to regularly engage with and learn from our elders, and to take part in community activities. While cultural preservation is stronger when we stay together, the individual tribal member may benefit from seeking opportunities outside of our homeland. This is challenge with no easy answer, but the success of Southeastern Oklahoma State University mitigates the dilemma. It is a powerful bridge between educational opportunity and cultural connectivity.

Native American Student Association

This chapter has already discussed how campus activity is minimal at Southeastern and that the efforts of student organizations have declined significantly in recent years. However, the campus does host an Indigenous student group, the Native American Student Association. Dr. King described the goal of the organization as helping to foster "...a family feeling through culture," and Rebecca spoke of several positive experiences with the group. This included going to its cookouts and social gathering, which have been a way for her to make several friends on campus. She described the NASA members as being "...good influences on each other."

Dr. Blankenship discussed efforts to keep the organization active during the COVID-19 era by having the group meet remotely. However, the group had been struggling with recruiting new members prior to the pandemic's onset. He described the group as being on "hiatus" during the summer of 2020 due to a lack of student involvement. Dr. Blankenship stated that it is a constant goal of the Native American Institute's staff to find ways of engaging students with the organization, but he also expressed concerns that the organization had grown too "administratively driven." Dr. Blankenship and Director Rowland both affirmed that it would be better to have students guide the mission and efforts of the organization, which would allow Institute staff to limit themselves to supportive roles.

Conversations with these two campus leaders featured regular examinations about why the student group struggled with momentum considering the high representation of Native Americans on campus. We often circled back to the previously examined point that student activity on campus has waned across the board over the past decade. There is also the question on the importance of a Native American campus community when an institution is centered in a tribal land base. This point was referenced by Director Rowland when speaking about several

students who stopped coming to NASA meetings because they found other opportunities for cultural connection. In her estimation, a Native student organization is "...not enough to bind people together here because everybody's Native... This culture isn't new; it's all around us."

Native curriculum

Academics at Southeastern offers several avenues of study specific to Native American populations. Many courses and programs were designed in collaboration with the region's tribal governments. Among these is the Master of Early Intervention and Child Development with an emphasis on Native populations. The program, which is 100% online, offers training in advocacy and support for Indigenous children with a focus on educational, medical, behavioral, and developmental oversight (Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2021). The university was originally founded as a teachers' college, and this program shows a continuation of this mission in alignment with the needs of Indigenous people in the region.

An additional degree to highlight is Southeastern's Master of Science in Native American Leadership. This degree is also 100% online and is designed to equip students with culturally relevant knowledge and skills to work in tribal administration (Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2021). Its coursework focuses on organizational leadership, tribal sovereignty, and contemporary issues facing Native populations (Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2021). The program's promotional webpage describes how its curriculum was designed by tribal leaders, which was affirmed by Director Parrish who spoke about how the Choctaw Nation's education department collaborated with university administrators on its design and implementation. He also stated that the tribe encourages its employees and citizens to enroll in the program. It is notable that the program's webpage features a video where senior tribal employees promote the degree. This includes a message from tribal Chief Gary Batton, who

serves as the elected executive leader of the nation (Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2021).

Finally, it is worth highlighting Southeastern's minor in the Choctaw language. The program is composed of 18 hours of coursework and was developed in collaboration with the Choctaw Nation. Director Parrish described how the tribe's language division, which resides within its Education Department, actually has staff employed by the university to teach in the program. This represents not only a fascinating collaboration between the Choctaw Nation and Southeastern but also a powerful means of cultural revitalization for Choctaw people. Language is an important avenue through which Indigenous identities are being revitalized across the globe (Niezen, 2003), and many tribes throughout Indian Country have joined this movement. The Choctaws and Southeastern have built a meaningful partnership in this field, and as described by Director Parrish, the tribe is "...very thankful for that relationship... and being able to teach [our language] to these students."

The Native American Institute

Much of the Indigenous programming at Southeastern is coordinated through the Native American Institute. Lauren Rowland, who serves as the office's Director, describes it as being "...a catch-all for anything and everything Native..." at the university. Dr. Blankenship described it as a "Native version" of the campus' Student Union due to the variation of services it offers. He went on to discuss how the Institute's mission "...is to find ways to help Native students from Southeastern Oklahoma dream about goals they have never thought of before... The hope is that maybe we introduce people to new possibilities, and maybe there are ways for them to bring that back home to build Southeastern Oklahoma and change what this part of the state looks like."

According to Dr. Bruce King, former Director of what was then called the Native American Center, the success of the office is significant considering that a concentrated effort in cultivating the campus' Native American students is a fairly recent development. It only began in 2003 with the hiring of a single Native-specific advisor. These efforts were strengthened in 2005 with the award of the federal Native American Excellence in Education Grant, which provided funds for academic support, tutoring, testing, fees, and the development of an additional staff position. This grant was then refunded in 2009.

Dr. King went on to describe how this momentum grew significantly in 2011 when the university received a Title III grant in order to better support Native American students. This two-million-dollar award was applied over the next several years and allowed for, among other initiatives, the hiring of two additional advisors to work with Native American students. He also noted that the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations have been incredibly supportive of the university over the years by providing funding for the office's efforts. In describing Southeastern's momentum with Indigenous populations, Dr. King stated that "...it started small, then we had a little bit of luck with tribal support [and] state and federal grants, and we just kept a good thing going.

The Native American Institute is located in a red brick building near the center of campus. It is decorated in Native American art, and while the setting largely feels like an office, Dr. Blankenship and Director Rowland both spoke about efforts to cultivate it into an environment that is comfortable for students. This is reflected in comments from Rebecca, who described the Institute as being a welcoming and open environment. Dr. Blankenship expressed a hope for the future that the Institute would be able to transition part of the office into a "living room" space where students feel comfortable spending time between classes.

The activities of the Native American Institute focus broadly on promoting cultural activities on campus, helping students navigate their university experience, and promoting community and relationships. The office also hosts a computer lab, which provides free printing to all students. Native cultural activities on campus range from arts and events to a stickball tournament, which is a game traditional to the Mississippian culture that has grown in popularity across Indian Country in recent decades. Dr. King described stickball as being "...a fun way to show-off a little bit of Native culture without a classroom or textbook."

A significant focus of the Native American Institute is providing support to students trying to navigate their time on campus. Fifty-one percent of Southeastern's enrollees are first generation college students (Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2021), so this support system can be highly beneficial for those who are less able to rely on family advice about higher education culture and procedure. The services offered at the Institute include advising on enrollment, academics, finances, and academic counseling services. Dr. Blankenship described how the office has grown more proactive over the past several seasons to ensure students are taking care of their administrative goals. He provided the example of reminding them to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid forms early in the season rather than waiting towards the end of the semester. Director Rowland noted positive results from this effort and that "...for the first time... we don't have the same rushes... and seasonal influx..." due to student outreach being more "intentional."

An additional goal of the Native American Institute is connecting Indigenous people across campus and in the wider community. Dr. Blankenship discussed several individuals who built friendships and support systems through the office's activities. Rebecca shared that she formed a strong friendship with a Choctaw student through her engagement with the Institute and

that this individual went on to become a roommate. Dr. King noted that the office has been used as a space for meetings, movie nights, and other social activities and that the staff was encouraging of these programs. However, Dr. Blankenship acknowledged that the Institute no longer sees "...a massive amount of students that show up for community activities..." which is linked to the previous examination of the minimal student activity on campus. Institute staff seem genuinely interested in building these opportunities, but their efforts are set in an incredibly challenging environment.

As described by Dr. Blankenship, approximately three-quarters of Southeastern's Center for Student Success employees have Native American heritage. This was described as a benefit to students who may be more willing to connect with university administrators who share their cultural background. Dr. Blankenship also described the Institute's employees as being closely-knit with the feeling of a family. Similar comments were made by Rebecca when noting the positive environment of the office.

When discussing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Institutes staff, Dr. Blankenship described them as being "exhausted" and "...doing the best that they can..." He shared an appreciation for the flexibility allowed by working remotely and expressed optimism about new ways to incorporate this technology in the future. He described the situation as helping to "...propel us into the 21st Century..." However, the question of remote learning circled our conversation back to the topic of the already minimal student activity on campus, to which Dr. Blankenship acknowledged the value of being present on campus for both students and staff.

Structurally, the Native American Institute is led by Director Rowland. It exists under the Center for Student Success, which is managed by Dr. Blankenship. His office then reports to

the university's Vice President for Tribal Affairs. Within the Institute are two full-time Native Retention Specialists who advise students, provide them assistance with their tribal government scholarship applications, and are involved in recruitment. These team members will also connect with students to provide support if they receive reports that they are struggling academically.

The Institute also houses employees from both the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations. The Chickasaw representative is in the office one day per week and focuses on supporting Chickasaw students who are applying for tribal scholarships and services. The Choctaw representative is on campus the entire week. Her role is to manage the tribe's First Year Initiative, a student retention program which will be discussed later in this chapter. She also assists students with Choctaw scholarship applications, hosts information sessions on available services, and generally works to connect them with tribe. Finally, there is the Choctaw Language specialists housed in the office, which helps bridge the Choctaw language minor program to the language initiative of the tribal government's education office.

The presence of these three tribal government representatives on campus is a testament to the trust and collaborative efforts built between Southeastern and the Native American nations in the region. They represent a small piece of these long-running partnerships as seen through the larger picture of university operations, but their impact on Indigenous students is profound. As described by Director Parrish of the Choctaw Education Department, they are a means of showing these students that the tribe cares about them and their success. The following section will further explore these relationships. It will begin with an overview of the regional tribes and their impact on the state. It will then focus on the higher education efforts of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and the long-intertwined educational mission of the tribe and the university.

Relationship to the wider Indigenous community

Native American culture is prominently woven into the character of Southeastern Oklahoma. As described by Director Parrish, “Oklahoma history is Native history, and Native history is Oklahoma history.” Dr. King shared a similar sentiment in his statement that “having Native culture [in other parts of the country] is unique. Here it is just an everyday part of life.” Specifically concerning the Southeastern campus, Dr. King described Native culture as “blending in” to the environment.

The following section will examine the impact of the wider Native American cultural landscape of the region in which the university sits. This will include a discussion on the long-standing relationships formed between the campus and tribal nations. It will begin with a brief affirmation from participants of the benefits of positive relationships between the institution and the tribes. It will then focus on the educational philosophy and post-secondary programs of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, which due to its proximity to campus, has enjoyed a particularly strong connection with the university. This discussion will include an examination of its economic impact in the region as well as a deep dive into its educational programs, focusing on those higher education projects with specific and meaningful impact on Southeastern.

Tribal relationships

This study focuses on Indigenous community building in higher education settings. However, previous sections outline a dearth of student activity on campus, which leads to a finding that Native American students are likely acquiring cultural identity development through their family and community relationships in the wider region. As the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma is the primary force for communal identity development among Native people in this part of the world, both on and off campus, it is beneficial to provide an in-depth exploration of its

efforts. However, it is critical to note that the Choctaws are not the only tribe with strong connections to Southeastern.

As described by Dr. Blankenship, the campus' close proximity to the Chickasaw and Creek Nations has helped ensure their strong representation among the student body. He also shared that Cherokees represent a significant percentage of Indigenous students on campus. This likely relates to the group being the largest federally recognized tribe in the country (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021) in conjunction with the relatively close proximity of the tribe's land base in northeastern Oklahoma. These facts reflect an interesting point from Dr. Blankenship that Southeastern's Native student representation is a "...mini version of the culture of our area..."

The tribes have had great impact on the region, both culturally and economically. Dr. Blankenship discussed how the efforts of the Choctaws and Chickasaws in building local infrastructure have benefitted not only their tribal members but also the wider community. He described the economic expansion of the tribes since the 1990's as having "transformed" the region by building "...access in these rural communities." Director Culbreath echoed these statements by describing Choctaws as being the "...best neighbors. We'll build the roads that you drive on. We'll help you with education.... We do all kinds of things to help this part of the state..."

The benefits of these investments have great impact on higher education, as evident from Dr. Blankenship's statement that Southeastern "...lives and thrives [through] our tribal partners." Director Culbreath spoke about how educational systems in Oklahoma are in "trouble" due to funding cuts. Because of this challenging landscape, she described the Choctaw Nation's investment in education as making "...a world of difference..." for all people in the region. This

connects to a point made by Tim Tallchief about how tribal investments have translated to a broader Indigenous impact on Oklahoma's higher education systems. Examples he provided included the development of Native language programs at numerous universities as well as curriculum developed on Indian health care as a result in the growth of tribally run hospitals and clinics. Mr. Tallchief spoke about how such Indigenous-aligned changes in Oklahoma's higher education landscape have moved things "...in the right direction to help our Indian students..." and that institutions have developed a greater understanding of the value of this segment of their populations.

The culture and programs of Southeastern Oklahoma State University fit within this wider trend, and there are numerous ways in which it has benefitted from its long-running tribal relationships. Native governments have assisted in building dormitories on campus (Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2019); regularly offer internships and professional learning opportunities to its students; and improve access to enrollment for their members through scholarships and grants (Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, 2019). Dr. Blankenship also described how the university's close relationship with the Choctaw Nation has proven a useful talking point for recruitment. This is due to the fact that the tribe is the largest employer in the region, and he is able to promote multiple programs at Southeastern as catalysts towards tribal employment both during and after school.

The presence of Native American nations on campus provides several additional benefits to the university's students. Dr. King described how the Chickasaw and Choctaw representatives housed in the Native American Institute have proven a crucial means of support for members of these tribes. If a Choctaw or Chickasaw student is struggling, these staff members are direct access points to tribal governmental offices which are able to provide scholarships, student

clothing allowances, and funding for technology. The degree to which these services and relationships are promoted is an important form of messaging to students. This is evident in a statement from Rebecca about how a perception of having many Native American “opportunities” at Southeastern led to her choosing the institution for her bachelor’s degree. In fact, her first time on campus was as a higher school student attending a camp at Southeastern hosted by the Chickasaw Nation. Such efforts by the region’s Native American tribes are a powerful means of ensuring that our young people know that they belong in higher education spaces.

The student body of Southeastern Oklahoma State University is twenty-eight percent Native American (Southeastern Oklahoma State University). These numbers are remarkable for a state institution, or for any post-secondary institution not specifically managed by a tribal government. This level of enrollment by Indigenous people is directly linked to the investments of the tribal governments in the region, and as described by Dr. King, maintaining trust and positive relationships with the tribes will be critical to the institution’s future. While there are several tribal nations contributing to this positive campus environment, the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma shares a particularly close connection due to its historic ties and its proximity to campus. The following section will focus on this relationship. It will begin with a brief overview of the tribe and its relationship to Southeastern. This will be followed by a discussion on Choctaw education efforts and those tribal programs with a concentrated impact on the campus.

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

Members of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma are descended from the great Mississippian chiefdoms that dominated the interior of North America between the tenth and

sixteenth centuries (Lambert, 2007). Our original homelands are in central Mississippi and Alabama, but the majority of the tribe relocated to Southeastern Oklahoma in 1830 as a result of the first Indigenous mass removal forced by the United States government (Lambert, 2007). However, many Choctaws stayed behind and eventually formed the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. As described by Choctaw elder and author Tim Tingle, "...the Trail of Tears divides us as a people into those who stayed in Mississippi and those who left for Oklahoma. In the eyes of many, we are two people... However, the heroics of survival, in the celebration of our miracle of being, we are seeds of a common thistle" (Tingle, 2003).

The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma is one of 567 federally recognized Native American tribes in the United States (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2016). It exists as a sovereign nation within the nation (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2016) possessing its own constitution, election system, and three branches of government (Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, 2021). These include the office of the Chief which serves as tribal executive, the Tribal Council, and the Tribal Court. The Choctaw Nation's service area covers approximately 11,000 square miles of southeastern Oklahoma and divides eleven counties into twelve voting districts, each with a representative on the Tribal Council (Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, 2021). The Choctaw Nation today is the third largest recognized tribe in the United States with nearly 200,000 members (Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, 2021). Our people are characterized by great variations in class, wealth, skin color, educational backgrounds, and political views (Lamber, 2007).

The Choctaw Nation experienced a significant economic expansion during the latter 20th Century (Lambert, 2007), which is critical to understanding its contemporary educational efforts. The tribe's business portfolio now includes construction, commercial real estate, economic and community development, agriculture, tourism, retail, gaming, hospitality, restaurant franchises,

printing, e-commerce, and wildlife management (Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, 2021). The Nation also manages several travel plazas, casinos, community centers, hospitals, and tribal service centers throughout the region (Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, 2021). Our community's experience fits within a wider trend in recent decades of tribal governments growing sophisticated and focused on self-sufficiency (National Congress of American Indians & The Department of the Interior Office of Indian Energy and Economic Development, 2007). In regions under their jurisdiction, many tribes provide firefighters, paramedics, and police officers to rural communities that otherwise could not support these services (Romero & Brewer, 2020). The Choctaw Nation's economic impact is significant in understanding the higher education experience of southeastern Oklahoma considering the degree to which post-secondary education has been a low funding priority of the state legislature over the past decade (Hoke, 2019). A recent study has shown that tribal governments had a combined \$12.9 billion economic impact on the state in 2017, including \$14,256,693 devoted specifically to education (Dean, 2019). In many regards, the tribal nations are the brightest points in a part of the world that has long been characterized by economic struggle.

Choctaw education

As described by Joy Culbreath, retired Director of Education Programming for the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, "Education makes the difference in the lives of people. It changes what you are; what you can be; what you'll become." During one of our conversations, Director Culbreath told a story about being asked in 1997 by former Choctaw Chief Greg Pyle what the tribe can do to help the children of southeastern Oklahoma. Her response was: "We have to educate them." When Chief Pyle asked how long that would take, Director Culbreath responded that it would take "... a generation. You have to start with the four-year-old child

[and] by the time they finish college, you will begin to see a change in the people of southeastern Oklahoma.” Director Culbreath went on to say that the region is now seeing a return on this investment, and that for the first time, tribal departments are able to hire Choctaw doctors, lawyers, businesspeople, teachers, and administrators.

The Choctaw Nation today manages numerous programs housed within its Department of Education. These include a head start program, K-12 focused initiatives, an adult education program, a vocational development program, and a tribal language program (Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, 2016). Concerning post-secondary education, the Choctaw Higher Education Office processes approximately 5,000 scholarships every semester, according to Jim Parrish, Executive Director of Choctaw Education. He described how this funding can be critical for Choctaw students in southeastern Oklahoma, which experiences high rates of economic disadvantage. Director Parrish shared that it is important for the tribe’s education offices to connect with students at an early age so that they know about available opportunities when they begin planning their college experience. An example of the services provided include the fact that tribal representatives will assist not only with its internal funding applications but also ensure that students are correctly navigating the state resources available. In the words of Director Parrish, “We just try to give them that little glimmer of hope” by helping students through these complex systems.

In addition to grants provided through the Choctaw Department of Education, the tribe also creates scholarship opportunities for Choctaw students through its Chahta Foundation. Finally, it should be noted that the tribe manages an employee scholarship program, which allows several thousand dollars of educational expenses to be reimbursed by the tribe. These programs are the direct result in the tribe’s economic expansion over the past few decades.

Director Parrish described an appreciation for the fact that Choctaw leadership have emphasized educational investment as a top priority during this period as a means of empowering the community.

Beyond funding, the tribe has additional programs focused on improving post-secondary access for its members. This includes Choctaw College Connect, a college fair that allows Choctaw students and families the opportunity to meet with officials from universities across the globe. Dr. Parrish shared that over seventy institutions have participated in this event, including Ivy League schools of several from the East and West coasts of the United States. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, this event had gatherings of over four hundred attendees at the Choctaw Convention Center. The program has since moved virtual, which has allowed Choctaw students from outside the state opportunity to participate.

The Choctaw and Southeastern relationship

The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma maintains relationships with numerous universities across the state. According to Director Parrish, this includes major institutions such as The University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University as well regional institutions such as Carl Albert State College and Eastern Oklahoma State College. However, he described Southeastern Oklahoma State University as being the "...primary institution for our kids..." and that, "...for most people in southeastern Oklahoma, this is our university." Director Parrish discussed how having the institution located in the heart of the Choctaw Nation provides a great fit for Choctaw educational programming and that tribal students are able to attend college while maintaining the financial and communal support available by close proximity to their families. Because of this, he believes that the partnership between the Choctaws and the campus has been "fantastic" and feels like a "...next-door neighbor relationship." Director Parrish also noted an appreciation that

the Choctaw Chiefs and Tribal Council have long recognized the importance of education for our people and that this connection can be seen tracing back to the beginning of the university.

Director Parrish discussed how both the tribe and the university engage in efforts to cultivate this relationship. He described direct connections with key staff between the institutions and that their teams often get together on either the campus or at the tribal headquarters. Dr. Blankenship spoke about one such meeting in June of 2020 in order for the university's incoming president to meet officials of the tribe. He described it as feeling comfortable and that there was a relaxed, collaborative, and fun atmosphere at the gathering. Beyond staff collaborations, the two institutions also create opportunities for each other to engage with their respective wider communities. This includes the university setting up an information booth at the annual Choctaw Labor Day festival and having tribal representatives attend university events, such as the Native American student graduation ceremony. As described by Director Parrish, these kinds of interactions "...build on our relationship, and it's been good for Native American kids..." to see that partnership.

The Freshmen Year Initiative

Among the most significant Choctaw programs housed at Southeastern Oklahoma State University is the Freshmen Year Initiative. As discussed by Director Culbreath, post-secondary retention has been a significant focus issue for the tribe for several years. She shared that the quality of a student's first semester on campus has been identified by the Choctaw education team as being critical to their long-term college success. Director Parrish expanded on this topic by noting how, in the past, approximately half of all Choctaw students on campus would withdrawal before their sophomore year. Through extensive research, including a research partnership with Oklahoma State University, the tribal education office discovered that

relationship-building and opportunity for cultural connectivity were central to the likelihood of student persistence. According to Director Parrish, many Choctaw students left school because they were not making friends nor becoming involved on campus. This topic is closely linked to the previously discussed issue of Indigenous loneliness in higher education settings. Director Parrish spoke about how feeling disconnected from family can prove particularly challenging for Choctaw students, so it is critical to find a means to help this population build new relationships while attending school. He stated, "...if we can connect you to other students and connect you to the Choctaw Nation, then maybe that will help that burden."

The Choctaw Nation's First Year Initiative (FYI) was born from these findings. Its goals are to "...create a community among Choctaw students, their college campus, and [Choctaw] staff wherein freshmen students are empowered to make informed decisions and develop academic and life skills to become confident, proactive, and accountable participants in their college education" (Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, 2021). The effort is managed by a First Year Experience Coordinator who is employed by the tribe but offices in the campus Native American Institute. According to both Director Parrish and Dr. Blankenship, this position works in close partnership with various university and tribal administrators in support of Choctaw students.

Director Parrish described the various means through which the FYI program aims to connect Choctaw students with each other and with the tribe. One particular goal is to foster relationships between freshmen and older students who know better how to "maneuver" around the university. FYI also hosts events throughout the year which provides opportunity for Native students to meet socially. The program offers administrative support by helping students complete their financial aid applications, and it occasionally brings human resources representatives from the tribal offices onto campus to provide students information on future

Choctaw employment. Director Parrish shared that it is important to not only provide practical assistance through these programs but to also let students know that there are others, including their tribe, who care about their success.

According to Director Parrish, this concentrated effort in relationships building has led to great success. After five years of the program, there is now an eighty percent rate of retention for Choctaw students between their freshmen and sophomore years. This success has led to the FYI program expanding onto the campuses of both Carl Albert State College and Eastern Oklahoma State College (Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, 2021). Director Parrish described the FYI program as one of the most important projects coordinated by the tribe's education department and that it has proven a powerful example of what is possible for Choctaw students.

Choctaw language curriculum

A final story to share which emphasizes the collaborative and mutually beneficial relationship between the Choctaw Nation and the university focuses on the Choctaw language program. Use of our peoples' traditional language remained common in southeastern Oklahoma through the latter 20th Century, but there were concerns of it being lost with the passing generations. The tribe has therefore engaged in a concentrated effort in language revitalization since the 1990s. Director Culbreath described how there were tribal members in the beginning who were against developing a language program, as they believed the language belonged to the first speakers. However, the program moved forward, and by 1998, the University of Oklahoma began offering a single class on the subject (Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, 2021).

Today, approximately 1300 students are learning the Choctaw language through fourteen tribally managed Head Start centers, two elementary classrooms, and forty-three public high schools within the eleven counties of the Choctaw Nation's jurisdiction (Choctaw Nation of

Oklahoma, 2021). College students are able to acquire language credits in Choctaw at Southeastern Oklahoma State University and Carl Albert State College (Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, 2021). The Southeastern program is the most extensive, offering a minor in the Choctaw language through eighteen hours of coursework. Director Parrish described how his staff in the tribal language office worked closely with university officials in the development of this curriculum.

This collaborative effort between the university and the tribe has resulted in great benefits for both. The university has been able to develop a specialized curriculum which appeals to an important segment of their student community. Meanwhile, the Choctaw Nation has an opportunity to promote and preserve their culture. One practical benefit to the tribe described by Director Parrish is that the Choctaw language program at Southeastern is an avenue for training their instructors, as several of his staff in the tribe's Education Department are Southeastern graduates who completed the eighteen-hour Choctaw minor.

Southeastern's Choctaw curriculum is a remarkable example of a state agency and tribal partnership. However, it is not the first such collaboration concerning language. Director Parrish shared a story about the development of a teacher education program for Choctaw speakers in the 1970's, which provides a fascinating insight into the natural connectivity between the tribe and the university. In the middle of the 20th Century, there remained a significant portion of Choctaw children who began elementary school unable to speak English. Choctaw was the language spoken in their homes and their primary form of communication. As a response, Southeastern's education department began a concentrated effort to recruit Choctaw speakers in order to train them as teachers able to serve this population. These individuals would

then have the language skills and educational training needed to work with students in small, rural communities in Eastern Oklahoma such as Broken Bow, Rattan, and Talihina.

Several decades later in the 1990s, the tribe began its efforts in language revitalization by opening an office within its Education Department. However, the office needed to be staffed by individuals with a very specific skill set, with specializations in both education and the Choctaw language. This led to the hiring of four individuals who participated in Southeastern's Choctaw speaking educator program from the 1970s. After decades of service as public-school teachers, they began working for the tribe on language education. This situation was made possible because the university recognized a need decades ago for individuals with a select cultural knowledge. The regional Native American community provided the cultural knowledge, the university provided the educational training, the public school system of the region benefited from decades of culturally competent education, and the tribe gained a powerful knowledge set which contributed to their cultural preservation efforts.

The partnership between Southeastern Oklahoma State University and the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma is long-running and marrow deep. Their stories have been intertwined since the university's founding, and the two institutions continue to find new, creative ways to promote and strengthen the other. This may take the form of language program development and student retention efforts, but it can also be seen in glowing reflections from all participants about the tribal representation on campus. Southeastern is a powerful example of what can be accomplished through positive, collaborative relationships between a state agency and Indigenous communities.

Analysis

Southeastern Oklahoma State University has a long and meaningful story to tell concerning its relationship to Native American people. It is an institution struggling in the face of state divestment in higher education, and in this wider context of austerity, Indigenous communities have proven to be among its greatest allies. The university benefits from a dedicated staff, a talented faculty, and several programmatic areas attuned to Native cultural values. Its high representation of Indigenous students attests to its success in cultivating and supporting this population. Southeastern is an institution characterized by both great challenges and great opportunities, and its greatest strength may perhaps be the long-running relationships it has developed in Indian Country.

This chapter has attempted to provide insight into Indigenous experience at Southeastern. It began with a description of the participants interviewed, followed by an overview of the institution. This included an analysis of its history and current student population. The chapter then discussed important aspects of campus, including the impact of a growing focus in online learning and the visibility of Native American people and culture. This was followed by a discussion on how the institution specifically serves Native American students, including an examination of this population's common cultural characteristics, an overview of the campus' Native American Student Association, and a dive into curriculum that has been developed which specifically focuses on Indigenous populations. The section then turned to the activities of the campus' Native American Institute, which serves as the primary hub for Indigenous activity. The final portion of this chapter focused on the post-secondary educational efforts of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, which has been deeply connected with Southeastern since the university's founding in 1909.

In discussing Native American student success, Dr. Blankenship framed his mission in consideration of the future. He stated: “When you make decisions, ask how they will impact the next seven generations.” Director Culbreath expressed a similar sentiment that the tribe should remain steadfast in strengthening educational opportunities long into the future and that doing so would help transform this part of the world. Both institutions are making great strides, and their partnership is an important example of what can be done when Native Americans and a state institution build a trusting, collaborative, and mutually respectful relationship. Education is a powerful catalyst towards Native American community empowerment, and Southeastern Oklahoma State University provides many important learning opportunities about how this work can be done well.

Queen's University

This chapter explores the experience of Indigenous people at Queen's University, a medium sized post-secondary institution located in Kingston, Ontario. The university has been characterized over the past several years by significant institutional intentionality towards cultivating this segment of the campus community. Queen's is an old, wealthy institution, which one participant described as being "stodgy." However, its efforts, outreach, and various campus resources provide a powerful example of what can be accomplished when higher education makes meaningful efforts to include people of color.

This chapter will begin with an institutional overview, including an analysis of the university's history, its legacy concerning colonialism, and its current student body. It will then move into a discussion on the intentional efforts to cultivate Indigenous community on campus. This will begin with a description of Canada's 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission report, which served as a major impetus for progress. The chapter will then explore various issues related to Indigenous representation on campus before focusing on specific academic programs concentrated in Indigenous issues. It will next dive into various social and cultural factors impacting the quality of Indigenous experience on campus before examining resources available for this population. The chapter will close with a brief analysis.

The research participants interviewed for this chapter are primarily composed of university administrators. There is also one faculty member and one individual who serves in both staff and student roles. The minimum student involvement is unfortunate, as this perspective would provide valuable insight into program experience as a supplement and comparison to administrator perspective. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in lower levels of student engagement on campus. This combined with the fact that the study

grew into full momentum during Queen's summer session made student recruitment difficult. Increasing student voice would be a valuable opportunity for future research.

The faculty voice included in this study is that of Nathan Brinklow, a Lecturer in the Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures. He also serves as Associate Head for the department's Indigenous Studies program. Brinklow self-identified as Mohawk and has been with Queen's for over six years. He described an appreciation for being part of the institution's momentum towards Indigenization and expressed interest in finding opportunities to build community on campus through his various roles and committee work.

Representing an administrator perspective is Kandice Baptiste, who serves as Director of the Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre. Baptiste is Mohawk from the Tyendinaga Territory. She has been with the university since February of 2018 and represents one of the senior voices of Indigenous leadership on campus. Her interviews provided valuable insight into campus activities as well as engaging analysis of the wider issues to consider as an Indigenous-serving higher education practitioner.

Also providing an administrative perspective is Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill, who leads the Office of Indigenous Initiatives as Associate Vice-Principal for Indigenous Initiatives and Reconciliation. Hill is a Clan Mother of the Mohawk Nation from the Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory. Prior to the creation of the Office of Indigenous Initiatives in 2017, she served in the Faculty of Education and assisted with initial research into the school's Indigenous Education Program. She then served for seven years as Director of the Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre. Hill shared that her Mohawk name, Kanonhsyonne, means "she's making a house." This is one framing through which she understands the relationship building that centers her work at Queen's.

The next participant is Jessica Parks, who serves in the position of Indigenous Advisor with the Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre. Parks is Wolf Clan Mohawk from Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory and has been an employee at Queen's since September of 2020. She shared that the limitations of the COVID-19 pandemic had not yet allowed her to visit campus by the time of our conversations. Her inclusion therefore provides a valuable, fresh perspective on the university landscape.

Representing Indigenous serving staff members who are embedded in academic units are Melanie Howard and Martha. Martha is both a student and a staff member in the College of Education and is involved in coordinating the school's Indigenous Teacher Education Program. She is also a graduate of this program. Martha self-identifies as being of mixed Kanyen'kehá:ka (Mohawk) and French heritage. The final participant is Howard, who is Mohawk and serves as Director of the Indigenous Access to Engineering program. She attended Queen's as an undergraduate in the early 1990s and was therefore able to provide valuable insight in how the campus Indigenous experience has changed over time.

Institutional overview

Queen's University was established on October 16, 1841 by a Royal Charter issued by the British monarch (Queen's University, 2021). As pointed out by Kandice Baptiste, the institution is older than the nation of Canada, which became self-governing in 1867. It is a university of great wealth and prestige and was described by Baptiste as being among the elite post-secondary institutions in the country. It has been ranked as the 419th in Best Global Universities and 16th in Best Global Universities in Canada (U.S. News & World Report, 2021)

Queen's history and location signify it as a historical focal point of colonialism, and this problematic aspect of the institution was discussed by nearly every study participant. The

university's very name, which was inspired by Queen Victoria, is a symbol of this colonialist legacy. However, Queen's University is remarkable in the level of institutional intentionality aimed at transforming the campus into a space of equity and inclusion. The recent decade has seen a dramatic shift towards the cultivation of an Indigenous community through both policy and the tireless efforts of administrators.

This shift has largely been in response to a 2015 report by Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which was established by the government in response to a class-action settlement concerning the nation's former Indian residential school policies (Government of Canada, 2021). While the full impact of this report across Canada is unclear, Queen's University has embraced its recommendations. The results have been an expansion of Indigenous-serving policies, including a separate admissions process for Indigenous students; the creation of the Office of Indigenous Initiatives; the expansion of Indigenous academic opportunities across departments; and a significant increase in staffing in Indigenous-supporting roles. These efforts show Queen's to be a powerful example of how a campus Indigenous community can strengthen when an institution is intentional about its cultivation.

Queen's University is located in the city of Kingston, Ontario, which is approximately half-way between Montreal and Toronto (Queen's University, 2021). It sits on the shores of Lake Ontario near the entrance to the St. Lawrence River. Kingston has been named by the British Broadcasting Corporation as one of the top five university towns in the world (Queen's University Undergraduate Admissions, 2021), and the campus poses a striking image with its mix of historic and contemporary architecture reflecting on the lake. It sits on the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishnabee peoples (Queen's University), and as described

by Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill, the institution aims to privilege these cultures while also encouraging representations of other forms of indigeneity.



Illustration 7: Queen's University Campus (Queen's University, 2021)

Queen's University is home to over twenty-five thousand undergraduate and graduate students and over five thousand faculty and staff (Queen's University, 2021). 95% of the student population is originally from outside Kingston, and the campus has representatives present from over one hundred countries (Queen's University, 2021). 45% of undergraduates qualify for financial support (Queen's University Undergraduate Admissions, 2021), and the university has an undergraduate completion rate of 93% (Queen's University, 2021). As described by Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill, the vast majority of first-year students live on campus. The 2019-2020 Academic Year saw enrollment of four hundred seventy-three self-identifying Indigenous students, representing approximately 1.9% of the total student body (Queen's University, 2021).

Legacy of colonialism

Nearly all institutions of higher education have managed to forget, erase, ignore, dishonor, and disrespect the truth that they reap benefits from their positions on the ancestral homelands of Indigenous people (Lipe, 2018). Queen's is no exception, and the campus

continues to struggle with the ongoing legacy of colonialism. However, it seems a campus that embraces conversations about its problematic past. As described by University Senate Chair Daniel Woolf in a 2017 ceremony marking the institution's 175th anniversary, "The Queen's community can and must change the narrative. By taking steps to ensure that Indigenous histories are shared, recognizing that all students can benefit from Indigenous knowledge, and by creating culturally validating learning environments, we can begin to reduce barriers to education and create a more welcoming, inclusive, and diverse university." (Queen's University, 2021).

While it is significant that this statement was made at such an important celebration, it is also notable that acknowledging Queen's role as a colonialist entity was a comfortable topic for most all participants. Kandice Baptiste spoke about how the "...bones of those [colonialist] structures are still there [and] still impacts us today..." and Martha stated that "...there's a lot of decolonization that has to happen..." at the university. A specific example of the cultural disconnect between Queen's and Indigenous values was provided by Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill. She shared how human resources at the university only recognizes three days of bereavement leave, which can include two extra days when travel is required. However, her community's traditions require ten days when a relation passes away. She affirmed that she would take the appropriate leave when needed but expressed frustration at the implication that it should be taken without pay based on a western understanding of grief.

Direct forms of racism were also a concern expressed by participants. Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill discussed multiple incidents of targeted racism on campus in recent years which were directed towards its Indigenous population and other people of color. Martha also acknowledged these incidents, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Kandice Baptiste linked the university's colonialist legacy to White supremacy and expressed concern about how both the institution's leadership and student body remained overwhelmingly White. Queen's University

is an old, wealthy, elite institution, and White dominance is often aligned with those characteristics in the world of higher education. This was problematized by Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill when discussing the “privileged” nature of the university and the degree to which it enrolls multiple generations of families. She described changing this culture as being a “big challenge.” However, there are signs of change, as expressed by Melanie Howard when discussing how the representation of diverse populations has gradually improved on campus since her time as an undergraduate in the early 1990s.

The challenges are big, but work is being done to cultivate change. Queen’s is remarkable in the degree of cross-campus intention in the work of decolonization. Kandice Baptiste discussed the prevalence of these conversations and how institutional staff is “...at a point where we have done all the trainings...,” but she framed these efforts around the question of how to transform them into systemic change with long term benefit. Baptiste acknowledged that there were not any units that were “...knocking it out of the park...” when it comes to indigenization, but she did recognize that several corners of campus have made great strides.

Institutional intentionality

The past decade has seen remarkable effort across Queen’s University to transform into an institution supportive of Indigenous people. This includes the opening of the Office of Indigenous Initiatives and a major expansion of the Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre, but it also includes the growth of Indigenous-serving staff embedded in several academic units. Indigenous student advisors can be found in the departments of engineering, education, business, law, medicine, and health sciences. The university has a separate admissions process for Indigenous applicants as well as funding opportunities specific to this population.

These policies are significant examples of Queen's effort to cultivate an Indigenous population, but participants also discussed several smaller ways in which the university is attempting to honor Indigenous values. One such topic is its efforts to address the history of Native land and Indigenous space. Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill spoke about an ongoing land acknowledgement project where plaques are being placed on major buildings across campus to recognize the region's first peoples. On a similar note, Martha discussed the university's decision to remove the name "Sir John A. Macdonald" from the law school building due to Macdonald's problematic history as an early governmental promoter of harmful policies towards Indigenous people. Martha expressed appreciation for the degree to which Indigenous communities were consulted in this process and expressed hope that the law school's new name might be associated with Indigenous culture.

These are some of the many ways in which Queen's University has steered towards Indigenousization. Nathan Brinklow described the current environment as being an exciting time for the institution where "...you can see the good things happening..." Brinklow also expressed appreciation for the number of advocates across campus in support of these efforts. All participants indicated momentum at Queen's University concerning Native issues, and most all indicated that a government report from 2015 served as the main catalyst towards this phenomenon. The following section will outline this document and its impact.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Queen's University's institutional intentionality towards Indigenous community cultivation has largely been guided by a national report in 2015 from Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This opinion was independently mentioned by several participants, including Jessica Parks, Nathan Brinklow, Kandice Baptiste, and Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill.

The formation of the Commission was a response to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, which was the largest class-action settlement in Canadian History (Government of Canada, 2021). Its purpose was to help facilitate reconciliation among the former students, families, and communities impacted by Canada's historic policy of state-forced cultural assimilation through residential schools (Government of Canada, 2021).

The Commission's six-volume report was released in 2015 and included ninety-four recommendations (Government of Canada, 2021). The document was accepted on behalf of Canada by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Government of Canada, 2021). It states that "Reconciliation is a process of healing of relationships that requires public truth sharing, apology, and commemoration that acknowledge and redress past harms." (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2021). It acknowledges the long-held, harmful policies towards Indigenous people which aimed to "...eliminate Aboriginal governments; ignore Aboriginal rights; terminate the Treaties; and, through a process of assimilation, cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada." (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2021). It calls for the creation of "...a more equitable and inclusive society by closing the gaps in social, health, and economic outcomes that exist between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians." (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2021). It also expresses support for Indigenous "...cultural revitalization and integrating Indigenous knowledge systems, oral histories, laws, protocols, and connections to the land..." (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2021)

Reports such as these are common from western governments. They are often more about making statements than actually implementing change. However, the leadership at Queen's University decided to embrace these ninety-four recommendations, providing a

powerful example of what can be accomplished for people of color through a combination of policy and activism. A meaningful example of the university's embrace of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is the fact that its Chairperson, Murray Sinclair, has been appointed as Queen's fifteenth Chancellor (Queen's Gazette, 2021). Sinclair is Anishinaabe and a member of the Peguis First Nation and is a long-time advocate for Indigenous people in Canada (Queen's Gazette, 2021). He assumed the role of Chancellor on July 1, 2021 (Queen's Gazette, 2021), which Nathan Brinklow expressed great excitement about. He described Sinclair's appointment as being a "huge get" and "impossible to underestimate."

Queen's University responded to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report by establishing a task force to examine its recommendations (Queen's University Undergraduate Admissions, 2021). The group's goals included the development of proposals to support Indigenous students, staff, and faculty across campus and to create a "welcoming culturally validating learning environment" (Queen's University Undergraduate Admissions, 2021). The task force's final report, *Yakwanastahentéha Aankenjigemi; Extending the Rafters*, outlines 25 recommendations for sustained institutional change (Queen's University Undergraduate Admissions, 2021). They include strengthening relationships with Indigenous communities; promoting a deeper understanding of Indigenous histories, knowledge systems, and experiences; and creating a campus that values and reflects Indigenous histories and perspectives (Queen's University Undergraduate Admissions, 2021). It recommends strategies to support the recruitment, admission, transition, retention, and graduation of Indigenous students, as well as the recruitment of and retention of Indigenous faculty and staff (Queen's University Office of Indigenous Initiatives, 2021). According to Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill, it also directly led to the

creation of the Office of Indigenous Initiatives and her position as Associate Vice-Principal for Indigenous Initiatives and Reconciliation.

As noted, several participants discussed the impact of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Queen's task force's recommendations on campus. Nathan Brinklow described positive feelings towards Indigenization on campus and that it is more than "red-washing" due to the institution making significant financial investments in institutional change. He referenced the opening and expansion of Indigenous-serving offices and the increase in staff specific to this population. Kandice Baptiste described the task force's push as being significant in building recognition that the work of supporting Indigenous people should not just be limited to offices such as the Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre. She expressed appreciation for the fact that several units across campus have taken up this cause through staffing and curriculum decisions. Baptiste described the task force's recommendations as helping to "spark" people into considering how they could be implemented in their own programs.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has greatly influenced the trajectory of Indigenous experience at Queen's University. Nathan Brinklow described it as a "framework" that has allowed the institution a path to push forward. It has been embraced by leadership, administrators, and students, and its impact can be seen in numerous ways from the changing of building names to the increased space of the Four Directions Centre. The Commission's report is a dense governmental document that could have been brushed aside, but Queen's University made the decision to treat it with respect and attention. The impact of this decision has been a profound empowering of this long-overlooked segment of the campus community.

Indigenous representation

The 2019-2020 Academic Year saw enrollment of four hundred seventy-three self-identifying Indigenous students at Queen's University, representing approximately 1.9% of the total student body (Queen's University, 2021). While this percentage is small, the campus has seen growth in Native representation over the years. Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill described a significant increase in Indigenous students and staff compared with when she first began at the university in the 1990s, as she was one of only two Indigenous people in the Faculty of Education at that time. Melanie Howard shared a similar experience. She spoke about how "...being an Indigenous person on campus [today] is very different from when I was an undergrad..." twenty-five years ago. She described feeling at the time like the only Native person on campus. In 1995, Howard began working in a new role at the university focused on Indigenous recruitment. She noted that the past several decades have allowed the cultivation of an Indigenous student population to the point that they have a "...much greater presence on campus..." and have a visible community with which to engage.

Queen's sits on the lands of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe people. According to Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill, these cultures' protocols, ceremonies, and languages are privileged at the university. She described how her office invites "...knowledge keepers and elders from many other nations..." but the elders in residence at Queen's are Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe. This approach is a powerful means of connecting the Indigenous campus community with the lands and traditional heritage of the region.

Hill discussed how Queen's Indigenous students represent many diverse communities and that it is important to honor and respect the spectrum of Native experience on campus. She went on to describe how approximately one third of the Indigenous student demographic is from

urban settings in Ontario between the Toronto-Montreal corridor. Another third is urban from outside Ontario, and the last portion are from rural communities. Approximately ten percent are from reservations, according to Melanie Howard. Hill also noted that the university's Indigenous staff are primarily Mohawk and that the campus has significant Inuit representation.

My conversation with Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill around Indigenous representation at Queen's eventually waded into an examination of Indigenous identity. She discussed in depth about Individuals she has known who do not come from a federally recognized community and how this phenomenon can impact identity development. Hill shared that one of the topics discussed regularly among Queen's Indigenous community is the importance of connecting with community. As she described, "...it's not only about who you claim, but who claims you." Her point echoes of how essential relational ways of being are to Native life.

During her time working at Four Directions, Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill would often have students say that they did not come to the center because they felt they were not "Indian" enough. Most Indigenous students at Queen's are urban-based, and many do not speak their traditional languages or have had a high level of cultural engagement. This would prompt Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill to emphasize that the Centre is still available to them, whether they want to engage with and learn about their culture or if they simply want to make use of its tutoring and counseling services. The college years are a critical period for identity development and provide a powerful opportunity for cultural engagement. Though not all students take advantage of the available resources, Queen's has done a great deal to build the structures and opportunities for those seeking various levels of cultural connectivity.

Indigenous self-reporting

Tracking Indigenous representation at Queen's University relies on student self-identification. Students with Indigenous ancestry are able to submit self-identification information at any point during their time as a student (Queen's University Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre, 2021). According to Nathan Brinklow, this is the same case for faculty and staff. Brinklow also expressed curiosity about the disconnect between the actual number of Indigenous students on campus and those that self-report.

Self-identifying ensures that Indigenous students are provided with information on Indigenous services at Queen's and helps the university enhance its programs and resources (Queen's University Undergraduate Admissions, 2021). This portion of a student's information can only be accessed by select staff at the Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre and in the Office of the University Registrar (Queen's University Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre, 2021). As described by Director Kandice Baptiste of Four Directions, their team will connect with incoming Indigenous students early through email. Their goal is to ensure students are aware of available resources and to assist with the admissions process when requested.

Indigenous admissions

One of the most significant tools used by Queen's University to cultivate Indigenous students is a separate admissions path for first year, full time Indigenous undergraduates. The primary benefit of this pathway is additional administrative support from the Queen's Indigenous Community Outreach Coordinator (Queen's University Undergraduate Admissions, 2021). Candidates seeking admission through this route apply through the Ontario Universities' Application Centre (Queen's University, 2021), but they must still meet the general admission requirements for the program in which they are applying (Queen's University, 2021). The

number of students admitted each year under this policy is determined by a review of the university's annual enrolment plan and consultation with various faculties and schools (Queen's University Undergraduate Admissions, 2021).

The existence of the Indigenous student admissions process provides both practical and performative benefits to Native cultivation. Its prominence in admissions promotional materials is an important signal to Indigenous applicants that the university values their presence. Its actual function provides critical administrative support to students who may be unfamiliar in navigating bureaucratic systems. The students benefit and various departments of the university benefit, which is evident by communications from the School of Medicine admissions material. It describes "...the critical shortage of Indigenous physicians in Canada and the need to educate more Indigenous physicians to serve as role models and address the health care needs of Indigenous people" (Queen's University Undergraduate Admissions, 2021).

The Indigenous admissions process is a remarkable representation of Queen's University's intentionality in cultivating Indigenous students. Its benefits can be seen in the fact that first year applications among self-identifying Indigenous students has steadily risen over the past several years. They have gone from 273 in 2015 to 391 in 2019, which is the most recent year with accessible data (Queen's University, 2021). This growth is likely the result of many different factors, and the direct impact of the Indigenous admissions process on these numbers would be an important topic for further research. However, this policy fits within a wider effort of institutional intentionality that is showing clear signs of success.

The "Playing Indian" scandal

A final topic to explore in relation to Indigenous representation at Queen's University is a controversy from the summer of 2021 in which the Indigenous heritage of multiple faculty

members was challenged. An anonymous report was published on June 7th and amended on June 10th (Greenfield, 2021) which accused four professors from different departments and two affiliated community members of falsely claiming Indigenous ancestry (Flaherty, 2021). The report challenges the legitimacy of one First Nation claimed by a faculty member; references the lax membership standards of another First Nation in which faculty are members; and notes the absence of evidence that another faculty member is a citizen the nation they claim (Greenfield, 2021). The report challenges the university to be more intentional about its role in Indigenous recognition politics and argues that "...providing white individuals with positions reserved for Indigenous persons harms actual Indigenous peoples," (Flaherty, 2021).

The response from Queen's University was swift. It challenged the anonymous reports findings and state that it "...supports its Indigenous faculty and staff, and community partners and the communities to which they belong, and its Indigenous Council – all of which have been targeted by these malicious allegations," (Flaherty, 2021). It described the report as being "misleading" and containing "factual inaccuracies." Finally, it noted that "The university respects and trusts the Indigenous protocols used to identify those it considers Indigenous," (Greenfield, 2021).

Also notable to this case is the wider response of the Indigenous academic community. On June 14th, 108 Indigenous scholars from across Canada and the United States released a letter responding to Queen's University's statements on the scandal (Greenfield, 2021). Titled "Collective Indigenous scholars' statement on identity and institutional accountability," the document challenged the university's dismissal of the issue. It criticized the "...concerted and strategic efforts by colonizers to eliminate and 'replace' native peoples disposed through genocide..." which characterizes the "stories" of colonial states in relation to Indigeneity

(Greenfield, 2021). The letter makes note that institutions have financial and legal incentives for overreporting Indigenous hiring, and it asserts that it "...is unacceptable for universities to simply use an honour system when it comes to verifying the legitimacy of claims made by any faculty, staff or student claiming to be Indigenous," (Greenfield, 2021).

Conversations concerning the legitimacy of Indigenous identity is a topic that is important for all corners of academia, but as described by Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill, "Queen's is the eye of the storm right now." Due to its recent appearance, it is unclear how this issue may impact the long-term cultivation of the Indigenous campus community. Institutions have a responsibility in their hiring and representation practices, but many are underequipped to manage the complex world of Indigenous recognition. There are communities on Turtle Island which have never been federally recognized but which are legitimate in their Indigenous ancestry. There are individuals who have blood recognition but who have no real connection to Indigenous peoples, and there are people with neither who will claim Native connectivity out of ego and self-promotion. Wading through these waters requires great caution. To do so effectively, institutions of higher education must trust in the process of Indigenous self-determinism and maintain ongoing dialogues with Indigenous communities.

Academics

Queen's University offers students numerous areas of study in over fifty departments across campus (Queen's University, 2021). Among these are several concentrations specifically concerned with Indigenous issues, including a Bachelor of Arts in Indigenous Studies, the Aboriginal Teacher Education Program in the Faculty of Education, a Master's in World Indigenous Studies in Education, and a Master of Arts in Indigenous Policy and Governance (Greenfield, 2021). The institution also provides support programs for Indigenous students in

the schools of law, nursing, medicine, and engineering and applied science (Greenfield, 2021). Many of these programs are new to or have been significantly expanded in recent years.

As described by Dowd & Bension (2015), providing opportunity for diverse students requires that educational programs, curricula, and systems be designed with an awareness of the meaning students give to their interaction with the institution. Queen's university has made this endeavor a priority for Indigenous populations. Both through central intentionality and significant contributions from individual units, the institution has made great strides in building an academic system with many streams of opportunity for this segment of its student population. The following section will highlight a selection of these streams.

There are several academic programs across campus which may not offer specific majors in Indigenous issues, but which do provide significant concentrations of Indigenous-related curricula. The Faculty of Law, for example, offers courses in Aboriginal Law, Aboriginal Child Welfare, First Nations Negotiations, and Bias in the Criminal Justice System (Queen's University Undergraduate Admissions, 2021). There is also the department of Kinesiology and Health Studies, which has been involved for years with Indigenous communities on diabetes prevention programs, according to Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill. Each provide valuable insight on Indigenous populations and training opportunities for Indigenous practitioners.

Another concentration of Indigenous curriculum to highlight is Indigenous language learning at Queen's University. According to Nathan Brinklow, a faculty member specializing in language, the university has been offering coursework in Mohawk and Ojibwe for over a decade. He describes these courses as being popular with the student body, resulting in the student capacity of these courses being maxed-out each semester that they are offered. Brinklow shared that the majority of his language students come from the departments of Education and

Global Development Studies, and he estimates that approximately fifteen percent of attendees are Indigenous.

In discussing language curriculum, Nathan Brinklow spoke in depth about the power of language in the development of Indigenous identity. One example he offered is how the Indigenous students in his courses typically set together, which allows them to "...find each other and build their own little community at their desk." He shared a perception that learning Mohawk for Mohawk students can be an important source of comfort as a reminder of home. Brinklow also offered insight into the impact of language for his personal development. He stated: "For me, that identity development is really rooted in finding language, learning language and all the places that leads. It leads into ceremony; it leads into story; leads into community, all these different places." This description provides a powerful example of the intersection of higher education learning and Indigenous community cultivation.

Indigenous Studies

Beginning in Academic Year 2020-2021, Queen's University offers an undergraduate, interdisciplinary degree in Indigenous Studies. The program is housed in the Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures. According to Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill, students are able to take part as either their primary major or as a minor. The program is designed to pull together a range of offerings from across fourteen departments concerning Indigenous First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples with a focus on history, culture, experience, and language (Queen's University, 2021).

The interdisciplinary approach of the program is designed to develop a broad knowledge base on Indigenous cultures, spirituality, social systems, history, language, and contemporary issues (Queen's University, 2021). Example of course offerings from the 2020-2021 academic

year include: Beginning Anishinaabe Language and Culture; Introduction to the Indigenous Arts of North America; Economics of Indigenous Communities; Indigenous Women, Feminism and Resistance; Aboriginal Law (Queen’s University, 2021). A new program such as this takes time to develop connections and cultivate a faculty base for cross-departmental coursework. While Queen’s University benefits from a decade-long effort of improving Indigenous-related curriculum, Nathan Brinklow acknowledged that there is still a need to increase the number of Indigenous faculty needed for the program. Fortunately, early signs show the university as being invested in its success. As described by Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill, “...it’s taken us a really long time to get to this point...” but the Indigenous Studies program seems on the precipice of creating great opportunities for Indigenous learners.

Indigenous Teacher Education Program

One of the long-running Indigenous serving academic pathways at Queen’s University is the Indigenous Teacher Education Program (ITEP). Beginning in 1991, the program provides opportunity for future educators to specialize in Indigenous education while also qualifying graduates for the Ontario College of Teachers certification (Queen’s University Undergraduate Admissions, 2021). The program is especially suited to Indigenous students in Education, and while non-Indigenous students are invited to apply, priority is given to Indigenous applicants (Queen’s University, 2021). The program’s several decades of expansion is a testament both to the need for Indigenous expertise in the Canadian education system but also of the university’s commitment to this segment of the state’s population.

In discussing ITEP, Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill shared that she worked in the university’s Faculty of Education in the early 1990s and was involved in its initial research and program design. She described how the early iterations of the program focused on on-site delivery within

Indigenous communities. Martha, who is both a graduate of the program and its current staff coordinator, shared some context for this approach. She described the wider challenge of Indigenous-serving education in remote parts of Canada. Often, non-Indigenous teachers will be assigned to Indigenous communities in areas such as northern Ontario, decide that it is not for them, and leave after a few months. Martha described this as being “...damaging for the students in that school because they often blame themselves for why the teacher left.” She described ITEP as being essential to help cultivate teachers who are willing to stay and “...nurture those students in the way that they need to be successful in education.”

Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill shared that the early recruits targeted for this program were individuals based in remote Indigenous communities who had education experience but who were not certified by the state to teach. The ITEP goal was therefore to create a program allowing them the ability to earn their credentials while remaining in their home communities. Hill described extensive consultation with the Indigenous communities involved through committees based in the regions where the program would be delivered. These local groups would have a great deal of input concerning curriculum and program design. The goal with this approach was to ensure that the local Indigenous people had a voice in how their children would be educated.

After several decades of success, the Indigenous Teacher Education Program is today a remarkable example of higher education serving the practical needs of Indigenous people. Participants are required to complete four successive terms and take specific courses concerning Indigenous education (Queen’s University, 2021). Additional program requirements include a twenty-one-week practicum placement working with other educational professionals in classrooms. Participants also have access to an Indigenous Elder-in-Residence at ITEP who

provides advising, and they are able to take part in several educational programs organized by the university throughout the year (Queen's University, 2021).

As described by Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill, the ITEP program has graduated several hundred individuals across several communities. The longest running of these is located in Manitoulin Island and has been participating for over eighteen years, according to Martha. She also shared that a new program was recently opened in the Lambton-Kent region and that she hoped for a future program in Toronto in order to service urban Indigenous populations. She described the degree to which Indigenous communities have reached out to Queen's to take part in ITEP as being "monumental," and that there is a need to grow the capacity of the office to provide this clearly valuable service.

In describing her own experience as a graduate of the program, Martha shared that it held significant impact on her identity. She stated: "...I'm not the same person who came into that program in 2018 as I am now... As a student and as a person [I have] become a lot more confident and I have a lot of pride in my culture and in who I am... It really helped foster a sense of identity and cultural pride." She went on to describe how ITEP helped her to engage in a "...community of people who were like me..." and that this served as a meaningful way for her to engage with and build community on campus.

Indigenous Access to Engineering

The next program to highlight at Queen's University which provides support for Indigenous students is Indigenous Access to Engineering (IAE). This project aims to provides culturally relevant student support services to Indigenous students enrolled in the Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science (Queen's University Undergraduate Admissions, 2021). Its goal is to increase the number of Indigenous engineers in Canada through two approaches: by

promoting math and science to elementary and high school students, and secondly, a campus-based program providing Indigenous students support through advising and community building initiatives (Queen's University, 2021). As described by Melanie Howard, the Director of IAE, this program was the first Indigenous service-focused support program on campus beyond the Indigenous Teacher Education Program, and it has served as a model in recent years for other departments pursuing similar initiatives.

When discussing IAE, Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill discussed its importance in relation to data showing that Indigenous students have not historically had high representation in math and science. Previously, most Indigenous students on campus would enroll in humanities-based programs. However, over the past several years, there has been a dramatic increase in their enrollment in science and technology-based programs. Hill credits the early outreach efforts of IAE as a major contributor to this change. The program's community outreach initiative delivers culturally relevant programming to Indigenous youth and their teachers in remote, rural, and urban regions (Queen's University Undergraduate Admissions, 2021). Indigenous Access to Engineering has also hosted summer campus for pre-college students, participates in career days to provide young people insight into the industry, and develops materials for use in public schools (Queen's University Undergraduate Admissions, 2021). Combined, these initiatives are an important means of communicating to Indigenous youth that they have a place in science and technology-based industries.

The other half of the Indigenous Access to Engineering program is to provide support to existing Indigenous engineering students while on campus. Melanie Howard discussed how she will check-in throughout the year with students registered in the program, especially if she notices problems with their grades. She described it as being important to cultivate relationships

early with members of this cohort in order for these interventions to be successful. Howard described her role as being the "...frontline person that they need to know [and] that I'm there and I do care about them." She shared that it is important to her role to be familiar with both the academic and social services available at the university so that she is able to guide students towards these resources.

Director Howard described IAE as being "...very successful in providing a community for our students." She stated that this is important within the unit due to the specific nature of Indigenous student experience in the engineering program. While this group has access to the spaces of the Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre, they also have their own space in the engineering building. Howard noted that she has previously heard concerns from Four Directions staff that engineering students do not come to the Centre, which she described as a consequence of this sub-group of Indigenous students having differing sets of interest from other Indigenous students on campus. She described how the engineering "...personality is not coming out to do a sunset or sunrise ceremony... It doesn't necessarily interest them."

Howard also acknowledged that the intensity of the engineering program at Queen's means that its average student does not have capacity to engage in the social-cultural programs of Four Directions. She acknowledged that Indigenous students often feel alone in STEM programs, but the other Indigenous-serving resources on campus may not provide "...them a peer set in the same way it does for students who are in the more humanities-based disciplines." For this reason, Howard described the Indigenous Access to Engineering program as being a critical connector for this sub-group of Indigenous students on campus. She stated that her work recognizes how Indigenous identity is not the only thing that defines a student. Her analysis is a

fascinating reminder that practitioners need to be aware of the various intersectional identities of the populations with which we work.

Time has proven the Indigenous Access to Engineering program to be a great success. Melanie Howard shared that its first cohort consisted of three students, which had grown to nine by the time she began in her role. Approximately three years ago, IAE had its first graduate students join, and today there are over fifty undergraduates and seven graduate students in the program. Queen's University currently graduates more Indigenous engineers than any other university in Ontario (Queen's University Undergraduate Admissions, 2021). These facts provide an inspiring reflection of what can be accomplished when not only an institution but also an individual unit aims to intentionally cultivate a student population long left on the sidelines of higher education.

These examples of academic pathways into Indigenous issues provide powerful insight into the university's intentionality towards this population, but they are far from the only scholarly routes for Indigenous students. There are many other programs and areas of study which can be designed to fit a student's scholarly need. As described by Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill, there is still "...quite a bit of work to do..." in providing curriculum opportunities for Indigenous people at Queen's University. However, she expressed respect and appreciation for the great amount of progress that has been made over the past decade.

Indigenous experience on campus

Higher education settings have the potential to oppress and marginalize as well as to emancipate and empower communities of color (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). As described by Nathan Brinklow, Queen's University can be both "good and bad" for Indigenous community members. The institution benefits from a changing cultural climate which

emphasizes the inclusion of people of color, but several participants emphasized that remnants of the institution's colonialist past remain. The following section explores this balance by examining both the challenges and positive attributes of Indigenous experience at Queen's. It will then focus on the experiences and activities of Indigenous students, followed by those of Indigenous faculty and staff. Finally, this section will examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on study participants and the wider campus.

Challenges

Institutions built on foundations of inequity cultivate cultures of silence and erasure (Lipe, 2018). Despite the great gains and hard work of Queen's University, challenges for inclusion remain. Study participants described the presence of racism, the perception of a cultural disconnect between the institutional and Indigenous values, and a lack of Indigenous representation on the campus. As shared by Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill, there is a great deal of pressure being Indigenous at Queen's. While she noted a significant cultural change during her decades on campus, our conversations emphasized the need for continued work towards making the university a supportive environment for Indigenous people.

Racism on campus was mentioned by multiple participants. Martha noted an incident in recent years where the Four Directions Indigenous Student Center was vandalized, which she described as being "upsetting" and resulted in an "...emotional toll on the Indigenous community..." Nathan Brinklow described how the university has a negative reputation concerning racism, which he attributed to "...periodic bursts of news about racist things happening on campus..." He described the university as being aware of that reputation and working to address it. Brinklow shared that he had not personally experienced institutional racism at Queen's, which he partially attributed to having arrived at the university after it grew

intentional on the issue. He also acknowledged that his intersectional experience as both an Indigenous person and a male may shield him from some of the negative experiences of others on campus.

A second concern for Indigenous people at Queen's University is the disconnect between academic culture and Indigenous values. This topic was addressed in-depth by Director Kandice Baptiste of the Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre. She discussed the challenges of navigating a colonial structure as an Indigenous person and the "...games that you have to play..." to be impactful in this environment. She described this work as requiring strategic thinking about how best to support Indigenous students' interests and needs while maintaining one's personal and community values.

Director Baptiste also spoke about challenges for Indigenous students applying their cultural knowledge in the classroom. She knows of students who struggle to have "...Indigenous knowledge valued at the same level of western knowledge..." which requires educating their professors on alternative cultural perceptions. My personal experience with this struggle is that the success of such a conversation varies greatly depending on the professor. This is a common issue for Indigenous people in academic and is a meaningful example of how what counts as theory in academia is often a reflection of power (Franklin-Phipps, 2017).

A third challenge for Indigenous people at Queen's is their low representation on campus. This is an issue with great impact on the previous two topics, as a critical mass allows people of color a more positive experience in educational settings by alleviating issues of tokenization and isolation (Park & Liu, 2014). Indigenous people represented only 1.9% of the total student body for the 2019-2020 Academic Year, which translates to 473 self-identifying individuals (Queen's University, 2021). While that may be a significant enough number to keep the Four Directions

Indigenous Student Centre and the Native Student Association active, both Director Baptiste and Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill described how their students are often the only Indigenous people in their classrooms. Baptiste described this as a challenge for students who are unable to see themselves reflected in the curriculum, their classmates, or professors.

The lack of Indigenous student representation is closely linked to a lack of Indigenous faculty representation. Nathan Brinklow, for example, shared that he is one of three Indigenous instructors in the Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures. He described this as being taxing due to the “...extra work that you’re invited to do as an Indigenous representative...” Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill made a similar point about how the small representation of Indigenous professionals on campus can be taxing.

Kandice Baptiste commented about how the combination of low representation of Indigenous staff and her role as an Indigenous leader of the Four Directions Center results in regular requests for assistance. She described a discomfort with being seen as a “spokesperson for our community.” However, she acknowledged such expectations as a reality of higher education culture and that she takes the responsibility seriously. Nathan Brinklow acknowledged that there is a benefit to include Indigenous voices, but the fact that many committees want an Indigenous representative mixed with a low representation of Indigenous faculty often results in an overwhelming workload.

Opportunities

It is important to acknowledge that Queen’s University has experienced dramatic shifts in its approach to Indigenous inclusion, largely as a result of the previously discussed institutional intentionality towards this population. This interpretation was mentioned by multiple participants. Nathan Brinklow shared stories of individuals who had negative experiences on

campus approximately fifteen years ago due to a culture featuring “less support” and an environment he described as being “more uneasy” for Indigenous people. He credits the changing environment over the past decade as being due to both the work of the Truth and Reconciliation campus committee and the hiring of critical administrators, including Kanohsyonne Janice Hill in the Office of Indigenous Initiatives.

The gradual improvement in Indigenous representation serves as both a contributor and a result of this changing landscape. Melanie Howard, who is alumni and Director of the Aboriginal Access to Engineering program, described the institution as being “...a lot different today than... when I first came to Queen’s.” She described feeling isolated as an undergraduate in the early 1990’s due to the lack of Indigenous students. She contrasted this experience with the contemporary campus environment in that there is now significant opportunity for students to engage with Indigenous community. Nathan Brinklow acknowledged that there are people who still have bad experiences on campus, but he shared a positive perception of the campus as a whole and that the community is “...moving in a good direction.”

An important part of contemporary positive environment for Indigenous people at Queen’s University is the prevalence of allies and community support across campus. Several participants spoke about a perception of general support for Indigenous initiatives, including Jessica Parks, Kandice Baptiste, and Nathan Brinklow. Brinklow expanded on this idea when discussing the benefits of Indigenous support being cultivated in “...many different places...” across campus rather than relying on a central hub. Again, he credited this to the impact of the Truth and Reconciliation report.

In discussing the importance of allies, Kanohsyonne Janice Hill discussed how there are always “...more settlers than there are us around. So, you need to connect with those who can

help move the work forward.” She went on to describe an appreciation for the fact that the university’s senior leadership has proven “extremely supportive” and willing to engage in in the work of indigenization and decolonization. This point harkens back to Nathan Brinklow’s statement that the current success of Queen’s Indigenous cultivation is due to “...having the right people in office at the right time.”

Beyond central administrative support, participants described several examples of allies embedded in different units across campus. This includes Martha, who spoke about having administrators in the Faculty of Education who are committed to equity and diversity. Nathan Brinklow spoke positively about the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, which he described as doing positive work towards indigenization and who have served as “...really excellent advocates.” He also spoke gratefully about having a non-Indigenous head in his home department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures who has served as a “...top-level advocate for Indigenous people.”

Finally, there is Jessica Parks from Four Directions who shared a story about having to build a network of staff and supporting partners around the Centre’s new Gather Together Program. This bi-weekly project provides students training on both academic and life skills. Jessica was concerned about being able to regularly recruit experts across campus to speak to students on these topics. She has since hosted representatives from the Department of Athletics and Recreation, Wellness Services, and Student Academic Skill Services. She described an appreciation for the support this new program has received and remarked that her cross-campus collaborators are “always excited” to be involved.

These narratives portray a campus highly supportive of initiatives aimed at cultivating Indigenous people. This may be due to a wider cultural climate that embraces diversity, the impact of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report, or the hard work of the many

dedicated individuals advocating for this segment of the community. In reality, it is likely the confluence of each of these streams. Queen's has built both an Indigenous community and a wider campus community willing to engage in the hard work of decolonization, and it is therefore set-up well for a positive future in Indigenous education.

Student activity

Indigenous students at Queen's University have a long history of campus involvement. A primary avenue of these efforts is the Native Student Association, which is composed of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals interested in Native culture and traditions (Queen's University, 2021). Melanie Howard, who is both an administrator and an alumnus, shared that she served as one of the organization's founding members during her time as an undergraduate in the early 1990s. She stated that the existence of this group was critical at the time due to the lack of Indigenous representation in the student body and the need for cultural connectivity. As Howard described, the group was so small at its founding that all four members had to serve as the club's executive team for the sake of university rules. Over time, the organization has grown significantly and is now incredibly active on campus. The group hosts discussion forums, social events, and celebrations, and it works in close collaboration with both the Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre and the Office of Indigenous Initiatives (Queen's University, 2021).

The Queen's Native Student Association is an important avenue for Indigenous student involvement on campus, but it far from the only opportunity. As described by Director Baptiste, there is typically an effort to include Indigenous student on committees dealing with Indigenous issues, including the university's Truth and Reconciliation Commission committee. Baptiste also noted a concerted effort to cultivate student leadership at Four Directions. This involves

including student voices in planning and strategizing the organization's goals but also in the day-to-day cultivation of the Centre as a community space.

Beyond involvement in the organized structures of the university, it should also be noted that student participation at Queen's has a significant history in activism. Kandice Baptiste shared a story about Indigenous students protesting in 2010 due to a perception that the Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre and the Indigenous Council, then called the Aboriginal Council, were not adequately providing support for their community. A significant part of the students' complaints was that there was not adequate representation of Indigenous students and staff on the bodies deciding how Indigenous-serving resources were to be applied.

Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill was appointed as Director of the Four Directions Centre shortly after this incident. She added further to this story by sharing how Indigenous students walked-in uninvited to a Provost meeting as a form of protest. The students wore tape over their mouths as a representation of their experienced of being silenced on campus. They then handed the President a statement, and they left peacefully after it was read.

A more recent example of student activism on campus is the 2019 March in Solidarity. This event was a response to the posting of a racist and homophobic poster in a student residence building and was organized by a coalition of Indigenous and Queer students (Rideout, 2019). Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill described the event as including approximately a thousand people marching through campus. The event organizers provided a list of demands to the administration, and both Hill and Baptiste affirmed that the majority of them have since been met.

Students often underestimate our impact on campus policy, but the reality is that there is great power in student voice. Such influence only requires effort. Kandice Baptiste shared that

she regularly advises students that were they to "...organize the same way [for Indigenous initiatives] as they do for homecoming, they could really get a lot done." Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill acknowledged that there will always be students who are more active than others, but she emphasized that it is important for administrators to create opportunity and space for those who wish to engage at a higher level. In her own words, "...student voice carries a lot of weight at Queen's."

COVID

A final issue to explore concerning the experience of Indigenous people at Queen's University is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This study is not specific to COVID, but it is a topic important to this work due to the pandemic's dramatic impact on higher education community building. My research at the other two institutions centered in this study began long before the start of the pandemic, so Queen's is the only university I have learned about entirely in this new context. This provides both interesting opportunities and limitations for a researcher. As described by Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill, Queen's has been fortunate in being located in a region with relatively low impact from COVID-19 and a high rate of vaccinations. The campus did reopen in the Fall of 2021, but it has required all students, staff, and faculty to be vaccinated (Queen's University, 2021). Still, the pandemic is not over, and the university continues to grapple with the cultural and educational challenges of the past year.

Both Jessica Parks and Kandice Baptiste share the impression that the students they work with have been struggling. Baptiste described them as being heavily reliant on the Indigenous community structures of the Four Directions Student Centre, and that the switch to online interactions as a result of the pandemic has proven particularly challenging for this population. This is due to the fact that they have been extremely limited in outlets for Indigenous cultural

connectivity. Jessica Parks noted that there are some students who embrace and enjoy online learning, but these individuals are the minority. She also noted a challenge in her role as Indigenous Advisor at the Four Directions Student Centre in that it has been difficult to build relationships with students when not sharing the same physical space. Melanie Howard shared a similar sentiment concerning the first-year students in the Indigenous Access to Engineering program.

These responses emphasize that the struggles with COVID-19 are not limited to students. Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill noted that she has heard from several staff and faculty members whom she described as “languishing” due to the impact of the pandemic. Kandice Baptiste noted that the Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre was not only a hub for students but also faculty who have not been able to engage in this access point to their Indigenous colleagues. It is also notable to consider the sensation of loss from students, faculty, and staff due to diminished or cancelled programming.

Kandice Baptiste shared disappointment in a general low attendance in Four Direction’s online programming, which she attributed to Zoom-fatigue. Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill spoke about being “sad” that the 2021 Indigenous Language Symposium had to be moved online and that it was “surreal” attending a conference virtually without the typical interpersonal connections such events provide. Finally, Martha spoke about the limitations of the Indigenous Teacher Education program. Much of the program centers on land-based education, so place is particularly important to its Indigenous methodology. Martha described this new reality as requiring her team to “adapt to think about how we bring Indigenous education into an online context.”

These stories are sure to resonate with university administrators across the globe as we struggle to support our communities in the dramatically changing pandemic landscape. While Queen's University opened for in-person courses in the Fall of 2021, Four Directions will remain cautious by offering limited in-person and online events. It and other offices will rely on rules and procedures to help provide a safe environment for its constituents. However, questions remain about the future of the pandemic and its wider impact on the university.

Indigenous serving resources

A significant aspect of Queen's University's institutional intentionality in cultivating an Indigenous community are the offices and programs created to serve as hubs of connectivity and support. Some of these entities are new to the past decade and others have been expanded as a part of the wider push towards indigenization. The offices with the most direct impact to the widest swath of Indigenous students are the Office of Indigenous Initiatives and the Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre. However, there are a mix of other important services dotted across campus, including Indigenous-specific staff in various units; the roles of Elders in Residence available for guidance and consultation; the Indigenous Council, which serves to cultivate relationships with Indigenous people of the wider region; and application points for financial aid and community connectivity. The following section will explore these resources in order to better understand the structural opportunities contributing to Queen's cultivation of Indigenous people.

The Office of Indigenous Initiatives

Queen's University announced the opening of the Office of Indigenous Initiatives in September of 2017 (Queen's University Office of Indigenous Initiatives, 2021). This move was largely the result of a recommendation by the university's Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Task Force with the goal of having a central hub to coordinate university-wide initiatives (Queen's University Office of Indigenous Initiatives, 2021). The university chose the Director of the Four Directions Student Centre at the time, Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill, to lead the office. She would be retitled soon after in the newly created position of Associate Vice-Principal for Indigenous Initiatives and Reconciliation. As described by Hill, her position reports directly to the Deputy Provost and it provides regular reporting to the university's Principal, which serves as head of the institution similar to the presidency in U.S. higher education systems. She shared a perception that the inclusion of her role on the senior leadership team as being indicative of "...the university's commitment to the work of indigenization and decolonization."

As described by Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill, relationship building has long served as the foundation of her work at Queen's University. Among her primary goals are "...bringing community to the university and trying to take the university to the community." She described it as being essential to help Indigenous people grow more familiar with the "...processes and bureaucracy of working with higher education." Part of this work involves bridge building beyond the campus, and the Office of Indigenous Initiatives works to connect with communities "...regionally, provincially in Ontario, nationally, and globally." An example that Hill provided of this effort is Queen's participation in the Matariki Network of Universities, which is a coalition of seven institutions across the globe. She described the group's Indigenous Student Mobility Program as being an exciting opportunity for improving support initiatives for Indigenous students.

On campus, the Office of Indigenous Initiatives offers several resources for Indigenous faculty, staff, and students. It provides Cultural Advisors and Knowledge Keepers to all members of the community for one-on-one and group meetings, ceremonial events, guidance,

and consultation (Queen's University Undergraduate Admissions, 2021). Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill shared that the office also maintains a group of seven individuals who serve as an Elders Advisory Circle. The "elder" term in an Indigenous context is bestowed to an individual by a community and is associated with the holding of spiritual and cultural knowledge rather than being a simple designation of age (Queen's University Office of Indigenous Initiatives, 2021). The Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Cultural Advisors serve as teachers and guides in the Queen's Indigenous community. Since the institution sits on the traditional lands of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe, Hill shared that members of these groups are prioritized for these roles.

The Office of Indigenous Initiatives is relatively young, but its impact can already be seen across campus. This is evident by a statement from faculty member Nathan Brinklow when he spoke about the great strides it has made for Indigenous community building at the university. It benefits from having a leader in Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill who has long-running, deep relationships at the university which have been built through decades of service. The office is well positioned to serve as a major catalyst for progress and Indigenous community cultivation.

The Indigenous Council

A second Indigenous-serving resource to review at Queen's University is the Indigenous Council. Established in 1992 and originally known as the Aboriginal Council (Queen's University Undergraduate Admissions, 2021), the group serves as an important connector between the university and the wider Indigenous community in which it sits. It is composed of representatives from Indigenous communities across Ontario as well as Indigenous and non-Indigenous faculty, staff, students, and senior administrators (Queen's University Undergraduate

Admissions, 2021). The body reports directly to the University Senate and the Board of Trustees (Queen's University Undergraduate Admissions, 2021).

The Indigenous Council's primary function is to provide guidance concerning Indigenous programs and services (Queen's University Undergraduate Admissions, 2021). Kandice Baptiste shared that its activity has grown more robust over the past decade as a response to 2010 protests by the Indigenous student body over its lack of engagement with the Indigenous campus community. Baptiste describes that the Council now "fulfills its purpose" as a conduit of Indigenous connectivity. The council previously met three times a year, but the caucus is now meeting monthly, according to Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill. She shared that the goal of this change was to ensure that members could "...be more mindful of events or issues that [are] taking place at the university..."

The Indigenous Council reflects a long-running effort by Queen's University to build relationships with the Indigenous people of the wider region in which it sits. It is far from the only outlet for such relationship cultivation, as this is also a critical aspect of the previously examined Indigenous Teacher Education Program and Indigenous Access to Engineering program. However, the Council is distinct in that outside connectivity is a primary focus of its mission. The activities and impact of this body would be a valuable avenue for future research.

Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre

The office with perhaps the most direct impact and connection with Indigenous students at Queen's University is the Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre (4D). Established in 1996 through funding from the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities (Queen's University, 2021), the Centre provides extensive services in both academic and social support. It is led by Director Kandice Baptiste, who assumed her role in February 2018 after the

former Director, Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill, moved into the newly created Office of Indigenous Initiatives (Queen’s University, 2021). Baptiste’s position reports to the Division of Student Affairs, and she works in close alignment with the university’s undergraduate recruitment and admissions offices.

The Indigenous Student Centre is composed of two red brick buildings overlooking park space on the east side of campus. The second building was added in 2018, effectively doubling the size of the previous facility (Queen’s University, 2021). Kandice Baptiste described this improvement resulting from recommendations of the campus Truth and Reconciliation Task Force. The facility offers students access to a fully stocked kitchen, free laundry services, study spaces, social lounges, a library, and meeting rooms.



Illustration 8: Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre (Queen’s University, 2021)

While the physical Centre has been closed due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Director Baptiste described how one of its most significant roles during typical semesters is to serve as a “hangout space” for Indigenous students. Martha shared that 4D served as an

important social outlet for her during her time as a student where she "...made tons of friends..." and "...felt really supported by the staff." Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill shared how the Centre has attempted to cultivate a "home away from home" environment where students can "...curl up on a couch and read a book, or do laundry, or make a snack in the kitchen." She also shared that 4D has a history of hosting full meals open to all members of the Queen's population, which she described as a powerful force for cultivating community. Hill described how she has known many students over the years who stated that they would not have survived at Queen's without Four Directions.

The Centre provides numerous services across campus supporting social, academic, and cultural growth. This includes providing staff, faculty, students with research opportunities, teaching support, classroom presentations, community outreach, and committee work (Queen's University, 2021). It hosts cultural programming including moccasin making, ceremonies, drum making, a sweat lodge, and beading workshops (Queen's University Undergraduate Admissions, 2021). It also hosts Indigenous elders and traditional knowledge keepers who provide advice and partake in programs. These programs include over one hundred events organized by 4D throughout the academic year (Queen's University Undergraduate Admissions, 2021).

Director Baptiste shared that the office staffs a cultural counselor who provides both individual and group counseling to Indigenous students. She described being unsure of the degree to which the service would be utilized when it began in 2019. This was due to research by the 4D team showing that Indigenous students were not taking advantage of the wider counseling services available at Queen's. She has since been surprised to see it grow into one of the most utilized programs offered by the Centre. The counselor's appointment schedule is consistently booked solid, which she estimated to be a result of Indigenous students craving this

service from an individual familiar with Indigenous ways of being. The Centre will soon be hiring a second Indigenous counselor to help meet demand.

The Four Directions Student Centre offers a variety of services for Indigenous people and makes significant effort to communicate these opportunities across campus. Still, the demands of a college student can be significant, and Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill estimates that the Centre is lucky to see a quarter of Queen's Indigenous students. 4D promotes its events and services on social media, through admissions material, and on the university's website, but Kandice Baptiste described the most powerful form of promotion as being "...students coming in and seeing the space in action..." She shared that the Centre typically has a core group of students who visit daily, a group of students they may see once a week, and then a group that comes in once per month for specific services. Every student's experience is different, and it valuable that Four Direction's builds layers of engagement opportunities to fit many different forms of need.

Cultivating student leadership

A critical goal of the Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre is the cultivation of Indigenous student leadership. Director Baptiste spoke about an intentional effort among her staff to create roles for students in order to both build their credentials and to provide opportunity for leadership skill acquisition. One manifestation of this intention is the recently created positions of Social Ambassadors. These student roles are volunteer-based and supervised by 4D staff member Jessica Parks. Parks describes providing these individuals great freedom to design, promote, and facilitate social events throughout the academic year. She spoke with pride about the experience of watching the personal and professional growth of the three individuals who served in these positions over the past year.

Inspired by the success of the Social Ambassador position, the Centre launched the newly created Four Directions Student Leadership Team in the Fall of 2021. Baptiste described how the intention of this program is to help cultivate ongoing student engagement at the Centre in order to counter the lull that often happens when active students graduate. Many student support practitioners will recognize this as an ongoing challenge in the world of higher education. This role will provide students the opportunity to have input on 4D's programmatic strategies and a voice in community affairs. It will also serve as a steppingstone between the other student leadership roles available.

A final project to examine concerning Four Direction's efforts to cultivate Indigenous student leadership is the Indigenous Peer Mentorship program currently in development. Kandice Baptiste described how 4D has had informal student mentorship roles for years. The example she provided was how their staff might informally connect a first-year Indigenous political science student with an Indigenous political science senior. However, the Centre is now aiming to be more formal and specific in these efforts in order to build a stronger structure of peer membership.

As described by Jessica Parks, first year students will be able to enroll in the program. However, the 4D staff is hoping to make it possible to include second year students for the upcoming cycle. This is due to the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic did not allow the previous year's freshmen access to campus, and many would still benefit from an older classmate helping them to navigate the university. The mentor and mentee will be matched based on their responses to a questionnaire, which staff will use to connect students based on their area of study, hobbies, and interests. The mentor and mentee will meet one-on-one on a regular basis and have contact at a minimum of once per week. The participants will have freedom to decide

together whether this will be in-person or online in order to respect the various levels of comfort with in-person engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The mentors will participate in an orientation at the start of the Fall semester. They will also be provided various training opportunities throughout the year. While the mentor position is currently volunteer, the goal of the 4D staff is to find a means to provide them with an honorarium. This recognizes that "...we are asking a lot of them..." as described by Parks. She shared a hope for future recruitment into the program where mentees who had a positive experience will return to serve as mentors in the future, which she described as a "snowball" effect.

A primary goal of Four Direction's new Indigenous Peer Mentorship program will be to help new students transition into Queen's University. Kandice Baptiste shared that it is important for students to "...know that they have a person that can help them navigate [campus]..." Jessica Parks stated that the timing of this effort is important as the new student transition can be "extremely challenging" for many students. Parks also expressed a hope that this extra level of engagement will encourage Indigenous student retention and completion at Queen's.

Concerning each of these hopes is the centrality of community connectivity in positive Indigenous higher education experience. Jessica Parks noted that a mentor may help younger students connect with the cultural and social programming, which may be a key opportunity to connect with these spaces. She stated, "...in being involved with the mentoring program, [students] are also becoming involved with our staff at Four Directions. They're coming into our Centre. They're building those relationships [even after] they're no longer a mentee. We're all still there and the space is still there, and they know that we're a support there for them."

Additional resources

The previous paragraphs have outlined the large, tent-pole programs serving Indigenous people at Queen's University. However, it should be noted that there are various other roles and resources speckled throughout the campus. These may be administered by central offices or by specific units, but they all contribute to a patchwork of opportunities for Indigenous community cultivation. The following section outlines a selection of these resources.

The first to acknowledge are the various staff positions which exist in different units across the university. There are positions designed specifically to support Indigenous students, faculty, and staff in the departments of Education, Engineering, Business, Law, Health Sciences, and Arts and Science. According to Melanie Howard, many of these positions are new over the past few years and represent the growing push towards intentional indigenization on campus. Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill described this as a great benefit to the different students in these fields as each are engaging with specific programmatic issues. It is therefore helpful to have an advisor knowledgeable about both Indigenous culture and their programs of study. Hill provided the intensity and "brutal" timetables of the engineering program as an example.

Another form of institutional support that should not be underacknowledged are the available funding opportunities. Queen's offers both merit and need-based financial aid specifically to students who self-identify as First Nations, Inuit, and Métis (Queen's University Undergraduate Admissions, 2021). Such opportunities can serve as an important lifeline for Indigenous students travelling to Kingston from remote communities in Canada. It is also notable that Indigenous students are prioritized for residency on campus, according to Melanie Howard. Queen's residency offers Living and Learning Communities, which are floors or room clusters in on-campus living which group individuals of similar interests (Queen's University

Office of Indigenous Initiatives, 2021). The Indigenous and Allies Living Learning Community provides a meaningful opportunity for Indigenous communal engagement (Queen's University Undergraduate Admissions, 2021), which may be critical for Indigenous young people who have never lived outside of their home communities.

This section has attempted to provide an overview of Indigenous serving resources at Queen's University. It is more of a highlight reel than a complete list, as the campus has a great wealth of allies, advocates, and avenues for Indigenous connectivity. While several research participants expressed a desire to see continued improvement, it is also clear that the institution has made tremendous investments in improving the experience of Indigenous people on campus. Many of these initiatives trace back decades, but a significant amount of growth has resulted from the wider push to incorporate the recommendations of the campus Truth and Reconciliation Task Force. If Queen's continues on its current route, it is sure transform into a beacon of what can be accomplished for Indigenous people in the world of higher education.

Analysis

This chapter aimed to explore the experiences of Indigenous people at Queen's University. It began with a brief overview of the institution, including its history, its legacy in colonialism, and an analysis of its current student body. It then explored Queen's institutional intentionality towards the cultivation of Indigenous community on campus and these efforts relation to the 2015 Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission report. The chapter then examined various issues related to Indigenous representation on campus before focusing on the various academic programs designed around Indigenous issues. It then analyzed various social and cultural issues impacting the quality of Indigenous experience on campus before closing with a discussion on the many resources available for this population group.

While a scholar should be careful of relying too heavily on simple themes, it would be a disservice to not emphasize the overarching trend towards Indigenization impacting numerous issues in this chapter. Queen's University is remarkable in the degree of its strategic intentionality in increasing Indigenous representation and improving the experience of this population group. Despite the legacy of colonialism and white supremacy described by participants, Queen's has embraced change through the impetus of the Truth and Reconciliation report. This document's recommendations have led to the creation of the Office of Indigenous Initiatives, the expansion of the Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre, and an increase in Indigenous-serving staff across units. It has also contributed to significant growth in Indigenous-focused academic opportunities. It is unknown whether the new program in Indigenous Studies would exist outside of the current context. It is clear that it, the Indigenous Teacher Education Program, and Indigenous Access to Engineering will each be in a stronger position moving forward due to the university's proven priorities towards Indigenous cultivation.

Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill acknowledge that the campus has not universally embraced this work. She shared that "...there's always naysayers..." and that she is aware of significant challenges that Indigenous people face across campus. Several other participants, including Nathan Brinklow and Kandice Baptiste, cautioned that there is still a great deal of work to be done in transforming the institution into a supportive environment for Indigenous people. Both of these participants noted that increased representation of Indigenous students, faculty, and staff would be an important component of this effort. However, the overall impression from participants implied an appreciation for the direction in which the institution is moving. As described by Brinklow, "I think they're really taking on this mantle of institutional social change.

In the Canadian context, that means you have to be positively engaged with Indigenous people and with Indigenous communities.”

Place is more than a physical location. It is also composed of the relationships that form in that setting (Nelson, 2018). As described by Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill, “As Indigenous people, our lives are about developing relationships...” This philosophy of Indigenous connectivity can be seen throughout the various Indigenous support initiatives at Queen’s. It can be seen in Melanie Howard’s early outreach aimed at building relationships with new Indigenous Access to Engineering students. It can be seen in the casual, “living-room” feeling of the Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre. It is even present in the candy dish that Hill keeps on her desk to help students feel as if they are visiting an elder in their home communities. These connections are an important means of building positive relationships, and positive relationships are a powerful means of improving Indigenous higher education success. Through institutional intentionality guided by the voices and values of Indigenous people, Queen’s University provides a meaningful story about how to do this work well.

Discussion

“I have heard this all my life. If you listen to the winds, they will guide you. It is the knowledge from the north, the south, the east, and the west. We are all different, but we all come together as one. The tribes across the country have their own ways; they have different customs; but we are still one people. My walk is my own, and each individual has their own way of entering the circle. This is guided by the four winds. There are so many different parts to us, but if we listen, somehow those winds will give us the strength and show the way. If we just will listen.” -Paula Taylor, Four Winds Intertribal Society

Study summary

This work aimed to explore the post-secondary educational experiences of Indigenous people. Its central research question asked: How are Indigenous communities built in higher education settings, and what are their impact on the development of Indigenous identities among students, faculty, and staff? This question was examined through the stories and experiences of Indigenous people at the University of Texas at Austin, Southeastern Oklahoma State University, and Queen’s University. The goal of this work was not to compare and contrast these institutions but to instead present the different chapters as sets of stories exploring various manifestations of Indigenous higher education experience. Connectivity and relationship building are critical to Indigenous ways of being, and my hope was to balance building bridges across communities with a respect for variations of Native identity. Shawn Wilson (2008) described research as a form of ceremony which brings Indigenous people together. The past several years have seen many communities connected through this project, and I have great hope that relationships will grow in the wake of this ceremony.

This work began with a chapter providing an overview of the purpose of this project, the challenges it aims to address, and an introduction to the themes featured in later sections. It also described my positionality in relation to the different communities involved. Chapter two outlined the literature lines used to frame this research. This included an examination of the history of Indigenous education, issues of identity pertinent to this work, and how they are impacted by educational systems. It then discussed the potential of higher education as a cultivator of Indigenous knowledge. Chapter three outlined the methodologies, theoretical framework, and methods used in the study. Chapters four, five, and six were each devoted to Indigenous communities connected to one of the three featured higher education institutions. This final chapter will serve to complete the work through musings and recommendations on the research.

The primary purpose of this work is to benefit the various communities involved in the research. My hope is that these pages stir opportunities and insights. I have highlighted the strengths of the campuses involved in order to cultivate positive conversations about future success. Challenges were not ignored, but each community possessed great opportunities which made this strengths-based approach easy work. I also hope that benefit can be derived from the cross-continental connectivity featured in the project and that insight can be gained and connections formed across Turtle Island.

The second purpose of this study is to provide a perspective on Indigenous higher education for the benefit of scholars and practitioners. While higher education enrollment for American Indian and Alaskan Natives was only 19% in 2016 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019), compared with 42% for Whites, the enrollment of American Indian college students has more than doubled over the past 30 years (Youngbull, 2018). This is an important

and growing population across the higher education landscape. Transforming the underlying assumptions of institutional culture is critical to transforming the institution itself into a space that is safe and supportive of Indigenous people (Lipe, 2018). Those of us working in this field will benefit from continued research into Indigenous community connectivity within educational institutions.

Indigenous higher education is a niche field of research. There are phenomenal scholars engaging in this work, including Bryan Brayboy, Robin Staff Minthorn, and Natalie Youngbull. However, there is much more needed. Specifically, there is a dearth of exploration into the specific topic of Indigenous community cultivation in higher education settings. There has been great work in the field of Indigenous research methods from authors such as Jo-Ann Archibald, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, and Shawn Wilson. The topic of institutional diversity has been examined by writers such as Sara Ahmed and Ellen Berrey. Luis Urrieta has written about identity development in relation to education, and Renya Ramirez and Circe Sturm have written about Indigenous community and relational ways of being. This work is inspired and supported by these authors and weaves together their strands of knowledge into a distinct intersection of education, identity, community, and indigeneity. A healthy sense of community is critical to Native post-secondary attainment, and this work aimed to emphasize this conversation and create pathways for future research.

The three campuses

The University of Texas at Austin, Southeastern Oklahoma University, and Queen's University each proved to be rich ground for research. They provided distinct variations of Indigenous community. By including a university on First Nations' land in the north, an institution focused on southern Indigeneity, and an institution in the heart of Indian Country, this

work is tied together through the theme of Indigenous connectivity crossing the borders of colonial states. My personal engagement with each campus also provided several opportunities for educational, relational, and spiritual growth. The relationship building required for this project pushed me in ways that were meaningful and often unexpected.

The University of Texas at Austin is a Tier-1 research institution located in one of the fastest growing cities in the country. Its Indigenous students are a small representation of the total student body, and we often struggle due to a lack of cultural support. For this reason, the campus' Native American and Indigenous Studies program has grown beyond an academic system to form a community focused on cultural connectivity and social support. The campus Indigenous community has also grown heavily reliant on local Native-serving nonprofits in order for its members to build on their Indigenous relationships and knowledge. The period of this studied featured a flurry of Indigenous student activism in support of one of these local group's efforts to repatriate their ancestors held by the university. This story provided a meaningful example of the power of student voice and the degree to which a shared mission can serve as a catalyst towards community building. It was an honor to take part in these events and to build on many friendships at my home institution.

Southeastern Oklahoma State University is a small, regional institution that has faced over a decade of financial hardship due to state austerity. As it is located in the heart of Indian Country, and Native Americans make up 28% of the study body (Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2021). It has long-standing relationships with several tribal governments, the most significant of which is with the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. The campus is located only a few miles from the tribe's headquarters, and the two institutions have been intertwined since the university's founding. The Choctaw Nation is incredibly active at Southeastern, and its various

collaborations over the years provide a powerful example of a tribal and state institution partnership. As a member of the tribe and coming from a family with many graduates of the institution, it was meaningful to engage so deeply in this portion of the study. The forests of my childhood are powerful medicine, and this research provided a meaning confluence of educational and spiritual growth. I hope to find more opportunities for this work in the future.

Queen's University provided me with the greatest exposure to new communities. I did not have any knowledge the university or the city of Kingston, Ontario prior to this work. Therefore, this section of the study provided an important opportunity to learn more about our Indigenous cousins to the North, their work in higher education, and the issues impacting contemporary Canada. The experience did not disappoint. What began as a desire for variation among institutions included resulted in a fascinating exploration of institutional intentionality and policy-driven Indigenous campus empowerment. The 2015 report and recommendations from Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission have provided a powerful framework for cultivating Indigenous community in educational systems. Queen's University has embraced this work, and the results are profound. From the opening of new offices, to the growth in Indigenous supporting roles, and the development of an Indigenous-specific admissions policy, the campus has deeply embraced the work of indigenization. It is a powerful example of what can be accomplished for people of color through institutional intentionality and how policy can focus institutional resources.

All of the organizations involved have provided valuable insights and portray a remarkable variety of pathways towards Native empowerment. Indigenous research requires extensive efforts towards building trust. I am incredibly grateful for the relationships formed through this process, and I have been pleased in having the opportunity to connect multiple

participants due to their shared professional and research interests. In looking back, I now understand the process of this dissertation to itself be an act of community building.

Recommendations

The following section outlines the recommendations drawn from this research. They are broadly broken into the categories of student support, institutional roles, and engaging in Indigenous research. In truth, these pieces are intertwined and build upon each other, but some degree of categorization is helpful in analysis. This work aims to emphasize a respect for the variation of Indigenous experience, and there is no equation for educational success that can transfer across all of the stories of Turtle Island. However, there are parts of these stories which may rhyme, and the recommendations below are meaningful points to consider for those attempting to cultivate positive Indigenous experience in higher education.

Students

A campus community is not limited to students, but they do represent the core of an institution's purpose. Their empowerment should center our mission as higher education professionals. Each institution included in this study offers varying and creative insights into positively engaging with Indigenous students. The following is an outline of the most prominent themes running through the work.

The first recommendation is the cultivation of roles, mission, and a sense of purpose for Indigenous students. Having an official role in an organization or project creates buy-in among participants. Students will be more invested in the success of a project when provided the opportunity for their voices to be heard and to take an active role in leadership. This may take the form of volunteer or paid work, but a title and position in the decision-making structure are

powerful tools. This approach also creates opportunities for young Indigenous leadership training, which is greatly needed in Indian Country.

This study presents multiple examples of student leadership cultivation across institutions, including the student organization representatives at UT Austin and the student staff positions at Southeastern's Native American Institute. However, the initiatives at Queen's University and the Indigenous Cultures Institute are worth highlighting. From its founding, the Institute has focused on creating opportunities for young leaders. It is generous in providing titles, responsibility, and trust to the UT Austin students who have joined the organization as both volunteers and paid staff. The organization's elders are incredibly active as mentors and guides, but they are intentional about ensuring their students are able to make decisions over the programs they manage. They also ensure that their young people receive the praise and opportunities that come from the organization's shared efforts. Over my fifteen years of involvement in the organization, I have seen firsthand how our elder's approach to mentorship has quickly cultivated a large, impassioned, and empowered community. Their work is an important model for engaging Indigenous young people which can easily be applied in higher education settings.

Queen's University provides similar stories of Indigenous student leadership cultivation which are actually set in a higher education setting. Their communities, cultural contexts, and applications are different, but both institutions are aiming to be intentional on this issue. Kandice Baptiste of the Queen's Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre spoke in-depth about the growing effort among her team to create roles for students in order to build their credentials and to provide opportunity for leadership skill acquisition. This has resulted in the creation of the student Social Ambassadors, the Four Directions Student Leadership Team, and

the Indigenous Peer Mentorship program, all within the past few years. The implementation of these roles aligns with the over intentionality at Queen's towards cultivating a positive environment for Indigenous students. It should be noted that this context provides opportunity for both the resources and staffing to make them successful, which may not be available in all institutions. However, how these programs develop in the coming years would provide an interesting learning opportunity for practitioners and future researchers. They will be worth watching.

A finale note concerning the importance of student leadership is to acknowledge the role of activism. Queen's University has a long history of Indigenous student protest leading to improved circumstance. This includes the restructuring of the Indigenous Council and the Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre to more adequately serve campus needs as a response to student protests in 2010. The efforts of UT Austin's Indigenous student groups in support of the repatriation of university-held Indigenous remains provides another example with direct impact on administrative decision making. This experience led to a flurry of activity which necessitated extensive relationship building for students across campus and beyond. Both stories emphasize how one should never underestimate the power of student voice, and having a shared mission is a powerful path towards community building.

There are several additional topics discussed in this work concerning Indigenous student success. This includes the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge into an academic system long disinterested in non-western epistemologies, as discussed by participants at UT Austin and Queen's. It also includes finding ways of mitigating the loneliness of Indigenous higher education experience. This second point was discussed as being critical by participants at all

three universities involved. It therefore seems an important issue to be aware of for Indigenous-serving practitioners across Turtle Island.

Engagement with the collective transforms the self (Youngblood Jackson, 2013). An individual's interaction with community is critical as identity grows dialogical in moments of expression, listening, and speaking with other community members (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). All societies are composed of individuals who are connected to social groups (Stone, 2012), but bonds between family and community are particularly strong among Native American people (Brayboy, 2005). This phenomenon can serve as either a bridge or barrier to Indigenous higher education success.

An important note to acknowledge from the UT Austin portion of the study is that several participants independently stated that they felt lonely and depressed on campus before they discovered the Native American and Indigenous Studies program. NAIS has attempted to format itself as a social and cultural community in addition to its role as an academic entity. It now serves as a critical anchor for many students feeling disconnected from their cultures and people. This phenomenon is strengthened by the relationships the program has formed with local Native-serving nonprofit organizations, such as the Indigenous Cultures Institute and Great Promise for American Indians. Each of these partners serves as critical support structures for Indigenous community members. The campus would benefit from growing these relationships, but this work must be done in a spirit of reciprocity and mutual empowerment as such intent is central to Indigenous ways of being.

Southeastern Oklahoma State University provides a fascinating story concerning family and community connectivity due to the fact that the campus is centered within a Native American land base. This location makes the institution a powerful promoter of Indigenous

education by allowing access to opportunity while allowing students to stay closely connected to home and family. This phenomenon led to an interesting analysis about the role of Native student activity on campus. The Native American Student Association has been struggling with recruitment for years, which fits a wider trend on campus of minimal student social activity. At least for Indigenous students, one must wonder how important or successful these activities can be when students do not need them to engage with their cultures and can instead rely on the cultural activities of tribal governments and local Native communities in the wider region.

However, this question only pertains to the dearth of student activity. The campus' relationship with the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma shows that Native American engagement with the university is critical. The tribe's educational programs, scholarships, staffing on campus, and its First Year Initiative program are important forms of support that have helped transform Southeastern into an institution of Native American educational success. The relationship between the Choctaw Nation and the university provides a powerful example of what can be accomplished between a state entity and an Indigenous community through respectful, reciprocal relationship building.

The importance of family and community connectivity was discussed by participants at Queen's University, and several examples were provided about how the campus attempts to cultivate a sense of connectivity for its students. This includes the community meals previously held at the Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre; efforts to cultivate relationships between students through programs such as the new Indigenous Peer Mentorship program; and the Indigenous Access to Engineering community space, which allows community building among a sub-section of the campus Native population. The campus also houses the Indigenous Council, which allows members of the wider Indigenous community a voice on campus. However, the

direct impact on student connectivity from this entity is unclear. Several administrators included in this chapter spoke about being attentive towards Indigenous student cultural and community isolation, but due to the brevity of this section of the study's length and the minimal student voice, more research is needed on this topic.

Institutions

According to Dr. Mario Garza of the Indigenous Cultures Institute, the future of successful Native education is a combination of Native-led institutions which reflect our own culture and values and mainstream institutions improving their function as spaces where Indigenous students can succeed. This study has shown that it can be greatly impactful when an institution is intentional about cultivating those communities long left on the sidelines of higher education. It is important for universities to show that they care about cultivating relationships with Indigenous people. Beyond simple communications and cultural performativity, such intention must also impact policy and practice.

In examining UT Austin and Southeastern Oklahoma State, it is easy to derive a correlation between Indigenous representation on campus and institutional interest in this population. Native Americans represent 28% of Southeastern's student population (Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2021), and the university is very intent about cultivating this segment of its community. Meanwhile, Native students represent just 0.1% of UT Austin's student population (University of Texas at Austin, 2021), and beyond a few select corners of campus, the university as a whole does not show much interest. This result is not unexpected, but the correlation so far described is also too simple. Queen's University bucks this trend. With only 1.9% of its total student body self-reporting as Indigenous (Queen's University, 2021), Queen's remains intent on supporting this group and improving its representation. The results

are a gradual but consistent increase in Indigenous representation over the past several years for which data is on record (Queen's University, 2021).

Change can be accomplished with a little institutional intentionality. It can also be helped along through a comparative lens. As described by Kandice Baptiste, higher education institutions are very competitive with those institutions they perceive as their peers. It can often be beneficial to argue to an administration that a rival institution is making great progress in an area as a means of building momentum on one's home campus. Baptiste stated that "...there's something about shame and competition that really springs people into action." I am supportive of any form of motivation that leads to improved experience for our Indigenous students. I therefore have no problem saying that UT Austin needs to get its act together.

It should also be noted how this study has shown policy to be a powerful tool towards institutional transformation. One example of this can be found at Southeastern in the design of academic programs specifically aimed at Native communities and employment in tribal governments. At UT Austin, we saw how policy decisions concerning repatriation served as a motivator for student engagement, which in turn impacted policy. However, the clearest example of the impact of policy comes from Queen's University and its embrace of the recommendations from Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission report. This document and the resulting campus initiatives have proven a powerful guide for the campus over the past several years, leading to the creation of the Office of Indigenous Initiatives, the expansion of the Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre, and the recent hiring of the Commission's Chairperson, Murray Sinclair, as the university's Chancellor (Queen's Gazette, 2021). Policy development can be a powerful tool for improving Indigenous circumstance, which leads to improved recruitment and retention.

Improved representation seems a prominent way of bettering Indigenous experience in higher education. This is evident from both outside literature on the topic (Austin, 2011) (Park & Liu, 2014) and the affirmations of research participants. Nathan Brinklow spoke about the need to increase Indigenous faculty at Queen's University to account for the growth in Indigenous-focused academics. He also spoke about how increased Indigenous faculty would lower the pressure of committee service, which was a point echoed by Kanonhsyonne Janice Hill. Brinklow, Hill, Kandice Baptiste, and several others also spoke about the need to improve Indigenous student numbers in order to benefit their social support structures.

The Native American and Indigenous Studies program at UT Austin is greatly focused on exploring avenues to improve representation on campus. Its faculty have engaged in significant outreach to recruit Native scholars to the institution, and it has had decent success in recent years on this front. Dr. Cárcamo-Huechante, who serves as Director of NAIS, is intent on building this community as a reflection and connecting hub for Indigenous people from both northern and southern traditions across the American continents and the globe. In this way, our campus provides a remarkable opportunity for cross-cultural learning and bridge-building. There is a great deal of work to be done, but the great progress being made should also be acknowledged. Our community simply needs to continue building on this momentum.

Indigenous representation at Southeastern Oklahoma State University is strong. The concept of critical mass proposes that minorities are better served in environments where their people have better representation (Park & Liu, 2014). Based on their 28% representation of the student body (Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2021) and the great deal of effort made to attune to their academic needs, it is safe to say that Native Americans at Southeastern have

attained a critical mass. It is clear that Indigenous people will continue to be a critical part of the institution's success moving forward.

The three higher education institutions centered in this work represent great variations in circumstance. They also possess great variation in Indigenous community representation. What is beneficial to one campus may not translate elsewhere, but these pages provide a great mix of issues for practitioners to consider. The one lesson that can be widely applied is that the labor of indigenization should not be limited to Indigenous people. The institutions also have a responsibility. All of us who serve as higher education practitioners must work to ensure access, equity, respect, and voice for all members of our communities across cultural worlds.

Research

The final set of recommendations proposed for this study focus on my approach to Indigenous-based methodologies. There are a phenomenal set of Indigenous scholars whose work has helped frame my approach. Some notable works include Lind Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2012), Jo-ann Archibald's *Indigenous Storywork* (2008), and Shawn Wilson's *Research is Ceremony* (2008). Each provided a valuable exploration into how to engage in research while incorporating the values and traditions of Indigenous people. However, just as critical to my own development as a scholar has been the guidance and insights of the Native communities in which I am involved.

The epistemological foundation of this piece reflects not only my views but those of my elders, family, and community relations. They were consulted as much as any academic voice throughout this process. Additionally, I made great effort to include voices of the Indigenous communities involved in this work throughout every stage. Study participants were invited to guide my focus, to provide feedback on the issues I was exploring, and to edit the work once

written. This last step took more time and effort than expected, but I consider it a critical aspect of the type of community-focused research this piece attempts to incorporate. Indigenous identity centers of relational ways of being, so it is therefore essential that Indigenous research is focused on relationship building and reciprocity.

An additional set of recommendations from this study relates to conducting research work on this scale. Though the piece is framed as a single work, it is essentially composed of three separate studies. The efforts to gain access at different institutions, the relationship building, and the very act of organizing my thoughts took a great deal of energy. This was especially ambitious during a period in which I was working full time at the University of Texas and simultaneously working part time at the Indigenous Cultures Institute. Throw in a global pandemic and the separation from my long-time partner in the summer of 2021, and I can confidently say that the past few years have been anything but boring.

Successfully completing these three studies required extensive strategizing and time management. While data collection began in 2018, it was staggered at each institution, beginning with UT Austin, followed by Southeastern in 2020, and Queen's in 2021. The writing followed a similar pattern, and I found myself overlapping across institutions between data collection and writing. For example, once interviews were completed at Southeastern, I began writing on this chapter at the same time that my interviews began in earnest at Queen's. This overlap helped both to organize my interview methodology and to allow my writing lens to remain focused on one institution at a time.

A critical issue of concern for a study of this scale was the importance of managing numerous relationships across multiple sites. It is often the case that relationship-building is centered during the outreach and data collection phase but drops-off after these sections of a

project are complete. My goal moving forward is to find opportunities for the friendships that have been made to continue and that I work in service to those communities that have allowed me access. Reciprocity is critical to relationship building, and Indigenous researchers should be cautious of only showing up when we have needs to pursue.

A final note concerning relational research methodologies associated with this study is on institutional cultivation and project review. This study routed through four separate institutional review processes, including through the research offices of the three universities involved and then through the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma's Institutional Review Board. Each review had their own procedures, applications, and requirements, and a surprisingly small amount of the materials were able to be reused across institutions. I now consider myself fairly expert in the institutional review board process.

The first review process was that of the University of Texas at Austin. It also proved the simplest. I began by asking permission from the Director of Native American and Indigenous Studies, who proved incredibly supportive of the project. He gave his blessing, followed by an invitation to serve on a NAIS project planning committee, thus demonstrating in quick time the practice of community reciprocity. The university's application was not the simplest process, but my submission returned without issue.

The Choctaw Nation Institutional Review Board application proved to be a bit more of a process. I began my outreach in the Spring of 2017 while not necessarily knowing the shape of this work but hoping that my tribe would be somehow involved. After this initial conversation, the effort stagnated until the Fall of 2020. It was eventually approved in February of 2021 after I was able to connect and build a friendship with Director Parrish of the tribe's Education Department. However, that original conversation in the Spring of 2017 involved a trip to my

hometown, and while in town, I began my conversation with Dr. King at Southeastern Oklahoma State University. I considered this at the time to be a tag-on to the visit and had no idea this experience would flourish into a deeper connection with the university.

Southeastern's review process also proved fairly simple. With support from the staff of the Native American Institute, I was able to submit my application materials to the university's Research Office. It returned with a few questions and requirements, but they were manageable. I believe the relationships formed at Southeastern also benefitted my proposal to the tribe, as the two are so deeply invested in each other's success.

The final and most challenging institution to confirm was that of Queen's University. When I originally began searching for the third institution in my study, I had imagined partnering with a tribal college. These are defined as institutions that are formally sanctioned by one or more tribal government (Brown, 2003). However, the COVID-19 pandemic moved into a more serious stage during the Spring of 2020 when I was in the middle of this outreach. Each of my connections stopped cold at this point. Tribal colleges are small, often underfunded institutions, which lead to an assumption that they were less willing than larger institutions to taking on an additional project in the middle of a crisis. I therefore had to redirect my expectations.

After consultation with several friends and mentors, I began outreach to the Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures at Queen's University, based on the advice of one of my doctoral committee members. This conversation occurred in the Summer of 2020, and while the department head proved supportive, any movement was put on hold through the Fall due to the campus being overwhelmed by the pandemic. We were able to restart discussion in the Spring of 2021, which involved informal conversations with additional Indigenous-focused individuals across campus. The project received final approval by April, 2021.

This step-by-step analysis of my institutional engagement may not be interesting to the casual reader. However, it was a critical and laborious part of this study. It featured high levels of stress, several tears, and there were many moments where I was unsure whether the project would come together. I share this story to emphasize the importance of good planning and early strategizing. Indigenous relationship building requires time and patience. We can and should not force our way into an Indigenous community for research, as this would only contribute to the toxic history of relations between Natives and academia. Outreach must be done in a way that is respectful of those communities. Any practitioner interested in engaging in this work must begin their conversations long before they have any expectation for an interview.

The previous section has attempted to outline several recommendations which could be pulled from this study. They are far from the full list but should serve as an adequate highlight reel. While I am cautious of over-simplifications, I will say that each of these recommendations center on service. They ask how we as higher education practitioners can better serve and expand access to the Indigenous people in our sphere. Some applications may be limited, as no campus or Indigenous community are the same. However, each are worth rolling over for the post-secondary professional interested in this work. Our journeys may be different, but there are parts of our stories which rhyme.

Conclusion

Higher education has proven to be a great benefit to Native American people. While western higher education systems are often challenging environments for this population, practice has shown that we are able to move forward by creating spaces through the expression of our Indigenous values and by growing our community. This will allow the continued transformation of universities into spaces where Indigenous people are better represented. It will

also grow them into spaces where we feel safe to bring our histories, knowledge, systems, languages, and worldviews, and where these elements are incorporated into the foundations of learning across research and practice (Lipe, 2018).

The University of Texas at Austin, Southeastern Oklahoma State University, and Queen's University each provide powerful examples of educational experience for Indigenous people. Their stories will continue, and it will be exciting to see how they develop in the coming decades. They each have an individual set of challenges, but there remains a great deal of promise within all communities involved concerning the improvement of Indigenous educational experience. These institutions benefit from a devoted mix of Indigenous young people and elders working to improve campus climate through community building and wider community engagement. This cross-generational bond is central to Indigenous ways of being and provides a great deal of hope for those of us wishing to see the cultivation of cultural wisdom through education.

There is good work being done across Turtle Island towards the strengthening of Indigenous communities. Education is a powerful tool for Native empowerment, and we are in a great period for the reclamation of space within educational institutions. It is clear that among the most critical factors impacting our success is for these efforts to be guided by Indigenous people, our values, and culture. Our traditions and voices may be different, but our future in education will be strengthened by the centering of our many Indigenous ways of being.

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