

Indigenous Students Navigating Community College
An Assessment of Culturally-Based Empowerment Workshops

by

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous students have not been achieving their educational goals similar to other racial and ethnic groups. In 2008 Native American students completed a bachelor's degree at a rate of 38.3% the lowest rate of all racial and ethnic groups and lower than the national average of 57.2%. The high attrition rate of Native students in post-secondary education, nationally, suggests that on-going colonization may be to blame. Much of the research exploring retention strategies found culturally sensitive institutions, family and peer support, supportive relationships with faculty and staff, skill development, and financial aid knowledge were consistent factors for student retention. No studies have examined the effects of cultural workshops as decolonizing practices, however. This action research examined the influence of a series of cultural workshops to address Native student and college community needs. Employing a mixed-methods design, this project framed the cultural workshops within decolonization and historical trauma. Five student participants attended five cultural workshops and completed questionnaires to offer insight into their college behaviors while journals were used to learn about their experiences within the workshops. The results of this study are consistent with the literature. There was no change in relationships as a result of the intervention, but relationships with faculty and staff that mimicked family were reported as important for student success. Participating students were at early stages in the decolonization process but were further along when they had experiences in college with American Indian Studies or faculty. Students felt that colonizing practices at the college must be challenged and Indigenous traditional practices must be integrated to create a culturally competent institution. Additional sessions are recommended to increase data collection and allow participants to develop and share their rich feedback with the college.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to all the warriors for Native students.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research was all about Mesa Community College Native students. I'd like to thank the Native students who participated in this research for their wisdom, time and experiences. I was blessed to share in your moments of decolonization and discovery and honored that you shared your families' achievements and sorrows, your hopes and dreams; and your plans for the future. Thank you for taking the time to help make the journey for future Native students more positive and successful. Without your contribution this research would not have been possible.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

“Whomever controls the education of our children, controls our future.”

-Wilma Mankiller, Chief of Cherokee Nation, 1985-1995

Evidence has demonstrated that Indigenous students have not fared as well as other racial and ethnic groups in education (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2013; Shotten, Lowe, & Waterman, 2013). The dropout rate in 2012 for Native American high school students was 14.6% compared to Hispanics at 12.7%, Blacks at 7.5%, Whites at 4.3%, and Asian/Pacific Islanders at 3.3% (Stark & Noel, 2015). In 2008 Native American students completed a bachelor’s degree at a rate of 38.3% the lowest rate of all racial and ethnic groups. This rate was much lower than the national average of 57.2% (Shotten, Lowe, & Waterman; 2013). There is little research on Native students in postsecondary education, however, and even more limited research on strategies and guidelines to improve the persistence and educational experiences for them. In fact, Native Americans are underrepresented in the overall higher education literature. For example, researchers found 1% of Native representation in the higher education literature on Native American college students’ experiences from 1991 to 2011 (Willmont, Sands, Raucci, & Waterman, 2016). The scant research on Native college students is a problem not only for Native students and their communities but for academia, in general, and those who work with Native peoples. How might institutions improve if the literature to guide improvement is lacking? (Willmont, Sands, Raucci, & Waterman, 2016). Despite the paucity of research on Native students, educational institutions must do more to support Native students on their educational journeys. Faircloth, Alcantar and Stage (2015) found that “American Indian students earned

less than 0.8% of all associate's and bachelor's degrees in 2008-2009 academic year...While 0.8% may not seem so different from the population percentage of 1% it suggests a 20% lower achievement rate within population. In other words, while AI/AN students represent 1% of the population, they only earn 0.8%, or 80% of their share, of the college degrees earned in the United States" (p. 8). Shotten, Lowe, and Waterman (2014) put Native college student enrollment and graduation in perspective, "for every one American Indian or Alaska Native who has a bachelor's degree, seven white individuals do" (p. 7). Other research results for first time, full-time bachelor's degree seeking students found 41% of Native students graduate with bachelor's degrees within six years the same rate as African Americans at 41%, but lower than Pacific Islanders at 50%, Hispanics at 54%, Whites at 63%, and Asians at 71%. The national average is 60% (Musu-Gillette, et al., 2014).

There are many potential causes for Indigenous students' attrition from college. Western-dominated schooling that requires Indigenous students to discard their traditional culture while assimilating to the college culture can cause discord between students and their home lives (Sanders, 2015; Romero, 1994). Other research attributes low retention to the myriad of social problems Native students and their families face. These social problems include poverty and substance abuse, among many others (Belgarde & LoRÉ, 2003; Flynn, Duncan & Jorgensen; 2012; Guillory, 2009). Low rates of achievement among Indigenous learners and socio-economic factors like poverty, that affect learners' well-being are connected (Peterman, 2001). In other research focusing on historical trauma, researchers have attributed the social problems experienced by Indigenous peoples to colonization and the forced removal of Indigenous peoples from their lands, languages and cultural practices (Duran, 2006; Evans-Campbell, 2008; Walters, Beltran, Huh, & Evans-Campbell, 2011).

Historical trauma as defined by Evans-Campbell (2008) was seen as the intergenerational

legacy of collective trauma experienced by a group resulting in often adaptive social, emotional, and psychological responses. There is evidence that historical trauma among Indigenous peoples, African Americans, Mexican Americans and Japanese Americans has lasting multi-generational effects (DeGruy, & Estrada, 2009; Evans-Campbell, 2008; Nagata, 1991), and this can significantly impact the populations' interaction with educational institutions.

The lower rate of college attainment among Native peoples could be considered a result of on-going colonization, expressly through the use of mis-education (Alfred, 2013). Yellow Bird (2004) defined colonization as "...the formal and informal methods that maintain the subjugation or exploitation of Indigenous peoples, lands, and resources" (p. 2). Dislocation and displacement from traditional homelands, the institution of state and federal policies that restrict or limit traditional ways of life (including hunting, fishing, and grazing rights); the institution of wage labor, removal from Indigenous communities to boarding schools, and the overall policies and ideologies of assimilation and acculturation with the express purpose of "killing the Indian and saving the man" (Adams, 1995, p.52) have been the processes of colonization that have attempted to erase Indigenous peoples as a primary strategy to acquire land, extinguish treaty obligations, and maintain the subjugation of Indigenous peoples (Adams, 1995; Ladner, 2009; Poupart, 2006; Deloria, 1977).

Policies fueled by "ethnocentric thinking based upon false assumptions that Native peoples had no educational structures, no sense of property, and an inferior brand of spirituality" (Grande, 2004, p. 25) led to institutional oppression in boarding and mainstream schools designed to strip Native students of their cultures (Adams, 1995). Poupart (2006) has argued that assimilationist policies reaching as far back as the 1800s continue to impact the current state of educational attainment of Native students that severely lags behind other

racial and ethnic groups. The history of systemic genocide, boarding school, the reservations system and second-class citizenship has played a role in the experiences and struggle of Indigenous students. “Postsecondary institutions are part of the process of colonization in the 21st century through failure to retain Indigenous students; through curricula focused on whiteness; through privileging the cultural capital of dominant culture; and through the exclusion of Indigenous knowledge” (Poupart, 2006, p. 213). More time and attention is needed to understand and address this underserved group of students at the postsecondary education level.

Personal Context

I am Dine' (Navajo) of the Red Running into Water clan, born for African Americans (which means my father is Black). My maternal grandfather is of the Salt clan. My family is from Tsidii tó (Birdsprings) on the Navajo Nation in Arizona. I am not fluent in Dine' Bizaad (Navajo Language) but speak and practice when I can, however, about half of my family is fluent in Navajo. I grew up among my maternal relatives on the Navajo Nation and in a small town bordering the Nation. I also grew up among my paternal relatives and a family who “adopted” me during trying times while living in South Central Los Angeles from 1987-1994, through the height of the war on Black and Brown communities. This was the era where policies and laws put in motion by Ronald Reagan and expanded by Bill Clinton resulted in exponential increases in the incarceration rates of people of color (Alexander, 2012). I therefore grew up in two disparate environments, which influenced my experiences in higher education and subsequently my research focus.

I graduated from a high school in what was called South Central Los Angeles, located a mile from the University of Southern California (USC). By then I had attended three high schools, two in Los Angeles and one in northern Arizona. I was a first-generation

college student raised in South Central Los Angeles, on the Navajo Nation and in a rural border town. Border towns, reservations, and ghettos are both targets for oppression and safe havens from white supremacy (Donaldson & Gonzales, 2006). Throughout my life, I witnessed violence and experienced discrimination because of my Blackness and or Indianness, a consequence of colonization and the institution of standards of whiteness (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). I can never be sure if how I was treated was due to Indigeneity, Blackness or gender due to the intersectionality of my identities (Carbado et al., 2013). However, I also experienced the great peace that washed over me at dawn after a Hozhooji' or Beauty Way ceremony and relished the freedom of exploring Los Angeles with my brother on the RTD (local bus system). These, and similar experiences, helped me gain perspective on the power of traditional ceremony for emotional healing and the importance of family in finding the joys in life when facing great adversity.

Poverty, oppression and fear was the air I breathed on a daily basis no matter which community I was living. On the “rez,” weekends were the most fearful times when family members and other adults would get drunk and someone would inevitably get hurt or killed. Similarly, the police and gang violence were unpredictable in Los Angeles. Someone in the community was shot and killed, or aggressively arrested, on a weekly basis. Despite the oppression I lived under, I was hopeful that my life could be different if I went to college. With the help of a counseling faculty member from a local community college, I applied and was accepted to USC, a historically white college and university (HWCU), in other words, a colonizing project whose traditions, culture and curriculum reproduced whiteness at the expense of non-Whites (Allen, 1991; Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Whiteness is defined as “racial domination normalized” (Desmond & Emirbayer, 2010, p. 39). Normalizing whiteness has the effect of making the cultural, educational, economic and political privileges enjoyed by

Whites an accepted and largely unquestioned social reality. At the same time, the privileges denied to non-whites and the systemic oppression put in place, are largely invisible, yet construed as innate deficiencies. I struggled to understand what was required of me while at the university and I did not feel a sense of belonging. I was an average student until my junior year when I finally figured out the culture of postsecondary education. I initially saw college as a reprieve from the oppressive environments I lived, however, attending an HWCU was an insidious type of structural violence that erased Indianness and pathologized Blackness and Brownness (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Robertson, 2015). For example, USC professors and students were often surprised that I was Navajo because I didn't "look Indian." I had brown skin and curly hair not the long, straight, black hair and light skin of the romantic stereotypical image of Native people in popular media.

I did not have time for extracurricular activities in college. I worked 20-25 hours per week, assisted my paternal grandmother with shopping and chores; and later, when she was diagnosed with breast cancer, I was one of her part-time caregivers until she passed away. I also had family responsibilities to my adopted family in Los Angeles. Miraculously, I graduated from USC in four years with the help of my adopted family as well as an extended family that I found at the Southern California Indian Center. It was at the Center where I discovered a sense of place and belonging as well as support and I even ran into people from my community, Tsidii tó. The Center provided scholarships and other funding to help me with housing and other school needs as well as a stable job that helped me develop professional skills. Most importantly, I was able to work with others who affirmed my identity as a Diné woman in Los Angeles and encouraged me to get my education. After receiving my bachelor's degree, I continued onto graduate school and received a Master's degree in Sociology with a focus on race and inequalities.

Since 1999, I have been a faculty member teaching American Indian Studies and Sociology at Mesa Community College (MCC). I have worked with the staff at the American Indian Institute (AII) on various grants and projects. For more than a decade, I have taught in the Hoop of Learning Program, a high school to college bridge program where Native high school students earn college credit as an incentive to graduate from high school. The program has been successful because the cultures of students are uniquely interwoven into the program and Native staff and faculty advise, teach and mentor students. The class I teach is titled, "Native Pride and Awareness." The goal is to help students become aware of the value of their indigeneity and to leverage traditional culture to complete their high school courses. My positionality in Action Research, according to Herr & Anderson (2005), was one of *insider collaborating with other insiders*. The AII staff and I were insiders because we are employed by the same institution where we collaboratively conducted this research. Yet, we were also insiders because we were Native people undertaking research to help other Native people. "Insider researchers often collaborate with other insiders as a way to do research that not only might have a greater impact on the setting, but also has the potential to be more democratic" (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p.45). With this research, my goal is to make MCC a place where Native students can thrive with their identities intact.

Local Context

Mesa Community College is one of ten colleges within the Maricopa County Community Colleges District (MCCCD) in Maricopa County, located in central Arizona. Maricopa County is the largest county in the state, representing two thirds of the state's population. Twenty five percent of land in the state of Arizona is Native held. The state is home to twenty-two tribal nations and has one of the largest populations of Native peoples in the nation at 5.3% of the state's 6.6 million residents (according to 2013 Census

estimates). Just over half of the Indigenous population resides in Maricopa County. With a student enrollment of 21,491, MCC is the largest of the ten Maricopa colleges. MCC also has the largest population of Native students at about 1333 that make up roughly 4.2% of the student population. MCC is one of just two colleges in the District that has an American Indian Institute (AII) dedicated to Native students. Services of the AII include: academic advisement, enrollment and registration, individual educational planning, tribal and private scholarship assistance, financial aid assistance, help to qualify for on-campus childcare, peer support and networking, and talking circles.

In spite of these services, Native students at MCC still lagged behind other racial groups in degree and certificate completion, persistence from semester to semester, and course completion rates according to 2014 data generated by MCC's office of Institutional Effectiveness. There were a few possible explanations for why Native students were not getting the services they needed when they have more resources than other Native students in the Maricopa District. Early in my research I met with the director of the AII and staff to talk about what they needed to better serve Native students. I was met with a laundry list of concerns that boiled down to four main issues: 1) the infrastructure surrounding financial aid, 2) the need for affordable housing, 3) the need for a therapeutic counselor on hand to help students manage personal and educational challenges, and 4) the lack of visibility of Native peoples and cultures on campus.

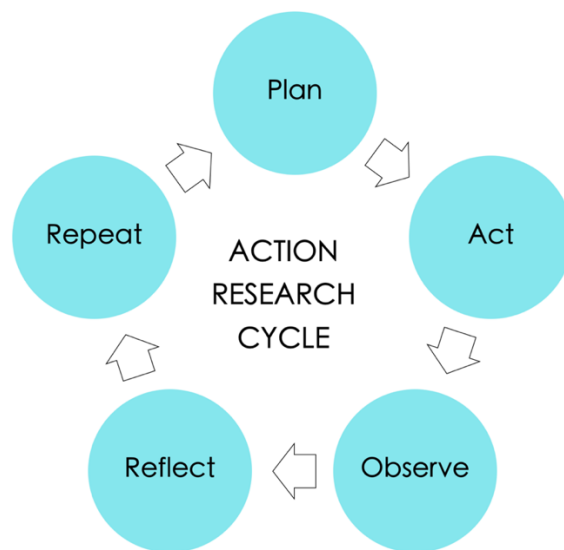
Action Research Cycles

In action research, the researcher collaborates with participants to create knowledge and change through reciprocal collaboration. Inquiry is an iterative cyclical process of examining the intersection between theory and practice. It is not wholly theory nor wholly practice that guides research but both (Herr & Anderson, 2014). For example, a problem is

identified, research questions generated, and action is taken. Reflection on the action and results may lead to new research questions and a different action to find solutions. The process of creating, action, and reflection are the cycles of action research. “Early on in the working relationship, time primarily must go to framing the focus of the research and agreeing on the research questions. This is done on at least two levels: listening intently to community concerns and issues that will be addressed through the action research, and then, in this context, framing the doctoral students’ research questions” (Herr & Anderson, 2014, p. 104).

Figure1.

Action Research Cycle



I met with the staff of the AII as part of the praxis of action research, research conducted *with* participant researchers not *on* them. In cycle one of my research, I attended two staff meetings at the AII and met one-on-one with staff members to request their participation in helping me create a dissertation project that would serve Native students at MCC. In the first meeting, the director and three staff members were excited to work

together and shared with me the many challenges they faced in supporting Native students, as well as the successful projects they had already launched. Several barriers were identified that interrupt students' ability to focus on coursework. These barriers included the need for childcare, financial stressors, domestic violence, incarceration, family pulls, and lack of affordable and accessible housing. At the second meeting I shared what I heard from them at the first meeting to make sure these accurately reflected their concerns. We identified potential solutions for students' most immediate needs. We decided to focus on securing help to find safe, affordable, and flexible-lease housing for students. Many students who were coming to MCC from rural and reservation areas were not prepared for the large security deposits, the 12-month lease contracts, and the need for a FICO score as part of the rental application. We also decided to partner with a local social and health services organization, Native Health, to provide therapeutic counseling to help students balance their personal and school lives. I made contacts with community members and other support networks within my college and district and in the greater Phoenix Metro-area to begin actualizing the interventions. Interviews with two Native students were conducted to collect rich data about their experiences at MCC thus far. Both were male, Diné, and had attended other institutions prior to enrolling at MCC. Both identified relationships with faculty and staff and other students as important. They also identified social activities and student affairs support as important to their success at MCC. Current needs identified were financial, housing, intramural sports, and social activities. All attempts to find accessible housing, create student housing, and bring a therapeutic counselor on campus failed.

Cycle Two consisted of a 21 item-questionnaire with questions taken from the American College Health Association and the 2015 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). I recruited students to participate in interviews about their experiences at MCC. In

the second cycle, approximately 2,300 students over the age of 18 who were enrolled in my academic department in the Spring semester, 2016 were recruited to complete an online needs assessment questionnaire. Approximately, 800 Native students on the email distribution list housed in the American Indian Institute were included in those recruitment efforts. Of these, a combined total of 134 Native and non-Native students participated in the survey. The AII selected eight Native students for interviews through the American Indian Institute, however, only two students followed through with the interview. Unfortunately, the timing of the interviews was scheduled just before final exams. These interviews highlighted student's experiences at MCC and asked about specific challenges they perceived from being an Indigenous student on campus. Additional recent research findings suggest Native students have always taken a non-linear path toward their education goals (Bowman, 2016; McAfee, 1997). Initial survey results of students at MCC showed that they were, in fact, on a non-traditional educational path. While there were very few differences in ratings between Native and non-Native students overall, the main differences were in students' weekly activities. Native students were more often working off campus (an average of 7.30 hours per week), volunteering (2.30 hours per week), and socializing (4.20 hours per week) relative to non-native students (4.54, $p=.006$; 1.54, $p=.002$; and 2.81 hours, $p=.021$, respectively). Native students were also taking fewer credits (2.70, $SD = 1.64$) relative to non-Native students (3.81, $SD = 1.64$).

Table 1

Differences between Native and non-Native student activities at MCC

<u>Significant Questionnaire Items</u>	<u>Native Student</u>	<u>Non-Native Student</u>	<u>P value</u>
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How many hours do you spend in a typical 7-day week working off campus for pay?	7.3 hours per week	4.54 hours per week	p=.006
How many hours do you spend in a typical 7-day week doing community service or volunteer work?	2.3 hours per week	1.54 hours per week	p=.002
How many hours do you spend in a typical 7-day week relaxing and socializing (time with friends, video games, TV or video, keeping up with friends online, etc.)	4.2 hours per week	2.81 hours per week	p=.021
How many courses are you taking for credit this current academic term?	2.7 courses per sem SD=1.64	3.81 courses per sem SD=1.64	p=.032

Native students at MCC also indicated a variety of goals for their education: 15% indicated ‘Some college’ as their goal, 21% selected an Associate’s degree, 35% selected Bachelor’s degree, while 15% selected the Master’s and 15% selected the PhD. In a society that teaches more is better thus the higher the degree the better, Native cultures place a higher value on family and community which is a characteristic that has most likely contributed to Native *survinance*, or active survival (Vizenor, 1999). Survivance, according to Vizenor, is the active presence of Native languages, stories, songs and overall culture that convey Indigenous people still exist. It is the presence of Native peoples that resists white supremacy and dominance. The diverse and non-linear education path for Native students has been attributed to values of family and community that take priority over dominant culture education. Thus, institutions who do not make the effort to get to know the student and integrate the student into the college community make it that much easier for the student to leave. “Learning is not about rigor for Indigenous peoples, it is a life-long journey through which each person develops the ability to create the balance one needs to live productively in the world” (Rodriguez de France, 2013, p. 88). As one student stated in an

interview, no support staff at her former college “came to check on me, talk to me” (Student B, personal communication, April 15, 2016).

Despite some differences between Native students and non-Native students, both groups agreed that they would attend personal and professional development workshops, which created the foundation of this intervention. However, Native students specifically noted that workshops on cultural awareness and scholarships would be helpful to them. Thus, the next cycle of the project built on this earlier information to create an intervention that specifically provided the resources and supports requested by Native students and allowed them to discuss their own beliefs and create an informative presentation for the college community about how to embrace and respect the Native students in their college.

The high attrition rate of Native students nationally, and at Mesa Community College, suggests there is a gap in supporting Native students. Like many colleges, Native students and Indigenous peoples are often invisible, especially if they do not present in romanticized stereotypical forms (Fryberg, Markus, Oyserman & Stone, 2008; Leavitt, Covarrubias, Perez & Fryberg, 2015). For example, wearing buckskin, having long hair, speaking in broken English, and appearing stoic are the stereotypical ways some non-Indians perceive Native peoples. This project was an attempt to bring awareness of contemporary Native peoples and their lifeways to MCC. The intervention, Understanding Contemporary Indigenous Communities, developed as a result of the two previous cycles of inquiry.

Innovation

The intervention, Understanding Contemporary Indigenous Communities (UCIC), was comprised of a suite of workshops for Indigenous students that was to culminate in a college community presentation to be disseminated online. The UCIC sessions focused on Native ways of being and doing to illuminate contemporary Indigenous peoples and cultures,

increased community awareness of Native peoples and their lifeways, and offered strategies for effective engagement with Indigenous students for faculty and staff.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this action research project was to examine the influence of a culture embracing support intervention, the UCIC, on Native students' personal and academic development, and at the same time bring awareness to the college community about Indigenous knowledge and culture. Specifically, this study explored the following research questions:

RQ1: What stage were these Indigenous community college students in Laenui's (2000) decolonization process?

RQ2: How did the UCIC influence Native students' experiences at MCC?

RQ3: What were the themes and topics of Indigenous peoples that students identified as missing in the college community? And, how did students talk about those issues?

RQ4: How did students experience the individual workshops?

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RELATED LITERATURE

This project is concerned with how culturally-based empowerment workshops, *Understanding Contemporary Indigenous Communities*, can create an environment of support for Indigenous learners. This chapter includes a brief history of Native peoples and education, the theoretical frameworks and a review of existing literature that guided this action research project.

Brief History of Education and Native Peoples

Until recently, Native people have never been in control of *formal* education for themselves and even today Indian control over Indian education is tenuous at best, limited and constrained by history, colonial projects, government policies, and underfunding at worst (Tippeconnic, course lecture, Spring 2016; Riding In, course lecture, Spring 2016). Most Native American students attend primary, secondary and postsecondary school outside of their communities (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2013; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008) and thus do not receive an education that incorporates their tribal values, beliefs, and epistemologies within Western education. The dominant culture educational system values the standards of whiteness and dominant American English, standards by which all students are compared and contrasted. Even in this era of multicultural education, where research supports the incorporation of the wealth of diverse knowledge that students bring to school with them (Lew, 2009; Rios-Aguilar, et. al, 2011; Sánchez, 2010), there is still a predominance of whiteness. Whiteness is defined as “racial domination normalized” (Desmond & Emirbayer, 2010, p. 39). As aforementioned, normalizing whiteness has the effect of making the educational, cultural, economic and political privileges enjoyed by whites an accepted and largely unquestioned social reality. At the same time, the privileges denied to non-whites and

the systemic oppressions put in place, are largely invisible, yet construed as innate deficiencies. Native American students are held accountable for their failure to succeed in this whiteness dominated educational system, instead of seeing the system as the source of the problem.

The structure of whiteness is rooted in colonization and the projects of colonialism. Wolfe (2006) refers to settler colonialism as a project, not an event. An event occurs in a specific time and place with a beginning and an end, while projects are continuous. In order for this society to exist, multiple settler projects are operating in concert to erase or assimilate Indigenous peoples as a strategy to separate us from our lands. Settler colonialism is the society created by Europeans that is dependent on dispossessing Indigenous peoples from their lands. Indigeneity is the expression of *Indianness* and an identity tied to place and land. It is indigeneity, rooted in the land that is a threat to colonial projects. Aikau (2010) refers to the structure of dispossession and settler colonialism as invisible and naturalized. It is assumed that all people desire to assimilate to U.S. culture.

A major innate deficiency identified by the U.S. government and religious leaders upon colonizing North America was the savagery of Indigenous peoples. A mix of genocide, forced assimilation, and acculturation policies were enacted over 500 years to remove Native peoples and strip them of their languages, cultures, and ties to the land (Alfred, 2009; Grande, 2008; Poupart, 2006; Wolfe, 2006). Policies were fueled by white supremacy, greed, and the belief that Native peoples were heathens with inferior cultures, morals, and beliefs (Grande, 2008). These ideologies, or beliefs that justified oppression, resulted in whole nations being killed off and later when genocide proved to be an expensive and ineffective practice of obtaining land, widespread oppression in boarding and mainstream schools was designed to “kill the Indian in him and save the man” as declared by Richard Pratt, the

originator of the first Indian boarding school (Adams, 1995, p.52). If Native children were stripped of their identities, cultures, languages, beliefs, and values, essentially, everything that constituted 'Indianness,' it was believed they would assimilate into dominant culture thereby relinquishing title to tribally owned lands. Therefore, children were forcibly removed from their homes and placed in boarding schools where they endured physical, psychological, emotional, and sexual abuse at the hands of priests, missionaries, teachers, and school staff (Yellow Horse Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998). Children were severely punished for speaking their Native languages, practicing their traditional cultures, and expressing their Indigenous spirituality both in the U.S. and Canada (Poupart, 2006). Poupart (2006) and others (McKegney, 2014; Shotten, Waterman, & Lowe, 2014) argue that assimilationist policies continue as evidenced by the current state of educational attainment of Native students that severely lags behind other racial and ethnic groups. Enrollment and graduation rates are lower among Native students than any other racial group. These statistics have held true for decades. The National Center for Education Statistics published a comprehensive report, *Higher Education: Gaps in Access and Persistence Study*. Using 2009-2011 data, the report highlights a variety of factors that shape students' preparation, aspiration, planning, and performance toward degree or certificate attainment. An increase of college enrollment for all racial and ethnic groups from 40 to 43 percent occurred from 2006 to 2010, however, enrollment rates for 18-24 year-old AI/AN males was 24 percent and for AI/AN females it was 33 percent. A significant omission from the NCES data is also the fact that Native undergraduate students only make up only 1% of the college population (Shotten, Lowe, & Waterman, 2013), when Native peoples represent 2% of the overall population of the United States (US Census Bureau, 2011).

Historical Trauma

Healing has become necessary for Indigenous peoples due to the socio-historical effects of colonization, summarized as historical trauma. Historical trauma, as defined by Evans-Campbell (2008), is seen as the intergenerational legacy of collective trauma experienced by a group resulting in often adaptive social, emotional, and psychological responses. Moreover, educational institutions have been recognized as sites of trauma for Indigenous peoples; specifically, federal boarding schools where children were subjected to multiple forms of abuse and isolated from their families resulting in generations of disruption of socialization as Indigenous peoples (Yellow Horse Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998). Children who experienced federal and missionary boarding schools, settler colonial projects, not only experienced physical, sexual, and emotional abuse; they were stripped of their cultures and Indigenous identities. Children were deprived of an Indigenous identity, including all the knowledge and skills needed to function appropriately and find a sense of place in their families and traditional communities (Adams, 1995; Yellow Horse Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998).

The systemic practice of assimilating Indigenous peoples was fueled by government funding of missionary and boarding schools (Talbot, 2006). It stands to reason that if education through schools was one institution by which colonial projects manifested trauma, then it is through this same institution that historical trauma can be healed by reclaiming languages forcibly taken, practicing traditions that had been stripped away, forming healthy identities based on the truth of their resistance and survival, integrating language and culture into the physical space of schools, and using language and culture explicitly in developing programming. The results of current research have shown through culturally sustaining and revitalizing pedagogies that integrating the unique culture and values of Indigenous peoples into educational institutions, along with decolonization practices, can help schools become

sites of healing and support for Indigenous learners and their communities. Because of colonial projects that inflicted historical trauma, institutions must go beyond a multicultural standardized curriculum and create traditional holistic learning communities for diverse Native students.

Revitalization and Decolonization

Tuck and Yang's (2012) definition of decolonization is to restore Indigenous land and life. For purposes of education, decolonization is specifically referring to the restoration of the value of Indigenous epistemologies and ways of being within dominant culture educational institutions; and the acknowledgement that place -land- cannot be separated from Indigenous knowledge and identity (Simpson, 2014). To decolonize education means to transform dominant culture education from a system that privileges whiteness including Western practices, beliefs, and values to one that incorporates local Indigenous epistemologies and ways of being and doing (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2013). They use the term 'decolonize' to mean the transformation and challenge of power and knowledge in the education system. Patterns of healing are reflected in themes of decolonization that have been incorporated into those schools and universities that have consciously chosen to honor and respect Indigenous ways of being and knowing. Educational institutions that value Indigenous peoples use culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogies, and accept and promote Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Culturally sustaining pedagogies, as coined by Paris (2012), includes questioning, critiquing, and resisting dominant language, literacy, and cultural practices that sustain White middle class norms by using pedagogies that recognize the strengths of all learners. Extending this pedagogy to support learners to reclaim and sustain their languages, literacies, and cultures of their communities while also gaining access to dominant cultural capital has been the essence of culturally sustaining

pedagogies. Paris (2012) argued that educational equity could be achieved by embracing pluralism and cultural equality among all groups marginalized and dominant.

McCarty and Lee (2014) highlighted the need to transform education for student success by employing culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy in Indigenous education. Revitalizing means “to make, someone or something, active, healthy or energetic again” (merriam-webster.com) and conveys in a powerful way, the need for Indigenous peoples to reclaim their languages and traditions by transforming education for Indigenous learners. Importantly, revitalizing means going well beyond a culturally sustaining pedagogy, as described by Paris (2012), where “both traditional and evolving ways of cultural connectedness [are supported] for contemporary youth” (p. 102). Culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy (CSR) means bringing identities, languages, cultures, and worldviews back to life. It means to heal. CSR in practice means teaching Indigenous languages at educational institutions, integrating Native culture within curricula and the physical space of institutions, and reinforcing Indigenous ways of being (e.g. cooperation over competition). For this research project, students used culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy to learn about their cultures and envision teaching aspects of it to the college community in order to respect Indigenous ways of being and doing and to validate who they were as Indigenous peoples. This was also a process of decolonization.

Glen Coulthard (2014) characterized the social reality of Indigenous people as a continuous subtly violent dispossession of their lands, languages, values, and principles through the interlocking oppressions of white supremacy, patriarchy, capitalism, and state power. Leanne Simpson (2014) urges the creation of a generation of Indigenous people who can think in the diversity of their traditional intelligence and ways of knowing, otherwise they lose who they are as a people. She cautions against relying on state-run schools or

Indigenizing the academy according to the college or university rules to create “community-based intellectuals and cultural producers who are accountable to our nations and whose life work is concerned with the regeneration of these systems” (Simpson, 2014, p. 13). In a society where Indianness has been and is under attack, this necessitates the re-creation of a culturally sustaining *and* revitalizing context.

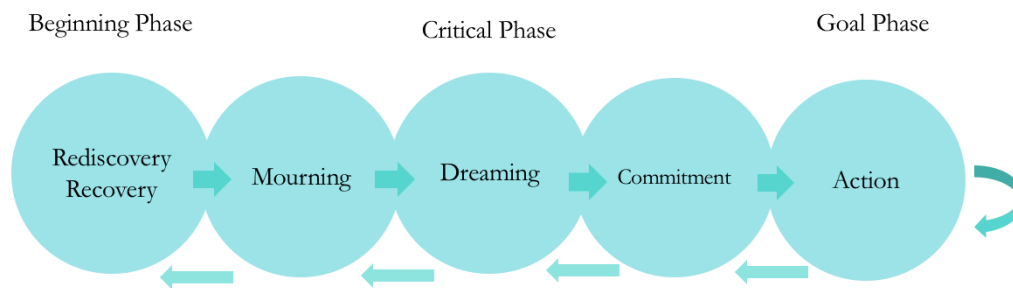
Faircloth and Tippeconnic (2013) reviewed manuscripts on leadership in Indigenous education and were encouraged by the efforts around the world to transform education to center Indigenous worldviews and values, or in other words, “Indigenize the curricula,” (p. 485) even though efforts were small and localized. Though Simpson (2014) cautions against Indigenizing Western schooling, the stark reality is that of the 181,100 Native students in colleges and universities in 2006, most attended Western schools. In fact, only 13,600 Native students were enrolled in tribally controlled colleges and universities in 2006 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008). Faircloth and Tippeconnic (2013) highlight how Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) serving Indigenous learners have struggled with mainstream educational practices yet remained hopeful about the possibilities to change to institutions that support learners’ unique cultural practices and diverse languages.

Poka Laenui (2000) identified five phases in the decolonization process that he believes Indigenous peoples must pass through toward the goal of decolonization. The process is linear in theory, however, stages can be skipped and/or revisited. See Figure. Laenui (2000) suggests the most critical stage is the Dreaming stage and this is the one stage that cannot be skipped. The ultimate goal is to arrive at the last stage, Action, where decolonization is actualized and people are actively working toward change. The first phase is *Rediscovery/Recovery* which is a fundamental step in moving forward. In this phase one suffers from inferiority given the history of Indigenous peoples with settler colonizers and

the processes of assimilation and acculturation many have undergone. It takes recovering traditional language, culture, and identity to get on a path of recovery. In the next phase, *Mourning*, one is aware of the victimization of being Indigenous in mainstream society and grieves all that was lost. It is a time to mourn. The next phase, *Dreaming*, is critical for decolonization. One must explore one's traditional culture, language, and make goals for future change. This phase is about hope. The next phase is *Commitment*. In this phase one must work with others to choose a clear path to move forward in reclaiming what was lost. Once one is committed with others, the consensus among the people determine what *Action* one takes in this last phase. Laenui's phases were used to evaluate which stages the students felt they were in during the intervention.

Figure 1.

Process of Decolonization



Several studies on revitalization highlight the need for incorporating Indigenous worldviews as a part of the healing process. Incorporating indigenous worldviews can include oral traditions, elder teaching/participation, respect for relationships and reciprocity; land based pedagogy, and responsibility to serve the community (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). According to Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991), incorporating Indigenous worldviews

should be considered a holistic process where the entire student is taught. For example, Indigenous worldviews of education saw learning as a lived experience that happened everywhere, and especially tied to place- land- and continued for a lifetime. Simpson (2014) posits that for education to be Indigenous, it must be rooted in land, as place, and from the land all the knowledge and practice rooted in place. Barnhardt and Kawagley (2005) emphasize the adaptive quality of Indigenous knowledge rooted in a particular place for generations has lessons to offer for sustainable living. Indigenous education also meant that feeling, observing, and relationships are privileged as opposed to being relegated to margins as in mainstream dominant education. A holistic education grounded in Indigenous knowledge and worldviews stresses balance, identity and respect (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). TCUs have incorporated Indigenous ways of knowing and being as part of the curriculum and culture of the schools to varying degrees. MCC can follow this example through learning about Indigenous cultures and worldviews then incorporating these views into the curricula and culture of the college. The UCIC is the beginning of this holistic educational process to promote healing; build relationships between students, faculty, and staff; and develop an awareness and appreciation for Native ways of being.

Interventions to support Native students in colleges and universities

Previous models have incorporated Indigenous ways of knowing and being in a variety of ways and levels (e.g. see Belgarde & LoRÉ, 2003; Lee, Donlan & Brown, 2010; Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003; Mosholder & Goslin, 2013). Some researchers have examined interventions on structural levels where changes were made to the university culture, campus environment and/or policies. Other interventions have targeted more specific behaviors or skills around Indigenous students' needs in education. In this study, the intervention was targeted to specific skills and experiences for Indigenous students, and incorporated aspects

from the variety of interventions for this population that have been utilized at the postsecondary level in the past.

Structural Interventions

At the university level, Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) encouraged universities to transform themselves to empower First Nations students' and incorporate students' unique values and worldviews into university culture. They posited the four r's to incorporate into university structures: respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility. Despite the age of the research, many researchers in the domain of Indigenous knowledges, methodologies, and education have continued to value the four r's. Brayboy, Gough, Leonard, Roehl, and Solyom (2012) referred to the four R's as respect, reciprocity, responsibility and relationships. The difference in the two was that Kirkness and Barnhardt emphasized *relevance*, the responsibility of the university to help students appreciate and apply their cultural knowledge and worldview to their college educational experiences, while relationships are implied in *reciprocity*. Brayboy and colleagues omitted *relevance* and replaced it with an emphasis on *caring relationships*. Either way, both models emphasized responsibility to incorporate the culture of students into the college, situating the student as both teacher and learner by recognizing that Native students come to college with valuable knowledge. *Respect*, emphasized honoring Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing as well as validating Indigenous learners' funds of knowledge that they bring to the university. Respect also embodies the pluralism and educational equity of culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris, 2012). *Relevance* denoted making education useful and aligning with students' goals. Making teaching and learning student-centered and recognizing professors were not the only ones who had knowledge to share were characteristics of *reciprocal* relationships. Finally, *responsibility* through participation suggested schools must create an environment where

students were able to participate in ways that allowed them to “gain access to power, authority, and an opportunity to exercise control over the affairs of everyday life...” (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991, p. 7). Essentially, the four r’s allowed for creating a welcoming and comfortable environment for Indigenous learners. The UCIC, by its design, aligned with the four R’s. Student participants researched their own cultures, traditional practices, and values; they were working alongside the researcher and AII staff as partners, and they planned to teach their culture and worldviews to the college community. In doing so, they would contribute to diversifying the college culture toward cultural competence.

Lundberg (2007) found through analyzing the College Student Experience Questionnaire for Native students, institutional commitment to diversity was the strongest predictor for Indigenous student success. Results from several research studies identified ways institutions have implemented and integrated Indigenous epistemologies, including the principles of the four r’s to varying degrees: respect, relevance, responsibility, and reciprocity. The University of Victoria in British Columbia established an Indigenous education program 40 years ago and since then has worked to integrate Indigenous worldviews and ways of being and doing into the infrastructure of the university (Rodriguez de France, 2013). Similar to the U.S., the impetus to incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing and being began with a policy paper. For the University of Victoria, it was the 1973 policy paper titled, “Indian Control of Indian Education” by the National Indian Brotherhood, now called Assembly of First Nations. The paper identified the ways in which Indigenous learners struggled in dominant culture educational institutions and demanded “an education system that would acknowledge the importance of traditions, beliefs, and worldviews” (Rodriguez de France, 2013, p.87). The University recognized “Indigenous pedagogies privilege and honour knowledge in its diverse forms and manifestations”

(Rodriguez de France, 2013, p. 85). The University made extensive changes to create a welcoming and supportive environment for Indigenous students. Interventions respecting diversity for Indigenous learners benefits all learners and improves Indigenous student retention (Rodriguez de France, 2013; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). Some of the changes included incorporating retention objectives and faculty support toward cultural competence within the institution's strategic plan; offering various Indigenous language revitalization programs, creating an Indigenous Education department for support; publicly acknowledging the Indigenous peoples on whose territories they learn, live, and work; creating courses and programs developed with Indigenous community members; hiring community members who did not have dominant culture credentials; offering specialized courses with low enrollment; utilizing a grading system not based upon competition but complete/incomplete; and hiring elders and community stakeholders to consult on the transformations.

This project on the UCIC has the potential to help the MCC college community toward cultural competence of Indigenous peoples. Only the AII at MCC had acknowledged the ancestral lands of the Gila River Indian community on their webpage, and in doing so was educating the MCC community on one aspect of Indigenous ways of doing. It was hoped that Indigenous students and community members might develop culturally competent ways for working with Indigenous students through the UCIC. For example, some course requirements like dissection were deemed taboo for some tribal nations. Dissection is a cultural taboo for Diné or Navajo. The UCIC was meant to help students explore their cultural traditions and determine workarounds for culturally inappropriate activities, and then teach faculty and staff about those traditions and alternative options. In this way, students' own culture and worldviews would be respected and students were

empowered to share their cultural knowledge with the college community, thereby working toward transforming the college climate to one that supports, respects, and values Indigenous worldviews (Rodriguez de France, 2013).

While the scope of this project was limited, there were some lessons that could be incorporated from the structural interventions. For example, working toward creating a welcoming and supportive environment for Indigenous students and incorporating the four Rs.

Targeted Interventions

Some interventions for Native students are targeted to support their learning goals, help them to feel welcome at the institution, and develop the whole student (Belgarde & LoRÉ, 2003; Guillory, 2009; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Heavy Runner & DeCelles, 2002). A research project of selected interventions at a Southwestern community college determined that certain services for Native students created greater retention than not utilizing the services (Engs, 1996). Structured interventions such as counseling and advising by Native staff, attending a financial aid and study skills workshop, and participating in the Native American club were statistically significant ($p=.043$), meaning the retention of those students who engaged in the interventions were greater than those who did not participate. This suggested that using targeted interventions (along with structural change foundations) were effective at improving retention. It remained unknown, however, if there would be additional benefits to a similar intervention, such as a higher percentage of students selecting the Bachelor's and higher degrees over the Certificates and Associate's degree; and improved relationships with faculty, administrative staff and student services staff.

Another targeted strategy that had been tried previously, was to include Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being in renewal activities. These are activities that mirror the

circle of life and seasons indicating a new beginning and fresh start (Rodriguez de France, 2013). In Mosholder and Goslin's (2013) review of the literature on improving Native student persistence and retention in colleges and universities, they found five factors consistent across the research: skill development, the support of family and peers, positive role models, financial aid savvy, and a culturally supportive school environment. The current study specifically incorporated skill development and peer support while working toward creating a culturally sensitive and supportive college community to help improve student's sense of well-being and support at MCC as well as increase personal and professional skills.

HeavyRunner and CeDelles (2002) describe the Family Education Model (FEM) where replicating the extended family structure at the college resulted in higher retention. The FEM was created in 1997 when Native social workers, educators, and advisors from five educational institutions came together to support students in degree attainment by acting as a liaison between the family and the social and health services they needed; training family members to support their students; and bringing family members into the life of the college. The colleges also made commitments to cultural values and student-centered learning. Many tribal colleges today operate as extended family to support students as they transition to college life with positive results. "...American Indian students who had attended a tribal college before transferring to a university were four times more likely to complete a university degree than those who entered a mainstream university as freshman" (HeavyRunner & CeDelles, 2002, p. 35). The UCIC focused more on cultural values and worldviews and may be one stepping stone toward creating an environment where students feel supported in their educational journey.

Adrienne Keene (2014), using the method of portraiture, examined a variety of qualitative data from the first-year college experiences of four Native students to examine

how they were negotiating their college experiences. She identified relationships as a primary theme: “relationships with campus communities, relationships with ‘home,’ relationships with tribal communities; and the complications and personal costs of ‘giving back’ to their communities through education” (p. iv). As the initial interview results from the second cycle of this action research study suggested, Native students at MCC may have poorer relationships with faculty, administration, and staff than non-Native students. The UCIC was intended to help students to develop relationships with college personnel as they prepared their culturally based research.

In terms of a healing and sustaining education rooted in sovereignty, Kirkness & Barnhardt (1991) wrote,

What First Nations people are seeking is not a lesser education, and not even an equal education, but rather a better education—an education that respects them for who they are, that is relevant to their view of the world, that offers reciprocity in their relationships with others, and that helps them exercise responsibility in their own lives....The very nature and purpose of higher education... must be reconsidered, and when we do, we will find that the entire institution, as well as society as a whole will be strengthened and everyone will benefit (p. 100).

Implications for the Project

At the time of this project, no studies had examined the effects of cultural workshops supporting the development of a student designed presentation to bring awareness to Indigenous worldviews and ways of being and doing on a college campus. Taken together, however, the theoretical perspectives of decolonization and historical trauma, in conjunction with related research, informed the methods of this study. First, if educational institutions were once sites of trauma, educators and other institutional

stakeholders can make changes to combat historical trauma by creating spaces of healing and empowerment for Native students. The UCIC was one way in which Native students could validate their own cultures and Indigenous worldviews while at the same time contributing to the college community as experts. Second, the process of the UCIC and ultimately the presentation could have been considered acts of decolonization. The UCIC might be thought of as a step toward sharing Indigenous lifeways as Tuck and Yang's (2012) definition of decolonization included the restoration of life. Third, building and maintaining relationships as part of extending the culture of Indigenous communities would honor native students' cultures and communities. This too, would have been considered an act of decolonization. Finally, listening to student voices and providing supports to meet their needs reinforced Indigenous ways of knowing and being and validated Native identities, Native worldviews, and students as contributors to the intellectual community.

Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) argued that education systems have served to create a competent yet singular-minded society. Native peoples' ways of knowing and being has not been valued in the United States historically, and in many ways this lack of Indigenous ways of knowing and being in postsecondary education suggests Indigenous knowledge is not valued in contemporary society either. To counteract this practice, incorporating Indigenous worldviews toward understanding and acceptance would educate the college community and Native students. Research results suggested that when education was transformed to be holistic, "we will find that the entire institution, as well as society as whole, will be strengthened and everyone will benefit" (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991, p. 8).

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Research Design

This study utilized a mixed method research design that used both qualitative and quantitative measures. Specifically, a concurrent mixed method design was used, where qualitative and quantitative data was collected and analyzed within the same study (Ivankova, 2015). Pre and post intervention survey data and weekly qualitative journal data were collected from a series of 90-minute sessions that was to culminate in a student-led, online presentation. This intervention accomplished four major goals: 1) empowered students to take action to learn about and share their culture; 2) data was collected to inform the college community of Native worldviews and perspectives; 3) engaged in the practice of celebrating and affirming Native students' lives at MCC; and 4) learned about the Native student college experience.

Settings and Participants

This project took place at Mesa Community College (MCC), a unique open access community-focused institution, which is one of ten colleges within the Maricopa County Community Colleges District (MCCCD) in Maricopa County, located in central Arizona. MCC lies on the ancestral lands of the Salt-River Pima and Gila River Indian Communities but now is central to the city of Mesa, which has a population of nearly 500,000. MCC is the largest community college within the district, employing 341 full-time faculty, 821 adjunct faculty, 377 administrative and support staff all serving 21,491 students annually. Of the 21,491 students enrolled, approximately 1333 identify as Native and make up 4.2% of the student population (Mesa Community College, 2015). The majority of Native students identify as Diné (Navajo). The Navajo Nation is one of the largest Indigenous nations in the

country and it is the largest tribal nation land base, however, over 50 nations are represented including the Gila River Indian Community, Salt River Indian Community, Hopi, White Mountain Apache, San Carlos Apache, Pawnee, Kiowa, and Comanche, among others (American Indian Center, 2014).

The Native student population is diverse in tribal nation affiliation, age, educational background, and where they were raised. The overall median age was 23 for the college, with a range from 18-42 among Native students (Mesa Community College, 2015; American Indian Center, 2014). Some students were raised on reservations, some in border towns near reservations and others grew up in a mix of urban and suburban settings.

The AII recruited a sample of five Native American students, however, the goal was to recruit ten to maintain the intimacy of the workshops and gather rich qualitative data from interviews and observations in the sessions. The AII staff posted flyers requesting volunteer participants and they recommended students for participation. Students had to have been 18 years of age or older to provide their own consent to participation. Non-native students were not eligible to participate. Students were asked to participate in the five-week UCIC sessions. The academic vice president's office provided the food for the participants for each session, and the department chair provided \$50 honorariums for each guest who presented at the sessions. A total of four guests presented for 30-60 minutes each session on prayer, talking circles, leadership, and decolonization.

Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

Quantitative measures.

Student survey: The pre- and post-intervention online questionnaire used in this study was created specifically for this project. It was adapted from the 2015 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and tested in the second cycle of this action research

project. The NSSE was launched in 2000 and administered to participating colleges and universities nationally since then. The NSSE listed *internal consistency statistics by class level* (nsse.indiana.edu) including first year and seniors. All alphas for each construct were over .80. For the constructs I selected, “student-faculty interactions” which I labeled “interactions with faculty,” NSSE listed an alpha of .84 ($\alpha = .84$) for first year students and an alpha of .86 ($\alpha = .86$) for seniors; for the construct I labeled “importance of relationships,” NSSE listed an alpha of .85 ($\alpha = .85$) and .82 ($\alpha = .82$), respectively; for the construct I labeled “support of the institution” NSSE listed an alpha of .89 ($\alpha = .89$) for both groups of students; and for the construct I labeled “participation in college,” NSSE listed alphas at .82 ($\alpha = .82$) and .81 ($\alpha = .81$), respectively. Items 1, 3, 13-15, 17, 18, 21, 24, 26, 29, and 30 were used and adapted for this study with permission from The *College Student Report*, National Survey of Student Engagement, Copyright 2001-16, The Trustees of Indiana University. The survey includes 22 questions and takes approximately 20 minutes for students to complete. The survey focuses on four main constructs: (a) quality of relationships, (b) participation in college, (c) faculty engagement, and (d) institutional support. Each construct relates to the study research questions. Students participating in the UCIC completed the online questionnaire the first day of the UCIC session and again on the last day.

Qualitative measures.

Student journals: Weekly student journals were collected from the five students participating in the UCIC. On a weekly basis, students participating in the intervention workshops completed personal journals about both their experience in the intervention sessions, as well as their thoughts about critical elements and experiences of being a Native student at MCC. Each journal entry included the same reflective prompt at the end of each workshop session: *Reflecting on today's session, in what ways does the content influence you as a student*

and as a Native student in particular? Journal entries were initially planned to be completed using a free online journal called Penzu (Penzu.com). Students were to electronically forward their journal entries to the investigator's email before leaving each session. Unfortunately, after the first session, only one entry was received and another entry could not be opened. Subsequently, students wrote entries by hand and submitted them at the end of the session or submitted them the next meeting if they ran out of time. Entries were collected and coded for themes both across participants within each session, as well as across sessions.

Presentation: Participants in this project planned to create a presentation on topics that participating students believed faculty, staff, and other students should be made aware of about Native students within the MCC community. The presentation, in addition to being used as product to share with other members of the community, was used as a data artifact, and coded to explore themes that the students developed, as well as gauge the receptiveness of the community about the content. Unfortunately, the lack of time to dedicate to a collaborative presentation resulted in only two students preparing content for the presentation.

Decolonization measure: A decolonization scale created by Poka Laenui (2006) suggested five stages of decolonization: Recovery, Mourning, Dreaming, Commitment, and Action. Students were asked during the final session to determine their placement on the decolonization scale. The scale was not meant to be linear, however, and one could be in a combination of phases. The desired phase is the last one, Action. The decolonization scale was used to determine where students were in the decolonization process.

Researcher journal: A researcher journal was maintained throughout the study to collect observations on the UCIC and data collection process, reflections on discussions throughout the intervention by participating students, and any unforeseen activities or

experiences noted by students throughout the intervention. These reflections were used for *data triangulation*, using different sources of data to produce understanding (Denzin, 1978; Flick, 2014). The researcher reflections, student reports in surveys, and student journals were analyzed to strengthen the quality of this project, and to help recognize connections across data sources (Flick, 2014). Table 1 highlights the timeline of the study, including administration of each of the study measures.

Table 2.

Timeline of the Study

Sequence	Actions	Procedures
August September 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain IRB approvals • Develop Innovation Workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit applications to Maricopa and Arizona State IRBs • Contact guest speakers, reserve room, request funding for meals
October 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment of participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flyers disseminated
November 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop sessions meet every Tuesday in November 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baseline surveys collected • Consent forms completed • Student journals collected • Interviews conducted • Investigator journal reflections
December 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect post-intervention data • Analyze quantitative and qualitative data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews and member checks conducted • Post-intervention surveys completed • Investigator journal reflections • Coding and themes developed

Innovation

A suite of workshops was developed called “Understanding Contemporary Indigenous Communities (UCIC)” to address Native student and community needs. The culmination of these workshops was to be a student designed online presentation to the

college community. Five returning Native students at MCC were selected in October 2016, to participate in the UCIC intervention. Students completed a pre-assessment survey prior to the initiation of the UCIC groups and took a final post-assessment survey after the UCIC groups were completed. Participants also completed journals at the end of each UCIC workshop session and met to create a final presentation on Native life at MCC that was to be shared with the larger MCC faculty, staff, and student community online, however, due to time constraints students did not complete the presentation.

There were five UCIC sessions that were to lead to the final presentation. The first UCIC session began with a renewal ceremony led by traditional community member and Navajo language and culture teacher, to mark the beginning. The community member began the session with a prayer spoken in Navajo, then summarized what he said in English. He burned sage during the prayer and explained why Native peoples used sage, cedar, and sweetgrass during prayer. The community member then sang a mountain song in the Navajo language for guidance, thinking, planning, and assurance that all will be okay. After the song, he explained proper code of conduct and the Navajo principles of living: think, plan, do, and rest your mind. He also encouraged students to be motivated and take control of their lives. Students were encouraged to examine their own cultural ceremonies around beginnings, renewal, and major endeavors.

The talking circle, a traditional format for many Indigenous peoples to ensure all are included in the discussion was utilized in the second UCIC session, to generate a list of culturally-appropriate topics to share with the college community. A community member who was also a professional counselor explained the purpose and importance of the talking circle and how it creates a sense of belonging and equality. She also described how it is also a powerful way to get in touch with our minds and an opportunity to 'become.' In the circle,

one speaks from the heart. Connectedness is created through energy and the energy supports healing. Using the talking circle method, students identified issues they believed warranted attention to improve the experiences of Native students at MCC. In the third UCIC session, students took a strengths assessment to identify their strengths to make use of those during the design of the presentation. Using the online strengths assessment, students developed an awareness and appreciation of their abilities and their culture as they moved through the UCIC sessions. Students were assigned or selected a component of the presentation to be responsible and conducted research which included traditional college research methods (searching for literature) as well as talking with tribal community and family members. In the fourth UCIC session, students learned about leadership from a head drum man who was taught about the drum at a young age. This community member was well known in the powwow community and had professionally recorded his music. After the presentation, students talked through their topics to get affirmation and ideas on what to include in their portion of the presentation. In the fifth UCIC session, a community activist and scholar spoke to students about colonization and decolonization. Students also determined their placement within Laenui's (2006) decolonization process. Afterward, students were asked to compile their part of the presentation to generate a comprehensive presentation that represented the entire group. Unfortunately, only one student was prepared to compile the presentation so they made plans to meet at the end of the week. Due to time constraints the presentation was never completed. Student participants completed the last journal and post-intervention assessment after the last session. Table 3 below highlights the activities of each session of the UCIC.

Table 3.

List of topics during each UCIC session

Sequence	Activity & Description	Purpose	Procedures
Nov 1	<p><i>Renewal Activity</i></p> <p>Most Indigenous peoples mark the beginning of major endeavors with ceremony. A community member blessed this project and asked that the students use thinking and planning in this project.</p>	<p>Personal development and cultural practice- Native cultural practices of prayer and burning sage were integrated. Students began the project in a traditional manner. Students also learned why Native peoples use sage and cedar when we pray.</p>	<p>Pre-intervention survey completed Electronic journal assigned after session. Investigator journal reflections.</p>
Nov 8	<p><i>Talking Circle</i></p> <p>This activity involved identifying whether Native culture is present at MCC in the physical space and curriculum. A community member started the project with prayer then traditional introductions and talked about the importance of talking circles and how to participate in one. We used a talking circle to address our topic- the lack of Native culture at MCC. Several topics and issues were identified to teach about Indigenous communities and ways to integrate Native culture/worldviews/ways of being and doing into the college culture.</p>	<p>To address issues of invisibility of Native peoples at the college as well as offer solutions for cultural taboos like dissection in Biology which is taboo for Diné.</p>	<p>Journal assigned after session via email. Investigator journal reflections.</p>
Nov 15	<p><i>Self Awareness</i></p>		

	Students took strengths assessment and brainstormed potential topics to research and present	Determine students' strengths and help them use those strengths in creating the presentation	Hardcopy journal completed in session Investigator journal reflections
Nov 22	<i>Action</i> A community leader presented on leadership using the pow wow drum and head man position to illustrate how leadership functions. Students fleshed out the topics previously identified and chose their topic to research	To practice team work, foster students' personal and professional development	Hardcopy journal completed in session Investigator journal reflections
Nov 29	<i>Closing Activity</i> A community member and activist presented on colonization and decolonization. Students were not prepared to put presentation together and planned a meeting three days later	Foster students' personal and professional development	Hardcopy journal completed in session Stages of decolonization activity completed Investigator journal reflections

Data Analysis

Qualitative data was analyzed using a “grounded theory approach” consistent with the work of Straus and Corbin (1998) to analyze qualitative data. In this approach, initial codes were developed, gathered into larger categories, and then collected into larger theme-related clusters. The clusters were then gathered into themes. Subsequently, the themes lead to assertions about the qualitative data. Themes “emerged” from the clustering of the codes. Additionally, I used inferential statistics to analyze pre- and post-intervention results from the student survey. Repeated measures multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) and means and standard deviations for the pre- and post- survey scores were computed. These results

were used in conjunction with themes from the qualitative data to attain a better understanding of the influence of the UCIC on student engagement and experiences.

For research questions one and two, exploring how students experience the UCIC, student journals were analyzed to discover emergent themes about their experiences and link those themes to Poka Laenui's (2000) five steps of decolonization.

For research question three, examining how a "culturally-based empowerment workshop, Understanding Contemporary Indigenous Communities, influences Native students' experiences at MCC, each of the pre and post assessment constructs were compared using a repeated measures MANOVA, to determine any change in students' relationships with college faculty, administration, and staff; educational goals; and participation in class and in college activities.

For research question four, exploring the themes and topics of Indigenous peoples that students identify as missing in the college community, student and investigator journals, and coding of the final presentation were used to help ascertain the topics about Indigenous peoples that students found important.

Threats to Validity

Threats to validity could be historical effects of education that could prejudice the students to withhold important information from an outsider given the harmful effects of education they and their family members may have experienced. The Native American boarding school era is a time in history most students are aware simply because parents, grandparents, and other relatives endured. Stories of trauma and abuse were prevalent. Experimenter Effect is when participants who know me or know of me as a faculty member at MCC attempt to give me responses they think I want to hear. As much as I attempted to remain neutral, I might have still unintentionally sent signals to students that could bias the

study. Students may have offered responses based on my unconscious and unintentional signals. To maximize validity, I monitored any potential bias in my tone and word choice. I provided rich descriptions in my journal to document procedures taken and the purpose for doing so as an audit trail for the study.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Five students identified by pseudonyms, Dina, Riley, Mary, Joya, and Tashaad participated in the UCIC for five consecutive weeks every Tuesday afternoon from November 1 through November 29th. All students were attending Mesa Community College (MCC) and planning to transfer to a four-year university in the future. Three students, Riley, Joya and Mary, were actively involved in student organizations and extra-curricular activities. These same students were also work-study students at the American Indian Institute, members of the Inter-tribal Student Organization (ISO) and two were members of American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES). The other two students, Dina and Tashaad, worked at full-time jobs off campus and were less involved in on-campus activities and organizations.

Dina was a 25-year old student who identified as Navajo. She completed three semesters at MCC while majoring in Nursing. She also worked a minimum of 36 hours a week in the healthcare field and said, “it’s just not where I want to be” (Personal communication, December 2, 2016). When she took an American Indian Studies (AIS) course, Survey of American Indian Issues, she changed her major to AIS. Dina planned to transfer to Arizona State University (ASU). She was not sure what she wanted to do with an AIS degree but knew she wanted to do something meaningful with her degree. I had not met Dina prior to the study, however, her younger brother was a student of mine in the Hoop of Learning Program, an education program that incentivizes Native American students to graduate from high school through earning college credit. Interestingly, she was recruited to the intervention through her friend, Tashaad, who was also a prior student in the Hoop of Learning Program and who then attended MCC full-time. Dina was born and raised in an

urban environment and would go home to the Navajo Nation infrequently to visit her relatives. She felt very close to her paternal grandmother who spoke only Navajo. Dina did not speak Navajo fluently but had fond childhood memories of watching her grandmother weave by kerosene lamp. Her dad's side of the family would always greet them with open arms when she and her family visited them on the Navajo Nation. Dina said, "Every time we go back, it's always this huge thing. All my dad's cousins, and aunts and uncles, we all get together, and there's always, we always eat or...we'll do branding and what not" (Personal communication, December 2, 2016). Both of Dina's parents were professionals working in the Phoenix-metro valley. She and her younger brother lived at home with their parents and were both attending college, she at MCC and her brother at ASU.

Riley was a 20-year old male student who identified as Navajo. His clans were Táchii'nii (Red Running Into the Water People), Tábaahá (Water's Edge), Tó'aheedlíníí (The Water Flow Together Clan), and Ta'neezahnii (Tangle Clan). He completed four semesters at MCC majoring in Emergency Management with the future goal of becoming a first responder manager. He was a part-time student working three other jobs for pay. Two of his jobs were in retail and he was also a student worker at the American Indian Institute at MCC. He was also president of American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES). Riley was going to college to have a better life. He said, "Growing up, my grandparents instilled in me values of tradition and just doing. They didn't go to school. They only knew very few words in English- just to get by. And for my grandparents, for individuals who have never stood foot in a classroom, to tell their kids and their grandchildren to go to school speaks a lot. My grandma actually ran away to try to go to school. She was willing to sacrifice her teachings for something better. If she's willing to do that, I should do that too" (Personal communication, November, 18, 2016).

Mary was a 22-year old student who identified as Hopi and Tewa. Her clan was Corn From the Tewa Village. She was from a small community in Northern Arizona. Mary was completing her final semester at MCC working toward degrees in American Indian studies and psychology. She was planning to transfer to ASU in Fall 2017 to continue in her majors. Despite taking a year off from school to care for her ailing mother, Mary was one of three students in the project who had been highly active in the college and Native American communities. While in high school she also participated in the Hoop of Learning program at MCC to earn credits toward college. Along with Riley, she was a work study student at the American Indian Center. She was also president of the Inter-tribal Student Organization (ISO), a member of the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES), and she had recently created a partnership between the ISO and a local high school to mentor Native students and help them graduate and advance to college. She was attending college to be able to create programs that address the issues Native youth are facing. This goal arose from some of the issues and difficulties she overcame herself like living among family members who suffered and died from alcoholism, lack of mentoring and support on the path to college, and the lack of opportunities to develop leadership skills. She said, “Well, in my family, nobody has gone to college. I’m a first-generation college student, so it’s very new to my family and myself. It’s kind of out of the ordinary.... I’m more or less just going to college because I wanna be able to create programs of some sort to be able to help out Native youth, specifically in troubling areas, or issues that many people don’t talk about, such as suicide prevention as well as drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence in the households, bullying, or even just building self-esteem, confidence, leadership skills, and instilling traditional values in them” (Personal communication, November 28, 2016). Mary had an outgoing and bubbly personality. While a student in one of my classes in the Spring

of 2016, she consistently presented herself as social, inquisitive, outspoken, and ready to take on any challenge whether academic or otherwise. She had sought out key people to help her meet her goals and had created strong relationships with advisors, faculty, and peers. Mary expressed that the American Indian Institute at MCC had provided her with the family that she needed to support her through college. “I don’t live with my parents anymore so, I kind of long for that family vibe, and I get that from Beverly and John (pseudonyms for AII advisors), and my co-workers, and the students who always come in all the time” (Personal communication, November, 28, 2016).

Joya was a twenty-seven-year old student who grew up traditionally on the Navajo Nation in the community of Lower Greasewood. She identified primarily as Navajo. Though her dad was never a part of her life she recognizes her Hidatsa and Chippewa roots from him. Joya was majoring in social work to help people heal from trauma and recover from difficult situations. She experienced the passing of her mom about seven years prior. At that time, she had no plans to attend college due to depression, lack of financial assistance, and lack of awareness of resources to help in the transition to college. Joya desired to be either a youth counselor or a hospital administrator, the latter inspired by her negative experiences at the hospital where her mom spent a lot of time being sick. Joya enrolled at MCC several years ago but stopped due to lack of direction and support. Upon re-enrollment she became very active in the college, mainly due to involvement with the staff and students at the American Indian Institute. Joya was highly active at the college and in Native American communities. Along with Riley and Mary, she was a work study student at the American Indian Center. She was also vice-president of the Inter-tribal Student Organization (ISO), a member of the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES), and she co-created with Mary the partnership between the ISO and a local high school to mentor Native

students. Joya said she and her uncle were the main factors in her furthering her education. Most of her family had been to college and obtained their degrees. Her mom went to Haskell, Berkeley, and ASU studying fashion design but was a few credits shy of obtaining her degree. Her mother's brother encouraged her to continue her education. He had a college degree and worked abroad most of the year. Joya said, being around other Native students helps her in her college journey. She said, "We have an institution where I can come and hang out with people. I get to talk and have a rez click. It helps being around people like us" (Personal communication, January 17, 2017). Joya spoke with confidence about her capabilities and strengths. She had a clear direction of where she wanted to go and was aware of her skill set and what kind of support network she would need to get there.

Tashaad was a 20 something year old student who also identified as Navajo. He was born and raised in the Phoenix-Metro area. He admitted he does not speak Navajo and he doesn't know all his clans or traditional practices. Both his parents were Navajo and he said they did not teach him the Navajo language. He was majoring in criminal justice. Tashaad had a long history with MCC. He also attended the Hoop of Learning Program, and Tashaad enrolled in MCC after graduating from high school and was planning to transfer to a local university in Fall 2017. Tashaad recruited Dina into this research project. Interestingly, Tashaad's best friend was Dina's brother. They attended the Hoop of Learning Program together. Tashaad showed Dina the resources available to her on campus. He took her to the library, the AII, and the cafeteria. During UCIC sessions, however, Tashaad was often very quiet and rarely contributed to discussion without being asked directly by me or his peers, although he had perfect attendance and arrived to each session early or on time.

Some data were missing. Two students, Tashaad and Riley did not submit the first three journals, Mary did not submit her first journal, and Joya did not submit the third

journal. Riley also did not complete the post-test questionnaire and Tashaad did not submit two photos requested for the interview. Originally, the journals were to be completed in the workshop during the last ten minutes of the session using Penzu, an online journal. Students had difficulty accessing the journal from their phones or they had difficulty forwarding the journals to me. I had used Penzu before the UCIC began. I created journal entries and forwarded them to a different email address. However, not one student was able to forward a working link of their journal to me. Two students were able to use Penzu, however, the links they sent did not work. I sent two emails to students before the next session urging them to send me their journals. At the next session students explained their frustration with Penzu and I asked them to simply send me an email with their journal entry. Two students sent their first journal entries via email and one sent a handwritten journal via intercampus mail. Two students never sent their first few journals despite two group emails and an individual email requesting the entries.

The qualitative data included five student interviews, five sessions of student reflective journals, student's self-placement on a decolonization scale at the end of the intervention, student photos, content on the student presentation, researcher field notes and journal. Student interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 1.25 hours and they were digitally recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed. Additionally, student journals from the five sessions were coded and analyzed. Students were asked to share how each session's content influenced them as a student and as a Native American student in particular. Also, students were asked at the end of the session to rate their location on a six-stage non-linear decolonization scale from the beginning stages of *rediscovery/recovery*, through the critical stage of *dreaming*, to the goal stage of *action*. I used students' responses from their journal entries and interviews to determine their placement on the decolonization scale. I compared my

determined placement to their selection on the scale after the last session on. Further, students provided one photo that exemplified their home and one that exemplified their MCC experience. Students were asked to describe the photos and explain their reasons for choosing the photos. Responses were coded and analyzed. Three students did not give me copies of both photos, Riley Joya, and Tashaad. Riley and Joya showed the photos to me on their phones and promised to send via text or email. However, only Joya sent one of her photos. Students described the photos during their interviews. Coupled with the student data, the researcher also maintained a journal and field notes during the intervention that were used to interpret student data. Field notes were written as soon as possible after the interview or intervention sessions. Flick (2014) notes that field notes aid in the production of the researcher's selective perceptions and reality. Selectivity can be reduced by comparing and contrasting field notes with participant data.

These data sources were triangulated. Triangulation is a comparison of different data sources about the same phenomenon to establish validity, measure what I wanted to measure, and corroborate findings between quantitative and qualitative data (Denzin, 1978; Flick, 2014).

The pre- and post-survey included a mix of 61 items divided into 21 questions designed to collect quantitative and demographic data. Six of the questions were Likert-type scale items on a 4-point scale for a total of 35 items; one question was a Likert-type scale item on a 6-point scale; nine were demographic questions, and four were categorical. Three questions also contained an optional dialog box to collect open text. Four constructs were used to evaluate students' behavior in the college classroom and community. These were: a) participation in college, b) interactions with faculty, c) importance of relationships, and d) support of the institution. See Appendix A for the complete survey. The pre- and post-

survey allowed for the examination of change among the constructs after undergoing the intervention sessions. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze quantitative data from the survey questionnaire. Pre- and post-test means were analyzed using comparative methods.

The pre-test survey was administered to the group of 5 students who volunteered to participate in the intervention. Using the online system Qualtrics, the questionnaire link was shared with students at the end of the first intervention session and they were asked to complete the survey in 24 hours. All students who started the questionnaire during the session, completed it (N=5). Questionnaire items were categorized into four distinct constructs: participation in college, interactions with faculty, importance of relationships, and institutional support and effectiveness. Students were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements within each of these constructs on a four- and six-point Likert scales. The four-point scale ranged from very often to never, or very much to very little. The six-point scale ranged from excellent to poor. Students were asked to complete the post-test survey after the last intervention session in December.

Results from the project are presented in response to the research questions:

RQ1: What stage were these Indigenous community college students in Laenui's (2000) decolonization?

RQ2: How did the UCIC influence Native students' experiences at MCC?

RQ3: What were the themes and topics of Indigenous peoples that students identified as missing in the college community? And, how did students talk about those issues?

RQ4: How did students experience the individual workshops of the UCIC?

Research question one asked what stage were the college students on the decolonization scale? Decolonization is not simply a state of mind but a social and relational

process. It involves thinking, feeling, looking, listening, acting and interacting (Pedri-Spade, 2016). To determine the decolonization phase the students were in, I used students' reflective journal entries locating key words and phrases. I also used content from the researcher's journal that indicated a process of thinking, feeling, looking, listening, and acting that privileged Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. Ideas, beliefs, words, phrases, and behaviors that helped me determine students' location on the scale were sourced from the literature on decolonization (Corntassel, 2012; Grande, 2008; Jacob, 2013; Laenui, 2006; Simpson, 2000; Tuck Yang, 2012; Wolfe, 2006). The following phrases and ideas, along with a brief description of each phrase are presented in Table 4.

Table 4.

Decolonization Key Ideas Associated with Decolonization Phases

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Decolonization key ideas</i>
Rediscovery/Recovery	Acknowledged or exhibited an awareness of the history of colonization and/or acknowledged something was wrong with the way society was organized for Indigenous peoples.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thought about reclaiming Indigenous lifeways or practices. • Identified the need to reclaim Indigenous languages and cultures. • Acknowledged the need to heal from historical trauma.
Mourning	Beyond acknowledgement and identified trauma including emotional pain like anger and sadness they and other Indigenous people have endured.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified anger and pain from oppression they and other Indigenous peoples have endured/are enduring.
Dreaming	Exhibited key attributes of moving through the previous two phases and also	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questioning dominant cultural practices.

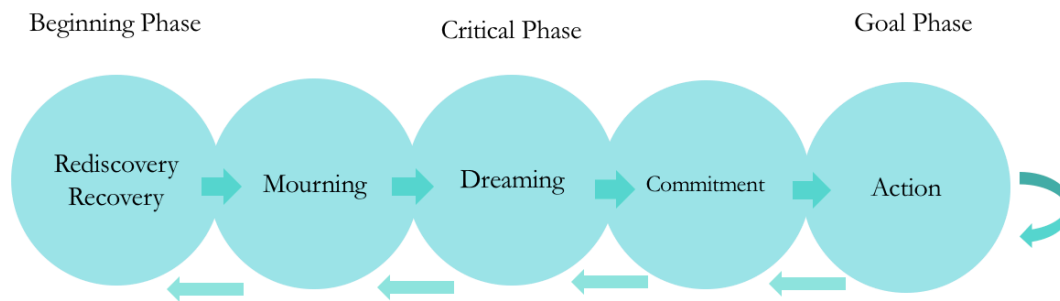
	had ideas for a better future for Indigenous people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centering Indigenous worldviews and values. • Incorporated Indigenous knowledges.
Commitment	Dedication to learning their language and culture or to educating others about decolonization or any number of issues facing Indigenous peoples, or desired to make change in their families and communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honored, respected, accepted, and promoted theirs and others' Indigenous ways. • Claimed Indigenous values. • Centering Indigenous worldviews and values.
Action	Actively involved in doing something to bring about social change for Indigenous peoples or protecting lands, resources, languages and cultures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resisted dominant cultural forces. • Practiced or reclaimed Indigenous lifeways or practices. • Critiquing and resisting dominant cultural practices. • Challenged dominant cultural power and knowledge with one's own truth and identity.

If students acknowledged or exhibited an awareness of the history of colonization and/or acknowledged something was wrong with the way society was organized for Indigenous peoples, students were placed in the Rediscovery/Recovery stage. If students went beyond acknowledgement and identified trauma including emotional pain like anger and sadness they and other Indigenous people have endured, then students were placed in the Mourning phase. If students exhibited key attributes of moving through a previous phase and also had ideas for a better future for Indigenous people, students were placed in the Dreaming stage. If students indicated a dedication to learning their language and culture or

Southwest Native, as a Native student on campus, we Natives, and helping Native youth. Students made several references to their traditional teachings and tribal cultures as well. References to “teachings” and “culture” involved wanting to learn more about their traditional teachings, being inspired by the traditional teachings in the UCIC sessions and relearning their language and culture to pass to future generations.

Figure 3.

Processes of Decolonization



After careful review of these multiple sources, I determined that Dina was in the Dreaming phase where, according to Laenui (2000), entails exploring one’s traditional culture, language, and making goals for future change. During a Navajo cultural presentation by Freddie Johnson from the Phoenix Indian Center, Dina expressed “I was excited to learn more that day” (Journal entry, November 1, 2016). Dina also explored the difference between the traditions of Christianity and Native American practices in one journal entry. She concluded “Natives don’t make claims of religiosity and act the opposite, but actually live and show their beliefs” (Journal entry, November 8, 2016). Dina chose to address the topics of stereotypes and Native diversity for the final presentation. She chose these topics “to inform the uninformed and remind ourselves that we are still here and that it’s still a

battle” (Journal entry, November 16, 2016). Dina believed if Native peoples can live within their traditional lifeways we can thrive. “I began to realize that the reason most things [like] government, healthcare, religion, etc., don’t work with/for us is because that’s not what was meant for us. We as Natives have our own traditions, beliefs, values, and ways of educating. I do believe if we as Native people were able to detach ourselves from Anglo ways we could thrive and become healthier in all aspects” (Journal entry, November 29, 2016). Dina took a Navajo weaving class at the Phoenix Indian center and says she will continue learning to weave as a connection to her paternal grandmother. She also took an AIS class at MCC and says the content on colonization and decolonization was an eye opener. She plans to continue to major in AIS to “be a step ahead in order to unravel the damage that’s been done” (Personal communication, December, 2, 2016). Dina brought a photo of the road to Wheatfields where her paternal grandparents live to represent home. See figure 3. Speaking of her grandmother Dina said, “...she represents home, and that’s why I love this picture. It just brings back so many good memories of family, and she’s definitely the glue for our family. It represents home, getting to the house” (Personal communication, December 2, 2016). Dina was raised in an urban environment, however, her reference for home is the dirt road to Wheatfields that lead to her grandmother. Home is the Navajo Nation where her grandparents live. For the Navajo, your clans tie you to a place, to land. It is a traditional perspective to say your home is your community, your land on the Navajo Nation. Dina has claimed the Indigenous value of land as one’s identity.

Figure 4.

Dina's photo of home



Riley was in a combination of the first and second phase, Rediscovery/Recovery and Mourning. Riley grew up on the Navajo Nation and attended elementary and junior high school in his community. He lived in a Bureau of Indian Education dormitory and graduated high school in a town bordering the Navajo Nation. Riley attended every session, however, he only submitted two journal entries. I determined his initial placement on the decolonization scale from his 4th and 5th journal entries, his interview, as well as my observations recorded in my journal notes. Riley often mentioned during the sessions how he was sacrificing his language, culture and time in his community to earn a college degree

(Researcher journal, November, 2016). He did not seem to see the use of his language and culture as a support in college or something to draw strength from. After the presentation on decolonization, however, Riley felt empowered to embrace his culture. He said, “This empowers me more to prove and work that much harder as a Native American” (Journal entry, November 29, 2016). The decolonization presentation highlighted the use of assimilation as a tool of oppression and Native culture as a form of resistance to the oppression. Much of Riley’s sense of empowerment seemed to come from the realization that he descends from people who have survived the ravages of colonization but not without great loss. “As a student, I missed out on a lot growing up, understanding and learning about my history and past. The system is built to cover/water down the harmful sad background of Native Americans. I wished I learned more from my early years of school... I felt lied to and set to a standard of not achieving much” (Journal entry, November 29, 2016). This statement is an expression of the Mourning phase because Riley is grieving the loss of his Navajo traditions and a comprehensive history of Native and White interactions. After the Talking Circle session where the community member requested that each person introduce themselves in a traditional manner to determine relationships to each other, Riley expressed wanting to learn how to say his formal introduction in Navajo.

After high school, Riley became aware of the history of Native peoples in the U.S. along with the many injustices they faced. He was angered by the omission of Indigenous-White relations in his K-12 education and saddened by the treatment dealt to Indigenous peoples by Whites. The fresh emotions Riley was dealing with coupled with discovering the historical treatment of his ancestors helped me determine Riley’s placement on the decolonization scale. Riley’s photo of home was of him holding his baby nephew while standing in the sheep corral. The picture is not included here, as would identify the child

who cannot give consent to be included in this study. Below is Riley's description of the photo.

My nephew, I'm holding him. We were shearing sheep during the summer, it was pretty hot. I wasn't prepared for my grandmother being passed away, but I always heard one life leaves the world, another is given in the world. So, we were shearing sheep, and if anything, my grandparents wanted their great-great-grandchildren to learn the lifestyle, livestock, and everything like traditional values. So, yeah. I think he was like six or seven months, and we're letting him play with the sheep. He wasn't scared, they're like nibbling at his feet. And one took off with his socks, so that's pretty funny. So that picture does represent back home because there's that little life that's there. He brings joy to all of us. So, I was holding him, I was smelling him, and not knowing that she was taking a picture of me. That's the best part, I didn't know she was taking a picture of me with him (Personal communication, November 18, 2016).

This image illustrates the passing on of traditions like sheep shearing. Sheep are the livelihood of many Navajos even today. Riley talked about sacrificing some traditions while he pursued his education. In his description of his picture of home he talked about what his grandparents wanted for him and he was holding onto those dreams for himself.

Mary was in a combination of Commitment and Action stages. Along with commitment to reclaiming one's traditions and language, the Action phase is where decolonization is actualized, where people are working to make change. The first session where Freddie Johnson presented mostly in the Navajo language, Mary shared that she didn't understand what he was saying but she felt his good energy and he reminded her that she can burn sage even when away from home in Hopi and Tewa. From the Talking Circle

session Mary said, “she has motivated me as a Native person to not forget who I am and to never lose myself while I am living in the white man’s world” (Journal entry, November 8, 2016). Of the student participants, Mary was the most traditional as she participated in her village’s traditional ceremonies from six years old to eighteen. The workday session where we brainstormed topics the college community needed to know about, Mary took the opportunity to listen to her peers and what they were passionate about sharing. She said, “This gives me hope that we can have our voices be heard, together, because we share the same concerns and solutions” (Journal entry, November 16, 2016). On the topic of decolonization, Mary shared that the presentation made her “want to push further along to work toward decolonization ...by revealing the brutal truths of our past and beginning to learn these terminologies. When we learn, we can understand, and our communities can be educated. This makes me want pursue my American Indian Studies degree much more and to educate the rest of my Native brothers and sisters” (Journal entry, November 29, 2016). Mary had been educating her Native brothers and sisters. She and Joya started the Westwood Native Warriors on the Rise club at her former high school. The club was a way to get more Native students to college by answering questions, helping them prepare FAFSA and scholarship applications, and encouraging them to pursue higher education while embracing their indigeneity. The club was sponsored by the American Indian Institute and the MCC dean’s office. Mary’s photo of home was a vibrant photo of several young girls from her village of Tewa dressed in their ceremony attire. The photo was taken at dawn, facing east, just before a ceremony. Some of the girls are smiling and some look as if they are trying to smile but sleepiness has gotten the better of them. The picture is not included here, as would identify individuals that have not given consent to be included in this study. Mary has a lengthy description of what she saw in this picture.

This is before a ceremony. It's facing east and these are the girls who are dancing.

It's not necessarily all the girls though, it's like a good bunch of the girls. When they do have this ceremony, it depends, because sometimes there could be anywhere from 50 to maybe even 100 girls who are dancing. ... The dances go on for two days, so, Saturday and Sunday. This dance, where all these girls are lined up at, this is the very, very first dance, and it's early-early in the morning. The ceremony usually takes place in about August - August or September. So yeah, this is the very first dance, and the very first dance is comprised of little girls who are probably like five, maybe even seven years old, or something like that. ... They have to see the first dance because just from teachings, you know, it just kind of gives them that extra blessing and everything, because they are gonna be the ones who are dancing for people, and who are asking for rain, asking for good health and everything to be given back to the people, and to our land, and to the world and everything.

But yeah, it makes me really happy. As you can see, they're all dressed traditional, and some of these girls that are already fully dressed up already, means they are gonna dance soon. But it's just really awesome, though, because it makes me happy when I do dance, and when I do go out there for the ceremony, because it really reflects upon when I first started dancing. And from barely learning the songs and everything, and how to do certain movements, it was really difficult for me at first, but then after going through practices and stuff for like two weeks and I finally got the hang of it. But yeah it's just really awesome" (Personal communication, November 28, 2016).

Mary's photo and description are clearly about sustaining traditional practices and teachings. Mary was one of the dancers when she was younger. Her love of and participation in traditional ceremony is clearly in the action phase on the decolonization scale.

Joya was in a combination of the Dreaming and Commitment phases. Again, the Dreaming phase entails exploring one's traditions and the Commitment phase entails collaborating with others to reclaim and revitalize traditional cultural practices and languages. After the first UCIC session Joya wrote, "When [he] brought up the four directions and how we go through life in a day, it was encouraging. ...he reminded me of how precious my culture and traditions are. I think [his] words were very helpful, guiding, and motivational. He has motivated me to be more proud of who I am" (Journal entry, November 8, 2016). On the Talking Circle and why we use them Joya "felt inspired to work toward being a better person, to be more genuine, and to be okay with sharing my thoughts. How [she] was explaining the talking circle, listening, and energy flowing between one another was inspiring. Sometimes I forget to be more connected with my spirit" (Journal entry, November 16, 2016). After a presentation on pow wow drumming which none of the students knew a good deal about, Joya wrote of the head drum man. "I would really like him to come back and speak about the Peyote meetings and how they're run, him being a roadman" (Journal entry, November 22, 2016). Joya also expressed that learning about Native culture would benefit Native peoples and non-Natives. "When people are more aware of our ways, they begin to understand our way of life and may be not so quick to judge" (Journal entry, November 22, 2017). Joya liked how the community member on decolonization defined colonization as a process not an event. She expressed, "my dreams are my commitment to change and challenging the process" (Journal entry, November 29, 2016). Joya's photo of home is a water well back home.

Figure 5.

Joya's photo of home



We have this well where we go- we used to turn it on for our cows, we can't really do much about it now. But this well that I used to go to with my Grandpa to turn on the water for the cows...and there's this tower. And just that particular photo and how it's taken, represents that area, and how-- just because that's where I used to run around as a kid, and I feel like everything being so contaminated... I used to drink from that well sometimes. You can't really do any of that anymore, everything has to be very-- you really have to watch out where you're going on the rez now. You don't know what is contaminated, you don't

know if it's contaminated. That just really touches home for me, just 'cause my livestock there, they drink that water. Just kind of makes me feel like I don't really want them... if I'm able to have clean drinking water, they should be able to, you know what I mean? 'Cause my Grandma always raised us to think that we're not here-- this world isn't for us, it's only borrowed from the animals. That this is the world, and it's meant for the animals. And it's not ours, we don't take a claim to it (Personal communication, January 17, 2017).

Joya's belief system that this world is not ours, it belongs to the animals, is a traditional way of thinking that privileges animals and not human beings. She also puts animals on the same level with humankind when she says if she can have clean drinking water the animals should be able to as well. Again, an Indigenous worldview that suggests resources must be shared with all living beings.

Tashaad was in the first phase, Rediscovery/Recovery. This fundamental phase entails suffering from inferiority but getting on a path of recovery through discovering one's identity, language and traditions. Of the two journal entries I received from Tashaad, he talked about realizing that he needed to do more as a Native person to help his community. After the decolonization presentation, he said, "This makes me feel as a student it would be my responsibility to graduate with a college degree so I can help my community in my own way. We need more Natives to help" (Journal entry, November 29, 2016). Despite this entry, Tashaad never expressed concrete ways he had helped or planned to help his community. After the Talking Circle session, Tashaad admitted that he did not know his clans and exclaimed his parents never taught him (Researcher Journal, November 8, 2016), however, he did not express a desire to learn his clans. Tashaad also felt the pull between mainstream culture and traditional culture when he stated, "We need to keep our culture strong and pass

it down for future generations.... It is hard because we need to adapt to the new world and learn how to survive that world but also keep our culture” (Journal entry, November 29, 2016). Tashaad did not give concrete examples of the types of material and non-material culture that he wanted to keep nor did he express wanting to learn any particular cultural practices. Instead his statements are brief general references about keeping Native culture alive. In earlier sessions, Tashaad was often quiet and rarely asked questions or offered his personal input. Much of my determination of his placement on the scale is from his 4th and 5th journal entries, his interview, and my observations during and after the sessions as I did not receive his first three journal entries. For most of the students there was talk of a cultural component jolting a memory of their own practices and teachings, however for Tashaad who grew up in an urban area, much of the traditions were not as familiar to him.

Upon further observation of patterns of placement in the decolonization phases amongst all participants, there was a clear delineation on the scale between students who had taken an American Indian Studies (AIS) course and those who did not. Of the three students who had taken an AIS course, Mary, Dina, and Joya, were majoring in AIS. All three of these students placed in the dreaming stage or beyond, whereas Tashaad placed in the first phase Rediscovery/Recovery and Riley in the first and second phase, Rediscovery/Recovery and Mourning. There is a clear gender divide between the women who took AIS classes and the men who did not. The possible gender gap in AIS enrollment is beyond the scope of this research but would be an interesting research topic.

In the last session of the UCIC, students were asked to determine what phase of decolonization they were in for themselves. Dina selected the Dreaming phase. Riley selected the Action phase, however, I found no evidence of his placement in the Action phase. Mary selected a combination of Commitment with Action and Joya selected a

combination of Dreaming with Commitment. Tashaad selected the Dreaming phase. See Table 4. Riley selected the Action phase, the last and final phase on the scale yet from his journal entries, interactions in the UCIC, and interview, I found no evidence of being in the Action phase. This phase is characterized by making a commitment to work with others to create social change while also reclaiming and revitalizing one's Indigenous language, culture, and traditions. Riley expressed that while he is in college he is sacrificing his language. "It's one of the sacrifice[s] I am making right now is not being around my native language. It's willing to sacrifice what you are for something you'll become" (Interview, November 18, 2016). Despite the sacrifice, Riley said, "I would like to go back home and learn my language again. It's sad to re-learn your language that you grew up with, but I would like to do that" (Interview, November 18, 2016). He also said, he would like to learn traditional livestock care. "I kind want to take the summer off and go home and learn ... how to do horses, attend horses, care for them, a lot more of the traditional values of livestock" (Interview, November 18, 2016).

Tashaad selected the Dreaming phase. Other than a vague reference to getting his education to help his community, however, there was little concrete evidence of the Dreaming phase. Tashaad may have been inspired by the community member's presentations and time spent with his peers talking about the college and ways to educate the college community about Indigenous peoples. Many Native peoples learn about decolonization within communities of consciousness, through practicing their cultural traditions, or through taking an AIS course. Three of the five students took AIS courses and were able to accurately determine their phase on the decolonization scale. More importantly they were actively engaging in decolonization within themselves or for their communities. Tashaad and Riley did not take an AIS course and may have lacked the understanding and

awareness of decolonization to accurately determine where they fit on the scale. Additionally, they were not actively practicing their cultures.

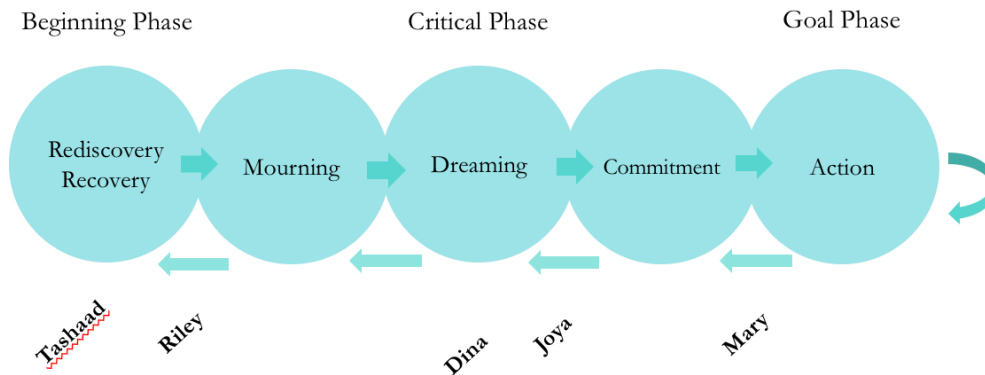
Table 5.

Student Placement on the Decolonization Scale

Student Pseudonym	Researcher Determination of Placement on the Scale	Student Determination of Placement on the Scale
Dina	Dreaming	Dreaming
Riley	Rediscovery/Recovery/Mourning	Action
Mary	Commitment/Action	Commitment/Action
Joya	Dreaming/Commitment	Dreaming/Commitment
Tashaad	Rediscovery/Recovery	Dreaming

Figure

Student Placement on the Decolonization Scale



Research question two asked how the UCIC influenced Native students' experiences at MCC. Using student reflective journals, researcher notes and descriptive data from an analysis of survey items and a comparison of pre- and post-assessments, students began to

question the fairness of their experiences at MCC against non-Native students. They also realized the possibility of integrating their Native traditions with mainstream college culture. Mary said she would start burning sage at school and laughed about not having realized she could do it before (Researcher notes, November 1, 2016). The UCIC gave students a safe space to talk about how they felt they were perceived at MCC. There was much talk about invisibility, lack of awareness of true Native culture and rampant stereotypes of Native peoples. Students expressed wanting to attend more ceremonies but found it difficult to balance attending ceremonies in their home communities with their rigorous school and work schedules. When sage was burned during the first session, students commented on how they missed the smell of sage and attending ceremony (Researcher notes, November 1, 2016). Students began to think about and question their own behaviors, beliefs, and prejudices. Students identified intra-conflict among the Native student body usually in the form of internalized oppression. The researcher had a brief discussion with students about internalized oppression and micro-aggressions during session three (Researcher notes, November 1, 2016). Students reported that they desired to socialize with other Native students at MCC, however, students who had acculturated often rejected students who spoke with accents, dressed differently, or were very traditional. Students realized they needed to practice acceptance before they could ask the college community to accept them.

To further examine the impact of the UCIC on student's experiences at MCC, the pre and post questionnaire responses to experiences in college were compared. Internal consistency and reliability for the 35-items on a 4-point scale within the instrument, Navigating College were tested. Six Likert-type questions or constructs were extracted from the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE), version 2015. "Cronbach's alpha is the most common measure of internal consistency (reliability). It is most commonly used when

you have multiple Likert questions in a survey/questionnaire that form a scale and you wish to determine if the scale is reliable” (Laerd Statistics, “Cronbach’s alpha α using SPSS statistics,” n.d.). Using SPSS software, Cronbach’s alpha was calculated on each construct and the overall instrument. The constructs had high internal consistency for this sample similar to NSSE results. Results are presented in Table 6 and discussed further below.

Table 6.

Navigating College Estimates of Internal-Consistency Reliability (n=5)

Construct	Within Construct Items	Coefficient Alpha Estimate of Reliability
Participation in college	Items 4a-4d	.81
Interactions with faculty	Items 5a-5d	.95
Importance of relationships	Items 6a-6e	.92
Support of the institution	Items 7a-7i, 9a-9j, 10	.95

Overall alpha	Items 4-7, 9,10	.97

General rules of interpretation for alpha α are: α greater than or equal to 0.90 is highly correlated with excellent internal consistency; α greater than or equal to 0.80 is strongly correlated with good internal consistency; α greater than or equal to 0.70 is correlated with an acceptable internal consistency; and anything lower than .70 has poor internal consistency meaning the individual questions within each construct, when compared with each other may not yield consistently appropriate results. (Ivankova, 2015). Within this sample, three constructs measured alpha’s as highly correlated: interactions with faculty ($\alpha = .95$), importance of relationships ($\alpha = .92$), and support of the institution ($\alpha = .95$). Participation in college was moderately strong ($\alpha = .81$). The overall Cronbach alpha for the

instrument was highly correlated ($\alpha = .97$). Similar to the NSSE listed alphas, my instrument had strong internal consistency.

Table 7. contains descriptive statistics about students' responses to construct 1, *participation in college*, which indicated the degree to which students engaged in the classroom and with peers on four interactions; construct 2, *interactions with faculty*, indicated the degree to which students engaged with faculty on four interactions; construct 3, *school relationships*, indicated the degree to which students felt engaged with college personnel, including their peers, faculty, advisors, and administrative and student services staff; and construct 4, *institutional support and effectiveness*, indicated how well college services emphasized academic skills and offered access to resources. Each student's response for each item was converted to numerical form to calculate the Mean and standard deviation. For constructs 1 and 2 on a Likert scale of four, responses of "Very often" were coded as three, "Occasionally" were coded as two, "Sometimes" were coded as a one, and Never were coded as "zero." For construct 3, on a Likert scale of six, responses ranged in number from "Excellent" coded as six to "Poor" coded as one. For construct 4 on the Likert scale of four for each construct with the more affirmative response of *Very often* and *Very much* converted to three, *Occasionally* and *Quite a bit* converted to two, *Some* and *Sometimes* converted to one, and *Never* and *Very little* converted to zero. The standard deviation indicated the variability of responses from the Mean, or how consistent respondents were in their answers. Overall, there were lower means in the post test compared to the pre-test, but this change was not significant. There was little difference in construct means as well. See Table 7.

Table 7.

Descriptive Statistics of Each Overall Construct

Construct	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	P value
Construct 1: Participation in college-pretest	5	2.60	.518	1.89
Construct 1: Participation in college-posttest	4	2.06	.554	
Construct 2: Interactions with faculty-pretest	5	2.15	1.14	2.26
Construct 2: Interactions with faculty-posttest	4	1.50	.540	
Construct 3: School relationships-pretest	5	1.92	.900	.835
Construct 3: School relationships-posttest	4	1.80	.000	
Construct 4: Institutional support and effectiveness-pretest	5	1.81	.621	.102
Construct 4: Institutional support and effectiveness-posttest	4	1.96	.675	

Research question three asked about the themes and topics of Indigenous peoples that students identified as missing in the college community, and how students talked about those issues. Session three was designed as a workshop specifically to address students' strengths and identify areas the college could improve to aid in the success of Native students. Students took a strengths assessment to identify their skills to put to use during the community presentation. Unfortunately, due to time constraints and busy schedules the presentation was started but not completed. Students brainstormed and agreed upon themes and topics to discuss and most completed some research on their topics. Students were not able to agree upon a time to meet again to put the presentation together, so the themes they

identified were analyzed to show the topics they felt were most important to share with the community even when they did not get to share these ideas directly. The themes included: 1) Being seen as stereotypes and the lack of cultural competence among the college community about Native peoples and their cultures; 2) the lack of vocabulary among peers to even inquire about Native peoples; 4) the diversity of Native peoples that many are unaware and the lack of Native peoples and issues in courses and the college community; 5) the lack of outreach to Native students about resources on campus; 6) and the underrepresentation of Native faculty and staff on campus.

Native Stereotypes and Lack of Cultural Competence on Campus: Joya raised the issue of how people often make assumptions about her because she is Native. For example, people assume she gets a monthly check from the government for being Native. The other students agreed with this sentiment and shared their own experiences with being stereotyped. Dina said her co-worker assumed she went to school for free. “This sparked a mini history lesson at work and made me realize/remember so many people were never educated on this issue, or should I say, about our people. My coworker, in her 30s, was asking me things that should’ve been taught to her in school. It just amazed me how small her scope was when it came to Native Americans-where we live, where we are in society now, and where we go to school and work... In her mind, Native people were still tucked away on reservations,... in a time period that doesn’t keep up with current society” (Personal communication, November 22, 2016). Mary and Joya shared that most non-Native people they meet don’t even consider they could be Native but assume they are Latinx. Latinx is the gender-neutral term for Latino or Latina (Scharron Del-Rio & Aja, 2015). This makes them feel invisible, again, reiterating the idea that Native people are of the past, people who lived during westward expansion and died off.

Students described how even when members of the college community were aware of the existence of Native peoples, they often lacked cultural competence about Native peoples and their cultures. For example, Riley said he had to return to his home community on the Navajo Nation abruptly and missed class. Upon his return, his business professor asked for a note even after Riley explained he had to attend an important ceremony. Riley said, “what was I supposed to do, ask the medicine man to write me an excuse” (Researcher journal, November 8, 2016). This comment was met with laughter and agreement. Mary expressed how at times, she has had to disagree with professors when they stated something false about Native cultures. Even though she doesn’t know every facet about all Native cultures, there are some cultural universals that most Native peoples agreed and practiced. For example, family and community as the first priority in one’s life. All students agreed they heard faculty speak poorly on Native issues though not everyone had the courage to speak up. Students agreed when professors were aware of and acknowledged Native peoples, it created a sense of belonging in the classroom and at the college. Students rattled off the names of professors who were culturally competent. Not surprisingly, these professors were in the areas of American Indian Studies, Anthropology, Sociology, Education, English, and Psychology.

Terminology: Another area students expressed needed cultural competence was on terminology. Joya said, “students don’t have the vocabulary to speak about Native peoples, a lot of them are culturally ignorant and unaware” (Researcher journal, November 8, 2016). Joya said even sharing with non-Native students it is okay to use the terms ‘Native American’ and ‘American Indian’ would help in starting real conversations. Riley said he has had to explain to others he doesn’t know what a *shaman* is but Navajos have medicine people who are healers, akin to medical doctors in mainstream culture. Students agreed they too had

to educate themselves on issues affecting Native peoples which involved vocabulary. Two students mentioned the football team, the Washington *slurskins*, and how it took becoming conscious about the entrenchment of stereotypes. They talked about being tricked into taking pride in something that is offensive to Native peoples. Joya stated, “terminology is about more than a definition but the meaning and symbolism tied to words as well” (Researcher journal, November 15, 2016).

Diversity of Native Peoples and Lack of Native peoples in Curriculum: The diversity of Native peoples and the lack of Native peoples and cultures represented in MCC courses and the community was another issue that students agreed needed change. Mary suggested that non-Natives need to know that Native cultures are diverse but “some things are too much to put out there” (Researcher journal, November 8, 2016). Dina said, “There are all kinds of Natives which means different foundations, morals, teachings, and beliefs... I’ve only seen Native issues in AIS and religions classes” (Researcher journal, November 8, 2016). Tashaad expressed, “I don’t think Native culture is present at all” (Researcher journal, November 8, 2016). Tashaad expected more of a presence of Native people and culture on campus. He said, there is a “little bitty section on Natives in the library” and “I expected a lot of stuff on campus” (Researcher journal, November 8, 2016). Tashaad said only one of his professors, his sociology professor, assigned Native centered events for extra credit.

Outreach to Native Students: Outreach to Native students was another topic students felt was missing from MCC. Three of the five students admitted to attending MCC for more than one semester without knowing about the AII, that there were Native clubs open to them, and that there was support for them as Native students. Dina said, “outreach is important. I had no idea the Thunderbird café was there, or the AII, or where to print stuff for free. I use to go to class and go home” (Researcher journal, November 8, 2016).

Joya chimed in, “Before I knew this place was here [AII], and I was printing out paper in the library. And I was having a hard time with the card situation 'cause I thought you could just put money in there. And then they want you to get the card, you gotta pay for the card... It's just nuts having to print a piece of paper at the library, so I was like, Oh my gosh, I need to find a printer somewhere. This can't be the only place I can print something out. And then they told me that-- or, Hannah told me that there was free printing there, so I came here. And now I'm working here” (Personal communication, January 17, 2017). Mary had a different experience. “The very first advisor I met with was John. I didn't know, I just stumbled upon the AII and ...well, I kind of did know, but I just didn't know because the entire school was already structured weird” (Personal communication, November 18, 2016). Mary and Joya who both work for the AII said the Institute is working on getting emails out to Native students before the next semester begins.

Underrepresentation of Faculty and Staff: Students raised the issue of the lack of Native faculty and staff at the college. In the 2016-2017 school year there were two full-time Native faculty members. Students specifically questioned how the hiring process worked, why there were more jobs being offered without benefits, and who makes the hiring decisions. We had a long discussion about changes at the college over time and how they, as students, could get on hiring committees and how they could also meet with the administrators as a group and ask these same questions. Students were concerned about the limited full-time staff at the AII and how much of the events planning and execution fell on student workers. Three of the five students were active in planning and running school events for the AII. They all agreed they enjoyed the responsibility of planning and executing events and activities, however, constraints of homework and attending class often meant they were scrambling to complete schoolwork when they were the main event planner.

Students were not complaining and understood they had choice. In fact, Riley said, “I’m spreading myself too thin” (Researcher journal, November 8, 2016). He was president of the Native engineering club, vice-president of the Inter-tribal club, executing events at the AII as a work-study student and working another job off campus. He struggled to find time to complete his schoolwork and study.

Research question four asked how students experienced the individual workshops of the UCIC. All students attended all sessions and stayed the entire time with the exception of Joya and Mary who were late for one session because they were coming from a conference at a local university. The students overwhelmingly agreed they enjoyed the UCIC and felt they had a voice, learned more than they expected, were awakened to new perspectives, and were motivated to practice their own cultures (Researcher journal November 29, 2016). Students suggested continuing the sessions as part of the AII extracurricular programs. When invited guests spoke in their heritage or traditional language, students expressed they didn’t understand all of it but said they recognized words and protocols. When sage was used to bless the first session all of the students said it reminded them of home. Joya and Mary made a pact to burn sage at school when necessary. Students also seemed interested in every session and wanted to provide immediate feedback. This often kept us beyond the scheduled session time. This time was also when students expressed how much they enjoyed the sessions. They enjoyed being reminded of their cultural practices and being taught new ones. Some said it felt funny to practice certain things like burning sage on campus but it was reassuring too. It was like their two worlds were joined for the moment. They all agreed the sessions were motivational on many levels. The head drum man urged them to always to do their best in everything they do. “Do it the best. Whatever you do, do your best” (Researcher journal, November 22, 2016). Those words are from his teachings when learning about the

drum. After that session students said they were inspired to do their best in the schoolwork, with their friends and family, and on their jobs.

After the community member presented on the talking circle, there was a reverent silence. After the silence students talked non-stop about how amazing the community member was. The elder told them that one's attitude is how we regulate the battle between mind and feelings. She also explained all human beings are valued, respected, and listened to in the talking circle. The circle represents integrity, honor, and choice. Mary said she felt like a longtime relative of the elder, as if she was her favored auntie or grandmother. Joya said she felt empowered to practice her culture. Riley said he never realized how much power he really had but that he will use it for good (Researcher journal, November 8, 2016).

In the last session on decolonization, the community member talked about colonization as having to do with resources. To resist colonization, one must work against maintaining the orders that facilitate it. Students were encouraged to develop their own praxis or active resistance. After this presentation students seemed overwhelmed or subdued rather than excited as in the previous sessions. One student said, "I've never heard of some of these words before-colonization and decolonization" (Researcher journal, November 29, 2016). Another student said, "It's hard to be self-sufficient and not depend on the government when even our Navajo Nation relies on the government because we have no economy" (Researcher journal, November 29, 2016). Joya said that the group can use decolonization as a topic to educate the college community. Riley came to the realization that both students and professors need to work together to make the college better but it would help if everyone was decolonized in their minds. Mary said, "I really enjoyed this presentation. He is such a great instructor and always keeps that fight of resistance alive within myself when he speaks" (Student journal, November 29, 2016). Despite the

seriousness and weight of the topic, students were motivated to improve in their personal lives and in college.

The most powerful part of the sessions was the family environment created where Native culture was appreciated and expected to be exhibited. For example, the researcher noted inside Native jokes and voice inflections were commonplace. There was a lot of joking which is typical among the Navajo. The presence of food for each session and taking time out to share a meal is culturally meaningful as well. The use of the Navajo language to greet each other and say goodbye during each session helped create a culturally supportive space. I also praised them when they spoke their language. If Mary spoke in her heritage language of Hopi, I would ask for a translation and how to say other words and phrases. Students shared and agreed the UCIC was like a family environment but also an educational one where two worlds merged (Researcher journal, November 22, 2016). The food, intimate setting, traditional presenters, informal language, confidentiality, and safe place to talk made the sessions a positive experience, according to the students (Researcher journal, November 22, 2016).

Overall, students enjoyed the intimacy of the sessions and having a floor to voice their opinions on their college and communities. Students agreed they should make these intimate gatherings a regular part of the extra-curricular programming at MCC. The UCIC gave students the opportunity, time, and directed safe space to talk about how they feel they were perceived at MCC. They talked about the need to address stereotypes and replace it with truth as part of the decolonization process. Their experience indicated their peers and the faculty were eager to learn about Native peoples and cultures. They were also aware of the great respect that must be shown to balance sharing culture and maintaining the sacred. Students were aware that certain departments at the college were comprised of faculty who

were more culturally competent about Native peoples than other departments. These departments were also more racially diverse and faculty were more flexible, according to the students (Researcher journal, November 15, 2016). Students were also aware that it takes everyone to make change. Despite this understanding, students said the change they want to see must come from them. Overcoming internalized oppression was one way to embrace the diversity of Native peoples and work toward decolonization. Riley said, “on the one hand we want to be with our own but we also buy into the difference is bad idea when students arrive to MCC and we talk about them because of their accents and style” (Researcher journal, November 30, 2016).

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

I began this study with the goal of learning more about Native students' college experiences at Mesa Community College and to determine potential retention strategies for them. I created an innovation to help explore and enhance the experiences of Native students on campus. Five self-identified Indigenous students attending Mesa Community College participated to share their experiences, goals, and needs in college. I asked about their college experiences and relationships with peers, faculty, administration, and staff using a questionnaire. I used decolonization and historical trauma as frameworks to contextualize educational institutions and students' lives.

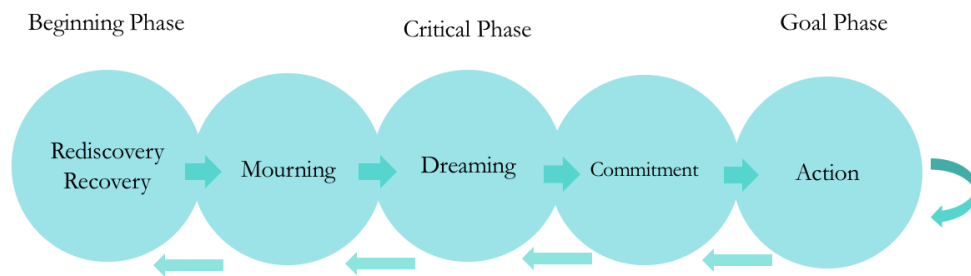
I designed the cultural workshops to support students' cultural needs in college and selected topics for the sessions using my own experiences from my Diné culture. Most Native peoples begin major undertakings with prayers, blessings, and ceremony, so I chose to begin the sessions with prayer. I also knew we would be engaged in talk about sensitive topics, hence, knowledge about a Talking Circle seemed a natural fit. I created one workshop to examine students' strengths and co-create a draft of the community presentation, however, the presentation was never completed. Leadership skills are useful in college and in one's life and career thus a session on leadership was included (Bird, Lee & López, 2013; Faircloth & Tippeconnic; 2013). Lastly, the concept of decolonization was used as a framework to make sense of students' experiences. To determine where students were in their decolonization process at the time of the workshops I utilized activist and cultural educator, Poka Laenui's (2006), decolonization scale. Decolonization is a process that all Indigenous people must undergo if they are to live again (Alfred, 2005). Research suggested that Native American college students rely on their cultural traditions, relationships with

peers, college staff, and family as a support in the college journey (Guillory, 2009; HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002; Rodriguez de France, 2013; Sherwin, 2011; Simpson, 2014; Shotten, Lowe & Waterman, 2013). Creating a college environment to enhance and support cultural experiences and relationships with faculty and staff is a retention strategy supported by the research literature and this project.

Research question one explored the stage that these Indigenous community college students were in within Laenui’s (2006) decolonization process.

Figure X

Laenui’s (2006) Processes of Decolonization



Three of the five students had strong ties to their traditional homeland and or cultural traditions. The literature suggests that Native students draw on their culture, traditions, and family during difficult times in college (HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). These three students explored their language, beliefs, and cultural traditions in the critical phase of *dreaming* and the subsequent phases of *commitment* and *action*. They took pride in being a Native person and were excited to share their cultural knowledge and language with others. They relied on close relationships with faculty and staff and cultural traditions like going home for ceremony, unlike students at the beginning of the scale who were more assimilated and less conscious of the value of their cultural traditions,

thus less likely to utilize ceremony, relationships, and prayer as a support through college. These students whose self-selection agreed with my assessment of their placement on the scale were already on a steady path of decolonization having been rooted in their families and traditional cultures.

Likewise, students who were further along the decolonization scale were often those who were conscious of colonization and the ills that are part of the system like assimilation and acculturation. If MCC staff and faculty could educate Native students about how dominant culture education is undergirded by ideals and standards of whiteness, standards and ideals which are in conflict with their Indigenous ideals and beliefs, students would be more likely to see the education system as the problem and perhaps see their role and experience in obtaining their education, differently. Students would also know that the stereotypes and invisibility of Native people are the result of centuries of colonizing projects. Similarly, the lack of cultural competence about Native peoples is also by design. With an awareness of and strength in their Indigenous beliefs and knowledge systems students could be empowered to disrupt the system and create environments that are supportive of Native students and highlight the strengths and diversity of contemporary Indigenous peoples.

For example, students could leverage their identity in course assignments by writing on the history, practices, and beliefs of their tribal nation or create art and imagery with designs and symbols that are culturally meaningful and often tied to land and place. Students might critique the myriad ways their people have been portrayed in history and offer a counter narrative. Students might compare and contrast their creation story with the one in the Bible. These decolonizing acts will expose non-Native people to the true culture of Indigenous peoples and make us visible again. More importantly, students will embrace their Indigeneity and practice who they are in college. This may translate into greater retention as

it may not be so easy for a student to stop out of an institution where they are researching, practicing, and sharing their culture and where their identity is affirmed. The presentation students began to create is a disruption to the system of whiteness, a step toward cultural competence for the college community, and a decolonizing act for the student.

Of the two students who had inconsistent placements on the scale, Riley had decided to put his traditional culture on hold while he pursued his education. This is not uncommon, as assimilation has often been an implicit requirement of most Native students as they pursued higher education in dominant culture (HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Poupart, 2006). In fact, it was the express policy in mission and government schools to *kill the Indian and save the man* (Adams, 1998; Poupart, 2006). Even today, the culture of whiteness and white supremacy make it implicit to relinquish one's traditional practices. Historically white colleges and universities (Bonilla-Silva 2010) then become contentious grounds for maintaining and revitalizing Indigenous identities and practices. It is no wonder Native students stop out of college or fail to get to college. Their identities and cultures are the price paid for entrance. "Postsecondary institutions are part of the process of colonization in the 21st century through failure to retain Indigenous students; through curricula focused on whiteness; through privileging the cultural capital of dominant culture; and through the exclusion of Indigenous knowledge" (Poupart, 2006, p. 213). Colleges and universities are at odds with the values, beliefs and principles of Native peoples.

Long distances from homelands make it more challenging to participate in ceremony on a regular basis, and prayer, burning cedar and sage, making offerings to Mother Earth, speaking heritage languages, singing, and embodying the traditional beliefs and values of one's tribal culture are not practiced widely due to historical trauma. The presentation on decolonization seemed to move Riley to select the Action phase as his location on the scale,

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Another reason for the inconsistencies on the scale could be the influence of taking an American Indian studies (AIS) course. Those students who took an AIS course seemed better equipped to accurately assess their placement on the decolonization scale. The spirit and philosophy behind AIS programs is in developing an Indigenous identity and awareness of the myriad issues facing Indigenous communities. The goal of the AIS program is to help students explore and appreciate the culture, history, language, and experiences of Indigenous peoples. Taking an AIS class seems to be an empowering and decolonizing force in students' lives given the extensive history of acculturation to the detriment of Indigenous language and culture. MCC could strongly recommend Indigenous students to take an AIS course. The principles of AIS courses could also be shared outside of the classroom. For example, the protocol of acknowledging the people on whose lands the college is built is one way to

practice respect for Indigenous peoples and the complex relationship we are traversing. It is also a practice in cultural competence.

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The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) might be a better option for community college students, rather than the National Survey of Student Engagement for 4-year college students. Future interventions might ask students to implement the behaviors on the survey over the course of a semester to better link the outcomes on the survey with the intervention itself.

Research question three asked about the themes and topics of Indigenous peoples that students identified as missing in the college community, and how students talked about

those issues. Students identified five thematic areas to address at MCC. These were: Native stereotypes and lack of cultural competence on campus, the lack of terminology to discuss Native peoples and issues, the diversity of Native peoples and lack of Native peoples in the curriculum, lack of outreach to Native students, and underrepresentation of Native faculty and staff. The themes students identified mirror the issues of concern in the literature on Native students in postsecondary education.

Students talked with ease about the challenges they were facing at the college which included being stereotyped as a Native person (Kirkness and Barnhardt, 1991; Shotten, Lowe & Waterman, 2013), being invisible (Poupart, 2006; Romero, 1994; Shotten, Lowe & Waterman, 2013), and not being able to go home for family and ceremony without severe educational consequences (Kirkness and Barnhardt, 1991; HeavyRunner & DeCelles, Shotten, Lowe & Waterman, 2013). The culturally affirming space and dedicated time of the sessions allowed for Native student perspectives about the college and their place in it as well as ways to move the college toward cultural competency about Native peoples. Some of the sessions offered alternatives to overcome those challenges. For example, burning sweetgrass or sage to feel a sense of calm, for prayer, or just to feel close to home is what students gleaned from the first session. We did not have time to explore the normalized and institutionally legitimized racism (Robertson, 2015) of invisibility and stereotyping in the workshop, however, I charged students to find reasons for the oppression.

The literature suggests that the history and contemporary issues of Native peoples must be integrated into every facet of the college community to create a welcoming environment for Native students to increase retention as students see themselves and their communities reflected in their college (Kirkness and Barnhardt, 1991; HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002; Guillory & Wolverson, 2008; Sherwin, 2011; Shotten, Lowe & Waterman,

2013; McCarty & Lee, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014; Simpson, 2014). The history, contemporary issues, and cultures of Native peoples can be integrated into the college through the use of Elders-in-Residence programs where a community elder brings traditional learning to the college. Elders would share their knowledge in classes, workshops and community presentations. College and universities across the US and Canada utilize this type of program to create a welcoming environment for Native students and to foster inter-generational learning and collaboration. Indigenous professors could also share their knowledge in less formal and more intimate workshops perhaps titled, “Dinner & Dialogue with Native Faculty,” as part of the American Indian Studies programming. The Dinner transforms a regular classroom into a safe space for students, albeit temporarily. For example, in workshop three I introduced the sociological concepts of internalized oppression and privilege and applied those concepts to Native students in postsecondary education. A safe space for students to share what is on their minds without judgement from those unfamiliar with Native ways of being is important to incorporate at MCC.

Research question four asked how students experienced the individual workshops. Students reported experiencing the UCIC sessions as overwhelmingly positive. After the third session, students suggested implementing informal cultural workshops as part of the American Indian Institute’s regular programming. Students stated they enjoyed coming to the sessions to talk about important issues they are facing at the college and within themselves or to just hang out (Researcher journal, November 15, 2016). The intimate setting of fewer than ten people, the shared meals, privacy to speak without judgement, one-on-one time with a faculty member, and the opportunity to learn about traditional beliefs and cultural patterns are reasons student enjoyed the workshops. Two students, Joya and Mary also discussed the compatibility of their traditional culture with dominant culture. After the first

session where sage was burned for prayer, Mary said she would burn sage at school and in her apartment rather than wait until she went to her home community, a five-hour drive away (Researcher journal, November 15, 2016). Rather than check one's culture at the door, students could see a way to integrate traditional culture at a dominant institution. This new awareness could open the possibility of integrating culture into the operations and physical space at MCC. For the more traditional students, Mary and Joya, the cultural component of the sessions also prompted them to evaluate the ways they were embodying and following their traditional teachings. Prayer and rising at dawn were two areas they identified as needing to practice on a regular basis. The cultural component also motivated students to explore their cultures and languages, the dreaming phase of Launui's (2005) decolonization model. Three of the four Navajo students expressed desiring to learn how to say their traditional greeting and speaking Navajo at school. Mary said she would come to school dressed in her traditional clothing more often. This boost in motivation might spillover to a boost in school work, studying and completion which results in retention.

Students presented a higher level of excitement after all sessions except the last one on decolonization. Students seemed to be more pensive after that session. The body language of some of the students suggested they might be experiencing mourning for all that was lost as a result of colonizing projects. For others they seemed to be solemn because of the weight of their commitment to decolonization for themselves and their communities. Dina said, "This is why I need to continue in AIS. We have a lot to learn for ourselves and our people" (Researcher journal, November 29, 2016).

Overall, this excitement for learning about Native beliefs, lifeways and practices could translate into excitement for learning. An excitement to ask critical questions in their classes would reveal the presence and knowledge of Native people. In doing so, students

could begin to create an awareness of Native peoples that did not exist prior. This would be a step toward cultural competence.

Limitations of this research included time constraints, unreliable access to technology to complete journals, and small sample size. Sessions were 90 minutes. Each session went about 10 minutes over the 90 minutes of allotted time. Students stayed an additional 10-15 minutes talking informally. Ideally, within each session a community member would present for approximately 20 minutes and leave about 10 minutes for questions and comments afterward. Due to the presence of food, time was also taken to share a meal. Invited community members often ate with the students before presenting. I left it up to the discretion of the community member to determine how they wanted to structure their 20 minutes whether to start the presentation upon arrival, or complete introductions then present, or eat first then present. The cultural component often took the majority of the session to complete even though each community member chose a different approach. For example, in the first session, we started about 10 min after the scheduled time, then the community elder presented for an hour. There were five minutes of comments and that left us with 15 minutes to complete the other components of the session which was not enough time. The combination of presentation with questions and comments took about 60 minutes of the session on average. This left little time for other activities like the questionnaire and session journals. Session time could easily be increased to 120 minutes broken down this way: 20 minutes for introductions and sharing a meal, 30 minutes for the cultural presentation, 30 minutes for the Q & A with presenter, 20 minutes for researcher presentation, 10 minutes to write the journal entry, and 10 minutes to conclude and respond to additional questions and concerns.

Time limitations also included the number of sessions. A future project might increase the sessions from five to ten. More sessions could be added to explore relationships with peers, faculty, and staff, and focus on the components of college that were explored within the survey. Only five sessions were scheduled, yet students needed more time to work one-on-one with the researcher to help shape their part of the presentation as well as work together as a team. Students were unable to complete the presentation on their own outside of the dedicated space and time. Ideally, two to three sessions could be dedicated to creating the community presentation. All students were full-time students and had at least one part-time job. An initial session would have been ideal as an orientation. A final session would have been ideal to process their experiences in the sessions.

Spotty access to technology was also an issue. The wifi in the classroom was weak and made it difficult for students to complete the e-journal, Penzu, during the session. Moving through the online questionnaire was a challenge as the pages took significant time to load and re-load. Penzu also did not allow forwarding of their journal to me. The journals I received were comprised of jumbled letters and numbers that were incomprehensible. I tested Penzu before the research project began and I was able to share journal entries between my home and work email addresses. I am unsure why the journal did not work when the students attempted to share their entries with me. Once students left the session it was difficult to get their journals from them. I emailed them weekly to remind them of the next session and to request their last journal entries. Future research endeavors need ample time for students to complete all data gathering activities in session.

Another limitation of this research project was the small sample size that cannot be used to represent all Native American college students. However, this is not the intent of Action Research. The goal was to explore this experience and effects of this intervention

experience on a small number of students. The student participants attended college full-time (although two had taken time off in their educational journeys to help with a sick parent). Two had more than one part-time job and one worked 35 hours a week. Three of the students were very active in the college and were student leaders holding demanding positions as club presidents and vice-presidents. These active students also engaged in outreach to local high school students and to students on tribal lands several hours away. Students had diverse work schedules, educational journeys, and family backgrounds. Given this specific population of five students, their experiences were unique. To explore whether there are true changes in student interactions with others or in their own decolonization as a result of this intervention, it would be good to try the sessions with additional students.

Implications for practice include specific suggestions by the students, as well as results of the data that was collected. Students suggested there should be an integration of cultural programming to address issues students are facing, recruit and hire more Native American faculty and staff, work toward development of cultural competence in the college community, and center Native issues in all facets of college life. Students were hungry to learn and practice their Indigenous traditions. Living far from their home communities and/or the absence of traditional people in their families made learning and practicing their heritage languages and traditions difficult. Cultural programming should adapt to current student needs. For example, weekly talking circles, an elder-in-residence program, culture presentations, and renaming ceremonies are some programming examples generated by students involved in this research. The weekly talking circle could be held in a dedicated space in the AII. This might involve re-purposing the current meeting room to a safe space for students.

The elder in-residence program would involve hiring community members who have the expertise in tribal language and culture but do not hold a dominant culture degree to meet the minimum requirements for teaching at MCC. Exceptions to the degree requirements or a new policy all together would be required. The culture programs could be held at the college every other month to highlight the diversity of Native peoples. These presentations could take the form of public ceremony, presentation, hands-on workshops, or media events like documentaries, film festivals, and art shows. Elders and respected community members could be invited to participate. They would be gifted and publicly acknowledged.

The hiring of more Native faculty and staff could alleviate the pressure on student workers and staff in the AII to service the entire local college community and state-wide Indigenous communities. New Native faculty and staff would reflect the Native students and help create a sense of belonging as well as introduce more resources for cultural programming. Likewise, a critical mass of Native faculty and staff could help to develop workshops, trainings, and presentations toward Native cultural competence for the college community. Centering Native issues requires a knowledge of the issues as well as practices to apply in the classroom and in implementing various services. The critical mass of more Native faculty and staff on the un-ceded lands of the Akimel O’Odam where MCC stands could create a genuine atmosphere of inclusivity and a sense of Native community for Indigenous college and community members. A critical mass of Indigenous faculty and staff and non-Indigenous faculty and staff who are culturally conscious and supportive of Native peoples and cultures could transform the community through deep dialogue and mutual understanding (Krouse, 2001; Arnold, 2006). Existing Native and conscious faculty could

use part of their teaching assignment to work at the AII alongside staff while also retaining their faculty line.

Partnering with local Indigenous communities is crucial to serving Native students. Likewise, students who were further along the decolonization scale were often those who were conscious of colonization and the ills that are part of historically white colleges and universities (HWCUs), ills such as assimilation and acculturation. "...the term HWCUs has become widely used in the scholarly literature to refer to an institution of higher education whose histories, traditions, symbols, stories, icons, curriculum, and processes were all designed by whites, for whites, to reproduce whiteness via a white experience at the exclusion of others who, since the 1950s and 1960s, have been allowed in such spaces (Brunsma, Brown & Blair, 2013, p719). Decolonization is needed to disrupt and dismantle the reproduction of whiteness.

If MCC staff and faculty could educate Native students about how dominant culture education is undergirded by ideals and standards of whiteness, standards and ideals which are in conflict with their Indigenous ideals and beliefs, students would be more likely to see the education system as the problem and perhaps see their role and experience in obtaining their education, differently. Students would also know that the stereotypes and invisibility of Native people are the result of centuries of colonizing projects. Similarly, the lack of cultural competence about Native peoples is also by design. With an awareness of and strength in their Indigenous beliefs and knowledge systems, students could be empowered to disrupt the system of whiteness and create environments that are supportive of Native students at the same time highlighting the strengths and diversity of contemporary Indigenous peoples.

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Of the two students who had inconsistent placements on the scale, Riley had decided to put his traditional culture on hold while he pursued his education. This is not uncommon, as assimilation has often been an implicit requirement of most Native students as they pursued higher education in dominant culture (HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Poupart, 2006). In fact, it was the express policy in mission and government schools to *kill the Indian and save the man* (Adams, 1998; Poupart, 2006). Even today, the culture of whiteness and white supremacy make it implicit to relinquish one's traditional practices. Historically white colleges and universities (Allen, 1991; Bonilla-Silva,

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that did not exist prior. This would be a step toward cultural competence for the college community.

The results of this study suggest that there were several key components to the intervention that could be expanded and incorporated into the college in different ways:

- 1) Bringing indigenous community members to the college helped students to feel more connected to their home culture. Creating an Elders-in-Residence program where a community elder brings traditional learning to the college would be one way to replicate the cultural sessions. Elders would share their knowledge in classes, workshops and community presentations. College and universities across the US and Canada utilize this type of program to create a welcoming environment for Native students and to foster inter-generational learning and collaboration. use of Elders-in-Residence programs where a community elder brings traditional learning to the college. Elders would share their knowledge in classes, workshops and community presentations. College and universities across the US and Canada utilize this type of program to create a welcoming environment for Native students and to foster inter-generational learning and collaboration. The elder in-residence program would involve hiring community members who have the expertise in tribal language and culture but do not hold a dominant culture degree to meet the minimum requirements for teaching at MCC. Exceptions to the degree requirements or a new policy all together would be required. The culture programs could be held at the college every other month to highlight the diversity of Native peoples. These presentations could take the form of public ceremony, presentation, hands-on workshops, or media events like documentaries, film festivals, and art shows. Elders and respected community members could be invited to participate. They would be gifted and publicly acknowledged.

2) Sharing a meal with students may replicate family. Native faculty and staff could share their knowledge in less formal and more intimate workshops perhaps titled, “Dinner & Dialogue with Native Faculty and Staff,” as part of the AII programming. The Dinner transforms a regular classroom into a safe space for students, albeit temporarily. For example, in workshop three I introduced the sociological concepts of internalized oppression and privilege and applied those concepts to Native students in postsecondary education. Having a safe space for students to share what is on their minds without judgement from those unfamiliar with Native ways of being is important to incorporate at MCC.

3) Carving time and space for students to discuss their issues together is valuable. A weekly talking circle could be held in a dedicated space in the AII. This might involve re-purposing a current meeting room to a safe space for students.

4) The hiring of more Native faculty and staff could alleviate the pressure on student workers and staff in the AII to service the entire local college community and state-wide Indigenous communities. New Native faculty and staff would reflect the Native students and help create a sense of belonging as well as introduce more resources for cultural programming. Likewise, a critical mass of Native faculty and staff could help to develop workshops, trainings, and presentations toward Native cultural competence for the college community. Centering Native issues requires a knowledge of the issues as well as practices to apply in the classroom and in implementing various services. The critical mass of more Native faculty and staff on the un-ceded lands of the Akimel O’Odam where MCC stands could create a genuine atmosphere of inclusivity and a sense of Native community for Indigenous college and community members. A critical mass of Indigenous faculty and staff and non-Indigenous faculty and staff who are culturally conscious and supportive of Native

peoples and cultures could transform the community through deep dialogue and mutual understanding (Krouse, 2001; Arnold, 2006). Existing Native and conscious faculty could use part of their teaching assignment to work at the AII alongside staff while also retaining their faculty line.

Implications for practice include specific suggestions by the students, as well as results of the data that was collected. Students suggested there should be an integration of cultural programming to address issues students are facing, recruit and hire more Native American faculty and staff, work toward development of cultural competence in the college community, and center Native issues in all facets of college life. Students were hungry to learn and practice their Indigenous traditions. Living far from their home communities and/or the absence of traditional people in their families made learning and practicing their heritage languages and traditions difficult. Cultural programming should adapt to current student needs. For example, weekly talking circles, an elder-in-residence program, culture presentations, and renaming ceremonies are some programming examples generated by students involved in this research.

Partnering with local Indigenous communities is crucial to serving Native students and being accountable to tribal nations on whose lands we live, work, and play. Developing pipelines from K-12 schools to MCC is important to practice building and maintaining relationships. MCC could partner with the local public school's Indian Education program and the Phoenix Indian Center as they both have Native education programs. The college could offer space and other resources for weekend language and culture courses.

Acknowledgement of tribal nations could also be displayed in the naming or renaming of streets and spaces to recognize the local Nations whose ancestral lands we reside. Public ceremonies to acknowledge the renaming are important in making Native peoples visible.

Limitations of this research included time constraints, unreliable access to technology to complete journals, and small sample size. Sessions were 90 minutes. Each session went about 10 minutes over the 90 minutes of allotted time. Students stayed an additional 10-15 minutes talking informally. Ideally, within each session a community member would present for approximately 20 minutes and leave about 10 minutes for questions and comments afterward. Due to the presence of food, time was also taken to share a meal. Invited community members often ate with the students before presenting. I left it up to the discretion of the community member to determine how they wanted to structure their 20 minutes whether to start the presentation upon arrival, or complete introductions then present, or eat first then present. The cultural component often took the majority of the session to complete even though each community member chose a different approach. For example, in the first session, we started about 10 min after the scheduled time, then the community elder presented for an hour. There were five minutes of comments and that left us with 15 minutes to complete the other components of the session which was not enough time. The combination of presentation with questions and comments took about 60 minutes of the session on average. This left little time for other activities like the questionnaire and session journals. Session time could easily be increased to 120 minutes broken down this way: 20 minutes for introductions and sharing a meal, 30 minutes for the cultural presentation, 30 minutes for the Q & A with presenter, 20 minutes for researcher presentation, 10 minutes to write the journal entry, and 10 minutes to conclude and respond to additional questions and concerns.

Time limitations also included the number of sessions. A future project might increase the sessions from five to ten. More sessions could be added to explore relationships with peers, faculty, and staff, and focus on the components of college that were explored

within the survey. Only five sessions were scheduled, yet students needed more time to work one-on-one with the researcher to help shape their part of the presentation as well as work together as a team. Students were unable to complete the presentation on their own outside of the dedicated space and time. Ideally, two to three sessions could be dedicated to creating the community presentation. All students were full-time students and had at least one part-time job. An initial session would have been ideal as an orientation. A final session would have been ideal to process their experiences in the sessions.

Spotty access to technology was also an issue. The wifi in the classroom was weak and made it difficult for students to complete the e-journal, Penzu, during the session. Moving through the online questionnaire was a challenge as the pages took significant time to load and re-load. Penzu also did not allow forwarding of their journal to me. The journals I received were comprised of jumbled letters and numbers that were incomprehensible. I tested Penzu before the research project began and I was able to share journal entries between my home and work email addresses. I am unsure why the journal did not work when the students attempted to share their entries with me. Once students left the session it was difficult to get their journals from them. I emailed them weekly to remind them of the next session and to request their last journal entries. Future research endeavors need ample time for students to complete all data gathering activities in session.

Another limitation of this research project was the small sample size that cannot be used to represent all Native American college students. However, this is not the intent of Action Research. The goal was to explore this experience and effects of this intervention experience on a small number of students. The student participants attended college full-time (although two had taken time off in their educational journeys to help with a sick parent). Two had more than one part-time job and one worked 35 hours a week. Three of

the students were very active in the college and were student leaders holding demanding positions as club presidents and vice-presidents. These active students also engaged in outreach to local high school students and to students on tribal lands several hours away. Students had diverse work schedules, educational journeys, and family backgrounds. Given this specific population of five students, their experiences were unique. To explore whether there are true changes in student interactions with others or in their own decolonization as a result of this intervention, it would be good to try the sessions with additional students.

Recommendations for future research include completion of all data collection activities from student participants during or immediately after sessions. This may reduce the high rate of missing data. For example, all journal entries could be completed in each session with extended session times. Interviews could be scheduled immediately before or after a session as well. The presentation could be created within three to four additional sessions. Similarly, sessions could be voice or video recorded to capture all data within a given session, instead of relying on researcher journaling after the sessions were complete. Taking notes on the community member's presentation, students' body language, questions and comments to each other, and to me, was taxing. It is possible I missed some rich data while focused elsewhere. Lastly, texting students on a regular schedule to remind them of upcoming sessions, to thank them for participation, or remind them to bring their part of the presentation to a session may be more effective than email. I was unsuccessful in reaching all students via email alone. I began texting much later in the project and had more success communicating with students. Using alternative forms of social media for recruitment and check-ins might help. The AII posted flyers on campus and sent emails to recruit students. Instagram, snapchat, and texting might yield more participants as more students are using

these forms of communication over email. These forms of communication also allow for immediate response.

Financial and social support might be a consideration for others replicating this research. I was lucky to have the support of the American Indian Institute director and staff, my department chair, the academic dean, and vice president of academic affairs. Combined support paid for the lunch at each session, the speakers' honorariums of \$50 each, a classroom space at the college for the sessions, and promotion and recruitment for the project. I had a generous amount of support from my college community. Multiple meetings and emails explaining my research project and how it could potentially help our college community was essential to securing support. Mesa Community College and our District office are student success-focused institutions and thus the research project fit with the goals of the college and district.

These student participants shared their hopes, dreams, goals, and experiences in college to help make MCC a more welcoming and supportive environment for future Native students (and all students). They also shared their experiences in their decolonization journey. Decolonization is important for all Indigenous people to undergo so that we break the narrative of the "Indian problem" along with the host of stereotypes associated. Decolonization is especially crucial for students. It wakes one to consciousness about the constructed world in which we live that relies on the continual dispossession of Native peoples. Once conscious Native students will work to disrupt systems of oppression within themselves, their colleges and their communities. The five student participants had a great support in the AII and with select professors who had mentored them. I have no doubt they will continue forward in their educational and cultural journeys. I wish them well on merging their traditional culture with mainstream culture and becoming stronger in their heritage

languages and practices. I also challenge all educators and those in academic environments to develop Indigenous cultural competence and decolonizing practices. Some decolonizing practices are acknowledging the ancestral and or un-ceded lands of tribal nations where the college resides; publicly acknowledging cultural appropriation when it arises; renaming spaces and places to original names usually in the language of local tribal nations; creating community and college relationships; and learning the true history of respective Indigenous lands to incorporate into course content.

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APPENDIX A

ELECTRONIC SURVEY ITEMS-SPRING/FALL 2016

Questions taken from the American College Health Association and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)

http://nsse.indiana.edu/pdf/survey_instruments/2015/NSSE%202015%20-%20US%20English.pdf

1. Please enter your major or expected major:
Major _____

2. How many courses are you taking for credit this current academic term?
0-3
4-6
7-9
10-12
13-15
16-18
19 or more

3. How many semesters have you completed? _____

4. During the current school year, about how often have you done the following?
(Very often, Often, Sometimes, Never)
 - a) Asked questions or contributed to course discussions in other ways
 - b) Attended an art exhibit, play, or other arts performance (dance, music, etc.)
 - c) Asked another student to help you understand course material
 - d) Prepared for exams by discussing or working through course material with other students

5. During the current school year, about how often have you done the following?
(Very often, Often, Sometimes, Never)
 - a) Talked about career plans with a faculty member
 - b) Worked with a faculty member on activities other than coursework (committees, student groups, etc.)
 - c) Discussed course topics, ideas, or concepts with a faculty member outside of class
 - d) Discussed your academic performance with a faculty member

6. Indicate the quality of your interactions with the following people at your institution.
(excellent 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 poor, NA)
 - a) Students
 - b) Academic advisors
 - c) Faculty
 - d) Student Services staff and offices (career services, library, student activities, etc.)
 - e) Administrative staff and offices (admission, registration, financial aid, etc.)

7. How much does your institution emphasize the following?
(Very much, Quite a bit, Some, Very little)
- Spending significant amounts of time studying and on academic work
 - Providing support to help students succeed academically
 - Using learning support services (tutoring services, writing center, etc.)
 - Encouraging contact among students from different backgrounds (social, racial/ethnic, religious, etc.)
 - Providing opportunities to be involved socially
 - Providing support for your overall well-being (recreation, counseling, etc.)
 - Helping you manage your non-academic responsibilities (work family, etc.)
 - Attending campus activities and events (performing arts, athletic events, etc.)
 - Attending events that address important social, economic, or politic issues
8. How many hours do you spend in a typical 7-day week doing the following?
(Hours per week: 0, 1-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20, 21-25, 26-30, More than 30)
- Preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, doing homework or lab work, analyzing data, rehearsing, and other academic activities)
 - Participating in co-curricular activities (organizations, campus publications, student government, intercollegiate sports)
 - Working for pay on campus
 - Working for pay off campus
 - Doing community service or volunteer work
 - Relaxing and socializing (time with friends, video games, TV or video, keeping up with friends online, etc.)
 - Providing care for dependents (children, parents, etc.)
 - Commuting to campus (driving, walking, etc.)
9. How much has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas?
(Very much, Quite a bit, Some, Very little)
- Writing clearly and effectively
 - Speaking clearly and effectively
 - Thinking critically and analytically
 - Analyzing numerical and statistical information
 - Acquiring job- or work-related knowledge and skills
 - Working effectively with others
 - Developing or clarifying a personal code of values and ethics
 - Understanding people of other backgrounds (economic, racial/ethnic, political, religious, nationality, etc.)
 - Solving complex real-world problems
 - Being an informed and active citizen
10. How would you evaluate your entire educational experience at this institution?
(Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor)

11. Within the last 12 months, have any of the following affected your academic performance:
(Yes, No)
- Alcohol use?
 - Anxiety?
 - Assault (physical)?
 - Assault (sexual)?
 - Concern for a troubled friend or family member?
 - Depression?
 - Discrimination (e.g. homophobia, racism, sexism)?
 - Drug use?
 - Finances?
 - Homesickness?
 - Housing?
 - Internet use/Computer games?
 - Learning disability?
 - Participation in extracurricular activities?
 - Stress?
 - Work?
 - Other_____
12. What is the highest level of education you ever expect to complete?
- Some college but less than a bachelor's degree
 - Bachelor's degree (B.A., B.S., etc.)
 - Master's degree (M.A., M.S., etc.)
 - Doctoral or professional degree (Ph.D., J.D., M.D., etc.)
13. What is the highest level of education completed by your parents (or those who raised you)?
- Did not finish high school
 - High school diploma or GED
 - Attended college but did not complete
 - Associates degree (A.A., A.S., etc.)
 - Bachelor's degree (B.A., B.S., etc.)
 - Master's degree (M.A., M.S., etc.)
 - Doctoral or professional degree (Ph.D., J.D., M.D., etc.)
14. What have most of your grades been up to now at this institution?
- As
 - Bs
 - Cs
 - Ds or lower

15. What is your gender identity?

- Woman
- Man
- Another gender identity

16. Enter your year of birth (e.g., 1994)

17. What is your racial or ethnic identification? (Select all that apply.)

- American Indian or Alaska Native (tribal nation: _____)
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White
- Other _____

18. Are you an international student?

(Yes, No)

19. Have you been diagnosed with a disability or impairment?

(Yes, No)

20. If in the future you were having a personal problem that was really bothering you, would you consider seeking help from a mental health professional?

(Yes, No)

21. If in the future MCC offered a workshop on the following, would you participate?
(Yes; Yes, only online; Yes, only face-to-face; No)

- Leadership development (e.g. identify talents and strengths, self-management, work effectively as a team, develop observation skills, translate vision into action, build relationships, etc.)
- Life skills training (e.g. resourcefulness, budgeting, cooking & cleaning, working with others, prioritizing, nutrition, staying safe, etc.)
- Financial management
- Academic skills (e.g. organization, active reading, note-taking, listening, participation, time management, preparing and taking tests, etc.)
- Other _____

APPENDIX B

ELECTRONIC SURVEY CONSENT- SPRING 2016

Dear Student:

You have been invited to participate in this **questionnaire** to explore Mesa Community College (MCC) student experiences and needs. Your participation in completing the questionnaire will take no more than 10-15 minutes.

My name is Mona Scott and I am working with Dr. Erin Rotheram-Fuller, Arizona State University professor. There has been little research undertaken on students' social and academic experiences at MCC, thus the findings from this research will be used to inform services provided to students.

It is up to you to decide whether or not to participate. You will be asked to complete an anonymous questionnaire about your own experiences at MCC. We expect about 3,000 students to participate. If you choose to provide your email at the end of the survey (which will not be linked to the survey answers themselves or used for any other purpose), you will be entered into a random drawing for one of four \$20 Amazon gift cards.

There are no risks to you in participating in this research. The questionnaire is anonymous. All information will be handled in a strictly confidential manner. Email information will be kept separately for use in the raffle only.

You can leave the research at any time by simply exiting the questionnaire. It will not be held against you and there will be no negative consequences to you or to your relationships at MCC. Already collected data may not be removed from the study database.

We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from your participation in this research, however, data will be used to inform future services for students attending MCC.

If you have any questions about this IRB approved study, please contact me at mccscott@asu.edu or Dr. Rotheram-Fuller at erf@asu.edu. You may also contact the IRB Coordinator of the Maricopa County Community College District, Lori Thorpe at lori.thorpe@domail.maricopa.edu irb_office@domail.maricopa.edu or (480) 731-8701. You may also contact the Chair of Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

By continuing with this survey, you are providing your consent to participate in this research.

118 APPENDIX C

PROTOCOL FOR STUDENT INTERVIEWS-SPRING 2016

1. Why are you going to college?
 - a. What factors have helped you get to college?
2. What do you like most about attending MCC? Least?
3. What are your greatest needs in college? (needs as a NA student)
 - a. How are your needs being met and/or not being met?
4. Show me a picture that represents your experiences at MCC. Can you describe it for me?
5. How does being Native help you in this process of college?
6. In what ways do you feel your Native culture is valued or accepted on campus?
7. How have Native Americans been represented in your courses (especially on the topics of race, gender, religion, sexuality, and nationhood)?
8. Show me a picture that represents home to you. Can you describe it for me? Where is it?
9. What advice would you give to other Native peoples who are considering going to college or who are currently in college?
10. What wisdom would you like to share about your experiences as a college student?

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FOR STUDENT INTERVIEWS-SPRING 2016

Dear Student:

My name is Mona Scott, and I am conducting a research study at Mesa Community College to explore Native American student experiences and needs. In this study, you will be invited to participate voluntarily in an **interview**. You will be asked to bring two photos to the interview or send via email: one representing home and one representing your experiences at MCC. Your participation in the interview will take no more than 30 minutes. For participating in this interview, you will receive a \$10 gift card for your time.

There are no risks to you for participating.

As a part of the interview, I would like to audio record your responses, so that I will be able to remember and go back to the things we discussed during the interview. Once coded, these recordings will be destroyed (within 3 years). All hard copies of photos, data and recordings of data will be secured in a locked file cabinet within a locked office and destroyed after seven years. Electronic records (survey data and entered data) will be maintained in encrypted files on a locked computer. Only the student researcher and Principal Investigator will have access to this data.

Your name and other identifying information will not be used or shared. All information will be handled in a strictly confidential manner, and you will be assigned a code name to ensure your anonymity. No one will be able to identify you when the results of the study are recorded/reported.

Your participation in this study is totally voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without negative consequences to you or to your relationships at Mesa Community College. If you wish to withdraw at any time during the study, simply inform me.

We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from your participation in this research; however, data will be used to inform future services for students attending MCC.

If you have any questions about this IRB approved study, please contact me at mccscott@asu.edu or Dr. Rotheram-Fuller at erf@asu.edu. You may also contact the IRB Coordinator of the Maricopa County Community College District, Lori Thorpe at lori.thorpe@domail.maricopa.edu irb_office@domail.maricopa.edu or (480) 731-8701. You may also contact the Chair of Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

I have read and understand the purpose of this research and my rights and responsibilities as a participant. I am 18 years of age or older and my participation in this research is my consent. I also consent to have my interview audio recorded. I will receive a copy of this consent.

APPENDIX E

RECRUITMENT FLYER FOR STUDENT INTERVIEWS- SPRING/SUMMER 2016



RESEARCH STUDY FOR NATIVE AMERICAN STUDENTS ATTENDING MESA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

We are looking for students currently attending Mesa Community College for a workshop series. Participating students will be asked to meet on campus for five 90-minute cultural workshops in Fall 2016 and explore ways to help faculty and staff better understand Native cultures to provide better support for Native students. Students will have an opportunity to share their culture in a college-wide presentation, will assess each workshop, will complete a questionnaire and an interview on their experiences at MCC. Participants must be 18 years or older, be a member of a tribal nation, and be willing to share their academic and social experiences in college. Participants will receive a \$10 gift card for the interview, will be provided a meal at each workshop; will work one-on-one with a faculty member, and will achieve professional growth and development.



Are you a current
MCC student?

Are you Native
American?

Are you interested in
sharing your culture
with the college
community?

**ARIZONA STATE
UNIVERSITY**

Mona Scott
480-461-7064
mcscott@asu.edu

APPENDIX F

UCIC STUDENT ELECTRONIC JOURNAL PROMPT- FALL 2016

Reflecting on today's session, in what ways does the content influence you as a student and as a Native student in particular?