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R. W. Lasher

Donald W. Good

East Tennessee State University, gooddw@etsu.edu

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College Experiences of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians

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by

Rebecca Williams Lasher
Western Carolina University
Cullowhee, NC 28723

and

Donald W. Good
East Tennessee State University
Johnson City, TN 37614

ABSTRACT

A survey was distributed to all enrolled members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indian (EBCI) college students to compare the experiences of those attending Tribal and non-tribal colleges. The results of the survey provided data for a nonexperimental quantitative study that addressed 18 research questions in an effort to determine whether there is a significant difference between the educational experiences of EBCI college students who attend non-tribal institutions and those who attend Tribal colleges. In particular, there was a focus on three domains: student viewpoints on separation and alienation from their tribal community; tribal community connections; and individual perceptions of success. A comparison of the experiences by gender between students attending Tribal versus non-tribal colleges was made. The researcher used the Native American Collective Orientation and Pursuits in Education Scale (NACOPE) survey results as determinants of the college students' experiences.

The findings of this study indicated there were no significant differences between the experiences of EBCI students who attended either Tribal or nontribal colleges. In addition, there were no significant differences when gender and type of college were considered. However, there were significant differences in those attending Tribal and nontribal colleges regarding some dimensions. Students in both groups had significantly higher survey scores than the median test value on the NACOPE in three areas. These higher scores were observed in their overall experiences being reported as positive; feelings of community connectedness to their home tribe; and less feelings of separation and alienation on their college campuses.

Keywords: Cherokee students, Native American, higher education, persistence, Tribal Colleges

INTRODUCTION

The Native American population is a comparatively small ethnic minority population with a unique history of institutionalized mistreatment and discrimination, including formal governmental programs targeted at genocide and cultural eradication according to Reyhner and Edner (2006). This cultural group has been described as the most disadvantaged and marginalized population in the history of the United States (Smith, 2012). Many Native American students face extensive challenges when entering and attending institutions of higher learning. Students who seek a higher level of education must overcome hurdles, such as inadequate college preparatory courses work and economic hardships. Pursuing a postsecondary education also means leaving Native American communities behind and acclimating to the expectancies and values of a dominant culture.

In the area of higher education, abundant research has focused on the specific needs for minority students who attend predominantly white institutions to experience a sense of inclusiveness and support. However, less research exists that deals with the experiences of the Native American students who attend predominantly white institutions. Thus, it is essential to investigate the protocol of provisions necessary for these students to enroll in college, persist in degree completion, and matriculate.

This quantitative study was conducted with members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) who were enrolled in either Tribal colleges or nontribal colleges and it investigated their college experiences. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine whether there was a significant difference between the educational experiences of EBCI college students who attend nontribal institutions and those who attend Tribal colleges. In particular, I focused on three domains: student viewpoints on separation and alienation from their tribal community; tribal community connections; and individual perceptions of success.

RELATED LITERATURE

In reviewing the history of Native American students in higher education, there has been an intense distrust of the American educational system. The unsatisfactory experiences of these college students have been related primarily to experiences of racism and cultural misunderstandings. Native American students have encountered surveillance, acts of micro-aggression, and being asked to speak for their entire culture (Brayboy, Fann, Castango & Solyon, 2012). In a study on marginalized populations from 2012, Smith identified a concept of Native Americans being referred to as the “Other” by Whites. She clarified this concept as the struggle between the interests and ways of knowing the West versus those of the “Other.” Smith delineates the theory of the “Other” in her conclusion, “It has been used alongside other similar concepts such as borders, boundaries, bridges, center-periphery, and insider-outsider to demarcate people in spatial terms: as well as in socio-economic, political and cultural terms” (p. 204). In Flynn, Duncan and Jorgensen’s 2012 research, students described the experiences of discrimination that included being verbally hurt by others. One student described an act of overt racism in the classroom: “Even within nursing there are people writing on Facebook during class saying, ‘Gosh it’s great sitting here in class learning how the

Indians get everything for free” (p. 444).

According to some researchers, Native American students have frequently experienced a sense of cultural disconnect. Life on a predominantly White campus differs significantly from living with fellow Native Americans, either on a tribal reservation, or within a community of tribe members. In 2012, a theory constructed by Winters examined how Native American students must move from being a member of the majority population to the minority population upon arriving to college. As Pavel and Ingelbret wrote (2007) “the distance you travel may be great – not so much in physical miles but in the distance from Native cultural values” (p. 156). These experiences often create a dilemma for Native American students because they feel as if they are “walking between two worlds,” (Pipes, Westby, & Inglebret, 1993, p. 140) due to the transition from home to the college campus. This phenomenon involves the one world being the tribal community and the other being the mainstream world. When Native American students go away from their tribal communities and embark upon college, they take their tribal identification and cultural values with them, but are also expected to join into an institution with its own unwritten and often unspoken rules that represent the dominant culture. The expectation of assimilation can be complicated because most of the personal and cultural identity, as well as spirituality are intertwined with the Native American students’ connections to the family, community, and homeland. Throughout their early development, Native students are raised to think of themselves as parts of the interconnected whole of their tribe (Garriod & Larrimore, 1997). For the first time in their lives, students realize that their tribal affiliation or particular region of the country means little or nothing to those in the college environment. In addition, the fragmentation of life into separate components of academic, personal, social, and professional is in total opposition to the upbringing the Native student has experienced during their lives within the tribal community. The traditional view of health and personal development for the Native peoples is that all are inseparable parts of a complex whole. In other words, the individual’s intellectual, physical, spiritual, and emotional aspects are intertwined, to maintain health and well-being; the Native American believes there must be balance among all (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991).

Native American students find themselves in uncertain situations because many feel uneasy in the mainstream culture and cut off from their Native culture. Consequently, the result is “cultural marginalization” (Pipes et al., 1993). Making the situation more complicated, Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) insist that, when Native students enter college and then withdraw before completion, they are “branded by the university as a drop-out—a failure” (p. 5).

In 1988, Lin, LaCounte, and Eder examined the school environment on academic performance and graduation expectation of Native American students. The conclusion was that campus hostility and feelings of isolation had a substantial bearing on the academic performance of the Native American students. Turner (1994) described the experience of minority students on predominately White campuses as “guests in someone else’s house.” Moreover, she described the total university climate as “unwelcoming” and the complicated college infrastructure as “problematic.” For Native American students, feeling like a “guest” on a predominately White campus is even more frustrating given that they are most likely the smallest student minority group at most conventional colleges.

College retention models infer that, in order to be academically successful, students must assimilate into the social and academic culture of the college (Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Tierney, 1992). Brayboy et al. (2005) has suggested that at most mainstream universities, “there is an implicit assumption that underrepresented students will (and should) change or accommodate at any cost in order to succeed” (p. 16). Therefore, for minority students, to acclimate means to act “white” and, consequently, if a student refuses to assimilate into the dominant campus culture, the cost is social isolation, alienation, and eventually withdrawal (Wright, 1996).

Wright’s 1996 research implied that the obstacle is not necessarily the academic difficulties that the college places on any student but rather the pressure placed on students to assimilate into the new college environment. Saggio (2003) argued that it is “difficult for students of color to become involved when the social context of the academy is so strikingly different from the primary cultures of these students of color” (p. 7). This brings attention to the cultural conflict that many minority students, including Native American students, encounter when they enter college.

The solid family and cultural associations can establish a complication of anxieties for college students. As revealed in a study by Colbert, Saguio, and Tate (2004), the capacity to sufficiently negotiate between the old life students left behind (family, friends and home) and the new life ahead of them was essential in their ability to persist in college. This process is often most problematic for Native American college students, considering the heightened pressure related to cultural distinctiveness, that often includes distrusting the degree to which one maintains close family and cultural ties (Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003). This research found that Native American students reported feeling stress in numerous ways, including academic accomplishment and the willingness to stay near to home or both. They also reported suffering anxiety to be able to return home to help with family struggles or trauma. This complexity is seen through the feelings of rejection by other Native Americans because of their decision to pursue college.

Furthermore, studies indicate that Native American college students are often fearful that they must relinquish their Native orientation to be successful. Yet, Huffman and Ferguson’s 2007 research revealed that Native American students can follow the model of Peace Corps workers who “simply increase their cultural repertoire by adding needed skills while retaining intact their Native culture” (p. 189). Although this may be true, once Native American students are on a college campus there can be a gap between what is learned in the classroom and what they know from their own tribal community, creating further feelings of displacement.

As a result of poor postsecondary educational preparation, the academic culture for the Native student in higher education presents another challenging experience. Students interviewed in Guillory and Wolverton’s 2008 research cited the lack of academic preparation as a major barrier to their success, starting in the first year and often lasting as long as their third year in college. One student remarked that Native American students are socially promoted to the next grade level and went so far to say that preparation for college is simply not a priority for K-12 reservation schools. The need for tutorial and remedial educational services in the college setting is often necessary for Native American students due to the lack of adequate academic preparation (Pewewardy & Frey, 2004). Consequently, locating and navigating these services can be

difficult because many are first-generation college students (Schmidt & Akande, 2011).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

To determine the differences in the educational experiences of college students from the EBCI who attend nontribal and Tribal colleges, the following research questions were developed as a focus for this study:

1. Do members of the EBCI who attend Tribal colleges report their educational experiences as overall positive to a significant extent?
2. Is there a significant difference in the extent to which EBCI male and female students who attend Tribal colleges report overall positive experiences?
3. Do members of the EBCI who attend Tribal colleges report their educational experiences as positive in the domain of separation and alienation to a significant extent?
4. Do members of the EBCI who attend Tribal colleges report their educational experiences as positive in the domain of community connections to a significant extent?
5. Do members of the EBCI who attend Tribal colleges report their educational experiences in the domain of individual success as positive to a significant extent?
6. Do members of the EBCI who attend nontribal colleges report their educational experiences as overall positive to a significant extent?
7. Is there a significant difference in the extent to which EBCI males and females who attend nontribal colleges report overall positive educational experiences?
8. Do members of the EBCI who attend nontribal colleges report their educational experiences as positive in the domain of separation and alienation to a significant extent?
9. Do members of the EBCI who attend nontribal colleges report their educational experiences as overall positive in the domain of community connections to a significant extent?
10. Do members of the EBCI who attend nontribal colleges report their educational experiences as positive in the domain of individual success to a significant extent?
11. Is there a significant difference in the extent to which EBCI students who attend tribal colleges and those who attend nontribal colleges report overall positive educational experiences?
12. Is there a significant difference in the extent to which EBCI students who attend tribal colleges and those who attend nontribal colleges report their educational experiences as positive in the domain of separation and alienation?
13. Is there a significant difference in the extent to which EBCI students who attend tribal colleges and those who attend nontribal colleges report their educational experiences as positive in the domain of community connections?
14. Is there a significant difference in the extent to which EBCI students who attend tribal colleges and those who attend nontribal colleges report their educational experiences as positive in the domain of individual success?

Population and Sample

Approximately 300 members of the EBCI currently enrolled in college comprised the population. The sample included students who responded to the survey. For this nonrandom sample, any type of college enrollment was included and students were required to be at least 18 years of age for participation. The sample included a wide variety in terms of gender, type of higher education institutions, age, and year in school. Only one formal criterion was used in selecting participants, the study was confined to enrolled members of the EBCI. To meet the requirements for enrollment, there are specific restrictions according to the EBCI Charter. There must be an unequivocal lineal ancestor who appears on the 1924 Baker Roll of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and the individual must possess at least 1/16 degree of Eastern Cherokee blood. The blood quantum is calculated from the ancestor listed on the 1924 Baker Roll and DNA blood testing is prohibited in determining this calculation. In addition, participants surveyed were restricted to students who receive funding from the EBCI educational fund. As enrolled members of this tribe, students are entitled to full financial support from the EBCI. This includes all living expenses, textbooks, and a laptop computer. The educational division provides each student with an advisor who works for the tribe. This staff person is available to college students for support and guidance on any issue that may occur within their college experience. If students do not maintain at least a 2.5 GPA each semester, the EBCI requires that the student pay all financial support back to the tribe.

Instrumentation

This research study was conducted using the Native American Collective Orientation and Pursuits in Education Scale (NACOPE) developed by Thompson, Johnson-Jennings, and Nitzarim (2013). Permission was granted for the use of the survey by the authors (see Appendix A). This instrument was developed specifically to assess the knowledge of Native American students' experiences in higher education. The authors created the survey to assess domains that had been previously identified in former research with this population and included 48 statements. The survey was a 5-point Likert-type scale with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree. Using an exploratory factor analysis (EFA), three factors emerged to create the domains that uncovered the unique experiences of Native American students. The factors are: a) separation or alienation from both the campus community as well as one's family, tribe, and community; b) motivation stemming from a desire to give back or contribute to one's family, tribe, and community; and c) a desire to be successful and advance oneself at an individual level both socially and economically. The coefficient alpha for the three subscales was .88 for the separation and alienation domain, .74 for the individual success domain, and .93 for the community connection domain (Thompson et al., 2013). This demonstrates acceptable internal consistency reliability.

Each domain within the survey has specific statements related to the dimension identified. The separation and alienation domain includes 22 items, the community connections dimension has 16 items, and the individual success domain has five items. An introductory paragraph about the research was included in the survey and four

demographic questions were asked of participants. The survey was estimated to take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Data Collection

An email invitation requesting the participation of current college students from the EBCI was sent to the Program Manager of the EBCI Higher Education and Training Department for distribution to all tribal members currently enrolled in institutions of higher education. The researcher informed participants that the data in the research records would be anonymous and confidential. It was made clear that the data would be stored securely and made available only to persons directly involved in the study. No reference would be made in any oral or written report that could be used to identify any participants.

The survey was distributed through Qualtrics, an online survey service. The survey was administered via an email link sent to students by the Program Manager of the EBCI Higher Education and Training Department and originated from their office. The Program Manager prepared an email for students expressing the need for research regarding their experiences in college to better help the Higher Education and Training Department meet its needs more effectively. The message also urged students to participate in the project to aid in designing and implementing future precollege programs. The Program Manager advised students that the EBCI tribe would use final results collected from the survey for possible program development, but there would be no release of individual responses or identifying information. Finally, students were notified that by starting the survey, they agreed they had read the explanation of the study and agreed to participate. The survey did not have a time limit for completion; however, students were advised that it would take approximately 20 minutes. To increase participation in the study, three additional follow-up email contacts were distributed at 2-week intervals. Students were asked to complete the survey before the end of the 2015 fall semester.

FINDINGS

Research Question 1

A single sample *t*-test was conducted to compare the overall positive experiences of EBCI students attending Tribal colleges to the test value of 3, which represents neutrality. The result was significant, $t(25) = 4.69, p < .001$. EBCI students attending Tribal colleges reported significantly higher mean scores on the NACOPE ($M = 3.18, SD = .197$) than the test value.

Research Question 2

An independent-samples *t* test was conducted to evaluate whether the overall positive experiences of EBCI students attending Tribal colleges differ between male and females. The overall positive experiences was the test variable and the grouping variable was male or female. The result was not significant, $t(25) = .510, p = .302$. The η^2 index was .01, which indicated a small effect size. EBCI students who were male ($M = 3.20,$

$SD = .26$) tended to have approximately the same overall positive experiences as females ($M = 3.16, SD = .14$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in the means was .123 to .205.

Research Question 3

A single sample t -test was conducted to compare the domain of separation and alienation felt by EBCI students attending Tribal colleges to the test value of 3, which represents neutrality. The result was significant, $t(25) = 82.95, p < .001$. EBCI students attending Tribal colleges reported significantly higher mean scores on the NACOPE ($M = 3.17, SD = .195$) than the test value.

Research Question 4

A single sample t -test was conducted to compare the domain of community connection felt by EBCI students attending Tribal colleges to the test value of 3, which represents neutrality. The result was significant, $t(25) = 7.49, p < .001$. EBCI students attending Tribal colleges reported significantly higher mean scores on the NACOPE ($M = 3.36, SD = .244$) than the test value.

Research Question 5

A single sample t -test was conducted to examine the domain of individual success felt by EBCI students attending Tribal colleges to the test value of 3, which represents neutrality. The result was not significant, $t(25) = .467, p = .644$. EBCI students attending Tribal colleges did not report significantly higher mean scores on the NACOPE ($M = 3.04, SD = .082$) than the test value.

Research Question 6

A single sample t -test was conducted to compare the overall positive experiences of EBCI students attending nontribal colleges to the test value of 3, which represents neutrality. The result was significant, $t(54) = 6.23, p < .001$. EBCI students attending nontribal colleges reported significantly higher mean scores on the NACOPE ($M = 3.13, SD = .159$) than the test value.

Research Question 7

An independent-samples t test was conducted to evaluate whether the overall positive experiences of EBCI students attending non-tribal colleges differ between male and females. The overall positive experiences was the test variable and the grouping variable was male or female. The result was not significant, $t(54) = 1.10, p = .317$. The η index was .01, which indicated a small effect size. EBCI students who were male ($M = 3.10, SD = .16$) tended to have approximately the same overall positive experiences as females ($M = 3.14, SD = .16$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in the means was .140 to .046.

Research Question 8

A single sample *t*-test was conducted to compare the domain of separation and alienation reported by EBCI students attending Tribal colleges to the test value of 3, which represents neutrality. The result was significant, $t(54) = 4.61$, $p < .001$. EBCI students attending non-tribal colleges reported significantly higher mean scores on the NACOPE ($M = 3.13$, $SD = .21$) than the test value.

Research Question 9

A single sample *t*-test was conducted to compare the domain of community connection felt by EBCI students attending nontribal colleges to the to the test value of 3, which represents neutrality. The result was significant, $t(54) = 7.10$, $p < .001$. EBCI students attending nontribal colleges reported significantly higher mean scores on the NACOPE ($M = 3.22$, $SD = .23$) than the test value.

Research Question 10

A single sample *t*-test was conducted to examine the domain of individual success felt by EBCI students attending nontribal colleges to the to the test value of 3, which represents neutrality. The result was not significant, $t(54) = 1.07$, $p = .289$. EBCI students attending nontribal colleges did not report significantly higher mean scores on the NACOPE ($M = 3.05$, $SD = .378$) than the test value.

Research Question 11

An independent-samples *t* test was conducted to evaluate whether the overall positive experiences differ between EBCI students attending Tribal colleges and those attending nontribal colleges. The overall positive experiences were the test variable and the type of college was the grouping variable. The result was not significant, $t(79) = 1.06$, $p = .306$. The η^2 index was .03, which indicated a small effect size. Students attending Tribal colleges ($M = 3.18$, $SD = .159$) tended to have approximately the same overall positive experiences as students attending nontribal colleges ($M = 3.13$, $SD = .021$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was .129 to .034.

Research Question 12

An independent-samples *t* test was conducted to evaluate whether the educational experiences in the domain of separation and alienation differ between EBCI students attending Tribal colleges and those attending nontribal colleges. The experiences of separation and alienation were the test variable and the type of college was the grouping variable. The result was not significant, $t(79) = .781$, $p = .380$. The η^2 index was .02, which indicated a small effect size. Students attending Tribal colleges ($M = 3.17$, $SD = .195$) tended to have approximately the same overall experiences of separation and

alienation as students attending non-tribal colleges ($M = 3.13$, $SD = .209$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was 3.08 to 3.19.

Research Question 13

An independent-samples t test was conducted to evaluate whether the educational experiences were positive in the domain of community connections differ between EBCI students attending Tribal colleges and those attending nontribal colleges. The experiences of community connections was the test variable and the type of college was the grouping variable. The result was significant, $t(79) = 6.07$, $p = .016$. The η^2 index was .01, which indicated a small effect size. Students attending Tribal colleges ($M = 3.34$, $SD = .244$) tended to have significantly more positive overall experiences of community connections as students attending non-tribal colleges ($M = 3.22$, $SD = .229$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was 3.16 to 3.45.

Research Question 14

An independent-samples t test was conducted to evaluate whether the educational experiences were positive in the domain of community connections differ between EBCI students attending Tribal colleges and those attending nontribal colleges. The experiences of individual success was the test variable and the type of college was the grouping variable. The result was not significant, $t(79) = .331$, $p = .567$. The η^2 index was .02, which indicated a small effect size. Students attending Tribal colleges ($M = 3.04$, $SD = .419$) tended to have approximately the same overall experiences of individual success as students attending nontribal colleges ($M = 3.05$, $SD = .378$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was .169 to .211.

DISCUSSION

Summary

Studies have indicated that Native American students' transition to higher education differs from that of students belonging to other minority groups and the predominately white mainstream culture (Swail, 2003). Once enrolled in college, Native American students face extensive challenges and the hurdles of leaving the tribal community behind and acclimating to the expectancies of a dominant culture. In addition, gaps in secondary education have contributed to the fact that only 39% of Native American students who enrolled in a 4-year institution in the fall of 2004 completed a bachelor's degree by 2010 (Shotton, 2012). Studies show that Native American students who attend Tribal colleges have an easier transition to college, are more successful academically, and are more likely to graduate (Guardia & Evans, 2008). Therefore, further study that focused on comparisons of college experiences of EBCI students enrolled in Tribal versus nontribal institutions of higher learning was important for understanding the impact of the choice of college for success, persistence, and retention. The findings of this study indicated there were no significant differences between the experiences of EBCI students who attended either Tribal or nontribal

colleges. In addition, there were no significant differences when gender and type of college were considered. However, there were significant differences in both Tribal and nontribal college students regarding their overall experiences as positive, their feelings of community connectiveness, and separation and alienation.

Recommendations for Practice

The findings and conclusions of this research have led to the following recommendations for practice. It appears that for EBCI students, the choice of type of college, Tribal or nontribal does not make a significant difference in the overall positive experience. Therefore, high school guidance counselors of EBCI students may not need to concentrate on the type of college, but focus on the best fit for the individual. One strategy to help high school students in their college selection would be to create collaborative summer programs with institutions prior to graduation. These programs for EBCI students would offer brief exposure, including overnight stays on college campuses during the sophomore year of high school. For example, an EBCI student who openly expresses a desire to stay closely connected to tribal traditions during the postsecondary experience could be offered the opportunity to spend time at a Tribal college campus. However, an EBCI student who had formidable family connections and a need to remain close to the actual tribal land would be encouraged to visit colleges close in proximity to the reservation. The educational division of the EBCI would develop relationships with specific universities, particularly places where EBCI students have flourished in the past, and then create a direct pipeline program. This programming would be reciprocally valuable to both entities. Students would experience a preview of the campus experience and the universities could actively recruit the EBCI students. In addition, these colleges would create an atmosphere where the EBCI families and the tribe as a whole would feel at ease sending their students.

Another strategy would be a peer-mentoring program for EBCI students to be developed between those in high school and those already in the colleges where the pipeline programs exist. EBCI high school juniors would also be invited to attend events on the college campuses with their mentors to experience the social culture of the community. In addition, the community colleges near the reservation should offer dual enrollment for those college bound students to earn credits before leaving high school, with an option of reaching out to their peer mentors for tutoring. These EBCI mentors offer a positive educational role model and would stimulate younger generations of EBCI students to attend college. A crucial component of this program is to provide nurturance and encouragement to EBCI high school students by creating a safe environment to “practice” college with a fellow tribal member before making a decision to attend a particular institution.

These university partnerships should also be a mechanism to create internships and practicums that would provide services directly to the EBCI tribe and community. Implementing these types of opportunities would foster engagement with the tribe and allow students to have an explicit method of giving back to the community. In addition, it would provide a pool of qualified EBCI students upon graduation to gain employment with the tribe. Profits from the EBCI casino in Cherokee have allowed the tribe to build many new facilities offering services to tribal members. These include a new hospital,

division of social services, and justice center. However, there is a lack of qualified applicants from the EBCI tribe to work within these facilities. This internship program would allow for trained EBCI students to become employees and serve their fellow tribe members.

To enable EBCI students who want to maintain a community connection to the tribe, distance-learning partnerships should be established with specific universities to better meet their needs. Rather than forcing the EBCI students to leave the tribal community, this approach would bring the university to the tribe. By establishing these programs, a larger number of EBCI students could earn a college degree without leaving the community where they feel such a deep connection and devotion. The EBCI belief that everything within their environment has an intelligent spirit and continues to play a central role in their daily practices may make leaving the native land difficult. The deliberate establishment of a distance-learning program would enable students to stay within the physical environment where they feel most comfortable.

Finally, the EBCI educational office should be more proactive with students at a younger age. Establishing programs with middle school students to create positive relationships with the educational division staff would allow for further mentoring and guidance before high school. The staff could also bring in current EBCI college students to speak to middle school groups about their experiences.

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