

## **Perspectives and Values of Leadership for Native American College Students in Non-Native Colleges and Universities**

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### **Introduction**

Higher education in the United States has become increasingly diverse in recent decades. Greater numbers of minority students are attending higher education institutions; however, enrollment among the Native American student population has remained steady, ranging only from 0.7% to 1.0% of total enrollments between 1976 and 2007 (NCES, 2009). In 2007, there were 25,063 Native American students in the higher education system (NCES, 2010). For Native American students, student support and development programs are essential, particularly at non-Native colleges and universities (NNCUs). Vital aspects of these programs are the inclusions of culturally sensitive leadership perspectives and leadership development. This research study explores this topic.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The presence of Native American students in higher education necessitates the need for advocacy and promotion of Native student perspectives in the services and programs offered at NNCUs. Included in this structure is the need for NNCUs, researchers, and practitioners to better understand not only the views of Native students, but also how cultural values impact Native student perspectives of leadership and leadership

development, particularly given that this population is uniquely shaped by their tribal values, families, and home communities. The purpose of this study is to explore the meanings and perspectives of leadership and leadership development among current Native American college students who are student leaders in Native American student organizations at five NNCUs in the United States.

## **Literature**

### **College Student Leadership Development**

Although there is a vast amount of literature surrounding leadership and leadership development, none have intentionally included the Native American student perspective or impacts of leadership on this student population. The following overview of college student leadership provides an overview of the general literature surrounding college student leadership development. Foremost among these corpora is the servant leadership approach developed by Greenleaf (1970) to bridge industrial and postindustrial paradigms. Although viewed as leader-centric, this approach advances a values-based concept of shared processes and outcomes.

The relational leadership model, a leadership development model proffered specifically for college students by Komives, Longenecker, Owen, Mainella, and Osteen (2006), emphasizes reciprocal relationships. The model consists of five key components, including purposefulness, inclusiveness, empowerment, ethical practices, and process orientation. This model was developed solely to help students expand their leadership capacity and effectively engage others. The social change model of leadership development is noted as the most applied leadership theory in college student leadership development (Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006; Owen, 2008). Developed

and created by Astin and Astin (1996), the model emphasizes two core principles: (1) leadership is tied to social responsibility and creating change for the common good, and (2) leadership is founded on both increasing individuals' self-knowledge and being able to work collaboratively with others (Higher Education Research Institute (HERI), 1996). These two principles help students grow across seven critical values: consciousness of self, congruence, commitment, collaboration, common purpose, controversy with civility, and citizenship, with all of these combining to manifest an eighth value, which is change for the common good. The eight total values interact and overlap across three domains: the individual, the group, and society (HERI, 1996).

A recent leadership development model developed by Komives et al. (2006) is based on five emerging categories that influence the development of a leadership identity: broadening view of leadership, developing self, group influences, developmental influences, and the changing view of self with others. Within each category there are stages that compare the growth in leadership identity in a linear manner. The six stages are: awareness, exploration/engagement, leader identified, leadership differentiated, generativity, and integration/synthesis. This leadership identity model for college students informs the perception of the formation of self and how life as well as the college experience ultimately impact leadership development (Komives et al., 2006).

### **Native Perspectives on Leadership**

The preceding overview of college student leadership development literature is provided as context to the general impact of leadership on college students; it does not sufficiently incorporate Native college student leaders' perspectives of leadership. For a study such as this, it is important to consider Native American perspectives on the construct of

leadership. The paragraphs that follow reflect the factors found in the literature to contribute to Native Americans and their identity in general, and specifically to the development of Native American leadership. Consequently, the findings that follow are important because they integrate the history of Native Americans and issues surrounding identity (Harris & Wasilewski, 1992). The literature indicates that multiple factors contribute to Native perspectives on leadership, including historical trauma, cultural identity, community engagement and social responsibility, and leadership development values.

**Historical Trauma.** Historical trauma includes the impacts of contact between the Indigenous populations of the United States and European settlers. Bird (1998) suggests that the hardest work for Native American populations is to go back and understand the impacts of colonization. Separating what is learned in textbooks or what is seen in the media from reality is difficult; Native peoples see the impacts of colonization on their families at a very intimate level, but this is not shown on the pages of textbooks or presented in the media (Mihesuah, 2004).

Historical trauma is also seen in the evolution of Native American leadership roles within tribal communities and families. For many families, the result of the boarding school experience is a break down in the family structure, with more single mothers and single parent households than before federal policy and assimilation efforts (Fox, Tippeconnic, Lowe & McClellan, 2005). This breakdown in family structure contributes to the loss of leadership roles that men, depending on the tribe and region, traditionally held in the family (Weaver, 2001). The cumulative picture portrayed in the literature is that

understanding Native perspectives of leadership necessitates recognition of the role and impacts of historical trauma (Duran, Duran, Brave Heart, & Yellow Horse-Davis, 1998).

**Cultural Identity.** Recognizing how historical trauma affects Native American populations involves consideration of external factors associated with identity and the impacts that historical events had on the cultural identity of Native American individuals and their communities (Nagel, 1997). Weaver (2001) discusses the effects that history, federal policy, and sovereignty had on Native American communities and indicates that an integration of all of these factors impacts the cultural identity of many Native Americans. The cultural identity of Native individuals—and thus their perspectives on leadership—is shaped not only by historical events, but also by the community in which the individual lives. Native cultural identity, however, is more than the “blood quantum” of a person and encompasses the language, connection to genealogy and ancestors, worldviews and philosophy practiced on a daily basis, one’s self-concept, and one’s tribal enrollment (Horse, 2005).

**Community Engagement and Social Responsibility.** The community engagement and social responsibility component of Native American leadership is an integral part of the Native American community and, therefore, important to the individual Native student (Johnson, Benham & Van Alstine, 2003). Portman and Garrett (2005) affirm that a foundational value of leadership for Native Americans is the holding of a shared vision and responsibility. Wise-Erickson (2003) examine the congruency between team based leadership and the values of Native American leadership within tribal communities, and find congruence between the values and the need to create a community-based leadership model that integrates the roles, values, and holistic nature of

the American Indian communities and concepts of leadership. These findings demonstrate the strong connection between leadership and the community, and the shared, mutual values of the individual, the tribe, and Native community.

**Leadership Development Values.** The literature indicates that the values associated with Native American leadership and the process of Native leadership development are based on the values encompassed by the individual, the tribal or home community, and the desire to impact the environment where the leadership is needed. For example, the leadership model developed by Johnson (1997) reflects Native ways of practicing leadership by tribal college leaders. Five themes for living and leading are revealed: a commitment to serving the community, claiming one's voice to take risks and actions for the community, demonstrating and modeling that education is necessary for cultural survival and self-determination, understanding and bridging relationships with diverse groups of people, and continually nurturing the spirit and maintaining a sense of balance in life. Similarly, Harris and Wasilewski (1992) find that the core cultural values demonstrated by tribal leaders are being a good relative, inclusive sharing, contributing to the common good, and non-coercive leadership. In leadership development within Native American communities the cultural values being tied to the community are of utmost importance.

### **Overview of Methodology**

To ensure that the voices of the participants—current Native American college students—are shared, this study utilized qualitative methodology. Focus groups were conducted among current Native American student leaders at each of the five NNCUs, which are four-year institutions. Each NNCU was located in a distinct geographic region

of the United States that represented diverse tribal nations from which student's leaders originated. In addition, one-on-one interviews were conducted with a Native American student leader at each institution to provide a narrative of his or her experience as a campus leader and his or her perspectives regarding leadership. Participants were chosen using purposive sampling through identification by Native American student affairs professionals at the five NNCUs. Native American student affairs professionals are individuals who are Native American themselves and work within the Native American student support programs, centers, or studies departments on the NNCU campus. At four PWIs four participants were selected at each institution, and at one NNCU five participants were selected, representing a total of 21 participants. I used the phenomenological data analysis approach, which provides a basis for researchers to explore meaning making in human experiences (Polkinghorne, 1989). These responses were examined per individual institution and then overall to determine if there were any relationships between regions or meaning made across the regions represented. In the following sections, more information will be provided on research participants, data collection, data analysis, and the conceptual framework that was used.

### **Research Participants**

The research participants were 21 undergraduate and graduate Native American students attending five different NNCUs within five regional areas in the United States.

Participants represented one or more tribal nations from each respective region. The selected participants were recommended through purposive sampling by Native American or Multicultural Student Affairs offices at each campus. Purposive sampling was observed through the intentional selection of sites and participants (Creswell, 2009).

The participants were actively involved on campus in the Native American student organization as leaders on their campuses. I deemed it important that the participants had leadership experience in the Native American organizations on campus; this enabled them to provide their perspectives of how these roles impacted their leadership development and how, or if, they impacted their perceptions of Native American student leadership, pivotal points of inquiry for this research study.

### **Data Collection**

I conducted each focus group using a semi-structured protocol that initially asked participants to introduce themselves and state their tribes, major, and type of home community. Questions followed that centered on leadership, Native leadership, and how participants became involved in leadership in the organization. Audiotaping ensured that the voice and words of each participant were recorded and correctly transcribed. Field notes were written at the conclusion of each focus group and interview. Field notes helped me to include the layout of the environment, facial and body movement, and any other observations made during each focus group (Emerson, Fretz, & Shawl, 1995). I also conducted individual interviews, using a semi-structured protocol. Interview participants were asked to elaborate on their experiences in the focus group and on additional thoughts that arose either from that interaction or reflection on their personal experiences. Audios from the recordings were transcribed within one week of the interactions with focus group and interview participants. The one-week deadline for focus group and interview transcription facilitated subsequent timely member checking. The confidentiality of the participants is upheld within this study through the use of

pseudonyms of each participant that they self-selected and had to be non-identifiable to them or their institution.

### **Data Analysis**

The phenomenological data analysis approach was employed for data analysis. This approach facilitates the exploration of meaning making in human experiences (Polkinghorne, 1989). As such, the phenomenological analysis approach seeks to gain meaning from lived experiences of a phenomenon of a person or group of people (Patton, 2002). The first step for the researcher accordingly is the “epoche” or gaining awareness of one’s own experience or bias and removing oneself from judgment of the participants’ meaning making (Patton, 2002). The next step of the phenomenological data analysis process is for the researcher to “bracket out” so that the data is in its purest form, enabling it to be deconstructed (Husserl, 1962). In bracketing, the subject or responses of participants are seen in their own terms. From the invariant themes and phenomenological data analysis process, a description of the findings emerged. I observed these steps for this research study because I sought to gain the meaning of the Native American student leaders’ perspectives on leadership. After acknowledging my own experience as a former student leader and recent advisor to Native student organizations, I began the process of bracketing out the responses of the students between each region and then across regions. From this process, the three descriptive terms emerged across the experiences of the Native student leaders.

### **Conceptual Framework**

**Indigenous Research Paradigm and Relationality.** The Indigenous knowledge and research paradigm is grounded in the belief that when Indigenous (Native American)

researchers are part of the research process the element of the non-Native researcher as outsider is removed, allowing inherent Native knowledge, values, and lived experiences to strengthen the research and to be seen through Indigenous eyes. Part of the supposition is that the research is not being conducted *on* people or participants but *with* them (Wilson, 2008). The components of an Indigenous research paradigm are conceptualized as a circle. The pieces are comprised of ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology. The following paragraphs describe how each of these contributes to the conceptual framework employed for this research study and how relationality is tied to the framework.

***Ontology.*** An Indigenous ontology acknowledges that there may be multiple realities and that reality is in the relationship that one has with the truth (Wilson, 2008). Reality is a relationship or set of relationships and there is no one definite reality but different sets of relationships. Reality is not an object but rather the set of relationships that make up our reality. Knowledge is shared through these multiple sets of relationships.

***Epistemology.*** Indigenous epistemology is equivalent to an Indigenous ontology; as stated earlier, reality is not an object but a set of relationships. The concept of Indigenous knowledge is relational. Indigenous epistemology is a system of knowledge built on relationships between things, rather than on the things themselves (Wilson, 2008). Thus Indigenous epistemology is Indigenous peoples or tribal culture, language, histories, spirituality, and how we are connected to the Earth and its being. How each is connected to each other, in relation to each other, forms the Indigenous epistemology.

***Axiology.*** The connections between the Indigenous ontology and epistemology are equally connected to an Indigenous axiology and methodology as they all lie within a circle representing an Indigenous research paradigm. The Indigenous axiology is built on relational accountability. The values that guide the Indigenous researcher are the responsibilities in fulfilling the role and obligations in the research relationship and being accountable to his/her relations (Wilson, 2008). As a part of the researchers responsibility, the outcomes of the research are based on reciprocity; any knowledge shared from the process of research means that findings or usefulness found must be given back to the community from which they came.

***Methodology.*** The Indigenous methodology is a process of relational accountability. The three R's (respect, reciprocity, and responsibility) must be key to a healthy relationship and included in Indigenous methodology (Weber-Pillwax, 2001). As an Indigenous researcher, it is important that the methodological approach encompasses these three values that are found in every Indigenous community. The Indigenous methodology of maintaining relational accountability is upheld between the researcher, the community, and the knowledge that is generated and shared.

***Relationality.*** Indigenous peoples, including Indigenous researchers, have multiple relational ways of being; this is what it means to be Indigenous (Wilson, 2008). Indigenous people have relationships with multiple communities including family, friends, tribal communities, professional circles, other Indigenous/tribal communities, ancestors, animals, and land. As an Indigenous researcher, understanding the importance of having respect by acknowledging and maintaining these relationships is necessary. It is as an Indigenous researcher that these relationships are connected to the subject or

knowledge being sought and to the already formed relationships that knowledge is acquired.

### **Describing Indigenous Leadership**

The findings from this study provided a deeper understanding of how the Native student leaders describe Indigenous leadership. I asked the students to describe Indigenous leadership using three different words and to provide an explanation for the choice of each word. What follows is a presentation of the three overarching words that resonated throughout the students' descriptions, with a weaving of some of the other descriptive terms that fall within each emergent category. The three words used by the Native student leaders to describe Indigenous leadership are: commitment, community, and collaboration.

***Commitment.*** For the Native student leaders this term describes the importance of multiple constructs, including using determination for the community, dedication, patience, and bravery and strength. The student's voices highlight the various hats that they wear, and the divergent tasks that they undertake, to advance their communities. Commitment includes considerations such as planning, as Walter states:

You have to be committed to it if you're going to do it. Because if you're not committed not only will you suffer the organization itself will suffer. If you're not committed to the organization it's like you're not committed to your family. In this context the organization is the Native student organization (NSO). Commitment represents addressing the needs of the community through dedication to providing needed programs and event planning.

**Determination and Fighting for the Community.** The Native student leaders describe the importance of determination for the community, encompassing strength, understanding, and determination. Leonard declares:

Then, determination, they have to be determined to work for the good of the people. They have to know how this will benefit this group, the overall picture of progressing through these modern times. Just keeping our Native nations alive and to prosper them to continue the traditions, the culture, the language so that we can just, you know, survive in these modern times.

Such determination is based on having the best intentions for people and the tribe. For Phillip, determination is about:

Specifically language, ceremony, and things like that. Heritage aspects of the community that are kind of shunned by the outside dominant society, but there's things that are really important to an Indigenous leader in an Indigenous community. Without those you really don't have the respect of the community.

When an Indigenous leader is committed to the community they are willing to stand up as a voice for the community. The Indigenous leader gives back to the community the strength they gain by serving as an Indigenous leader.

**Dedication.** The word *commitment* is the resounding theme behind all of the descriptive terms. The word encapsulates not only determination but also dedication as it relates to ensuring that the members of the community do well. In this regard, for the Native student leaders dedication includes making sure that programs and events for the well-being of the community are created and planned. With dedication comes great sacrifice, as Art states:

I think as a leader you got to sacrifice a little bit of yourself. Maybe if it's sacrificing a little bit of your sleep time, your free time, you got to step up and you got to give a little bit of yourself to whatever organization you're going to be in. Motivation is absolutely 100% key and you know that's everything about you, your stature, the way you carry yourself. You have to be motivated and that will come across very clearly to your group.

Dedication means giving of oneself to the community, even when being in a leadership position and working in the community is hard. Scott states:

Well to add on to that I would say another word would be you have to be *dedicated*. Like Chad said, I mean ya'll a small group so you can't give up just because ya'll a small group. You never give up so you have to stick to it and stay dedicated.

Whether in a small Native organization or a tribal community, Indigenous leadership requires dedication. This echoes throughout the voices of the Native student leaders.

**Patience.** Commitment also requires patience to deal with people and to see desired progress achieved in the community. Cloud Hehaka Sapa speaks to this:

I guess you could even say because you just, you got to have patience with people and with situations. You can never plan out everything as much as you think you can.

Patience is particularly important for the Native student leaders when they deal with their own tribal community. In this context they are involved with the people they grew up with: elders, peers and family. The Native student leaders also state that it is important to have patience with the community and with the environment of which they are a part.

**Bravery and Strength.** Other descriptive terms that encompass the word *commitment* are the needs for Indigenous leaders to have bravery and strength. In this context commitment means that one is willing to have the strength in the face of adversity to stand up for what is right. An Indigenous leader must be prepared to stand up for the whole organization or the tribal community. Charlie observes:

A leader should have strength and that strength should be performed in the ability to stand up to adversity whether it's one person in your group or the entire organization.

The Native student leaders also state that it is important to be brave. There are times when the Native leader is the only person of color in a room and they represent their organization or tribal community. Chad states:

I'd also say that you have to be brave by being such a small population and more than likely coming from a small organization you're representing students. It can be intimidating when you walk into a room where you know 90% of the people are of one race. It can be intimidating, so you have to be brave to do so.

The need to be brave in an Indigenous leadership role is necessary, not only in the face of adversity but also in places where no one else looks like the leader. Their role is to be committed to the leadership position and the community. All of this occurs within a community that maintains and sustains the person.

**Community.** Another term used to describe Indigenous leadership is *community*. This term appears in most of the students' descriptions. It embraces considerations such as: understanding the concept of community, family and culture, responsibility to the community, developing a voice with pride, and vision and awareness for the community.

In the following sub-sections the students speak about the importance of each of these, how they are inter-connected, and how community is a construct that should be inherently understood as an Indigenous leader. The Native student leaders are individuals who came from a community, whether that community is urban, reservation, tribal, or rural. In addition, as leaders on campus they seek to build a community for themselves and other Native students. Both of these realities underscore the words and the voices of the Native student leaders.

**Understanding the Concept of Community.** We begin by looking at how the Native student leaders understand the concept of community. Cloud Hehaka Sapa uses community as his first descriptive term to describe Indigenous leadership:

Community first and foremost because I think in any Indigenous perspective one of the main differences from Western is the concept of ‘I’ and ‘I am nothing without my community.’ Whether that be here in the urban setting or if its back home in South Dakota then, you know, ‘I am only because they are.’ So I think that’s one thing that motivates me. The whole reason I’m doing this is for my community, not for me.

Cloud Hehaka Sapa’s understanding of the importance of community—as a Native person and even more so as an Indigenous leader—is reflected in every interview and focus group. The drive and motivation to accomplish personal goals and to succeed is for the good of the community. Phillip captures this well. Although he initially uses the descriptive term *decolonization*, his comments are more about the efforts to help the tribal community and to do so with the best of intentions:

Decolonization just because as stated before that the entire idea of an Indigenous leader is someone who comes from the community and it's not someone who is there to lead the community and change them. They are there to maintain and keep the community healthy and safe and do their best as a leader, do their best by their people. It's never an individual thing, even though the individual is only allowable through the community, without a community there is no individual.

The Native students understand the concept of community; this is seen in their words and their descriptions of the role of an Indigenous leader within the community. As an Indigenous researcher, I view the epistemology and understanding of the concept of community as the same, as a shared idea and lived experience as an Indigenous person.

**Family and Culture.** The Native student leaders also describe how family and culture impact Indigenous leadership by contributing to support and development. Walter speaks about the broadness of the term *family* and how it can refer to various individuals who are not biologically related but are who he knows as his family:

That sense of family is a key part of leadership [be]cause I mean, trust me, if you're on the exec[utive] board ya'll going to fight, ya'll going to have fun times just like a family. You'll are all doing the same goal and you will have fun. We'll laugh, we cry everything, and then culture that's from my personal perspective [be]cause I know I wouldn't be able to do the things that I do here leadership wise without the ties to the culture that I have. Without being able to lean on that when I need it for support being able to lean on what I was taught when I'm in a bind on what to do to help me, to help the people around me. So you have to be committed to that too because it's all connected I guess so for me.

This Native student leaders' understanding of community, family, and culture are tied together because in his perception of Indigenous leadership one cannot exist without the other. This understanding of the idea of family and how it impacts the Indigenous leader is important. Recognizing the role that family plays in the development of an Indigenous leader, Kateri states:

So your family plays in [contributes] because your family is who made you who you are. No matter what you say. They are the people that helped you on this journey all the way to where you are. Because of them that's where you are and think that like no matter what in all the way until you're like in grandma status you're still going to have your family and that's still going to be a part of your leadership.

Kateri indicates that family, culture, and values are the foundation for Indigenous leadership. The upbringing of the individual—through the values instilled through family and culture—consequently impacts the type of leader they become.

**Responsibility to the Community.** This phrase embodies the description of community as it relates to what Indigenous leadership is. For Good, it means being honest and spiritually connected in order to make decisions responsibly:

People don't think so much about the entire tribe. They think so much about their family or other people that are going to vote for them. Spirituality is that, you know, we as Native people are spiritual and that's a big part of it, if we do how our ancestors did in the correct ways.

For the Native student leaders, it is important to ensure that the image and spirit of the ancestors within Indigenous communities are respectfully upheld. Lillian states:

Responsibility just because the whole imagery of Native Americans is not accurate in a lot of places. And we have a responsibility not just to our ancestors but to the future of our people. To hold ourselves in a certain way especially as a leader [be]cause you're the role model you're the person that everybody that the public sees.

This Native student leader describes the importance of upholding a positive image and defying the stereotypes and inaccuracies that some people hold about Indigenous peoples.

**Developing a Voice with Pride.** The Native student leaders understand the important role of community and how it defines Indigenous leadership. Associated with community is the concept of developing with pride a voice for the community to use.

Sydney offers:

You know, you have to develop your own voice, like I said. You need somebody who [is] able to kind of conform themselves and change in different environments and different areas to develop that voice as well.

Once a voice is formed it is also important to have pride as an Indigenous person and in the community that is served, whether the community is a NSO or tribal. Chad states:

You have to have pride because you have to be proud of who you are and proud of your people. Being in a student organization or the leader of that organization you have to show pride in that.

The voice of the community should be heard through the pride that the Indigenous leader has in who they are and in the community they represent.

**Vision and Awareness.** The voices of the Native student leaders also address the need to have a vision and an awareness of the needs of the community. Charlie declares:

A leader should be aware, so that means aware of what is happening within their nation and other political dynamics. Then also aware of what people are actually facing. So, taking that leadership to the collegiate setting, you know, aware of what your members want to have happen. A leader should be concerned about issues, community, and actually the same thing.

Being aware of the needs of the community means that an Indigenous leader should be invested in who they represent, and facilitate changes that will benefit the community. Consequently, an Indigenous student leader should have a vision for the future of the community. Clark states:

Vision because you need to remain focused through all of this. You have to be aware. You have to know where things are going, what's possible; you have to realistic about what can be achieved.

Without the community that an Indigenous leader represents there is no leader.

Therefore, for an Indigenous person a community is the center of leadership.

***Collaboration.*** The final term used to describe Indigenous leadership is *collaboration*. This term is associated in the students' descriptions with being open minded, fair, cooperative, and understanding. As previously discussed, the community is the center of Indigenous leadership, and this calls for the ability to collaborate within and outside of the community.

***Open Minded.*** The first descriptive term associated with collaboration for an Indigenous leader is the need to remain open minded. As Joy states, Indigenous leaders deal with the diverse backgrounds and life experiences of people within and beyond the community:

I would maybe say open-minded because not only do you have to except people from all different tribes, we're all different. You have to be open minded to different people's perspectives and open minded to stereotypes. So, I think open minded and humble.

Collaboration means being willing to help others learn, whether or not they are part of the tribal community. Collaboration also means being willing to learn from others. In addition, collaboration necessitates good communication, as Lillian emphasizes:

You have to understand who you're, who we're dealing with and how to communicate with them so that you can work with them, which brings the collaboration. I think that the future of Native, our Native leaders are going to be dealing with not just the state level or federal level but international as well as intertribal. So they're going to have to learn how to collaborate with different, you know, diverse ethnic backgrounds.

The Native student leaders understand that Indigenous leadership means being opened minded, teachable, and able to communicate with multiple audiences; these are not confined to the tribal community but entail connecting with others across the state, nation, and world. As Harris & Wasilewski (1992) state, Indigenous populations across the continent face similar issues, and collaboration across borders is important for future progress.

**Fair.** Another descriptive term that falls under collaboration is the need for an Indigenous leader to be fair. Wilma states that it is important for an Indigenous leader to be "fair, holistic, and seeing from all aspects not just linear, understanding," in other words, able to see from all viewpoints. Because community is the center of leadership

for an Indigenous leader, it is important to be “equal” in advocacy and leadership within the community. The students emphasize the role of cultural values, honesty, and integrity in this regard. These are associated with being fair to those with whom they work and represent.

**Cooperation.** Another descriptive term that arises from the students’ voices is the importance of cooperation. Phillip states:

Cooperation is just that, if you’re going to be a leader in an Indigenous community you have to work with the people. It’s never your decision.

As Phillip declares, Indigenous leaders need to cooperate within the community they work and to move past the politics and internal conflicts. Vera discusses the importance of cooperation and being egalitarian in leadership as an Indigenous person:

I would say that ideally again that people would respect difference so that way there’s not tribal politics. On an individual level within the leadership you don’t bring that up into, um, a position where it diminishes someone else’s participation.

The Native student leaders see Indigenous leadership from their personal experiences, their involvement in the NSO, and their tribal communities. Based on these experiences they emphasize the need for cooperation.

**Understanding.** Understanding, as the final descriptive term associated with collaboration, encompasses the ability to relate to the people the Native student leaders represent. Clark emphasizes the importance of respecting previous Indigenous leaders and what they contributed to the current state of the community or organization:

Deference because you're going to have to respect the ones who came before. The politics is going to be a part, you know, an important part of changing anything. People are going to [be]offended especially if they feel like the work that they've done in the past isn't being respected and that can splinter a group in no time. Understanding the role that prior leaders had in the advancement of the community or organization is crucial for contemporary Indigenous leaders. Leonard adds:

They have to understand who they are as a tribal member, as a tribal person, and they have to understand the needs of their people. They have to understand just the whole cultural aspect so that they can use that to strengthen themselves, so they can strengthen their position for speaking for people.

Recognizing the needs of the community builds the voice of the people. Full recognition of those needs necessitates reflection on the part of the leader, as Cloud Hehaka Sapa states:

Understanding, that's the part of reflection on things. You finish something and you have to reflect and understand what happened. What went well, what could have been better, and how can I reapply that to the next project that we're working on.

The Native student leaders offer significant insights on Indigenous leadership. Their insights are captured by three words: commitment, community, and collaboration. Within each of these words multiple descriptive terms are included. Understanding their insights is imperative for this study because these are the voices not only of current Native college students but also of Indigenous community members.

## **Recommendations and Summary**

These descriptions underscore the collective voices of the Native college students when they describe Indigenous leadership with the three key words of commitment, community, and collaboration emerging. What is important is that the perspectives of current Native student leaders are provided, and these perspectives are derived from their personal experiences both as a Native student leader and with Indigenous leadership in general. The use of the Indigenous Research Paradigm acknowledges the value that an Indigenous researcher brings in generating a better understanding of concepts within Indigenous communities. The ideas and concepts of leadership in a Western perspective should be challenged from an Indigenous perspective as the voices of Native college students confirm concepts of Indigenous leadership to embody the values of commitment, community, and collaboration. These findings are closely related to the literature presented by Portman and Garrett (2005) affirming that Native Americans hold value in a shared vision and responsibility. Meanwhile, Harris and Wasilewski (1992) found that core cultural values of a good relative, inclusive sharing, contributing to the common good, and non-coercive leadership were deeply connected to tribal leaders and communities, which reflects the values that the Native student leaders held in defining Indigenous leadership. This study affirms the unique perspectives and values that Native American college students bring with them on campus which ultimately impact their college student experience, level of engagement and success. Research questions and future studies could explore the role that prior leadership experiences within the Native college student's tribal communities and family influence have on participation and depth of involvement on campus. The way we begin to diversify higher education and society

is to acknowledge the strengths of all of our communities and, in this particular study, the experiences of Native American colleges students and the values they attribute to Indigenous leadership. This is a pivotal research study that requires leadership development researchers, practitioners, and educators to better learn and understand a missing voice in current leadership development current theories, models, and literature. In order for our communities to progress, we must acknowledge the values that have been instilled in us by our ancestors and the diverse communities each of us represents.

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