

Successful First Year Experience: Sociocultural Factors for Indigenous Peoples

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The graduation rate of American Indian college students remains the lowest rate of any other group of college students in the United States. Much retention research establishes the correlation between cognitive factors to persistence in higher education. However, more recent literature proposes non-cognitive factors relating to adjustment, motivations, and perceptions, such as self-concept and leadership experience, may be more significant predictors of academic success for minority students than traditional intellectual factors. The theoretical framework used was Pascarella's (1985) general college impact model that draws on multiple lenses to predict academic success, rather than merely predicting with test scores.

This study examined the extent to which academic success of American Indian freshmen students enrolled at a predominantly white regional four-year institution located in the Midwest was impacted by: (a) pre-collegiate characteristics; (b) collegiate characteristics; and (c) non-cognitive characteristics. Indigenous student characteristics were factored in a model of student attrition that examines the complex processes that take place in a university and investigates the interactions of students with the environment and experiences.

Two sets of data were employed in the study. The first set included institutional student data records consisting of demographic characteristics of participants as well as high school, ACT and college performance measures. The second set included responses to Tracey and Sedlacek's (1984) Non-Cognitive Questionnaire (NCQ).

Non-cognitive factors relating to adjustment, motivations, and perceptions as measured by Tracey & Sedlacek's (1984) Non-Cognitive Questionnaire (NCQ) have been determined to predict persistence among minority students. The NCQ was designed to assess attributes not typically measured by other instruments; it may provide a more effective assessment and evaluative approach for persons with nontraditional experiences to show their abilities.

Data was collected from freshmen American Indian students enrolled in the university First-Year Experience seminar during the 2007/2008 year. Correlation analysis was conducted to measure linear relationships between variables. Data analysis procedures incorporated multiple regression statistics to find linear relationships between response variables and grade performance predictors. Regression equations were used to predict the extent to which some variables are associated with others.

By identifying factors that promote persistence during the first year of college, this study provides educational administrators and counselors with additional tools to understand and improve students' success in postsecondary education. This poster provides a backdrop to understanding the unique social and cultural contexts of American Indian student academic success.