"In Community": A Critical Qualitative Investigation of Engagement with Indigenous Communities to Improve Community College Access

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy (Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN – MADISON

2024

Date of final oral examination: May 8, 2024

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Dedication

To my Nyla, with all my heart babygirl.

"This is for every little rez kid, every little urban kid, every little Native kid out there who has a

dream" - Lily Gladstone (Blackfeet and Nimiipuu)

Acknowledgements

Many Many Miigweches.

First, Gitchi-Manidoo – for guiding me on this seemingly frightful, challenging, and unlearned journey.

Nyla girl, we made it. Thank you for your patience, your big sweet heart, and the love and joy that you bring to my every day. No matter how impossible things may seem, I hope this journey reminds you that your strength can be bigger than your biggest fears and obstacles. Never give up. I love you so much. I hope you reach for the stars my girl.

My family and my home in Bad River, thank you for shaping me to the person I am today. You contribute to my why. You continue to stay in my heart even when we are miles away.

My friends. Thank you for supporting me throughout this journey. For your listening ear, your check-ins, and for finding the big and little ways to support me and my little one as I attempted to juggle all the things. Katie, Katrina, Lana, Yolanda, Daisee, Sara, and Heather – good looking out.

My dissertation committee – Dr. Xueli Wang, Dr. Rachelle Winkle Wagner, Dr. Pete Miller, Dr. Alberta Gloria, and Dr. JP Leary. Each one of you have been an instrumental part of this process, from my letter of recommendation to the finish line. Thank you for your scholarship and for the support that you provide for your students. I am grateful for your willingness to engage in this project and be part of this discussion.

My research participants. Thank you for taking the time for me, for just being you, and for trusting me to share your voices. Each of you has left a huge impression on me, and I hope that through our visits, we can inspire more positive and impactful changes to come.

My ELPA family and SG Team. I am so proud to be a part of this community and bonded in this experience with all of you. Thank you to the ELPA faculty and staff who supported me every semester. Special thank you to Drs. Walter Parrish, Dominic Ledesma, Ashley Gaskew, and Colleen Larsen for our conversations these last few weeks. You affirmed me, and you lifted me. I appreciate you so much.

To Dr. Mercile J. Lee and my "Fellow Scholleagues" – your legacy lives on. I will always value the years of care, (tough)love, and support that she invested into each one of us. She pushed us to be better versions of ourselves. Thank you, Mercile for opening the door and thank you Dominic for seeing me through. "Once a scholar, always a scholar!"

And last but most certainly not least. Dr. Xueli Wang. I cannot express enough gratitude for your guidance and support over the years. Thank you for your incredible service as my doctoral advisor and for allowing me to "just be" in all of the ways that I needed to be. Your wisdom, love, and compassion have been instrumental in my journey as a scholar-practitioner, and I am deeply honored to have had the privilege to learn and grow under your leadership. I am so grateful for the time and effort that you have invested in me. Thank you for helping me to navigate through both challenging and uplifting times and for believing in me, especially during the times when I didn't believe in myself. You helped me learn how to trust my gut and to trust in the promise. You inspired me and challenged me to dig deeper. May we never forget: Xueli is always right.

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Abstract

The community college serves both a role and a purpose within the higher educational and social landscape of America. As access to and through these institutions remains increasingly important in our ever-changing society, the purpose of this research was to shift the lens to not only include but to center the communities to which it serves. This project focuses on the intersections of the community college, college access, and community engagement by exploring the relationship between the community college and Indigenous communities. It seeks to provide an "eastern-facing perspective" by centering the experiences, insights, and observations of Indigenous community members (myself included) in regard to the community college. Using Critical Indigenous Research Methodologies, Tribal Crit, and the Seven Values of the Anishinaabe, my data analysis identified three domains of findings that pertain to power, place, and person, which underscore how Indigenous community members define and experience community engagement efforts of the community college to increase college access. Findings reveal that meaningful engagement with Indigenous communities must occur at multiple societal levels, and requires a deep understanding of the myriad structural, environmental, and interpersonal factors that shape Indigenous communities' interactions and relationship with the community colleges.

Bezhig (1): Introduction

Community colleges currently enroll 38% of all undergraduates in the United States, representing over 10.2 million students (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2024). As open-access institutions and a bedrock of the American educational and economic landscape, this sector plays an important role in broadening pathways to and through higher education and responding to regional economic and workforce development needs. With over 1,000 institutions across the country, a community college can be found in every state, and in most cases within global reach through online offerings and international education (Kisker et al., 2023). Many would argue that it is more than just an educational center focused on teaching and learning, but that its use and existence carry a deeper meaning and potential to the communities living in the regions where they reside.

It is well documented that community colleges in the United States serve a large proportion of students who have been historically excluded or underserved in higher education (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2024; Beach, 2011; Edgecombe, 2019, Kisker et al., 2023). With 57% non-white students enrolled for credit (AACC, 2024), community colleges are a common choice for Black, Indigenous, and other racially minoritized students. Despite the large numbers of non-white students enrolled at community colleges, it is evident that not all communities experience access to higher education in the same way. Access to college is limited and unequal for various reasons, such as college costs, location, time, discrimination, and pre-college academic preparation, to name a few (Perna, 2006; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2007). Centuries of social and political struggle have enabled gaps in college access among those attending community college (Kisker et al., 2023).

These gaps carry further implications to overarching communities as many historically underserved populations are not given the same attention in the structural design and delivery of services offered by the American community college (Wang, 2020). The community college is known to benefit some more than others as policies and practices that negatively impact communities still exist (Kisker et al., 2023). As community colleges work to succeed in their social role and contribute to community growth and well-being, it is important to consider the lived experience and over-all impact of the communities to which it serves. While enrollment percentages are a good place to start in understanding access to and participation in America's community college system, they only provide a fragmented understanding of how and why students get there. In addition, they only provide a glimpse into an institution's relationship with a community. At a time when the social and economic landscape of our world is rapidly shifting, the institution's continued commitment to all the communities it serves is seen to become increasingly important to remain an accessible, diverse, and inclusive institution.

One population in particular that is often overlooked in research surrounding community college access are Indigenous communities. Despite a majority enrollment of non-white students, in 2021 American Indian and Alaskan Native students accounted for less than one percent of students enrolled in public two-year colleges (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). They are a very small proportion of the students enrolled in public institutions, and therefore become a forgotten group (Brayboy et al., 2015). This invisibility leads to a college access and completion crisis among Native American students and carries further implications for broader Indigenous communities (American Indian College Fund, 2019; Reyes & Shotton, 2018). Despite the small number of Indigenous students enrolled in community colleges, the community college has a disproportionate impact on Indigenous communities as they currently enroll 53% of

all Native American undergraduates who are in credit-bearing courses and programs (AACC, 2024, National Center for Education Statistics, 2023).

Though there is growing scholarly attention to how community colleges can contribute to the success of the individual student (Bombach, 2001; Hollifield-Hoyle & Hammonds, 2015, Mohammadian, 2021; Pierce, 2016), less scholarly attention has been paid to the "community" in community colleges—that is, the ways in which the American community college actualizes its relationship to local communities as an effort to change the status quo. However, it may arise as community colleges have recently turned their attention toward their relationship with and impact on community. Community college networks like Achieving the Dream, a nation-wide network of over 300 community colleges in 45 states, recently revealed their Institutional Capacity Framework to include community *and* students at the center of the foundational capacities of community colleges. The foundational capacities are believed to ensure that community colleges are ready and able to drive equitable outcomes for those they serve. By placing a focus on community connectedness, "[community] colleges can leverage their potential to be collective impact hubs to drive transformation in their communities" (Achieving the Dream, 2024). As community college practice moves towards a more intentional focus on the community, research in the coming years will likely follow.

Empirical research on community engagement is often situated within four-year institutions (Kelly, 2016; McRae, 2012a; Mtawa et al., 2016; Sandmann and Jones, 2019). Scholars have recognized that within these settings, community engagement is a foundation for outcomes such as student access, retention, persistence, and local economic workforce development. Despite this insightful research on four-year institutions' community engagement, the omission of research that specifically focuses on community college engagement with

historically underrepresented communities, more specifically Indigenous communities, demonstrates a need for further inquiry. It is vital to connect community engagement and community college access as one inseparable issue to advance community college services to Indigenous communities. This is an imperative and a commitment that grounds my dissertation project, which sets out to examine the experience Indigenous communities have with a community college's engagement with communities and efforts to improve college access. What I hope will emerge are key strategies supported by research and literature that supports Indigenous communities and puts them at the center of community college access work.

Definition of Key Terms

To focus my inquiry, it is important to clarify a few definitional and contextual issues. To begin, ***community colleges*** refer to any public not-for-profit institution that is regionally accredited to award the associate in arts or the associate in science as its highest degree for over 50% of their awarded credentials. While some community colleges have been able to offer baccalaureate degrees since the late 1990s, community colleges in my dissertation are those that confer more than half of their degrees at an associate level. These often include comprehensive two-year colleges and technical institutes that serve a variety of curricular functions including transfer preparation, occupational education, continuing education, developmental education, and community service (Kisker et al., 2023).

When looking at community colleges and their relationship to the community, it is important to note that there are some that are categorized as Native American-Serving, Nontribal Institutions (NASNTIs) or minority serving institutions (MSIs) that serve specific Indigenous populations like Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs). NASNTIs are two-and four-year institutions that are primarily public that receive grants from the United States Department of

Education under Title III as part of the Higher Education Act of 1965. These grants help NASNTIs improve their ability to serve Native American students. To qualify as an NASNTI, an institution must have at least a 10% headcount of Native American undergraduate students and not be a Tribal College or University (US Department of Education, 2014). There were 37 institutions eligible for NASNTIs in 2020 (Benally et al., 2020). TCUs on the other hand, are specifically chartered by tribal governments and provide higher education opportunities that are local, holistic, and culturally relevant to those they serve (Delong, et al., 2016). During the 2018 academic year, 34 TCUs awarded over twelve hundred associate degrees to an almost 80% self-identified American Indian/Alaskan Native student body (U.S. Dept of Ed, 2019). Considering this, these institutions are a critical access point for Indigenous communities that have traditionally been excluded from higher education throughout American history (Delong, et al., 2016; Gasman, et al., 2015). While NASNTIs and TCUs exist across the country, they do not serve all Indigenous communities. Often, the local community college is the only option for Indigenous students.

This dissertation positions ***Indigenous communities*** at the center of community college access work. Indigenous is a term that is often used in different ways. For the purposes of this dissertation, they are communities that descend from the original people who lived in the United States before European colonization. They are the people who identify as members or descendants of Tribal Nations in the US, residing within the community college district of this study. Throughout this dissertation document, the terms "Indigenous", "American Indian", "Native", "Tribal Nations" will all be used interchangeably as these are terms that are used by Indigenous communities themselves.

College access carries different meanings to different individuals and entities. For some, it is measured through enrollment rates into post-secondary education for an entire population or for particular groups often defined by demographics. These trends can serve as indicators where higher enrollment rates are interpreted as signaling greater access to education (Long, 2018). However, as scholars of college access have pointed out, access is more than just the enrollment rate of students. Instead, it considers the financial, geographical, programmatic, academic, cultural, social, and physical accessibility of the institution (Heller, 2001). In essence, college access comes down to the conditions and factors that facilitate and encourage or prohibit and discourage a student from attending college (Everett, 2015). Access to higher education can be limited for various reasons, and it is important to consider the role that engaging with Indigenous communities can play in improving college access in community college settings.

Engagement within higher education has undergone shifts in the terminology, framework, and models used throughout the years. Earlier conceptualizations of this topic focused on public service and outreach done by the institution, and as some researchers would say, faced *inward* as it focused on student learning and faculty research. However, given the legacy of community colleges serving as agents of change within their community, engagement has grown to be recognized as a powerful way to creatively connect campus and community to foster positive social change. Today, discourse around this topic has shifted to describing engagement as a reciprocal act that values the needs, knowledge, and expertise of the community (Sandmann et al., 2016).

Research Question and Study Significance

The lived experience of Indigenous communities in the United States often highlights the persistent barriers they face in accessing postsecondary education, including community

colleges. Despite purported accessibility, systemic issues such as cultural insensitivity and insufficient support services hinder Indigenous students' enrollment and success. The interconnected relationships with one's community have been proven to be salient for Indigenous students as many choose to attend higher education (e.g., Fong et al., 2019). Therefore, it is important for community colleges to also grapple with their connectedness to that same community. Considering the ways in which educational institutions have historically played in the lives and educational experiences of Indigenous communities, the community college's approach to engagement has significance as it can either reduce or exacerbate inequities experienced by students. In many ways, American higher education continues to fail Indigenous students across many measures of student access and success. Without involving the community in these conversations, there will continually be gaps. It begins to beg the question of who and what these institutions are designed for, and the further impacts this has on the communities it serves. Thus motivated, I pose the following research question for my dissertation project: ***How do Indigenous community members describe and experience a community college's community engagement efforts to improve college access?***

Niizh (2): Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter serves as a synthesis of recent literature for exploring college access within community colleges, community engagement, and Indigenous education. While there is little research that comprehensively synthesizes and analyzes inquiry surrounding these topical areas, there are important insights that can be drawn from each to situate my study. This review focuses on the scholarship that has emerged in the last decade in relation to my study and provides a more holistic understanding and approach to this dissertation project. In addition, this review helps inform community college and community engagement practitioners concerned with improving college access for Indigenous communities by offering various perspectives from which we can view these topics. By examining college access, community engagement, and Indigenous education, this review surveys the current state of knowledge and sets a direction for future research and practice.

Search Methods

In this section, I describe my literature search process, including the databases, and sources from which I retrieved the literature. I accessed several online catalogs and databases through the University of Wisconsin Library. Within this system, I searched databases associated with the subject of education, primarily focusing my searches within the Education Research Complete database which contains scholarly research in all fields of education and related social issues. Within Education Research Complete, I conducted a series of searches based on the keywords "college access" and "community engagement" plus each of the following: community colleges, higher education, and Indigenous. I utilized database suggestions for similar keywords such as technical colleges/2-year colleges, and Indigenous or Native or American Indian or First

Nations. I also searched Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Science Direct using these same keyword combinations. Aiming to focus on more recent literature, I primarily limited my search results down to work published since 2013 and those that only provided a full-text and were peer-reviewed so that I could fully synthesize recent literature and empirical research that exists around this topic. In addition, I went back to find previously published works if it was later found to be referenced within that article and utilized previous course reading material.

While this literature review is primarily focused on scholarship published within the last 10 years, my literature search process began in the early years of my doctoral program when I decided to dedicate my doctoral research to community engagement and Indigenous communities in the community college setting. With each course that I have taken, I found ways to incorporate this topic into assignments and projects that allowed me to begin building an ongoing list of references related to the topics discussed in this review. More recently, I integrated literature concerning community college access as an inherent part of my literature review, which was a decision aligned with my evolving professional and personal identities. As a scholar-practitioner, it remains important to strategically align my research with my everyday work to better understand the practicality and applicability of what I am researching and studying. Throughout this time, I have maintained a foresight on aligning this work with historically excluded communities—more namely Indigenous communities—in hopes that it provides direction on where I can contribute in the field.

As the years have gone on, I have maintained these references in an Excel spreadsheet. This spreadsheet serves as a reference guide for keeping track of literature related to this topic and highlights important aspects such as topic, keywords, authors, titles, type of resource, source, research questions, research design, and findings. All the articles that I have considered are listed

in this document, which correspond to word documents that are annotated bibliographies for each topic area.

When looking for literature, I filtered my search result page to the search criteria described earlier and opened articles in a new tab that seemed relevant to the topics of this proposal. As the scholarship for these topic areas is later described, 'college access,' 'community engagement,' and Indigenous education are very nuanced and complex. Therefore, it was important to set exclusion criteria for articles that emphasized an inward approach to community engagement (such as service-learning, civic engagement, and faculty research which will be later described) as well as those that were not specific to post-secondary education. After opening an average of 10 articles, I spent time reading abstracts and summaries in hopes to find relevant thoughts to my research, and if there was, spent time reading more in-depth into the literature.

Many scholarly and peer reviewed journals surfaced during this stage of my literature review. They include: *Canadian Journal of University Continuing Education, Catalyst for Change, Contemporary Educational Psychology, Community College Journal, Educational Policy, Higher Education, Indigenous Nations Studies Journal, International Journal of Educational Development, Journal of American Indian Education, Journal of Community Engagement & Scholarship, Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, Journal of Higher Education, Journal of Higher Education Policy & Management,, Journal of Higher Education Outreach & Engagement,, Journal of Higher Education Policy & Management. New Directions for Community Colleges, New Directions for Institutional Research, Theory into Practice, and Urban Review.* Also included are publications from national associations and organizations related to these topic areas such as the American Association of Community Colleges and the Community College Research Center. While online sources provided a large portion of literature

synthesized in this review, I also referenced other printed books that were either authored by researchers within the fields discussed, or were edited volumes containing useful literature related to this topic.

To make sense of the literature, I asked myself a series of questions that included its relevance to community colleges, how the author(s) conceptualized notions of college access, community engagement, and Indigenous higher education. I gave attention to the theoretical and conceptual frameworks used by the author(s), what type of scholarship I was reviewing or what research was being conducted, and what specific findings might pertain to my dissertation project. I then took the additional step to negotiate the lens being used to research these areas, what populations were included in the study, and what considerations might aid in what I am trying to get at. Often articles would provide me with additional specific keywords or authors to search.

Key Literature Strands

Based on my search and review process, over 90 pieces contributed to my analysis of the literature. The process described earlier in my search methods allowed me to organize my findings into three categories: *the community college mission and college access, the community college and community engagement, and Indigenous higher education.*

Community College Mission and College Access

Within the literature surrounding the community college and college access, it is well-stated that community colleges' mission is based on an ethos of increased access to education and training. They have been historically known as low-cost and accessible. Some would argue that the purpose of community colleges is to increase access to higher education for the most vulnerable populations, for those who might not otherwise have it (Schudde & Goldrick-Rab,

2015). In their work regarding access, equity, and community colleges, Gilbert and Heller (2013) discuss a time in United States history when equity in access did not mean that every potential student should receive the same opportunity, leading to a recommendation set forward by the Truman Commission in 1947 which outlined specific recommendations for expanding access to higher education. This included eliminating financial barriers and those related to race, sex, and religion. While very controversial at the time, the Truman Commission's vision pointed to community colleges as a way to do this because they were easy to build and generally viewed as the cost-effective option in higher education. The authors also discuss how the two-year colleges were still drastically evolving institutions in higher ed during this time, so this vision laid the groundwork for what we see within the rhetoric and literature involving the community college mission and college access (Gilbert & Heller, 2013).

Enrollment rates of students and communities are one way that we can look at college access in the community college (Long, 2018). Enrollment trends over the last 100 years can point to the contribution that community colleges have had for access for historically underrepresented and marginalized communities. Nationally, they have become more diverse, with data from the National Center for Education Statistics suggesting an almost 33% decrease in non-white students enrolling since 1976 (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). When these trends are disaggregated by racial and ethnic groups, they are even more revealing regarding the community college contributions to access (Kisker et al., 2023). The open-access mission of the community college often translates into 'ease of entry'. It gives the impression that students can enter classes almost at will. However, there are downsides that should be considered and many questions we can ask ourselves about what access means to those who do show up in community

college classrooms each day and how community colleges help to mitigate the barriers in attending college (Kisker et al., 2023).

Despite best efforts and the proverbial open door of community colleges, access and equity issues remain today. The promise of access against persistent barriers to attending college among students from minoritized and underserved communities complicates our understanding of what this means (Green, 2006; Guth, 2023). An informative lens toward a broader definition is offered by Everett (2015), who discussed how the public community college creates access and opportunities for first-generation college students. In this discussion, the author points to a definition of accessibility offered by Donald Heller, a researcher on college access. Heller (2001) summarizes historical definitions of access and outlines the components of financial accessibility, geographic accessibility, programmatic accessibility, academic accessibility, and cultural/social/physical accessibility. Therefore, in essence, "community college access defines the conditions and factors that facilitate and encourage or prohibit or discourage a person from attending college" (Everett, 2015, p. 53). As scholars in higher education, we know this to be true. Access to higher education can be limited for a variety of reasons, whether it be college costs, racism and discrimination, and inequities in other places such as K-12 institutions. Another caveat to the discussion is thinking about those students needing access to accommodations (Hoogendoorn, 2021).

Despite this holistic definition of access which is underlined by myriad societal and educational contexts, the literature around community colleges and college access is largely based on the financial accessibility of the institution and the cost of students to attend. While most research is based on monetary conceptualizations of college access and costs through federal aid and the rise of community college promise programs (Monaghan & Attewell, 2023;

Perna et al., 2020; Rosigner, 2017; Sublett & Taylor, 2021), other literature from the last 10 years seems to "lightly dabble" in the other components of college access introduced by Heller which include what access might mean through the other lenses. This is seen with the emergence of research on access for undocumented students (Negron-Gonzales, 2017; Neinhusser, 2014; Ngo & Hinojosa, 2022) and those that might be academically underprepared (Pratt, 2017; Nix et al., 2020; Toby, 2021). Recent research also considers the role that geography plays into access and seeking to interrupt patters of inequalities related to transfer opportunities that is often tied to location (Jabbar et al., 2017). It is not until more recently we see inquiry surrounding students who are houseless (Gupton, 2017), parenting (Madden, 2018), or justice-involved and formerly incarcerated individuals and their access to higher education and the community college (Johnson & Manyweather, 2023); along with discourse on the access to specific offerings within the institution, such as international education and programming (Whatley & LaVenture, 2022). There has been other coupling of college access with institutional offerings such as first-year experience programs (Acevedo & Zerguera, 2016) and dual-credit programs (Roughton, 2016) and thinking about how these components promote the ideals of college access for community college students.

With the focus on financial accessibility in the community college, discourse has centered on the costs of community colleges, federal aid and grants for students, and ways in which community colleges try to meet the costs of attendance. This has not seemed to change as it was also the case 10 years ago that much of the scholarship centered around these same things with an effort focused on leveling the playing field (Gilbert & Heller, 2013). To reiterate the fact that the concentration of community colleges and college access literature has been on financial accessibility is not to say that is not warranted. There are have been many meaningful insights

given by scholars around whether or not the lower-tuition costs of community colleges or ways

to mechanisms to cover the costs of tuition and fees through community college promise

programs in fact reduce or eliminate barriers to college access (Billings et al., 2021; Perna et al.,

2020; Monaghan & Attewell, 2023; Sublett & Taylor, 2021). The answer still remains unclear, as

to whether or not money for tuition and fees is actually the thing that holds people back

(Schudde & Goldrick-Rab, 2015). Students at community college carry a lot of unmet needs in

other categories (Sublett & Taylor, 2017).

Concepts aside from tuition and fees that are discussed in the literature include the

influences and structures that support college access such as the role of college presidents

(Bumphus, 2023; Davis et al., 2022), the placement of community college within federal policy

and funding priorities (Rosinger, 2017; White, 2022), and other life-circumstances surrounding

students (Pratt, 2017). Therefore, there is a lot to take into account when thinking about

community college missions and college access and researchers seem to agree that there are

numerous structures affecting the community college and the open- access mission.

Schudde and Goldrick Rab (2015) discuss the tension and negotiations of institutions

providing access with no consequential success. Sociologists and researchers alike often debate

the tension between increasing educational opportunity and the impact it has on the students it is

meant to serve. This is brought up as students potentially fall victim to "cooling out," a concept

published by Burton Clark in the 1960s, where students end up in professions that do not require

higher credentials and maintain the status quo in other social measures instead of moving to

greater aspirations (Wang, 2020; Wickersham, 2020). All this considered, it begs critical

questions about what and who community colleges were established for and are providing access

to, which seems to be an ongoing question for the 21st century (Beach, 2001, McCambly et al., 2023).

A critical question that is worth highlighting discusses community colleges themselves as racialized organizations (McCambly et al., 2023). Discourse offered by McCambly et al. (2023) provides a discussion in the meritocratic perspective that community colleges are culturally neutral, race-evasive spaces guided by an open-access mission. Community colleges are often as marginalized as the students they serve and despite their best efforts, the impact of inequitable organizational structures and practices are not helpful. McCambly and colleagues remind us that community colleges were developed during the 20th century, a period where W.E.B Du Bois outlined the "problem of the color-line" where skin color and hair would be the basis for "denying to over half the world the right of sharing to their utmost ability the opportunities and privileges of modern civilization" (as cited in Appiah, 2013, p.1). Even though we have progressed into a 21st century, these problems still linger as we think about ways to improve access. Therefore, it is important to identify, center, and deconstruct racialized structures within community colleges in order to get closer to the mechanism of inequities influencing access (McCambly et al., 2023).

This is definitely easier said than done. Working through the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, community colleges have been facing declining enrollment, a tightening labor market, strains of finances, and a student debt crisis (Bulman & Fairlie, 2022; Burmicky & Duran, 2022). As a result, many community college leaders are re-evaluating how they bring in students and support them to graduation and goal completion (Royal et al., 2023). In steps community engagement.

Community Engagement and the Community College

To ensure alignment with needs of the 21st century, higher education leaders are exploring ways to partner with communities to better understand needs and experiences for a variety of social issues. Since the early 2000s, it's been captured in academic journals as an essential vehicle to accomplish higher education's most important goals (Fitzgerald et al., 2016), and one of higher education's most influential reform agendas for changes to the status quo (Sandmann et al., 2016). In searching literature, it is clear that engagement, like access, is a very nuanced and multi-faceted construct. For some, it is all about putting services out to the community and doing outreach. Scholars would refer to this as "inward facing" community engagement; that is, efforts that are internal to higher education institutions like student learning and faculty development (Yamura & Koth, 2018). These are certainly intended to help the local community, but the attention is often placed on teaching and learning outcomes (e.g., Finkel, 2022; Greenwood, 2015; LaFave et al., 2016; Merceron et al., 2022). Inward-facing efforts are thought to reflect a historical town-gown perspective that separates the institution from the geographic and social communities around them (Hall, 2017). Therefore, throughout the literature, we learn that there are other dimensions to consider when looking at community engagement, which all ultimately affect how it can be interpreted.

Engagement, for the purposes of this review, is meant to bring more attention to the community colleges "outward facing" focus, which are those efforts to address larger societal issues within communities (Yamamura & Koth, 2018). However, empirical research involving the community college remains very limited. Most of what has been published within the field continues to be based on four-year colleges and universities or said to be about higher education institutions in general (e.g., Fitzgerald et al., 2016; Green et al., 2021; Sandmann & Jones, 2019).

What we find looking at the broader literature within higher education, is general agreement among scholars that community engagement is an inherent objective of the institution. To add to the discussion about the directional approaches to engagement, research has found that there has been evolution within the terminology, language, and definitions that have been used to describe the work within higher education over the last 20 years. Today's discourse is thought to involve a deeper and more mature understanding of engagement as a mechanism to make impact, as opposed to the early 1990s when the concept was first defined as public service and outreach (Sandmann et al., 2016).

The most recent and common definition of community engagement used in higher education today is through The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, or simply the Carnegie Classification. This classification identifies colleges and universities that practice community engagement as part of its core. Carnegie defines community engagement as "the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity" (American Council on Education, 2023; Driscoll, 2014; Fitzgerald et al., 2016). This "two-way street" is said to give voice to communities within the relationship (Sandmann et al., 2016). Ironically enough, this is not emphasized in the literature.

An exploration of a community engagement model known as "place-based engagement" attempts to center the viewpoints of the community. In a multiple case-study approach on five 4-year universities, researchers Yamamura and Koth (2018) derived meaning from community perspectives and found that building trust, maintaining clear and continuous communication, addressing problems, navigating diversity and racially mismatched contexts, and the importance

of attaining a 'virtuous cycle;' that is, the presence of those within the community helping to lead the charge were all important. A place-based community engagement framework is said to build upon the evolution of community engagement in higher education by offering a strategy that is specific to long-term vision and commitment. Drawing from concepts of collective impact, it has an equal emphasis on campus *and* community (Yamamura & Koth, 2018).

Implementing place-based community engagement initiatives takes time and careful planning, and differs from the service-learning strategy that is more prominent within community engagement literature. In pointing to examples, Yamura and Koth (2018) discuss the work of the Harlem Children's Zone, which was an effort to improve the lives of those living in a 97-block swath of New York City. Coincidently, other examples of place-based engagement initiatives include the promise programs discussed earlier with college access. These initiatives are considered to focus on uniting community leaders, services, and institutions to positively address the challenges faced by communities. The place-based community engagement model moves community engagement from isolated actions to an institution-wide strategy (Yamamura & Koth, 2018) and thinking about how we build the road.

The limited literature found on community engagement for the community college looks to explore how structurally, community colleges increase their capacity for engagement. A study done in 2014 found that authentic engagement exists in various degrees during its institutionalization, distributed leadership at the college derived from boundary-spanning behaviors, and the advancement of community engagement efforts paralleled its communication channels (Purcell, 2014). Identifying leadership characteristics that are needed to support community engagement was brought up again in 2023, when researchers attempted to identify the factors that community college presidents utilize to promote engagement. Utilizing a

narrative inquiry approach, they interviewed presidents and found that relationships are key to the process and that it is important to create spaces where all voices are heard. More importantly, they learned that positions of power matter at the community college for community-engagement work (Al-Sharif et al., 2023).

An important study by Miller and Kissinger (2007) offered some specific examples of how community colleges use continuing education and other non-credit activities that provide key services to the community. While an older piece compared with the rest of my reviewed articles, what made this work important and enduring is that it recognizes that community engagement is often directed by its size, scope, and geographic location. It highlights the community college's power and unique opportunity to address the economic and social issues present in rural America through leisure education, economic development, and cultural enrichment (Miller & Kissinger, 2007).

An institution's unique power is further explored with land-grant institutions and more specifically Tribal land-grant colleges and universities to offer a lens into tribal perspectives and how these institutions maintain strong connections with community (Kowalkowski et al., 2022). These institutions ascribe to the Kellogg Commission for conceptualizing community engagement. The Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities' seven-part definition of an engaged institution includes: Responsiveness to communities, respect for partners, academic neutrality, accessibility, integration, coordination, and resource partnerships (1999). Using this framework and utilizing a story submitted from an alum, researchers note that every touchpoint of engagement between a TCU and its tribal community is an opportunity for a profound and personal connection because students and community see themselves as part of the institution. The same could be said for NASNTIs. Community

engagement efforts are advanced by Indigenous people holding rank as faculty and leadership of the institution, and deep and long-standing relationships are key to facilitating successful partnerships that give voice to the community.

The small amount of literature on community engagement in the community college coupled with the larger body of research involving 4-year institutions provide further understanding of how community engagement in both research and practice continues to evolve. Contemporary trends and directions are moving toward bigger questions and provide a call-to-action for institutions to work toward creating space for dialogue and connection (Yamamura & Koth, 2018). It continues to be important for both institutions and researchers to work toward institutionalizing engagement that moves away from emphasizing projects to emphasizing impact (Fitzgerald et al., 2016). However, as scholars continue to offer different definitions and frameworks of engagement, a universal understanding and description is likely going to remain elusive for some time (Sandmann et al., 2016), particularly in how it pertains to Indigenous communities and the American Community College and efforts to improve college access.

Indigenous Education

Indigenous students come from all walks of life. Some are from urban communities, some live on reservations, some are very connected to their Indigenous identity, some are more removed, and some are enrolled as Tribal citizens. They fall into different economic statuses, and like any other population, they pursue different options. However, scholars would agree the Indigenous educational context is unique from other racial and ethnic groups. While Indigenous communities are often racialized, it is important to understand that they also hold a political identity that is not held by other racial groups (Brayboy et al., 2015, Lopez, 2017). Therefore, understanding postsecondary education for Indigenous populations involves taking into

consideration the historic, legal, and institutional factors that influence what it means today. Within prominent community college literature, the understandings surrounding Indigenous communities and the community college are mainly situated towards headcount data.

Many scholars recognize that Indigenous education has evolved from a very complex and often painful history of settler colonialism and the boarding school era (e.g. Brayboy & Lomawaima, 2018). Educational institutions have often been used as a weapon toward American Indian people which carries influence on the relationships felt today. While many institutions have tried to mend these relationships through tribal consultation policies and practices in higher education, there is further we can go in understanding of how consultation is actualized within the community college. Over the past decade, an active and engaged network of scholars and practitioners has emerged, ensuring that Native voices are leading much-needed conversation supporting the success of Indigenous people in education (Waterman, et. al., 2018), however most literature surrounding college access for Indigenous students is situated within TCUs and four-year schools.

In a 2017 article titled "American Indian Access to Higher Education: Where are all the NDNS?", Jameson Lopez explored the accessibility factors for Indigenous students to higher education. Finding a lack of literature pertaining specifically to college access, Lopez considers how college access and college persistence are intertwined. In addition to the financial, geographic, programmatic, academic accessibility, and the cultural/social/physical accessibility offered in the literature on college access, improving access for Indigenous students also involves a deeper dive in the cultural/social dimension to give further considerations of family and community support that are salient for Indigenous students (Lopez, 2017).

My intention with this section is to offer a glimpse into the considerations we must make in thinking about engaging with Indigenous communities and their access to the community college. While there has been intentional scholarship outlining the history of Indigenous education in the United States (e.g. Adams,1995; Reyhner and Eder, 2017) my aim is not to operate from a damage centered approach that focuses on Indigenous communities as being broken and conquered (Tuck, 2009). As my dissertation project unfolded, my understanding of Indigenous education was deepened and I aim to enrich this discussion through what I have learned from the research process, and most important, community members who contributed to my research. I detailed these learnings in my findings chapter.

Discussion

This integrated review sets up my dissertation project that focuses on community colleges' engagement with Indigenous communities. By reviewing and analyzing the literature on community colleges, college access, and community engagement, we gain deeper insights into the necessity of clear interpretations and definitions. Throughout this analysis I kept returning to the importance of being able to interpret and articulate what college access and community engagement means to communities to which they serve. Understanding these interpretations may not only help community college practitioners improve the effectiveness of the individual work and offer opportunities for how community engagement can be further studied with historically underrepresented communities. It is very evident that a specific focus has not been placed on the relationship building aspects of community colleges and Indigenous communities, which represents a prominent gap in the literature. This is where I focus my dissertation project. Addressing this gap is of vital importance for a better understanding of the

ways that community engagement can address some of the inequities in higher education that we see today.

Further, this integrated literature review and analysis revealed that the current research base does not recognize disciplinary differences or adequately reflect the differences and real-world complexities of Indigenous communities. The research has not been explicitly conducted from the perspectives of racialized communities. Being able to interpret and articulate what college access and community engagement mean to both the institution and the communities to which they serve remains even more critical in the quest for defining and refining existing research related to the topic. Reflections on these topics may not only help community college practitioners improve the effectiveness of their individual institutions and can add to the larger body of scholarship revolving around community college investment and practice with local communities.

Community engagement in higher education depends on an interpretation of community engagement. While there are numerous studies dedicated to the service learning in community colleges, there is little to nothing written about the boundary spanning and relationship building work that happens between community colleges and Tribal communities. While the interactions between Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) and the Tribal communities can serve as a model for the endeavors taken on by other community colleges around the country, building relationships with local historically underrepresented communities like Tribal people should not be strictly left to them.

In considering the tenants of TribalCrit—and my conceptual framework which I detail in the following chapter, it is important to examine why these relationships are important, who they are benefiting and why. Indigenous communities work toward the same goals of bettering their

local communities and can be important thought partners to this work. It is important to include them in the construction of knowledge for it means to challenge the status quo. Applying critical theory to research on community engagement means involving Native people in defining research goals and determining what types of data could be used to explore the topic. It also means involving them in the research design and analysis to ensure that the results are an accurate depiction of their lived experience. TribalCrit puts participants as the driver for what is important to consider when researching and understanding community engagement within tribal communities. In Chapter 3 that follows, I further unpack TribalCrit principles along with other methodological choices and decisions that guide my study on community engagement with tribal communities, centering Indigenous perspectives and prioritizing community voices.

Niswi (3): Research Methodology and Design

In this chapter, I outline the methodological approaches and research design of this dissertation project. While most methods chapters begin with a description of the type of research completed, followed by the design and description of procedural methods, I chose to begin with a description of my self-location, or positionality to this research. As an Indigenous scholar, this is an important starting point in explaining the research approach. It also gives context to the analysis, findings, and discussion to follow (e.g., Kovach, et. al, 2013). After providing my self-location, I discuss my choice of methodology and associated procedures.

Self-Location

Boozhoo giinawaa! Aaniin, indinamwemaaganidog. Mino-Giizhigad. Nookomis Makwa Akii Ikwe niindiijinikaaz Anishinaabemong. Gaye Nicole zhaanganaashiiwinikaazo. Makwa ndoodem. Mashkiiziibiing, ndoonjibaa, jiigi Gitchee-Gumee. Nindaa Dejope, wiijii nindaanis, Nyla izhinikaazo. Cora gaye Ron, wiinawaa ingitiziimag. Ervin Soulier gaye Robert Houle wiinawaa nimishomisag. Anita Shinaway gaye Leona Marksman wiinawaa nikomisag. *Nimiigwechiwenmaag.*

(Hello everyone! My name is Nicole. A proud member of the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Ojibwe. I am bear clan. I grew up on the Bad River Indian Reservation, along the shores of Gitchee-gumee or Lake Superior as it's known today. Now I live in Dejope, with my daughter Nyla. My parents are Cora and Ron. My grandfathers are Ervin and Robert. My grandmothers are Anita and Leona. I am grateful for them.) I grew up in an extended family household with aunties, uncles, and cousins. I was raised in a western convention that intersected with Anishinaabe culture and teachings. I attended both private and public schools growing up, a forty-five-minute bus ride away. After high school, I attended the University of Wisconsin–

Madison where I have completed both a bachelor's and a master's degree. After attending a city-wide community event celebrating American Indian graduates when I earned my bachelor's, I started working at a local community college. Since then, I have served in various positions leading toward a student affairs administrator – which inspired me to pursue my graduate degrees. I also consider myself to be an educator, researcher, and practitioner, but more importantly a student and member of the communities who have guided me here and continue to keep me here today.

My self-location is an important starting point for this research. Otherwise referred to as my positionality, my self-location reveals my identity; who I am, who my family is, what communities I belong to, and to whom I am accountable to in my work as a scholar and as a practitioner (e.g., Windchief & San Pedro, 2019). It is informed by my relationships to both people and places, and for transparency, influenced the design and methodological approaches of this study. As an Indigenous scholar and educator, starting with my self-location is an important step in honesty and setting the stage for outlining the methodological approach of gaining more knowledge of the constructs in my research question and speaks to 'relationality' which will be discussed later in this chapter. More significantly, it follows cultural protocol. As one of my Uncles once told me, "Introduce yourself first, so they know who you are, where you come from, and that you are coming in a good way."

Academic researchers have a long history misleading and mistreating Indigenous communities; so is a history of education used as a weapon toward Indigenous communities (Tuck & Yang, 2014; Wilson, 2008). This tension has given me a great deal of introspection over the years and has allowed me to critically examine my potential role in the further exploitation of Indigenous communities for the sake of educational research and institutional benefit. However,

in my time working in and studying community colleges, I have been able to witness and learn first-hand the ways that the community college can change lives, and it is my hope that this research creates more intentional and positive opportunities for Indigenous people. My approach to this research was driven by the desire to serve my community, and I proceeded in hopes to influence both scholarly research and practice that positively impact Indigenous communities and amplifies Indigenous voices.

While there is a point in this overall dissertation discussion where we must recognize the hard truths of settler colonialism, the harmful impacts of colonial structures have had (and continue to have) on Indigenous communities, my intention was not to have this as the driver of this work. Rather, I wanted this project to shift the narrative around college access for Indigenous communities from a deficit framework to a strength-based discussion that Indigenous scholars call for (e.g., Tuck, 2009). However, as I have come to learn, when it came down to it, there is really no way around it. Colonialism is an endemic (Brayboy, 2005), and it is a truth that we cannot ignore.

Conceptual Framework

To center the experiences of Native people, one pertinent conceptual framework that is appropriate for this project is Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit). In this section, I provide a brief overview of TribalCrit and why it makes sense to incorporate it to a study about how Indigenous communities describe and experience a community college's community engagement efforts to improve college access.

Tribal Critical Race Theory

Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) evolved from Critical Race Theory (CRT). It provides a framework for the complicated relationship between American Indians and the United

States federal government. While CRT focuses on race, racism, and other areas of subordination, TribalCrit gives an added layer of consideration toward Indigenous peoples' legal and political identity associated with years of experience with colonialism in U.S. history. TribalCrit is rooted in the epistemologies and ontologies found in Indigenous communities and can serve as a guide for working with Tribal Nations (Brayboy, 2005). It offers an avenue for examining institutional relationships with Indigenous communities as it provides explanations for Indigenous perspectives and experience within academia. It helps further a larger conversation because it provides an Indigenous lens for understanding how colonization and imperialism influence these perspectives and experiences. TribalCrit serves as a reminder that Indigenous people have a desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification.

The tenets of TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2005) are as follows:

1. Colonization is endemic to society.

2. U.S. policies toward Indigenous peoples are rooted in imperialism, White supremacy, and a desire for material gain.

3. Indigenous peoples occupy a liminal space that accounts for both the political and racialized natures of our identities.

4. Indigenous peoples have a desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification.

5. The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens.

6. Governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation.

7. Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups.

8. Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being.

9. Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work toward social change.

According to Brayboy (2005), the first tenet of TribalCrit states that "colonization is endemic to society," and it serves as a basis for the other eight tenets. Relating this tenant to Indigenous education, the goal of Western formalized schooling was a tool for settler colonialism to eliminate Indigenous people through assimilation. More specifically, it included replacing their language, heritage, and ways of being under the premise of moving toward civilization. As we consider the role that community colleges play in this dynamic, we cannot separate them from educational institutions when it comes to the impact that they have in the lives of Indigenous people. TribalCrit exposes the continued presence of colonization in higher education systems and forces careful consideration to the motives of educational institutions in engaging with Indigenous communities and why Indigenous communities feel the way that they do about the community college.

To unpack the lived experience of Indigenous communities and postsecondary access through the community college, it is important to take into the account that Indigenous epistemologies influence the way that they view what it means to be "in community" and what it means to access higher education (Wilson, 2008). This theory centers tribal sovereignty and cultures as essential to changing how educational policies and practices are orientated.

Deployment of this theory can help facilitate a better understanding of the institutional changes required to implement programs that actually benefit Indigenous communities. Utilizing this theory is essential to prevent the continued weaponization of education toward Indigenous communities by educational systems and is crucial to the trust and responsibility that were revealed in the literature review on community engagement.

Critical Qualitative Inquiry and Critical Indigenous Research Methodology (CIRM)

For this study, I adopted a Critical Indigenous Research Methodology (CIRM) (Brayboy and Chin, 2018; Brayboy, et al., 2012; Brayboy and McCarty, 2014). CIRM stems from critical qualitative inquiry (Brayboy, et al., 2012), which is an approach to qualitative research that addresses social justice issues and settings where certain populations are marginalized and excluded (Winkle-Wagner et al., 2019). It focuses on the relationship of power and systems that cause the margination and exclusion of non-white populations. It is guided by distinct philosophical assumptions and scholarly principles to confront social issues. This includes placing the voices of the oppressed at the center of inquiry (Denzin, 2017). As highlighted in the literature, community colleges are viewed as avenues of social mobility, which suggests the presence of power and structures at play. Given that community colleges are crucial for providing critical access for marginalized communities to postsecondary education, and considering the intersections of college access, overall underrepresentation, and the experiences of Indigenous students in higher education, a critical qualitative approach is deemed appropriate.

Categorizing this research as critical inquiry is more than just what it is about. It also helps articulate how it was done. Critical qualitative inquiry urges scholars to push the boundaries of traditional education research and to consider alternative paradigms, in confronting the world's social problems. This includes consideration of what counts as research, as evidence,

and legitimate inquiry, as well as the theories that help inform it. Critical qualitative inquiry urges scholars to "take risks, to move back and forth between the personal and political, the biographical and the historical" (Denzin, 2017, p.14). In retrospection, considering my values, aspirations, and experiences tied to this dissertation project, it is all very much that.

In exploring the notion of alternative paradigms to educational research, I reflected on scholarship often stemming from 'western facing' approaches, that is, evolving from a settler-colonial mindset a 'westernized' expansion as the answer. Deep considerations for critical inquiry moved me to consider the adoption of a metaphorical 'eastern facing' approach; that is, centering the experience of those facing 'east,' during westernized expansion.

Critical Indigenous Research Methodology (CIRM)

In centering the voices of those facing east, I looked to Critical Indigenous Research Methodology (CIRM) to further guide the methods of this research. While there are no direct definitions of CIRM, Indigenous scholars suggest a methodological framework incorporating the underpinnings of critical inquiry but builds on the "four R's": relationality, responsibility, respect, and reciprocity (Brayboy et. al, 2012). These principles, all deeply intertwined, are common principles followed in a variety of global Indigenous research and served as the metaphorical backbone of this study.

The first guiding principle of CIRM, noted as relationality, is a process of fostering the relationship between the researcher, the community, and the topic of inquiry. It is a common starting point to remind us that knowledge is relational and not based on an objective truth. It situates the researcher to the inquiry and comes from a position of trust and accountability (Brayboy, et al, 2012). During the research process, relationality is noted to be achieved when the research is honest and clearly identifies the purpose and motivation behind it (Tsosie, et.,

2022). As it was made evident in my research findings, relationality is deeply embedded in Indigenous communities. By beginning this chapter in Anishinaabemowin, or the Anishinaabe language, I set a context for this principle and my intention to proceed with the research in accordance of these principles. It is rationalized that when you speak Anishinaabemowin, you are learning an old way of looking at the world, which further supported this methodological approach.

Responsibility, the next guiding principle of CIRM, outlines a consideration for how this research affects those beyond myself. As I struggled to negotiate my contributions to this research, discussed in the self-location section, my research approach became all but linear. Thinking about how this research affects those beyond myself was an actualization of this principle, but also incorporated my responsibility to the project and to myself as a researcher, full-time practitioner, and community member. The principle of responsibility guided me toward a careful consideration of the effectiveness and thoughtfulness of my research design.

Emerging from the principles of relationality and responsibility in CIRM are the final two Rs: respect and reciprocity. This includes not only the respect toward individuals involved at various levels of this research, but the respect of Indigenous knowledge systems as legitimate starting points in the inquiry and methodological approach. Considering alternative data collection methods found in traditional educational research is a form of respect for Indigenous communities. Reciprocity, on the other hand, is a continuous and intentional exchange process, grounded in the belief that as researchers benefit from Indigenous knowledge and participation, they are ethically obligated to reciprocate by sharing findings, resources, and opportunities for community empowerment. This ensures that research outcomes contribute positively to Indigenous communities toward a truly mutually beneficial partnership built on trust and equity.

Seven Value Framework

Guided by CIRM, and rooted in my own identity, I chose to further incorporate a Seven Value Framework of the Anishinaabe. These are foundational values and beliefs handed down through generations to guide the way we live our life, and as such guided the way I approached my dissertation research. Throughout the entire dissertation process—from inception to delivery—the values emerged and served as guiding forces to the rollout of my research design in ways that not only align with the broader Critical Indigenous Research Methodology, but also carry distinction for a philosophical framework involving my positionality as an Indigenous researcher.

The Seven Values Framework of the Anishinaabe are (Bad River, 2024):

- *Nibwaakaawin – Wisdom: To cherish knowledge is to know Wisdom. Wisdom is given by the Creator to be used for the good of the people.*

- *Zaagi'idiwin—Love: To know peace is to know Love. Love must be unconditional. When people are challenged emotionally and financially they become fearful of their situation. Anishinaabeg is reminded to love the people; the children; and the environment.*

- *Minaadendamowin—Respect: To honor all creation is to have Respect. All of creation should be treated with respect. You must give respect if you wish to be respected.*

- *Aakode'ewin—Bravery: Bravery is to face the foe with integrity. In the Anishinaabe language, this word literally means "state of having a fearless heart." To do what is right even when the consequences are unpleasant.*

- *Gwayakwaadiziwin—Honesty: Honesty in facing a situation is to be brave. Always be honest in word and action. Be honest first with yourself, and you will more easily be able to be honest with others.*

- *Dabaadendiziwin—Humility: Humility is to know yourself as a sacred part of Creation. In the Anishinaabe language, this word can also mean "compassion." You are equal to others, but you are not better.*

- *Debwewin—Truth: Truth is to know all of these things. Speak the truth. Do not deceive yourself or others.*

Constructive Anishinaabe Research Ethics (CARE) Framework

To further illustrate my approach to this research, I present a framework where I incorporate the CIRM principles (Brayboy et al., 2012) with the Seven Values Framework of the Anishinaabe (Bad River, 2024; Gitchi-Manidoo, time immemorial) and the constructs of Tribal Critical Race Theory. I refer to this as a Constructive Anishinaabe Research Ethics (CARE) Framework. It provides the reference for my methodological approach and considers the tenants of theory used in my dissertation project. I named this framework Ganawenim, which in Anishinaabemowin, means to "take care of, protect, keep an eye on." Considering the parts of speech in Anishinaabemowin, this verb is used to care for something that is animate or living. When I consider the relationship between myself and this work, it feels to be very much that – as it is one that required lots of nurturing and growth. Another consideration for using the transitive animate verb form of the word is to understand within the topics of this dissertation project--the relationships with community colleges and Indigenous communities--are also alive and need to be nurtured and grown.

Figure 1. Ganawenim: Constructive Anishinaabe Research Ethics (CARE) Framework

GANAWENIM: A CARE Framework
Critical Anishinaabe Research Ethics

Critical Indigenous Research Methodology (CIRM)
(Brayboy, et al., 2021)

N
W E
S

Tribal Critical Race Theory
(Brayboy, 2005)

Wisdom   Love   Bravery

Reciprocity   Responsibility   Respect   Relationality   CIRM

Honesty   Humility   Truth

Seven Values Framework of the Anishinaabe
(Gitchi-Manidoo, time immemorial)
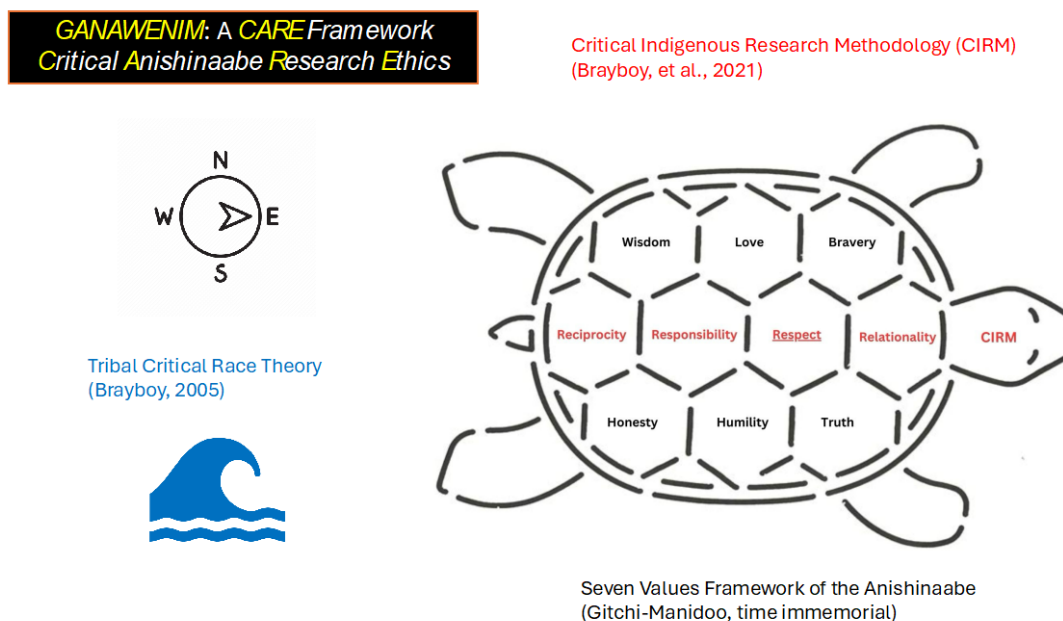
The CARE Framework depicts an image of a turtle, which for the purposes of this dissertation study coincides with "Turtle Island," or North America as it is also known as today. The image of a turtle not only gives reference to place, but honors the Indigenous history, culture, and political activism that comes with it. In addition, the turtle has a prominent place in Anishinaabe worldview (Benton-Banai, 1979). Placed on the head of the turtle is CIRM, to annotate the paradigms leading my research. The principles of CIRM are carried down a metaphorical spine of the turtle, providing a proverbial "backbone" to both my research design and analytical approach. The Seven Values Framework of Anishinaabe values which were carried throughout this dissertation work – which are interconnected - making up an entire shell. The turtle itself is swimming through Tribal Critical Race Theory, the framework that also guides my work. As this research explores the experience of Indigenous people in the American

community college, this framework carries symbolism throughout this dissertation project.

These values combined are what I consider to "be a good relative" with those I interact. While there are no formal steps for this because Tribes and Native communities are each unique, I know that my research means that I must learn from Indigenous community perspectives along the way, carrying attention to both humility and respect. Through the dissertation research process, all of these values emerged at numerous important milestones of the process, from formulating my dissertation topic, to reviewing the literature, to proposing my study, to collecting data, and to discussing what I found and learned. The CARE framework allowed me to negotiate the procedural aspects of the research design, as well as my own sensemaking throughout the process.

Research Design and Procedures

In the following sections, I outline my research design and describe the study context as it relates to the research setting, as well as participants and sampling strategies. I then describe how I collected data and the protocols I used, followed by a discussion of my analytical approaches, issues of trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Research Site

I have chosen a mid-size, comprehensive community college located in a midwestern state, which I refer to as Riverbank College. This community college is situated on the ancestral, traditional, and contemporary homelands of First Nation people. Each nation has a story that includes a special connection to a certain place. This complex history involves migrations, removals, and (in/direct) relations of many Native nations that influence ties to this research site.

The community college in this study covers more than 10 counties and has more than 5 locations throughout. Students can earn an associate degree, technical diploma, or certificate in

an industry program or start working on their bachelor's degree and transfer to a four-year college. Each campus location has a different mix of program offerings and on-site services, but all serve the college's mission of providing access to higher education. While college locations span across the entire college district, the flagship campus for this college is located within a mid-size city with a rich history in relationship to Indigenous communities and a place where Indigenous people with multiple life experiences reside. This includes the intersections of being an enrolled member or descendant of one of states Tribal Nation or elsewhere in the United States, and as a layer of many other identities. This is an important aspect in the selection of the research site, because it considered and recognized the diversity within Indigenous communities and participants of this study.

This institution was also selected because of its proximity to the researcher and recent initiatives of the college to institutionalize engagement with historically and systematically excluded populations and efforts to strategize college access. Within the college, an office was established and charged with planning, coordinating, facilitating, and implementing a robust community engagement strategy to advance the college's mission, vision, strategic priorities, and department plans. For the purposes of this dissertation study, they will be referred to as the Office of Community Engagement (OCE). OCE works on ways to increase the college's visibility with populations including Latino, Hmong, Black/African American, and Native/Indigenous communities. As a process that happens in institutions of higher learning in planning for the future, this institution was undergoing a strategic (re)visioning process intended to inform the direction of the college. In collaboration with college's board of trustees, themes were decided, which included a tenant of college access. This theme reflects the ethos of open-access, and the mission, vision, and values of community colleges. From this theme and in

consideration of OCE, the college hosts a number of events and partnerships that intend to engage and center the voices of students, employees, and communities within the college.

With engagement with Native communities being an intentional approach of this college, along with the vision work being done around the theme of college access, this institution served as a suitable research site for my dissertation. I hold an insider role within the institution, having served as staff in both student and academic affairs. However, I should note that there are no direct employment reporting lines between myself and those community members that I interviewed. Holding this insider role with both the institution and the community allowed for greater access to the study's areas of focus and the ability to follow-up with meaningful questions of participants.

Observations and Own Experiences and Insights as Authentic Data

As an Indigenous scholar deeply rooted in my own community, my identity and insights cannot be separated from my scholarly endeavors. Drawing from Indigenous ways of knowing and researching, I bring a unique perspective to this study, one that acknowledges the interconnectedness of all aspects of life, including academia and community engagement.

From 2008 to early 2024, my journey as a practitioner at the college has been intertwined with my role as a community member. Throughout this time, I have had the opportunity to observe and reflect on events hosted by the college and participate in my capacity as a college staff and a community member. These events, sometimes held annually within Riverbank's campuses or the surrounding city, provided me with firsthand experiences and insights into the dynamics of community engagement and college access work. Over the past 15 years, I have spent over 1200 hours in community engaged practice at the community college which speaks to the depth of observational contributions in this study. In these observations, I was not a

traditional stand-by observer, as I played an active role in many of the events due to my affiliation with the college. For my observations, I played a role as a participant in community engagement, from both the vantage point of working at the college as a staff or advisor to Indigenous students and being a member of the Indigenous community. As part of my observations, I took notes and did reflective journaling on things that I saw, heard, and questioned. Throughout my observations, these notes pertained to the involvement of others, and my own interpretations of community engagement and college access work at play.

In addition to these observations, I also draw upon my experiences and insights gained from my personal journey as an Indigenous scholar and staff member. Reflecting on the college's engagement with the community, I have observed patterns and challenges that hindered or contributed to college access for Indigenous communities. These reflections, grounded in my lived experiences, provide valuable context for understanding the broader implications of community engagement efforts.

By engaging my own observations, experiences, and insights as authentic data, I hope to use my dissertation project as a small yet important step toward the decolonization of scholarship, challenging traditional research methodologies that often marginalize Indigenous voices. Through this approach, I hope to honor the knowledge systems of my community and affirm the validity of Indigenous ways of knowing in academic discourse. Taken together, the reflective notes from my observations, along with the experiences and insights I have gleaned from my own personal journey, while not the primary data source, lend rich and nuanced context for making sense of the interview data that I collected, as described in my findings chapter.

Interview Participants and Sampling Strategies

At the heart of this dissertation project, I hoped to center in-depth conversations with key members of the Indigenous communities that Riverbank College strives to engage with. The main inclusion criteria included individuals who self-identified as Indigenous and had some interactions with the college previously, whether that was through an event hosted by the college, being a student or an alumnus of the college, or having had an interaction with a community engagement event of the college. Because the college is situated in a place with varied Indigenous footprints, it was important to not narrow participant identity down to a specific Tribal affiliation, as it would exclude the varied Indigenous individuals served by the community college.

I used a combination of purposeful and snowball sampling informed by Indigenous communities. Purposeful sampling involves identifying and selecting individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2015). Through this approach, I purposefully identified participants who had some previous experience with the college through their Indigenous identity and could speak to their personal experience with engagement, access, and mission of the college. Considering the context explained earlier in my research site, I began recruiting participants who attended recent community listening sessions hosted by the college via email or social media inviting them to participate in this study. Since not many self-identified individuals attended these events, I also contacted previous students of the college and members of the community that the college has engaged with using personal networks.

From there, I also engaged snowball or referral sampling with my initial participants regarding who else they think should be part of the conversation, giving ownership to my

participants to guide and influence who I should interview next. I ended up conducting in-depth interviews with eight participants. Each interview contributed unique perspectives and insights that collectively enhanced our learning of how the college can better serve Indigenous communities through thoughtful engagement to broaden college access. The following table provides a description of the participants and several salient characteristics.

Table 1. Interview Participants

PSEUDONYM	CONNECTION TO COLLEGE	SALIENT IDENTITIES EMERGED DURING VISIT
LILAC	Current student Community member	Community leader (formal role) Veteran
LAYLA	Previous student Community member	Mother Daughter Community leader (formal role) High School Drop Out
RALPH	Community member	Higher Education Practitioner
KIP	Community member	Community leader (formal role) Father
ROBERT	Previous student Community member	Son High School Drop Out
BRYAN	Community member	Community leader (formal role)
DAWN	Previous employee Community member	Community leader (formal role) Daughter
BETTY	Previous employee Previous student Community member	Mother Daughter

Data Collection

I used visiting and participant stories as the primary source of data. As the last tenet of TribalCrit outlines, stories are not separate from theory and are real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being (Brayboy, 2005). Visiting and conversation has also been outlined by Indigenous scholars as a means for gathering knowledge (Kovach, 2010; Wilson, 2008). These were more than just one-shot interviews with Indigenous community members who fit the purposeful sampling criteria. Rather they built upon an already existing relationships between myself and the participants and were preceded by an establishment of trust and interests towards our community taking place over the last twenty years.

I asked participants to select a meeting location convenient for them, recognizing the time and effort they were contributing and ensuring comfort and accessibility. Most chose public spaces like local restaurants, coffee shops, or near their workplaces. A few opted for the college campus itself. With participant permission, our visits were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

While I provided a list of questions to participants to help to guide our conversation (see Appendix B), as noted earlier, topics of community engagement and college access are nuanced, and their definitions can mean different things to different individuals. The varied educational and personal histories of my participants, along with their connections to my personal and professional network, meant that different conversations may come up in our conversation that would not in others. It remained necessary to utilize the language brought forth by the participants to move forward with the questions relating to the topic, which would have been difficult to accomplish with a standardized interview script. Although I presented participants with a sheet of questions that would help guide our conversation, I helped set the tone that we were just there to have a conversation – a conversation about their experience with Riverbank

College. Before diving into that conversation, the participants and I would spend time ordering our drinks or meals and catching up on both our professional and personal lives, which included discussions about our families, our travels, and recent events within our community at-large.

After getting settled, I started by saying that we could begin with any question that jumped out to them, or even just start with "What do you think of when you think of Riverbank College?" The conversations with participants then turned to a recount of their own connections with the college, whether it was through their previous employment, experience as a student, or their sentiment about their perception of the college. Our conversations flowed very naturally, often weaving between stories, personal accounts, dreams for the future, and laughter. After each visit I also invited participants to ask questions, which included questions about the college or any resources that could be helpful in what they are speaking to. Throughout this process, I kept a journal to examine my reactions, questions, and perspectives of each event and interview.

As an Indigenous scholar conducting research with Indigenous communities, it was appropriate for me to follow cultural traditions. It is common protocol in Indigenous cultures to offer a gift of tobacco, or 'asemaa' in exchange for knowledge or when you ask someone to do something. Also, in line with the goal to assert Indigenous frameworks within this research process, it was important to work within my own Indigenous protocol and paradigm to offer tobacco as a way of saying thank you to my participants for the time, efforts, and words that they shared with me. Thus, I offered each of my participants small gifts of asemaa and sage during our visit as a way of saying thank you. In my spirit, it felt like the right thing to do. In a reflection of what it means to include the use of tobacco in Indigenous research, Wilson and Restoule (2010) indicate that Indigenous research is founded on relationships and are tied back to the four R's found in CIRM previously discussed. For those participants that met me a coffee

shop or a restaurant, I also paid for their drink and their meal for taking the time out of their day to meet with me.

Data Analysis—Inductive and Deductive Reasoning

I used a combination of inductive and deductive reasoning throughout the analysis process. As part of this dissertation and career project, I have also been keeping ongoing journal and field notes to annotate my own sensemaking of the topic and process. I developed and utilized an organizational system within Microsoft Excel to keep track of my analysis and emerging findings. I also noted the transcription that theme was found where quotes were highlighted regarding that theme.

Inductively, I reviewed the transcription data along with my journal notes to produce a list of emerging key insights for each interview. Following that, I conducted a more in-depth review of transcription data, in-vivo coding to create low-level codes informed by highlighted short phrases said by the participants. In the next phase of my analysis, I grouped similar low-level codes together and started to examine them against my conceptual framework. As mentioned, I also kept a journal to take notes during each event and after each interview and referred to these during my analysis to compare how my position related to my interpretation of the transcription data.

For my deductive analysis, TribalCrit serves as a framework that allowed me to further make sense of the emerging findings by serving as a way to validate the themes that emerged throughout my visits with participants and observed sessions. As the tenants of TribalCrit happen with the micro, meso, and macro layers of community colleges and Indigenous communities, they provide a starting point for future dialogue on making community colleges and Indigenous communities more understandable to one another (Brayboy, 2021). The use of TribalCrit helped

underscore the challenges encountered by Indigenous communities due to the unique and conflicting relationship between Indigenous communities and the federal government. For instance, visits with community members exposed themes such as colonization, racism in educational policies, and knowledge through an Indigenous lens. These themes connected to the tenets of TribalCrit and highlighted the theory's applicability in the current community college system. Although I proceeded with my data analysis in ways that align with "traditional" qualitative approaches, I am compelled to the new insights I gleaned from this journey that led me to a new way of thinking about qualitative data analysis, which I describe below as Ganawenim Analysis.

Data Analysis—Culminating Ganawenim Analysis

Have you ever watched a turtle swim? In order to swim, turtles utilize all four of their legs, extending each one ever so synchronously to propel themselves through water. This is what it felt like in order to actualize the coding of the data. In order to make sense of my research findings, it was important to utilize each leg of my framework (Tribal Crit, CIRM, Seven Values of the Anishinaabe, and Eastern facing research) in unpacking the data and how they can be understood and contextualized in relation to my research question. I imagined a turtle swimming east in the waters of Tribal Crit, carrying each experience and piece of knowledge expressed about these constructs towards the larger body of both research and practice related to community college, community engagement, and college access for Indigenous communities. During the coding of my data, I felt the need to group similar ideas to draw conclusions about the participant's interpretation of the community colleges and experience with community engagement efforts and college access. What I quickly realized is that each theme was interwoven and painted a bigger picture to understanding the community colleges relationship to

Indigenous communities. In looking at the collection of data from the values offered by the turtle, I was able to pull the findings described in the following chapter. Utilizing a Ganawenim framework fostered my own personal decolonization in relation to being an Indigenous scholar. Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing contributed to this critical qualitative analysis specific to Indigenous communities.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations for this study include applying for IRB approval, getting permission from those involved in this study, and protecting the identity of those involved, which include both participants and the research site. Therefore, I invited participants to sign a consent form where they agreed to the study and let them know that they can refuse to answer any questions and stop the interview at any time. I was transparent in sharing that my findings will not only be used for my dissertation study but will be shared with larger audiences such as community college leadership and other presentations. I let my participants know that they can refuse to answer any of my questions and they can stop the interview at any time. To protect their identity, I asked if participants wanted to choose a pseudonym for themselves and I changed certain identifying details in the interview transcripts and write-ups that could lead to their identity (such as age, occupation, Tribal affiliation). I strove to ensure that they cannot be identified but also made sure that it was done in a way that did not change the meaning of the data.

In addition to these efforts to protect the identity of my participants, I took precautions to ensure that the data stay secure by transferring audio recordings to a password protected computer and were immediately delete the files after they have been transferred. All consent files

and field notes were locked in a secure location and I developed a system to label my notes and documents with pseudonyms to maintain the anonymity of participants.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

In the spirit of transparency, throughout the analysis process, I constantly reflected on the assumptions I brought to the table, with particular attention to both the power and potential biases that my identity as an Anishinaabe scholar and community college practitioner may introduce. Working closely with my advisor, I strove to ensure the integrity of both the data and my writing, while being in constant conversation with my assumptions and beliefs. As an insider in the worlds of Indigenous communities, academia, and community colleges, I aimed to leverage my positionality to benefit the research, while also remaining attentive to potential biases. I do this by checking my interpretations against my previous-held assumptions, not to discredit them, but rather to deepen and nuance my understanding of the findings. Although I was not able to conduct follow-up conversations with my participants to debrief or co-construct findings, I strove to operate with a spirit of collaboration and conversation through the interview process I described earlier. Follow-up conversations may have generated further insights into research findings. For this project, I hope to engage with my dissertation committee, drawing on their expertise in community colleges, critical research, community engagement, college-going experiences, and Indigenous education to further enrich the study beyond the confines of this dissertation.

Limitations and Caveats

It is important to consider and outline the limitations related to my study. By focusing solely on Riverbank College, this study does not extend to the variety and complexity of all community colleges in America. As mentioned in my introduction, there are over 1,000

community colleges across the country, and this study only examines engagement and college access at one. Future research could look at the colleges who are part of a particular state system or even part of a national network, such as Achieving the Dream which is a community of community colleges working on issues related to college access and student success. Additionally, by focusing on this one institution and eight participants, it does not touch upon the vast array of life experiences and circumstances Indigenous populations related to geography and living on Tribal land. Because I also work at this institution in this study and consider myself to be a part of the Indigenous community, it makes me an insider to the efforts of the college and still very much part of the team(s) doing the work. Many community members will agree that "Indian country is small," which means that I will likely have some previous or current relationship with the participants which may influence the results.

Taken together, as a subservice and critical act within itself, my research question has lent itself to a critical qualitative research approach because it allowed me to gather rich data for a nuanced understanding of individual experiences of the community college's engagement with Indigenous communities. It gave me the opportunity to leverage Indigenous research methods such as visiting and storytelling as a process to obtaining detailed accounts of these concepts and how research towards these topics can advance college access among Indigenous communities. As Jasmine Ulmer reminds us in her work "Critical Qualitative Inquiry Is/as Love" (2017, p. 543) - bell hooks said, "profound changes in the way we think and act must take place if we are to create a loving culture."

Niiwin (4): Findings

I came into this project seeking to answer the question: ***How do Indigenous community members describe and experience a community college's community engagement efforts to improve college access?*** Applying a Ganawenim framework to this question led me to conducting visits with eight Indigenous community members that had some connection with Riverbank community college—as prior students, prior employees, or were a member of the Indigenous community within the college district that previously engaged with the college in some way. These visits provided my participants a platform to not only share their definitions and meaning making of the broad notions of engagement and access, but also tell stories and share their vision for the future in how community colleges can engage with Indigenous communities to improve college access. As detailed in Chapter 3, using Ganawenim as a guide, I analyzed the interviews that I conducted with community members from these visits, along with my observational data collected throughout the past 15 years working at the institution. After identifying emerging themes, I utilized TribalCrit to make sense of my findings and situated them with my understanding of the theory. This integrated approach allowed me to center the voices of the community members I interviewed, while deeply engaging the perspectives and experiences of myself as both a community member and an insider at Riverbank college. Knowing that participants were speaking from their own perspectives which were both aligned and different from my own, CIRM and the Seven Value Framework of the Anishinaabe guided me towards handling the words of my participants with the six values of respect, responsibility, love, truth, humility, and honesty. I then utilized bravery and wisdom to interpret the results and present them in the subsequent domain structure. In this chapter, I provide a brief overview of each participant and then describe the domains of findings that illuminate the complex

intersections community colleges and their engagement with Indigenous communities that is relational to Indigenous worldview.

Participant and Visitation profiles

The following participant profiles are aimed at centering the contexts and wisdom of the Indigenous community members, whose voices and perspectives together lend meaning to the themes and claims that I present later. To construct these profiles, I combined a summary of our visit with observational notes that I took after meeting with each community member. In introducing my participants and keeping true to the ethics of the Ganawenim framework, I am purposefully inserting the language "Indigenous community member" as this is in acknowledgement in respect of their unique identity and affiliations of being Indigenous. The Indigenous community within Riverbank is small, and to protect the identity of my participants, I have chosen not to name their Tribal affiliations in this dissertation project or place their formal titles within the context of their profiles.

Betty

Betty, an Indigenous community member, was a previous student at Riverbank College and currently resides within the geographic boundaries of the college district. Betty not only holds a relationship as a student at the college, she had previous employment with the college and her family has also previously enrolled at the college. In our conversation, Betty spoke about her journey in getting to Riverbank, and the timeline for her various interactions as a student, staff, and community member. Betty spoke fondly of the people who worked at the college, naming individuals she interacted with during her tenure both working and while being a student at the college. As Betty grew older, she had children and she also spoke about her

experience in being a parent of a student attending Riverbank and what it was like to try to navigate resources.

Robert

Robert, an Indigenous community member and first-generation college student, is an alumnus of Riverbank College and currently resides within the geographic boundaries of the college district. As a community member holding various relationships to the college over time, his perspectives and feelings toward the institution have also evolved during the years. As a young adult, Robert attended Riverbank College through a high school completion program and experienced the college as being an access point for his journey into higher education. Enrolling at the college was based on the pure happenstance of location, time, and people. After finishing the program, he continued to complete two associate degrees. Robert spoke at length about how, during this time, his involvement with the Indigenous student club and key individuals supported his success at the college. Especially, he talked about staff who worked at the college— Indigenous and not—who played pivotal roles in shaping his journey and educational success. These staff members helped Robert with both getting in and getting started, while also helping to figure out how to pay for college. He also pointed out that it was often the non-Native staff who had the most impact on his success and trajectory.

This positive student experience aside, when it comes to being a staff member at the college, Robert also described tensions of "tokenism" and how it is translated and felt by members of the community. He discussed that tokenized staff are often seen as the barrier to engagement with Indigenized communities, as they are seen to withhold opportunity within the college for community members. Fast forward to his more recent perspectives of the college, Robert situated himself as a community member, and expressed feelings of the institution being

"self-serving" and "disconnected," noting that it was seen as 'building itself up vs. building the community'. He discussed how this trickles down to relationships with people. As the college continues to seek funding for expansions within the community, we discussed the question of who has the power to make change for Indigenous community and Indigenous individuals.

During our visit, Robert indicated that his experience with Riverbank College was unique, but that from the different intersections of his identity, they were still very similar in thinking about those who utilize the community college not just for postsecondary education and training, but for the goal of high school completion. Robert emphasized the importance of understanding that Indigenous communities come from all walks of life and background, and events offered by Riverbank college, for example, the annual spring powwow, and the importance of understanding that not all Indigenous people participate in that way. It is important to consider other avenues of participation, in particular specific program areas and the history of those vocations within Indigenous communities. During our conversation, when talk about strategic planning in relation to supporting Indigenous communities he asked, "What is the college going to do to engage community to make it happen?"

Ralph

Ralph, an Indigenous community member, contributed to a very rich conversation about community engagement with Indigenous communities. Our discussion began with talking about the formation of his engagement with the college – which was through an Indigenous staff person working at the college and what it felt like coming from an Indigenous community not home to the boundaries of the Riverbank District. Ralph carries a wealth of experience working within both institutions of higher education and within Indigenous communities. He framed Riverbank college as an asset to Indigenous communities and the perception that the college can

be more responsive to Indigenous communities in ways that four-year institutions can't. During our discussion, we discussed many of the challenges related to engaging with Indigenous communities, the interplay of trust and value systems, and our own experiences serving as both higher education practitioners and members of the Indigenous community. There was a point in our conversation that stood out to me, where Ralph posed a rhetorical question to ask "how do you, as an indigenous person, understand your own safety and welfare, and how it might be impacted by the institution, if it doesn't understand you or care to understand you?"

Kip

Kip, an Indigenous community member, noted that his experience with the college came within the name of the institution itself – *community*. While he has had no direct employment or enrollment at Riverbank College, he has attended numerous community engagement events hosted by departments within the college and by Riverbanks Indigenous Student Club. During our visit, he spoke highly of the institution as one that has more to offer community then four-year counterparts and perceives Riverbank as being more accessible to community. Thinking in terms of increasing capacity of as Tribal residents or as residents of the college district – Kip outlined that the college as providing an opportunity for individuals to explore areas of interest. He views the community college has having more direct access systems for community and that he views it as being an asset for students in learning how to "do college".

During our visit, Kip discussed the role of imagery, namely within college marketing, and the importance of representation. He noted he the importance of not just representation, but real representation and the importance of students seeing themselves both within the college and through marketing materials. In defining the work of engagement, Kip described the importance of not leaving the work of engaging with Indigenous communities to Tribal liaisons, and that

there should be agreements between institutions. He mentioned that relationships needed to extend beyond titles. That's where real opportunity can happen. Before ending our conversation, Kip described the value of interactions and how they play a big part within Indigenous communities with the understanding that community talks to one another, and if someone has a good or bad experience, that is going to greatly impact influencing someone they know to interact with the college in the same way. Before leaving, Kip said, "I really wish institutions would live up to what they say (it's mission). To me, it's like treaties. They're empty words if you don't live up to them."

Dawn

Dawn, an Indigenous community member, serves in a leadership role for a Tribal nation with historical footprints in the Riverbank College district. She holds a graduate degree, has a background in administration, and is previous employee of Riverbank College. During her tenure, she assisted with coordination of service for Indigenous students, and assisted with various aspects of college access – whether that was help looking for childcare, helping with transportation, dealing with mental health issues, and navigating solutions and resources for college life. In our visit, Dawn spoke about how different the community college environment was to other institutions she had experience with, namely regarding the lived lives of students and their mentality about their programs of study, specifically in the trades. Dawn spoke about the power and importance of a Indigenous individual employed at the college, who was named by other participants in the study as a person who was instrumental in their experience with the college. This person was considered to be a mentor, not just to her, but for the indigenous community and students and community the mentor interacted with. This mentor helped establishing the pow-wow, a celebration and experience of Indigenous culture hosted by the college. During our visit, Dawn mentioned her participation in community conversations to bring

in voices from the Indigenous community to college leadership to have conversations about what can be done to make a difference in the lives of students and community members. Dawn spoke to the importance of community engagement not being transactional and the importance of the college investing in ways to build Indigenous community, not just in terms of money, but in terms of caring about what is happening to and within Indigenous communities. As the college approaches Indigenous communities, it is important not to leave the work to Indigenous employees of the college. We discussed the long self-life that relationships can carry within Indigenous communities.

In addition to the actual interactions of engagement, Dawn and I spoke to the complexities within Indigenous communities about "falling victim to our own" and what it means to be Indigenous not just through an affiliation to a Tribal community.   It's not going to be easy to fix these things as some of the issues Indigenous communities grapple with run deep. Dawn mentioned that institutions are good at aspirational vision, but they need work on the opposite end and the importance of working to scale engagement. We discussed how connections need to exist for the work to have somewhere to live. Within our discussion, questions that stood out include "what are you planning for? And how are you putting people in the places that are going to do the best for these long-term issues that these communities are facing?... Is there a staged progressive way in thinking about that – that will help a tribal community?"

Bryan

Bryan, an Indigenous community member, also holds a formal title as a leader within his community. Our conversation started in thinking about the geographic location of the college, and the incredible historic footprint and rich cultures for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Our conversation included aspects of leadership that happens within Tribal Nations and the various priorities and goals that have been set. Brian emphasized legacies of

colonialism and the urgency of environmental justice issues happening within Indigenous communities. We talked through the implications of college marketing but also land acknowledgement and college promise programs. While all these constructs are very important aspects to consider for Indigenous communities, a central component to our conversation included the importance of investment. This investment is not only on the side of the college, but also within Indigenous communities as Bryan stated, "it isn't the degree that I really want people to have. It's the sense of contribution and investment that they have in their, in their in their own people in their own government. I want them to come back. Not because there's a job waiting for them that's going to pay their rent but come back because the know a little bit that they do each day matters to people."

Lilac

Lilac, an Indigenous community member, is a current continuing education student of Riverbank College and a veteran of the United States Armed Forces. In recalling their experience with the college, they explained their perception that the college is not diverse. Within their program, there are no diverse students as it relates to demographics, and on top of that, there is no diversity of thought within the training that they receive. We discussed the implications of this as many of the students going through his program are in the field of public safety and services. In our discussion, they emphasized the notion that we just can't tell a student's identity by how they appear or show up physically. We then went into a discussion about how Indigenous communities are perceived by society and the negative impacts this carries for the well-being of communities. Letting Lilac lead the conversation, we discussed the traumas of Indigenous students and how settler colonial mentality is still prevalent today. When discussing the time that it takes to build trust and a sense of safety with Indigenous students, I

mentioned that many of them at that point are graduating. Lilac asked, "why does the circle have to stop once they walk out the door?"

Layla

Layla is a graduate of Riverbank College and a member of the Indigenous community served by the Riverbank College District. During our visit, she spoke very positively about the college, as she viewed it as a place where she was able to unlock her potential and it helped her to figure out her place in higher education. As a high school drop-out and first-generation college student, Layla discussed the importance of relationships and people within the institution who helped her to figure out who she was. She recalled many fond memories being involved with the Indigenous Student organization as it helped her to see who she was and how she was connected to other Native people within the community. She discussed the importance of career exploration for Indigenous students and how she wished there was more guidance regarding financial literacy for Indigenous students. In our conversation, we discussed the importance of 'having a person' that understands community and is connected to community and has the freedom (ability) to connect with students and take them under their wing. Because Indigenous communities can feel very scattered, the college served as a point of connection for Layla in not only her own identity, but in getting connected to resources to support her educational journey.

Indigenous Perspectives on Community College Engagement: Power, Place, Person

Based on my analysis of the data gathered from these visits with Indigenous community members and my observations at community engagement events, in this section, I describe three main domains of themes and claims—power, place, and person—that provide a deeper insight into the nuances and complexities underlying the answer to my research question. While it can be argued that these domains resemble a western paradigm of societal structures, describing the

findings within these domains helps bridge an understanding to the many considerations associated with community engagement with Indigenous communities. In addition, these domains are grounded in the work of Vine Deloria and Daniel Wildcat (2001) in examining the issues facing Native American students as they progress through schools, colleges, and on into professions. The three domains provide a viewpoint for these research findings can be situated within a structural context, with each domain often layered against each other, where one can serve as the bedrock for the next.

Informed by Ganawenim framework, **Indigenous community members describe and experience a community college's community engagement efforts to improve college access within domains of (a) Power engagement (macro- level) (b) Place engagement (Meso-level) and (c) Person engagement (micro-level).** These domains, presented in figure 2, provide a structure to the personal and interpersonal factors that contribute to the definitions and experience of Indigenous communities. They reveal that definitions and experience can be distinct but are often interrelated with one another. Further, they help articulate how they play out within a community college setting.

The power level is the level that examines large-scale social processes and what it means to be in community with one another. It focuses on the influences on human societies that individuals live in. The heart of TribalCrit explains that colonization is the endemic to society and that U.S. policies and practices are rooted in imperialism, White supremacy, and a desire for material gain. It argues that European thought, knowledge, and power dominates and permeates present day society, which is an important base layer domain for the findings of this project.

The place level involves "the relationship of things to each other" (Deloria, 2001). At this level, Indigenous community members define and experience community engagement through

lateral agency and investments, meaning that the entities(agents) and capital influence their definitions and experience. This domain considers the third and fourth tenant of Tribal Crit, which outline that Indigenous people hold a political identity in addition to their racialized one, and therefore have a desire to obtain and forge sovereignty, autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification (Brayboy, 2005). The entities and agents of relationships formed with Indigenous communities involve both titles and levels of organization. Investments include community college budgets and other forms of capital that inform the definition and experiences of engagement for the participants in this study.

At the person level, community engagement is contextualized at the intersection of individual connection, which is sometimes overlayed with collective experience within Indigenous communities. Here, the focus lies in the nuanced interplay between personal agency and communal belonging, and gives meaning to how everyone's unique identity, history, and aspirations shape their engagement with community and college access efforts. As Dawn pointed out, "it isn't just from a set of like expertise or skills… but again, that personhood thing." As detailed later, underscoring individual perspectives, findings in this domain help us understand both the uniqueness of individuality and the power of socialization for Indigenous communities. Thus, in some cases, this domain also speaks to the profound impact of social bonds and shared experiences as a community.

Figure 2. **Asiniig (Stones): Community engagement domains for Indigenous community members**

Power *(Macro – level)*	• Community college functions aimed at systems of colonialism • Agreements to kinship and transformational change
Place *(Meso – level)*	• Lateral relationships • Investment
Person *(Micro - level)*	• Individuality and personal connection (intertwined with collective experience)
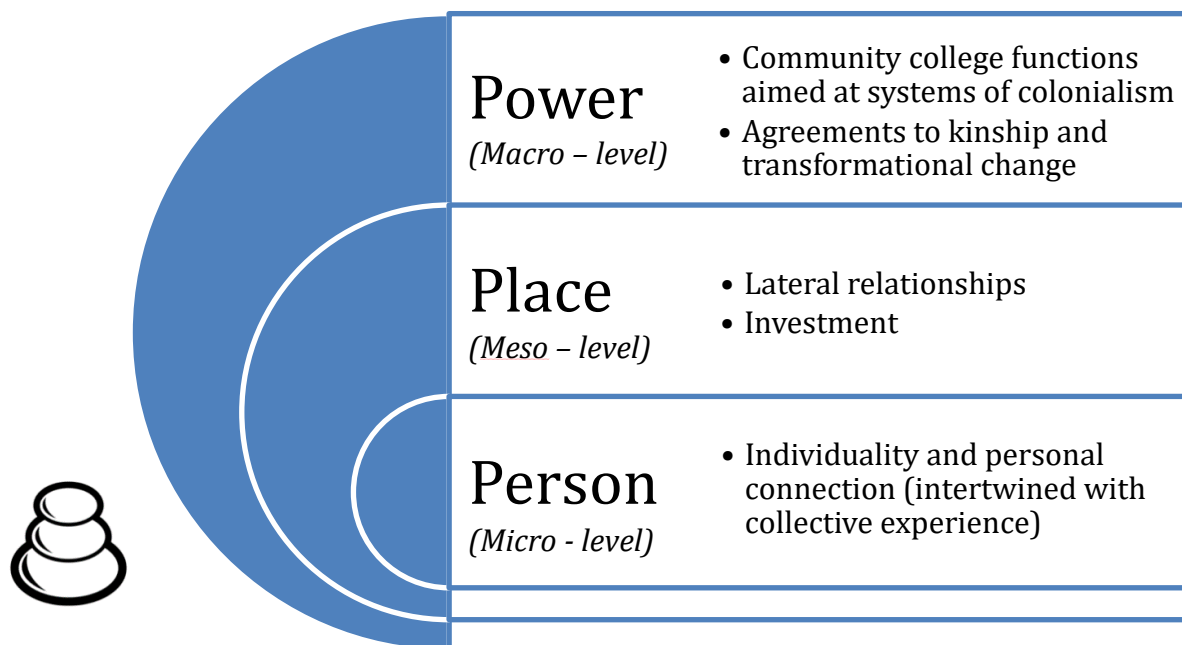
When analyzing research findings, it was clear that there were many ways that I could slice and dice the data to answer my research questions. After arriving at a set of domains relevant to my conceptual framework, it was clear that the findings were deeply intertwined and situated within another for each participant and my observational findings. To explain and summarize the dichotomy, I arrived at a metaphor of stones, or asiniig, as we would say in Anishinaabemowin. Like stones, these research findings are both distinct but can be made up from the elements of another domain. For example, while Indigenous community members discussed their own personal experience related to the college, it also involved a conversation about organization and agency, and ultimately point to differences and similarities in epistemologies and the everyday experiences of Indigenous communities. Therefore, is important to recognize that within individual contexts, these domains involve the makeup, or the presence of another.

In Anishinaabemowin, asiniig (stones) are animate nouns. This means that we speak about them in the same way as we word of someone who is alive. Anishinaabe writer and poet Louise Erdrich (2019) outlines that the universe began with a "conversation between stones" and that they each hold a rich and enduring history to their size, strength, and formation. So like asiniig, the domains of definitions and experience with community engagement can be considered living, dynamic, and exist in conversation with one another.

While the previous section outlined the summary and context of my visits with Indigenous community members, this section will attempt to further describe research findings within the domains of the community engagement asiniig. These findings are expressed as (re)claims as Indigenous scholars call for the reclamation of research pertaining to Indigenous communities. The (re)claims of this study are driven by Indigenous peoples, knowledges, beliefs, and practices and they are rooted in the recognition of the impact of colonialism and the emancipatory interests of Indigenous peoples and communities (Brayboy, et al., 2012). These (re)claims are what both participants and I consider to be truth and simply calling them claims would leave them open to debate. In connecting back to my conceptual framework, it is important to approach the constructions of these findings from the ethics carried from the turtle. As Dr. Robin Wall Kimmerer (2015) – mother, daughter, scientist, decorated professor, and enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation states, "What good is knowing, unless it is coupled with caring?" (p.345).

Domain of Power (Macro-Level)

(Re)claim 1: Indigenous community members define and experience community engagement through community college functions aimed at systems of colonialism.

From a macro-level, the participants in this study described community engagement and college access in relation to college functions aimed at systems of power, namely involving the legacies of colonialism experienced today by Indigenous communities. Colonialism has left numerous legacies that infuse modern day experiences of Indigenous communities. For Indigenous people, it is a source of systemic racism, cyclical poverty, economic inequity, violence, loss of language and culture, environmental justice issues, and is the root factor for an enormous amount of missing and murdered Indigenous people. Colonialism is not just a power of the past, and even if-then, direct experience with it carries through in the experience and memories of those to come.

During my visit with Lilac, I brought up the point that many of the Indigenous students that Riverbend College do or could potentially serve are only one generation removed from direct experience with boarding schools. It is an important consideration in thinking about how the institution approaches communities. Before going on to my next point about how these experiences play out in the current lives of Indigenous students today (and thinking about the idea of "blood memories"), Lilac interrupted me:

> We're not. These kids today are in it. They're the ones, they are still facing this,
> this, this institutional racism at school. This thing just happened what, two, three
> years ago up in [town] and another what happened [in this other town] just a
> couple of years ago, where it's the same sh*t, that for generations we've, that
> we've all been facing. And it is, it's a denial of education. It's an ability of the

institution to even look at how wrong they've been treating individuals just based on race. Never mind what they think of, you know, all these other things that go along side it. We're not removed. Nobody's removed. It's active…. that same mentality… It just takes on a different, it takes on a different look and feel… it is the same crimes… it's the same results. So, yea, I will absolutely refute that any of these are in the past.

The striking reaction of Lilac's testimony serves as an example of how Indigenous people describe and experience educational institutions today. These contested experiences manifest in several main specific functions of the community colleges and their engagement efforts, all bearing enduring connections with colonialism. I turn to this discussion now.

Curricular functions. One common point of contention that has surfaced throughout my interviews and observations is the curricular function of Riverbank College, which includes the vast array of teaching and learning that happens within the college. It is not only the academic programs and courses offered to the broader community, but the learning that happens within the college through the professional development and training of students, faculty, and staff around these issues of community engagement and college access. What emerged is an understanding that Indigenous community members define and experience community engagement through curricular functions aimed at systems of colonialism. Some participants spoke very personally to their interactions with these functions, while others spoke to the opportunities and pitfalls that curriculum can have in relation to legacies of colonialism and underlying dependencies.

From a services perspective, curricular functions work to provide the knowledge and skill attainment toward a trained workforce and advancement to further higher education. When conversation about workforce came up, Ralph said,

> I'm gonna think about you know, the needs of Indigenous nations today, you know, what type of skilled workers they're hoping for. Most people want to develop in house, you know, your own nation's citizenry, to serve your nation in some way… I think about you know, I heard them say 'we want science and engineers, because we don't want to keep outsourcing to non-Indigenous science and engineers for our Tribal evaluation, environmental management, or other kind of engineering design or whatever they need' They need more scientists… 'we've expressed healthcare as a big need', they want natural resource because it's a bigger need, they also need Tribal governance, they need more lawyers, they need all sorts.

Ralph's statement reflects a proactive stance toward building capacity within Indigenous communities by prioritizing the development of a skilled workforce from within their own communities. In further consideration of how certain community college curriculum could contribute to the needs and interests of Indigenous communities, more contextually to a specific Tribal nation, Bryan noted that,

> So, if I were to give you the top five, I would say pharmaceuticals to have one of our people in, I would say engineering to have one of our people in, I would say, production and marketing, to have our people in, I would say accounting, definitely. And, and then also legal, these are all areas that I would not have a problem. I could hire all those by 10 o'clock today.

In such discussions of the program and workforce development areas that Indigenous communities and Tribal Nations are looking for, it is important to consider why these are areas of interest for Indigenous people. Many Indigenous communities are fighting what has been dubbed as the "water wars," or attacks toward the environment and the current and future impacts facing Indigenous communities. When discussing what was on the desk of any Tribal leader, Bryan pointed out that a corridor of frac sand and silica sand mining driven by the fossil fuel industry runs through the ancestral and contemporary homelands of Indigenous communities, causing downstream health effects on communities living close by. He discussed lead in the water, and PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) used in the industrial process and the harmful health effects it imposes onto people. He brought up Enbridge, a Canadian corporation, who has a dangerous and outdated oil pipeline running through the United States and passing through the boundaries of Tribal communities. These industries have and continue to threaten the well-being of Indigenous communities, destroying lands and wetlands, often eliminating habitats and ecosystems, while contributing to both air and water pollution that cause downstream impacts to community health and sustainability. Considering this, Indigenous community leaders are looking for ways they can leverage knowledge and skill attainment through postsecondary education to combat these threats, which not only include areas of STEM, but professions involving things like law (paralegal) and finance (accounting).

Tribal leaders are often considering the avenues of workforce development needed and the importance of being able to hire "their own" in thinking of the various level of Nation-building involved in these circumstances. In addition, Ralph asked, "how do we help other places grow and develop in ways that are important for them to develop as they define it?" Especially when the college is perceived as one that can be more adaptive and responsive to community

needs faster than their four-year counterparts. In discussing the knowledge and skill attainment required to combat these systems of power (colonization and imperialism), Bryan speaks from a community college prospective, hoping that one day they could say:

> You tell me the need, and we will build that program for you. You tell me what skills they need, we will not only fund the program, but we will create a custom degree for you…. (later goes on to say) I want you to be able to be able to arm yourself… and we are going to give you the tools to do that.

Another legacy of colonialism surfaced from a conversation with Dawn, who spoke the loss of language and culture keepers within her community. For many Indigenous communities, Native languages have been in decline for decades with some close to extinction as the remaining first language speakers get older. This causes concern as languages define how Indigenous communities connect with the world. The painful and complex history with residential schools prevented Indigenous people from passing on their Native language to their children, and Indigenous Nations are seeking ways to combat this legacy of colonialism. Dawn told me,

> Your research may get trickier in the future. I mean, just again, trying to understand Indigenous communities and the fact that it's changing so much, like even right now, as we speak, you know, I mean I looked at our list of eminent speakers, and we have only about a dozen left. It's getting, it's getting down there. Like I said, I mean, the number of people that actually know things, it's even smaller than that. We have a lot of old people around, not many elders though.

In thinking about the role that community colleges could play in this, Dawn and I discussed that it is not just a matter of teaching the language, it is the layers of getting certified

teachers, finding someone with a master's degree. "And are we just gonna go and teach whatever language class without consulting with the nation?" Language involves a way of knowing that needs to circumvent the translation and teaching of words. Curriculum is not just serving communities as a service, but also is about creating the atmosphere for authentic knowledge and skill attainment and building up language teachers in Tribal communities. As Indigenous languages disappear, colleges must help preserve them; but it is not an easy feat, and it requires the definition and experience of engagement at the meso level. However, it is important to consider potential solutions such as the contribution of educational technology, distance learning, or aiding in the advancement of language teachers in other ways defined by community.

The intersections of knowledge and skill attainment with various programmatic areas offered by the community colleges is not simply aspirational. While my discussions with Bryan and Dawn can speak to the ways that Indigenous communities could help with the knowledge and skill attainment needed to combat the legacies of colonialism, other participants pointed to the existing ways curricular functions have aimed at systems of colonialism. Robert pointed out one of the ways that historical engagement and partnership for community colleges programs have intersected with Indigenous communities. There are several programs that have historically tied very closely to the lived experience of Indigenous people. As Robert states, "There is a history about the fire service and how it mingles with Tribal communities because of wildland fighting."

In our discussion, Robert explained how historically, the US Federal Government and the Bureau of Indian Affairs put out grants to contract with Tribal communities to train Tribal Citizens in wildland firefighting who would then be deployed to different Tribal communities fighting wildfires around the nation – such as California and Florida. These individuals would be

called into other search and rescue situations like when the space shuttle Challenger blew up and trained firefighters were sent to the Everglades to search for the remnants. While this tie in definitions and experience of community engagement towards curricular offering may not directly address colonialism, it provides an example of how a stronger partnership between the U.S. Government, the Community College, and Tribal Nations have historically worked together around curricular functions that provided a deeper engagement with environmental legacies of colonialism.

As existing programmatic areas and partnerships amongst agencies can serve as one avenue of curricular function, another participant in this study brought to light possibilities of leveraging current economic workforce opportunities in present day communities. Kip asked,

Can the college have that type of conversation with Tribal enterprises and saying, 'Hey, we offer these programs for your, for your employees? What are some ways that we can partner effectively?'

There are numerous possibilities that speak to existing programmatic areas in which community college curriculum can intersect with Indigenous communities was supported through a quote from Ralph, stating that:

I think community colleges offers so many incredible areas of skill development, and so on so many different ways that they could serve the, you know, tourism and gaming and other connections, whatever other diversification of business interests tribes want to do, you could build a labor force coming out of Riverbank College because of the wide ranging kind of skills, whether they are in kind of manufacturing or design or all sorts of society. I just think about, or you know, as a springboard to getting people into more highly selective institutions... and so

there is just, they seemed to be positioned so well, to meet the immediate needs of

Native nations in ways that large institutions can't do very quickly.

Curricular offerings and the teaching and learning that happens in community college

don't just apply to transferrable skills from the classroom for students. For curriculum to be

aimed at systems of colonialism, it is important for college leaders and faculty to understand

Indigenous communities and all their complexities and the ways it can be embedded into

curriculum. Not just for the benefit of Indigenous communities, but in the individuals who end

up in positions that serve Indigenous communities. Whether it is the non-Indigenous students

who end up in professions serving Indigenous communities or it is community college leadership

who makes decisions about which programs and classes to offer, this function serves as a major

construct in how Indigenous community members define and experience engagement. To

emphasize the education that needs to happen first, Ralph stated,

> Well first, we have to educate our institutions… educate leaders and where there's
>
> relevance in thinking about Indigenous nations in the work they do…the depth of
>
> how well they understand the Native Nations and Indigenous populations within
>
> the counties they charter to serve in some way… Education has to happen in so
>
> many places.

As a foundational level, it is important for community colleges to continue to understand

Indigenous worldview and understand the relationships to land and water. In working toward

this, Riverbank College hosted the screening of a documentary for the college community to

better understand the lived experiences of Indigenous students with a panel with Indigenous

community members to follow, which I participated and observed. While it was great to see

exposure to Indigenous worldviews supported by the college, I couldn't help but notice that non-

Indigenous community college administrators and staff leave the screening right after the movie.

They did not stick around for the discussion where Indigenous community members spoke to

their reaction and participation in the film, and further discuss the implications of what was

happening. While their departure may not have been noticeable to the attendees at large, it spoke

to the fact that the education of Indigenous worldviews is often put on the backs of Indigenous

people within the institution. This observation was further validated through a comment made

by Ralph,

> It's an unfair burden for Indigenous scholars because there's so few of us in any
>
> place and were asked to do so many things. Because given this, like, well, we are
>
> a little more clued in.
>
> This statement shed a light on the complexities of who and how to teach these

worldviews to people within the college. The teaching of Indigenous worldview is not something

that happens overnight. We discussed the benefit of having Indigenous People already in

leadership at the institution; however, it is rare to see it happen. Based on my years of

experiences and observations at Riverbend College, I serve as one of the two mid-level leaders

who identify as Indigenous, with no perceived representation in the understanding of the lived

experience in Indigenous communities in those above me. As we continued to discuss the ways

to strategize the education of college leadership, Ralph stated,

> And the worst part is when you get a new one, back to zero, and you got to start
>
> over, the collective memory of whatever education happened for senior leadership
>
> at an educational institution is going to fade and going to have to re-educate
>
> again… and it takes time for this type of education to sink in… It's like a wave
>
> where we get a real good momentum going, because a leader we find and educate,

and they can devote resources and energy to an issue that really important to
Indigenous nations and communities, and then they retire, and then we're back to
educating. So, it's like, it's just this constant kind of process. So, I think of
Riverbend College, you know, I'm sure it's a challenge there too.

These participants' reflections and insights both center and extend beyond the curricular
functions as key teaching and learning environments within and around the institution as they
relate to Indigenous communities. While the curriculum function contributes to access
surrounding degree completion and certification of students, it is more crucial to recognize its
broader impact on the interests and aspirations of Indigenous communities. As Brian put it, "it
isn't the degree that I really want people. It's the sense of contribution and investment that they
have in their, in their in their own people in their own government. I want them to come back.
Not because there's a job waiting for them that's going to pay their rent but come back because
they know a little bit that they do each day matters to our people." Brian's words underscore a
deeper desire for meaningful engagement and empowerment within Indigenous communities,
and the importance of education not just toward individual success, but as a tool for community
upliftment and self-determination, and ultimately challenging and disrupting the legacies of
colonialism.

Student service functions. Indigenous community members also define and experience
community engagement through student service functions that are similarly aimed at
understanding the systems of colonialism. During my visits with participants, all of them
provided insights into student services and how they influenced how they define and experience
community engagement. Since these functions help support the educational objectives of the
college, they have direct implications for engagement with Indigenous communities. As we learn

from literature on the community college, the scope and definition of student affairs supporting community engagement vary from institution to institution. At Riverbank College, it includes divisions of student engagement, enrollment management, learning support, and co-curricular services.

In our conversations, all participants emphasized the importance of student services that revolve around the relationships with those in roles dedicated to serving students. Whether it was the influence of specific individuals on their experiences or broader functions such as student engagement initiatives like the Indigenous Student Club (ISC) at Riverbank College, these individuals acted as conduits, bridging the gap between students, the institution, and the community. As Layla describes: "You know, like, even a Native community can be kind of scattered, who's in what circles and maybe in certain circles, but I think for me, just like, like the, you know, the ISC and putting out a powwow and being able to connect with the broader community, like that was really important, but even building community, you know."

During our discussion, Layla spoke fondly of the memories of her involvement with the ISC, and how the students would fundraise by selling tacos and the community that was built during club gatherings. She also spoke about the relationships that she formed with various advisors (as she saw them, although noted in our conversation that she wasn't even sure what their exact titles were). She described how they were the ones that she felt like she could turn to when she needed help. Throughout my observations and within my own experiences of the college, having a 1:1 relationship with student services staff is crucial to the experience of Indigenous students at the college. Robert supported this claim by sharing:

Let me share with you about what kept me in school. Okay. Right. So, you heard

you know about my access point in the school. So how I ended up staying in

school, it was a hole because you're talking about once you finally access, now

you got at least two years, well, depending on your program, less than a year, up

to two years or even more, but in the long term is like how you're going to stay in

there becomes the question once you actually access right? And for me, so I like

to view my starting point with Riverbank College as the glory days, because, man

they were they were so awesome. Man, I cannot, I cannot tell you how awesome

my experience with Riverbank college was because at the time, it was (named

person – Indigenous staff member) who man, I, I love and adore man, like [she]

was like… she was awesome.

Throughout my tenure at the college, I have served in a variety of functional roles

specific to admissions, credit for prior learning, and curriculum management. As an Indigenous

staff person, I also served as an advisor to the ISC for several years. Because I was someone that

Indigenous students, and sometimes members of the community, felt they had a trusting

relationship with, I was often the person whom students and community contacted when trying

to navigate the college. Despite not being a college recruiter or an expert in financial aid, it was

important for me to assist students and community in doing more than a referral to another

office. Often, I helped translate college policy and procedure to the student and became a

resource whenever someone had a question with any part of the journey. In my experience with

working through these cases, it always came down to the person I was working with

emphasizing, "I don't like referrals. It's not that I can't do it, I just want one person who can help

me along the way." After years of involvement, I realize that what it came down to was

familiarity and trust. While Riverbank College has a robust student service model that assigns

academic advisors and success coaches to students to help them navigate college and has moved

away from the idea of 'identity-specific' recruiters of the college, many of my experiences were often located at the entry point for students and communities to the college. My identity as an Indigenous staff person being connected to the college was an important factor, as I was able to interact with students in a community in ways that made them feel like they had a person. While these experiences land in a future claim regarding the micro-levels of engagement, it also supports the claim that the navigation of student services is important for how Indigenous community members define and experience community engagement.

As many of my participants spoke about their personal histories and access points to the college, other functions of student services also surfaced for individual ways that student services can impact access and retention, and ultimately views of community engagement of Indigenous community. Many of the participants spoke to damage-centered experiences with poverty, addiction, incarceration, and even being high-school dropouts. Therefore, it is important that student services are tailored within a community college setting to capture these needs of students, and not make assumptions about their lived lives. Lilac and I talked through how Native and Indigenous people are often seen as the most-diagnosed or most-medicated communities, and despite the actualities of these claims, it is important that student services understand the reality of these detriments in the lives of Indigenous community. On the other hand, it is also important to consider where student services can promote areas of strength for Indigenous communities when it comes to supporting the curriculum function and aims at colonialism.

(Re)claim 2: Indigenous community members define and experience community engagement through kinship agreements and transformational change.

When examining the power-domain of my research findings, it is apparent that relationships and intentionality are underlying factors when thinking about systems that aim at and understand Indigenous communities. I found that community engagement is defined and experienced by Indigenous communities through kinship agreements and transformational change. Kinship not only refers to the titles that can be given to others, but also means the relationship and intentionality that Indigenous people hold around them. As Bryan noted in our visit, genuine partnerships are achieved when "your priority becomes our priority." Ralph went on to say,

> If a technical college really cares about the welfare of the population that it is
> serving, then it should probably understand how previously contributing to the
> harm of that population that wasn't that long ago. And then what can it do to
> alleviate that harm today? And so I think that's the fundamental kind of thing that
> I think what access is like, it just feels we're all been looking at institutions… is
> this a harmful place? Or is this a helpful place?... How do you, you know, have
> you, as an indigenous person understand your own safety and welfare, and how it
> might be impacted by the institution, if it doesn't understand you or care to
> understand you?

This claim points to the importance of intentionality within engagement, and the importance of an agreement to transformational change. Naming this claim as an agreement to kinship points to the idea of what it means to "be a good relative" in holding a relationship with Indigenous communities operating within a power system of colonialism. As relationships can be

also exploitative or transactional, my findings point to the importance that an Indigenous communities seek a kinship agreement based on transformation. For Indigenous communities, kinship can refer to one's family and the role that they plan in an individual's life; but it can also refer to alignment in understanding and respecting these relationships from both the college and the community. During my visit with Dawn, she stated that it was about "...caring about the things that we care about…. What we need for you to understand, we still have families to feed, we still have futures to think about, we want better things for our children, and our grandchildren you know."

Dawn's sentiments, shared by other community members including myself, indicate that kinship agreements are essential in acknowledging the holistic identity of Indigenous students within the college environment. By recognizing and respecting the expansive network of relationships and community ties that Indigenous students maintain, the college can demonstrate a commitment to empowering students within their educational pursuits. Further, as Indigenous people consider beings outside of immediate families to be relatives, it is important that the college consider the people and 'beings' that are important and relatives' students and community member. For example, as it was outlined that asiniig are animate beings, in many Indigenous communities, they are also considered to be grandmothers and grandfathers, which can be confusing to someone who does not attune to these perspectives and understandings. In another example, environmental justice is an attack on our mother, which was outlined by a panelist at the previously mentioned documentary screening at Riverbank College. Lastly, many Indigenous people identify with clan systems that are named after animals and therefore, those animals are relatives to Indigenous peoples. Without an alignment on understanding these constructs, there can be misalignment on the perceptions of community engagement and what it

means to be in community with one another. By understanding embracing the expansive and non-nuclear family structures prevalent in Indigenous communities, the college can challenge traditional power dynamics and engage in decolonizing practices that may marginalize or overlook the experiences of Indigenous students.

In addition to understanding families and relatives, it is important that community engagement efforts of the college be ones that focus on transformational change within systems of colonialism. Dawn spoke to the perceived intentionality of the college and what it means to really engage with Indigenous communities. She described it as a matter of asking: "Are you with us, or are you here for some other reason?" As legacies of colonialism continue to be a part of our world, it is important that the engagement extended by community colleges work toward transformational change. As Dawn asked the institutions, and those often looking to engage, "what are you planning for? And how are you putting people in the places that are going to do the most for these long-term issues that communities are facing?" Dawn went on to describe the challenges the college faced in fostering truly authentic engagement with Indigenous communities through her own observations. While Riverbank college once offered 'community councils of color' – a space and an avenue to get feedback from various racialized communities and develop a relationship among community and college leadership, Dawn attended those for Indigenous communities.

> We would sit around and we would talk about, I guess, the different ways that
> college is sort of letting us down you know. And I kind of felt like we never
> really, like you're saying, drilling down to like, okay so what can we do that
> actually makes a difference? You know, it's almost like, the institution cannot get
> past… transactional? Like it's all transactional. It's like, no like, you'd have to

invest. You have to actually; we have to see you guys doing good here. All right.

I don't know how to explain that to you, if you don't dig down in your own spirit,

your own hearts. And like get a sense of what that means… I was working with a

different place at one point, they wanted to have a relationship with our tribe….

Same thing, they're like, how do we get to the communities? How do we get

involvement… and I actually took them around to different communities. And

they sat back.

Dawn's observations are underscored by both a strong critique and a dire need for the

college to move beyond transactional approaches to engagement and toward investing genuinely

in building relationships and trust toward transformative change that matters for Indigenous

communities. Similar experience with community councils of color also came up during my

conversation with Ralph who stated,

I remember them starting this effort of trying to bring people in to help inform the

institution, but it just kind of fizzled out. And so that's, you know, it's a good first

attempt, but it doesn't build trust. If you can't sustain something, then that's gonna

be a little bit of a red flag. Do you care about this as an institution? Or is this as

somebody's pet project? That's just going to go away?... Is this too much time

without enough actual outcome? So, I'm, like, I backed off of myself, too, because

it's like, well, this doesn't seem like it's gonna be a vehicle to do make any change.

What both Dawn and Ralph shared with me pinpoint both the importance and troubling lack of

action within community engagement. Just like Lilac poignantly stated, "community speaks, but

some people are blind to listen."

Additionally, it is important that the engagement is genuine. In my observations working as a community engagement coordinator with Riverbank College, it was important to share with community the intentions of the connections that I was hoping to build. It was during this time that community members shared with me that it was appreciated, as it often seemed that the institution only reached out to them as a way to benefit themselves, meaning looking to increase enrollment numbers or visibility of the college. While yes, that is one of the outcomes of engagement that the institution hopes to achieve; However, it shouldn't be the driving factor for building stronger connections with community and Indigenous community partners. Participants in this study shared that engagement can feel more transactional or motivated by self-serving reasons. As Robert mentioned, "there's a self-serving attitude, where you know, the faculty and staff are only interested in what they're doing." The conversation with Bryan also supports this claim of relationality and intentionality, "We want to be partners, they want to be visible partners".

Kinship agreements and transformational change are important considerations for how Indigenous community members define and experience the college's community engagement. In recognizing the relationships that Indigenous communities hold with others, it is important that these come from a place of good intentions and that something is done with it. As Dawn stated,

> I don't know how to explain that to you, if you don't dig down in your own spirit,
> your own hearts, and like get a sense of what this means…. what would do you do
> if this [Indigenous community] was your family?

Domain of Place (Meso-Level)

(Re)claim 3: Indigenous community members define and experience community engagement through lateral agency.

For this claim, lateral agency not only describes the importance of establishing relationships between the community college and Indigenous communities and similar agencies established to provide a particular service for Indigenous communities, it also considers the capacity of individuals and organizations to have the power and resources to fulfill their potential.

As relationships were found to be important in the student services function in the power level, relationships with other agents of the college are also very important. This includes not only the relationships that students and community members have as students, staff, or community members of the college, but it is also regarding the lateral relationships of agency and roles amongst the college and the community. Throughout visits with participants, these factors surfaced throughout our discussions as important elements underlying relationships with Indigenous communities. In discussing ways that the community college can better serve and work with Indigenous community, specifically in regard to the needs of specific Tribal Nations, Bryan said, "I don't want to talk to you, I want to talk to your president, I want to talk to your CEO, I want to talk to anyone that does anything with an Excel spreadsheet." Bryan's statement outlines the importance of considerations toward sovereignty in Tribal Crit, and the importance of building intentional leader-to-leader relationships within Indigenous communities. It wasn't that Bryan didn't want to have a conversation and participate in my study; rather, he was stressing the importance of having tribal leader to college leader conversations, because those are the people who can enact directives and change at the college. Building relationships

with lateral roles is important. It is also important to establish relationships as entities and functions of the community college and Indigenous communities.

During my observations with Riverbank College and the engagement that it has with Indigenous communities, I found that it is not only important to develop relationships among individuals within the community, but also the sensemaking and experience with community engagement needs to happen among entities within both places. As Riverbank college celebrates the achievements of students, they host an All-City Indigenous student celebration, partnering with neighboring educational institutions (the university and local school district) as an opportunity to come together as a community to celebrate graduates, kindergarten through doctoral. I have attended this event year after year. After earning my bachelor's degree, I was invited to attend the event to celebrate my accomplishments as a graduate of the university. I was presented with a certificate and a stole and was then presented with a microphone and asked to say a few words. Not knowing that I would have to give a speech, I didn't know what to say. Someone told me, "Just talk about your plans after graduation." Not really knowing what my next steps were, I introduced myself and said "I don't have any plans… so if anyone out there has a job for me… my phone number is...." and I rattled off my contact information. It wasn't until afterward, a vice-president from Riverbank approached me. She said, "send me your resume, I think I have something for you." And that following Monday, I was working in her office providing administrative support as a clerical tech which served as a jump start to my career at the college. While I wasn't familiar with Riverbank College at the time, it was because they were engaged in this partnership with a like-institution that I know that opened the door to me joining the college.

Anecdotal it might have seemed, my story demonstrates how lateral collaborative efforts like such can yield transformative opportunities for individuals, like myself. My unexpected journey from attendee to employee at Riverbank College highlights the intricate dynamics of lateral agency in community engagement. As Indigenous community members define and experience community engagement through lateral agency, it becomes evident that meaningful collaborations extend beyond individual interactions to encompass broader relationships and partnerships between entities. Bryan's earlier emphasis on leader-to-leader conversations underscores the importance of recognizing tribal sovereignty and building intentional relationships within Indigenous communities, while my own experience illustrates the transformative potential of lateral collaborative efforts. By fostering partnerships with neighboring educational institutions and engaging in community celebrations, this particular initiative by Riverbank College demonstrates how community engagement initiatives can yield unexpected opportunities for professional growth and personal development.

(Re)claim 4: Indigenous community members define and experience community engagement through capital investment.

Indigenous community members define and experience community engagement through investments made by the college which include monetary budgets and other forms of capital. A common thread across participants was that they spoke to the capital investments that the college makes in their engagement and how it influences their perspective of the institution. Whether it is supporting Indigenous community events, or funding positions and initiatives specific to Indigenous communities, these efforts speak volumes to community members for how they see

the institution. In my meeting with Ralph, in response to my first question, "What do you think of when you think of Riverbank College?" he answered,

> When I first moved here, I thought highly of the institution, probably because they were supporting the local Indigenous community by doing something as minimal as supporting the powwow…. I worked at an institution that didn't support the powwow, that we had to fight the institution to hold the powwow basically every year. And so how frustrating was it to try to organize events where you're trying to bring a community together without the support of the institution… … so when look at Riverbank College, I was like wow, you know, here's this place that's really helping Indigenous communities, could they learn to do better? Probably, but at the time, at least they're trying to do something… and so I think of Riverbank College, it was my first thoughts on it… in you know, the people who are working for it, and then the opportunities they're creating, to connect with other Indigenous people because you're hosing these types of events for the general Indigenous community.

What Ralph described was the importance of institutional spending toward engagement with Indigenous communities and how something as simple as hosting a powwow can make a meaningful difference in one's relationship to an institution. For Ralph, it was his relationship as a community member and feeling a sense of value from this event. In my observations as advisor for the Indigenous Student Club over the years, the powwow serves as a source of pride and belonging for students, knowing that the institution is willing to put money on creating an environment where they feel a sense of belonging. It is an event they look forward to every year,

as it allows them an opportunity to connect with others in the community and feel a sense of pride for being a student at Riverbank.

Despite the great things that the powwow brings for engagement with Indigenous communities, other participants in this study spoke to capital spending and community engagement initiatives from a different perspective. Bryan noted,

So, when you look at a budget, when you come over and tell me all these wonderful things you want to do, the first thing I'm gonna do is I'm gonna have you lift up the curtain, I see what you're putting into this. I want to look at the bottom and I want to look at the right, now I see how important this initiative is to you... Because I can guarantee you, you'll be spending more on pesticides for your grass than you will on diversity initiatives. So, I want to see what you are getting paid, I want to see what people like you are getting paid, I want to see if you can work, and maintain a home on what they're paying you. That's where value is. It's gonna come down to the bottom right in money. So, I love words, I'm good at em, I can do a podium talk any day of the week. But when it comes down to making things function, there needs to be capital investment.

While an annual powwow and financial capital provides an opportunity for the college to build greater connections and experiences with Indigenous communities, investments in the engagement with Indigenous communities can also involve other types of capital such as human capital or constructed capital. A few years ago, Riverbank College saw that refugees from Afghanistan were being relocated to a state army base, and that the local Tribal Nation was stepping in to help. The Nation was coordinating a donation drive to assist Afghan families with basic needs items, pointing to both an act of humanitarianism and duty. Noting that Indigenous

people are familiar to feelings of displacement, the Nation decided to step in to help these families get settled and welcome them to their traditional homeland area. Seeing this, the college reached out to the Nation to see how they could help. Because this was happening during the time of the coronavirus pandemic, the Nation expressed that safety was their top priority and that donation pick-up was being done by request only.

As news outlets picked up about the effort, the Nation had a long list of pick-ups accumulating. Riverbank then offered to serve as a donation drop-off point for members of the college community, in hopes to alleviate some complexities and inconveniences involved with coordinating pick-ups. The college had facilities where the collection of items could be done safely and effectively. With safety practices and guidelines in place, the college set up donation drop off bins at all their regional and metro campuses. The bins were out for three-weeks, leading up to a drive-thru event held withing a round-about parking lot outside of the college that could accommodate the flow of traffic. The college collected clothing and footwear, personal hygiene products, backpacks, luggage, and baby items. At the drive through, the college recruited 35 volunteers to assist on-site throughout the day to help direct traffic, unload vehicles, sort, and pack items. The event turned out to be a huge success, with over 115 vehicles come through. Volunteers packed and sorted nearly 14 pallets of donated goods and stored them in one of the empty wings of one of the college's warehouses to prepare for pick-up. After seeing the influx of donation items being sent to refugees from others across the state, volunteers committed to resorting everything (clothing and other items by size and gender) so that they could be easily distributed. It ended up being a six-week project, which ended with representatives from Riverbank traveling to the army base with members of the Nation to drop of donated items.

This account of Riverbank College's collaboration with the local Tribal Nation to support Afghan refugees illustrates the diverse forms of capital investment in community engagement. Beyond financial resources, the college leveraged its human and constructed capital to facilitate a successful donation drive, and thus demonstrated its commitment to solidarity and support toward Indigenous communities. The various logistical and volunteer supports served as a tangible platform for collective action with the spirit of reciprocity and mutual support.

Betty also spoke to the similar notions of investment through her experience working for another organization located in the same building as one of Riverbank's branch campuses. The people who worked at the campus were very accommodating in allowing her to utilize space for her own programming. This experience motivated her to volunteer at the Riverbank pow-wow every year, as it is her way of giving back to the organization who helped her so many years ago when she needed something as simple as space. Together, these stories and examples serve as an example of how investment in the interest and goals of Indigenous communities can take place utilizing other forms of capital in addition to budgetary dollars.

Domain of Person (Micro-Level)

(Re)claim 5: Indigenous community members define and experience community engagement through individual relations and connections to the college, which can be intertwined with collective and historical experiences.

The seventh tenant of TribalCrit expresses the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups. To unravel the individual connection component to this finding, it could be argued that discussion within this domain is very much situated within previously mentioned claims. However, it seemed important to pull out and emphasize the importance of individual relationships and connections for this project. While there were differences in the contexts for

this finding, every participant in this study spoke of the relationship that individual Indigenous community members had not only to their own culture and community, but the individual relationships that they developed and formed within the institution. The saliency of the recurring themes of personal relationships and connection for participants motivates me to develop this final person-level claim in its own right.

Two of my participants mentioned their connection to the college simply being one of happenstance, where they came across an ad for Riverbank while sitting on a bus or they decided to stop in the college after walking by each day. In approaching the college, they met individuals who they were able to connect with and who removed barriers for gaining access to the institution.

In our visit, Robert told a story of how access to college was a problem, because he had dropped out of high school. He grew up on the reservation, which he noted as being in the middle of nowhere. His father wanted him to go to college, but he didn't know what college was except for the means to get a better job and make money. He described growing up in poverty and how nobody (not even his school) had expectations of him or his family as they were also drop-outs. He eventually moved to Riverbank because he had family living here, and decided to stop by the college one day on a whim while he was walking past the campus. He walked up to a services window with no idea what college was. He remembers the person at the window giving him all the information to enroll, including the fact that he needed to submit a high school diploma. It had never dawned on him that it was needed to be admitted. So he told the person that he couldn't, because he didn't have it. He took all the information with him and told her that he would back another time. He didn't take notice to the woman standing behind him, and as he walked away – she followed him, flagged him down, and asked to talk to him. She asked him he

if ever considered getting a GED or HSED and took him to her office to talk more. When he

learned that there were test fees involved, he was ready to walk away again because he didn't

have the money. But before he knew it, she paid for the test out of her own pocket and told him

that she wanted to see him complete. She paid for all his test and made him promise to come

back. Robert took the tests and was able to earn his HSED. In his story, he described, "That's

where it all began for me, was you know, from her… a stranger taking an interest in me. You

know she was not Native; you know, she was a white lady… and you know." He mentioned that

throughout his academic career, it was always the non-Native staff that really made a difference

for him.

Robert's story sheds light on the profound impact of individual relationships in shaping

the educational trajectories of Indigenous students at Riverbank College. What seemed like

chance encounters translate into personal connections that serve as a catalyst for true access and

success for an Indigenous student facing significant barriers and economic hardship. Further,

Robert's recognition of the supportive role played by non-Native staff members highlights the

importance of culturally responsive support systems within educational institutions.

Layla also shared a story of her individual relationship and connection to an Indigenous

staff person who worked at the college in a capacity that she called the "Native advisor." Layla

described,

> I mean, I just remember one time that, here's just a little funny story. I lost my
>
> coat in the cafeteria, and by the time I got there, it was gone. Nobody ever turned
>
> it in. And I was just crying because you know, coats back then were like, you
>
> know, let's say 100 bucks. Well, 100 bucks was like, a lot of money. And so I
>
> went and I was like crying in the office. And I was just like, man, I don't have a

coat, it's so cold. It was so cold. It was a bitter cold like January. And it was like a

Columbia coat. You know, so like, back then I was like thee coat to have and I

must have saved up or used my financial aid loan money. But [the advisor] was

like "Hey. I got this extra coat…you can wear till you get a new one". And it was

just like, "oh my gosh, you know, yeah! that was just like, amazing to like, have

anybody else they would have been like, you know… maybe I don't have…but I

don't even know that I would have felt comfortable telling anybody else like my

problems.

Similar to Robert's story, Layla's narrative illustrates how individual bonds can

profoundly impact students' experiences, and in Layla's case, offering both practical

assistance and emotional support during times of difficulty. While Layla and Robert's

stories highlight the impact of personal relationships on their experiences as students,

Ralph's narrative emphasizes how as a community member, his experiences were shaped

by similar relational dynamics.

I remember her working there when I came first came to town. And she actually

tried to recruit me to work there as well, because she says, you know, pays better.

And I was like you know, for whatever reason, she found it to be a supportive

enough place that she wanted me to work there, I'll consider working there as

well. So when I think of some of the Indigenous community leaders in the town,

and their perceptions of our educational institutions, you know, I kind of think

about how that influences their own understandings of those institutions to some

degree. And here was someone I really admire telling me that this is a place I

should consider in some way shape, or form in my own development as a young professional.

Ralph's account underscores the impact of community leaders' perceptions on their understanding of educational institutions. His recollection of being recruited to work at the college by someone he admired reflects how the endorsement of trusted figures can shape one's perception of an institution. This experience pinpoints the important fact that the views and experiences of influential community members play a significant role in shaping individuals' perspectives on educational opportunities and professional development within the community.

On a related note, while individual relationships and connections to the college represent the most pronounced theme at the person level, these relational dynamics are also intertwined with collective and historical experiences. Some of my participants' sentiments regarding engagement for Indigenous communities are influenced by others, which speaks to the longevity of engagement experiences within Indigenous communities. As Dawn pointed out, "these relationships, they have a very long shelf life… they have to know you, they have to trust you… you know, it takes time, it takes a lot of time you know," suggesting that the history of engagement impacts its trajectory within Indigenous communities. Within Indigenous communities, stories and experiences with education are maintained and carried on. As the parents in this study discussed their own personal experiences and how they influenced their decisions to support their children in attending Riverbank, it is also important to note that these same experiences carry weight outside of the nuclear family; Indigenous communities communicate with one another. During our conversation, Kip noted, "You know, that's the reality, you

know, I was told by one of my mentors, he always called it the good 'ol moccasin telegraph. And you know, that words travel faster and sometimes you can tweet something out or put something on social media somewhere, the 'ol moccoasin telegraph moves 10 times faster."

Taken together, my participants' insights and experiences highlight how individual connections to the college are not isolated events, but can also be deeply intertwined with broader community narratives and historical legacies. They underscore the significance of trust, longevity, and collective experiences that can transcend individual interactions and contribute to the broader fabric of community engagement and support to advance college access and success.

Naanan (5): Discussion and Implications

How do Indigenous communities define and experience a community college's engagement to improve college access? Setting out to answer this question through my dissertation project, I have learned that meaningful engagement must occur at multiple societal levels, which aligns with the principles of critical inquiry and research. Also central to my findings is engagement as a dynamic relationship, a living entity that requires a deep understanding of multi-layered, dynamic contexts, barriers, and opportunities—historical, cultural, and systematic. Grounded within that understanding, my findings demonstrate the importance of collaborative approaches at all levels in fostering meaningful engagement efforts rooted in Indigenous values and traditions, and bolstered by trust, mutual respect, and sustainability. Taken together, my findings align with and support the use of TribalCrit in educational research involving Indigenous communities as the theory helped in determining the domains in which definitions and experience are located. From a pragmatic sense, the findings contribute to the field of higher education and community college research by complicating the notions of engagement and cultural relevance surrounding community engagement. In this chapter, I further discuss my findings and their implications for policy and future research.

My dissertation project reveals findings that hold significant implications for the broader literature base surrounding college access and community engagement, particularly within the context of Indigenous communities. By delineating the domains of Power engagement, Place engagement, and Person engagement, I offer a comprehensive understanding of the myriad structural, environmental, and interpersonal factors that shape Indigenous communities' interactions with community colleges. This understanding not only deepens and complicates extant literature around college access (e.g., Heller, 2001; Perna, 2006) and community college

access (e.g., Kisker et al., 2003) by bringing to light Indigenous populations that are severely understudied in the literature, but also underscores the importance of adopting a holistic, culturally sensitive approach to address the multifaceted dimensions of community engagement. Further, by centering Indigenous voices and perspectives, my findings contribute to the ongoing efforts to decolonize educational practices and foster equitable access to higher education for marginalized communities (Smith, 2016). Ultimately, these findings serve as a critical foundation for developing and implementing more culturally responsive strategies aimed at promoting college access and success among Indigenous populations.

My findings highlight the fact that engagement with Indigenous communities to enhance college access is indeed a multifaceted endeavor that intersects with various domains of thought and action. Just as college access remains unique to the individual, so too is community engagement. My interview and observational findings show that each interaction, initiative, and partnership forged between the community college and Indigenous communities reflects the unique needs, perspectives, and aspirations of those involved. Recognizing and embracing this complexity at the personal level is essential for fostering meaningful and sustainable engagement that resonates with Indigenous community member's lived experiences and values (Smith, 2016). As community colleges continue to grapple with their community engagement efforts, it becomes increasingly apparent that authentic collaboration and partnership-building at both personal and structural levels are key to advancing the shared goal of equitable access to higher education for Indigenous populations.

Moving beyond the unique, individual level, my findings also complicate the community college as a social institution in service to its communities, especially Indigenous communities. The notion of an "Indigenous Community Serving Community College" serves as a poignant

reminder of the collective responsibility to engage with and serve Indigenous communities. While some institutions may formally identify as TCUs or as NASNTIs, it is imperative to recognize that all community colleges play a role, to varying degrees, in serving Indigenous communities and this type of focused work should not be left to TCUs or NASNTIs. My findings show that this recognition extends beyond individual level engagements and should include a far broader range of efforts that shape how community colleges function within Indigenous communities. By acknowledging the multifaceted nature of engagement, from institutional policies to grassroots initiatives, community colleges can better align their efforts with the needs and aspirations of Indigenous communities. In essence, the concept of an "Indigenous Community Serving College" underscores the interconnectedness of community colleges and Indigenous communities and challenges us to reimagine community colleges as potent agents of change and empowerment. While an institution's NASNTI designation often points to this, NASNTIs are often located near reservation communities, which makes the 10% of enrollment threshold reachable. As Indigenous student data definitions are somewhat convoluted due to Tribal enrollment criteria and students who identify as bi-racial not being counted, an "Indigenous Community Serving Community College" can expand and deepen partnerships of the community college with Indigenous communities regardless of the threshold amount and locations of NASNTIs.

Implications for Policy and Practice

My dissertation's findings not only contribute to the current higher education literature and discourse, but also hold significant implications for policy and practice. In the following, I offer a few key implications and recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and

stakeholders seeking to enhance community colleges' engagement efforts and promote access to higher education for Indigenous populations.

First, it is crucial to adopt culturally responsive engagement strategies. Policies and practices must prioritize collaborative efforts rooted in Indigenous worldview, values, and traditions. Institutions should center Indigenous perspectives and voices in development and decision-making processes involving Indigenous communities to ensure that engagement efforts authentically reflect the lived experiences and aspirations of Indigenous communities. As community colleges focus on increasing access to postsecondary education and work to foster the success of diverse communities, paying particular attention to Indigenous perspectives help to ensure that they are doing so in an authentic and meaningful way that is relevant and considerate of Indigenous communities and their lived experiences. This involves including voices at all levels while recognizing the sovereignty and self-determination of Indigenous people. Individual community members voices are important, but is also important to know the structures of Indigenous communities, and sensitive and informed on the goals, challenges, and opportunities of specific Indigenous nations served by the community college.

Second, community colleges must embrace a holistic approach to engagement that transcends individual-level interactions. Collaboration and partnership-building are essential, requiring institutions to move beyond superficial gestures toward meaningful and reciprocal relationships. For Indigenous communities, this means further understanding towards their lived realities both as Tribal nations as well as individuals with numerous intersections of identity. Engagement can take on a whole new meaning when it's coupled with authenticity and respect. It can be even more successful there is investment and intentionality that is clearly communicated and acted upon. It is important that collaboration and partnership is built at all

levels of the institution, and at all levels congruent to Indigenous communities. It is important that institutions develop a clear definition and plan on where these collaborations and partnerships take place.

Next, institutions must recognize and address structural and systemic barriers that hinder meaningful engagement with Indigenous communities. This may involve revisiting institutional policies, practices, and decision-making processes to ensure they are inclusive and responsive to the needs of Indigenous populations. But before that can happen, it is important to gain a better understanding of those who are impacted. Policies for community colleges should include consistent consultation with Indigenous community and should include performance measures and accountability. Furthermore, community colleges should prioritize the allocation of resources toward initiatives that support access to higher education for Indigenous communities.

Further, to effectively engage with Indigenous communities, community colleges should invest in capacity building and training for faculty, staff, and administrators. This training should focus on developing cultural competence, understanding historical and contemporary issues facing Indigenous communities, and fostering respectful and reciprocal relationships. Centering the voices of Indigenous communities should not be left to Indigenous practitioners. In the community college, we are all serving Indigenous communities to some extent. And although it may not show up within your every-day work, it all contributes to the experience of Indigenous community members toward the institution.

Recognizing that "community" can be one and can be many, institutions must invest in community engagement efforts that reflect the diverse identities and needs of Indigenous populations. This involves actively listening to community members, building trust through meaningful relationships, and collaborating on initiatives that prioritize community well-being

and empowerment. By investing in community, community colleges actualize their commitment to the success of community. Overall, community colleges must contribute to prioritize the development of collaborative partnerships and networks with Indigenous communities, Tribal governments, and other stakeholders. These partnerships can take time, but they can lead to an enormous transformation in the lives of those they serve. To work together in genuine partnership, institutions must center Indigenous communities in the discourse surrounding community college engagement to move beyond tokenistic gestures toward meaningful partnerships and collaborations.

Implications for Future Research

Through this journey of learning and unlearning as an Indigenous scholar, I offer the following ideas and directions for future research. First, future work should continue to amplify Indigenous knowledge and perspectives within and beyond the context of community college engagement and college access. Building upon the methodological contributions of this dissertation, researchers can further explore how Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing contribute to our understanding of education issues that matter for these communities. For instance, researchers could conduct collaborative studies with Indigenous communities to document and preserve traditional knowledge related to education and college access. Additionally, exploring the intersectionality of Indigenous identities and experiences with community college engagement could yield valuable insights for developing culturally responsive practices.

The unique methodological approach that I utilized in this dissertation project also offers a promising framework for future research in this area. The Culminating Ganawenim Analysis, inspired by the metaphor of a turtle swimming east, proved to be a promising tool for unpacking

and contextualizing the data. Researchers can build upon this approach by further refining and adapting it to different contexts and research questions. Additionally, future research can explore the approach of integrating multiple Indigenous frameworks, such as Tribal Crit, CIRM, and the Seven Values of the Anishinaabe, in qualitative data analysis. The Ganawenim framework allowed me to bring parts of myself to research that other methodological approaches wouldn't have and helped to validate the use of Indigenous knowledge systems within educational research.

In addition, given the interdisciplinary nature of Indigenous scholarship, future research should continue to embrace interdisciplinary approaches to studying community college engagement and college access with and for Indigenous communities. By drawing upon insights from fields such as Indigenous studies, education, sociology, and anthropology, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of how intersections amongst these disciplines can contribute to the success of not only the institution, but to communities writ large.

Conclusion

My dissertation project complicates traditional notions of access and community engagement within community colleges. Historically, access and engagement has been defined and approached primarily within the structures of the institution, with little consideration given to the perspectives and sensemaking of the communities being served. However, my research has shifted the lens by not only including but centering the community's approaches and understandings of engagement and how it implicates college access. By centering Indigenous perceptions, my goal was to (re)claim Indigenous knowledge as what we've always known to be true, being "in community" is something we've always done. My study turned engagement from a western-centric gaze toward a more east-facing perspective, acknowledging the importance of

honoring Indigenous values and traditions in the engagement process. As Kisker et al. (2023) aptly state, "the orientation of community will not change... It is written into the DNA of the institutions." While our conceptions of community, engagement, and access may evolve, the true north for community colleges should always remain rooted in serving the needs and aspirations of the communities they exist to serve.

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Appendix A: Participant Recruitment Message

Initial recruitment (purposeful sampling)

- **Those who attended community engagement events:** Boozhoo! (Hello!) It was so nice to see you at the recent (event name) hosted by the college last month. Just wanted to follow -up to see if you would be willing to take part in my dissertation project about how community sees the college's efforts to increase college access.? I'm looking to do one-hour follow-up conversations with those who attended the event- at a time and place that is convenient for you. Before we start the conversation, I'll go over why you are being invited, what you should know about the study (including the risks and benefits), what will happen with the information that I collect, and any other information you need to know. If this is something you are willing to do - I'm happy to meet at a time and

place that is convenient for you! Please do let me know if you have any questions that I can help address at this point!

- **Indigenous Student Alumni:** Boozhoo! (Hello!) I hope this message finds you well! I wanted to reach out to you to see if you'd be willing to participate in my dissertation research? I'm looking to do one-hour conversations with Indigenous student alumni of the college to better understand their perceptions on our community engagement efforts to improve college access. Before we start the conversation, I'll go over why you are being invited, what you should know about the study (including the risks and benefits) , what will happen with the information that I collect, and any other information you need to know. If this is something that you are willing to do - I'm happy to meet at a time and place that is convenient for you! Please do let me know if you have any questions that I can help address at this point!

- **Indigenous community members involved with previous engagement efforts:** Boozhoo! (Hello!) I hope this message finds you well! I wanted to reach out to you as someone we have previously connected with at the college to see if you'd be willing to participate in my dissertation research? I'm looking to do one-hour conversations with community members and leaders to better understand their perceptions and experiences of the colleges engagement efforts to improve college access. Before you agree to take part, I will go over why you are being invited, what you should know about the study (including risks and benefits), and any other information you need to know. If this is something that you are willing to do - I'm happy to meet at a time and place that is convenient for you! Please do let me know if you have any questions that I can help address at this point!

Script for ongoing recruitment (snowball sampling):

- Boozhoo! (Hello!) Hope you are well! I recently had a chat with _____ about my dissertation project and they thought that you might be a good person to talk to who could provide some insight to how community sees the college's efforts to increase college access? I'm looking to do one-hour conversations with community members and leaders to better understand their perceptions and experiences of the colleges engagement efforts to improve college access. Before you agree to take part, I will go over why you are being invited, what you should know about the study (including risks and benefits), and any other information you need to know. If this is something that you are willing to do - I'm happy to meet at a time and place that is convenient for you! Please do let me know if you have any questions that I can help address at this point!

Appendix B: Flexible Interview Protocol

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

- Do you have a story about the local community college?
- When you hear about community college (Madison College), what comes to mind?
- Could you tell me about your connection with the college?
- How would you describe your awareness of the college?
- How would you describe the mission of the college?
- What does it do well, what does it do not well?
- How does cultural background and personal experience/identity influence view of community college?

COLLEGE ACCESS

- How would you define college access?
    - What is your experience with college access?
    - Did you ever go to the community college, why or why not?
- In your opinion, what does the college do well with when it comes to college access?
- What barriers or challenges do you believe members of your community face with pursuing education or enrichment opportunities. How can the college address those barriers?

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- How do we define community?
    - What are the similarities/differences in how the college sees community?
- What can the college improve on when working with our communities?
    - What ideas do you have?
- How do you think MC could engage and support Native communities?
- How would you describe the community colleges relationship with your Tribal Community?
- Have you heard of the term "community engagement"?
    - What are words or phrases you think about when you hear "community engagement"?
    - What other terms or words have you used or heard when describing potential ways in which Madison College or other two-year institutions work with local communities?
- In general, how important is it for the college and other two-year or community colleges to practice community engagement? Why?
- What do you feel is the college's role (or responsibility) in community engagement?
- What do you feel is the community's role (or responsibility) in community engagement with the community college (or the word that you referenced?)
- Can you name a few ways community colleges should practice community engagement?

- Given what you know about the ways that the college and the communities engage with one another, what do you think has gone well? What would you say are the biggest challenges?

- Do you have any additional comments you'd like to offer?
- Who else should I talk to?
- What do you want your pseudonym to be?
- Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix C: Flexible Observation Protocol

Event:

Date/Time:

Participant as Observer:

<u>Descriptive Notes</u>

- General: What are the experiences of community members attending these events
- Was it easy to get there? Was the time and location convenient?
- Event layout and comments about physical setting
- What happened during the event – what was the agenda and/or program flow?
- How many community members were in attendance?
- Where are they situated in the room?
- What were the topics of discussion?
- What were the feelings in the room – positive conversations or frustrations?

<u>Reflective Notes</u>

- Notes for myself as the researcher
- Problems/highlights experienced or observed.
- Preliminary themes – what is coming up?

<u>Field Notes</u>

- What did I see?
- What did I hear?
- Chronology of what happened at the event.
- Draw a picture of the setting.
- A short story about what happened (with no identifying information)
- Reflexivity notes

Appendix D: IRB Approval Letter

WISCONSIN
THE UNIVERSITY *of* WISCONSIN
MADISON

Minimal Risk Research IRB
1/23/2024

Submission ID number:	2023-1757
Title:	"In Community": A Critical Qualitative Investigation of Engagement with Indigenous Communities to Improve College Access
Principal Investigator:	Xueli Wang
Point-of-contact:	Nicole Soulier
IRB Staff Reviewer:	Laura Conger

A designated MRR IRB member conducted an expedited review of the above-referenced initial application. The study was approved on 1/23/2024 by the IRB member. The study qualified for expedited review pursuant to 45 CFR 46.110 and, if applicable, 21 CFR 56.110 and 38 CFR 16.110 in that the study presents no more than minimal risk involves:

(6) Voice, video, digital, or image recordings
(7)(b) Social science methods

As part of its review, the IRB determined this study does not require continuing review either under federal regulations or institutional policy, or both. Please note, however, that although this study is not required to undergo continuing review, you must still submit the following to the IRB:

1. Changes of protocol prior to their implementation (unless the change is necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to subjects)
2. Addition of new study personnel
3. Funding updates
4. Reportable events (unanticipated problems, noncompliance, new information) in accordance with institutional policy
5. Closure report

In addition, please be aware that the type of funding that supports a study or whether the study falls under FDA regulations can affect whether continuing review may be required in future.

To access the materials approved by the IRB, including any stamped consent forms, recruitment materials and the approved protocol, if applicable, please log in to your ARROW account and view the documents tab in the submission's workspace.