BEYOND THE ASTERISK

Understanding Native Students in Higher Education

EDITED BY

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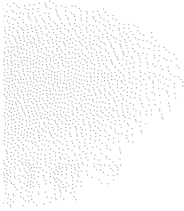

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ACADEMIC AND STUDENT AFFAIRS PARTNERSHIPS

Native American Student Affairs Units

Molly Springer (Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma), Dr. Charlotte E. Davidson (Diné/Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara), and Dr. Stephanie J. Waterman (Onondaga, Turtle)

The counterpart to Native American Studies programs (NAS), academic units concerning the study of Native America, are the Native American/American Indian student affairs units. Champagne and Stauss (2002) have written *the* book regarding NAS units. However, the history and development of the student side—student affairs units/services—is directly connected to NAS programs, as most of these are charged with supporting students (Champagne & Stauss, 2002). Because Native American student affairs is a relatively new field, often associated with an academic unit or multicultural office, the authors chose Native American Student Services Unit (NASSU) as a general label simply for this discussion. Whereas Western hierarchies characteristically promote inequality, top-down control, and individualism, and are linear and masculine in orientation, an Indigenous "way of being" is circular and balanced—a paradigm imbued with a spiritual language that promotes harmony, healing, kinship, and masculine and feminine balance, and that is ecologically oriented (Emerson, 2002, as cited by McAlpin, 2008). Given the differences in orientation, how do NASSUs function within Western-oriented non-Native colleges and universities (NNCUs)?

"[E]ducational institutions are sites that can be used in the coordination, creation, and practices of Indigenous projects" (McAlpin, 2008, p. 115). One

of the primary steps toward decolonization, in the context of higher education, is reinvesting the community with control over educational processes to create an empowering university context for students (Smith, 1999). This type of work can be seen on many campuses where the presence of culturally unique spaces and Native-centered programming has allowed for the building of a "new" narrative into institutions of higher education (Williams & Tanaka, 2007). This chapter addresses the strengths in certain NASSU programs, provides a short history of the NASSU and its unique characteristics, and looks at three successful model units. Because this book is intended as a resource for staff at NNCUs, we do not discuss tribal colleges. We urge a dedicated look at student affairs systems within tribal colleges and universities (TCUs).

Ethnic and Multicultural Student Support Centers

While this chapter is about NASSU, we begin with a short review of the development of ethnic support centers. All multicultural student support offices and cultural centers are the result of the Civil Rights Era (Patton, 2005). Rojas (2007) argues that Black studies was a direct result of the Black Power movement. Civil unrest, demands for equality, and President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty resulted in numbers of students of color attending college as never before. Passage of the 1965 Higher Education Act (HEA) increased financial aid, opening the doors for students of color. As a result of the 1965 HEA, a college could access funds for the underprivileged. Federal [TRIO] Programs were developed that focused on college "talent" search, college preparation, and student support, although it should be noted that these programs did not serve tribal colleges until 1990 (U.S. Congress, 1998). Furthermore, these programs (Veterans Upward Bound, Upward Bound Math-Science, Upward Bound, TRIO Student Support Services, and the Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program) are housed within host institutions to increase degree attainment across various fields of study up to the postgraduate level.[1] The missions of these programs were fulfilled mainly by serving thousands of African American students. However, as Patton and Hannon (2008) write,

> Despite the swelling Black enrollment at these institutions, campus administrators had done very little to prepare for the arrival of these students . . . these students were expected to assimilate were . . . plagued by racism, oppression, and discrimination. Unwilling to assimilate or forfeit their own

> cultural values and identity, African American students and their allies began to protest and conduct sit-ins, demanding that PWIs [predominantly White institutions] . . . provide offices and facilities where they could meet and commune in a safe, non hostile environment. (p. 142)

In response, Indiana University's Black House was created in 1969 as the first such center to aid in efforts to retain African American students on campus. At the time, Native students were also expected to assimilate to the college campus, a similar sink-or-swim proposition.

History of the Native American Student Support Unit

The rationale for NASSU was largely in response to a lack of support on campus for Native students, even though other ethnic or multicultural support units had been established. NAS and NASSU were created out of both student and community persistence (Champagne & Stauss, 2002). For example, at Cornell University, the American Indian Program (AIP) was the result of the recommendation of a committee of staff, faculty, and students "to serve Indian students and expand interest in Indian affairs on campus" (Unser, 2001, p. 36), and to expand outreach to the community. The committee, the driving force in establishing AIP at Cornell, emphasized student services as well as Native studies from the beginning (http://aip.cornell.edu). NAS programs have been criticized for being "geared primarily toward student services" (Champagne & Stauss, 2002, p. 11); consequently, NASSU is often dependent on the collaboration and strength of the NAS program on campus.

As indicated in the introduction to this book, Native Americans are greatly outnumbered on college campuses, which means we need each other to survive. Because of this overarching need, students, staff, and faculty cross academic barriers, class, and power structures to connect, and through these critical connections, they build structures of support in a collaborative way. The newly established Payne Family Native American Center is an example of such a center that crosses academic borders, combining NAS and NASSU in one central space.

> [I]ntentionally designed to serve as the home for academic support services and provide an intellectual and social hub for all those interested in learning about Native American history, issues, culture, and perspectives and a center that would include: collaborating among the diverse Native American educational programs across the campus; provide a space for students

> to gather, to assist in the transition to life on campus; to explore the intersections between the traditions of Native American and non-Native American cultures, and "provide an epicenter" for tribal leaders across Montana and beyond to gather, join forces, and tackle some of the most pressing issues they share. (University of Montana Native American Center, 2012, p. 2)

Placement of the Native American Student Support Unit

The placement of NASSU is shaped by campus history and by an administration's Native American knowledge base. Like many ethnic programs, a NASSU can find itself in a rather marginalized area on campus, inhibiting growth and hampering visibility (Patton, 2005). It is important to note that this placement is not usually intentional, but the result of a combination of a lack of knowledge about the good and intentional work of Native American student affairs as a field, and a general lack of literature and knowledge regarding Native American education by both student affairs administrators and faculty (Champagne & Stauss, 2002).

Most NASSUs were simply established under the framework of diversity units already on a campus. For example, if a multicultural center was in place, a Native American piece was placed within it, rarely with any research on what might be the *right* placement for its growth and security. NAS faculty can and have advocated for where NASSUs should be placed. However, because faculty rarely have a student affairs or student development education, even their input can be given without knowledge of student affairs. While closely linked, NAS is different from Native American student affairs. As academic units, NAS must fulfill academic demands first, answering to academic affairs officers and the requirements of their academic discipline.

Inserting a NASSU into a blended or "*multi*cultural" space can further marginalize Native American students. Native American students live on land that was colonized by the very institutions from which they seek an education. Treaties and other policy agreements, laws, and Native American sovereignty are part of our students' experiences. No other population comes to college with these characteristics. There is also the vast diversity of Native America, which includes over 500 federally recognized tribal nations (Wilkins, 2002). A "best practices" model of placement does not exist. What we do know is that students flourish when they have a structure that fosters intentional challenge and support (Sanford, 1962), offers assistance with navigation and involvement, and offers a "home away from home" that encourages retention (Astin, 1993; Shotton, Yellowfish, & Cintrón, 2010).

Ideally, an autonomous unit is best for the stability of any multicultural/ethnic support unit (Patton, 2005). If a NASSU is to be successful, and build a program that relies on the cultural interests and needs of the students it serves, the surrounding community, and the institutional mission, a cookie cutter mold will not suffice. Collaborations with multiple partners in both student affairs and academic affairs are an essential tool in building a program that can move toward self-determination and growth, and can have the support and stamina to stand on its own.

Programming for the Native American Student Support Unit

A Native student on campus can have multiple academic, financial, social, and cultural problems. In fact, because a NASSU is small and often understaffed, campus networks must be extensive to provide the necessary connections for Native students. The numerical comparison to other groups remarginalizes the potential of such a unit. The NASSU must be in communication with the other commonly used campus units and act as a liaison to those units, even though NASSUs are typically not well funded or well staffed because of the low number of Native students on campus. Yet, the needs of our students are far-reaching, which is true of other multicultural/ethnic units as well (Patton, 2005). For example, Harvard University's Native American Program (HUNAP) promotes learning communities. HUNAP hosts a colloquia series in which students, faculty, and staff come together to share and expand upon scholarly topics, while hosting year-round academic, cultural, and social events for its students. Further examples of programming are in the models at the end of this chapter.

NASSU programming and structure is typically defined externally by other communities on campus because the unit is subject to the needs of the division in which it is housed as a whole. For example, when a unit is within a student affairs division, it would be expected to assess Native student programming in the same way as other student affairs divisions. If housed within an academic affairs unit (such as NAS), the NASSU may have a different means of assessment directed by academic affairs.

Director of the Native American Student Support Unit

The head of any NASSU is a very complex and demanding position. The director must contend with the lack of understanding among university administrators on the subject of "Indianness" and ethnic matters in Native America (Champagne & Stauss, 2002; Pewewardy & Frey, 2004). University administrators

> often do not understand the fundamental facts about American Indians and generally classify them as a small ethnic group. Issues of Tribal membership and federally recognized Tribes and their rights are little understood by and complicate the task of university administration. (Champagne & Stauss, 2002, p. 6)

This includes the student affairs side of campus.

NASSU directors must wear different hats and fill various roles for their students and campus community. The NASSU director often coordinates the following, with or without a staff: visit the hospital when a student is sick; visit with parents and family when they are in town; advocate for students with faculty advisors who have no knowledge, stereotyped knowledge, or little knowledge of Native Americans; advocate with scholarship and financial aid departments and encourage creative thinking on policy; help the registrar's office understand tribal deadlines, which vary according to tribe; work with student organizations to learn about Native student needs and understand that only 10, *yes, only 10*, students can, and do, organize the biggest campus event of the year—the annual pow-wow; and advocate to campus security that the drum "noise" is a sacred cultural piece of the students' well-being, and students should not need to get a permit every time they pull out their drums. The director helps our student body develop political sophistication, such as understanding the difference between Native feminism and non-Native feminism, while still partnering with the women's center/studies. NASSU directors are expected to gather Native students for "multicultural" gatherings to be visible on campus; dispel misconceptions that TRIO programs fulfill all of our needs; and guard against exploiting Native students in committee work, recruitment, and campus image. The unit may also conduct academic advisement because our students often trust a Native person's opinion over the opinion of someone with initials after his or her name. Considering the assimilationist intent of Native American education in this country (see this book's introduction; Carney, 1999), it is no wonder that these units fulfill myriad roles. In addition, the director must have the blessing of the Native community and have the *skills* to do the work. Of course, having a Native American student affairs specialist who can also be the recruiter, counselor, administrator, community builder, and sole grant writer is like winning the 50/50 raffle at a pow-wow—where, much like drawing the winning ticket, it is a lottery governed by good fortune and a lot of luck. This is especially true when there are so few Native American student affairs specialists—Native and non-Native, in graduate programs or working in the field.

Funding of the Native American Student Support Unit

As it is for other support units, funding is a challenge. With the majority of people on campus unaware of our students, or when they exist only as "an asterisk" in a report (Garland, 2007), it can be difficult to be awarded the necessary budget. Yet, looking to others for building resources for your community is not very self-determinate. So how do we gain funding?

Funding for NASSUs is found through a number of different vehicles. There are collaborative efforts of multiple communities and departments to jointly support programming, private and alumni donations, fund-raising sales, scholarship drives, corporate and small-business grants, not-for-profit grants, and endowments. Dartmouth College is the only model of its kind in the country with an endowment. This external endowment comes through the student affairs operating budget. Its history of supporting Native students for 40 years is unparalleled; Dartmouth's endowment allows for its independence.

Resources typically are based on quantitative and numerical data and assessment. Other campus groups and administration often view student numbers as the determining factor for resources. Champagne and Stauss (2002) state that NAS programs are "often small . . . ad hoc organizations . . . in danger of incorporation into other disciplines or into ethnic or American Studies programs" (p. 11). The same issue of being a "small" unit within a unit that may be struggling itself to survive puts NASSUs in danger of being incorporated into a blended space, such as a multicultural or ethnic student support center. Yet, just because student numbers are smaller than other populations does not mean our work is any less valuable. See our NASSU models for more examples of funding.

Why Native American Student Support Units Matter

Native American cultural houses and centers support students' personal, cultural, and academic growth (McAlpin, 2008; Shotton et al., 2010), and also serve as resource hubs to welcome and celebrate the uniqueness of our students. Not to be diminished is the manner in which these centers endeavor to design programming that advances the self-determinate needs of the local Native community, as well as those of tribal nations to which students belong. Working in accord with various departmental units on college campuses is critical to achieving the shared vision of graduating students from the tertiary level of their education. An array of multifaceted support systems currently exists as a means to enrich what could be an otherwise impersonal

educational experience for Native students. For example, the Stanford University American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian Program (AIANNHP)/Native American Cultural Center (NACC, n.d.) is one of the stellar programs in the country. Its online literature details the historicity of Muwekma-Tah-Ruk (the center's Native-themed house), and provides an inner picture of who it is and what it does concerning recruitment, orientation, advisement, counseling, student organizations, monthly and annual programs, and intralibrary loans. The question, "why do we exist?" is answered in AIANNHP and NACC's mission statement, where they posit their overall goal to nurture students throughout their journeyed accession through the academic pipeline, as being mediated through a team of staff members who possess practical, cultural, and institutional understandings of best student development practices (NACC, n.d.).

While a multitude of programming is provided through the University of North Dakota's American Indian Student Services (AISS) (Brown, 2005), a unique aspect of its support is illustrated through the university's policy of burning cedar, sweetgrass, and sage. Citing the 1978 American Indian/Alaska Native Religious Freedom Act, Native students are guaranteed the right to use cedar, sweetgrass, and sage within campus housing and nonclassroom buildings for ceremonial purposes.[2] What can be gleaned from this policy is the necessity and importance of spiritual sustainability within the realm of academia. Integral to maintaining balance and the processes of academic, cultural, and personal growth of students (McAlpin, 2008), spiritual rootedness should be perceived as a means to aid students in renewing efficacy and cultural values.

Native American Student Support Unit Models

Following are three NASSU models as examples of their diversity. The reader should note that these student support centers are the result of grassroots movements. Websites for additional information are found at the end of this chapter.

Portland State University: Native American Student Services and Native American Student Community Center[3]

A truly collaborative effort by Native American/Alaskan Native students and alumni, Portland State University administrators, the Tribes of Oregon, and Portland-area Native American communities produced the Native American

Student and Community Center (NASCC) with a commitment to serve the multiple constituencies supportive of the vision and the creation of the facility (NASCC, 2012). A "cultural home" for Native American, Alaska Native, and Pacific Islander students, the center has a classroom where NAS classes are taught, a large gathering space, meeting rooms, a computer lab open to students and the public, a kitchen, the office of the coordinator of Native American Student Services, and an office shared by three student clubs—UISHE (United Indian Students in Higher Education, founded in the late 1970s), a chapter of AISES (the American Indian Science and Engineering Society), and PIC (Pacific Islander Club). Student groups, the campus community, local Native American organizations, and the tribes all use the center, which hosts an Honor Day Graduation Ceremony—a capstone event common among NASSUs across the country.

The mutual efforts of Native American students and alumni, the university, the tribes of Oregon, the metro Native American communities, and private donors and foundations culminated in the construction of the NASCC, or in their words, "a home away from home" for Native American, Alaska Native, and Pacific Islander students. Day-to-day operations are managed by the NASCC specialist and trained student assistants, most of whom are Native or Alaska Native. Outreach and academic support services are the responsibility of the coordinator of Native American Student Services, a position created in 1992—the first position on campus to serve a specific ethnic population. Both positions report to the executive director of Diversity and Multicultural Student Services (DMSS), under the vice president for Enrollment Management and Student Affairs. The DMSS department includes three TRIO programs; two additional coordinators (for Latina/o students and African American students); the multicultural center; and La Casa Latina, a new Latino Student Support Center created in June 2011. Funding to support the center's operations comes from institutional funds and leasing fees; the center is a "mock" auxiliary. Very recently, student incidental fees were allocated to support the center's student programs.

Most notable, the center has an advisory board comprising students, faculty, staff, local Native American community representatives, and a tribal representative, along with two seats for civic leaders (NASCC, 2011). The role of this board is to provide advisement to the executive director of DMSS and the center's staff to ensure that the NASCC's short- and long-term goals are fulfilled and rooted in Indigenous cultural mores. The advisory board also takes an active role in fund-raising for scholarships and programming.

Cornell University: American Indian Program and Akwe:kon

As an example of the intimate linking of student support with NAS, we present a short history of Cornell's AIP. In the 1970s Frank Bonamie, a Cayuga chief, was convinced that Native student attrition was the fault of the institution and not student ability. An ad hoc committee was formed to analyze the problem, as referred to in chapter 3. The committee recommended hiring a graduate student to recruit Native students and to develop policies and practices to improve retention. In 1975 the first American Indian studies (AIS) faculty member was hired. The program grew, and its director, Ronald LaFrance (Mohawk), initiated the concept and building of Akwe:kon (the Native student house), increased new staff lines and outreach, and oversaw the academic expansion of AIP. Still setting the tone of this vision is AIP's aim of developing and educating new generations that will "contemplate, study and contribute to the building of Nation and community in America" (http://aip.cornell.edu). Staffing includes a director, an associate director, a student development specialist, a residence hall director, a faculty affiliate, an administrative assistant, and student employees. The AIP structural makeup involves its director reporting to the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, whereas Akwe:kon (a residential house) is jointly supported by AIP and Campus Life. Sitting in the heart of Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) territory, Akwe:kon features Haudenosaunee symbols and colors. AIP is supported through funds from Cornell University's Office of the Provost, Cornell's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, and the Office of the Dean, while scholarship and outreach funds are furnished by individual donors.

Purdue University: Native American Educational and Cultural Center

Like its northwest and northeastern NASSU counterparts, the emergence of the Native American Educational and Cultural Center (NAECC) was initiated primarily by Native American students, along with members of the campus community, both of whom resolutely expressed a need for a campus space for Native students. This movement, otherwise known as the Tecumseh Project (a grassroots initiative that assisted postgraduate students with research projects), aided in the eventual birth of NAECC (NAECC, 2011b). Under the auspices of the Division of Diversity and Inclusion (DDI), NAECC's primary aim is to encourage a Native-centered learning community for an intertribal constituency of Native American, Alaska Native, and

Native Hawaiian students. Fully funded with the institutional commitment of the Office of the Provost and DDI, the NAECC merits attention for the additional support it receives from the National Science Foundation (NSF), the Sloan Indigenous Graduate Program, and ADVANCE Purdue, all of which help NAECC's retention and recruitment efforts. The NAECC aligns the viewpoint of its mission with Purdue's three campus initiatives of "Launching Tomorrow's Leaders," "Discovery with Delivery," and "Meeting Global Challenges" by placing an organizational premium on (a) yielding a successive generation of degree-bearing Native scholars who can promote issues in their home communities; (b) generating support for research and scholarship funding, as it pertains to Native American people; and (c) cultivating non-Native appreciation of the plural contexts of Indigenous Peoples (NAECC, 2011a). Staffing includes a director, administrative assistant, and part-time student position, and its space includes a 25-person conference room, a computer lab, a student lounge, and an al fresco area to accommodate outdoor events.

Recommendations

Recent years have seen an increase in Native American college student research; this book is just one example. Administrators, staff, and faculty members, including those in NAS, need to educate themselves about the students they serve, all students. A major issue affecting NASSUs is the lack of Native American personnel in the profession and the dearth of professionals who have educated themselves regarding Native American students. Encouraging student affairs or academic affairs staff and faculty to attend conferences and workshops on Native American college students not only will help Native American students, but will also provide professional development for all staff. National organizations like the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) have Native American professionals who can provide resources and contact local Native American communities.

Like all institutional units, NASSUs are subject to assessment. The most appropriate means of assessment would be to create an external review committee made up of other knowledgeable Native American student affairs practitioners to arrange a fair assessment of the program. Some units have set up community advisory councils that can act as sounding boards and assessment boards.

In addition to special advisors, memorandums of understanding (MOUs) developed in collaboration Native communities, TCUs, and the NNI can formalize working agreements. Such MOUs can set goals, encourage communication, and educate both the Native and non-Native community. The University of Idaho, North Idaho College, Lewis-Clark State College, Northwest Indian College, and Washington State University have entered into an MOU to collaborate with a Native American collaborations committee. MOUs and special advisors formalize commitments, identify key individuals, and provide direction.

Conclusion

In this chapter we discussed the difference between NAS and NASSU, the history of NASSUs, and the complicated development that included the varied placement, funding, and administration of these units. We then shared NASSU models as examples and followed this with a short discussion of issues and recommendations. As noted throughout this chapter, NASSUs must work to meet the unique needs of Native students. These students are striving to be human as they journey through an experience that may not always value who they are or what they know. Furthermore, institutions of higher education too often exist without compassion and objectify Native peoples (Davidson, 2008, 2009; McAlpin, 2008). Therefore, spaces are needed for students to experience a sense of cultural safety where the sacred is not suppressed, so they may restore themselves from what can be an exhaustive, insensitive, and treacherous pathway, as a means to reorient themselves to endure the experience of higher education.

Endnotes

1. Please visit www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/index.html for detailed information.
2. For more information, University of North Dakota American Indian Student Services (2010)
3. Sources for this section include the NASCC website and personal communication with its director, Dean Azule.

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Example Websites for Native American Student Support Unit Models

Cornell University: American Indian Program (AIP) and Akwe:kon
http://aip.cornell.edu/cals/aip/about/history/index.cfm

Dartmouth University: Native American Program
http://www.dartmouth.edu/~nap/

Harvard University: Native American Program
http://www.hunap.harvard.edu/

Portland State University: Native American Student Services and Native American Student Community Center
http://www.pdx.edu/nativecenter/
Purdue University: Native American Educational and Cultural Center
http://www.purdue.edu/naecc/index.html
Stanford University: Native American Cultural Center
http://nacc.stanford.edu/
Syracuse University: Native Student Program
http://multicultural.syr.edu/programs/nsp.html
University of Arizona: Native American Student Affairs
http://nasa.arizona.edu/