Barriers and Enablers to Native American Persistence in Higher Education Programs: Narratives from Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians

Bianca J. York-Crockett

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Barriers and Enablers to Native American Persistence in Higher Education Programs: Narratives from Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians

by

Bianca Jonique York-Crockett

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School, the College of Science and Technology and the Department of Human Capital Development at The University of Southern Mississippi in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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May 2018
ABSTRACT

According to data from the U. S. Census Bureau (2016), Native Americans have the lowest postsecondary education completion rate (13.8%) among all racial and ethnic groups in the United States; and simultaneously, Native Americans had the second highest unemployment rate among all ethnic groups. A positive and direct correlation exists between a community’s economic growth and the attainment of higher education by members within that community (Becker, 1994; Fann, 2009). Though 567 federally recognized tribes exist in the United States, this research study focuses on one tribe, the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians (MBCI). The national postsecondary six-year completion rate for the 2010 cohort was 54.8% (Shapiro et al., 2016). During the same period, the post-secondary completion rate for MBCI tribal members who used the tribe’s scholarship program was 20.6%.

This study identified barriers and enablers that influence MBCI tribal members’ persistence in higher education programs in order to support effective strategies to help increase the post-secondary completion rate for tribal members. The concept of social support (Cobb, 1976; Vaux et al., 1986), self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2008), self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977, 1989), transculturation theory (Hallowell, 1963; Huffman, 2001), and integration theory (Oxendine, 2015; Tinto, 1975, 2006) form the theoretical foundation to support the influencing factors affecting MBCI students in higher education programs. The enablers identified in this study include self-determination, to be a role model, Choctaw pride, personal goals, a positive support system, acceptance and involvement, and the utilization of student support services. The
barriers identified include self-doubt, lack of preparation, personal struggles, school/life balance, lack of support, and lack of necessities.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis was used to interpret the lived collegiate experiences of MBCI tribal members. The importance of personal support networks, academic preparedness, a sense of belongingness, and self-determination for the persistence of MBCI students throughout post-secondary education programs were identified. The findings and recommendations could be valuable to tribal leaders and educators to develop effective strategies to increase MBCI students’ persistence in institutions of higher education.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to give a special thanks to my dissertation chair, Dr. Brown, for his endless dedication and guidance throughout this journey. The genuine interest you continuously expressed regarding this topic of study has always been and forever will be appreciated. Thank you to my dissertation committee, Dr. Heather Annulis, Dr. Cyndi Gaudet, and Dr. Dale Lunsford for your guidance and advice throughout this process. Thank you to Mrs. Suzy Robinson and Mrs. Robin Johnson for all the support and dedication you show to everyone in the program.

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to Melanie Carson and the staff at the MBCI Tribal Scholarship Program. I appreciate the support and assistance you provided in making this research study possible. To the research participants, I am grateful to each of you for taking time out of your day to share your lived experiences. You made this possible. I sincerely appreciate everyone who played a part in making this research study a success, and helping me achieve this milestone.
DEDICATION

Peace to my ancestors and my elders. I walk in your strength, legacy, and power, today and every day. -Author unknown

Thank you to my family and friends who genuinely supported me throughout this laborious process. To my parents, thank you both for instilling in me the belief that I can achieve anything I set my mind to. I am ever so grateful for your continued support throughout my collegiate career and throughout life, in general. To my friends, thank you for showing your love and support through words of encouragement. Your acts of care and kindness let me know there is still goodness in this world. You all truly pushed me to continuously believe in myself, and I am ever so grateful for each of you. To my rock…the one who had to endure the good, the bad, and the ugly sides of me throughout this process, thank you! The acts of generosity and love you have shown me over the years did not go unnoticed. I truly appreciate you and everything you have done to support me through this process.

This accomplishment is not mine alone. I dedicate this to each one of you, because without you this would not have been possible. I am forever grateful.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MBCI</td>
<td>Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSP</td>
<td>Tribal Scholarship Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPA</td>
<td>Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2016), Native Americans have the lowest postsecondary education completion rate (13.8%) among all racial and ethnic groups in the United States. Caucasians, African-Americans, Asians, and Hispanics have postsecondary completion rates of 31.1%, 19.5%, 51.4%, and 14.3%, respectively (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). The number of degrees conferred to Native Americans has declined at each postsecondary level, certificate through doctorate, over the past five years (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2016). Table 1 shows the percent change in the number of degrees conferred over a five-year period and one-year period. The largest declines over a five-year period are among the number of bachelor’s and master’s degrees conferred to Native American students. The number of certificates and doctorate degrees conferred to Natives increased during the one-year period, whereas the number of associate’s, bachelor’s, and master’s degrees conferred to Natives within the same time period decreased.

Table 1

*Degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions to Native Americans*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>Percent Change</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>2013-2014</td>
<td>2014-2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificates</td>
<td>12,003</td>
<td>10,817</td>
<td>11,084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate's</td>
<td>10,101</td>
<td>10,338</td>
<td>9,993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>12,405</td>
<td>10,784</td>
<td>10,211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>3,965</td>
<td>3,512</td>
<td>3,412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>952</td>
<td>861</td>
<td>884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39,426</td>
<td>36,312</td>
<td>35,584</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Data is representative of postsecondary institutions participating in the Title IV federal financial aid program.


1
The varied rates of degree attainment among ethnic groups illustrate a broad perspective of the disparity between Native Americans and other ethnicities in higher education institutions (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Native Americans had the lowest postsecondary completion rate in 2015, and in the same year, Native Americans had the second highest unemployment rate (14.7%) among all ethnic groups (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that there is a strong correlation between employment and educational attainment; meaning well-educated individuals in the United States experience some of the lowest levels of unemployment and earn larger incomes (www.bls.gov). Additionally, existing literature on economic development states a positive and direct correlation between a community’s economic growth and the attainment of higher education by members within that community (Becker, 1994; Fann, 2009).

Literature states 42% of Native Americans are under the age of 25; therefore, ensuring Native youth receive quality education is a critical factor for fostering future economic success and improving community welfare (National Congress of American Indians, 2013). Tribes have control over internal assets, which are critical factors in the successful economic development on Native American reservations, including natural resources, culture, institutions of governance, and human capital (Cornell & Kalt, 1992). The development of human and social capital through higher education programs will stimulate economic and political viability within Native American tribes; therefore, as human capital grows, so do the chances of successful development throughout tribal lands (Cornell & Kalt, 1992; Marling, 2012). Investments in higher education “provides tribal economies with a more highly skilled workforce, but also can directly spur
economic development and job creation on tribal lands” (NCAI Policy Research Center, 2012, p. 2). Advanced levels of education encourages personal advancement, and as a result, improves social welfare and community empowerment—key factors that contribute towards the maintenance of cultural vitality and advancing sovereignty for Native American tribes (NCAI Policy Research Center, 2012).

Currently, Native Americans maintain undesirable educational attainment and unemployment rates, as compared to other ethnic groups within the United States. To understand the plight of present-day Native Americans, one should understand the group’s background. The following section provides a brief synopsis on the impacts American history has on the evolution of education among Native American people.

Background of the Study

Native Americans, also known as American Indians, have a long history that includes their forced assimilation into the dominant culture (Garrett & Pichette, 2000). *Assimilation* is the adoption of another culture, or to become part of a different society, country, etc. (Assimilation, n.d.). Understanding the historical experiences of Native Americans is critical in comprehending their present state of being. Garrett and Pichette (2000) state that the attempts of assimilating Native Americans into the dominant culture left a lasting impact on Natives and their way of life. Throughout history, a number of instances occurred where the U.S. government mistreated Native Americans, and this harmful history continues to resonate throughout Native tribes to this day (Garrett & Pichette, 2000). Garrett and Pichette (2000) state, “it is important to understand the influence of oppression on a person’s experience and to assess the extent to which the
process of acculturation has affected or continues to affect a person’s cultural identity” (p. 5).

According to Juntunen and Cline (2010), “the lasting implications of forced assimilation strategies are demonstrated through various aspects of contemporary life for American Indians, including mental health, physical health, economic, and educational concerns” (p. 393). Garrett and Pichette (2000) note Native children were sent off to schools where they were forced to cut their hair, banned from speaking in their Native tongue, and forced to adapt the skills and lifestyles of the dominant culture. Marling (2012) states negative historical relationships between tribes and the dominant culture have adversely affected the success of Native students in higher education by “decreasing the perceived value of college degrees amongst tribes and even creating conflict between the formal education process and tribal culture and values” (p. 5).

The Impact of Higher Education on Native Americans and Tribes

The education gap between Native Americans and the total population is largely due to the difficulty Native American students face when transitioning to postsecondary education (Carlyle, 2007). According to Fann (2009), implementing college preparatory programs in high schools and emphasizing the importance of education will help increase the chances for Native students to enter and complete higher education programs. As a result, an educated Native American workforce will have a positive social and economic impact throughout their respective tribe; and Natives who attain degrees in higher education can possibly serve as role models for the younger generation of Natives (Cunningham, McSwain, & Keselman, 2007).
Tribes have a stake in encouraging their tribal members to attain degrees from higher education institutions and, in turn, return to the reservation to apply their skills and knowledge to benefit the tribe (Marling, 2012). According to Marling (2012), “one of the key obstacles to economic development for tribes is the lack of human capital to fill the roles many tribes need to expand their economies” (p. 106). The NCAI Policy Research Center (2012) cites, “tribes need Native college graduates to contribute their skills back home, boost available human capital and thereby attract new businesses, reduce unemployment, stimulate reservation economies through direct spending, and launch their own entrepreneurial ventures” (p. 2). Investments in higher education can result in benefits for both the individual as well as the tribe, and those benefits include “higher rates of employment, less reliance on public assistance, increased levels of health and a greater sense of civic responsibility” (Cunningham et al., 2007, p. 3).

Research on the Native American experience in institutions of higher education investigates various perspectives based on tribal affiliation, college attended, field of study, or collegiate classification, just to name a few. Literature cites the most common enablers for Native American persistence in higher education programs include family support, cultural connection, self-efficacy, academic preparedness, and the support of faculty and staff (Carlyle, 2007; Chee, 2008; Mendoza, 2014; Oosahwe, 2008; Oxendine, 2015). The most common barriers Native American students face, as found in previous literature, are peer pressure, economic depression, pressure to conform, stereotyping, and isolation (Chee, 2008; Mendoza, 2014; Oosahwe, 2008; Oxendine, 2015). The aforementioned influencing factors for college persistence are not specific to any one Native American tribe.
The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians

Though there are 567 federally recognized Native American tribes throughout the United States, this research study focuses on the tribe within one of the lowest rated states, economically and educationally, within the country. The state of Mississippi has one of the lowest state economies and ranks as the state with the lowest median annual household income in the United States (Bernardo, 2017b). Mississippi has the poorest population in the nation with 20.8% of the state living below poverty (Bishaw & Benson, 2017). Mississippi also ranks as the second least educated state in the country, based on three key determinants: educational attainment, achievement gaps between gender and races, and school quality (Bernardo, 2017a). Additionally, Mississippi is among the bottom five states with the lowest percentage of high-school diploma holders, lowest percentage of associate degree holders, lowest percentage of bachelor’s degree holders, and lowest percentage of graduate or professional degree holders (Bernardo, 2017a). The employment rate of Whites ages 25-54 within the state of Mississippi was 74.9% between 2009 and 2011; and, during the same period, the employment rate of Native Americans in Mississippi was 69.7% (Austin, 2013).

The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians (MBCI) is the only federally recognized tribe in the state of Mississippi. The current study focuses solely on the lived collegiate experiences of MBCI tribal members. The MBCI’s tribal lands cover over 35,000 acres in ten different counties in the state (www.choctaw.org). The tribe consists of over 10,000 tribal members, a majority of which live on reservation lands. The MBCI has its own tribal school system, which consists of six elementary schools, one middle school, and one boarding high school, all located on the reservation (www.choctaw.org).
The school system serves more than 1,700 students and is the largest locally controlled Indian school system in the country (www.choctaw.org).

The evolution of education for the MBCI sets a foundation for understanding and examining the lived experiences of tribal members in a higher education setting. The history of the Choctaw education system dates back to 1819 when the tribe opened their first schools with the help of the American Board of Commissioners to Foreign Missions (Carlyle, 2007). By 1830, the Mississippi Choctaws had one of the premier education programs in the region; however, the signing of the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek turned the Choctaws’ education programs over to the federal government (Carlyle, 2007; Ferrara, 1998).

According to Ferrara (1998), the quality of the Mississippi Choctaw education system began to drastically decline once under the control of the federal government. Today, the MBCI has a boarding high school that serves students from the tribe’s eight communities (www.choctaw.org). In 1994, the tribe established the tribal scholarship program (TSP), and the program’s objective is to provide financial and academic aid to qualified tribal members who commit to pursuing post-secondary education (www.choctaw.org).

Limited research exists detailing the college experiences of MBCI students who attend post-secondary education institutions. Carlyle (2007) conducted a study to identify the barriers MBCI students face in higher education programs. Between 1994 and 2005, 1,519 tribal members received funding from the MBCI TSP to attend college, and during that same period, 446 students (29.4%) completed post-secondary education programs with a certificate or degree (Carlyle, 2007). The results of Carlyle’s (2007)
study show MBCI students face barriers including racial conflict, feelings of being academically overwhelmed, and having to care for a dependent. Recommendations from the research study suggest additional research to gain deeper understanding of the issues MBCI students face in higher education programs (Carlyle, 2007).

Statement of the Problem

In 2105, Native Americans had the lowest postsecondary education completion rate, and in the same year, Native Americans had the second highest unemployment rate (14.7%) of all ethnicities (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Becker (1994) states the most important investment required to create and develop human capital are investments in education and training. In order to develop effective tribal economies, tribal leaders and professionals should be educated and knowledgeable to serve within the various industries located within the tribe (Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, 2008). Identifying factors that assist in the persistence in post-secondary education can increase Native American degree completion rates and, in turn, strengthen tribal human capital via higher education.

The MBCI’s TSP funded approximately 1,000 tribal members to attend a post-secondary education institution between Fall 2011 and Spring 2017, and during that same period, 206 students completed a certificate or degree (M. Carson, personal communication, March 21, 2017). Only 20.4% of MBCI students who attended a higher education institution between 2011 and 2017 completed the program with a certificate or degree (M. Carson, personal communication, March 4, 2017). This percentage is much lower than the national postsecondary six-year completion rate for the 2010 cohort, which was 54.8% (Shapiro et al., 2016). If barriers and enablers to higher education are
not addressed, the MBCI risks negative impacts such as increased unemployment, a lack of skills and knowledge, and a decrease in social welfare among its most valuable asset, human capital. An underdeveloped workforce can adversely affect the tribe’s future economic environment and socioeconomic status.

Statement of Purpose

While literature identifies barriers and enablers that affect Native American students’ persistence while attending higher education programs (Carlyle, 2007; Chee, 2008; Mendoza, 2014; Oosahwe, 2008; Oxendine, 2015), the results are not generalizable to every Native American tribe. The purpose of this study was to seek an in-depth understanding of MBCI students’ lived experiences while attending post-secondary education programs, and to identify barriers and enablers that influence MBCI tribal members’ persistence while attending higher education programs. The results will provide recommendations to assist in increasing post-secondary completion rates for the tribe.

Research Questions

The current study documents the lived experiences of MBCI tribal members who are currently enrolled in a post-secondary education program or whom have graduated from a post-secondary education institution within the past five years. Three questions served as a basis for guiding the research in a direction to gather information necessary to fulfill the study’s purpose. The following research questions served as the foundation for the current study:

1. What factors enable Choctaw students to persist and complete higher education programs?
2. What barriers hinder Choctaw students’ persistence and completion of higher education programs?

3. What are the experiences of Choctaw students in higher education programs?

Research Objectives

This study explores the lived experiences of Choctaw students to identify the motivational factors that contribute to their persistence while attending higher education programs. In addition, the research will identify the barriers Choctaw students face while persisting in an institution of higher education. Overall, Native Americans have the lowest post-secondary completion rate among all ethnic groups in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). The current study focuses on the education rates of one tribe, the MBCI. The tribe’s TSP reports the six-year post-secondary completion rate among tribal members using the program is 20.4%, which is nearly 34 percentage points lower than the national rate. Identifying and understanding the barriers can assist educators and counselors in strategizing and preparing the MBCI youth prior to entering institutions of higher education, which can result in an increased postsecondary education completion rate for MBCI tribal members. The research objectives are as follows:

**RO1** - Describe the demographic characteristics of the study participants, including age, gender, and education level.

**RO2** - Identify the perceived enablers that influence Choctaw students’ persistence while attending a higher education program.

**RO3** - Identify the perceived barriers that hinder Choctaw students’ persistence while attending a higher education program.
Document the lived experiences of Choctaw students who attended a post-secondary education institution, and the perceived influence of those experiences on persistence while attending higher education institutions.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual model in Figure 1 illustrates the influential factors for academic persistence, from the perspective of MBCI tribal members. The research identified seven enablers for academic persistence, which include self-determination, to serve as a role model, Choctaw pride, fulfillment of personal goals, a positive support system, acceptance and involvement, and the utilization of student support services. The research identifies six barriers to academic persistence, including self-doubt, lack of preparation, personal struggles, school/life balance, a lack of support, and a lack of necessities. The figure illustrates how academic persistence in post-secondary education programs can result in an educated, skilled and knowledgeable workforce. Additionally, the figure identifies the possible economic and social outcomes resulting from an educated, skilled, and knowledgeable workforce.

A combination of theories and concepts support the themes identified as enablers to Native American persistence in higher education. Some theories apply to investigating motivational factors of academic persistence among various ethnic groups; however, others, such as transculturation theory, are specific in investigating the experiences of Native Americans in postsecondary education. Deci and Ryan’s (1985) self-determination theory is a macro theory of human motivation that addresses the motivation a person has to predict important outcomes. Bandura’s (1977) self-efficacy theory states a person’s belief in himself or herself affects his or her ability to perform a
behavior. Chee (2008) conducted research on Native American undergraduates that reported a positive correlation between self-efficacy and the confidence to complete academic work in college. Cultural connection is associated with Huffman’s transculturation theory and the theory addresses a barrier to education attainment, the pressure to conform. Transculturation theory simply states the need for strong cultural association and the ability to resist assimilating into the dominant culture (Huffman, 1991). Lastly, Tinto’s (1993) integration theory states academic integration is partially reliant on the experiences students have with faculty and staff, and suggests students who feel isolated are less likely to integrate into their collegiate environment. Oxendine (2015) incorporated integration theory in the investigation of Native American college students in non-Native colleges and universities. The study reported Natives cited their relationship with peers and faculty members as predictors for a sense of belonging within the collegiate setting (Oxendine, 2015). Researchers define social support as the support available to an individual via “other individuals, groups, and the larger community” (Lin, Ensel, Simeone, & Kuo, 1979, p. 109). Chapter 2 discusses the theories in detail.
Figure 1. Influencing factors for academic persistence conceptual model
Significance of the Study

Educators and counselors can benefit from this study in preparing Choctaw students to successfully persist throughout a higher education program; resulting in the development of the MBCI’s human and social capital as well as growth in economic development. Census data from 2010 reveals 20.5% of Native Americans in the United States lived on a federal reservation or on off-reservation trust lands (Norris, Vines, & Hoeffel, 2012). The MBCI is comprised of approximately 10,800 tribal members, with about 84% of its members living on the reservation and 16% living off reservation lands (M. Dreifuss, personal communication, February 22, 2017). The MBCI currently employs approximately 6,000 people in a variety of professions and industries (www.choctaw.org). Since a vast number of MBCI members live on the reservation, the tribe should encourage the continuous development of a knowledgeable and qualified workforce to expand tribal economic development. In conjunction with existing literature, the results derived from this study can assist tribal leaders and educators in the strategic development of programs that could positively influence the educational persistence throughout all Native American tribes.

The current research can serve as a foundation for future studies regarding not only Choctaws, but also all Native Americans, in higher education. The research from this study can help identify factors that attribute to the educational gap between Native Americans and other ethnic groups within the United States. As a result, the findings can serve as a foundation for those counseling or mentoring Native American students to spread awareness about key motivational factors to attain degrees in higher education (Juntunen & Cline, 2010). School counselors and teachers can use the information from
this study to learn how to affectively prepare and equip Native American students with the knowledge and tools necessary to persevere in a higher education program (Juntunen & Cline, 2010).

Educating Native youth has a significant impact on the prosperity of Native American tribes throughout the country. Written history regards Native Americans as a marginalized group; however, many Native Americans are breaking the mold and attaining degrees of higher education (Oosahwe, 2008). The researcher investigated the problem to gain an understanding of the factors that play a significant role in overcoming the gap in post-secondary education completion rates. Educators, mentors, and counselors who work with high school students can use the results of this research study as a guide to help transition Choctaw students into higher education programs.

Delimitations

Delimitations are boundaries the researcher has set for the study, which lets the reader know the scope of the research (Roberts, 2010). Two delimitations exist for this research study. First, this study focuses on members of one tribe, the MBCI. Though there are two Choctaw tribes, this study is not inclusive of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, who governs independently from the MBCI. Currently, 567 Native American tribes throughout the United States are federally recognized (www.ncai.org). Due to the vast cultural differences between tribes, the results of this study may not apply to the entire Native American population. The second delimitation is the researcher only sought participation from members of the MBCI who are currently using the assistance from the TSP to attend an institution of higher education or a TSP recipient who has graduated from an institution of higher education within the past five years. Some
enrolled members of the tribe do not, or cannot, use the TSP as a resource due to the failure to meet the minimum entrance requirements; therefore, they are not included in the target population. According to the MBCI (2013) TSP Policies and Procedures, scholarship applicants must meet one of the following requirements:

1. Minimum composite score of 15 on the enhanced ACT, or its equivalent SAT score, or
2. Minimum composite score of 11 on the ACT if taken prior to 1989, or
3. Minimum composite score of 12th grade on the Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE), Level 7, or
4. Minimum cumulative grade point average of 2.5 on at least 12 semester hours (or the equivalent) of college level core academic classes, including English Composition I with a minimum grade of “C”, and
5. Freshman students who make below a composite score of 17 on the enhanced ACT will be required to attend, and complete, a 2-year degree at a community or junior college. Commuting freshman students who score below the 17 minimum ACT may attend a senior college/university only if the community or junior college is substantially far from their home, or none exists. However, this will not apply to freshman students who want to attend BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs] or Tribally controlled colleges and have attained the minimum 15 ACT score. (p. 3)

Verifying tribal enrollment is a part of the TSP application process; therefore, using the program’s data pool minimizes the enrollment verification process for the researcher.
Assumptions

Assumptions are the ideas taken for granted in a research study (Roberts, 2010). The current research study has three assumptions. First, the sample studied in this research is representative of the total population of the MBCI. Second, the participants of the study could accurately recall the motivational factors and barriers they faced throughout their experience in a higher education program. Lastly, the researcher assumed that all participants truthfully responded to each question.

Definition of Terms

The meanings and interpretations of terms can vary among different readers. The listing of terms and definitions exists for clarity and consistency within this study. The definitions of the terms are as follows:

1. *Culture Conflict* – the experience of being associated with two cultures, resulting in identity crises (Garrett & Pichette, 2000).
2. *Higher Education* – Education that extends beyond the K-12 grade level; for example, education from a college or university institution (Higher education, n.d.).
3. *Native American* – “A person who is a member of a tribe that is recognized by the United States government, or a person who is not a member of the tribe but has a blood-lineage traceable to Native American ancestors” (Krogman, 2013, p. 8).
5. *Post-secondary Institution* – “An academic, vocational, technical, home study, business, professional, or other school, college or university - or other organization or person – offering educational credentials or offering instruction or educational services for attainment of educational, professional, or vocational objectives” (National Center for Education Statistics, 1981, p. 3).

6. *Self-Efficacy* – An individual’s belief regarding their ability to achieve certain behaviors or outcomes (Bandura, 1977).

7. *Social Capital* – The network among individuals who reside and work within a particular society, which allows for the effective functionality of that society (Social capital, n.d.).

**Summary**

Marling (2012) states higher education is key in developing an effective and efficient workforce educated in various career fields; and the development of human capital will stimulate economic and political viability within Native American tribes. The MBCI established the TSP to provide financial assistance to qualified tribal members who commit to pursue higher education. According to Carlyle (2007), only 29.3% of Choctaw students who used the scholarship program actually attained a degree in higher education. The purpose of this study was to seek an in-depth understanding of MBCI students’ lived experience while attending postsecondary education programs. Specifically, the study identifies barriers that hinder Choctaw students from persisting in higher education programs and it identifies enablers that facilitate Choctaw student persistence while attending higher education programs. The next chapter provides a
detailed review of literature and theories that pertain to MBCI tribal members’ persistence while attending higher education.
CHAPTER II – LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing literature identifies the factors that contribute to academic persistence in postsecondary-education programs; however, little research identifies the factors that influence the persistence of MBCI tribal members while attending post-secondary education programs. This chapter discusses the present-day demographics of postsecondary institutions in the United States, the significance of human capital and education, and the concepts and theories relating to the enablers that influence MBCI students’ persistence while attending higher education programs. The chapter closes with an overview of the barriers that affect college persistence, and specifically, the barriers that influence MBCI students’ academic persistence while attending post-secondary education programs.

Demographics for Postsecondary Education Institutions in the United States

The enrollment rate at all postsecondary (undergraduate and post baccalaureate) institutions increased 17% between 2004 and 2014; however, enrollment decreased 4% between 2010 and 2014 (Snyder et al., 2016). Both undergraduate and post baccalaureate enrollment rates increased 17% between 2004 and 2014, totaling 17.3 million and 2.9 million, respectively (Snyder et al., 2016). Postsecondary education enrollment in fall 2014 consisted of 65% of students at a 4-year institution, 33% at a 2-year institution, and 2% at a less-than-2-year institution (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The percentage of 18 to 24 year-olds enrolled in postsecondary institutions increased two percentage points, over a 10-year period, to 40% in 2014 (Snyder et al., 2016). In 2014, students aged 25 years and older accounted for 40% of all enrolled students (U.S.
Researchers project college enrollment to increase by 15% between the Fall 2014 and Fall 2025 semesters (Snyder et al., 2016).

Native American enrollment in postsecondary institutions accounts for approximately 1% of the total enrolled population (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). In fall of 2010, approximately 196,000 Native Americans enrolled in a postsecondary institution but in fall of 2014, the number of enrolled Natives decreased to approximately 153,000, which is a 22% decrease (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The percentage of 18 to 24 year-olds Native Americans enrolled in postsecondary institutions increased 11 percentage points, over a 10-year period, to 35% in 2014 (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Snyder et al. (2016) reports that in 2014, Native Americans had the third lowest college enrollment rate of all ethnicities, for individuals 18 to 24 years of age; however, the rate was a decrease from their highest enrollment rate of 41% in 2010.

In 2014, 17,879 students enrolled in a degree-granting tribally controlled postsecondary institution, and Native Americans accounted for 79% of the overall total enrolled (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Since 2000, tribal institutions have experienced a 31% increase in the enrollment rate; however, there has been a steady decrease in the enrollment rate since 2010 (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Tribally controlled postsecondary institutions conferred 1,266 associate’s degrees and 295 bachelor’s degrees in 2014 (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Table 2 shows the number of degrees conferred by higher education institutions based on race/ethnicity and level of degree during the academic years 2009-2010, 2013-2014, and 2014-2015. The data provides an overview of the disparity in degree conferment between Native Americans and other ethnicities in postsecondary programs.
Table 2

*Degrees conferred by postsecondary institutions by race/ethnicity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Degree and Academic Year</th>
<th>Total¹</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>American Indian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Certificates</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009 to 2010</td>
<td>935,719</td>
<td>511,186</td>
<td>191,657</td>
<td>172,015</td>
<td>41,407</td>
<td>12,003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 to 2014</td>
<td>969,278</td>
<td>523,015</td>
<td>177,860</td>
<td>185,677</td>
<td>43,800</td>
<td>10,817</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 to 2015</td>
<td>961,167</td>
<td>512,017</td>
<td>174,793</td>
<td>188,090</td>
<td>44,694</td>
<td>11,084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% change from 2009-2010 to 2014-2015</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>-9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>-8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% change from 2013-2014 to 2014-2015</td>
<td>-1%</td>
<td>-2%</td>
<td>-2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009 to 2010</td>
<td>848,856</td>
<td>522,376</td>
<td>113,876</td>
<td>112,403</td>
<td>44,026</td>
<td>10,101</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013 to 2014</td>
<td>1,005,155</td>
<td>601,959</td>
<td>134,621</td>
<td>168,106</td>
<td>50,368</td>
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<td>2014 to 2015</td>
<td>1,013,971</td>
<td>590,390</td>
<td>137,892</td>
<td>180,515</td>
<td>51,750</td>
<td>9,993</td>
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<tr>
<td>% change from 2009-2010 to 2014-2015</td>
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<td>7%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>-1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% change from 2013-2014 to 2014-2015</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>-2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>-3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009 to 2010</td>
<td>1,649,919</td>
<td>1,167,322</td>
<td>164,789</td>
<td>140,426</td>
<td>117,391</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013 to 2014</td>
<td>1,870,150</td>
<td>1,218,998</td>
<td>191,437</td>
<td>202,425</td>
<td>131,662</td>
<td>10,784</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 to 2015</td>
<td>1,894,934</td>
<td>1,210,523</td>
<td>192,715</td>
<td>217,718</td>
<td>133,996</td>
<td>10,211</td>
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<td>% change from 2009-2010 to 2014-2015</td>
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<td>4%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<tr>
<td>% change from 2013-2014 to 2014-2015</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>-1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>-5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Degree and Academic Year</th>
<th>Total(^1)</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>American Indian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Master’s</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009 to 2010</td>
<td>693,313</td>
<td>445,158</td>
<td>76,472</td>
<td>43,603</td>
<td>42,520</td>
<td>3,965</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013 to 2014</td>
<td>754,582</td>
<td>444,771</td>
<td>88,606</td>
<td>55,962</td>
<td>44,533</td>
<td>3,512</td>
</tr>
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<td>2014 to 2015</td>
<td>758,708</td>
<td>433,106</td>
<td>87,265</td>
<td>58,684</td>
<td>44,517</td>
<td>3,412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% change from 2009-2010 to 2014-2015</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>-3%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>-14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% change from 2013-2014 to 2014-2015</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>-3%</td>
<td>-2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>-3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Doctor’s</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009 to 2010</td>
<td>158,590</td>
<td>104,419</td>
<td>10,413</td>
<td>8,085</td>
<td>16,560</td>
<td>952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 to 2014</td>
<td>177,587</td>
<td>110,157</td>
<td>12,621</td>
<td>10,665</td>
<td>19,118</td>
<td>861</td>
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<tr>
<td>2014 to 2015</td>
<td>178,547</td>
<td>108,912</td>
<td>13,278</td>
<td>11,257</td>
<td>19,193</td>
<td>884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% change from 2009-2010 to 2014-2015</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>-7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% change from 2013-2014 to 2014-2015</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>-1%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Data is representative of postsecondary institutions participating in the Title IV federal financial aid program. Adapted from U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics* (2015 ed.).

\(^1\)Includes individuals who identify with two or more races and non-resident aliens.
The Native American group showed an increase in the number of certificates and doctor’s degrees obtained in 2014-2015 from the prior school year. The year over year decreases at the associate’s through master’s levels stands out as compared to other ethnicities whom are excelling in the same areas. According to the data, other minority groups, such as Hispanics, are significantly outpacing Native Americans in degree attainment at each level of postsecondary education. Researchers attribute the educational gaps to “the lack of [Native American] cultural relevance in mainstream educational settings” (Martinez, 2013, p. 199). An in-depth examination of the experiences Native students have in higher education programs will help identify strategies to increase educational persistence and attainment among Native Americans, and in turn, build human capital throughout Native American tribes. The current study adds the MBCI perspective to existing literature on the Native American postsecondary education experience.

Human Capital, Education, and Economic Development

Human capital theory states that education enhances individual and societal capital development (Adams, 2013). Douglass (2010) states, “higher education will grow markedly in its importance for building a culture of aspiration and, in turn, the formation of human capital, the promotion of social economic mobility, and for determining national economic competitiveness” (p. 6981). According to Douglass (2010), the United States is the pioneer of mass higher education, which generated the concept of training, talent, and creativity of its citizens is at the forefront of building economic prosperity as a country’s natural resource. Adams (2013) compares the application of a cost-benefit analysis to college education choices to assess the investment in education to the way a business owner would assess their capital assets.
Existing literature states higher education, in general, plays a significant role in benefits, both private and public, that are important to a nation’s economy (Douglass, 2010). Some of the personal benefits of higher education include higher employment rates, greater economic status and mobility, cultural capital for upcoming generations, and greater social opportunities (Douglass, 2010). Similarly, advanced levels of education encourages personal advancement, and as a result, improves social welfare and community empowerment—key factors that contribute towards the maintenance of cultural vitality and advancing sovereignty for Native American tribes (NCAI Policy Research Center, 2012). Societal benefits of higher education include workforce productivity and talent, economic and social equity, reduced unemployment rates, increased social tolerance and higher voter participation (Douglass, 2010). Investments in higher education for Native Americans can results in benefits for both the individual as well as the tribe, and those benefits include lower unemployment rates, less need for public assistance, increased states of health and “a greater sense of civic responsibility” (Cunningham et al., 2007, p. 3).

Currently, Native Americans have some of the lowest completion rates, for both secondary and postsecondary education (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). Research cites he most common deterrents Native American students face in school include a lack of cultural connection, peer pressure, economic depression, pressure to conform, stereotyping, and isolation (Chee, 2008; Martinez, 2013; Mendoza, 2014; Oosahwe, 2008; Oxendine, 2015). Consequently, Native Americans account for some of the highest unemployment rates among all ethnicities in the United States (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). Snyder et al. (2016) reports that Native Americans had the highest percentage (25%) of
students, ages 18-24, who had not completed high school in 2013. The report continues that the unemployment rate for Native American adults, ages 25 to 64, who did not complete high school was 23%, the second highest of all ethnicities (Snyder et al., 2016). In 2013, 15% of Native Americans, aged 25 and older, had earned a bachelor’s degree (Snyder et al., 2016). The unemployment rate for Native American adults, ages 25 to 64, with a bachelor’s degree was 5% in 2013 (Snyder et al., 2016).

The National Congress of American Indians (2013) reports that tribal members who obtain quality education and skills development are necessary to create, support, and sustain strong tribal economies. Literature on economic development states that there is a positive and direct correlation between a community’s economic growth and the attainment of higher education by members within that community (Becker, 1994; Fann, 2009). The NCAI Policy Research Center (2012) cites, “tribes need Native college graduates to contribute their skills back home, boost available human capital and thereby attract new businesses, reduce unemployment, stimulate reservation economies through direct spending, and launch their own entrepreneurial ventures” (p. 2). The development of human and social capital through higher education programs will stimulate economic and political viability within Native American tribes; therefore, “as human capital rises, so do the chances of successful development throughout tribal lands” (Cornell & Kalt, 1992, p. 9; Marling, 2012).

Theoretical Foundations

Thompson (2013) conducted a study to help identify the relationship between career barriers and college outcome expectations (COEs), and used a sample of 121 Native postsecondary students. A qualitative examination of interviews with the Native
postsecondary students revealed common barriers such as “difficulties related to academic unpreparedness, inadequate funds to finance one’s education, family and peer pressure to stay at home on the reservation, and pressure to conform to perceived social norms” (Thompson, 2013, p. 312). Krogman (2013) identifies several motivational factors for Native students to enroll and pursue a degree at a postsecondary institution. Support from family and friends, a cultural connection, academic preparedness, exposure to college, support from the college faculty and staff, and the availability of financial aid were all identified as motivational factors for Native students to attend and persist in higher education programs (Krogman, 2013). The support of parents, family, and friends is a key motivational factor for Native American students in pursuit of higher education. Though the current study will not focus on career development, college outcome expectation plays a significant role in predicting Native American students’ success in postsecondary programs.

Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between the examined concepts and theories for this study. The illustration shows how each concept or theory influences a student’s persistence based on the amount of control one has in the given situation. The directional path of persistence first navigates through the theories (external situations) that the student has minimal control over, and it continues to move beyond the concepts that internally drive the student to reach the end goal. The initial phase includes transitioning and integrating into the collegiate environment, which is a critical step, for most students, in aiding in student persistence. MBCI tribal members reported that involvement in collegiate organizations and groups provided a sense of belongingness. They also expressed the importance of having positive interactions with faculty, staff, and peers in
the collegiate setting. Integrating into the collegiate environment also includes MBCI students having to face the cultural differences of their surrounding environment. Research participants expressed how their involvement in Native American organizations eased any cultural tension they experienced. Lastly, students seek external and internal motivation to help them thrive in their respective collegiate program. MBCI students stated various forms of intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors, which played a large part in their persistence throughout their programs.

The remainder of the chapter details the concepts and theories that support the findings from the current research study. Each section provides an overview of the theory, an explanation of the theory’s relevance to education and lastly, an explanation of how the theory supports the findings for the current study. Self-determination theory, self-efficacy, transculturation theory, integration theory, and the concept of social support will provide an in-depth explanation of the factors that assist in enabling the persistence of MBCI students in higher education programs.
Figure 2. Theoretical foundation

Self-Determination Theory

Deci and Ryan’s (2008) self-determination theory (SDT) is a macro theory of human motivation that addresses fundamental issues such as “personality development, self-regulation, universal psychological needs, life goals and aspirations, the relation of culture to motivation, and the impact of social environments on motivation” (p. 182). Research on SDT reports findings within various fields of practice; however, this study focuses on the role SDT plays in educational outcomes. This section provides an overview of SDT then discusses how the theory applies to educational outcomes, specifically persistence in higher education programs.
In lieu of measuring the amount of motivation a person has to predict important outcomes, SDT focuses on the type or quality of motivation a person has (Deci & Ryan, 2008). SDT distinguishes motivation into two categories, autonomous and controlled motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Autonomous motivation entails intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in which individuals identify with the value of a process and incorporate it into their internal sense of self (Deci & Ryan, 2008). In contrast, controlled motivation entails external regulation, such as external rewards or punishments; and introjected regulation, in which factors such as the ego internally motivates action, self-esteem, approval, and avoidance of shame (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

According to Deci and Ryan (2008), a large portion of research throughout various fields concludes that autonomous motivation has a greater effect on psychological health, effective performance and persistence than does controlled motivation. SDT “examines both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, psychological needs, and environmental factors that may foster or hinder motivation, social functioning, and personal well-being” (Smith Bontempi, 2006, p. 16). According to Deci and Ryan (2000), an intrinsically motivated individual does an activity because it satisfies them, whereas an extrinsically motivated individual does an activity to seek an anticipated outcome. Deci and Ryan (2008) conducted years of research, throughout various cultures, and identified a set of universal needs that are necessary for psychological health. This study will focus on the basic needs sub-theory, which identifies the three universal human needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Smith Bontempi, 2006). According to Deci and Ryan (1994), the factors that assist in fulfilling the three needs influence how people react to both intrinsic motivation and external motivational sources.
According to Deci and Ryan (1985), there are four categories of extrinsic motivation: integrated, identified, introjected, and external regulation. External regulation influences behavior because of external contingencies, such as reward or punishment (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991). Introjected regulation drives behavior based on internalized rules, pressure, or promised rewards; therefore, the behavior is internally coerced, not self-determined (Deci et al., 1991). Identified regulation leads a person to behave willingly, due to how they value an outcome, rather than allowing external contingencies to shape their actions or behaviors (Deci et al., 1991). Behaviors motivated by identified regulation are considered more self-determined than those behaviors motivated by external and introjected regulation (Deci et al., 1991). Lastly, integrated regulation is a case in which “the regulatory process is fully integrated with the individual’s coherent sense of self; that is, the identifications are reciprocally assimilated with the individual’s other values, needs, and identities” (Deci et al., 1991, p. 330).

Deci and Ryan (1994) state that optimal learning is dependent upon both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation a person has, in addition to a person’s sense of self. According to Guay, Ratelle, and Chanal (2008), integrated and intrinsic regulations optimize student motivation, and introjected and external regulations result in less than optimal motivation. Smith Bontempi (2006) states that the SDT applies to motivation studies on various cultures, but researchers have yet to apply the theory to investigating education persistence in Native American cultures. SDT can provide insight on ways to impose intrinsic motivation upon Native American students who are solely extrinsically motivated to complete higher education programs (Smith Bontempi, 2006).
Self-Efficacy Theory

Bandura’s (1977) self-efficacy theory states that a person’s belief in himself or herself affects his or her ability to perform a task or behavior. Motivation is one of the key characteristics of self-efficacy (Hoppa, 2012). Self-efficacy plays an integral role in comprehending human decisions and motivation patterns that result in particular behaviors or actions (Brown, 2015). Self-efficacy leads humans to determine how much effort they will put into a task, their amount of persistence when facing difficulty, “and how resilient they will appear in detrimental situations” (van Dinther, Dochy, & Segers, 2011, p. 96). People assuredly perform tasks that they feel they are capable of completing, but they tend to avoid tasks they believe are beyond their capabilities (Bandura, 1977). A person’s self-efficacy influences the length of persistence and their perseverance when facing difficulties (Bandura, 1982). People with low self-efficacy slack in their efforts or give up all together when faced with obstacles, whereas people with high self-efficacy put forth greater effort to overcome the challenge (Bandura, 1982). This section discusses the role self-efficacy plays in predicting academic achievement among college students and, more specifically, the role it plays in Native American persistence in higher education.

Bandura (1986) identifies four information sources within the self-efficacy framework: performance accomplishments, psychological states, verbal persuasion, and vicarious expectations. According to Taylor (2001), performance accomplishments serve “as a source of efficacy information” (p. 26) based on past repeated successes or failures. Experience of repeated success enhances self-efficacy expectations, and repeated unsuccessful experiences tend to diminish self-efficacy expectations (Taylor, 2001). Psychological and emotional mood states can trigger feelings of tension, stress, or anxiety,
therefore dwindling an individual’s self-efficacy (van Dinther et al., 2011). On the contrary, positive mindset or mood state can strengthen an individual’s self-efficacy (van Dinther et al., 2011). Verbal persuasion sources affect self-efficacy expectations through a suggestion that an individual can successfully carry out a certain action or behavior (Taylor, 2001). Vicarious experiences increase self-efficacy expectations when an individual observes someone else successfully executing an action or behavior (Taylor, 2001). When an individual sees someone else failing at completing an action or task, self-efficacy expectations decrease (Taylor, 2001). Earley (1994) discovered that the influence of the sources of information on self-efficacy varies, lesser or greater, depending on differing cultural values.

Existing literature details research on self-efficacy and its effect on human behavior in various fields of study such as education, psychology, healthcare, and business (Brown, 2015). A considerable amount of research documents the role of self-efficacy in students’ academic achievement. Studies show that a student’s achievement, learning, and motivation predicts and mediates self-efficacy expectations (van Dinther et al., 2011). According to van Dinther et al. (2011), previous research on self-efficacy support the theory that an individual’s self-efficacy is a predictor for the performance of learned behavior, and it predicts the ability to learn new skills.

Self-efficacy is a predictor for academic achievement (Bandura, 1993; House, 2009; Lent, Brown, & Larkin, 1984; Weiser & Riggio, 2010). Self-efficacy beliefs influence the key indicators of academic motivation: emotional reactions, persistence, choice of activities, and level of effort (Zimmerman, 2000). Chen’s (2014) research on the effects of self-efficacy on degree aspiration among international and domestic
community college students shows self-efficacy has a positive influence on academic achievement. Self-efficacy serves as a mediator between motivational persistence and academic success (Zimmerman, 2000). Students with a high sense of self-efficacy choose to take on more difficult activities and tasks than do their counterparts with a lower sense of self-efficacy (Zimmerman, 2000).

Chee (2008) conducted a study on 158 Native American undergraduate students to investigate the factors that affect academic persistence among the cultural group. The results of the study show that self-efficacy is positively correlated with the likelihood of the student’s confidence to do the academic work required of them (Chee, 2008). The study reveals the stronger the student’s ethnic identity is, the more positive their self-efficacy is (Chee, 2008). Furthermore, the research “suggests that ethnic identity becomes stronger the longer the Native student persists in college” (Chee, 2008, p. 83).

Contrary to literature supporting the correlation between self-efficacy and academic success, Coser’s (2012) research shows no relationship between college self-efficacy and Native American students’ academic success. Coser (2012) collected data from 80 Native American college students from 21 different tribes. Coser (2012) implies the definition of success may vary between Native American culture and the dominant culture; therefore, future research is required to understand how Native American students define success. According to Flynn, Duncan, and Evenson (2013), Native American adolescents show more interest and self-efficacy in conservative and realistic goals than their Caucasian counterparts do. Though the literature reports conflicting results, there is an opportunity for further research regarding the correlation between self-efficacy and
academic persistence to predict the educational outcomes of Native American college students.

**Transculturation Theory**

The origin of the term transculturation can be traced back to Cuban ethnographer, Fernando Ortiz and American anthropologist, A. Irving Hallowell (Huffman, 2011). Ortiz (1947/1995) recommended the use of the term transculturation in social sciences in lieu of acculturation to “describe the process of transition from one culture to another, and its manifold social repercussions” (p. 98). Ortiz’s (1947/1995) research on transculturation manifested because of the phenomenon within Cuba that he describes as an “extremely complex transmutation of culture” (p. 98). The term transculturation encapsulates the various phases throughout the process of transitioning from one culture to another which involves uprooting from and losing one’s original culture and melding into another, which consequently, results in a cultural phenomenon (Ortiz, 1947/1995). This section details how researchers incorporate transculturation in various types of studies regarding cultural groups. Specifically, the section provides literature on the use of transculturation theory to investigate Native American experiences in higher education.

Hallowell (1963) references Ortiz’s research on transculturation as a guide in investigating the “Indian-white relations” in America (p. 520). Hallowell’s (1963) preference for the term *transculturation* in lieu of acculturation led him to coin the term transculturalization to describe the cultural readjustments made throughout collective groups. Hallowell (1963) defines transculturalization as:

The process whereby individuals under a variety of circumstances are temporarily or permanently detached from one group, enter the web of social relations that
constitute another society, and come under the influence of its customs, ideas, and values to a greater or lesser degree. (p. 523)

Hallowell (1963) describes one extreme of transculturalization where the individual completely identifies with the new culture and transforms psychologically as well. The opposite extreme is the individual superficially adjusting to the new culture with little to no change in values, beliefs, or psychological impact (Hallowell, 1963). In between extremes is the individual who effectively plays a dual role by identifying with both cultures (Hallowell, 1963). The degree of transculturalization is dependent on a number of factors including the age of an individual at the start of the process, the perception and attitude regarding the other culture, motivational factors, the length of time residing in the environment, and the type of the roles played by the individual (Hallowell, 1963).

The implications of transculturation appear throughout research in areas such as arts, literature, history, and education. Coloma Penate (2012) employs Ortiz’s notion of transculturation in the examination of parallels in folklore and literature from the Afro-Hispanic and African American perspectives. Manathung (2011) investigates the transcultural knowledge of engineering supervisors at an Australian university to determine how the knowledge translates into the interactions with a diverse group of students. Existing literature on transculturation mainly focuses on its impact on one culture-sharing group and since the theory emerged specifically to explain the Native American educational experience, there is minimal research on the educational effects of transculturation in other cultures (Huffman, 2010).

Studies show that cultural elements such as social values, communication styles, and interpersonal behaviors (just to name a few) are likely the primary cause for the high
Native American attrition rates in higher education programs (Deloria, 1990; Huffman, 2001). Literature indicates there is a correlation between cultural conflict and lack of persistence in higher education; however, each Native American college student does not have similar experiences with cultural conflict (Davis, 1992). Merriam Webster’s dictionary defines culture conflict as “the conflict of behavior patterns and values that results when different cultures are incompletely assimilated” (culture conflict, n.d.).

Huffman’s (2001) earlier research on Native Americans in higher education started with the theoretical consideration called transculturation hypothesis. Huffman (2001) conducted a qualitative investigation on 69 Native American students’ college experience. The results of the research led to the grouping of two types of traditional Native American students, estranged and transcultured (Huffman, 2001). Estranged students are culturally traditional Native Americans; and the research showed that these students experienced alienation in college and performed poorly. Transcultured students also identify as culturally traditional; however, this group of students overcame the alienation they experienced and achieved academic success (Huffman, 2001). The continued research on the effects of transculturation on Native American in education resulted in the development of transculturation theory.

Transculturation theory is a theoretical perspective developed for the unique purpose of investigating the experiences of Native American students in postsecondary education (Huffman, 2010). Transculturation theory states that in order for Native Americans to achieve academic success, they must embody a strong cultural association and identity (Huffman, 2010). Huffman’s (2011) research on Native American students identifies two assumptions in relation to transculturation. The first assumption states that
a Native student’s culture assists in persistence by using their Native uniqueness as a cultural and emotional anchor (Huffman, 2011). The second assumption states that Native students’ ability to maintain a strong cultural identity will positively affect the student’s ability to engage in an institutional environment, resulting in academic success (Huffman, 2011). According to Huffman (2001), transcultured students treat their Native American ethnicity as a “social-psychological anchor” from which they draw upon confidence, security, and strength (p. 6). Some culturally traditional Native Americans become overwhelmed with the obstacle of cultural conflict in a higher education setting, resulting in an early exit from the institution (Huffman, 2001). On the other hand, there are culturally traditional Natives who manage to overcome the barriers and persevere (Huffman, 2001).

Huffman (2011) states that Native American students must familiarize themselves with and comprehend the cultural settings found within conventional higher education institutions in order to be successful. Transculturation stems from the notion that cultural identity must be lost in the midst of cultural exchanges (Huffman, 2011). It supports the notion that Native students can preserve their culture, traditions, and beliefs while learning another culture’s beliefs and ways (Huffman, 2011). Existing research on Native American persistence in higher education programs generally supports the concepts of transculturation theory (Davis, 1992; Huffman, 2001; Okagaki, Helling, & Bingham, 2009; White Shield, 2009). Huffman (2011) suggests that transculturation theory extends beyond the concept that strong cultural identity is key in Native Americans’ success in higher education. Huffman (2011) posits that a strong cultural identity will give the same students the desire to return home to contribute to their reservation communities.
Research can identify ways, beyond strong cultural identity, that Native American students can smoothly integrate into the mainstream culture found at many higher education institutions.

Integration Theory

Tinto’s (1975) integration theory states that a student’s persistence in higher education is related to and reliant on the transition from home to a postsecondary education institution. Tinto (1975) argues that the unsuccessful integration of a student into a collegiate environment results in less likelihood for the student to remain enrolled in the academic institution. This section discusses previous research done regarding integration theory and educational persistence. The literature offers an investigation to integration theory, its role in academic persistence, and the application of the theory specific to Native American persistence in the collegiate environment.

Tinto (2006) identifies three stages of the integration model: separation, transition, and incorporation. According to Tinto (2006), the initial stage entails the student separating from their community in order to integrate into the college environment. The second stage of the integration process, transition, is when a student is in the process of learning and embracing the college culture (Tinto, 2006). The third, and final, stage is incorporation, which describes how well a student integrates into his or her respective higher education institution (Tinto, 2006).

Tinto (1975) recognizes that student persistence in college is a result of both internal and external factors. Internally, students have background narratives that shape their views upon entering a collegiate environment (Tinto, 1975). The narratives include an individual’s attributes, their family background, and their secondary education
experience (Tinto, 1975). Tinto (1993) states that a student’s persistence in a higher education institution is a result of the student’s integration into the various systems within the institution, and external factors may also contribute. Interactions with faculty and staff, peers, and administration are integral factors as well as internal commitments to oneself (Tinto, 1975).

In addition to intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors, social integration plays a significant role in determining student persistence (Tinto, 1975). Tinto defines social integration as the degree of interactions between an individual and the surrounding social environment. Oxendine (2015) simply refers to social integration as the “informal education of students” (p. 36). Social integration is the out-of-classroom interactions and affiliation students have with their peers, faculty, and staff (Tinto, 1975). Some critics assert that Tinto’s integration theory is not applicable to all college students, especially minorities, because the model does not take into account the assimilation of minorities into the dominant culture on most college campuses (Tierney, 1992).

Madrid (1997) investigated the applicability of integration theory to nine Native American and Hispanic women. The results of the study do not support Tinto’s notion that students must separate from their home communities and adopt new values to integrate into the collegiate environment (Madrid, 1997). Literature states that “interventions designed to assist participants to separate from past communities and to integrate into new college communities (adopting new values and norms of behavior) do not meet the needs and goals of Native American and Hispanic women” (Madrid, 1997, p. 254).
Oxendine (2015) uses integration theory as a foundation for a study regarding the sense of belonging among Native Americans enrolled in non-Native colleges and universities. One of the study’s objectives is to determine whether institutional integration contributes to Native students’ sense of belonging in higher education institutions (Oxendine, 2015). The results of the study show that Native students’ relationships with their peers is a main predictor for their sense of belonging, and the support of faculty and staff was a significant predictor for a sense of belonging (Oxendine, 2015). Furthermore, the study reveals factors such as “peers showing respect for culture, having Native friends, feeling a part of the campus community, having friends from different cultures, and seeing friends as family on campus” contribute to Native students’ sense of belonging (Oxendine, 2015, p. 107).

Integration theory serves as a foundation to understanding the significance of Native American college students feeling a sense of belongingness in their collegiate environment. Positive interactions with peers, family, friends, and faculty and staff have influence over the academic persistence of Native students (Oxendine, 2015). The development of strategies to best transition and integrate Native students into the collegiate environment can assist in increasing persistence and degree attainment.

Social Support

Extensive investigations on social support within various fields resulted in literature that includes multiple theoretical definitions for the concept (Hupcey, 1998). One theoretical definition describes social support in terms of a network, defining it as “support accessible to an individual through social ties to other individuals, groups, and the larger community” (Lin et al., 1979, p. 109). Existing literature reports the
significance of support from family, friends, college faculty, and staff for student
persistence in a collegiate setting (Mendoza, 2014; Oosahwe, 2008). Rodger and
Tremblay (2003) researched the effects of peer mentoring among first-year college
students. Results from the study revealed the mentored students had significantly higher
grades compared to the control group, whom did not receive mentors (Rodger &
Tremblay, 2003). The following literature reviews studies highlighting the educational
outcomes for students who have the support of an individual, group, or network of
individuals.

Cohen and Hoberman’s (1983) research identified social support as a buffer to
stress for college students in the midst of life changes. Additionally, literature identifies a
positive association between informal student-faculty relationships and academic
achievements, institutional persistence, and personal development (Pascarella, 1980).
Studies regarding Native American persistence in higher education programs cite the need
for social support systems.

Carlyle’s (2007) research on MBCI students’ transition into college identifies the
positive influence of faculty, peers, mentors, and the uses of formal college support are
beneficial to academic persistence. The research reveals that MBCI students who
overcame significant obstacles during their educational pursuit were able to adjust by
receiving practical support from their faculty, peers, family and/or student services
(Carlyle, 2007). The findings of the study stress the importance of students having access
to social support to assist in persistence throughout college (Carlyle, 2007).

Jackson, Smith, and Hill’s (2003) research on Native American college students
links positive experiences and outcomes to family support, structured social support, and
the support from faculty and staff. Oosahwe’s (2008) research on Native American
academic success reveals support systems were a means of helping participants cope with
obstacles and continue to persist in college. The research cites Native Americans seek
support from friends, family, peers, and faculty and staff when facing difficulties in
college (Oosahwe, 2008). Additionally, the literature expresses the need for mentorship
for Native American students and specifically, “mentors who model the professional and
personal characteristics that the students find admirable and successful” (Oosahwe, 2008,
p. 113). Literature on the effects of peer mentorship on college students reveals mentored
students obtaining significantly higher grades than those without a mentor (Rodger &
Tremblay, 2003).

Oosahwe (2008) asserts that mentorship provides Native American students with
the encouragement, guidance, and support students need while pursuing a degree in higher
education. Literature suggests the development of mentoring programs that pair
beginning Native American students with advanced Native American students to offset the
feelings of isolation, bad influences, bicultural identity, and academic frustration (Jackson,
et al., 2003). Existing literature suggests Native American students be paired with
positive and professional role models who are admirable and exude genuine care for the
mentee’s well-being (Shotton, Oosahwe, & Cintron, 2007). Positive support from an
individual or network of individuals can be beneficial to the persistence of Native
Americans in post-secondary education programs. Pairing inexperienced Native
American students with experiences mentors can ease the transition into college and result
in positive academic outcomes (Jackson et al., 2003).
Barriers to Academic Achievement

Existing literature identifies various barriers students face in the pursuit to attain academic achievement in postsecondary education programs. Research shows that, in general, college students face barriers such as financial constraints, time management, limited college preparation, stereotypes, professors’ teaching style, academic and financial support, low sense of belonging, lack of organization, and limited resources, to name a few (Coleman, 2012; Davila, 2011; Hurtado & Guillermo-Wann, 2013; Jobe, 2013). This section examines the perceived barriers from various minority groups, and discusses some of the common themes and experiences cited among them. The discussion also includes the common barriers Native Americans face while in institutions of higher education.

A study conducted on males who were first generation college students details barriers experienced at home and at the academic institution (Coleman, 2012). Three major barriers the participants faced are time management and organization, financial assistance and academic support (Coleman, 2012). Davila’s (2011) research identifies the barriers Hispanic students face in community college. The barriers include time management, professors’ teaching styles, class scheduling, and academic/social life balance (Davila, 2011). Jobe’s (2013) research documents the college experiences of African American women from low social and economic backgrounds. The participants of the study cite limited college preparation, financial restraints, life challenges, and time management as barriers to completing a higher education program (Jobe, 2013).

Lastly, research conducted for the Diverse Learning Environments (DLE) project details information on the factors that affect the academic trajectories of diverse student populations in higher education programs (Hurtado & Guillermo-Wann, 2013). Data for
the study was collected from 14 colleges and universities throughout the United States (Hurtado & Guillermo-Wann, 2013). The results of the DLE project shows African Americans identify racial stereotypes as the greatest barrier to academic achievement (Hurtado & Guillermo-Wann, 2013). Similarly, students who identify themselves as multiracial and Asian American indicate a low sense of belonging, discrimination, and bias as barriers to academic success (Hurtado & Guillermo-Wann, 2013). The aforementioned studies identify barrier perceptions from a variety of minority groups, and the remainder of this section will discuss the known perceived barriers for Native Americans in higher education programs.

The most common barriers Native American students face, as identified in previous literature, are peer pressure, economic depression, pressure to conform, stereotyping, and isolation (Chee, 2008; Mendoza, 2014; Oosahwe, 2008; Oxendine, 2015). Chee (2008) identifies factors that serve as barriers to academic persistence among 158 Native American undergraduate students at Arizona State University. Barriers include academic stress, cultural incongruence, lack of college preparation, and isolation (Chee, 2008). Similarly, Mendoza’s (2014) research provides insight on the issues faced by 12 Native American college graduates and students in postsecondary education programs. Some of the obstacles the participants described include cultural misunderstanding and insensitivity, stereotyping, lack of support, and substance abuse affecting their immediate family (Mendoza, 2014). Oosahwe’s (2008) phenomenological research gathers information, from 13 Native American undergraduate students, that focus on the strategies used to overcome the barriers they faced in college. Some of the barriers include death in the family, feelings of isolation, academic stress, and traumatic life
experiences (Oosahwe, 2008). Lastly, Oxendine’s (2015) research focuses on strategies to overcome one of the common obstacles for Native students in higher education, a lack of a sense of belonging to the college environment. The research shows that institutional integration and staff support would contribute to a sense of belonging for Native students; and social isolation is a significant predictor of a sense of belonging (Oxendine, 2015).

Summary

This chapter discusses the demographics of postsecondary institutions in the United States, the significance of human capital, education, and economic development, and the concepts and theories relating to the enablers that influence MBCI students’ persistence while attending higher education programs. The chapter explores concepts that support MBCI persistence while attending higher education by detailing the theoretical foundations associated with the perceived enablers for academic persistence, as a result of the current study. The discussion on the barriers to postsecondary education highlights the perspective of various ethnic groups to illustrate the similarities and differences between them, and the section identifies the barriers MBCI tribal members face in collegiate settings. The next section of the paper explores the methodology used to collect data for the current study.
CHAPTER III – METHODOLOGY

The key to developing an effective and efficient workforce is higher education in various career fields resulting in the development of human capital to stimulate economic and political viability within Native American tribes (Marling, 2012). This research examines the post-secondary education experiences of members of one Native American tribe, the MBCI. Carlyle’s (2007) research investigates the barriers MBCI college students face in higher education programs, and he suggests that scholars conduct additional research to gather further insight on the issues Native American students face in postsecondary education. The current study explores the lived experiences of MBCI students while attending higher education programs and focuses on identifying factors that serve as enablers and barriers for persistence while attending post-secondary education programs.

Five common enablers for academic persistence in higher education among Native Americans, as found in previous research, include family support, cultural connection, self-efficacy, academic preparedness, and the support of faculty and staff (Carlyle, 2007; Chee, 2008; Mendoza, 2014; Oosahwe, 2008; Oxendine, 2015). In addition, the five most common barriers found in the studies are peer pressure, economic depression, pressure to conform, stereotyping, and isolation (Chee, 2008; Mendoza, 2014; Oosahwe, 2008; Oxendine, 2015). Though previous literature identifies the enablers and barriers applicable to various Native American tribes throughout the country, this study will investigate the enablers and barriers specific to MBCI tribal members who attended higher education programs. The remainder of this chapter provides detail on the research
objectives, population and sample, research design, validity of research design, instrumentation, role of the researcher, data collection procedures, and data analysis.

Research Objectives

This study explores the lived experiences of MBCI students to identify the enablers that influence their persistence in higher education institutions. The research will identify the barriers MBCI students face throughout their pursuit of higher education. The research objectives are as follows:

RO1 - Describe the demographic characteristics of the study’s participants, including age, gender, and education level.

RO2 - Identify the perceived enablers that influence Choctaw students’ persistence while attending a higher education program.

RO3 - Identify the perceived barriers that hinder Choctaw students’ persistence while attending a higher education program.

RO4 - Document the lived experiences of Choctaw students who attended a post-secondary education institution, and the perceived influence of those experiences on persistence within higher education institutions.

Research Design

A qualitative design was used to investigate members of the MBCI who attended a higher education institution within the past 5 years to document their collegiate experiences. Creswell (2013) defines qualitative research as the study of a social or human problem by using a qualitative approach, collecting data in the study participants’ natural setting, and inductively and deductively analyzing data for emerging patterns or themes. Because minimal literature exists regarding persistence factors for MBCI
collegiate students, the current study uses a qualitative design to gather rich descriptions of each participant’s college experience. Qualitative research explores a problem in a group or population, to identify ideas and variables that reach beyond the predetermined information that exists in previous literature (Creswell, 2013).

A phenomenological research approach was used to investigate the lived experiences of MBCI tribal members to determine the barriers and enablers that influenced participants’ persistence in higher education programs. Creswell (2013) states, “a phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (p. 76). Since little research investigating MBCI tribal members’ experiences in higher education programs exists, a phenomenological approach best suited the study’s purpose by gathering in-depth participant responses rather than attempting to expound upon any previous explanations on the topic (Reeves, Albert, Kuper, & Hodges, 2008). Researchers who conduct phenomenological studies work to report the variables the research participants have in common based on their experience of a phenomenon or concept (Creswell, 2013).

The researcher gathered data for the current study by conducting one-on-one interviews, via telephone or in-person, and an in-person focus group. The research study reports the lived experiences of MBCI tribal members, who attended or are still attending, an institution of higher education. In addition to documenting the participants’ lived experiences, the researcher gathered information to identify factors that serve as enablers and barriers to persistence in higher education programs.
Population and Sample

The population for this study consists of enrolled members of the MBCI who have attended a post-secondary education institution, up to at least to the sophomore level, within the past five years. Persistence rates for first-time students entering college is measured by the students’ enrollment in college for their second fall term; therefore, this study will only include individuals who have, at minimum, persisted to their second fall term in a higher education program. Cataldi et al. (2011) cites the median time to complete a four-year degree was 52 months, or nearly four and a half years, in 2008. A five-year sample garners data from a portion of the population that has recently lived the post-secondary education experience. The research study solicits the experiences of individuals at both the undergraduate and graduate degree levels. A total of 1,009 MBCI tribal members utilized the TSP between Fall 2011 and Spring 2017 (M. Carson, personal communication, March 21, 2017). The data was gathered from a sample of 17 current students or recent graduates of higher education programs to acquire information regarding barriers and enablers to completing post-secondary education programs. Data was collected from the research participants using one-on-one interviews, via telephone or in-person, and a focus group.

The use of purposive, criterion sampling ensures that data gathered is solely from MBCI tribal members who attended an institution of higher education within the past five years and have persisted to their sophomore year, at minimum. Creswell (2013) suggests researchers use criterion sampling to ensure all participants have experienced the phenomenon under investigation. The researcher solicited the assistance of the TSP to ensure that all participants met the criteria for the current study, which includes tribal
members who have used the program’s resources to attend a post-secondary education program within the past five years and have at least persisted into their second year of college. According to the MBCI (2013) TSP Policies and Procedures, scholarship applicants must meet one of the following requirements:

1. Minimum composite score of 15 on the enhanced ACT, or its equivalent SAT score, or
2. Minimum composite score of 11 on the ACT if taken prior to 1989, or
3. Minimum composite score of 12th grade on the Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE), Level 7, or
4. Minimum cumulative grade point average of 2.5 on at least 12 semester hours (or the equivalent) of college level core academic classes, including English Composition I with a minimum grade of “C”, and
5. Freshman students who make below a composite score of 17 on the enhanced ACT will be required to attend, and complete, a 2-year degree at a community or junior college. Commuting freshman students who score below the 17 minimum ACT may attend a senior college/university only if the community or junior college is substantially far from their home, or none exists. However, this will not apply to freshman students who want to attend BIA or tribally controlled colleges and have attained the minimum 15 ACT score. (p. 3)

One-on-one interviews were used to collect participant data from 10 individuals, and subsequently, a focus group consisting of seven individuals was conducted to triangulate the data and strengthen the validity of the research. According to Creswell (2013), the researcher should gather thorough details on the research topic from a few
individuals, up to the point of saturation. Research on sample size and saturation was conducted based on a random sample of 560 PhD qualitative studies, and the results of the study reports a mean sample size of 31 (Mason, 2010). Researchers have attempted to create guidelines on sample size for qualitative research, but evidence shows some researchers do not adhere to the guidelines (Mason, 2010). Existing literature recommends a sample size ranging from 20 to 30 for qualitative studies; and a sample size of five to 25 for phenomenological research (Creswell, 1998). Research cites the opinions of 14 social scientists and 5 early-career researchers on the proper sample size for conducting qualitative research, and the results are inconclusive (Baker & Edwards, 2012). The results of the research conclude that since qualitative studies are exploratory by nature researchers face difficulty in determining how much data to collect (Baker & Edwards, 2012). The researcher enlisted the assistance and expertise of her dissertation chair to help determine once the data reached the point of saturation, which was after the completion of eight interviews. Once saturation was reached, two more one-on-one interviews were conducted to verify no new themes emerge from the data, resulting in 10 one-on-one interviews.

Once the researcher reached a point of saturation and completed gathering data via one-on-one interviews a focus group, consisting of seven participants, was conducted to gather additional data. The focus group served as a means of triangulating the data; therefore, strengthening the validity of the results of the study. Creswell (2013) states, “focus groups are advantageous when the interaction among interviewees will likely yield the best information” (p. 164). Research shows focus groups consisting of eight participants produce significantly more ideas than focus groups consisting of fewer
participants (Fern, 1982). The researcher recruited and confirmed eight individuals to take a part in the study’s focus group; however, one person did not show up on the day of the group. Once the group convened, it was apparent at least two of the participants were familiar with one another; however, the researcher anticipated the likelihood of familiarization due to the small population for the research study. Fern (1982) reports there is no significant difference in the number of ideas generated between focus groups consisting of acquaintances and groups consisting of strangers.

Validity of Research Design

Validation in qualitative research is necessary to support the notion that the collected data is accurate. The basis of a qualitative study’s validity is “how well the research represents the actual phenomenon” (Morse, 2015, p. 1213). Eight common validation strategies used by qualitative researchers include clarifying researcher bias, external audits, member checking, negative case analysis, peer review, prolonged engagement and observation, rich and thick description, and triangulation (Creswell, 2013). Literature suggests researchers utilize a minimum of two validation strategies to verify the accuracy of the study (Creswell, 2013). The validation strategies used for this study were clarifying researcher bias and triangulation.

To clarify researcher bias, the researcher must state his or her stance in relation to the research study. The clarification entails the researcher’s “comments on past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that have likely shaped the interpretation and approach to the study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). Forms of researcher bias include the outcome anticipation, population sample bias, and biased research questions; therefore, the researcher should have checks and balances in place to combat researcher bias (Morse,
The researcher used reflexivity to help clarify and avoid researcher bias. Berger (2015) describes reflexivity in qualitative research as:

[The] turning of the researcher lens back onto oneself to recognize and take responsibility for one’s own situatedness within the research and the effect that it may have on the setting and people being studied, questions being asked, data being collected and its interpretation. (p. 220)

The researcher kept a reflective journal to allow for transparency in the research process by documenting how personal beliefs, assumptions, and subjectivity could influence the research (Ortlipp, 2008). Self-reflection helps during the interview process by identifying the questions the researcher tends to shy away from or emphasize, and helps raise the researcher’s awareness about thoughts, emotions, reactions, and triggers in the interviews (Berger, 2015). Existing literature cites the importance of rigorous self-reflection for researchers who share the research participants’ experience, also referred to as an insider (Berger, 2015). Though the researcher shares the same experience as the research participants, each participant’s experience remains unique and should not be overshadowed by the researcher’s preconceived notions (Berger, 2015).

In addition to clarifying researcher bias, triangulation was employed as a validation strategy for the research study. Triangulation involves using different methods or sources of data to explain a perspective or theme (Creswell, 2013). Triangulation uses two or more data collection methods, and “increases scope or depth of the study, because different sets of data or different qualitative methods may each elicit different data” or perspectives (Morse, 2015, p. 1216). The in-person focus group was used as an additional method of data collection from a different source, or group of participants. Triangulation
entails the researcher locating similar themes among different data sources, therefore proving the validity of the findings (Creswell, 2013). The researcher utilized two of the eight suggested validation strategies for the current research study to ensure the validity of the qualitative research design.

Instrumentation

Literature suggests researchers collect data for phenomenological studies primarily through in-depth interviews (Creswell, 2013). The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews and a focus group to collect descriptive narratives about the lived experiences of MBCI students in higher education programs as well as the enablers and barriers that influence persistence throughout post-secondary education programs. The researcher drafted a recruitment e-mail (see Appendix A) to seek interested participants for the research study. Individuals interested in participating in the study were asked to fill out an original, six-question demographic survey (see Appendix B) so the researcher could ensure a mix in participant demographics for the study. The researcher used an original research instrument (see Appendix C), consisting of open-ended questions and sub questions, to collect data for the one-on-one interviews.

Literature recommends researchers use pilot testing to refine interview questions and procedures (Creswell, 2013). The interview protocol (see Appendix C) for the current study was pilot tested with three MBCI college attendees to measure the validity and reliability of the instrument. The researcher conducted three pilot tests prior to recruiting participants for the study. Two one-on-one pilot test interviews were done in person, and one was conducted via telephone. The hand-held recording device was used to test the quality of the audio recording gathered during the interviews, especially the telephone
interview. It was important to ensure the recording was of good quality, at minimum, so the transcriptionist would be able to decipher the audio files sent in for transcription. The pilot tests were also a learning tool for the researcher to (a) gain confidence in conducting an interview for research, (b) test the flow of the interview questions, (c) note any changes necessary for the instrument, and (d) get an idea of how long the interviews will last. Because of the pilot tests, minor changes were made to the interview protocol, including the order of questions and the verbiage of one question. Before conducting the focus group, the researcher also refined the focus-group protocol (see Appendix D) based on the results acquired from the preliminary analysis of the one-on-one interviews. The refining process ensured the most significant questions were asked in order to maximize on the time allocated for the focus group.

Experts support the notion that a valid instrument is a reliable instrument (Phillips, Phillips, & Aaron, 2013). Literature states, “to be an effective data collection instrument, the survey should provide consistent results over time (reliability) and measure what it is intended to measure (validity)” (Phillips et al., 2013, p. 123). The researcher developed original interview questions, by creating a survey map, which aligns with the four objectives of the study. Mapping the research instrument to the research objectives to ensure content validity, meaning each measure within an instrument aligns with a research objective (Phillips et al., 2013). Table 3 illustrates how the interview questions align with the research objectives for the current study.
Table 3

Mapping Instrument to Research Objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Objective</th>
<th>Instrument Questions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RO1</strong> - Describe the demographic characteristics of the study’s participants,</td>
<td>Demographics Questionnaire</td>
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<tr>
<td>including age, gender, and education level</td>
<td>DQ1-DQ6</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>RO2</strong> - Identify the enablers that influence Choctaw students’ completion of a</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>higher education program</td>
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<td><strong>RO3</strong> - Identify the barriers that hinder Choctaw students’ completion of a</td>
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<td>higher education program</td>
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<td><strong>RO4</strong> - Document the lived experiences of Choctaw students who have attended a</td>
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<td>postsecondary education institution</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q7, Q8, Q9, Q11, Q12</td>
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Role of the Researcher

Qualitative researchers are encouraged to include biographical information that explains their fundamental values in relation to their research so that readers have an understanding of the underlying influences on the work (Greenbank, 2003). The researcher of this study is the granddaughter of the late Chairman of the MBCI, Mr. Emmett York. Mr. York raised his children to be proud and well-educated members of the tribal community. He pushed his children to be intelligent and persist beyond the threshold of secondary education into higher levels of academia. The researcher’s early educational influences stems directly from the values instilled in her mother, the youngest of Mr. York’s children. The researcher’s passion lies in carrying on her grandfather’s
legacy of encouraging members of the MBCI community to attain a degree (or degrees) in higher education.

The researcher is a Mississippi-Choctaw and African-American, mixed-race woman born in Choctaw, Mississippi and raised in Marietta, Georgia. The researcher’s educational experiences in college, consisting of both persistence and struggle, serve as a foundation for the current study. The researcher’s experiences in higher education could be beneficial by allowing her to relate to and empathize with the current study’s research participants. Though the researcher is a tribal member within the population of the current study, proper validation strategies will be instituted to avoid bias and ensure the research remains objective.

The researcher aspires to encourage and assist the Choctaw youth in attaining degrees from higher education institutions by adding valuable information to the existing literature regarding MBCI members’ persistence towards academic achievement. One goal for the current study is that the results will lead to strategies to effectively prepare the Choctaw youth for post-secondary education, as well as provide the tools, support, and knowledge to assist them in persisting throughout to degree attainment. The intention of the study is to add a valuable contribution to existing literature for the educational advancement and improvement for all Native American tribes throughout the country. The researcher’s goal is to join the growing group of Native scholars who are striving to create “culturally relevant theories and practices for Native American students, helping to remove the stigma surrounding research within our own communities” (Oxendine, 2015, p. 18).
Data Collection Procedures

The initial step in the data collection process was to obtain permission to have access to the population of the study. A research plan was presented to the tribe’s education committee and members of the tribal council to obtain consent to conduct research using the TSP as a primary resource of participant selection. The MBCI tribal council and chief passed a resolution to approve the current research study on June 14, 2016 (see Appendix E). The second step was to obtain approval to conduct research from the selected dissertation committee and The University of Southern Mississippi’s (USM) Institutional Review Board (IRB) before collecting data. Once the researcher received approval of the research proposal, by both the dissertation committee and the IRB (see Appendix F), the preliminary phase of data collection began.

The researcher requested the TSP director send an informational email (see Appendix A), drafted by the researcher, to all TSP participants who fit the criteria of the study detailing the purpose of the research and requesting their participation in the study. The e-mail instructed the individuals interested in participating in the study to fill out the demographic questionnaire (see Appendix B) and return it to the researcher via email. The contact information for the researcher was provided in the email for all potential participants in the event that they had any questions regarding the study. A $25 gift card was offered as an incentive to encourage individuals to participate in the research study, and each participant was told they would be rewarded the gift card at the conclusion of his or her interview or focus group. Grant and Sugarman’s (2004) research shows that offering incentives to retain research participants is mostly harmless. Instances where incentives become problematic are “where the subject is in a dependency relationship with
the researcher, where the risks are particularly high, where the research is degrading, and where the participant will only consent if the incentive is relatively large because the participant’s aversion to the study is strong” (Grant & Sugarman, 2004, p. 717). The researcher received 59 responses from the e-mail recruitment.

The first individual to express interest in participating was scheduled for a one-on-one interview. After the first interview, the researcher scheduled interviews based on the responses from the demographic questionnaire. The questionnaire was used to ensure data were collected from a rich mix of participants. The researcher sought out a well-balanced mix in participant age, gender, high school attended, and highest level of education completed. A visual of the demographic mix was tracked on a piece of paper that listed the participant demographic categories and each interviewee.

An email was sent out to selected potential interviewees to request a scheduled date and time for an interview. Interview times and locations were scheduled at the participant’s convenience. The duration of the one-on-one interviews ranged from 24 minutes to 58 minutes, averaging 41 minutes. The in-person interviews were conducted at a neutral location or over the telephone, which was dependent on the proximity of the interviewee to the researcher. The reference point used was the researcher’s location, which is the Pearl River community in Choctaw, Mississippi. The researcher conducted in-person interviews with individuals located within a 30-mile radius of the Pearl River community, and administered telephone interviews for individuals located more than 30 miles outside the radius of the Pearl River community.

The researcher conducted five in-person interviews and five telephone interviews. The in-person interviews took place at the Neshoba county public library,
which is located in Philadelphia, Mississippi (7.1 miles from the Pearl River community). Advantages of in-person interviews include the visibility of social cues, spontaneous responses, and synchronous communication (Opdenakker, 2006). Telephone interviews are appropriate when the research participants are not easily accessible to the researcher; however, one setback is the researcher will not be able to see the interviewee’s informal communication or body language (Creswell, 2013; Opdenakker, 2006). Researchers are unable to create the proper, distraction-free environment when conducting telephone interviews, and interviewees’ attention can be easily shifted (Opdenakker, 2006). A study comparing telephone and face-to-face qualitative interviewing reports that the two modes of data collection yield similar results (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004).

The researcher met with each participant at the scheduled time and location, then after the initial introductions between the researcher and interviewee, the researcher gave the participant a consent form (see Appendix G) to read and sign before the researcher began the interview. Telephone interviewees received an e-mail with an attached copy of the confidentiality agreement prior to the scheduled interview time. The telephone interview participants signed and scanned an electronic version of the signed form back to the researcher before the interview.

At the start of each interview, the researcher reiterated the purpose of the study, the study’s significance, and assured complete confidentiality of the participants’ identity. The researcher asked each participant if he or she had any questions about the interview before starting. A hand held audio device recorded each one-on-one interview to ensure accurate data capture. At the conclusion of the interview session, each research participant received a $25 gift card, funded solely by the researcher, inside a handwritten
thank you card as a token of appreciation for his or her time and participation in the research study. Gift cards were mailed to telephone interviewees via U.S. Postal Service immediately following the interview, and one interviewee requested an electronic gift card be sent to her via email in lieu of a physical gift card.

After each one-on-one interview, the researcher uploaded the audio recording to a laptop and sent it to a professional transcriptionist in an mp3 file format. Prior to receiving the first file, the transcriptionist emailed a signed confidentiality agreement (see Appendix H) to the researcher. Once a transcribed copy was obtained from the transcriptionist, the researcher listened to the corresponding audio recording of the interview while reviewing the accuracy of the transcription. The researcher analyzed the data collected from the one-on-one interviews, and the focus group protocol was refined based on the preliminary findings.

A focus group recruitment email was sent to the individuals who expressed interest in participating in the research study, but did not participate in the interviews. The focus group date and time was communicated in the e-mail so participants could determine their availability. The researcher wanted to ensure the focus group consisted of a mix of participants, so the demographic questionnaires assisted in executing a strategy similar to the one used for choosing interview participants. Thirteen individuals responded expressing interest in participating in the group, and the researcher chose eight to participate. The researcher sent an e-mail to provide the eight focus-group participants with information regarding the date, location, and time of the group. An e-mail was sent to the remaining five individuals who expressed interest in participating asking if they could be on standby to participate in the group in the event that someone canceled before
the meeting time. Two of the standby participants were used due to cancellations prior to the group. The researcher sent a reminder email to the eight individuals the day before the focus group to increase the chances they all attend.

On the day of the focus group, seven out of eight individuals showed up to participate. Once the group of participants situated themselves in the conference room, the researcher reiterated the purpose of the focus group and the significance of the research study. Each participant was given a consent form (see Appendix I) to read over and sign before the session started to ensure complete confidentiality of his or her identity, and the researcher collected each agreement before the start of the session. The group participated in an introductory icebreaker activity to familiarize themselves with one another and to make everyone more comfortable with speaking in front of the group. After the introductions, the researcher began recording the focus group using a hand held audio recording device. The researcher incorporated mini-group discussions and activities into the session to help keep the participants engaged. The first activity included an icebreaker exercise, which helped the participants become comfortable speaking and sharing ideas within the group setting. To break up the monotony of the round table discussion, the researcher also had the participants break into groups of two and three to discuss responses to the questions posed to the group. After a short period, the teams reconvened in the round-table setting to discuss their responses. The focus group lasted approximately 90 minutes and at the conclusion of the focus group, the researcher rewarded participants with a $25 gift card, inside a hand-written thank you card, as a token of appreciation for their participation in the group. Each gift card and thank you card was funded solely by the researcher.
The audio file recording from the focus group was sent to a transcriptionist via email in an mp3 format. Once the transcribed data was obtained from the transcriptionist, the researcher analyzed the data from the focus group to compare it to the preliminary findings from the one-on-one interviews. Once the data collection process was complete, the researcher sent an e-mail (see Appendix J) to the remainder of individuals who expressed interest in participating but were not chosen to participate. The e-mail expressed the researcher’s gratitude and appreciation to those individuals who expressed an interest in participating in the study. The data collection process took approximately seven weeks, and an additional two weeks was dedicated to the analysis process. Table 4 illustrates the data collection plan, including post-collection analysis and reporting, for the research study.

Table 4

*Data Collection Plan*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Pre-study | • Obtained approval from the university’s Institutional Review Board  
• Pilot tested the interview protocol |
| 1 | • Sent informational email detailing the purpose of the study and requesting participation  
• Scheduled interviews  
• Made entries into a reflexivity journal |
| 2-6 | • Conducted one-on-one interviews, and sent audio data to transcriptionist at the conclusion of each interview  
• Read and reviewed each transcript after receiving them from the transcriptionist  
• Documented self-reflection in journal for each interview and continued making entries throughout the analysis process |
| 7 | • Moderated a focus group |
| 7-9 | • Analyzed focus group data  
• Completed analysis and findings |
Data Analysis

The analysis of data for the current study occurred simultaneous with the data collection process. According to Creswell (2013), analyzing qualitative research data entails organizing the data for analysis, using coding to generate themes from the data, and illustrating the data visually or verbally. Transcribed textual data was uploaded into QDA Miner after each one-on-one interview. QDA Miner is a data analysis software designed to help researchers store, code, and analyze data. The software has the capability to analyze transcribed data from interviews or focus groups as well as data from articles, legal documents, photographs, and books (www.provalisresearch.com). The qualitative analysis software assisted in managing and coding the data; however, a majority of the analysis was done manually, following IPA guidelines, which was a method that provided a deeper understanding for the researcher. Smith and Osborn (2007) states, “the aim of interpretative phenomenological analysis is to explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world, and the main currency for an IPA study is the meanings particular experiences, events, states hold for participants” (p. 53). IPA requires the researcher to play an active role in the research process and conduct a detailed examination of the research participant’s personal account or perception of an event (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

IPA offers a set of general guidelines researcher can use as a guide through the data analysis process. In the initial stage of analysis, researchers are advised to read the transcript multiple times, and listen to the audio recording, to immerse themselves in the data (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Researchers should take notes on each transcript and highlight responses that stand out as significant to the research (Pietkiewicz & Smith,
The next step is to translate the notes derived from the data into emergent themes. Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012) suggest, “At this stage, the researcher should work more with his or her notes, rather than with the transcript. When detailed and comprehensive have been produced in the earlier stage, they should reflect the source material” (p. 367). In the next phase of analysis, the researcher is to seek out the connections between the themes that have emerged, then group the themes based on “conceptual similarities” and give each grouping a descriptive label (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Lastly, a report of the identified themes is written up and each theme is explained and supported with extracts from the participant interviews (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

The current study reports demographic information and participant narratives to explore the four research objectives. Chapter IV reports the participant demographic information (RO1) using frequency distributions and it provides the results of the interview and focus group, which addresses RO2, RO3, and RO4. Table 5 illustrates the data analysis plan for the current study.

Research objective one describes the participants of the study. Demographic variables identify all participants based on a number of variables including age, gender, high school, highest level of education, and parents’ highest level of education. The variables were analyzed and reported using frequency distributions to illustrate the demographic differences between the research participants.
Data collected from the one-on-one interviews and focus group were transcribed then analyzed for emergent themes to produce the results to satisfy RO2 and RO3. The researcher used IPA to delve into the world of each participant to gather an understanding on his or her perspective of the collegiate experience. Chapter IV provides a detailed report of the data analysis process, including the steps leading to theme development. RO4 is fulfilled in the following chapter by providing rich narratives from research participants regarding their experiences in college to provide readers a look into the MBCI student’s perspective.

Lastly, the researcher interpreted and displayed the findings using text and visualization tools to communicate the results in an effective and memorable manner (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Miles et al. (2014) recommends displaying...
qualitative data in the format of a matrix or network. Visual displays of qualitative data “requires you to think about your research questions and what portions of your data are needed to answer them; it requires you to make full analyses, ignoring no relevant information; and it focuses and organizes information coherently” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 108). The network model will assist the researcher and readers in focusing on and analyzing multiple variables at one time (Miles et al., 2014).

Summary

The researcher conducted a qualitative, phenomenological research study to explore the lived experiences of MBCI tribal members in higher education programs. This chapter reviews the methodology and research design used to bring the research study to fruition. The strategies used to ensure the reliability and validity of the research instrument and data are discussed, as well as the importance of the role of the researcher. The chapter goes on to discuss the research population and sampling strategies used as well as the participant recruitment process. The data collection process is discussed in detail and the chapter concludes with an overview of the analysis process. The following chapters report the analysis process and results for the research study, as well as the conclusions and recommendations.
CHAPTER IV – RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to seek an in-depth understanding of MBCI students’ lived experiences in post-secondary education programs. Specifically, the study identifies barriers that hinder Choctaw students’ persistence in higher education programs and identifies the enablers that facilitate Choctaw students’ persistence in higher education programs. This chapter reports the results of the study based on analysis of the qualitative data collected from enrolled members of the MBCI who are currently in a post-secondary education program or those who have graduated from a post-secondary institution within the past five years.

This chapter begins with providing details on the qualitative data analysis process, including theme development, used to report the findings of the research study. The validity and reliability of the data are discussed by reviewing the validation strategies used for the study. The four research objectives are reviewed, accompanied by the corresponding results that fulfill each objective. The participant demographics report the various backgrounds of the research participants using frequency distributions, satisfying RO1. Emergent themes identifying the enablers and barriers to persisting in higher education programs, as perceived by MBCI tribal members, are also reported, satisfying RO2 and RO3. Lastly, RO4 is fulfilled using rich, thick descriptions of the lived experiences MBCI tribal members had while attending institutions of higher education.

Data Analysis

Initially, the researcher intended to use the qualitative data analysis software, QDA Miner, as a tool to store and code text transcripts of each interview and the focus group. Pre-analysis, all interview text transcripts were uploaded into QDA Miner to
facilitate the coding and analysis process. After reviewing nearly half the interview transcripts using the QDA Miner software, the researcher opted to do the analysis by hand rather than use the QDA Miner software for coding. This allowed the researcher to become intimately familiar with the data through rereading, hand writing notes, highlighting, and creating visual boards throughout the analysis process. The data analysis for the study was completed using the guidance outlined for the IPA process.

Analyzing data using the IPA process is one in which the researcher immerses himself or herself in the data collected (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). Smith and Osborn (2007) state that it is, “important to remember that qualitative analysis is inevitably a personal process, and the analysis itself is the interpretative work which the investigator does at each of the stages” (p. 67). IPA guidelines are flexible and can be adapted by researchers based on the research objectives of their study (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). The literature goes on to state, “These guidelines are merely an illustration of one possible way of analyzing the qualitative material. They should not be treated as a recipe and the researcher is advised to be flexible and creative in his or her way of thinking” (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012, p. 366). Based on the guidelines provided in the literature, the researcher executed a data analysis process that followed IPA recommendations.

The researcher reviewed and analyzed each case individually, as suggested for researchers using IPA, and repeated the steps in the analysis process for each of the remaining transcripts (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). The initial step of the process calls for the data to be thoroughly examined by reading each text transcription several times as well as listening to the recorded audio from each interview. Reading the text several times helps the researcher familiarize himself or herself with the participant’s personal account
(Smith & Osborn, 2007). Interview audio recordings and transcripts were simultaneously reviewed to ensure the data corresponded with one another. The researcher listened to the audio recording of each interview and wrote down impressions or thoughts on the transcripts that could add value to the data analysis process. Each transcript was read multiple times during the first phase of analysis.

The next phase in the analytic process in IPA involves the identification of emergent themes. The researcher began with the first interview transcript to examine and find emergent themes within the text. Creswell (2013) advises researchers to create a list of “significant statements” to use as the foundation upon which to gain an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The transcripts and researcher’s notes were examined for significant phrases, sentences, or paragraphs. Using the descriptive coding method, three codes were assigned during the initial review of data – enablers, barriers, and significant lived experiences, each aligned with the research objectives for the study. All keywords and phrases representative of enablers (RO2) were highlighted in pink, and signified what participants identified as the things that assisted in their persistence throughout college. The keywords and phrases signified as barriers (RO3) were highlighted in yellow, and signified things the research participants perceived as a hindrance during their time in college. Lastly, lived experiences (RO4) were coded and highlighted in green based on the richness of the narrative provided by the participant. The researcher’s goal was to report descriptions of lived experiences that would provide readers with descriptive text to convey the participant’s point of view. Once the researcher did a full examination of the transcript, including notes and highlights, a second review of the same transcript was conducted.
The researcher reviewed the transcript again and used a separate sheet of paper to draft a summary of the findings. On a blank piece of paper, the researcher hand wrote some of the information gathered from the first participant’s demographic sheet, including the respondent’s age, gender, high school attended, and highest level of education. On the same sheet of paper, the respondent’s interview text highlighted in pink, signifying RO2, was written under a column labeled ‘enablers’ and the text highlighted in yellow, signifying RO3, was written under a column labeled ‘barriers’. All text highlighted in green, for RO4, was paraphrased and written, in bullet format, on the respondent’s sheet as well. The same process was repeated for the remaining 9 interviews. A similar sheet was done for the focus group; however, it only included the enablers and barriers columns and not the demographic information of all the participants.

Beginning with the first interview transcript, key phrases and words highlighted as enablers were written on an 11X17 sheet of paper, and the same was done for barriers on a separate sheet of 11X17 paper. The researcher then reviewed the remaining transcripts and put a tally mark next to repeat phrases or words and listed any new phrases or terms identified as an enabler or barrier. Once the researcher completed documenting information from the focus group transcript, the phrases and words with the most tally marks, or repeated ideas, visibly stood out on the paper.

According to Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012), the next phase in IPA is to identify a connection between themes that emerged from the data, and group them together based on their “conceptual similarities” then give the group a descriptive label. This process involves “compiling themes for the whole transcript before looking for connections and clusters” (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012, p. 368). The researcher grouped similar words and
phrases from the 11X17 sheets to develop emergent themes. Phrases such as “I want a better life”, “I want better job opportunities, and “I push myself to finish” were all placed under an enabler theme named self-determination. This emergent theme describes the determination of individuals to succeed based on their personal beliefs about themselves. The same process of grouping the data was done to identify other emergent themes. At this point in the analysis, some of the themes were found to be insignificant due to not having strong presence in the triangulation of data. Some themes emerged from the interviews but did not emerge from the focus group; therefore, the researcher did not present them in the final results of the study. As a result of the analysis, 13 themes were identified. Seven themes emerged as perceived enablers for persisting in higher education programs, and six themes emerged as perceived barriers. The enablers identified include self-determination, to be a role model, Choctaw pride, personal goals, the importance of a positive support system, acceptance and involvement, and the utilization of student support services. Barriers identified include self doubt, lack of preparation, personal struggles, school/life balance, lack of support, and the lack of necessities.

Validity and Reliability of Findings

Two validation strategies, reflexivity and triangulation, were employed to ensure the validity and reliability of the research results. The researcher documented in a reflective journal throughout the data collection process to allow for transparency in the research process. The journal was used to make notes of feelings of anxiety and anticipation prior to beginning the data collection process. Following each of the initial interviews, the researcher reflected thoughts on the delivery of the interview, the effectiveness of the questions, the body language of the participants, and the interview
outcomes. A self-reminder of remaining unbiased and not to present leading questions was in almost each journal entry. The journal was a reminder to leave all preconceived notions out of the interviews and the focus group.

Triangulation of the research data was used to strengthen the validity of the study by using both one-on-one interviews and a focus group. Triangulation uses two or more data collection methods, and “increases scope or depth of the study, because different sets of data or different qualitative methods may each elicit different data” or perspectives (Morse, 2015, p. 1216). In addition, data was collected from 19 participants whom are all at different stages in life in regards to age and education level. Triangulation entails the researcher locating similar themes among different data sources, therefore proving the validity of the findings (Creswell, 2013). Themes and perspectives gathered from the one-on-one interviews were deemed valid for the current research study only if they also came up in the focus group discussion.

Participant Demographics

Demographic data were collected from each participant using the Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix B). Data were collected via one-on-one interviews with 10 research participants, and data were also collected via focus group from seven additional individuals. The information gathered ranges in diversity for participants’ age, gender, and educational background. The 17 participants of the research study have a variety of educational backgrounds, which includes a pursuant of an associate’s degree to a doctoral program graduate. Table 7 shows the frequency distributions for the highest level of education obtained by each research participant; however, there are participants who are currently pursuing advanced degrees, which are not identified in the table. Specifically,
three participants are in pursuit of a Master’s degree and one participant is currently pursuing a Specialist degree. The pool of participants comprised of 11 females and 6 males. Two participants earned a GED, seven graduated from Choctaw Central High School (CCHS), and 8 graduated from a high school other than CCHS. Seven participants mentioned they are the first in their immediate family to either graduate from college or graduate with advanced degrees. Table 6 illustrates the demographic breakdown of all the research study participants.

Table 6

**RO1: Participant Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 18</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-25</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56 or older</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choctaw Central</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other high school</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earned GED</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest level of education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently pursuing certificate or degree</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AA degree</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6 (continued)

<table>
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<th>Father’s highest level of education</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary school</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some high school</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GED</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College graduate</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate/Professional level degree</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother’s highest level of education</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary school</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some high school</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GED</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College graduate</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate/Professional level degree</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Themes Associated with Perceived Enablers

Open-ended questions were presented to the participants to gather their experiences on who or what enabled their persistence in their college programs. Based on participant responses seven themes were developed and identified as perceived enablers for persistence in higher education programs. Open-ended questions aided in guiding the dialogue on who or what participants perceived to be enablers throughout their collegiate years. The perceived enablers identified for the study include self-determination, to serve as a role model, cultural pride, personal goals, a positive support system, feelings of acceptance and involvement, and the utilization of student support services.
Theme 1. Self-Determination. All participants, from both the interviews and the focus group, expressed their determination to create a better life for themselves as a means of persisting through college. Participants stated that obtaining a degree in higher education is a means to opening doors of opportunity for jobs and careers that will afford them the lifestyle they desire. Three interviewees and two focus group participants lived through unpleasant circumstances and persisted through higher education as a means to afford them the opportunity to live above the poverty level. One participant was determined to free herself from an unhealthy relationship, and create an independent life for herself and her children. Four interviewees and three focus group participants simply wanted to create a better life based on their childhood experiences and circumstances. When asked what motivated him to pursue and persist towards a college degree, one participant stated:

I think it was just when I was young I had the dream of wanting a big house and a nice vehicle and I knew that I wasn’t going to attain those things unless I had a degree and had a nice paying job. So that was the main reason why I went, because I wanted to have a good living. I didn’t do it because…I wanted to follow into someone’s footsteps. It was just because I wanted to…have that good job where I was able to have a house, have a vehicle of my own, and make my own living. I’ve seen what I’ve struggled through as a child…what my parents went through, what my relatives went through and I wanted to be different.

Another participant recollected her mindset in college as follows:

I think my mentality at that time was, you can do this. You’re just as smart as they are. And I think just keeping that mentality in mind that…you are here for you and
to better yourself and your family and your tribe. I mean, I think that’s what motivated me to keep going.

One participant explained how her childhood experience, with growing up watching her mom struggle, played an underlying role on her persistence through college.

For me, like, my mom worked really hard when we were in high school. She always had two jobs. She had a full-time job and then a part-time job. She worked really hard. She tried to just barely make ends meet. I knew that college was my way not to do that…to get out of that. And so, that was for me the biggest benefit…to have a job with higher pay and that I wouldn’t struggle and my kids would have a better life than what my parents were able to provide for me.

Similarly, one participant recalled how a negative childhood experience involving a teacher in secondary school affected his will to persist in college later in life.

I feel that people growing up have those self-fulfilling prophecies. You are or aren’t going to be who you need to be. You hear things all your life even from like schoolteachers growing up, you know. They already have you labeled as you’re not going to do anything, you are not going places. I had one teacher in school that always taught me that you’re a bum, you’re always going to be a bum. You are going to be a welfare case and the state is going to take care of you. And I still remember his name. It’s weird, when I graduated I said I fulfilled something that this teacher said I wasn’t going to fulfill so it was fulfilling for me, that I did something for myself.

Other participants expressed their internal motivators as follows:
“I just did not like being a failure. I don’t think anyone groomed me to be that way, but failure was not an option for me.”

“I’m competing with myself, really. I want to better myself everyday”

“For me, it was seeing successful people, you know. How did they get nice cars, nice houses? I felt like education was a way to make that happen.”

“It was just basically…a personal thing for me to want to finish college so I kept pushing myself.”

**Theme 2. To be a Role Model.** Five interviewees stated they persisted through college to serve as a role model for their family, friends, and other tribal members. Additionally, six focus group participants expressed the importance of being a role model to those around them to show that graduating from college is an attainable goal for all Choctaw tribal members, especially the youth. One participant expressed why it is so important for her to set an example for her family members in the quest for higher education. She states,

I want to be an example for my children and I want to be an example for my siblings. I want to be an example for my nieces and nephews, you know. And so you know, I – they see me, my kids see me.

Another participant expressed how his parents look to him to be a role model to show younger family members they can attend and graduate college.

I think the one thing that they [my parents] expect from my education is making sure that I am setting a good example for my younger nieces and nephews. I think that once…since I’m getting my education, they can use me as an example and I know they’ve done it before that hey, we’ve got somebody in the family that’s
going to college and if they can do it, you can do it. You know, there’s no…barriers to hold you back, no obstacles that you can’t overcome. And so they use me as that prime example.

Other participants stated,

- “I wanted to prove to people that it can be done. Because…you see people on the reservation and they’re…I don’t think they have the motivating factor to go to college and to better their lives.”
- “My nieces and little cousins are still in school and I just want to be a role model for them when they get older. When they get ready to go off to college also, I just want to be able to be one of the people that they say, ‘hey, if she can do it, I can do it.’”
- “We want to be a role model for the children, for the future. And to set an example that there’s more to life than just…what we’re doing daily.”
- “For me, it is for my children. I want to set an example for them to…get an education. I’ve always pushed them to get an education.”
- “I want to have the opportunity one day to tell my kids that I did go to college, and whatever life challenges come your way you’re able to overcome them.”

Theme 3. Choctaw Pride. Seven research participants expressed how their Choctaw culture influenced their persistence throughout college. Some participants discussed how being a tribal member gave them a sense of pride that makes them want to give back to the tribe via applying the skills they learned in college to careers that will advance the Choctaw people and communities. Other participants addressed appreciation
for their ancestors’ plight throughout history, which resulted in present-day opportunities such as the ability to acquire higher education.

Because I’m Choctaw I was motivated. My grandmother always told us…she was denied an education; her and her family members. So she always told us go and get an education. Do it for all of us who weren’t able to. Not just for you…it will benefit the tribe.

Another participant expressed how being Native American, and specifically being Choctaw, shaped or influenced her education experience:

Knowing the historical trauma that we’ve [Choctaws] gone through, like fully understanding that sacrifice, um, I mean our tribe and every other tribe in America really…had to give up. And the loss of so many traditions and the loss of land. Just everything…the culmination of the historical trauma and intergenerational trauma. Those impacts and the way that they have impacted our education and poverty levels and substance abuse, and mental health. All of those things wrapped up, I think for me being Choctaw with a sense of pride that…all the sacrifices were made before me, um, I certainly didn’t take those lightly and I felt a sense of responsibility to do better and to…make my grandfather proud. As well as my great grandfather.

Other participants expressed how being Native American, specifically Choctaw, influenced their educational experience.

• “I wanted to just be one of the ones…that said I’m Native American, I’m Choctaw. I went to Choctaw Central. I got an education. I guess it just feels
like we aren’t supposed to succeed, or be smart enough to do that. But I did it just to show that we [Choctaws] are capable.

- “It’s just all about giving back to the Choctaw community and to my people. Right now I work with the youth and one of my goals right now is to find alternatives and opportunities for our younger generations.”

**Theme 4. Personal Goals.** Five of the individuals interviewed set personal goals for themselves, and obtaining a degree in higher education was sought as a means to reach that goal. Similarly, four focus group participants also set a goal to attend and persist in an educational program at the collegiate level. Each story is different and respective of personal upbringings and experiences. Some had a goal to be the first in their family to graduate from college, while others needed higher education to land their dream job.

- “At the end of my senior year in high school, before I graduated, I found out that my mom was the valedictorian of her high school’s graduating class. And so when she told me that, that’s when I wanted to, you know, go to college and finish to prove to her that hey, I’m representing you.”

- “Overall…finishing school is a personal gratification that you…it’s a sense of accomplishment. So for me completing and getting my college degree, it’s more personal as well as showing my daughters that at no matter what age and no matter what life um throws at you, you can still have a goal and reach the goal and accomplish it.”

- “Working as a lifeguard and working with EMTs inspired me to want to do something in the medical field, so I know I need an undergrad degree to get into med school.”
• “I want to be a very outgoing and educated individual. I don’t want to be another statistic. I want to be the statistic that says that I’ve made it.”

• “Earning a college degree allowed me to change my career. I had a career in the service industry and I kind of reached my peak and it was not a long-term strategy. Going back to college changed my life. It’s allowed me to do something that I’ve always wanted to do. I now have an amazing job. It’s gonna help us, make my family more stable in the long run. It’s going to give us a better shot. Aside from that, I really want to make a difference. I’m now working in natural resource management and I have the opportunity to make a long-lasting change that is going to be around for decades after I’m gone. It’s just really eye-opening when you start thinking like that.”

• “I had an idea and strategy of where I wanted my career to go, but I didn’t think I would be able to get there without the tools that a doctorate education would give me.”

• “I had a personal goal to climb the ladder of success with my job. Specifically, I want to further my education so that I can try to accomplish that goal.”

• “It was a challenge for me to return back to college. There was a gap, and it took me a while, I think about 15 years before I went back to school. I wondered if I could keep up with the young folks [laughs]. It was supposed to take me 5 years to finish but…I shortened it down to three. So I got my bachelor’s in three years. It was a great feeling. I accomplished one of my goals, to go back and finish.”
Theme 5. Positive Support System. A total of 15 research participants expressed the importance of having a positive support system to help guide and encourage them throughout their collegiate experience. The support systems most identified are comprised of family members, institutional faculty and staff members, and friends/peers. One participant expressed how his parents’ support encourages him to persist in college as follows:

Even now in my Master’s program, my parents are my support system. Even though I’m 30-something years old, my parents…my mom especially, asks about how class is going. She asks about my grades and so I think even though she’s just asking, you know, Choctaws don’t really come out and say “I love you” and “I’m proud of you” or anything. I think just her asking me how I’m doing and what are my grades just shows that she’s…she’s supportive of me and she’s my…the person that is actually there to push me.

When asked how interactions with the faculty and staff affected her college experience, one participant responded:

They affect me to become a better person and a better student. Because I know some of the classes, how people say it’s pretty hard or it’s very difficult. And you know, even for me, just being away from home, I’m able to ask for their advice on what I need to do once I graduate or I just ask them for advice on what I need to improve, even just in class. So it’s like I’m able to have that support system. And not only that, but just having their feedback and honesty, because I know some of the professors were once in my shoes. So if I can ask them, you know, what was
your experience before, they are able to tell me honestly what they experienced. And they give me their advice.

Another participant discussed how being surrounded by supportive peers has been imperative in her persistence throughout school thus far.

I like my friends a lot because not only do they give me advice to just be able to continue going to school, they also make me think about getting a Master’s or PhD. Most of my friends are older, so when I hang around them they are always talking about continuing their education and thinking about what type of careers they are going to have. And for me, I’m still an undergrad. When I came to school I was able to look up to them so just having that impact from them and just being able to have that type of support from them helps me from day to day.

Other participant responses regarding their support system includes:

- “My bosses at work actually recommend that they know my class load and they also ask for my syllabus so that they know which week to add more hours or deduct hours for me so that I have enough time to study, and my friends help me too. They always ask me, “how is your class going?” or “how’s this going?” and I tell them. And sometimes, my roommates and I get the same classes so, um, being in the same class with them has helped me a lot.”

- “People that have helped me have been other students, teachers, and stuff like that, and staff…have been able to help me with either study habits, actually just studying with me or tutoring me. And then my parents do help me by…they’ll keep on me about my grades, stuff like that and make sure I’m focused and not losing my focus on schooling.”
• “I had support from my family. They wanted me to finish school and...I had younger siblings that helped me a lot. My parents helped a lot. But I mean I honestly feel like if it wasn’t for them...I probably wouldn’t have finished school.”

• “The support from my family was huge. If it weren’t for them, I couldn’t pull this off. I had two small children and my wife was working full time so it was a bit of a juggle, so obviously I give them the most credit. The faculties at both universities are outstanding. I mean they can really tell when someone is interested and pays attention and I tried to be focused on everything they were teaching me. They really helped push me, keep me going.

**Theme 6. Acceptance and Involvement.** Six interviewees and three focus group participants expressed how being involved and feeling accepted at their respective institution of higher education positively influenced their persistence. Involvement in extracurricular activities such as American Indian Student Associations, music fraternities, and Inter-Tribal Societies helps students feel accepted among a group of others similar to themselves. Their active involvement in the respective organizations, including the interactions with other group members, helps encourage the student’s persistence in college. One interviewee expressed how involvement in a music fraternity helped all the members keep each other going in college.

I tried to see what kind of programs the school offered. There was a music fraternity that I fell in love with at first by just listening to what they were doing and what their mission statement was. Eventually, I became the president of that fraternity and so that’s what kept me going in school, it was being involved in that
fraternity. They were more of a family. You know, they’re the ones that were always there. We did social events together…of course we had our meetings together and you know, every time we saw each other in the hall, we knew that we were brothers and sisters in that fraternity and so we had to…we communicated with each other. We kept each other going.

Another interviewee expressed how her involvement in various student associations helps her connect with other students with similar backgrounds, which makes it easier to feel like she fits in.

One of the clubs I am involved in is the American Indian Student Associations, so it’s called AISA. So for that club it’s mostly Native Americans but we also invite non-natives into the club as well. We do like homecoming and a pow-wow in the spring and in the fall. I am also in the BSA, which is the Black Student Union. That’s a different club that is all African Americans, but I joined because I wanted to see if it would be different than the AISA. I like it a lot because not only was I able to make friends, but also I was able to experience a different environment. Back to AISA though, I feel like that club made me more comfortable because they are able to talk to you about the college experience and even some of the faculty is a part of the club. We had events that felt more like family events and you end up being closer together. There were also other students who were a long way from home so they don’t have family there as well. I believe AISA helps you have that support system. Being around other Natives who are also away from home, you can relate to each other and just be able to help each other. You know,
it’ll be fine, just as long as we have one another, and be able to grow together and just have a positive impact on each other.

One student shared how her position on the Native American transfer board at her university helps motivate her to stay in school.

I help Native American transfer students into college life. I help make their transition into classes and campus life a lot easier. It motivates me a lot because I was once a transfer student and I can now help others. They learn from me as much as I learn from them. It has helped me a lot to stay in school because I am an example for them.

One student cited his involvement with the campus’ social center as a motivational factor to persevere.

I had a friend who worked at a social center that we have on campus. There are times I will go by and kind of hang out with them. Then it kind of led me to being a volunteer at the social center where I helped the other workers as a volunteer tutor. I have to say that strengthened my motivation. Working at the social center helped me see how other students worked or how they were trying to continue with their college years. That motivated me to like…either be the same or do better than them. To, you know, accomplish what I want to accomplish.

*Theme 7. Utilization of Student Support Services.* Another theme that emerged from both the interviews and focus group is the importance of using student support services. Research participants provided their accounts of how the use of resources such as writing centers, tutoring centers, and speaking centers have helped strengthen them in
areas they struggled in academically. One participant recalled how student support centers assisted in her persistence throughout college.

The one thing I do a lot now is use the resources on campus. In the beginning I didn’t because I was like, “Oh, I don’t need the help.” But now using the resources has helped me become a better student. There’s a student group…like student study groups, that’s what they call it. You just meet with other students who have the same major. Going to events like that…the college of your major, they…sponsor. One of the big things that I do now is reach out to students who want to major in Exercise and Wellness. And we help them get on track with what they want to do in the future. That’s what helped, helps me a lot with getting through my college experience.

Another participant speaks about how helpful student support services are in the development of her writing and speaking skills.

One of the resources I use outside of class is definitely the writing centers. At USM, oh man, the writing centers have been very helpful and it helped me be a better writer. And also the speaking center, to help me be better at speaking, for like, one project we had was kind of a campaign kind of thing. So I really believe those resources have shaped me to be the person that I am today. I make sure if there are resources on campus, I use them. I use that, you know, to make sure that my grades are up to par.

One participant spoke about her experience with a chemistry class, and how student support services help her when she is in need of additional assistance outside of the classroom:
Well for chemistry it’s just like I found for myself that doing practice problems really help. Anything with processes I would need to do, like I would go on the internet or in other books that were in the chemistry tutoring center and just do practice problems. I use the tutoring center often for chemistry, especially. I’ve been to the English tutoring center once and it was really helpful. I feel like it helped me become a pretty strong writer.

Themes Associated with Perceived Barriers

Participants were asked to identify any barriers they have encountered while attending an institution of higher education. Based on the data analysis, there were six ideas that emerged numerous times among the 17 participants. The barriers identified by the group of participants include self doubt, lack of preparation, personal struggles, school/life balance, lack of support, and lack of resources.

Theme 8. Self-Doubt. Seven participants stated they had feelings of self-doubt at some point in their collegiate experience. Some questioned their worth and if they are good enough to obtain a degree in higher education. Others were worried about being away from home and questioned if they would make it on their own. One participant recalls his undergraduate experience as follows:

The one thing that I had, um, a challenge of in my Bachelor’s degree was when I first started school, the mindset of, “Oh my gosh, how am I gonna make this on my own?” Even though it’s in-state college, being away from your friends and family…I wanted to make sure that I went to a college where I did not know anybody. That’s one of the things that I was scared of, was with the school…am I going to make new friends? Am I going to be able to stick it out? Because I’ve
seen other students go to school and they dropped out probably after the first or second year of college, and my thought was. Am I going to be like that?

Another participant shared her feelings of self-doubt, which was based off how she measured herself compared to her peers.

I would say one obstacle I would say was motivation. Because I wasn’t always motivated to go to class because I was always thinking, “Oh my God, when…when am I gonna be done with class…” or, “When am I gonna graduate…” I always thought that part because I always saw people graduating before me when I…when I came into college with them. And so I thought, “Oh, maybe I’m not good enough.” I always had these types of thoughts.

Other participants’ experiences include:

- “So the only challenge is just…personal. You know you’re smart. You want to make that A and you have it in you. Nothing can stop you. And then you don’t get it in that college algebra or that business finance, or that statistics class. This isn’t coming as quick as it should. I think that’s just a kind of barrier that I feel that I’m not as smart as I used to be.”

- “I took an English 1 class that made me feel like I wasn’t prepared academically…it made me feel like, am I really…college material? Am I really a person that can do this? Because I knew the people that went to college and dropped out, who didn’t finish. I questioned myself about that.”

- “I think the experience for me going through was I doubted a lot. I made grades…I passed and never had a problem, failing or anything like that. But when I went back for my doctorate, these feelings came up. Like how did I get
into this school? Did they let me in because they need this quota of letting in minorities? Am I really smart? And I thought that the grades were being given to me like it was this entire self-doubt thing. Like…maybe I’m not here because I really belong here. Maybe it’s not because of my hard work or my work ethics. I think what’s interesting is going through that experience and then coming back on the other side at that one reflection of saying, you know, hey, you did get along there.”

• “I thought, “Am I good enough?” I think being my age, you always wonder what can I do to better myself or am I studying hard enough and…maybe I didn’t make good on this test. Am I going to pass? Am I going to graduate on time?”

• “It’s just like, am I able to do this? Throughout college, it was just like, am I able? Even like study abroad. I mean, am I able to? And I never did study abroad because I felt like I couldn’t do it.”

Theme 9. Lack of Preparation. Four interviewees and three focus group participants stated they did not feel prepared with the knowledge or habits necessary for college. Some struggled from a lack of study habits and self-discipline. Others did not feel academically prepared compared to their college peers. One participant shared the experience of her first semester in college. “I didn’t feel like I had the right classes when I graduated high school. I didn’t really have the right type of studying skills…but I wasn’t prepared at all when I started college.” Other participants shared their experiences on how they felt unprepared for college:
• “Some of the subjects I...some of the classes I took are on subjects that I had previously taken in high school. It turned out that...the knowledge I had from high school wasn’t really on par with every other student that was in the same class as me so it made it feel unprepared.”

• “My English 1 class made me feel like I was not prepared because I think I took the other electives like Psychology and Sociology and stuff like that, and those were easy because it was just listening and reading. But when it came to that English 1 class...you know I honestly felt like I didn’t, I wasn’t prepared. I didn’t. I was terrified when I heard the work.”

• “My first trip to college didn’t work out for me because I was still kind of young. I wasn’t ready, wasn’t prepared so I ended up dropping out. I was just pretty young and dumb, and there really wasn’t a real structure...kind of guidance or mentoring program in the university at that time. I feel like you’re just kind of left to your own design as far as taking classes and keeping your schedules and I just wasn’t prepared for it.”

• “I think the biggest shock for me was getting into the classes, not having the study habits, not having made a really strong foundation and...in literature and math and some of the other things that, uh, just would better prepare you for college. I just think, the preparation for college, I didn’t have that. That made it hard in the beginning, because you know, other kids may have a rich foundation in terms of education. Learning to write was really difficult. Writing was the hardest piece for me because I didn’t feel like I had a strong foundation of that, and reading and inquiries.”
• “To this day, I guess, I still feel unprepared. I feel like high school didn’t prepare me, especially in the English courses, the Math courses, it didn’t help prepare me. Because there’s a lot of things that were taught in college that I’m sitting there like, what? Like okay, so there was just another thing that I had to learn on the side while trying to do these other things.”

Theme 10. Personal Struggles. Seven participants experienced personal situations that interfered with their college work to an extent, whether it be major or minor. Some of the personal struggles the participants reported includes divorce, health issues, and deaths in the family. One participant recalls how unforeseen health issues came as an obstacle in her sophomore year in school.

I think it was my sophomore year. I ended up getting the shingles. And so I had that for maybe a month, and then I couldn’t come home because I had school. So that affected me that semester. And then…this past summer I had cellulitis in my forearm. I always said my health was my first priority instead of education, because I would rather be healthy and going to school.

One participant, whom is fluent in the Choctaw language, spoke about the language barrier served as an obstacle for her in college.

The English/Choctaw language was a barrier for me. I remember in college, feeling like I’m stupid, why did I attempt this? Because I could read a page and I would have to read it about 20-something times. Now that I’m older I realize why…it’s because of how we process information. Having a second language, I had to learn to focus more. College was, and it still is, tough. Like I have to read something several times before I fully understand what it’s saying.
Another participant talked about how deaths in her family made it difficult for her to focus while pursuing an undergraduate degree.

I have to say that my undergrad degree had been very challenging because of the fact that I lost many, several family members during that time. Death after death after death. I can’t tell you that my path was easy because it wasn’t. There were times where I would, you know, study for an exam and just lose all my, the answers, the studying material, everything because of death. You can’t really predict that.

Divorce was an obstacle for one participant, not only personally but also academically:

When I started the graduate program, I was going through a divorce and stuff. There were times when I was just like, I felt so low, and I couldn’t face anybody even those people who knew me. I just didn’t want to be around people and I almost quit school. There was just personal stuff going on and then, um, there were times that finances were tight. Especially during the time I started graduate school. I was on my own, and I had stuff to take care of at the house. I didn’t have enough money to go to class sometimes.

Other participants spoke of their personal circumstances that served as a barrier to their persistence in college:

• “I have social anxiety so that made it difficult for me. I had a public speaking class and I knew one girl in there so anytime I had to present something I would just look at her.”

• “I was in an abusive relationship and, you know, that tends to weigh very heavy on an individual. It affected my self esteem and my schooling.”
• “I get homesick a lot. That’s probably one of the hardest things is being able to continue my education without any family presence.”

Theme 11. School/Life Balance. Five interviewees and three focus group participants expressed that maintaining a school/life balance was an obstacle they had to overcome in order to persist in college. A majority of the experiences entail trying to maintain a job or raising children while in school. One participant reflected on her experience raising a child throughout her undergraduate program.

When I became a parent…it was kind of a change in my thought process. Like, I thought to myself, am I going to quit and go to work and take care of her, or am I gonna go to school and still try to finish? I was so scared to leave her because I was like, this is my baby, you know. But my parents and my daughter’s other grandparents wanted me to finish school. It was like, you go to school…we got her. There were times that my kid got sick and I had to miss class, but everything worked out.

When asked about what obstacles he’s faced throughout his collegiate career, one participant stated:

I guess through this most recent trip, through the last four years, the biggest obstacles I’ve faced were…like I said, I have two kids and that made it really hard. It put a lot of strain on our family trying to be able to focus on them and do homework and…actually attend classes, especially kids getting sick all the time, so…it’s tough.

One participant recounted her experience trying to balance being a young mother while in college.
Things were hard. I needed to still help carry a job and try to get everything paid for and covered with my son. So college was a little bit different. It was um…it was really sort of like this world that felt unknown, and it was a struggle, I think, even for me to fit in and find my niche because I wasn’t like everyone else. Most kids…didn’t have children. Finances were a big challenge as well. Trying to make sure that you…could go to school full time. And…still get everything covered. A stipend from the scholarship program is not gonna completely support you if you have a family.

Other students expressed their struggle with balancing their responsibilities and college life:

- “Another challenge that I face is not living on campus. I live off-campus so it’s a little bit harder…to try to maintain school and paying rent.”

- “Trying to work and go to school. My first two years, I worked and it was just a struggle to try and do both. It’s hard enough just going to school. Trying to juggle a job makes it even harder.”

- “A challenge for me was the family life. I was trying to juggle college, raising kids, and my income.”

- “One of the challenges I have today is my duty as a mom. I breastfeed, so having time to go to work, go to school and then you know, trying to be a mom who breastfeeds is an adjustment. Trying to find and make the time is a challenge.”

*Theme 12. Lack of Support.* Four interview participants and two focus group participants discussed how not having support from those around them made it difficult to
persist in college. Participants noted they experienced a lack of support from various sources including, spouses, teachers, and family members. One participant recalled how an unsupportive spouse made it nearly impossible for her to continue with her education:

I was with someone who was really unsupportive of me going to school. I got involved with him and he didn’t have a college degree. He wasn’t supportive and he was very negative and didn’t want me to advance. He’d tell me I needed to be home with the children instead of going to school. He would say school is not going to do anything for me and he would tear my school books up. He would, um, cause me to be late to classes because he would lose the keys or take off in the car. So then at that point I would have to call a friend so they could take me to school, or one of my family members would. There were a lot of obstacles at home that had an impact on my schooling.

One participant recalled a conversation she had with an adult she looked up to and whom she had known for a long time. She informed him of the university that she chose to continue her education at once she was done with community college:

I told him I’d be attending MC and he was like, “MC?” And I said yeah and he was like you know that is one of the toughest schools in Mississippi? And I said really? He said, “Yeah, it’s hard.” So he instilled in my head that it was really tough there. And that made me feel like I probably am going to fail. And he even made the comment, “I hear the staff there, they are just…they don’t take crap. They don’t work with you.” I mean, he had these negative statements to…kind of discourage me. And I was scared. Like I said, he just kept telling me all these things and they made me feel like I probably wasn’t going to make it.
A lack of support from the faculty and staff made it difficult for one interviewee to manage her way through school. She felt that the faculty and staff was not understanding of her personal situation.

The biggest obstacle was just the lack of a support system at the school. There was very little support in terms of realistic expectations about the things that I needed to handle in my personal life and then my schooling, you know. It felt like people were not supportive or understanding of my situation or what I wanted to do. I knew that I needed to get out and make some money since I had a child to support. The staff at my school really discouraged work but I knew I had to work full-time because I had a child. And so, I kept that a secret from my instructors because we weren’t allowed to work.

A lack of support from a close family member was a major obstacle one participant had to face during her time in college. She recalls:

I had signed up for community college. So I went to my mom. I had my little one, my oldest one at the time. I went to my mom and asked her, you know, “Can you help me out? Will you watch her while I go to school? I’ll pay you.” And she said no, she was like, “That’s your problem. You shouldn’t have gotten pregnant at a young age. Get off my yard.” So at that time I was, you know, struggling. And I didn’t do so good at EC [community college] so I just kind of quit for a couple years. So you know, finding a good support system is one of the challenges that I struggled with.

**Theme 13. Lack of Necessities.** Four interviewees and three focus group participants noted that a lack of necessary resources, including transportation, mentors,
wi-fi and laptops, makes college more difficult. Two interviewees and two focus group participants cited a lack of some sort of resources as an obstacle in their college experience.

- “The main challenge I had was a lack of transportation. The campus is about three miles from my apartment. I actually walk to school sometimes.”

- “It’s hard, especially when you’re in institutions of higher learning as a minority and depending on where you come from. And if you come from a family that has never gone to college…they don’t know the experience. They can’t share that with you. Um, they don’t have any tips, if you will, to help you through. So you…you don’t have anybody to say, to mentor you and to tell you what it was gonna be like.”

- “A challenge for me was the transportation problem. The car broke down and…the cost of transportation. I mean the transit system over here it was like, “Who’s going to the hospital in Meridian and can I jump in and ride?””

- “Another challenge for me was needing a laptop to use to take my online classes.”

Participants’ Lived Experiences

Participants were asked multiple open-ended questions, and responses addressing both RO2 and RO3 are discussed in the previous sections. The lived experiences of MBCI students interviewed varied from participant to participant, but each experience provided valuable insight on the individual’s story in reference to Choctaws in higher education. Participants were asked to talk about their college experience, and the narratives derived from the interviews and focus group resulted in 13 emergent themes.
identifying the perceived enablers and barriers to completing higher education programs. Rich, thick descriptions provide readers insights on the MBCI tribal members’ experiences in college as well as insights on how their past and present lived experiences have influenced their persistence in higher education.

Research Objectives and Theme Correlation

Data analysis for the research study resulted in the display of participant demographic information and 13 emergent themes regarding MBCI tribal member persistence in higher education programs. The display of participant demographics in Table 6, along with an explanation of the participant demographics, satisfies RO1. The descriptive narratives provided in the section on perceived enablers satisfy both RO2 and RO4. The seven emergent themes identified as perceived enablers are supported with rich descriptions from the study’s 17 participants. The perceived barriers are identified with supporting narratives gathered from the participants of the study, fulfilling RO3 and RO4. Six emergent themes were identified as barriers to completing higher education programs for MBCI students. Table 7 displays correlating research objectives and themes for the current study. Figure 3 provides a visual display of all the themes identified, which satisfy RO2 and RO3 of the research study.
Table 7

*Research Objectives and Theme Correlation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Objective (RO)</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RO1</strong></td>
<td>Demographic descriptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RO2</strong></td>
<td>• Theme 1: Self determination</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Theme 2: To be a role model</td>
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<td>• Theme 3: Choctaw pride</td>
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<td>• Theme 4: Personal goals</td>
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<td>• Theme 5: Positive support system</td>
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<td>• Theme 6: Acceptance &amp; involvement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Theme 7: Utilization of student support services</td>
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<td><strong>RO3</strong></td>
<td>• Theme 8: Self doubt</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Theme 9: Lack of preparation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Theme 10: Personal struggles</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Theme 11: School/life balance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Theme 12: Lack of support</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Theme 13: Lack of necessities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RO4</strong></td>
<td>Participants’ descriptive narratives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ENABLERS

- **Theme 1: Self Determination**
  - Desire for a better life
  - Better career opportunities
- **Theme 2: To be a Role Model**
  - For family members
  - For friends
  - For Choctaw youth
- **Theme 3: Choctaw Pride**
  - For ancestors
  - To break barriers
  - Prove it can be done
  - Give back to the community
- **Theme 4: Personal Goals**
  - 1st in family to graduate
  - Conquering a challenge
  - Fear of failure
- **Theme 5: Positive Support System**
  - Family
  - Friends
  - Faculty & staff
  - TSP
  - Work colleagues
- **Theme 6: Acceptance & Involvement**
  - Student associations
  - Social centers
  - Fraternity
- **Theme 7: Utilization of Student Support Services**
  - Writing lab
  - Tutoring center
  - Speaking center

BARRIERS

- **Theme 8: Self Doubt**
  - Am I good enough?
  - Can I do it?
- **Theme 9: Lack of Preparation**
  - Underdeveloped writing skills
  - Poor study habits
  - Tough transition
- **Theme 10: Personal Struggles**
  - Homesick
  - Death in family
  - Lack of motivation
  - Divorce/bad relationship
- **Theme 11: School/Life Balance**
  - Working while in school
  - Parenting while in school
- **Theme 12: Lack of Support**
  - Unhealthy relationship
  - Negative family members
  - Discouragement from others
- **Theme 13: Lack of Necessities**
  - Transportation
  - Laptop
  - Wi-fi
  - Finances

*Figure 3. Summary of Identified Themes*
Summary

Chapter IV details the data analysis process used to identify the results of the study. IPA strategies were used to direct the researcher through every imperative step in the data analysis process. The chapter also discusses the validation strategies implemented to ensure the data reported is reliable and valid. Participant demographics are reported using frequency distributions, which satisfies RO1. The enablers and barriers (RO2 and RO3) to completing higher education programs are identified and supported by rich narratives from 17 MBCI tribal members. Participant narratives provide insight on the lived experiences of Choctaw students in college as well as how those experiences affect their persistence in their respective college programs. Lastly, the research objectives are correlated to the themes that were developed as a result of the research and analysis. The next chapter discusses the conclusions, interpretations and closes with the researcher’s recommendations for future studies.
CHAPTER V – CONCLUSIONS

The four previous chapters of this research study discuss the background for the study, supporting literature, the research methodology, and the results of the data collection process. This chapter provides a summary for the research study and a summary of results, as well as findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The chapter concludes with discussing the implication for study limitations and it presents recommendations for future research studies.

Summary of the Study

A community’s economic growth is directly correlated to members within that community attaining higher education (Becker, 1994; Fann, 2009). Literature states there is a strong correlation between employment and educational attainment; meaning well-educated individuals in the United States experience some of the lowest levels of unemployment and earn larger incomes (www.bls.gov). Between 2011 and 2017, only 20.4% of MBCI students who attended a higher education institution completed the program with a certificate or degree (M. Carson, personal communication, March 4, 2017). This percentage is much lower than the national postsecondary six-year completion rate for the 2010 cohort which totals 54.8% (Shapiro et al., 2016). The purpose of this study is to seek an in-depth understanding of MBCI students’ lived experiences in post-secondary education programs. The study also focuses on identifying the barriers and enablers to persistence in higher education programs for MBCI tribal members. The following research questions were used as a guide for the current research study:
1. What factors enable Choctaw students to persist and complete higher education programs?

2. What barriers hinder Choctaw students’ persistence and completion of higher education programs?

3. What are the experiences of Choctaw students in higher education programs?

A phenomenological qualitative research design was used to investigate the lived experiences of MBCI tribal members via one-on-one interviews and a focus group. Purposive criterion sampling was used to recruit study participants of various demographic backgrounds, ranging in age, gender, and educational backgrounds. The sample consisted of 17 individuals, 10 interviewees and 7 focus group participants, each of whom shared rich descriptions of their collegiate experiences.

Participant demographics were collected using a demographic questionnaire and the results were reported in Chapter IV, fulfilling RO1. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews, using open-ended questions, which facilitated discussions with the participants to assist in identifying factors that serve as enablers and barriers for MBCI tribal members in higher education programs. The data collected was analyzed and interpreted following the guidelines of the IPA process. MBCI tribal members’ lived experiences were reported verbatim from interview transcripts to provide rich descriptions of their collegiate experiences, fulfilling RO2, RO3, and RO4. The data analysis process resulted in seven emergent themes categorized as enablers including self-determination, to be a role model, Choctaw pride, personal goals, positive support system, acceptance and involvement, and the utilization of student support services. Additionally, six themes emerged as barriers to completing higher education programs, including self-doubt, lack
of preparation, personal struggles, school/life balance, lack of support, and lack of necessities.

Summary of Results

The participant demographics were displayed and reported using frequency distributions, fulfilling RO1. Analysis of the interview and focus group data resulted in the emergence of 13 themes, seven of which support RO2 and six support RO3. The previous chapter presented themes and illustrated how they align with their respective research objective. Each theme is supported with verbatim text from the interview and focus group transcripts. The themes identified as enablers to competing higher education programs include:

- Theme 1: Self-determination
- Theme 2: To be a role model
- Theme 3: Choctaw pride
- Theme 4: Personal goals
- Theme 5: Positive support system
- Theme 6: Acceptance and involvement
- Theme 7: Utilization of student support services

The themes identified as barriers to competing higher education programs include:

- Theme 8: Self doubt
- Theme 9: Lack of preparation
- Theme 10: Personal struggles
- Theme 11: School/life balance
- Theme 12: Lack of support
• Theme 13: Lack of necessities

Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The findings discussed in this section are relative to the problem concerning low post-secondary education completion rates among MBCI students. The findings are a direct result of the connection between the exiting literature and the results of the data collected from the research participants. In addition, the findings are reflective of the suggestions made by research participants regarding persistence in college and the researcher’s interpretation of the study’s results.

Finding 1: Personal support networks are critical to the academic persistence of MBCI students in pursuit of post-secondary education

A total of 15 out of 17 research participants expressed the importance of a support system throughout their post-secondary education experience. The sources of support included family, friends, and the institution’s faculty and staff. Many of the research participants expressed how the support of others is what helps them continue to persist through their program of study when faced with obstacles. In contrast, seven research participants discussed how the lack of support from individuals close to them negatively affected their outlook and persistence in college.

Conclusion for Finding 1. The notion that personal support networks are critical to academic success for Native American students aligns with existing literature. Carlyle (2007) found that a support system is a significant element in the persistence and successful completion in postsecondary education for MBCI tribal members. Data from Native American college students indicate that having a support system helped them cope with issues they faced in college (Oosahwe, 2008). Research shows that Native American
students are likely to excel in higher education if they have a mentor to influence and persuade them in the right direction (Mendoza, 2014). Carlyle (2007) cites only 28% of the 87 MBCI research participants in his study reported having a mentor while in college. Seven out of the 17 participants from the current study were the first in their family to graduate from college or graduate with an advanced degree. A majority of them expressed the inability to seek advice from those closest to them because no one experienced college, so some sought advice from outside sources.

Recommendation for Finding 1. To ensure all MBCI tribal members have some type of support system, the TSP may find it beneficial to incorporate a mentoring program into the program’s offerings. Jackson et al. (2003) recommends the development of “structured mentoring programs” to pair Native American students who have advanced in college with Native American students who are just beginning their college careers. Some research participants did not have anyone to solicit advice from since they were first-generation college students. By offering the mentorship option to students, transitioning into a post-secondary education program could prove to be beneficial over time. Pairing new college students with MBCI college graduates who are able and willing to share their time, advice, and experience could help minimize or eliminate the self-doubt students experience in higher education programs. Though the data collected from this research study made no specific mention of formal mentoring, the discussions with participants revealed the positive influence informal mentors (family, friends, faculty/staff, i.e.) had in their persistence throughout their collegiate experience.

Finding 2: Academic preparedness is instrumental for MBCI tribal members in the transition into post-secondary education level
Nearly half of the research participants expressed they felt academically unprepared upon entering college. A lack of preparation was cited as an issue from individuals who graduated from CCHS as well as individuals who graduated from a high school other than CCHS. Participants stated they lacked good study habits, they did not feel as knowledgeable as their academic counterparts did, and they lacked the writing and public speaking skills necessary to perform well in classes. Participants cited their use of support services at their respective colleges to help with the difficulties they faced because of their lack of preparation. Tutoring, writing, and speaking centers were some of the support services available to the students that helped facilitate the academic obstacles they faced.

*Conclusion for Finding 2.* One piece of advice that the research participants offered to the Choctaw youth is to take advanced classes and develop disciplined study skills while still in high school. In hindsight, many of the participants said they wished they knew what they know now, which is the importance of taking academics seriously in high school. Similar to the findings from this research study, Carlyle’s (2007) research reveals nearly 40% of MBCI students did not feel they were academically prepared for college. Research participants cited inadequate study habits, English being their second language, the pressure of academic deadlines, and being overwhelmed with college level coursework as academic stressors (Carlyle, 2007). Participants from the current research cited bad study habits, the mismanagement of time, English as a second language, the difficulty of college coursework, and poor writing and speaking skills as academic stressors.
Chait and Venezia (2009) state that students who are academically prepared for post-secondary education have higher rates of degree completion. Research reveals that nearly 78% of students labeled as highly prepared for college complete their degree, compared to a 31% completion rate for students who are not prepared and a 46% completion rate for those who are minimally prepared (Chait & Venezia, 2009). According to the literature, “research shows that rigorous academic knowledge and skills—and certain habits of mind and non-academic knowledge and skills—are needed for students to be prepared for and succeed in college” (Chait & Venezia, 2009, p. 29). They go on to state that underserved students need networks of support, early academic assistance in preparation for rigorous coursework, and informed details about college in their early years (Chait & Venezia, 2009).

**Recommendations for Finding 2.** Offering a mentorship program to allow high school students to be in contact with college students and graduates could help direct a path for those high school students who wish to attend college but are unsure of what to do to prepare. The research participants stated they offer college advice to family members, but it could prove beneficial to formalize a mentorship program to assist high school students whose family and friends may not have attended college. Bruce and Bridgeland (2014) report that informal mentoring tends to support a young person’s personal development whereas a formal mentorship program leans towards providing more support in academics. They note that young individuals under the guidance of a mentor set higher academic goals and are more likely to attend a post-secondary education institution than those who do not have mentors (Bruce & Bridgeland, 2014).
Finding 3: MBCI tribal members use self-determination as a means of persisting and persevering throughout college

Each research participant expressed they were self-determined to obtain a college education. Participants cited a variety of reasons. Participants were determined to get a college education so they could afford a certain lifestyle they desire, to work in a career field they enjoy, to create a better life than how they were raised, to provide their dependents with a good life, and one participant stated that failure was not an option. Each individual’s lived experiences shaped their outlook on life and affected their decision to attend college and persist in college.

Conclusion for Finding 3. This study’s emerging theme of self-determination as an enabler to persistence in higher education aligns with previous literature (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 2008; Smith Bontempi, 2006). Self-determination theory is a macro theory of human motivation and it addresses the effects of motivation based on factors such as personal goals, psychological needs, social environment impacts, and personality development (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Data collected from the current study supports the notion that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation has a great effect on an individual’s persistence and performance. Participants expressed that motivation to persist in college was attributed to wanting a better life, nice things, a good career, and some simply wanted to prove they could obtain a degree.

Recommendation for Finding 3. Exposing Choctaw youth to a variety of collegiate campuses via college tours provides students exposure to post-secondary education environments. Two research participants noted they participated in the (MS)^2 (Math and Science for Minority Students) program which aims to support the development of
disadvantaged minority students in the areas of math and science. Both participants recalled their experience doing out-of-state campus visits and as a direct result of those visits, both participants chose to attend major universities after graduating from high school. They noted the exposure they gained from the (MS)² provided them with the desire to attend college and obtain a degree in the fields of math or science. Exposure to the collegiate environment could prove to have positive effects on the goals Choctaw students set for themselves upon graduation from high school.

Finding 4: Involvement in collegiate organizations and student activities helps MBCI students remain committed to their academic goals

Nine research participants explained their involvement in one or multiple organizations on campus. Participants stated the interactions with other members in their respective organization gave them a sense of belongingness and family, therefore aiding in their persistence throughout school. Participants noted their involvement in various groups kept them motivated because people with similar interests who support their academic efforts surrounded them.

Conclusion for Finding 4. Involvement and acceptance in the collegiate environment aligns with Tinto’s (1975) integration theory. Social integration is identified as an extrinsic motivational factor, which Tinto (1975) states plays a significant role in determining student persistence. Tinto (1975) defines social integration as the out-of-classroom interactions and affiliation students have with their peers, faculty, and staff.

According to Huffman (2001), transcultured students treat their Native American ethnicity as a “social-psychological anchor” from which they draw upon confidence, security, and strength (p. 6). Several participants from the current study expressed the
The notion of Choctaw pride as a motivation factor which assisted in their persistence beyond obstacles faced in college. Huffman's (2011) research on transculturation reports Native Americans must embody a strong cultural association and identity in order to achieve academic success. Oxendine’s (2015) research reveals factors such as, “peers showing respect for culture, having Native friends, feeling a part of the campus community, having friends from different cultures, and seeing friends as family on campus” contribute to Native students’ sense of belonging (p. 107). Four research participants expressed how involvement in Native American organizations on campus made them feel connected to others with similar backgrounds. Though they were in the minority, involvement in their organization made them feel as if they belong. Other participants were involved in non-cultural organizations, but their connection with other members still provided a sense of belongingness based on their shared interests and experiences.

*Recommendation for Finding 4.* Exposure to various colleges prior to attendance can provide students with an idea of the institution’s social and academic environment. One research participant stated she attended four different post-secondary institutions before she found one where she “fit in”. A college tour, to a variety of campuses, should be offered to high school students to help them find the institution that best fits their needs. During the campus visits, perspective students should inquire about the organizations available for students. Being knowledgeable about the institution’s environment and offerings can assist the student in making an informed decision regarding their academic future.
Implications of Limitations

This section discusses the limitations for the current research study. One limitation is in the participant selection process. The researcher faced the challenge of choosing which individuals would participate in the research study based on their responses on the Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix B). The researcher was contacted by 59 individuals who were interested in participating in the study, but after 8 one-on-one interviews the data gathered reached a point of saturation. Two more interviews were done to ensure no new data was collected, and a total of 10 one-on-one interviews were conducted. Adding in the participants from the focus group, data was collected from 17 of the 59 potential participants. The researcher did not speak with all 59 individuals who expressed interest in participating in the research study; therefore limiting the number of lived experiences documented.

Another limitation is the researcher’s inexperience with qualitative data collection, specifically the interviewing, process. The three pilot tests conducted prior to actual data collection afforded the researcher the opportunity to refine the research instrument and interviewing skills, but during the first 3 to 4 interviews, the researcher further learned how to ask probing questions to gather the information sought in the study. Towards the latter of the one-on-one interviews, the researcher’s confidence and interview delivery improved significantly in comparison to the initial interviews. The confidence and experience gained from the interviewing process proved beneficial for the researcher while conducting the focus group.

A limitation found within the focus group was the inability of the researcher to prevent groupthink, or the tendency of a participant to conform to the consensus of the
group. In addition, some participants may have been reluctant to express their experiences in front of the group for fear of judgment; therefore, the data gathered during the focus group session may not have captured the true lived experiences of all seven participants. To help minimize groupthink and reluctance in the focus group, the researcher incorporated various methods of data collection such as team exercises, individual exercises, and group discussions.

Lastly, the researcher being a MBCI tribal member currently enrolled in an institution of higher education may have affected researcher bias for the current study. A reflexive journal was used to help minimize researcher bias; however, the researcher’s own lived experiences may have had some influence on the interpretation and analysis of the research data. The use of triangulation helped to minimize researcher bias by only reporting themes that emerged in both the one-on-one interviews and the focus group.

Recommendations for Further Research

The current research study only collected the lived experiences of MBCI tribal members who used the assistance of the TSP while in an institution of higher education. Future research investigating MBCI tribal members who do not use the assistance of the TSP could garner additional information about the influencing factors on persistence throughout college. Additionally, further research can specifically investigate whether or not there is a difference in the collegiate experiences of CCHS graduates and non-CCHS graduates. Researching the differences in the high schools of origin could result in strategies for the TSP to execute to best prepare tribal members for college in the areas in which their high schools may not provide.
Research on the Native American experience in higher education programs can be expanded to other Native tribes throughout the United States. The current research study reports the findings from only one of the 567 federally recognized tribes within the United States. An investigation on the influencing factors to persistence in higher education programs could reveal the updated enablers and barriers for current-day Native American students. The results could lead to the updating of strategies used throughout assistance programs to ensure students are getting the assistance needed for the present-day issues they may face. The results of research conducted within other tribes can be compared to those found in the current study to highlight the similarities and differences in persistence factors found among Native American tribes. Similarly, Carlyle (2007) suggests qualitative research among various Native American tribes to derive themes from the Native American post-secondary experience. The identification of these themes could be used by colleges and universities to create effective transition strategies for Native Americans into post-secondary education pursuits (Carlyle, 2007).

To gain a deeper understanding of the barriers that prevent MBCI tribal members from persisting in collegiate programs, it would be best to speak with tribal members who did not complete their program of study. Barriers identified in the current study are those that were overcome by graduates or they are barriers that are currently being overcome by students who are still persisting throughout school. Speaking with tribal members who did not complete the college program they started can help identify the barriers that play a detrimental role in MBCI students’ persistence in college. Additionally, the research can determine whether racial conflict with faculty or peers (Carlyle, 2007) continues to serve as a hindrance for MBCI students in post-secondary education programs. The current
research study did not identify racial conflict as an obstacle that MBCI students currently face.

Discussion

Information collected throughout the course of this research study has touched upon the plight of the Native American people in higher education as well as their ability to overcome and achieve education beyond the secondary level. The interest shown by members of the MBCI community in response to the current research study shows the desire of some tribal members to persevere beyond stereotypical expectations. The passion in which the research participants spoke with is a reflection of the shift in the mindset of educational attainment.

Most of the research participants have adopted the Choctaw self-determination ideology as a mindset and a means to persist beyond the challenges they faced in college. Upcoming generations of Choctaw youth will look to these individuals, among others, as role models for success; therefore lies the possibility of increased interest in advanced educational attainment for the MBCI. This research study is a step in the direction towards laying a foundation that can sustain and support academic success, and in turn, economic development and growth. An identification of the drivers and obstacles to success, specific to MBCI tribal members, in collegiate programs begins the conversation on ways to supplement existing programs and strategies to further support tribal members throughout their journey in higher education.

Continued research on ways to improve the educational and economic status of the MBCI is of utmost importance if the tribe is to continue to grow and be self-sufficient. This study, in conjunction with Carlyle’s (2007) research, is yet another step in the
direction towards a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of MBCI tribal members in post-secondary education institutions. It is the responsibility of the tribe to provide educational assistance, based on up-to-date strategies, which will help tribal members persist and succeed in programs of higher education. Existing literature on economic development states there is a positive and direct correlation between a community’s economic growth and the attainment of higher education by members within that community (Becker, 1994; Fann, 2009); therefore, higher education is the foundation that will support the economic prosperity of the Choctaw tribe and its people.

Summary

This chapter presents a summary of the research study, including the interpretation of the results. The purpose of this study was to seek an in-depth understanding of MBCI students’ lived experiences in post-secondary education programs. Additionally, the research focused on identifying the barriers and enablers to persistence in higher education programs for MBCI tribal members. Interpretative phenomenological analysis was used to analyze the data and reveal emergent themes. The developed themes were reported under two categories, enablers and barriers, to identify those factors that assisted or hindered MBCI students’ persistence in higher education programs. Verbatim narratives were also reported to report the lived collegiate experiences, as told by MBCI tribal members.

The findings, conclusions, and recommendations for the research study directly align with the results of the study and existing literature regarding Native American persistence in higher education. The theories supporting the findings include self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Smith Bontempi, 2006) and integration theory
(Tinto, 1975). The importance of support networks (Mendoza, 2014; Oosahwe, 2008) and academic preparedness (Carlyle, 2007; Chait & Venezia, 2009) also support the research findings. Implementing a formal mentorship program and conducting college tours for high school students are recommendations to increase college persistence and degree attainment among the upcoming generations of the MBCI.

Human capital development is one of several critical factors in successful economic development of Native American reservations (Cornell & Kalt, 1992). The investment in higher education for tribal members results in a skilled and educated workforce, whom can contribute to the community’s economic growth via knowledge share and skills application. With Native Americans having the lowest post-secondary education completion rates among all ethnic groups, continued research needs to be conducted to rectify this disparity.

This research study investigated the lived experiences of MBCI tribal members, and it identifies the factors that assist and hinder their persistence in post-secondary education programs. The personal accounts of the research participants from this study are indicative of tribal members thriving beyond the stereotypical assumptions that once marginalized their existence. Resilience, determination, and perseverance are overshadowing the mindset of doubt, and tribal members who overcome the adversities faced in higher education can serve as role models for the younger generations. The implementation of a formal mentoring program can assist in the development of human capital throughout the tribe, which is imperative for continued positive social and economic impacts within the MBCI. Tribal members, such as the participants from this study, are creating a foundation solidified in education, which will guide future
generations down the path towards academic persistence, degree attainment, as well as social and economic prosperity.
Hello, my name is Bianca York-Crockett. I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Southern Mississippi in the Human Capital Development program. I am conducting research on the enablers and barriers to Native American persistence in higher education programs. As a proud member of the MBCI, I am interested in hearing about your college experience to help identify the factors that influence Choctaw students’ persistence in post-secondary education programs. I am inviting you to participate and share your collegiate experience because you are currently in a higher education program or are a recent graduate of a higher education program. Your contribution to the research study could result in a lasting and positive impact on the guidance offered to Choctaw youth in preparation for their experience in a higher education program.

Participation in this research includes sharing your collegiate experience in a one-on-one interview setting or in a focus group. At the conclusion of your interview or the focus group, you will receive a $25 gift card as a token of appreciation for your participation in the research study. If you are interested in participating in this research study, please fill out the attached questionnaire and return it, via e-mail, to bianca.yorkcrockett@usm.edu. Feel free to e-mail me if you have any questions regarding the study.

Your time and consideration is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Bianca York-Crockett
APPENDIX B – Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic Questionnaire

Place an X in the box next to the items that describe you.

1. Gender:
   □ Male
   □ Female

2. Age group:
   □ 18-25 years old
   □ 26-35 years old
   □ 36-45 years old
   □ 46-55 years old
   □ 56 or older

3. High school you graduated from:
   □ Choctaw Central High School (CCHS)
   □ High school other than CCHS
   □ Earned a GED (graduation equivalent diploma)

4. The highest level of education you have completed:
   □ Currently pursuing a certificate
   □ Currently pursuing an undergraduate degree
   □ Certificate
   □ Associate’s degree
   □ Bachelor’s degree
   □ Master’s degree
   □ Doctorate degree
   □ Other (please explain):________________________________________

5. Father’s highest education level:
   □ Elementary school
   □ Middle school
   □ Some high school
   □ High school graduate
   □ GED
   □ Some college
   □ College graduate
   □ Graduate level and/or Professional degree
   □ Not sure
6. Mother’s highest education level:

☐ Elementary school
☐ Middle school
☐ Some high school
☐ High school graduate
☐ GED
☐ Some college
☐ College graduate
☐ Graduate level and/or Professional degree
☐ Not sure
APPENDIX C – Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Introduction: Hello, my name is Bianca York-Crockett. The purpose of this interview is to explore the experiences of Choctaw students in higher education programs. I welcome you to give in-depth responses on your experience in college, including any obstacles you may have faced as well as the things or people that encouraged you to persist through the program. Feel free to tell stories and say whatever you think. There are no right or wrong answers. Your identity will remain confidential, as stated on the confidentiality agreement you signed. If at any time you feel uncomfortable or you do not wish to participate, you may leave the interview. I will be recording the interview and afterwards I will transcribe the data to paper. I will remove any identifiers so that no one reading the transcript will be able to identify you as a participant. Do you have any questions?

Introductory Questions

➢ When did you first begin to think about going to college?
➢ Did you always plan to attend college?
➢ What college did/do you go to?

1. Tell me about your college experience
   a. Experience inside and outside the classroom?

2. How did/do you feel about the faculty and staff at your institution?
   a. Were they supportive? How/How not?
   b. How did your interactions with faculty/staff affect your college experience?

3. What did you believe is/ was the benefit of earning a college degree?
   a. Was there anything specific that motivated you to pursue a college degree?

4. How did your family and friends feel about you going to college?
   a. Were your family and friends supportive? How/How not?
   b. How much influence did they have over you to attend college?

5. Who or what contributed to your success in college?

6. What challenges did you face in college?
   a. How did you overcome them?
7. How do you think being Native American, or specifically being Choctaw, shaped or impacted your education experience?
   a. Please provide examples.
8. How did your interactions with other students affect your college experience?
9. Did you participate in any extracurricular activities while in college?
   a. If so, how did your interactions in those activities affect your motivation in college?
10. Who was your support system throughout college?
    a. How did they encourage you
    b. What did they expect of you
11. What advice would you give to a young Choctaw who may consider attending college in the future?
    a. How can they best prepare for college?
12. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience, or the Native student experience, in college?
APPENDIX D – Focus Group Protocol

Focus Group Protocol

Introduction: Hello, my name is Bianca York-Crockett. The purpose of this focus group is to explore the experiences of MBCI students in higher education programs. I welcome each of you to give in-depth responses on your experience in college, including any obstacles you may have faced as well as the things or people that encouraged you to persist through the program. Your identity will remain confidential, as stated on the confidentiality agreement you signed. I will be recording the focus group and afterwards I will transcribe the data to paper. I will remove any identifiers so that no one reading the transcript will be able to identify any of you as a participant. Are there any questions?

Introductory Questions

➢ When did you first begin to think about going to college?
➢ Did you always plan to attend college?
➢ What college did/do you go to?

1. Using one word, how would each of you describe your college experience?

2. How did/do you feel about the faculty and staff at your institution?
   a. Were they supportive? How/How not?
   b. How did your interactions with faculty/staff affect your college experience?

3. What did you believe was the benefit of earning a college degree?
   a. Did any of those beliefs change?
   b. Was there anything specific that motivated you to pursue a college degree?

4. How did your families and friends feel about you going to college?
   a. Were they supportive? How/How not?
   b. How much influence did they have over you to attend college?

5. Who or what contributed to your success in college?

6. What challenges did you face in college?
   a. How did you overcome them?

7. How do you think being Native American, or specifically being Choctaw, shaped or impacted your education experience?
a. Please provide examples.

8. How did your interactions with other students affect your college experience?

9. Did any of you participate in any extracurricular activities while in college?
   a. If so, how did your interactions in those activities affect your motivation in college?

10. Who was/is your support system while in college?
    a. How did they encourage you?
    b. What did they expect of you?

11. What advice would any of you give to a young Choctaw who may consider attending college in the future?
    a. How can they best prepare for college?

12. Are there any additional comments anyone would like to share about their experience, or the Native student experience, in college?
APPENDIX E – Resolution to Conduct Research

Resolution to Conduct Research

MISSISSIPPI BAND OF THE CHOCTAW INDIANS

RESOLUTION CHO 16-058

A RESOLUTION TO APPROVE BIANCA YORK-CROCKETT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI TO CONDUCT RESEARCH ON “BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS TO COMPLETING HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR MISSISSIPPI BAND OF CHOCTAW INDIAN STUDENTS”

WHEREAS, Section 1, Subsection (a) of Article VIII of the Revised Constitution and Bylaws of the Mississippi Band of the Choctaw Indians (the “Tribe”) empowers the Tribal Council to negotiate with and approve or disapprove contract or agreements with Federal, State or local governments, with private persons or with corporate bodies; and

WHEREAS, Ms. York-Crockett is beginning the dissertation phase of the Human Capital Development Program at the University of Southern Mississippi; and

WHEREAS, Ms. York-Crockett’s dissertation will focus on investigating barriers that hinder students from completing higher education programs and identify factors that help facilitate students persistence in higher education programs; and

WHEREAS, Ms. York-Crockett will conduct interviews with tribal members who have attended or completed higher education; and

WHEREAS, Ms. York-Crockett’s proposal has been reviewed by the Education Committee and is recommended to the full Council for approval; now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the Tribal Council authorizes the Tribal Chief or her designee to sign any documents, forms or contracts directly related to the continuance, amendment or extension of this project without further Council action.; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the results of this study be presented to the Tribal Chief and the Tribal Council and said results shall not be published or otherwise revealed without the permission of the Tribal Chief and the Tribal Council.

CERTIFICATION

I, the undersigned, as Secretary-Treasurer of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, certify that the Tribal Council of said Band is composed of 16 members (1 seat vacant), 16 of whom, constituting a quorum, were present at a Special Call meeting duly called, noticed, convened and held this the 14th day of June, 2016; and that the foregoing Resolution was duly Adopted by a vote of 16 members in favor, 0 opposed and 0 abstaining.

Dated this 14th day of June, 2016.

ATTEST:

RES CHO 16-058
Page 2

Phylliss J. Anderson, Tribal Chief

Stella Willis, Secretary-Treasurer

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APPENDIX F – IRB Approval Letter

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Phone: 601.266.5997 | Fax: 601.266.4377 | www.usm.edu/research/institutional.review.board

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the “Adverse Effect Report Form”.
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months. Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 17060605
PROJECT TITLE: Banners and Enablers to Native American Persistence in Higher Education Programs: Narratives from Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians
PROJECT TYPE: New Project
RESEARCHER(S): Bianca York-Crockett
COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Science and Technology
DEPARTMENT: Human Capital Development
FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: N/A
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Expedited Review Approval
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 06/08/2017 to 06/07/2018

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board
THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI AUTHORIZATION
TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH PROJECT

Consent is hereby given to participate in the study titled: Barriers and Enablers to Native American Persistence in Higher Education Programs: Narratives from Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians

1. **Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to seek an in-depth understanding of MBCI students’ lived experiences in postsecondary education programs. Specifically, the study will identify barriers that hinder MBCI students from completing higher education programs; and it will identify the enablers that facilitate MBCI students’ persistence in higher education programs.

2. **Description of Study:** The current study uses one-on-one interviews to collect data regarding the lived experiences of MBCI tribal members who have attended an institution of higher education within the past five years. The duration of each interview is dependent on each individual’s response time. A range of 6 to 30 participants will be selected to participate in the one-on-one interviews. An audio recording will be done during each interview, and the data will be transcribed and analyzed by the researcher.

3. **Benefits:** The results of this study will assist educators and counselors in preparing Choctaw students to successfully complete higher education programs; and as a result, the MBCI could experience a growth in economic development because of strengthened human capital. Though the research study may not directly benefit you, as a participant, the results will have a lasting, positive impact on the guidance offered to Choctaw youth in preparation for their experience in a post-secondary education program. A $25 gift card will be given to each participant at the conclusion of the interview as a token of appreciation for your participation in the research study.

4. **Risks:** Currently, there are no predicated risks associated with this research study.

5. **Confidentiality:** The name and any other identifying information about research your participation in this study will remain completely confidential. Information obtained during this research project that could identify you as a participant in the study will not be divulged, published, or otherwise made known to unauthorized persons or to the public.

6. **Alternative Procedures:** There are no treatments given in this research study; therefore, there are no alternative procedures associated with the current study.

7. **Participant's Assurance:** Whereas no assurance can be made concerning results that may be obtained (since results from investigational studies cannot be predicted) the researcher will take every precaution consistent with the best scientific practice. Participation in this project is completely voluntary, and participants may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty, prejudice, or loss of benefits. Questions concerning the research should be directed to Bianca York-Crockett at 404-840-9569. This project and this consent form have been
reviewed by the Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research participant should be directed to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board. The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5116, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266-5997. A copy of this form will be given to the participant.

8. **Signatures:** In conformance with the federal guidelines, the signature of the participant must appear on all written consent documents. The University also requires that the date and the signature of a witness appear on the consent form.

________________________________________________________________________
Signature of the Research Participant  Date

________________________________________________________________________
Signature of Witness  Date

Participant’s Initials  _____
CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT FOR TRANSCRIPTION

This research is undertaken by Bianca York-Crockett, a Ph.D. candidate at The University of Southern Mississippi. The purpose of the research is to identify the enablers and barriers to Native American persistence in higher education programs. As a transcriber of this research, I understand that I will be hearing recordings of confidential interviews. The information on these recordings has been revealed by interviewees who agreed to participate in this research on the condition that their interviews would remain strictly confidential. I agree not to share any information on these recordings, about any party, with anyone except the researchers of this project. Any violation of this and the terms detailed below would constitute a serious breach of ethical standards and I confirm that I will adhere to the agreement in full.

I, Watumesa Tan, agree to:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may or may not be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-recorded interviews, and/or in any associated documents.
2. To not disclose any information derived from the audio-recorded interviews, and/or those contained in the associated documents to any other third party.
3. To use the information derived from the audio-recorded interviews, and/or those contained in the associated documents strictly for the purpose of transcribing as directed by the instructing researcher.
4. To not make copies, both online or otherwise, of any of the audio recordings or the transcribed interviews texts.
5. To store all audio recordings and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession.
6. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents including the audio recordings and transcripts from my computer hard drive and any back-up devices upon completion of the transcripts.

Transcriber name: Watumesa Tan

Transcriber signature:

Date: 6/15/2017
APPENDIX I – Focus Group Consent Form

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI AUTHORIZATION
TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH PROJECT

Consent is hereby given to participate in the study titled: Barriers and Enablers to Native American Persistence in Higher Education Programs: Narratives from Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians

1. **Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to seek an in-depth understanding of MBCI students’ lived experiences in postsecondary education programs. Specifically, the study will identify barriers that hinder MBCI students from completing higher education programs; and it will identify the enablers that facilitate MBCI students’ persistence in higher education programs.

2. **Description of Study:** The current study uses a focus group to collect data regarding the lived experiences of MBCI tribal members who have attended an institution of higher education within the past five years. The focus group is scheduled to last no more than 90 minutes. A range of 6 to 8 individuals will be selected to participate in the group. The focus group will be recorded using a hand-held audio device, and the data will be transcribed and analyzed by the researcher.

3. **Benefits:** The results of this study will assist educators and counselors in preparing Choctaw students to successfully complete higher education programs; and as a result, the MBCI could experience a growth in economic development because of strengthened human capital. Though the research study may not directly benefit you, as a participant, the results will have a lasting, positive impact on the guidance offered to Choctaw youth in preparation for their experience in a post-secondary education program. A $25 gift card will be given to each focus group participants at the conclusion of the group as a token of appreciation for your participation in the research study.

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human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research participant should be directed to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5116, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266-5997. A copy of this form will be given to the participant.

8. **Signatures:** In conformance with the federal guidelines, the signature of the participant must appear on all written consent documents. The University also requires that the date and the signature of a witness appear on the consent form.

_________________________________________  _________________________
Signature of the Research Participant  Date

_________________________________________  _________________________
Signature of Witness  Date

Participant’s Initials ________
APPENDIX J – Thank You E-mail

[Recipient’s name],
Thank you for showing interest in participating in the research study about Native American persistence in higher education. Thanks to an overwhelming number of responses, the data collection process for the study has been completed; therefore, you will not be needed to participate in the research. I do, however, want to extend my deepest gratitude to you for your willingness to contribute to research that can be used to help enhance the higher education experience for Choctaw tribal members. I encourage you to share your collegiate experiences with friends or family who may be heading to college and are unsure of what to expect. Your words could positively impact someone’s transition into college and, in turn, increase their chances of succeeding. Thanks, again, for your interest in participating in this research study.

Yakoki,

Bianca York-Crockett
REFERENCES


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