

# **House of Indigenous Philosophies**

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**Sovereignty in Education**

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## Introduction

From time immemorial, education has been a focal point of our cultures. Also, education has been our cultural and inherent responsibility to teach younger generations. These systems of sharing and teaching of our knowledges were in place. Because of this, our societies were vibrant and sustainable. Due to various factors like genocide, oppression, and attempted removal our Indigenous identities, our system of education was removed and replaced with western ideologies, principles, and values. Since this inception of tragedies, Indigenous peoples have struggled for the right to teach our own children, in our way.

Education is a treaty right. Article 13 of the Point Elliott Treaty of 1855 states, “The United States further agree to establish at the general agency for the district of Puget's Sound, within one year from the ratification hereof, and to support for a period of twenty years, an agricultural and industrial school, to be free to children of the said tribes and bands in common with those of the other tribes of said district,...” (The Governors Office of Indian Affairs) This agreement between the United States and the tribes created a responsibility, a responsibility that our past leaders never let the federal government forget. In our recent history we have seen leaders such as William Jones Sr, Joseph DeLaCruz, Alan Parker, John McCoy, Cheryl Crazy Bull, Ada Deer and others fight endlessly to ensure this right was preserved for future generations, for us.

Although we have lived through many educational hardships, we are still standing. It is a false belief that we do not know anything about our past or knowledge. Indigenous people still exist; know who we are, and where we come from. “Among Indigenous peoples there is a wealth of knowledge and resources and people with the ability to teach and share. We are trying to save ourselves, our identity, and our language. There is power in numbers” (Crazy Bull, 2014). Today, we have an opportunity to create an Indigenous university. More rapidly, Indigenous peoples are advancing their education status to masters and doctoral levels each year.

There is a need to offer graduate level degrees that are grounded in Indigenous knowledge. There are not many options for Indigenous students to attend programs grounded in Indigenous knowledge in America. Our Indigenous people are graduating from western universities and some are faced with obstacles. Although these Indigenous students graduated or attempted a graduate program, they are faced with challenges that they must overcome to be successful. “A Native student unfamiliar with mainstream life can become quickly overwhelmed when encountering large numbers of non-Natives with concomitant stereotypical beliefs about those outside the dominant culture, insensitive teachers and classmates, and the stressful university life, in addition to being forced to conform to differing worldviews, values, and social skills.” (Mihesuah, 2004) Many non-Indigenous values, principles, and worldview are taught through a western curricular approach. The students are in a constant uphill battle fighting for what their elders have taught them. Mainstream universities know little about the histories and current Indigenous issues. “How can an outsider really understand life on reservations, the struggle for recognition, sovereignty, economic development, preservation of language and culture?” (Mihesuah, 2004) Students that attend western universities and come back home into their communities are left unequipped to face pressing Indigenous issues, on a local, state, federal, and national level due to western ideologies taught by western universities.

Some Indigenous students attend mainstream universities only to find offensive and inappropriate mascots. During our interview process, Northwest Indian College Vice President of Instruction, Carole Rave, described this experience. A friend of Carole’s, an Indigenous lady, attended the University of Illinois whose mascot was known as Chief Illiniwek. Chief Illiniwek would wear regalia and dance frantically around the stadium. This mascot created a huge controversy in the state of Illinois, with supporters and protesters voicing their opinions publicly. The Indigenous student spent her entire career overcoming the stereotypes this mascot created

and educating her non-Native peers. She felt she was not in a place that supported her identity and these conflicting worldviews redirected her focus away from her studies. (Rave, 2014) Chief Illiniwek was officially retired from university events. (University of Illinois, 2011) Though Chief Illiniwek supporters are still hopeful in the return of the mascot, he has not performed on campus since 2007.

There are only three PhD degrees in the United States that are focused on Indigenous Studies. The University of Arizona, the University of California at Davis, and the University of Alaska Fairbanks all offer a PhD in Indigenous Studies. (Indigenous Peoples Issues and Resources) There are three options for Indigenous students and Indigenous Studies PhD. degrees. These options require students to attempt to fit into mainstream academia. Though some mainstream universities employ Indigenous professors, it is still considered a western institution. Western worldviews are ingrained mainstream universities beliefs and values. A graduate university is needed to house our Indigenous philosophies, knowledges, and languages.

It is important for Indigenous people to pursue the highest levels of degrees. According to Carole Rave, by doing so, these achievements set examples for future generations. Our Indigenous children need us to be role models. Achieving a high level of education attainment can create generations of lawyers, doctors, administrators, professors, and federal workers. (Rave, 2014) This professional blood lineage can be accomplished. An Indigenous approach in education creates and welcomes the promotion of self-governance, self-determination, and inherent right to self-sufficiency of Indigenous peoples. We can learn from teachings of our past leaders and elders who lived with and defended these three important elements. To determine our futures for the community and children is true self-determination. These teachings were not granted by the U.S. government, but were granted and taught by our elders before colonialism. An Indigenous University's learning environment would allow growth of faculty and students; their inherent rights are engrained in how education is approached.

By housing Indigenous education, we have a safe haven to address our hard issues and also a way to protect our intellectual knowledge. Without our own university, we can never fully achieve what it means to have sovereignty and self-determination. These institutions are important to do our own research and find the right answers to help our Indigenous communities. According to Daniel Wildcat, "Our Indigenous communities have spent valuable resources on professional experts or have had researchers come into our communities extracting data who

know nothing about our communities, embedding their principles they have learned from western institutions who know nothing about our culture, values, principles, and protocols.” (Wildcat, 2014) All to find out after their research, their recommendation does not address and solve the community needs. There are many current issues which adversely affect Indigenous peoples, such as, climate change, environmental, social, and political, health, and much more. It is critical for Indigenous peoples to find the answers from an Indigenous viewpoint which embrace methods to preserve, promote, and protect our community’s indigenous knowledges.<sup>1</sup>

## **Brief History**

The idea of a tribally controlled university has been an ongoing conversation for over 100 years. The first public record of Indigenous people requesting a tribally controlled institution goes back to the early 1900’s. “Since the beginning of the 20th century some Americans such as August Breuninger, an American Indian, believed that American Indians should control their own educational institutions and he went on to propose in 1911 to the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) that they have their own university.” (Stein W. , 2009) Also, there were many individual tribes who wrote to the BIA to request funds to establish an educational institution, a place where Indigenous people could educate their children at home. These requests were never fulfilled. Throughout history there have been various factors to push this idea forward. Some factors concern politics, for example the Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act played a role, and the Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Act. Some factors are concerned with advocacy, like the establishment of AIHEC and WINHEC. And the tribal college movement has a very important role in moving this idea forward. Tribal people are already moving toward this idea.

Economic development played a big role in the early days of tribally controlled educational institutions. In the 60’s and 70’s economic development was not prevalent on tribal reservations. During this time, many tribal leaders were looking for ways to increase economic development, decrease unemployment, and decrease the prevalence of poverty on reservations. The emergence of tribal colleges begins with the college, formally known as, Navajo Community College. “Navajo Community College was the first tribal college, founded in 1968

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<sup>1</sup> “*Knowledges*” is a term we use when describing our knowledge. This will be seen throughout this document.

by the Navajo nation to provide an education and cultural grounding for its students.” (American Indian College Fund) This college was founded by the organization Dine Inc. Dine Inc. was formed by Navajo political leaders such as Raymond Nakai, Guy Gorman, and Allan Yazzie. This organization was formed for the purposes of taking control of education of the Navajo students. The tribal college also emerged with the full support of Navajo students attending mainstream universities. (Stein W. , 2009)

Education is directly linked to economic development, therefore directly linked to empowering reservation communities into the future. “A 1997 study done by David D. Harris of Cornell University asks the question, ‘Do Colleges Promote Local Economic Development?’ found statistically important data that reinforces the contention that TCU’s have become a significant part of economic development on their reservations when compared to other nearby reservations without TCU’s.” (Stein W. , 2009) According to Mr. Harris’ study, men and women living on the reservations found an increase in wages over a 10 year period and the overall rate of poverty went down over 10 years. It was also noted that reservations without access to a TCU saw an increase in poverty rates over those same 10 years.

Political influence also played a big role in the early days of tribally controlled educational institutions. In the 1950’s and 1960’s federally recognized tribes were faced with termination and relocation policies. Termination was meant to force tribes into mainstream society by no longer recognizing them as a distinct tribe. Relocation was meant to break up reservation populations and assimilate them into mainstream urban locations. These policies failed. Reservation populations were still living in extreme poverty. On July 8, 1970 President Nixon declared a new direction in Indian Affairs in America. His address was made to congress in a special message.

*The first Americans - the Indians - are the most deprived and most isolated minority group in our nation... This condition is the heritage of centuries of injustice... But the story of the Indian in America is something more than the record of the white man’s frequent aggression, broken agreements, intermittent remorse and prolonged failure. It is a record also of endurance, of survival, of adaptation and creativity in the face of overwhelming obstacles... The time has come to break decisively with the past and to create the conditions for a new era in which the Indian future is determined by Indian acts and Indian decisions. (Nixon, 1975)*

On January 4, 1975 President Ford signed into law the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act. This Act gave tribes an increased sense of control over their own affairs. Title III of the act is titled The Education Assistance Act. Outlined in this section is the process the Secretary of the Interior follows in order to ensure school districts are meeting the needs of the Indian students they are serving. (Prucha, 1975) Also outlined in this section is the allocation of funding for school districts that are serving Indian students.

Many Indigenous scholars weigh in on the definition of self-determination and true self-determination. Vine Deloria Jr asked the question, “What is it that we Indians as selves and communities are determining?” (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001) The act itself outlines a process that takes place between the Secretary of the Interior and the school districts to ensure the districts are meeting the needs of the Indian children they serve. But where are the tribes in this process? Deloria goes on to say, once Indians are educated in mainstream universities “We will find that we are basically agreeing to model our lives, values, and experiences along non-Indian lines.” (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001) The Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act was a big step in the right direction, and this act allocated money to tribally controlled institutions.

In 1973 the American Indian Higher Education Consortium was established. This organization was meant to serve as a “network of member institutions through public policy, advocacy, research, and program initiatives to ensure strong tribal sovereignty through excellence in American Indian higher education.” (American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 2004) AIHEC became a collective voice for tribal colleges, advocating for key legislation and initiatives. The idea of this organization grew from a number of meetings held in 1972. (Gipp D. , 2009) From this series of meetings, delegates met in Washington DC in October of 1972. These delegates represented nine institutions that ranged from mainstream universities, tribal colleges, and BIA schools. The outcome of the meeting of delegates was funding to establish AIHEC. Once AIHEC was established the six founding members were DQ University, Navajo Community College, Oglala Sioux Community College, Sinte Gleska Community College, Standing Rock Community College, and Turtle Mountain Community College. (Gipp D. , 2009) Tribal colleges at the time knew the importance of creating a unified voice among them. “The success of the grassroots tribal college movement was initially dependent on a handful of educational leaders that recognized the need and value of unity.” (Gipp G. , 2009)



This unified voice advocates on their behalf for policy, research, program initiatives, and other areas. AIHEC has continued to be this voice for 40 years.

In 1978, President Jimmy Carter signed into law the Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act. Thanks to the hard work of Senator Abourezk and Representative Blouin, this act allowed funds to be secured to tribally controlled community colleges. (Peters & Woolley, 2004) AIHEC also played a big role in pushing this legislation through. Lionel Bordeaux, who was the AIHEC president at the time, testified before congress in support of this bill. (Gipp D. , 2009) These funds allow tribally controlled community colleges to provide higher education to their communities therefore enhancing the lives of families on reservations. When this act was signed into law, tribal colleges had already been established for nine years. (American Indian College Fund) This act really opened the door for tribal colleges around the country. The funding allocated to tribally controlled community colleges empowered more tribes to invest in higher education.

There is something very powerful about the tribal college movement and the people who truly believe in it. Tribal colleges not only have individual students in mind but entire communities they serve. Tribal colleges have been building capacity in tribal communities, increasing wellness, and decreasing poverty. Many tribal college students are nontraditional though that demographic has been changing in recent years. There are more tribal youth attending college right out of high school, now more than ever. Today there are 37 tribal colleges throughout Indian Country. (American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 2004)

In the 1990's Senator Daniel Inouye, also known as the Chairman to Senate Committee on Indian Affairs became an advocate for the idea of Indigenous people establishing a graduate university. Although there had been many tribal colleges established throughout the United States, Inouye believed strongly in the philosophy that Native Americans "needed a university that they could enter and enroll into in order to gain PhD credentialing." (Parker, Proposal to Establish a Native American Graduate University, 2013) In July of 1991 Senator Inouye wrote a letter to the tribal colleges asking, "To review the traditional and nontraditional models of higher education institutions, as well as the special needs of American Indians and Alaskan Natives, and research." (American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 1991) At this time Senator Inouye

introduced HR 3127: A bill to establish a Native American Graduate University. This bill was first introduced in April of 1991 as HR 1690.

On November 22, 1991 AIHEC presented a testimony to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs on HR 3127. In this testimony AIHEC discusses the study they conducted with tribal colleges. One of the main issues at the time was funding. Tribally controlled colleges and universities were allocated a certain amount of funds and these were distributed to each. The colleges feared their distribution would get smaller if there were a Native American graduate university. The proposal that was brought forward discussed the possibility of creating a central location for students to attend this university. In the early 1990's technology was not as advanced as it is today. AIHEC and the tribal colleges were concerned that the central location would create Pan-Indianism. Overall AIHEC requested further study for this issue, including specifically how the university will benefit tribal communities and the nation as a whole, and how politicians could coordinate more with the tribal colleges. In the end AIHEC urged all parties to move forward slowly and carefully because this idea is so complex. (American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 1991)

Since 1991 this bill was rejected and not reintroduced. AIHEC never gave a position of support or opposition. There were proposals for studies, specifically for the impact of a graduate university on tribal colleges. The money was never finalized, and studies were never done. The topic was mentioned on agendas during the AIHEC Executive Committee multiple times throughout the years, but no study has been produced. On January 22, 2009, Cynthia Lindquist, AIHEC President made a motion to oppose the Native American Graduate University concept until a thorough study takes place. One of the main reasons for this position is because of the growth of tribal colleges in recent years. Many colleges are offering bachelors and master's degrees now and through their partnerships they are already acting as an underfunded "Native American Graduate University." (American Indian Higher Education Consortium Board of Directors, 2009)

In 1992 Indigenous people in New Zealand established their own college. This college, *Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi* is considered a public institution that is rooted in Maori knowledge and language. This institution offers degrees ranging from certificates to PhD degrees

in Indigenous studies and prepare students to not only understand who they are as Maori people, it also prepares students for the modern world. This institution has three campuses in New Zealand and multiple networks throughout the country and world. This educational institution is a model for Indigenous people who would like to regain control of their education at all levels. “Of importance is the vision to promote, grow and sustain Māori language, knowledge and culture in all its manifestations and with regard to tikanga Māori practice.” (Te Whare Wananga O Awanuiarangi)

Since their early days, tribally controlled colleges and universities have been empowering tribal students around the world. Representatives from New Zealand, Canada, and the United States established the World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium in 2002. WINHEC was established to “provide an international forum and support for Indigenous peoples to pursue common goals through higher education, including ‘creating an accreditation body for Indigenous education initiatives and systems that identify common criteria, practices and principles by which Indigenous peoples live.’” (Barnhardt, 2009) The founding members of WINHEC established principles based on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Articles 13, 14, and 16 all describe the rights Indigenous people have to preserve their indigenous knowledges and pass them on to future generations. This passing of knowledge could be through a formal education or other appropriate strategies. This was the first time in history that indigenous people were able to accredit their own institutions.

Currently there are several national and regional accreditation associations in the United States. Several agencies focus on specialized schools and disciplines. There are six agencies that oversee all colleges and universities that are not considered specialized. (U.S. Department of Education) These agencies created process where an outside agency can review colleges and universities to ensure they are offering quality education and are meeting their goals through self-study reports. The process of accreditation includes annual site visits from review committees made up of “peers” or administrators from other colleges. These review committees evaluate college and universities self-evaluation reports to ensure their goals align with their mission. Another role of the agency is to approve new colleges and degree programs. If a college or university would like to offer new programs the approval process includes providing evidence that the college or university has the capacity to offer this program. The accreditation association

looks at the college or university's finances, human resources, physical resources, and the curriculum. This process is rigorous, and it ensures the college or university is offering quality educational programs.

WINHEC created an accrediting body for Indigenous institutions. According to the WINHEC handbook, "An underlying consideration in the implementation of this accreditation process is the inherent diversity of Indigenous cultural histories, traditions and worldviews, all of which must not only be acknowledged, but must be recognized and celebrated as a valued asset and serve as one of the fundamental premises on which the accreditation process rests." (WINHEC Accreditation Authority, 2003) This process is grounded in Indigenous worldview and the committees evaluate institutions from an Indigenous perspective.

Indigenous people have been regaining control over Indigenous education for over 100 years. This journey has been difficult. There were some huge successes, and setbacks. But Indigenous people are resilient. We have faced oppression, genocide, loss of identity, and culture but we are still here. We still know who we are, and who our ancestors were. Tribes across the nation are currently providing preschool education, K-12 education, colleges and universities that provide associates, and bachelors, and master's degrees. Creating an Indigenous PhD granting university would mean Indigenous people have successfully gained control of Indigenous education at all levels. Now is the time.

## **Role of the Researchers**

### **Laura Williams (Plelaelut)**

This journey of questioning the possibilities of what it would take to establish an Indigenous University began when Dr. Alan Parker, former Evergreen State College (ESC) attended a winter quarter course at the ESC one day. Dr. Parker stopped in to speak to our class regarding the possibilities of establishing a National Indigenous University. Although Dr. Parker did not directly ask any particular student if they had any interest in area of establishing a National Indigenous University for the up and coming capstone project, he asked in a very polite Indigenous way. Indirectly and in my heart, I believe he was hoping to spark interest in students who might find this subject intriguing.

On a physical and even a spiritual level, I felt it was necessary to take action by using an Indigenous principle of “we”, meaning to act on something together. Using my Indigenous way of knowing, similar to the feeling of intuition, this is something that we, as Indigenous students and also educational leaders, ought to take part in. Growing up in Lummi, we are taught to help when we see or feel intuitively that help is needed without asking. With this being said, it was necessary to build a team of from the MPA tribal cohort program to help the lifelong visionaries of former and existing tribal educational leaders.

Through conversations throughout the program with other fellow MPA tribal cohorts, we talked about the possibilities of continuing our education even further after our master’s degrees, such as, a doctoral program or law. Nearing graduation with our master’s degrees and ending this program with a final capstone project, my research partner and I felt this was a necessary path to take. In our discussions, the road forward was uncertain because of barriers like universities that do not embrace our world views and methodologies. Of my knowledge, the only university which offers a PhD and truly embraces these constructs of Indigeneity is the Te Wānanga O Awanuiārangi educational institution, in New Zealand. However, the biggest barrier with attending Te Wānanga O Awanuiārangi is funding. U.S. students including the Indigenous peoples of America are confined to the boundaries of the United States. With the federal financial aid and many scholarships, they do not financially support students who would like to attend universities in foreign countries. The U.S. Department of Education Financial Aid (2014) only allow U.S. students two types of funding: (1) Direct Unsubsidized Loans and Direct PLUS Loans or (2) a student’s parent(s) to borrow on your behalf, called a Direct PLUS Loan specifically aimed towards parents. The U.S. Department of Education states, “International schools do not participate in the U.S. Department of Education’s grant programs, so you will not be able to obtain a Federal Pell Grant to get your degree at an international school.” This could mean that either the U.S. Department of Education does not allow international schools to participate or international chooses not to participate. Because of these restrictions, students are confined to taking out student debt or either having to belong to a family which can provide the financial support needed, in terms of taking out loans. These are the realities Indigenous people have to face in pursuing a professional degree.

With all of these factors in mind, we became proactive in these issues through our capstone research project, in hopes that tribal educational leaders may find useful to carry out their visions and missions. Most importantly, our intent is begin a contemporary and important dialog amongst tribal educational leaders to discuss if we are ready to establish an Indigenous University and to get a better understanding of what this may look like.

### **Lexie Tom**

I (Lexie Tom) am a member of the Lummi Nation. I have been working at Northwest Indian College for 12 years. This experience is integrated into this research project. I feel a connection to this topic and Indigenous education is something I am passionate about. Working for a tribal college has given insight to the experiences tribal students have in the field of education; it is a community based and place based experience they cannot get anywhere else. I also have experience attending a mainstream university and have seen barriers to tribal students' success at these institutions. Mainstream universities are focused on the students as individuals. Many tribal students have to make the transition from community based education and some are not always successful. When I attended Northwest Indian College, I knew my teachers, I was comfortable with knowing exactly what they are expecting of me, and I knew almost all people on campus. When I attended mainstream university, I had to learn how to do everything alone. I had to learn to eat alone, study alone, go to the library alone, and find motivation within myself to finish. That was my reality and I see so many tribal students struggling with this reality. That is where I stand on this topic and I am going into this research project fully aware of my biases. My biases will be mitigated by constant reflexivity throughout the research process.

### **Definitions**

- Indigenous, Native, Native American, Indigenous, Indian, and First Peoples: shall be used throughout the proposal to reflect the first people of the land in the America; also, there is reference to each of these definitions as “we” or “our”.
- Native nations, tribal governments, Alaskan Native Corporations/Villages: Indigenous forms of government or way to take care of Indigenous people.
- MPA: Masters of Public Administration with an emphasis in tribal governance.

- Tribal educational leaders: a person who has had or currently has an active part in Indigenous education. For example, former tribal college presidents, political positions who advocate for Indigenous education, etc.
- Indian County: Tribally recognized tribes (urban and nonurban) and non-recognized tribes, in the United States.
- Mainstream Universities: Educational institutions which provide an education from western focused approach; taught from a non-Indigenous aspect.
- Indigenous/Tribal colleges and universities (TCU): Tribally controlled and/or chartered educational institutions.
- Self-Sovereignty: An individual's Indigenous inherent right to do what is in their heart for their future.

## **Literature Review**

### **Decolonizing Methodologies, Linda Smith (2012)**

Linda Smith's (2012) *Decolonizing Methodologies* captures the aim of Indigenous research at its potentialities, not only for academics but for Indigenous peoples'. It is critical that we, as Indigenous peoples, take into consideration the possibilities of breaking down the western scholarship and making our own or creating a safe haven to embrace Indigeneity, in a senses of our own principles, values, philosophies, and methodologies in a credentialed education setting. The survival of our cultures is not just merely in a physical sense; our survival is "far more pressing." (Smith L. , 1999)

A western influenced education gives us a distorted view of our sense of self and worth. Throughout history, we have been taught to deny and oppress our culture. We then are left with many generations afflicted with historical trauma: shame, guilt, hopelessness, and worthlessness. Smith introduces a way to resist colonization through an indigenized process, called "Decolonized Methodologies".

Exerting self-determination and sovereignty is a multi-complex issue that must be understood in detail. Smith (2012) breaks down the way Indigenous peoples are defined through concepts, such as: imperialism, history, writing, and theory. Smith uses a perfect analogy from

Audre Lorde “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.” (Smith L. , 1999)  
This articulates the need for Indigenous educational institutions to decolonize and give power back to the people, by means of using our own tools and knowledge to counteract colonialism.

The first theoretical step in decolonizing ourselves is (or should be) understanding imperialism and its manifestations. Manifest destiny is a widely held belief, that originated in the 1800’s, the white settler days which has manifested its way into all aspects of Indigenous life, specifically speaking to what the federal government defines as “Indian education”. This concept is dominant and a widely accepted superior form of imperialism over Indigenous peoples.

Attending the Evergreen State College’s MPA Tribal Cohort program, this has opened up and fostered many important discussions. Of this conversation, manifest destiny is defined, as follows:

“Manifest destiny as a concept that had roots in Eurocentric teleology’s - particularly Church doctrines, Enlightenment political ideas, scientific reasoning, and economic theories. It is very closely related to the "idea of progress" and the idea of "civilization" - manifest destiny combined ideas such as cultural superiority with feelings of divine right or that it is god's will - all very universal concepts. In the context of 19th century, U.S. imperialism the effect on Indigenous peoples was devastating and driven by religious zeal as well as competitive self-interest and the capitalist political economy. Part of the logic of settler colonialism was that Indian "savages" did not know how to cultivate the earth and make it productive - borrowing ideas from Genesis about how God told man to "subdue the earth" - and therefore, civilized people... At the national policy level, the U.S. felt it was unique in the history of nations and had a prerogative to bring freedom and democracy to the world. Nationalism is closely related to manifest destiny - although what the U.S. and other colonial powers actually engage in empire building in the process of advancing their interests. In my opinion, manifest destiny is still evident in U.S. foreign policy (American exceptionalism) and particularly in federal Indian policy (emphasizing the "special" or "unique" relationship between the federal government and Indians).” ~ Evergreen State College, 2014 MPA Tribal Cohort Graduate

Because of this, Native Americans were forced into condensed land areas; and in many instances, multiple of tribes were forced together. This created tension amongst the non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples which often times ended up in war and mass killings. The aftermath to this tension between the non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples still exists today systematically, specifically schools and higher education institutions. The destiny of educational



manifestation did not end with Indigenous land grabbing. This destiny to ‘take over’ manifested its way into educational institutions teaching Indigenous children the supremacy of white history, knowledge, values, principles, and ideologies which still exist today. Our existence and relation to the world and each other is impacted because of the manifestation of imperialism embedded in non-Indigenous education.

Having the breadth of understanding of our own histories reinstates our power. Smith (2012) makes a clear point about power, “...history is mostly about power. It is the story of the powerful and how they [the colonizers] became powerful, and then how they use their power to keep them in positions in which they can continue to dominate others.” (Smith L. , 1999) Thus, we must understand the how past and present power dynamics were developed if we are to challenge them and reinstate our own power.

Writing is a tool; we are empowered when we write. We are empowered when we write our memoir of history. We are powerful when we weave our own values and beliefs into higher education. It is important for Indigenous peoples to do our own research, write our own literature, define our own past, and form our own theories based upon our philosophies. To have positive impact in our Indigenous communities, having our own education is critical to our existence which affords Indigenous professors and student the freedom to be ourselves, in order to address issues in our communities.

Activists and researchers must co-exist. Smith (2012) advocates for ways both can collaborate to advance Indigenous interests on all levels of government. Although she acknowledges the important role activists had in advocating for Indigenous peoples in the last two decades to create awareness in policy, she also strongly believes in the role of the researcher to take part in the preservation of Indigenous knowledge. With researchers in an educational setting, Indigenous peoples can then begin a process of fully utilizing our sovereign rights which support our front line, called Indigenous rights activists. These two bodies of people are intrinsic to fully implement advocacy for our Indigenous communities, as Smith (2012) expresses:

“Academic research and community-based research however produce research that activists may find extremely powerful. Academic researchers are trained to provide in-depth analyses and have the freedom to conduct research that is out on the edge of

knowledge... The point is that often graduate students, who are doing substantial original research, and they represent a potential pool of researchers who could work in collaboration with activism... the very existence of a community that can study and research traditional indigenous knowledge is something that activism has actually created and must also protect—in other words, it is a measure of the success of activism, but cannot be successful unless the knowledge scholars do the work they have to do to protect, defend, expand, apply, and pass knowledge on to others.” (Smith L. , 1999)

Having our own Indigenous institutions free from restrictions will allow students researchers and educators the freedom to address our issues is essential to protecting and saving our Indigenous communities. Through our own Indigenous framework in education, we collectively can fully support in the process of Indigenous activism.

### **Research Is Ceremony by Shawn Wilson (2008)**

Shawn Wilson (2008) explains the major differences in the Western and Indigenous approaches to research, which is paradigmatically important to understanding the need, and value for a Native American University. The author’s intent in writing this book is to hope that readers will expand their thoughts and beliefs about marginal ways of doing research. Studying under a western education institution does not teach the importance of using an Indigenous research. An imperative part of Wilson’s work illustrates that western approaches, methods, and paradigms do not best suit Indigenous researchers; as he states, “This approach focuses on problems, and often imposes outside solutions, rather than appreciating and expanding upon the resources available within Indigenous communities.” (Wilson S. , 2008) Rather than dismissing Indigenous resources, the author accepts the Indigenous communities, in its natural state. For example, oral knowledge, protocols, and methodologies are validated and become a credible source for Indigenous research. With an educational institution to house our philosophies, give us the right and credentials to tell our own stories from our perspective. Unlike western universities, they do not recognize nor accept Indigenous research as valid, as it is known as hoax, folklore, and myths. Smith (2012) suggests, “The need to tell our stories remains the powerful imperative of a powerful form of resistance.” (Smith L. , 1999) Attending a university whose philosophies, values, and beliefs are not accepted creates resistance for Indigenous students to write while expressing their indignity.

What is powerful about Wilson, is he recognized as an indigenous author, that it would not be possible for him to take on an “assimilated view (i.e., try to conduct this research as a

westerner researcher would).” (Wilson S. , 2008) Embracing our voice as indigenous writers is an imperative step in the decolonization process. This gives opportunities to indigenous writers to use their inherent voice that resides within their hearts, allowing for flexibility and creativity when doing research. In other words, “If one starts from an Indigenous paradigm, then one can choose to use any tool from within that paradigm that may be affective.” (Wilson S. , 2008) These tools include talking circles, observations, interviews, all of which are in some way related to traditional ways (methodologies) of learning.

As Indigenous people, we are taught that everything is related. In Indigenous research, the same concept applies; meaning everything in research is related from the beginning to the end. In our worldview, all people, nature, and methods are intertwined with emotion; therefore, therefore doing research should include studying these interconnections between people, nature, and places. Western research practice is often times cut and dry methodologies which unemotionally segregates research into its parts. With the research findings, often times the research data collected is not in benefit for the common good but for individual gain, unlike Indigenous research. In comparison of western research with Indigenous research, Wilson (2008) argues that in order for research to be valid in a western world that emotions and motives have to be eliminated; however in Indigenous cultures, Wilson also validates that it is acceptable to have feelings in research. Wilson (2008) validates the emotionality piece as relationality, “Humans—feeling, living, breathing, thinking humans—do research. When we try to cut ourselves off at the neck and pretend an objectivity that does not exist in the human world, we become dangerous, to ourselves first, and then to the people around us.” (Wilson S. , 2008) As indigenous writers, researchers, and even community leaders and members, it is okay to embrace the emotion of humanity when research is involved or affected communities, however, research must be done in a way that is both cognizant and respectful in following the cultural protocols unique to each culture.

If we fail to make our indigenous voices heard through academia that accepts and credits our ways, we risk losing our culture and traditions. It is critically important that we understand the history, both western and Indigenous; also, we recognize the importance and sovereignty of expressing our voices through literature, therefore, giving power back to Indigenous communities, one word at a time.

## **Power and Place: Indian Education in America (2001)**

Many scholars of Native studies have been declaring a need for Indigenous education in America. The reason behind this declaration is that Indigenous scholars find Western ways of knowing and western education constantly coming into conflict with their truth. In the book *Power and Place* (2001), Vine Deloria Jr. discusses this conflict. “In most introductory courses their culture and traditions are derided as mere remnants of a superstitious, stone-age mentality that could not understand or distinguish between the simplest of propositions... Nothing could be further from the truth.” (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001) Dr. Daniel Wildcat not only supports this view, but sees value in moving away from colonial education systems. “It is essentially a tribal intellectual and moral mandate requiring action, unless we want our current educational system to be like our contemporary political structures and practices, which all too often merely reflect the dominant society’s institutions.” (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001) Not only does Dr. Daniel Wildcat feel the need to move away from colonial education systems, but he also understands the importance of maintaining a tribal identity in higher education. “Increasing evidence suggests that there are good reasons for American Indian students not to discard knowledge traditionally held by their tribes – knowledge that once ecological, moral, practical, and most certainly philosophical.” (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001)

There are many times when non-Indigenous professionals and even sometimes our own Indigenous professionals who are trained western institutions that are not equipped to handle Indigenous issues. We need educated professionals that have the necessary tools. Dr. Wildcat (2001) talks about what kind of professionals are needed and what happens to tribes when hiring professionals who know nothing about Indigenous communities. We need “the requisite technical knowledge, skills, and abilities to advise Indian communities on an array of possible solutions and scenarios to address specific problems... when non-Indian professionals are hired to do things for tribes, the clash in underlying worldviews—that is Indigenous-versus-Western conflict—makes accomplishment of tribal goals difficult if not impossible.” (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001) Because of this, it is essential that we educate our own professional embedded with our principles, values, and with our world views. So, when it comes time to defend, educate, protect, as doctors, lawyers, and all other professionals do, protecting our sovereignty and inherent rights will not be such as challenge and hard learning curve which sometimes takes years to learn or all together never. Non-tribal, other-tribal, and sometimes even our own have gone to school and

bring back Western beliefs which are out of alignment with communities values. We need professionals to reflect our values and at the same time give us professional recommendations who understand us, rather subjecting their “I” linear way of thinking upon Indigenous peoples.

### **Guided Research Question**

Are U.S. tribal educational leaders ready to embark on the journey of establishing a Native American graduate university?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research project is to understand if tribal education leaders are ready to embrace a Native American Graduate University within the United States, which cultivates and embraces Indigenous research techniques. A Native American Graduate University would embrace an Indigenous model like the University of Waikato. An Indigenous model would support Indigenous peoples and their communities. Having an Indigenous education model that embraces unique cultural values and beliefs can help address emerging issues in Indian Country.

### **What is the definition of educational leader?**

An educational leader is someone who represents the community. Knowing how to and what to represent on behalf of the community. An Indigenous educational leader is someone who knows the cultural protocols and ways to act. A tribal educational leader is an advocate and a person who lends a voice for Indigenous students. Being a leader goes beyond having been awarded credentials. A person educated or not, can be a leader by advocating on behalf of the Native community for no personal gain or interest. As Stein (Stein M. , 2008) quotes an Ojibwe spiritual leader, “A native leader is not known for what he has done for himself, but rather what he has done for his people” (p. 149) Although this inferences towards spiritual leadership, this same context applies towards all tribal leaders, all expertise, and subjects of advocacy. An educational leader also must have a deep connection to Native Americans, by understanding and respecting each unique culture, value, and belief. An educational leader in this context knows, “leadership is shaped by social, historical, and cultural experiences.” (Stein M. , 2008) In general, Native leadership has been in communities since time immemorial. Therefore, a contemporary view on leadership is not a new phenomenon. “Leadership, as it has been practiced for generations among the native people of the Americas, is grounded on the principles of

community, shared responsibility, and cultural appropriateness.” (Stein M. , 2008) With western leadership, it is very linear which does not validate the human process, meaning to leave out emotion in leadership; if emotions play apart, it is thought of as being weak. Because of these vast differences, it is important to know the difference from tribal leadership and western leadership.

### **Target Participants: Educational Leaders**

Senator John McCoy is an enrolled member of the Tulalip Tribe. With a brilliant Indigenous mind, he helped federally build the first telecommunications system, called the intranet now known as the internet. Under his leadership, the Tulalip tribe established the municipality Quil Ceda Village. He has been an advocate for education during his career, sponsoring bills such as HB 1495: Requiring that Washington’s tribal history be taught in the common schools; SB 6523: Expanding higher education opportunities; SB 6556: Studying barriers to access; SB 6529: implementing strategies to close the educational opportunity gap; and HB 1494: Providing additional funding for the state’s higher education institutions and their students, among others.

Brian Cladoosby is a member of the Swinomish tribe and is currently serving as the President of the National Congress of the American Indian. Brian’s political career began in 1985 when he was first elected to the Swinomish Tribal Council. He remained an elected official for his tribe throughout his career. He held the position of Chairman for 16 years beginning in 1997. Given his extensive career, he is now considered the most seasoned tribal politician that is currently active in Washington State.

Carole Rave is currently the Vice President of Instruction and Student Services at Northwest Indian College. Carole has a Master’s degree in education from South Dakota State University. Carole has worked for tribal colleges for more than 30 years. She truly believes in the tribal college movement and is an advocate for Indigenous education.

Cheryl Crazy Bull is the CEO of American Indian College Fund. “The American Indian College Fund is *educating the mind and spirit* of Native American communities by providing Native student scholarships and programmatic support for the nation's 34 accredited tribal colleges and universities.” (American Indian College Fund) Cheryl is also versed in business and

strategic planning. She planned, organized, and implemented the \$44 million Capital Campaign at Northwest Indian College.

Bernie Thomas is currently the Director of Education at the Lummi Nation. This position also serves as the Lummi Nation School Superintendent. Bernie has a PhD in Education. He is also serving on the Lummi Nation tribal council. Bernie's knowledge and expertise was instrumental in reorganizing the Lummi Nation School in order to redirect the school in a positive direction. Before Bernie became the Superintendent/Education Director the school was on the Restructuring List at the BIE and was at risk of closing.

Alan Parker attained a law degree from UCLA and practiced law for 20 years in Washington DC. While in Washington DC, Alan served as Chief Counsel to the US Senate Committee on Indian Affairs. During his service he assisted with securing the passage of the Indian Child Welfare Act, Indian Religious Freedom Act, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, and the Tribal Self-Governance Act. Since 1997 Alan has been teaching at the Evergreen State College. He and Linda Moon-Stumpff developed the MPA Tribal Governance degree. This was the first degree in the United States that focused on tribal administration.

Justin Guillory is the President of Northwest Indian College. Justin is a member of the Nez Perce tribe and has an EdD degree in education. Before becoming the president, Justin served as the Dean of Distance Learning and the Site Coordinator at Nez Perce. He believes in the tribal college movement and bringing forward Indigenous knowledges to modern education.

Linda Moon-Stumpff has PhD in Public Administration from the University of Southern California. Twenty years of her career was devoted to various leadership positions at the National Park Service and the United States Forest Service. In 1997 Linda began teaching at the Evergreen State College. After much collaboration with Washington State educational leaders she wrote the proposal for the Washington Higher Education Board to establish a two-year Master's degree in 2000. Linda was the lead on curriculum design by developing original curriculum in the area of tribal administration including curriculum redesign into intensive format which gather for three weekends per quarter. (Northwest Digital Archives)

Dr. Daniel Wildcat, Ph.D., is a professor at Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kansas, and an accomplished scholar who writes on indigenous knowledge, technology, environment, and education. A Yuchi member of the Muscogee Nation of Oklahoma, Dr. Wildcat is the coauthor, with Vine Deloria, Jr., of *Power and Place: Indian Education in America*. Known for his commitment to environmental defense and cultural diversity, Dr. Wildcat has been honored by the Kansas City organization The Future Is Now with the Heart Peace Award. (American Indian and Alaskan Native Climate Change Working Group)

Bill Tsilixw James is the hereditary Chief of the Lummi Nation. Bill comes from a long line of chiefs and was selected to hold this position at a young age. As a young boy, instead of playing with his friends, Bill spent time visiting elders. He is now an elder himself and worked his entire career and life preserving and revitalizing Lummi shelangen, our way of life.

## **Indigenous Framework**

As Indigenous researchers, we feel a deep connection to our people, place, and environment. We reviewed frameworks that are present in the social sciences and do not believe they will help us uncover our reality as Indigenous people. Philosophy in research asks very big questions such as: What is our reality? How do we know what is real? And, how do we as researchers uncover this reality?

Paradigms that are ingrained in the social sciences include post-positivism. Post-positivism allows people to believe that we are imperfect beings and it is not possible to uncover absolute reality with certainty, only probability. Post-positivists also believe an important concept to discovering absolute reality is objectivity. In order to be objective, we need to acknowledge that we come with bias, worldview, and background. These have a strong influence on the outcome of the research. Therefore, more emphasis has to be paid to objectivity when researchers use a post-positivistic paradigm.

After reviewing dominant paradigms our team decided we would like to use an Indigenous Research Paradigm. There are two main reasons behind this decision. The first main reason we would like to use an Indigenous paradigm is because of the concept of objectivity. We as Indigenous people are researching topics that will benefit our community and our people. We



are connected to our community and people and this connection does not ever go away. The second reason we would like to use an Indigenous paradigm, is due to the topic of ownership. In dominant paradigms the belief of ownership is that once a researcher gains knowledge, that knowledge belongs to the researcher. We as Indigenous researchers do not believe we own our knowledge. Our knowledges are relational, and are shared with all of creation.

Our Indigenous research framework will guide our research. Our ontology answers this question, “what is our reality?” Our reality as Indigenous people is relational. We live in a world described by Begele Chilisa as a *social reality* and we are connected to all of creation. (Chilisa, 2012) Our Epistemology answers the question of: “How do we come to gain this knowledge and what systems of knowledge do we use?” Our knowledge comes from our first ancestor and the creator, and it is passed down through generations. It is our responsibility to protect our inherent knowledge and Indigenous epistemology.

Our axiology or ethics, and morals are built on Chilisa’s definition of the four R’s. (Chilisa, 2012) The first R is relational accountability. Relational accountability goes beyond the longevity of our research project. We are doing research in what Wilson describes as, “ceremony” in order to strengthen our relationships which may affect Native peoples. (Wilson S., 2008) The second R is respectful representation. This means we will always listen to our participants and create a place for them to have a voice. If participants do not agree with our research or wish to not participate we will accept and respect their decision. We are seeking out participants that are experts in their field. It is important to listen to them and treat their information with the utmost respect. The third R is reciprocal appropriation. It is very important to us that our research benefits the community we are serving. The community represented in our research is not limited to one tribe. We are serving Indigenous educational leaders and the general community of Indigenous scholars present in America. The fourth R is about rights and regulations. Special attention will have to be paid to defining the ownership of the knowledge acquired. This definition will be clarified by having conversations with people who transfer the knowledge to us.

## **Indigenous Methodology**

The methodology is based on the guiding question. Our research is designed around tribal educational leaders, as the sample targeted population. We hope to uncover information to better understand if we are ‘ready’ to begin a Native American Graduate University in the U.S.

## **Worldview of Qualitative Research:**

Because we are both members of the Lummi Nation, we feel it is appropriate to use our lens from the community we come from. We made the conscious decision to adopt the philosophical methodology of *netse mot i shwolowen*, “one heart one mind”, an Indigenous ontology. *Netse mot i shwolowen* is our reality as we move forward in our research. We are Indigenous researchers, who remain connected to our land; therefore, our mind and heart “are bound to a place” (Kovach, 2009) and research is contextualized, respected, and reciprocated back to Indigenous communities. This Indigenous ontology “captures the self in relation to quality of Indigenous knowledge systems.” (Kovach, 2009) Using an Indigenous ontology is natural and sensible logic. It is important for us to embrace our connection to who we are. We will incorporate Indigenous methodologies, similar to Kovach’s (2010) framework, which aligns with our traditional values since time immemorial. Embracing these aspects, we will attempt to understand if we are ready to make progressive steps towards the establishment for a N.A. University, which will provide graduate level education (both masters and doctoral level degrees). We will focus on the population of Indigenous tribal leaders for education to address this matter.

## **Research Design**

### ***netse mot i shwolowen***

The philosophy we are using is *netse mot i shwolowen* (one heart one mind) approach. We use our traditional language to explain our four main methodology concepts; the one heart and one mind is at the center because the historical knowledge of the Lummi people is connected with Indigenous Lummi values. These Lummi values are our inherent right and it is our responsibility to protect our inherent rights. It is a practical outlook from our natural-given lenses embracing this philosophy and working together as one. *netse mot i shwolowen* is important to maintain while working in a group. Collectively, we are both working toward an end; we should

always work toward this purpose together for the good and benefit of all native peoples, in the U.S. and potentially for Canadian First Nations peoples, as well.

Because we are using an Indigenous lens, the objective is to breakdown whether Indigenous Native peoples in the U.S. are ready for this educational undertaking by using our historical Indigenous one mind one heart approach. Within this methodology, there are several characteristics that we would like to draw upon to explain our approach (see below, figure 1.1), using a parallel methodology as Kovach (2010). The characteristics are as follows: (1) Indigenous reality or Ontology—breaking down colonialism in academia using this approach, (2) researcher preparation using Lummi protocols, (3) researcher preparation involving a research design familiar with cultural ways of the Lummi, (4) interpretation of all sources of knowledge gathered, and (5) gifting [giving] back to all Indigenous Native Americans the knowledge's attained through this research. Using our lens, this method is our way to care for and give back to all Native Americans, as a gift from two Lummi women researchers.



**Figure 1.1**

**qwechost (prepare)**

qwechost describes the process of preparing ourselves. In traditional Lummi culture our people would prepare themselves for the coming seasons, salmon runs, gathering plants, and preparing for the winter months. Today, we use this term to prepare ourselves to face our journey, the process that we prepared ourselves for our research. We prepared ourselves through agreements between each other, both researchers, regarding the best way to approach each educational leader. We approached some educational leaders through email, phone, and Facebook inbox messaging. In respect of their status among Indigenous peoples and expertise, we were flexible our interviews around their time and space, whether this was in-person or via phone.

According to Linda Smith's presentation she describes the importance of understanding the colonization process when conducting research in Native communities. She emphasizes the importance of knowing the people you are researching. (Smith, NWIC Decolonizing Methodologies Presentation, 2013) We used Kovach's meaning of researcher preparation, defined as "inward knowing that arises from personal experience." (Kovach, 2009) As Lummi researchers, this helps interweave a relationship between our work and the world, internally and externally. Preparing the research will involve us having, what Smith names as, hypersensitivity; to the community we are serving. The preparation of research will be methodical in choosing who will participate, based on what knowledge they know versus statistical random sampling. This journey of seeking knowledge is a methodological way of the Lummi people. In its organic state, we will attempt to be aware of and keep knowledge that is found within us (an Indigenous ways of knowing and learning).

**q'pet (gather)**

In traditional Lummi culture, the men always hunted and fished. One fishing season could bring in enough seafood to sustain an entire family for a year. However, women brought equally important nutrients to the table. Women were solely responsible for gathering plants for sustenance and medicinal purposes. These plants equally sustain an entire family all year. As Lummi people facilitating this research, this is our way of how we connect to our culture and give back, as a gift out of respect.

In the scope of our research, we will gather information from our participants by using specific methodologies and techniques that are Indigenous to our culture. It is important that our techniques are left in its natural state when obtaining knowledge, meaning when collecting data. When we gather knowledge, we will take into account relational accountability to our culture of the Xwelemi (Lummi) people to ensure the highest quality and protocol standards. What we gather is a tool that we can offer back to all Native communities. This research is a reciprocal relationship and accountable to the people.

### **t'elnonget and xchit (understand and know)**

Long ago, it was the responsibility of our entire community to nurture future generations and ensure our people know and understand all teachings they would need to survive. Of all the knowledge gathered, it is our job to interpret results from all sources, ensuring that our intuitiveness of community needs is respected always. In Indigenous learning, the interpretations are sometimes gray, meaning not clear to the seeker of knowledge, us as the researchers; however, this grayness is our intuition (our own Indigenous spiritual being) and can be affirmed from two or more sources (people, literature, etc.) agreeing on same results, in two different controlled settings. We will rely on these ways of knowing, as affirmations to determine each result.

### **onges (give)**

The Lummi people have always been widely known for our generosity. Giving back is a part of many Indigenous Native cultures. It is important that we are transparent in our findings with good intentions of helping our Indigenous communities. As these results, will soon be a gift in the hands of native people for the education tribal leaders to decide the next steps. Doing this research is an honor, and gifting this research back for the benefit of native community is a traditional teaching to share knowledge for future generations.

Our objective is to give back to the Indigenous communities across the nation of our research findings. We will give our information in a condensed form, in a summary format. We would like to use the following methods: digital presentation, brochure, website, which will provide summary of our research findings. These methods of giving will broaden our audience to reach many different people in Native communities. We hope to reach the attention of tribal

education leaders, elected officials, and activists to show the significance in learning instruction and collective base for high-level research. Having this information wide and readily available may help the Native communities, in terms of policy-making decisions. As a capstone project, this research will added to The Evergreen State College research project collection, available for future tribal cohorts, or anyone interested in the subject of professional education for Indigenous peoples, a place to house Indigenous philosophies.

## **Qualitative Design**

We developed a qualitative research project. This project drew upon the expertise of Indigenous educational leaders. We engaged in direct qualitative interviews, and analyzed their responses. Collectively with the participants, the outcome of the analysis is to determine if we are ready to take this dream of establishing a graduate university to the next level.

For data collection, we wrote four open ended questions (see Appendix C). These questions were designed to answer our research question. During the interview process we found respondents shared information about the necessary steps this university would need to take in order to be successful.

## **Qualitative Data Collection**

This research consisted of qualitative data collection and analysis. The qualitative instrument used was a set of questions created by the researchers. The interview questions were four open-ended questions designed to give the participants the opportunity to discuss this important topic. The educational leaders that were identified are people who served in some type of educational capacity, leadership role, advocacy, and/or political. So we, the researchers, had to be flexible with our schedules. We needed to be ready to conduct an interview at any moment. Participants were on travel, lived in different states, and had busy schedules. The participants that lived outside of the Bellingham area were interviewed over the phone. We were able to meet with four participants face to face. The time for each interview varied, some interviews were 30 minutes, some were an hour. It depended on how much time participants had to spend discussing this important issue.

The project was reviewed by the IRB in April. In order to complete this process, the researchers sent a copy of our proposal and all IRB application documents to the IRB review committee at the Evergreen State College. After conducting a review of the project, the IRB found there to be no potential risk to participants. The project was filed as a “No Review” project. We, the researchers, still gave each participant a copy of our consent form, though they were not required to sign anything.

We spent much of our time keeping our schedules open and working around the educational leaders’ schedules. At the end of each interview we would ask the participants who they felt would have something to contribute to this topic. We heard one name on more than one occasion. We were told that Lionel Bordeaux would have a big contribution to this project. He has been speaking at public engagements about this topic for many years. Lionel Bordeaux is the president at Sinte Gleska University. He has spent his entire career advocating for tribal colleges. He served as president of AIHEC during the time when the Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Act were passed. We would have liked to speak with him and hear his thoughts on this topic. It is unfortunate that we were unable to connect with them; he would have much to contribute to this topic. As this project moves forward, we know Lionel’s contributions will be needed.

## **Data Analysis**

Immediately after each interview, we transcribed our notes. These transcriptions allowed us to analyze the data effectively. Once we finished conducting interviews we reviewed our transcriptions together. This teamwork strategy is a direct reflection of our paradigm. We work together with one heart, one mind. We asked the question, what are these interviews telling us? There was a pattern that emerged from the interviews. The educational leaders we interviewed came from very different backgrounds. There were politicians and these politicians were working in tribal communities and the federal government. There were educators and these educators were from tribal colleges, mainstream universities, and Haskell University. There were Indigenous education administrators. These administrators were working on the national level, such as Cheryl Crazy Bull and the local level, such as Carole Rave. Each of these leaders had pieces of this overarching process. There were comments about what should be done first in order to establish this university and what should be done next. There are also very important

comments, suggestions, and ideas of best practices for this university included in these sections. We broke this process up into seven themes: Setting the Vision, Feasibility, Program Design, Accreditation, Curriculum, Implementation, and Sustainability. These themes describe the process that would need to be followed in order for this idea to become a reality.

## **Interpretation**

In order to ensure validity while coding and interpreting, we referenced the text, *Qualitative Data: An Introduction to coding and Analysis*. The authors of this text outline the coding process (1) Raw text, (2) Relevant Text, (3) Repeating Ideas, (4) Themes, (5) Theoretical Constructs, (6) Theoretical Narrative, (7) Research Concerns. (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003) The first step is to read through the raw text. In this process, we have to make sure we are taking the entire data set into consideration. The second step is to look for relevant text. During this step we need to ask ourselves, what information will help us answer our question? And the information that will not help us answer our question is set aside. This process does not require us to delete any information. We will go back to it at a later step. From the relevant data we looked for repeating ideas. These repeating ideas were noted and helped us complete the next step. The repeating ideas were any and all information that seemed to repeat itself throughout the interview data, but when we develop themes we have to make sure there is a clear connection between these repeating ideas and our research question. After we established the seven themes we created narratives for each of them. These narratives were created with information from the qualitative data.

When taking into consideration our final project, we wanted to display the data two ways. In order to do this, we needed to conduct two separate coding processes. These two processes were completely separate from each other, so once the first process was over we started over with the original data set with all information included. The first process was conducted in order to write the narration. For this particular interpretation, we were only looking for data that described the importance and benefit of this project. In the video project, we wanted to describe to our audience why this is a good idea. We wanted to describe to our audience how this idea would benefit tribal communities. We followed the steps described above to answer the question about the importance of this idea and the benefit to tribal communities. We color coded the data



and moved all responses to another document. From this other document we wrote the narration to our video.

The second process of coding was conducted for the overall analysis of the research project. For this round of coding we asked ourselves our research question, Are educational leaders ready to embark on the journey of establishing a Native American graduate university? In order to complete this process we used the seven steps described above. In this research we found there were seven themes and these are described in our findings.

## **Findings**

# **SETTING THE VISION**

## **Strategic Planning With the Educational Leaders**

*“It is important to involve all the stakeholders in the process to develop a model, in a strategic planning session. Talking with our elders is very critically important to understand where to go, like a vision for the people.”*

*–Linda Moon Stumpff and Senator John McCoy*

According the themes, setting the vision is a process of getting together to develop a plan that is strategic in nature among Indigenous educational leaders. Educational leaders that participated in this research have identified a group on educational leaders; however, it is not inclusive just of these leaders.

In addition to visionaries, the strategic planning needs to happen also with educational leaders that have the expertise in creating and maintaining colleges and universities. Also, a great point to remember in this dialog is that "our strength as Indigenous people is that we have a lot to offer due the high number of historical mistakes", in terms of Indian education which "have made our people experts in what not to do, starting with European history till now" (McCoy, 2014).

On this planning team, it was articulated by the educational visionaries and experts. In order to make this a reality, there needs to be identified funds and commitment in their busy

schedules to set aside a delegated time to get together which is strictly to a session on the development of and Indigenous University. Commitment among educational leaders needs to happen, in terms of identifying resources and time. Because it takes money, educational leaders need to warrior together to make this a reality, as the life of the project depends on leadership. As Wildcat (2014) said, "We need to get together and work out the details to make this happen, but it takes money to do those things. Once we build the consensus that is when the real work starts. It is going to be hard, as our enemies might want to create some divisiveness." There is a difference between dreaming and taking action on those dreams. There is a lot talk going on around this subject among educational leaders, however, it will take an action steps, money and commitment of time, to take this vision to the next level.

# FEASIBILITY

## To Understand Our Communities

*"In the 21st century, we are breaking education. Native students have doubled in numbers. It is not a lack of students. We can operate at that standard."*

*- Brian Cladoosby, NCAI President*

In order to know what an Indigenous University might look like, a feasibility assessment must be done to understand each community's needs, according to educational leader participants. Common theme questions throughout this research are what faculty PhD. professionals and students will come, what financial resources will it take them to come, what programs are needed, and how will we teach, in terms of curriculum? In addition to these questions, should students be taken out of their communities to go to school? If so, where will this school be located? If not, should this be an online or hybrid brick-and-mortar school to keep students at home? With this being said, it is important to know the pros and cons, like SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) of each. These are all questions that each community must answer, in order to be successful. From this collected data, we heard collectively that it is critical the communities served to have input and to be a part of cultivation of the model. With a feasibility study, educational leaders can then begin to build upon a strategy building process, called a strategic plan.

This set of data is a collection of themes that coincide with the need to understand our communities through a feasibility study, a plan which identifies the Indigenous needs in their communities and also to answer the four "w's": who, what, where, when, why, and how. It is certain that we need to inventory our assets and know what the emerging needs are. Through this study, there were a lot of commonalities in opinions of what needs are for such a grand university. For example, we need Indigenous Ph.D.'s, we need a place where students feel they are understood, Indigenous languages should be embraced and taught in these institutions, and our children need to see graduates to create long lineages of doctors and other professionals. During these dialogs with participants, there were a lot of innovative ideas, such as, way to do a feasibility study (needs assessment). As one said, you could create a blog and ask people from all over if they would be interested in attending this college, in order to get responses from tribal students all over." A feasibility study can be powerful tool to understand what is needed and how to approach a long-term plan.

In addition to understanding our needs, a feasibility study which also understands our limitations is needed, according to the data. The limitations with a professional university are there will be challenges with faculty recruitment and also recruitment of students which is projected to be an outcome of the feasibility study. Because there are so many questions and needs for an Indigenous educational institution, we need this assessment which comes from an Indigenous perspective to address some of the issues, as stated, "climate change, environment, sociological, political, and health" and much more current issues.

In context of building an Indigenous university to address tribal needs, there were phrases such as "we need", "building capacity", "it is necessary", "student could learn the process of being colonized", "awareness", "develop a common understanding to all tribes' policy concerns", and "this university will open the door to diversity". These are all a part of what feasibility could address. And from a feasibility study, a strategic plan could be then develop and articulated to meet the identified needs in the feasibility study.

Although the term need was major theme throughout the interviews, there were many examples of what this could potentially look like. These conversations brewed in depth conversations on what we could to do, if an Indigenous university were a reality. Hypothetically,

we could begin this educational learning process which allows faculty and students to turn within themselves, their creative centers, to unlock centuries of oppression and develop methods of our own which preserve, promote, and protect communities Indigenous knowledges and languages. There were visions of enrolled student could even serve on public school advisory committees, on behalf of Native students, as they would be equipped to do so. This research is full of life because many of the identified educational leaders felt our capstone project will hopefully bring awareness and answers need for this feasibility study to understand our needs.

In some of the data under the feasibility section, critical thinking and pretending to be a devil's advocate played a part, in terms what if we do not act. An important point was made that if Indigenous educational leaders do not take advantage of this window of opportunity this dream could potentially never happen. I believe what was meant by this notion is the alignment of political actors and educational leaders. But also, we would have an opportunity to make our studies visible (meaning respected as other western fields are) and keeping ancestral knowledge known for future generation to learn from. This knowledge centers would increase Indigenous capacity which strengthen the federal trust obligation to Indigenous peoples.

Collectively, we are attempting to protect our identities, cultures, and languages. The strength identified through this research is sovereignty. As people, we have the inherent right and recognition of treaty rights to self-determination of our people. We have the right to education ourselves and to build ourselves up. We have to right to be visionaries, futures scholars, and educational leaders for future Indigenous generations. It is our inherent and relational accountability to our people to teach them to create a safe and prosperous environment.

The biggest question is why is a need assessment needs, or called a feasibility study because of the fact that many students are unsuccessful when attending mainstream universities for their professional degrees. Being unsuccessful could mean high class failure rates, high dropout rates, cultures unrecognized and honored on campus, western curriculum that does not apply to Indigenous communities, therefore, is not useful.

It is evident that western institutions lack Indigeneity; therefore, they do not address Indigenous needs. However, an Indigenous university could offer Indigenous scholarship which

addresses our agendas, protocols, values, principles; all of which are connected to Indigenous peoples. It is important to note from this data that a needs assessment could understand how much human capital we have; how much we are spending on bad professional advice (professionals taught by non-Indigenous educational institutions); and tribes could economically keep resources within their own communities rather than outsourcing to people who do not live in the area and have no other interest than getting paid. All of these factors are (ACTS OF) an act of sovereignty.

It is important to note that part of this feasibility study has already been initiated as we speak by Dr. Alan Parker and other parties of interest. This study is to understand what the current needs are among the Indigenous communities and if Haskell University would be the best option to house a PhD. program.

# PROGRAM DESIGN

## **Model | Degrees | Environment | Centralization**

*"This is a catalyst to create a space where we have a research center where the problems that are defined by us, not people from the outside. The approach to these problems are Indigenous ways of knowing."*

*- Daniel Wildcat, Native American Author/Scholar*

The program design is a very important aspect to consider once the vision is set and the feasibility study has been complete. Included in this section are educational leader's discussions about the possibilities for an institutional model. Would this institution be a traditional brick and mortar? Will this institution be based on an already established model in New Zealand that is much like our tribal colleges? There were also comments in this section about the environment of the institution. The environment a very important aspect of this institution because even though Indigenous people are emerge from very different cultures, we still value working together. Also included in this section are the possible degrees that could be offered at this institution.

There were many possibilities proposed for the program design, though there will be more of a direction once the feasibility study takes place. According to the educational leaders interviewed, one possibility could be a reservation based design. A design similar to this has already been implemented at The Evergreen State College at the bachelor's levels. One participant described one particular master's program. This program was designed so the faculty from the university would come out to the reservation and teach. Included in this idea was the possibility of a rotation of professors. This could keep costs down. Ideas emerged from the data about the possibility of establishing one central location for this institution and tribal students could access information and courses through technology. Graduate students could remain in their communities working toward the betterment of their people. This proposal of a central location was proposed by Lionel Bordeaux. This design could mirror a medicine wheel with a central location and networks throughout Indian Country. Included in this central location would be a network of library and archives. This would be a place where Indigenous students could access knowledge relevant to our communities. And most program requirements could be offered through online and hybrid models.

Another idea that emerged from the interviews is the possibility of creating research think tanks. This could be a place where Indigenous students could come together, share ideas, and learn from each other. It could be a place where students could support each other in researching topics that are determined by us, and are important to our communities. "This is a catalyst to create a space where we have a research center where the problems that are defined by us, not people from the outside. The approach to these problems are indigenous ways of knowing." (Wildcat, 2014) Think tanks could also create research fellowships where Indigenous students could share ideas and build on the body of knowledge that is currently out there.

Another possibility for program design is to model the institution from the Maori University in New Zealand. The Maori University is considered to be a tribal college, much like the tribal colleges we have here. The Maori University is rooted in Indigenous knowledge and emerges from the people. The idea of a college emerging from the people was emphasized during the interviews. Alan Parker was recently awarded an Honorary PhD from this university. We would really like to see this type of university in the United States. It's very important to include Indigenous people in the planning of the university that will serve them. That is what

self-determination means. This university is also a public institution and is accredited through the government of New Zealand. They are not in the business of privatizing education for profit.

There were some ideas about what the program design should not include. The participants believed there were limitations with modeling this institution after a traditional brick and mortar. The institution used as an example was Haskell. Haskell was originally a boarding school established by the BIA in the 1800's. The relationship between Haskell and the BIA still exists. One limitation that emerged was with autonomy from the BIA. If the BIA is involved, funding could be impacted, policies and regulations could be impacted, and flexibility of areas of study could be impacted. If the program was designed modeled after the traditional brick and mortar, regional centers could be established.

The environment of the institution is very important. Indigenous students learn better in inclusive environments and they need to feel like this university belongs to them. The students attending this university are coming here because it's indigenous, the environment should reflect that. Throughout this entire process indigenous educational leaders have represented unity. It has been said, we can accomplish more by working together. One idea that came out of the interviews was the possibility of creating cohorts. The Evergreen State College incorporated the cohort model. This model creates a place where students can motivate, support, and work together. This model has been successful in retaining students who come from a community-based society.

There weren't many recommendations about what programs this university should offer. But out of the data, I was able to pull some information. I think the most prevalent type of degree that was brought up would be professional degrees, as opposed to philosophical degrees. One comment emphasized the importance of funding currently available. We would be more successful in attracting dollars if we were offering degrees in medicine, engineering, and law. We should be thinking about the need in our communities. We need more engineers, pharmacists, lawyers, and doctors. I think out of the participants that mentioned degrees said a law program would be a good idea. Another possibility could be medicine. That way this program could focus not only on traditional western medicine, but traditional medicines as well.

# CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

## Epistemology: The Body of Knowledge

*“This university would benefit all tribal people no matter where we live; we are in this together, in terms of economies, even though we are all unique.”*

*– Cheryl Crazy Bull, AICF President*

A theme that kept reoccurring during data collection was curriculum development. Questions were brought up by the educational leaders about what is going to be taught and who gets to decide. Would community members with degrees come to help develop the curriculum? We gathered all responses about curriculum development for this thematic narrative. Emerging from the data were topics of the development of curriculum. Before you can decide what is taught or how it's taught, you have to set the vision. And whose vision will this be? Another topic introduced in this section answers the question about what should be taught. What skills should Indigenous graduate students have in order to be successful professionals in their communities? And the third topic discussed in this section is about the strengths in developing an Indigenous curriculum.

According to the participants, there should be a clear understanding of the where the vision comes from. The curriculum that is taught at the Maori University in New Zealand is based on their own language, teachings, and beliefs. This concept is so important. If this university is to be considered Indigenous, this curriculum has to come from the people; it has to emerge from an Indigenous language. One the other hand, there are 29 federally recognized tribes representing over 100 unique cultures, whose history will be taught? Will the host tribe's culture be taught? That is the model at Northwest Indian College. NWIC believes in place-based education and that is what is taught. NWIC has 6 extended sites throughout Washington and Idaho. These sites will soon be developing their own curriculum that is relevant to their communities. Place-based education is important because it allows the curriculum to move away from pan-Indianism. We are not all the same. And with tribal colleges supporting place-based



education we are celebrating diversity, that we all have a history unique to us. In order to develop a successful curriculum community needs should be assessed. This educational institution will have a positive impact on communities as long as their needs are met. A good example of this inclusion is the Evergreen MPA program. The original idea of the program was designed based on the perspectives of tribal leaders, students, and educators. It was a shared vision.

As far as what should be taught, one statement stuck out in my head, research is a critical part in our lives. It would be really important to include a research component to the curriculum that way students can contribute to a body of knowledge that reflects us. If the proposal included regional centers, environmental studies could be incorporated into the curriculum. Environmental studies would be hard to include in a national university because tribal needs are so different from each other. There might be different needs for curriculum based on forestry in Quinault than the Cherokee Nation or Midwest tribes that do not have trees. Also laws and regulations vary from state to state, so this variation should be considered during the process of developing curriculum. Another important consideration should be paid to insider and outsider perspectives. It is really important for Indigenous people to learn from an indigenous perspective, but we also need to understand the dominant perspective. We will have to deal with dominant perspectives in our lives, there is no avoiding it. To understand ourselves and others differences, we can function as a better citizen. Building critical thinking skills is also an important consideration. Critical thinking is an important skill that indigenous students should have. This skill will allow students to build something out of nothing, identify issues in their communities and solve these issues. We should develop student's skill to tie back to their communities.

It's imperative to remember why we are doing this. We are enriching Indigenous students experience with relevant curriculum regardless of funding. As educators we should teach methods and knowledge that benefit all tribal people no matter where we live. We are in this together even though we are all unique.

# ACCREDITATION

## Quality | Recognition | Standards

*“Having an accredited program and institution will set the standard for excellence.”*

*– Justin Guillory, NWIC President*

Accreditation has to be addressed for this new institution. This section could be considered a strength or limitation, but necessary. The topics discussed about accreditation included why it's considered a limitation. If educational leaders create an Indigenous institution grounded in Indigenous knowledge, who will accredit it? Another topic discussed was the possibility of seeking accreditation from WINHEC, which is the only Indigenous accreditation association. The third topic discussed was why we need to seek accreditation and why accreditation is necessary.

Accreditation is a limitation because of the lack of indigenous voice in these associations. These associations were not developed with indigenous people in mind. They strictly evaluate from an outside perspective. It is also a limitation because the credentialing process is arduous. We need to rely on other educational leader's expertise in running educational institutions, like Cheryl Crazy Bull. Her knowledge in this area would be beneficial in the planning process.

According to the educational leaders interviewed there is a solution to this limitation. The World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium (WINHEC) has been established as an accreditation authority. There are a few tribal colleges who are accredited through WINHEC, including Navajo Technical College.

The third topic discussed looked at the question of, why do we need to seek accreditation? According to educational leaders, we need to prove we can offer this level of education. Having an accredited program and institution will set the standard for excellence. This is our chance to have a university that is truly owned and operated by Indigenous people, as we would take over responsibility. Not only will the accreditation association review our program

and determine whether or not we can teach the program, there will also be annual meetings to ensure we are maintaining the program.

# IMPLEMENTATION

## Systemic of Program Development

*“Education is so important; however it cannot give all the answers. If education is done right it will give students the ability to find the answers. Having the ability to problem solve is needed in our communities.”*

– Senator John McCoy

Once the program and curriculum development takes place the program will need to be approved by an accrediting body. After this is all complete, the real work starts. The program will need to be implemented. There was information that emerged from the data about the practical issues this program will face once it has been created and approved. These practical issues are discussed in the implementation section. Ensuring the program aligns with the needs assessment and maintains quality methods and materials is very important. Student services needs to be completely prepared. Ensuring students know exactly what is expected of them and whether or not students are ready to enter graduate level work. What will the requirements be for students? Implementation is an essential topic to discuss while developing a new institution.

Ensuring the program aligns with the feasibility study is important and will directly impact implementation. We need to pay attention to the quality of the program. We need the best faculty, methods, and the best materials. The program outcomes will be very important to think about. These will need to emerge from the community. The program should have a service learning component. In order to recruit enough students to this university the needs defined in the needs assessment should align. And in order to recruit faculty, the program has to be meaningful for the professional education instructors.

Very practical questions need to be worked out before implementation. Will the graduate university have a GRE requirement? Most mainstream graduate programs require students to complete the GRE test. The question of whether or not this university will require it will have to

be considered. Also, will there be a minimum GPA requirement for students transferring in with a bachelor's degree? If there is a minimum GPA requirement students need to be prepared to meet this requirement while taking classes for their bachelors. Will current students pursuing a bachelor's degree be ready to enter into these graduate programs? Attention needs to be paid to the alignment of current bachelors programs and this institution. This will require programs and colleges to work together to ensure the programs align and students are prepared to enter into graduate studies.

Education is so important; however it cannot give all the answers. If education is done right it will give students the ability to find the answers. Having the ability to problem solve is needed in our communities. This university has endless possibilities and we just need to implement them.

# **SUSTAINABILITY**

## **To Understand Our Assets and Opportunities**

*"The benefit would be to start an endowment fund and to offer students degrees at the university for free. What do you think about that?"*

*-Brian Cladoosby, NCAI President*

In the data collected, there were some commonalities in the terminology used by the educational leader participants. There were statements like, "the biggest barrier is money" or "The limitations is funding, funding, funding", meaning finding and sustaining funding source will be a major concern amongst tribal educational leaders. Creating a National Indigenous University has financial concerns which we must consider. This data has brought the attention of potential limitations, barriers, battles, and inflexibility issues tied with funding resources. However, these are opportunities for educational leaders to be creative and strategize how this can be done. This time is the time to start dialog about the constraints but also the possibilities. As Indigenous peoples, we have been adaptable and survived many challenges, in terms of U.S. imposed education. From time immemorial, we have found efficient ways to overcome these trying times in order to sustain our culture. By having assessed our resources around us, we have

found ways creative to conserve and sustain ourselves throughout time. With this being said, it is pivotal to assess our resources and leverage them, but it is also pandemic that we understand what exactly we need.

Although there are funding challenges, the questions then become how then can we create it with the resources available and how can we be most efficient in doing so? So then, this becomes the beginning stages of planning to figure out what we have and what we need, called an assessment or feasibility study. It is important to assess which tribes have interest in establishing this type of institution and which ones have the financial capabilities to establish a potential endowment to produce a steady flow of financial resource.

There are upsides and downsides of implementing various types of models, such as brick-and-mortar, online degree, hybrid online and brick-and-mortar, or a centralized location with a regional-based learning institutions. The challenges are competition over financial resources. With a privately funded institution, we would have to compete for private contributions. There are benefits and disadvantage which need to be assessed. For example, Haskell may have some advantages, such as, money being readily available for graduate degree, as they are Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) funded; however, the potential limitations is limited funding flexibility which is controlled by a sets of rules, process, and policies; as opposed to TESC.

TESC like model, TESC has more of a flexible model to development new courses unlike Haskell. Also, the location constraints take people out of their communities which also require extra financial resources in order to do so. With online or hybrid courses, you have the advantage of leveraging funding resources and technology, therefore, keeping students and faculty in their Indigenous communities. Partnerships are also a possibility for Indigenous peoples by being under a wing of a more established university; for example, like educational institutions with large financial capacity (i.e. endowment funds), Harvard, Stanford, The University of Washington, etc. This contractual relationship could look like a cooperative agreement which underpins the specific needs and desires of an Indigenous educational model, along with some authority and autonomy for decision-making power.

## **Conclusions**

When we look back to our guiding research question, Are Indigenous Educational Leaders ready to embrace the idea of creating a national Native American graduate university? We find the answer has changed throughout our research. When we began this journey we wanted to know if people are ready to start this idea. But after conducting interviews we realize the question is not if people are ready, it is how will this get done? We found that educational leaders were guiding us through a process that discusses how this university will become reality. We believe that people are ready to start talking about this university. They are ready to give their expertise. It will take expertise from all levels of Indian Country for this university to open its doors. What made the tribal college movement so successful was that the early president's believed in the importance of unity. They all worked together to achieve this dream of creating tribally controlled colleges and universities. They believed there was power in numbers. We believe this university will be just as successful if all stakeholders meet together, work together, toward the same goal. *Netse mot i shwolowen*, one heart one mind.

## **Assumptions**

It is our assumption there is an identified need for a Native American University based on prior tribal leaders, stakeholders, and visionaries in education. In addition, based on the current constraints of federal financial aid funding for students, students cannot achieve an education outside the U.S., unless there is policy change to accommodate Native students. Lastly, we assume the Indigenous model of the Maori is paradigm for Indigenous people to fully assert their sovereign powers and strengthen self-determination in the U.S.

## **Limitations**

The first limitation to this research project is time and the availability of our participants, tribal education leaders. With only one quarter to complete this research project, this puts phenomenal pressure in the ability to gain validity of data results and then present findings. As with any working professional, we as researchers have been accommodating to participant's schedules out of respect. Working educational leaders are assumed to have a high-level of expectations in their day-to-day jobs, so finding time for participation in the interviews has delayed the analytical piece project, such as interpretation, coding, and making sense of the data through a written analysis. Early on, we acknowledged that that we may not be able to reach all

identified tribal education leaders, as hoped for, due to a variety of factors (i.e. uninterested, skepticism, time constraints, location differences, and so on). These limitations were factored in when we considered this project.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

In lieu of the research project, we dedicate our final capstone research project as a gift to share with among educational leaders. In our recommendations, we hope to give some validity based on qualitative data. This report is for all educational leaders who are or will at some point be a part of this process.

Our first recommendation is to not only understand our opportunities and strengths but also to assess our weaknesses and threats. By know our opportunities; we can leverage them to the fullest extent. And knowing our weakness and threats, we can understand and be prepared for unforeseen circumstances. As our Lummi Nation Chief Bill (Tsilixw) James says, “Values are sacredness of our ancestors.” It is important to take this carefully into consideration and to overthink what our values are of our elders and teachings of our ancestors. To us, this is meaningful because it is better to be over prepared, grounded in values, than to be under prepared for circumstances, such as: criticism, political battles, funding challenges, unsettled agreement on location, or what curriculum will be taught, and so on and so forth. Through a feasibility study, we can better understand our communities using a community-based research approach by Indigenous researcher(s), cultural aspects, and visions of Indigenous educational leaders but also incorporates our visions of elders.

Indigenous educational leaders ought to identify funding sources to begin a strategic planning session to understand how to approach establishing a university which provides variety professional degrees, both liberal and non-liberal. It is important that all stakeholders be at the table for the initial discussion to understand the logistics of these meetings of where, when, and how much time and money is involved. There also must be someone who initiates this conversation, an educational leader who calls upon their allies to open the table and dialogs. Although busy in our day-to-day lives, a commitment to this project must be made by the education leaders to ensure the longevity and existence of our people. With honor, our

educational leaders understand this is their gift to Indigenous peoples, tribal governments, and their communities.

## **APPENDIX**

### **Appendix A:**

#### **Interview Questions**

1. Do you think establishing a Native American University is important?
2. What are the limitations in establishing a Native American University?
3. What are the strengths in establishing a Native American University?
4. How would a Native American University benefit tribal communities in the United States?

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