

# **American Indian Doctorate Receipt 1980-2000: A Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis**

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## *Abstract*

This research presents a quantitative and qualitative analysis of American Indian doctorate receipt between 1980-2000. A quantitative analysis of American Indian doctorate receipt by sex and by broadfield category is initially presented. This research also sought to qualitatively explore the multiple factors that influence American Indians to receive and utilize their doctorate in the field of Education. Interviews with 16 American Indian doctorate recipients in the field of Education from the University of Oklahoma, the University of Arizona, and Northern Arizona University were conducted. Findings revealed that issues of community, personal and professional interest, and voice and access were all contributory factors that both influenced and motivated these persons to obtain their doctorate in the field of Education.

The literature on the Native American experience in postsecondary institutions is generally relegated to footnotes in books about other minorities in the United States.... In many respects, Native Americans are invisible in academe.<sup>1</sup>

## *Introduction*

This quote by American Indian scholar William Tierney from some ten

years ago is still true today: American Indians are the invisible Community of Color. On college campuses, American Indians have lower enrollment rates than any other group, are more apt to dropout, and are least likely to persist to degree attainment. Although American Indians experienced a 48 percent increase in enrollment and a 26 percent increase in aggregate degree acquisition from 1980-2000, they still remain underrepresented, underresearched, and invisible.<sup>2</sup>

Nowhere is American Indian academic and scholastic invisibility more pronounced than at the highest rung of academic excellence – the doctorate. Educator Madeline Williamson states that “Underrepresentation in doctoral programs is particularly severe for . . . American Indians.”<sup>3</sup> When compared to the doctorate acquisition rates of other racial/ethnic groups, American Indian doctorates are indeed invisible.

Research has been conducted concerning African American doctorates<sup>4</sup> and Chicano doctorates.<sup>5</sup> Yet, research pertaining to American Indian doctorate acquisition is scarce in comparison. The limited research that does exist consists of an expose of the personal and professional reasons that led nine American Indian women to pursue a doctorate;<sup>6</sup> an innovative doctoral program for American Indian and other native peoples;<sup>7</sup> a qualitative inquiry into the factors that impact both Chicano and American Indian doctorate receipt;<sup>8</sup> an ethnographic study of eight American Indian graduate and/or professional students;<sup>9</sup> and a qualitative study examining the personal and professional experiences of 12 American Indian doctorate recipients.<sup>10</sup> Though W. T. Cross, an educational specialist, does provide a peripheral quantitative analysis which addresses the issue of American Indian doctorate receipt, the breadth of statistical information provided is extremely limited.<sup>11</sup> This study will expand upon this limited quantitative analysis by presenting a twenty-year (1980-2000) statistical compilation of American Indian doctorate receipt.

The objectives of this research are two fold: first, to provide a quantitative analysis of American Indian doctorate receipt between 1980-2000, and second, to qualitatively examine doctorate attainment, particularly in reference to doctorate in the field of education. The goal is to add a new layer of statistical and analytical comparison to previous research into doctorate attainment for American Indian students in the hope of, once again, illuminating the invisible.

### ***The Road to the Doctorate***

In order to explore the issue of American Indian doctorate receipt, it is imperative to situate the issue within the parameters of American Indian education at large. It is through such a situational frame of reference – by moving from the general to the specific – that the issue of American Indian doctorate pursuit and receipt will become more pronounced.

For American Indian students, the march through the academic pipeline in search of the doctorate is not easily navigated. Doctorate acquisition is

dependent upon safe passage through a series of academic “staging areas,” starting with grade school and ending with graduate school. In order to conceptualize American Indian doctorate receipt, it is important to chronicle the academic path – the pipeline – from whence such students ultimately emerge.

Figure 1  
The American Indian Educational Pipeline

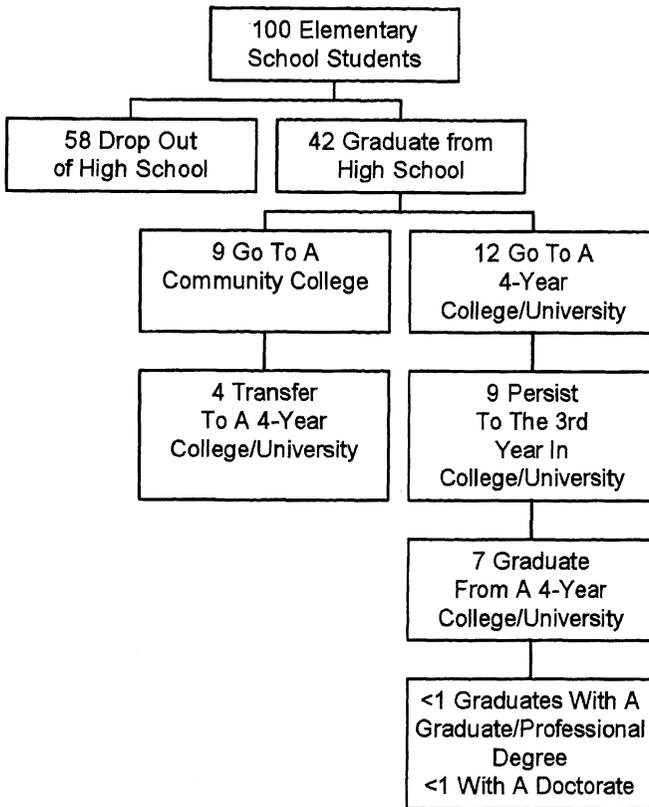


Figure 1 illustrates that, at each successive stage of the educational pipeline, American Indian representation is lost. Educational researcher Alexander Astin states that this lack of representation “becomes more severe at each higher level . . . owing to several critical ‘leakage’ points” in the educational process.<sup>12</sup> Thus, as selected American Indian students travel the academic pipeline – from grade school to graduate school – in pursuit of the doctorate, their persistence and participation in each succeeding level of education is reduced. The result is evidenced in the fact that for each 100 American Indian elementary school students, less than one will receive the doctorate.

The journey through the academic pipeline for American Indian students is

often a conflicting study of persistence offset by attrition. Many obstacles await American Indian students as they navigate their way through education.<sup>13</sup> In spite of such hindrances, a select few do persist and do receive the doctorate. Though this cohort is relatively small when compared to other racial groups, an analysis of doctorate receipt reveals much about an overlooked and underresearched slice of American Indian education.

### ***Quantitative Methodology Study***

To provide an overview of doctorate receipt in the U.S. between 1980-2000, several sources were utilized, including the National Research Council's Doctorate Records Project (DRP). The DRP derives its information from the Survey of Earned Doctorates from U.S. universities. This annual survey is completed by all doctorate recipients from U.S. institutions. Data is collected and categorized by seven broad fields of study: Physical Science, Engineering, Life Science, Social Science, Humanities, Education, and Professional. Due to computational and compilation inconsistencies between 1980-2000, with particular reference to the Professional and Humanities fields, and for the sake of statistical reliability and consistency, this study utilized the broadfields of Education, Physical Science, Life Science, Social Science, and Engineering. Statistical information was also gathered through the Condition of Education and the Digest of Education Statistics, both publications of the U.S. Department of Education.

Statistics provide only a partial picture of American Indian doctorate receipt. To further contextualize the issue, these numbers must be compared to some baseline figures. Therefore, to create an equity benchmark which would facilitate the comparison of doctorate production data, a Doctoral Parity Index (DPI) was utilized. The DPI is derived from taking the cumulative percentage of American Indian doctorates from 1980-2000, partitioned by sex, and dividing this by the averaged overall population percentage of American Indian females and males during this same period. Any number above 1.00 represents overrepresentation, with numbers below 1.00 reflecting underrepresentation. For this study, equity is reached when the percentage of American Indian doctorates produced during 1980-2000 is equal to their averaged percent of the overall population for the same time period.

### ***Results***

Table 1 presents an extensive and multifaceted overview of American Indian doctorate production between 1980-2000. From this, several points can be drawn concerning the relationship between American Indians and doctorate receipt.

Table 1  
Number and Various Percentages of American Indian Doctorate Recipients by  
Gender and Select Broadfield: Cumulative From 1980-2000

<i>Females</i>						
	#1	%2	%3	%4	%Ch 5	Parity 6
Physical Science	37	0.2	4.9	20.5	+17	0.50
Engineering	24	0.1	3.5	16.0	+25	0.25
Life Science	102	0.2	12.9	46.3	+40	0.50
Social Science	149	0.3	18.8	48.0	+83	0.75
Education	425	0.5	59.9	53.9	+17	1.25
All Fields	737	0.3	100	45.2	+35	0.75
<i>Males</i>						
Physical Science	142	0.2	14.8	79.5	+51	0.50
Engineering	103	0.2	11.1	84.0	+29	0.50
Life Science	126	0.2	12.3	53.7	+13	0.50
Social Science	163	0.3	16.5	52.0	+6	0.75
Education	364	0.5	45.3	46.1	-33	1.25
All Fields	898	0.3	100	54.8	+13	0.75

- Note:
- (1) Number of American Indian doctorates in that field
  - (2) Percent of American Indian doctorate recipients in that field as a total of all recipients.
  - (3) Percent of American Indian doctorates in that field as a cohort.
  - (4) Percent of American Indian doctorates in that field by sex.
  - (5) Percent change from 1980-2000.
  - (6) The parity index is the percent of male American Indian Ph.D.'s for the period between 1980-2000 divided by the average population percentage of American Indian females (0.4) and of American Indian males (0.4) from 1980-2000. A parity number of 1.00 means that American Indians are represented in doctorate production in the same proportion to their percentage of the population. Any number above 1.00 reflects overrepresentation with numbers below 1.00 reflecting underrepresentation.

Referring to Column 1, a total of 1,635 doctorates were awarded to American Indians between 1980-2000. Of this, 737 doctorates were awarded to American Indian females with 898 doctorates being awarded to American Indian males. The field of Education attracted the greatest number of both female and male doctorates, accounting for 425 and 364 of all doctorates awarded respectively.

For both females and males, the fewest doctorates were received in the field of Engineering.

Column 2 represents the overall percentage of American Indian doctorate receipts as a total of all doctorates produced in the United States between 1980-2000. The 737 doctorates awarded to American Indian females accounted for 0.3 percent of all doctorates granted to women. The 896 doctorates awarded to American Indian males equated to 0.3 percent of total male national doctorate production. For females and males, doctorate receipt in the field of Education accounted for the greatest percentage of representation, garnering 0.5 percent of all Education doctorates awarded. Both female and male national representation was least evidenced in the Engineering, Physical Science and Life Science fields.

The figures in Column 3 reflect the percent breakdown of American Indian doctorate receipt by particular field of study. Education is clearly the field of choice for females as 59.9 percent of all doctorates awarded during 1980-2000 were in this field. Conversely, only 3.5 percent of all female doctorates were in the field of Engineering. For males, the greatest percentage of representation was also in the field of Education, accounting for 45.3 percent of all doctorates granted. The Engineering field represented 11.1 percent of all male doctorate production, the lowest of any broadfield category. Column 4 illustrates the comparative sex representation by field of study. Significant disparity exists in both the Engineering and Physical Science fields as males dominate doctorate receipt in both disciplines. Relative statistical parity is witnessed in the Life Science and Social Science fields, yet only in the field of Education are more doctorates awarded to females than to males. When viewed as a composite, of all doctorates awarded to American Indians between 1980-2000, 45 percent were awarded to females, 55 percent were awarded to males.

Column 5 reflects the percent change in doctorate acquisition between 1980-1990 and 1991-2000. American Indian females increased their overall doctorate production in every broadfield studied. The greatest increase was noted in the Social Sciences where doctorate production increased 83 percent over the twenty-year period of study. The fields of Education and Physical Sciences witnessed the least amount of increased acquisition. Overall, between 1980-2000, doctorate acquisition for American Indian females rose 35 percent. For American Indian males, more moderate increases were noted, as evidenced in the fact that doctorate acquisition increased a comparatively modest 13 percent during this same time frame. Males experienced increases in doctorate acquisition in every broadfield with the exception of Education, where doctorate production actually decreased by 33 percent. The greatest overall gains for American Indian males were in Physical Science, where doctorate acquisition increased 51 percent.

Lastly, Column 6 reflects the representation of parity index for both American Indian females and males. In this case, the parity index is a reflection of the overall American Indian doctorate acquisition percentages between 1980-2000, divided by the average population percentage of American Indian females (0.4)

and of American Indian males (0.4). A parity number of 1.00 means that American Indians are represented in doctorate production in the same proportion to their percentage of the population. Column 6 shows that both American Indian females and males are underrepresented in doctorate production in every broadfield category with the exception of Education. In fact, both females and males are actually overrepresented in the field of Education. Overall, both American Indian females and males are underrepresented in terms of doctorate production as compared to their representation in the overall population.

What is most revealing about American Indian doctorate receipt between 1980-2000 is the consistency of underrepresentation. In each of the broadfields, with the exception of education, both females and males are underrepresented. The greatest degree of underrepresentation was evidenced for female Engineering doctorates. Yet, in spite of overall underrepresentation, for both females and males, doctorate receipt has actually increased.

When examining doctorate receipt by individual broadfield, a cause for both concern and celebration is warranted. Low cohort and national representation for female doctorate production in Physical Science and Engineering appears to be of greatest concern. For males, a significant decrease in doctorate production in Education is noted. Conversely, for females, healthy increases were noted in Life Science and Social Science. Physical Science doctorate attainment for males was also significant.

What is most striking and, in turn, most revealing, is the field of Education. Between 1980-2000, this field dominated doctorate production for both females and males. It is the only broadfield in which overrepresentation was achieved. Yet, as stated previously, for males, doctorate attainment in Education declined significantly, with still remaining the field of choice. For females, Education (along with Physical Science) witnessed the least amount of doctorate production increase. Though Education was clearly the most popular field of study for both American Indian females and males, there is a shift away from Education and into other fields of study, as noted by general increases in competing disciplines. Such fluctuations indicate a moderately diversified and, at times, rather fluid doctorate attainment.

One theme that clearly emerged from the quantitative analysis is that Education is the field of choice for American Indian doctorate recipients. This is evidenced in the fact that between 1980-2000, 59.9 percent and 45.3 percent of all doctorates awarded to American Indian females and males respectively, were in the field of Education. The unquestionable conclusion to this phenomenon is that it exists; the more elusive question is why it exists. Why do American Indians pursue and receive the doctorate in Education to a greater degree than any other broadfield discipline?

### ***Qualitative Methodology Study***

The sample population for this research was American Indians who received

their doctorate in Education from the University of Oklahoma (OU), Arizona State University (ASU), the University of Arizona (U of A), or Northern Arizona University (NAU) between the years 1985-2000. Doctorate recipients from these universities were chosen based on several factors. A national survey ranked Oklahoma second and Arizona third in total college enrollment of American Indian students<sup>14</sup>. With specific reference to doctorate production, between 1990-2001, the University of Oklahoma, the University of Arizona, and Northern Arizona University consistently ranked in the top quartile in institutional production of American Indian doctorates.<sup>15</sup>

To gain access to these American Indian doctorates, a detailed letter was sent to each Dean of Education of the three universities, explaining the intent and scope of the research. A list of 55 recipients was generated this way. Due to incorrect data or access constraints, the initial list was reduced to 35 recipients. Based on this revised list, 16 personal or telephone interviews were conducted. Of the 16 respondents who were interviewed, six were male and ten were female. These respondents represented 13 different tribal affiliations. There was an equal distribution of Ed.D. (8) and Ph.D. (8) degrees. There were seven different subject fields represented, with the most doctorates being awarded in the field of Educational Leadership. The majority were employed as college or university professors or program directors in various educational enterprises.

Table 2: Tribal, Educational, and Occupational Descriptors: by Sex

Tribe	Degree	Subject Field	Institution	Occupation
<b>MALES</b>				
Lakota	Ed.D.	Ed. Leadership	NAU	College Professor
Blackfeet	Ph.D.	Higher Education	U of A	Program Director
Choctaw	Ph.D.	Ed. Leadership	OU	College Professor
Skokomish	Ph.D.	Higher Education	ASU	College Professor
Lumbee	Ph.D.	Indian Studies	U of A	Self-Employed
Apache	Ed.D.	Ed. Leadership	NAU	Superintendent
<b>FEMALES</b>				
Choctaw	Ed.D.	Ed. Administration	NAU	College President
Creek	Ph.D.	Ed. Technology	OU	College Admin.
Pineridge	Ed.D.	Indian Studies	ASU	Program Director
Navajo	Ed.D.	Ed. Psychology	NAU	Therapist
Navajo	Ed.D.	Ed. Psychology	NAU	Program Director
Yaqui	Ph.D.	Curriculum/Inst.	ASU	College Professor
Siksika	Ph.D.	Curriculum/Inst.	ASU	Program Director
Navajo	Ed.D.	Ed. Leadership	NAU	College Professor
Comanche	Ph.D.	Adult and Higher Ed	OU	Director/Prof.
Juaneno	Ed.D.	Indian Studies	ASU	College Professor

### *Research Findings*

To address the second strand of this research – why is education the field of choice for American Indian doctorate recipients? – each respondent was asked a series of prescribed questions. These questions were ultimately compressed into three metacategories: 1) why the doctorate in education?; 2) the utility that the doctorate provided, in terms of “voice”; and 3) the role that community – in the form of communal enrichment or “giving back” – played in the pursuit of the Education doctorate.

#### *Why Education?*

To some respondents the doctorate in Education was a natural appendage to both their personal and professional interests (particularly teaching) as well as a continuation of their previous academic degrees. The doctorate was the natural culmination of this personal and scholastic interest in the field of Education. A female respondent recalled:

My first interest was in teaching children. I did obtain a teaching credential. I was a certified teacher and I wanted to remain a certified teacher. During my teaching years, I noticed that the behavior of children and their difficulties in learning was something that I wanted to know more about. So, when I decided to go back to graduate school, I knew that educational psychology was the area in which I was interested.<sup>16</sup>

Another respondent stated, “When I first got my [bachelor’s] degree and started teaching, I immediately saw that the curriculum being used was not reaching the students. So I thought that I could make a difference. I pursued my doctorate in curriculum and instruction, thinking that this was the natural place to begin.”<sup>17</sup> A male respondent, who had been moving in and out of pedagogical circles for close to 20 years, discussed why he chose to pursue his doctorate in the field of Education:

From my standpoint, staying in the field of Education, whether it was a Ph.D. or Ed.D., really didn’t make any difference. I knew I was going to stay within Education. So, I wasn’t going to get my Ph.D. in History because, with that degree, that’s all I would do – teach History. With my degree in Education, I’m able to do far more things. There’s far broader implications concerning the field of Native Education that I’m now able to facilitate.<sup>18</sup>

Access was another issue that impacted degree choice. Some respondents linked their interest in the field of Education with the convenience of the program itself. “I wanted to stay within the field of adult Education. But because I was

working I needed a program that would be tailored to my specific needs.”<sup>19</sup> Another respondent stated that choosing a doctoral program in Education “provided a way that was very pragmatic. It got me what I was looking for. So, it was a combination of my underlying philosophy about education and the availability of the program itself.”<sup>20</sup>

For some, the field of Education was more than pure interest, it was destiny. “I never had any doubt that Education was the field for me. I knew it in grade school. I always wanted to be a teacher. But it wasn’t until way later that I started thinking about my doctorate.”<sup>21</sup> A second respondent compliments this “call to teaching” by stating, “I knew it. It was a drive. It was a calling.”<sup>22</sup>

One respondent addressed this issue of doctoral degree choice from an extremely pragmatic perspective. Knowing the often limited employment “market” on many reservations, the field of Education was one of a handful of professions that would facilitate employment. When asked why she chose to obtain her doctorate in the field of Education and not, say in Anthropology or Sociology, she responded:

You have to know the employment situations on these reservations. If you look at the economics on most reservations, they don’t deal in areas of Anthropology or Sociology. You’ve got educators, you’ve got teachers, you’ve got administrators, you’ve got health personnel, you’ve got transportation personnel. If you have a doctorate in Education, you’ll sure be able to use it out there.<sup>23</sup>

A handful of respondents also agreed that their decision to acquire the doctorate was driven as much by employment or economic reasons as by personal fulfillment. “To stay within the field of Education, I couldn’t advance without my doctorate.”<sup>24</sup> A female respondent who is now the president of a community college in a large urban city in the southwest stated, “Definitely, employment became important. There were only a few people in my district who had their doctorate degrees when I was hired. There’s no question in my mind that I would not be able to move through the ranks without the doctorate.”<sup>25</sup>

A very insightful parallel was made between the acquisition of the doctorate in Education and the “visibility” of educators, particularly on American Indian reservations. When asked why she chose the field of Education for her doctorate she stated:

I think there are larger numbers of Indians that go into the Education fields than any other because those are the first people we have contact with – educators. We see that (teaching) is something possible. We don’t have a lot of contact with doctors, or lawyers, or engineers or CEO’s. We see educators every day. We see that as an example of what we could be.<sup>26</sup>

### *Voice and Utility*

Communities of color are constantly searching for a platform, a forum, from which they can explore and articulate issues pertinent to their needs and beliefs. This can be described as a search for "space." Space may be an academic conference, a meeting, a classroom, or as casual as a passing conversation. Quite simply, space is access.

One issue that clearly emerged from the interviews was the notion of respect. To many, the doctorate was, and is, a concrete means for gaining respect, not exclusively within the American Indian community, but within the dominant, non-Native world as well. A female respondent expounded upon the heightened level of respect she now receives in her community due to her acquisition of the doctorate:

I notice, first of all, a different way of treatment. Even in the initial reaction of people who meet me. For a Native American to have a doctorate! To have studied at the doctorate level and be a school psychologist! There is an initial expression of pride and soon thereafter there is a level of respect.<sup>27</sup>

This new-found respect the doctorate provides, moves beyond awe and platitudes and facilitates access and action, traits not easily obtained by those who move within the system of red-tape bureaucracy. "With the respect that I now get, I'm able to get things moving a bit quicker than I did before. I get appointments much quicker. The requests that I make for services for the students are better listened to and better received."<sup>28</sup> Another respondent stated that his doctorate "seems to open doors and gets people to listen. When I am negotiating with other people, the government, or the mainstream, having those credentials does come in handy. The doctorate degree has made me a little more high profile. And, because of that, it gets your foot in the door that otherwise would be more difficult."<sup>29</sup>

A few respondents linked the doctorate to a bridge; a tangible means by which to link both Native and non-Native worlds. A male respondent articulated how his doctorate has enabled him to bridge two worlds with reverence and respect:

It certainly has allowed me to work more efficiently and effectively in the non-Indian world. I'm left to blend them together to live in both worlds. The traditional training allows me to live in the traditional world. The Ph.D. allows me to live in the contemporary world. The combination of both allows me to make the smooth transition between multiple worlds.<sup>30</sup>

Another issue that emerged was the utility the doctorate affords within the academic world. One respondent stated "Intellectually and academically, I would

say that the doctorate has been beneficial in the way that the academic community perceives me. But it hasn't been easy."<sup>31</sup> Another respondent used the word "authority" in discussing the utility of her doctorate. "You are now looked upon as an academic equal. I have traveled the same road that all the other Ph.D.'s have. With this comes a measure of opinion and authority."<sup>32</sup> Yet one male respondent struggled with the issue of authority particularly in reference to the multifaceted policy work he does. "If you are interested in American Indian education, American Indian affairs, multicultural education, and issues having to do with underrepresented people, the powers that be type-cast you that way. They pigeon-hole you."<sup>33</sup> One respondent discussed the academic and, in this case, societal pigeonholing that surrounds American Indian scholars in general yet seems to gain strength and voice from such prevalent stereotyping:

I used to get this all of the time. And I bet a lot of other Native scholars get it as well. "Oh, you are pretty articulate for an Indian." I've also heard: "What was it about you that led you to succeed when so many others didn't?" Like, "you're a credit to your race." In actuality, this kind of rhetoric has given me more of a forum because I debunk, on a daily basis, that perception, that stereotype.<sup>34</sup>

In this regard, the utility of his doctorate is the voice that he has gained. And with this voice has emerged a means by which to challenge the societal dogmas that surround American Indians, either exclusively within the academic circles of discourse, or within the conceptual perceptions of American Indians at large. His doctorate is a platform for transformation and change and begs for a recalibration of both perception and action.

Yet the most poignant articulation of utility of the American Indian doctorate in Education came from a respondent who, in the closing minutes of our conversation, added this to his interview:

You have to realize where you come from. Sometimes that piece of paper will open a lot of doors but if you abuse it, then that paper doesn't mean anything. This is especially true for Natives. For them, it's not just a piece of paper. What it represents is the future of their community. It's the community that you work for. It means that you never work alone.<sup>35</sup>

### *Community*

Much of the research concerning the educational motivations of students of color focuses on the belief that being an educator facilitates a means by which to go back or to give back to one's community.<sup>36</sup> This notion of educational communalism has been referenced specifically within the Chicano community<sup>37</sup> and the African American community.<sup>38</sup> Within the scant research that explores

the motivations of American Indian students to enter the field of Education, the notion of community is prevalent as well.<sup>39</sup>

This question of community or communal enhancement/importance was addressed within the interviews. Many believed that there was a communal component inherent in their acquisition of the doctorate degree in Education. This communal component seems to run parallel with a tenet of American Indian lifeways, which promote and cherish communal ties. One respondent stated that after she received her doctorate "It was expected of me to go back. That is a value, an ideal that makes Native peoples unique. We are supposed to go back."<sup>40</sup> Another respondent seconded this communal expectation by stating:

People are always telling you that you must serve your community regardless if you have a Ph.D. or not. As a child, you are instilled with the value [of giving]. That you look for the collective good. That's very different from mainstream society in which it's very individualistic. With us, it's what is going to benefit everyone. All decisions are being done with the collective good in mind.<sup>41</sup>

Many respondents approached the link between doctorate receipt and community from a very pragmatic perspective. Articulating the importance of community in her decision to pursue her doctorate, a respondent recalled:

All of my degrees had a lot to do with community. I always thought 'What can I do to help?' It was never a personal thing, you know, 'What's in it for me?' Even when I was in high school and I knew that I was going to the university, I would ask 'What can I do?' Even though I never saw myself as a teacher, I chose education as a way to give back to my community.<sup>42</sup>

A male respondent simply stated, "Growing up in the reservation, I saw the need to go to college and gain the skills and knowledge necessary to be of service to my people."<sup>43</sup> Another respondent stated:

Certainly, getting a degree does mean that you give back. When you come to the university or college, your family comes with you. And you do not do this alone. Because your community is looking at you to be successful. And they may not know what that really means and what's all involved. But at times, that pressure, that expectation, is a burden. When I was in my program, I would hear my classmates say 'Well, I'm just doing this for me.' And I was feeling that I had to do it not just for me. My whole community was looking at me.<sup>44</sup>

Did these respondents have to live and work on their reservations to "give

back” to their communities? This spatial disengagement was referenced by several respondents when discussing the issue of community. An educational analyst described how she is able to participate in American Indian education at large from her position in a major southwestern city:

After I received my doctorate, I thought, at some point, that I would be able to assist, but I wasn’t too sure what capacity that would be in. I knew that I didn’t want to go back to teaching on the reservation. But I knew that if I dealt with Indian education, somehow I would be involved.<sup>45</sup>

A program director in an urban city describes how she can effectively implement change within American Indian educational circles without being physically located on her home reservation:

When I got my Ph.D., I really thought that I was going to return to my community to be an educational counselor. Then I was offered a job at the university. That sort of threw me away from returning to the community. Even though I’m not living on the reservation, I do feel that I have made contributions just as effectively, maybe even more so. I feel that as long as I can work outside the community and contribute very much to that community, through the mentoring of other Indian graduate students, or the grant writing and the programs that I’m involved with, I know that I am making a contribution.<sup>46</sup>

### *Discussion*

The reasons why these American Indian scholars chose the field of Education offer a fascinating glimpse into an issue that has, heretofore, been absent from the scholastic record. In this regard, why did these American Indians choose the field of Education for their doctoral studies? The answers are as diverse as they are enlightening.

Service was a tremendous motivator for American Indians to pursue the doctorate in Education. Incumbent in service is the notion of change. Some entered the doctoral program in Education as a means to facilitate change, either at the local or community level or within the dictates of American Indian education at large. Many believed that the “weight” of their doctorate – access, respect, knowledge – would serve as a vehicle to facilitate change. Many saw the doctorate as a means by which to challenge and redefine the dogmatic perceptions that linked American Indians with limited academic potential. Some desired to organize and implement policy that would directly assist American Indian students.

Community was also an important motivator. Many felt that it was their

obligation to serve their immediate community (reservation) or to serve the larger American Indian community. This expectation was cultural. Several of the respondents stated that it was part of their cultural upbringing – the “Indian way” – as one respondent put it, to give back to one’s community.

Many of the respondents unabashedly claimed that they were able to affect greater change off the reservation than on it. Through their writing, teaching, politicking, and their physical presence off the reservation, they were able to move in avenues of access and influence which, in turn, facilitated voice and action. One respondent claimed that “I am much more effective in this office that I would be on any reservation.”<sup>47</sup> These American Indian scholars felt obliged to enlighten and inform, through voice and action, those entities that perpetuate the American Indian educational myth of pandemic mediocrity. Through voice and action, these American Indian doctorates can serve to promote and facilitate dialogue and can lead to constructive change. It is bridge building at its most communal and essential form. The doctorate in Education is the cornerstone of this bridge.

### ***Conclusion***

This research had two objectives: to quantify American Indian doctorate receipt between 1980-2000 and to qualitatively uncover the multiple motivations of American Indian doctorate recipients particularly within the field of Education, for numbers are hollow unless contextualized.

Quantitatively, three sweeping conclusions can be reached. First, that American Indians are underrepresented in doctorate receipt in every broadfield discipline with the exception of Education. Secondly, Education dominated doctorate production between 1980-2000 for both American Indian females and males. Lastly, there were significant percentage increases made in terms of select broadfield disciplines, reflecting a move towards a more diversified doctorate receipt distribution.

This research also provided a glimpse into the personal and professional motivations of selected American Indian doctorate recipients. In doing so, it has given voice to these forgotten scholars. Their motivations are clear: heightened access and utility, respect, communal enhancement, and dispelling of cultural and educational debilitating stereotypes.

The quantitative and qualitative understanding of American Indian doctorate production is important for those colleges and universities attempting to facilitate a greater presence of students of color on campuses. Concerted and aggressive recruitment of such students into graduate programs is seen as a key to enhancing doctorate production. Programs such as Life Science and Social Science for females and Physical Science and Engineering for males must capitalize on the surging American Indian doctorate interest in these fields. Institutional and economic support is also imperative to the sustained growth of

American Indian doctorate recipients. It is through such proactive means that the production and diversity of American Indian doctorates will continue. A roadmap, a pipeline of sorts, which chronicles the patterns of American Indian doctorate recipients has been presented. It is incumbent upon colleges and universities to facilitate and sustain the travel.

### Notes

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