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# Pathways into the Profession: Native Americans in Student Affairs

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*This study explores how Native American student affairs professionals entered the field and factors influencing their decision to pursue a career in student affairs. Fifty-two participants responded to an online survey. Awareness of student affairs came through involvement in campus organizations and student leadership, and respondents pursued student affairs to provide programs, services, and to give back to Native American students and community. Implications for Native American students and recruitment into the profession are discussed.*

In 2010, the United States census reported that approximately 1.7% of the total population identifies as American Indian either alone or in combination with another race (Norris, Vines, & Hoeffel, 2012). Since 1976, Native American post-secondary enrollment has increased in number—although not percentage—(Snyder, De Brey, & Dillow, 2016) from 76,100 or 0.7% to most recently 146,171 or 0.7% of the total population of enrolled students in 2016. Despite making gains, Native American students have the lowest graduation rates of all racial/ethnic groups, and this gap has remained steady over the past three decades (Brown, Donlan, & Lee, 2010). Native American students who begin college do not persist to graduation at rates comparable to their non-Native peers; in 2012, only 39% of Native American students who began as first-time, full-time students at a four-year institution graduated within six years, compared to 60% of their White counterparts (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Ginder, 2012). Furthermore, 92% of Native American students are attending non-Native colleges and universities (NNCU), where they are less likely to encounter significant numbers of other Native students or any Native American staff or faculty (NCES, 2015, 2016a).

The importance of having contact with faculty and staff of Color, specifically those who are of the same cultural, racial, or ethnic background, on campus has been supported by the extant literature (Belgarde, 1992; Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002; Museus & Quayle, 2009), and seeing those like oneself increases sense of belonging, perception of campus climate, and ultimately retention and persistence (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 2001; Gonzalez, 2002; Tinto, 1993). Studies specifically have supported the importance of Native American faculty and staff in the success and persistence of Native students (Belgarde, 1992; Falk & Aitken, 1984; Shotton, Oosahwe, & Cintrón, 2007; Waterman, 2007; Wright, 1985). In 2015, the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) reported that approximately 0.8% of student and academic affairs and other education

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services staff are Native American (NCES, 2016b), but there is no definitive information on the number of Native American student affairs staff specifically.

Over the past three decades, there has been widespread concern about the lack of diversity in the student affairs profession (e.g., Komives & Kuh, 1988; Oseguera, 2013; Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1991; Talbot, 1996; Taub & McEwen, 2006). Sagaria and Johnsrud (1991) pointed to the potential for a more diverse student affairs staff to create a more diverse campus environment. Luedke's (2017) qualitative analysis found that first-generation college students of Color turned to staff of Color for mentoring and support. Recently, quantitative research has shown that Native American students' sense of belonging and intention to persist is related to having Native American staff on campus supporting their academic success (Oxendine, 2015). Given concerns about the college persistence of Native American students, the presence of Native Americans in student affairs could play a critically important role.

A small number of studies have explored entry into the student affairs profession. These studies have included cross-institutional surveys (e.g., McEwen, Engstrom, & Williams, 1990; Taub & McEwen, 2006), single-institution studies (e.g., Hunter, 1992), and single-institution or multiple institution case studies (e.g., Linder & Simmons, 2015; Mertz, Eckman, & Strayhorn, 2012). Studies have shown that those entering the profession are predominantly White, female, and young (McEwen et al., 1990; Mertz et al., 2012; Taub & McEwen, 2006). Turrentine and Conley (2001) found that the new graduates of student affairs programs in 1997–98 were 18–24% people of Color (0–1% were Native American). Qualitative and quantitative studies have found that the majority of those entering the profession were encouraged to do so by mentors/sponsors (Hunter, 1992; Mertz et al., 2012; Oseguera, 2013; Richmond & Sherman, 1991; Taub & McEwen, 2006; Ting & Watt, 1999). Most also were involved as student leaders, peer helpers (such as resident assistants and orientation leaders), or in student activities (Mertz et al., 2012; Taub & McEwen, 2006).

Researchers (Linder & Simmons, 2015; Mertz et al., 2012) have called for research into the noticeable lack of people of Color from student affairs. We have no research specifically about the pathway into the student affairs profession for Native Americans.

## Theoretical Framework

Tribal critical race theory (TribalCrit; Brayboy, 2005) provided a lens for framing this study in a “culturally nuanced way” (p. 430). TribalCrit emerged from critical race theory (CRT; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) to address the issues of Indigenous peoples in the United States. CRT is both a theoretical framework and a movement for “studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (p. 3). One of the basic tenets of CRT is that racism is endemic to and pervasive in our society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

In contrast to CRT, TribalCrit holds as a central tenet that colonization is endemic to society, although the role that racism plays in society is acknowledged (Brayboy, 2005). Additionally, TribalCrit focuses on Indigenous families, Indigenous identities, the importance of a relationship to land (place/space), Indigenous education, and tribal sovereignty and self-determination. The use of TribalCrit in this study centered the Indigenous experience and guided the researchers in crafting items that reflected that experience.

In addition, this study is situated within critical quantitative inquiry, which seeks to “conduct culturally relevant research” (Wells & Stage, 2015, p. 103). Most critical quantitative work has focused on race and ethnicity; however, Wells and Stage acknowledged that certain groups, including American Indian/Alaska Native students, remain overlooked and marginalized even within critical quantitative research. Further, critical quantitative researchers approach their

research from a non-deficit perspective. Finally, the goal of critical scholarship is to illuminate and confront inequities. The lack of research about marginalized populations contributes to the creation of educational policy and student services that do not take these populations into account (Vaccaro, Kimball, Wells, & Ostiguy, 2015).

Through the use of a quantitative methodology this study creates an Indigenous statistical space (Walter & Andersen, 2013) by centering the experiences of Native American student affairs professionals and their pathways into the profession. Furthermore, the use of TribalCrit problematizes the concept that Native American quantitative data is unreliable and insignificant because of sample size and inability to use more sophisticated analyses.

### Method

The following questions guided this study:

1. When and how did Native American student affairs professionals become aware of the profession of student affairs?
2. What influenced Native American student affairs professionals to enter the profession?
3. What factors were most important in attracting Native American student affairs professionals to the profession?

### Participants

Fifty-nine participants responded to the invitation to participate in the study. Of those 59, 52 met the inclusion criteria, that is, they responded that they identified as Native American (66%) or as Native American and also biracial/multiracial (24%). There is no research that supports treating participants who identify as Native American and another race differently than those identifying as Native American only (Garland, 2010). Demographics of the participants are presented in Table 1. Ninety-eight percent

Table 1  
**Participant Demographics (n = 52)**

Participant Demographics	n	%
Gender		
Female	39	75
Male	13	25
Age*		
18–24	1	2.5
25–34	15	37.5
35–44	11	27.5
45–54	7	17.5
55–64	6	15
Student Affairs/Higher Education Degree*		
Yes	18	37.5
No	30	62.5

\* Note. The total n is less than the number of participants.

of respondents reported that they currently work in or have worked in student affairs; 53% currently hold a professional position in a college or university student affairs office. The majority of respondents held a graduate degree; 53% reported their highest educational level was a master's degree, 20% reported that a doctoral degree was their highest level of education, and 2% reported another professional degree (such as a JD or an MD). Only 37.5% reported that they held a master's or doctoral degree in student affairs or higher education. As this study drew from a small population and the expected small sample size of the participants, the researchers did not ascertain the institutional types in order to maintain anonymity and decrease the chances of an incidental identification of the participants.

### Instrument

The instrument used for this study was based on the instrument used by Taub and McEwen (2006) to study entry into the student affairs profession. That instrument was comprised of three parts: awareness of and attraction to student affairs as a field (7 items), graduate preparation programs (13 items), and future plans and demographics (21 items). The instrument items had a mix of response formats; some were categorical (e.g., "At what point in time did you first become aware of career opportunities in the field of college and university student affairs?"), some Likert-type scale (e.g., "As you prepared to enter your graduate preparation program in student affairs, to what degree were you confident that student affairs was the right career choice for yourself?"), and some open-ended (e.g., "What was your undergraduate major?").

The Taub and McEwen instrument was modified through an Indigenous lens through inclusion of tribal culture, beliefs, knowledge, and values. Therefore, unique variables were included such as: (a) reasons for entering the profession (e.g., "Lack of Native American student affairs professionals") (b) concerns about entering the profession (e.g., "Maintaining my cultural identity"), (c) reasons for choosing a specific graduate program (e.g., "Reputation of the institution within my tribal community," "Graduate program located in/near my tribal community"), and (d) financing of education (e.g., "Tribal scholarships").

### Procedures

Many of the studies of how and why individuals choose student affairs have focused on students enrolled in graduate programs or recent graduates of programs (Hunter, 1992; Linder & Simmons, 2015; Mertz et al., 2012; Taub & McEwen, 2006). Because our interest was specifically in the pathways of Native American student affairs professionals and because there is no evidence that the pathways necessarily led through graduate preparation programs (especially given the low representation of Native students in graduate student affairs programs found by Turrentine & Conley, 2001), we chose to focus on current student affairs professionals as our participants. The investigators received support from individuals representing several Native American higher education associations (NASPA-Indigenous Peoples Knowledge Community and ACPA-College Student Educators International-Native American Network). Invitations to participate in the study were sent via e-mail to members of ACPA's Native American Network (NAN) and NASPA's Indigenous Peoples Knowledge Community (IPKC), which added credibility to the study for Native participants. The e-mail contained an embedded link to the instrument. Because some members of NAN and IPKC are not Native Americans, a demographic screening question asking if the respondent identified as Native American was used for inclusion/exclusion for the study. Due to the unknown number of Native American student affairs professionals and the sampling technique used in this study, it is impossible to compute a response rate.

## Analyses

This quantitative study utilized inferential and descriptive statistics, which included a chi square, measures of central tendency, frequency distribution, percentages, and measures of variance to answer the research questions. Because many of the items were not continuous variables, chi-square analysis was used to explore potential relationships between variables. The total number of participants was too small to permit more extensive analysis, such as comparison of group means. This phenomenon is all too common with studies of Native Americans. When American Indians are studied, they run the risk of falling prey to the American Indian research asterisk (Garland, 2007); that is, they typically are not reported or discussed in quantitative research (Shotton, Lowe, & Waterman, 2013) and seen as “statistically insignificant” (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010). Expectations of large sample sizes and complex analyses that require large sample sizes have contributed to the dearth of literature about Native students and Native practitioners. This critical quantitative inquiry approach allowed for a context-specific study while also adhering to methodologically sound research that is rigorous and useful for transforming practice (Faircloth, Alcantar, & Stage, 2015).

## Results

### Awareness of Student Affairs as a Profession

Respondents typically became aware of student affairs as a profession in the latter part of their undergraduate career or later. Almost one-fourth (24%) became aware of student affairs as a profession during their junior or senior year, and another 50% became aware sometime after graduation. Only 22% first thought about student affairs as a career for themselves during their junior or senior year; 69% first thought of student affairs as a career for themselves sometime after graduation.

### Sources of Information about and Attraction to Student Affairs

Respondents used a variety of sources to gather information about student affairs as a career. The most frequently used sources were being involved in student activities and organizations (81.6%), talking with a current student affairs professional (81.6%), holding a student leadership position (75.5%), and talking with a mentor (71.4%). Respondents rated only two sources as at least somewhat helpful in learning about student affairs as a career: involvement in student activities/organizations ( $M = 3.22$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ) and talking with a student affairs professional ( $M = 3.12$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ) on a four-point, Likert-type scale where 1 = *no information* and 4 = *very helpful*.

**Influence.** Sixty-five percent of the respondents reported that they were encouraged to enter the profession by a specific person or persons. Overall, 33 respondents listed 53 individuals as having influenced them. Of those 53 individuals, 34 (64.1%) were identified as people of Color; 22 (41.5%) were Native. These influential sponsors were described most frequently as supervisors, mentors, or advisors of the respondents. A Chi-square analysis indicated no significant relationship between having a mentor and obtaining a higher education degree ( $\chi^2 = 2.192$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = 0.139$ ). Although not statistically significant, it is interesting to note that 77.8% of the participants who held a degree in higher education were influenced or encouraged by someone to enter student affairs, whereas 56% of those who did not obtain a higher education degree were encouraged or influenced by someone to enter the profession.

Respondents also were influenced by their own experiences. The three experiences rated by participants as having the greatest degree of influence on their decision to enter student affairs

were the lack of Native American student affairs professionals ( $M = 3.78$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ), student leadership experience ( $M = 3.69$ ,  $SD = 1.54$ ), and encouragement by a mentor ( $M = 3.37$ ,  $SD = 1.65$ ) on a four-point, Likert-type scale where 1 = *no influence* and 4 = *great amount of influence*.

Chi-square analysis indicated that there was a significant relationship between being influenced to enter the profession by participants' student leadership experience and being encouraged to enter the profession ( $\chi^2 = 8.763$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ). There were no other significant relationships between experiences and sponsorship.

**Confidence.** Respondents reported a medium level of confidence about the likelihood that they would remain in student affairs long term (10 years from now), with 1 = *very unlikely* and 4 = *very likely*; the mean was 3.04 ( $SD = 1.14$ ).

**Attraction.** Respondents were asked to assess the extent to which they were attracted to the student affairs profession by a variety of factors. Forty respondents (80.0%) reported that two factors had a great amount of influence on their attraction to student affairs: the desire to provide programs and services for Native American students and the desire to give back to the Native American community. Also of great influence to a large number of respondents were the desire for personally fulfilling work ( $n = 35$ ; 70.0%), the desire to provide programs and services for students ( $n = 33$ ; 66.0%); the desire to work on a college campus ( $n = 30$ ; 60.0%); the desire to continue to learn and develop in an educational environment ( $n = 27$ ; 54.4%); the desire to help influence/nurture student development ( $n = 25$ ; 50.0%); and the desire to support the educational and service goals/mission of higher education ( $n = 24$ ; 48.0%).

### Information about Graduate Programs in Student Affairs

The respondents in this study who received a student affairs/higher education master's degree ( $n = 18$ ) were asked to rate the helpfulness of the information they received on graduate programs in student affairs. Sixty-one percent of those with master's degrees found the on-campus visit helpful. Half or more of the respondents did not receive information from the following: graduate school fair, interview/conversation with faculty in the program, on-campus housing, on-line directory of graduate programs, and conversations with current students in the program. Fifty-five percent of respondents found that graduate program websites were of little value or no value. These statistics are concerning especially for graduate programs' responsiveness to recruiting Native American graduate students.

Respondents who received a student affairs/higher education master's degree were also asked to rate variables that influenced their selection of a specific graduate preparation program. Fifty-three percent of the respondents rated the following two variables as having a great amount of influence: having the program located in their own state/region and total cost of attending the program. The availability of assistantships was identified as having a great amount of influence for 41% of the respondents.

## Discussion

For several decades, there has been an acknowledgement of the need to increase the representation of diversity within the student affairs profession (Komives & Kuh, 1988; Oseguera, 2013; Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1991; Talbot, 1996; Taub & McEwen, 2006). In spite of the concern for ensuring that the profession mirrors the demographics of the student population, there is an undeniable lack of professionals of Color in student affairs, especially Native

Americans. In a field that professes to value diversity and inclusion, this continued lack of representation is concerning. Understanding the factors and influences that guide Native Americans to student affairs careers and their experiences in researching graduate programs is essential to the creation of strategies for the successful recruitment of Native Americans into the profession. This study provides information that can help graduate preparation programs tailor their recruitment and retention efforts with culturally relevant practices to attract Native Americans.

In some ways, the Native American pathways into the profession resemble the traditional one: involvement in student activities and organizations, talking with a current student affairs professional, holding a student leadership position, and talking with a mentor (Hunter, 1992; Oseguera, 2013; Richmond & Sherman, 1991; Taub & McEwen, 2006). Interestingly, the Native pathways differ in at least two important ways. First, Native American student affairs professionals frequently enter the profession by a route other than a graduate program in student affairs/higher education. Second, Native American student affairs professionals do not frequently gain information about student affairs through working as a peer helper (for instance, as a resident assistant or orientation leader).

A large percentage of respondents (62.5%) did not have a graduate degree in student affairs/higher education. Further, since most of the research has been conducted with graduate students enrolled in student affairs preparation programs or recent graduates of programs (e.g., Hunter, 1992; Linder & Simmons, 2015; Richmond & Sherman, 1991; Taub & McEwen, 2006), the existing research about entry into the profession likely has missed Native student affairs professionals.

Participants in the study who attended a graduate program in student affairs/higher education reported that factors that influenced their choice of graduate program were cost, location in their home state/region, and graduate assistantships. This finding is similar to that of Linder and Simmons (2015) in their study of students of Color in graduate students in student affairs. They found that among the important factors related to choice of program for those students were graduate assistantships and practical opportunities (such as internships) and location. For some, location was important due to proximity to family; for some that proximity to family was associated with costs. Linder and Simmons (2015) observed:

The theme of location is especially important for those mentoring SOC through the choice process to consider. The master narrative in higher education focuses on “independence” from family as a developmental hallmark (Chickering & Reisser, 1993); this milestone comes from a Westernized, individualistic perspective that must be interpreted differently in cultures that value community over individuals. (p. 423)

Native American student affairs professionals gained information about student affairs as a profession through their involvement in clubs and organizations, as student leaders, and through talking with others, mostly student affairs professionals and mentors. They did not often gain information through working as a peer helper (in positions such as resident advisors and orientation leaders, for instance). Taub and McEwen (2006) called for “the ranks of RAs and orientation leaders to become more diverse, and possibly the pools from which these paraprofessionals are selected needs to become more diverse as well” (p. 215) in order to work to attract a diversity of people to the profession.

Are these kinds of positions not attractive to Native students? Are Native students not being encouraged to apply? Are they applying but not being selected? Healea and Hale (2016) referred to

the existence of “RA recruitment gaps” (p. 72), where the number of students selected as RAs differs markedly from their representation in the applicant pool and where their representation in the applicant pool differs from their representation in the student population. Healea and Hale also identified the importance of intentional recruitment of underrepresented RAs: “even the smallest efforts by the department to promote diversity issues were perceived as validation for underrepresented students. . . . by being intentional, they [staff] can effectively enhance the recruitment of a diverse RA staff” (Healea & Hale, 2016, pp. 74–75). Linder and Simmons (2015) referred to the need for graduate preparation programs to recruit “students who may not represent the ‘typical’ characteristics of a student affairs professional (e.g., ‘outgoing,’ young, White women)” in order to diversify the profession (p. 424).

Previous studies consistently have underscored the crucial component of mentorship (or sponsorship) in encouraging people into the field (Hunter, 1992; Linder & Simmons, 2015; Oseguera, 2013; Richmond & Sherman, 1991); this is particularly true for students of Color (Linder & Simmons, 2015). This study follows suit with 65% of respondents being encouraged to enter the field by a mentor. What is evident in this study reveals that the majority of mentors for Native Americans were people of Color (64.1%) and 22% of all mentors were Native American. The literature on the importance of matching mentors and mentees based on race/ethnicity is mixed (Liang & West, 2007). Some mentoring literature suggests that when students are given the opportunity to choose mentors, they tend to seek mentors of their own race/ethnicity (Jackson, Kite, & Branscombe, 1996; Klaw & Rhodes, 1995; Sanchez & Colon, 2005). Some research suggests that mentors of Color are more likely to reach out to mentees of Color than White mentors are (Kalbfleisch & Davies, 1991) and that students of Color are more likely to find mentors who match them in race/ethnicity to be more helpful (Santos & Reigadas, 2002). Luedke (2017), in her study of the mentoring relationships of Black, Latinx, and Biracial students, found that students reported that they found that White staff and administrators did not attempt to form genuine relationships with them, and consequently, they turned to people of Color to mentor them. Cultural values can be important in the selection of mentoring and in the quality of the mentoring relationship (Liang & West, 2007), as mentees also tend to be more satisfied with the mentoring relationship when their race/ethnicity matches that of the mentor (Ensher & Murphy, 1997; Santos & Reigadas, 2000). Unfortunately, the small number of Native American student affairs professionals makes it likely that many Native students will not have the opportunity to be mentored by a Native American student affairs professional.

On the other hand, Oseguera (2013) found that ethnic heritage of the mentor was not important to NASPA NUPF mentees. Other points of similarity between mentor and mentee (such as similar interests and attitudes) may be just as, or more, important to satisfaction and success (Ensher & Murphy, 1997; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Oseguera, 2013). In addition, it is unreasonable to expect student affairs professionals of Color to take on sole responsibility for mentoring students of Color. In any event, multicultural competence is essential for a successful cross-race mentor-mentee match (Rhodes, 2002; Sanchez & Colon, 2005).

One of the strongest influencers on participants to enter the profession was the lack of Native American student affairs professionals. The most important factors in attracting Native American student affairs professionals to the field were the desire to provide programs and services for Native American students and the desire to give back to the Native American community. This echoes the findings of Linder and Simmons (2015) that “an overwhelming number of participants” (p. 418) attributed their motivation to enter the profession to their desire to do access-related work with students of Color and first-generation students. This desire for advocacy and generativity is

an additional layer of motivation that has not emerged in studies of the motivations to enter the profession of largely White student affairs professionals.

In many ways, the findings of this study were congruent with previous studies of the decision to enter the profession of student affairs (Hunter, 1992; Taub & McEwen, 2006). Through applying an Indigenous lens by utilizing TribalCrit, the findings of this study add to our understanding of differences in the pathways and motivations of Native American student affairs professionals. Specifically, an understanding of the importance of community, reciprocity, family, and the relationship with land for Indigenous people led to modifications of the existing instrument. Without those new items, culturally specific motivations of Native student affairs professionals to enter the profession would not have been illuminated.

The significant disparity of the representation of Native Americans working in higher education is alarming. The current study demonstrates that the greatest influence for seeking out a career in student affairs for Native Americans was overwhelmingly related to the need to provide services to Native American students, a desire to give back to the Native American community, and to combat the lack of Native Americans working in higher education. These findings support literature on Native American graduate students that there is a “cultural need to give back to the community” (Tijerina & Biemer, 1987, p. 91) and reciprocity influences many aspects of educational aspirations for Native Americans (CHiXapkaid & Inglebret, 2007; Guillory, 2008; Juntunen et al., 2001).

### **Implications for Research and Practice**

In addressing the use of TribalCrit as a theoretical lens within research and praxis, Brayboy (2005) identified a hope that it would address structural issues and inequality and create “action or activism” (p. 440) to expose and change the phenomenon being explored to improve situations for tribal communities. These implications are framed in that context.

Given the general importance of peer positions such as resident assistant and orientation leader positions as a pathway into student affairs (Taub & McEwen, 2006), it is important to learn more about why this is not the case with Native students. Future research could investigate the attractiveness of these positions to Native students and possible perceived barriers to pursuing them. Such research could also explore the existence of “recruitment gaps” (Healea & Hale, 2016) and possible selection bias for Native students. For example, do selection processes favor “outgoing” individuals over those who are more reflective or less emotionally expressive? Arminio et al. (2000) stated student affairs professionals should critically analyze whom they encourage to seek out these types of leadership positions in lieu of encouraging students who only seem “to lead in traditional and hierarchical ways” (p. 506).

The importance of mentors or sponsors in encouraging individuals to consider student affairs as a profession has been identified by several researchers (Hunter, 1992; Linder & Simmons, 2015; Oseguera, 2013; Richmond & Sherman, 1991; Taub & McEwen, 2006; Ting & Watt, 1999) and is underscored by the current study. Because of the small number of Native American student affairs professionals, the responsibility to mentor Native students often will fall on non-Native professionals. These potential mentors should become multiculturally competent by increasing their knowledge about and interactions with various cultures and specifically for Native American students; this includes but is not limited to learning about Native American history, culture, tribes, spending time with Native American communities, among other ways to increase competency. Future research should explore the mentoring relationships experienced by Native American student affairs professionals.

To help diversify the profession, current student affairs professionals should look beyond the traditional peer para-professional positions to other arenas of involvement and leadership on campus (Linder & Simmons, 2015; Taub & McEwen, 2006). A recruitment strategy would be to reach out to identity-based organizations and cultural centers on campuses such as Native student organizations (NSOs), historically Native American and multicultural fraternities and sororities, and Native American student services as a source of potential future student affairs professionals who could be encouraged to look at the profession for themselves.

Efforts by national associations, such as ACPA's Next Generation conference and NASPA's NUFPP program, could place greater emphasis on recruiting Native American undergraduates to participate, both by recruiting at tribal colleges and by recruiting at non-Native institutions through Native affinity organizations. NUFPP has been successful in attracting underrepresented students into the profession (Oseguera, 2013) and could serve as a model for recruiting more Native American students into student affairs. Establishing relationships with local institutions of higher education, Tribal colleges and universities, Native American community organizations, and tribal communities could increase awareness of the diversity of career areas within higher education.

Another recruitment strategy for Native students is to emphasize the potential in a career in student affairs to help Native students and to give back to the community—two factors that were identified in the current study as most influential. Recruitment materials could highlight how the student affairs profession is inclusive of factors that are important to Native students, including culture, family, and community (Thomason & Thurber, 1999) as well as the profession's commitment to diversity, social justice, and decolonization (ACPA–College Student Educators International, n.d.; ACPA & NASPA, 2015). Furthermore, the data from this study identified that reciprocity is a significant factor in seeking out student affairs and supports the need for graduate preparation programs to establish relationships with Native American communities in their area. Articulating the professions' mission for supporting and developing students within higher education as a way to serve their communities could provide motivation for Native students to seek out a degree in student affairs.

It also is important that, once recruited into the profession, Native American graduate students and new professionals are supported and mentored. In many cases, this will mean that Native graduate students and new professionals will be mentored by non-Native faculty and student affairs professionals. Mentors, who might be faculty members, assistantship, internship, or practicum supervisors, or other professionals, will need multicultural competence to be effective (Oseguera, 2013; Sanchez & Colon, 2005). Professional associations in student affairs also can assist in mentoring efforts by connecting Native American graduate students and new professionals with mentors on campuses other than their own. The profession cannot expect our colleagues of Color to take on the exclusive responsibility for mentoring Native students and other students of Color.

## Conclusion

The college enrollment and persistence to graduation of Native American college is the lowest of all racial/ethnic groups in the United States. According to the findings of this study, few Native Americans currently are pursuing careers in student affairs, and few of those who are doing so entered the profession along typical routes. Very few Native Americans are represented in graduate programs in student affairs and higher education. Our intent in framing this critical quantitative

study was to bring awareness and representation of the participants experiences through numbers (Oxendine, 2016).

Native students have much to gain from the involvement of Native American student affairs professionals in their college experience (Oxendine & Taub, 2016). The profession can and should do more to recruit and retain Native American student affairs professionals and, by doing so, make a positive difference in the lives of Native college students.

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