

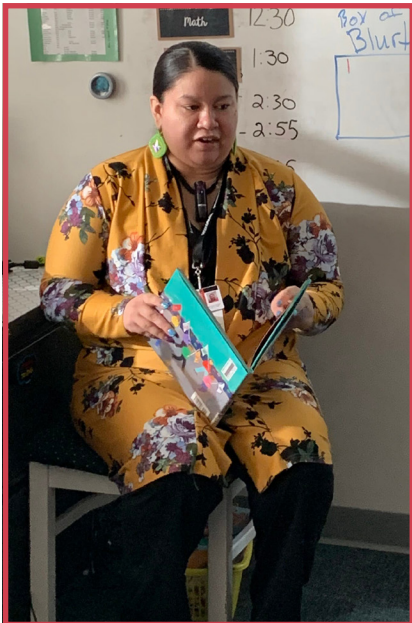
# PATHWAY TO POST SECONDARY SUCCESS FOR NATIVE STUDENTS

## *Literature Review*

December 2021



[www.aihec.org](http://www.aihec.org)



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), representing the nation’s 37 Tribal Colleges and Universities, completed this Literature Review as a design component of the work to develop and to share a holistic framework of strategies supporting American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN) success and completion in postsecondary education. Using AIHEC’s core values to frame existing primary research, a broad and insightful Literature Review revealed the following Key “Take Aways”

- Indigenous research methods blend Western and traditional research strategies.
- Post-secondary research on American Indians/Alaska Natives focuses on undergraduate students.
- Gender issues are rarely explored.
- Cultural values support qualitative inquiry.
- A significant number of primary inquiry studies propose avenues for future research to validate findings.



This Literature Review includes summaries of fifty studies (Appendix B), with an additional list of relevant resources available (Appendix C).

## LITERATURE REVIEW DESIGN

The literature review comprised multiple broad strategies: Western literature and Indigenous literature review processes, outreach to key Indigenous stakeholders, and subject matter experts. These are explained next, followed by a summary of findings and key “take aways” seen throughout the literature for stakeholders to consider.

*Figure 1: Indigenous Literature Review Design*

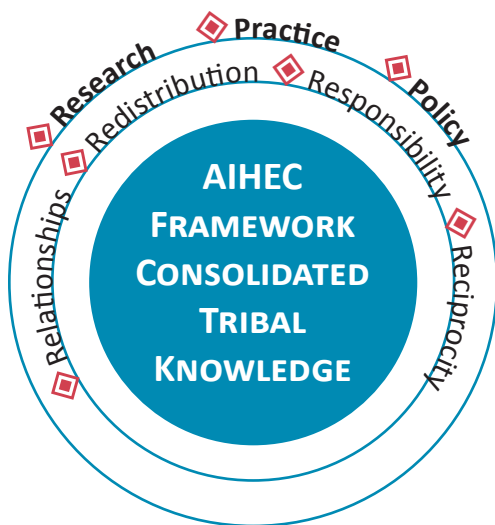


Figure 1 illustrates the comprehensive review of literature grounded in research, emerging practice, and policy as aligned with AIHEC’s four Core Values to create summaries of primary inquiry. The comprehensive search was conducted using Academic Search Premier, ProQuest, ERIC Clearinghouse; Dissertations and Theses Database: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection, and Google Scholar. AIHEC’s team used a Western

approach to literature searches complemented with an Indigenous literature review process which strategically used Key Word/Variable searches targeting American Indians/Alaska Natives/Native Americans. Gray literature (unpublished, hard-to-find, non-professional essays) was not included in this literature review. Fifty items were

chosen for review in this document. Appendix A is the bibliography for the Abstracts in Appendix B. Appendix B is designed as a working template where users can add additional notes or comments. Appendix C provides citation information for additional relevant literature. As noted in Figure 1, the literature review design and methods included strategic links to AIHEC’s accreditation core values, specifically:

- ❖ **Relationships:** To acknowledge the historical context and experience within which tribally chartered institutions of higher education have and will continue to evolve.
- ❖ **Redistribution:** To encourage collaboration and information sharing among member institutions and regional, national, and international institutions, and organizations to promote, preserve, and actualize the inherent rights of Indigenous peoples worldwide to determine their education systems and to maintain, to strengthen, and to revitalize their Native languages and cultures.
- ❖ **Responsibility:** To promote excellence among member institutions through a rigorous process of scholarship that honors Tribal Identity, Indigenous knowledge, Sovereignty of Tribal nations and the unique holistic, spiritual, community/family, and place-based foundation of individual tribal institutions of higher education.
- ❖ **Reciprocity:** To recognize and to nurture the personal gifts of students, faculty, administrators, presidents, and governing boards of member institutions through partnerships.





To emphasize the connectivity of these core values, the literature review uses the following template.

## TABLE 1-ABSTRACT TEMPLATE

CITATION		
<p><i>The document citation is listed in this section; it reflects the format of the American Psychological Association’s Seventh Edition (2020) and would be used in standard bibliographic entries.</i></p>		
ABSTRACT		
<p><i>Summary of the study/work including the problem, sample, statistical analysis, results/conclusions.</i></p>		
TYPE	ACCESS	INDICATOR VARIABLE
Essay/Opinion: Evaluation: Policy: Research: Technical Report:	Peer Reviewed: Open Access: # of Pages: Full Text Available:	This section links the work to AIHEC Framework.
Keywords: (added per article)		
<p><i>This space is provided for the user to make additional notations for individual use. Each of the abstracts in Appendix B are designed to be used for scholars in the development of future projects.</i></p>		

Given the intentionally structured Indigenous-centered scientific literature review design, the resources listed here reflect a multi-layered, multi-racial, and multi-jurisdictional design element aligned and presented using the framework proposed by AIHEC stakeholders using the proposed Accreditation Core Values. The format is designed so that scholars can build on this work as they design future projects.

# KEY LITERATURE REVIEW FRAMEWORK-AIHEC

This literature review used AIHEC's Accreditation Core Values aligned with Indicator Variables found in the literature.

## Relationships

- ❖ **Indicator 1:** Assessment
- ❖ **Indicator 2:** Academic Preparation
- ❖ **Indicator 3:** Placement
- ❖ **Indicator 4:** Tutoring/Mentoring/Advising

## Redistribution

- ❖ **Indicator 5:** Orientation
- ❖ **Indicator 6:** 1st Year Activities
- ❖ **Indicator 7:** Learning Communities
- ❖ **Indicator 8:** Distance Learning/Online Courses

## Responsibility

- ❖ **Indicator 9:** Academic Performance
- ❖ **Indicator 10:** Early Warning Programs
- ❖ **Indicator 11:** Experiential Learning
- ❖ **Indicator 12:** Internships

## Reciprocity

- ❖ **Indicator 13:** Persistence
- ❖ **Indicator 14:** Collaborative Learning Practices
- ❖ **Indicator 15:** Native Languages
- ❖ **Indicator 16:** Cultural Connectedness/Identity

Prior to presenting the full literature review annotated findings (Appendix B), we purposefully draw attention to the literature review process. This culturally responsive and scientific literature review reveals an Indigenous strategy to include culturally responsive theory, methods, and practical approaches to accessing information to address retention and completion of TCU degrees. The first step in the design of this review process included incorporating American Indian research team members in the review of the literature. This ensures that assessments reflect multi-tribal perspectives and that include culturally appropriate research. By weaving multiple

tribal perspectives into the final product, literature findings that can be applied and modified into real solutions for Tribal Colleges and Universities. Through the literature review processes, we learned that tribal research methods require a blending of Western and traditional research strategies, so it is possible to find effective and realistic solutions. This begins with



American Indian/Alaska Native researchers who have been trained in Western social science methods and are also informed by lived experiences in tribal communities. Observation and experience inform both Western and Indigenous research. Access to mainstream literature is privileged and for American Indian/Alaska Native researchers, the ability to review that literature through a lens that extrapolates bias allows us to share strategies and interventions that are useful to Tribal Colleges and Universities.



This literature review is conceived as a beginning for scholars working with American Indian/Alaska Native students. This grounding does not replace the experiential listening, observing, and understanding that is practiced throughout tribal communities. Future generations of Tribal Colleges and Universities' graduates will continue the important work of privileging Indigenous research methods, while at the same time continuing to engage, to assess, and, where appropriate, to develop and use Western research strategies. The Literature Review presented here is a synthesis of quantitative and qualitative research, theoretical frameworks, and policy perspectives found primarily in published venues from 2000 to the present. Appendix B provides abstracts for fifty pieces of scholarship. These are limited to samples with American Indian/Alaska Natives. Articles that reflect multi-ethnic perspectives are not included in the review because often they do not have a large enough sample size to include American Indians/Alaska Natives in statistical testing, resulting in insufficient findings.

The **Findings** section in this document summarizes the literature found in Appendix B. The findings are categorized using AIHEC's core values. The abstracts are linked to specific Indicator Variables for this discussion. Appendix C lists the overall body of references used for this Literature Review and includes over 100 articles.

### **Findings – Articles, Policy Briefs, Dissertations, Manuscripts, Red (White) Papers**

Two key reviews are provided which reflect all four core values. The article by William Demmert is a comprehensive literature review which focused on academic performance of American Indian students, including factors leading to success in college (Demmert, 2001). The scope and breath of Demmert's work crosses all variables and forms a key staple in the review of primary research on American Indian students. Completed nearly twenty years' ago, this review synthesizes perspectives that remain foundational to later research. Additionally, Pewewardy's (2002) review of literature, focused on learning styles and again provides a solid framework for later research studies; both are frequently cited in the literature and remain relevant to the corpus of literature on American Indian/Alaska Native students. The following summaries are aligned by Core Value and Indicator Variable. Summaries include the primary Indicator



Variable (listed first in the Abstracts). The summaries in each category begin with the oldest work through the most recent publications.

## RELATIONSHIPS

### *Assessment, Academic Preparation, Placement, Tutoring/Mentoring/Advising*

Green (2003) shares personal narratives of her work for more than three decades as a non-Native professional mentor for Native faculty, graduate, and undergraduate students. Drawing on her own personal experiences as a minority (a female in a male dominated faculty), Green describes grant funded initiatives that allowed her to train



Native psychologists. Activities she found to be most intensive were: 1) building a program, 2) mentoring Native graduate student advisees, 3) encouraging undergraduate Native students to continue their education, 4) incorporating relevant material into her teaching, 5) building appropriate practicum places in tribal communities, 6) supervising research on Native issues and populations.

By building life-long relationships, Green recognizes the need to identify mentors in post-secondary institutions. Brown's (2005) chapter on student services addresses similar relationship issues by noting the importance of "having a place where Native American students feel like they belong and feel comfortable."

By providing adequate staff for centers, relationships will allow students to become more independent. Jackson, A.P. et al. (2010) studied the relationship of college counselors who worked with American Indian students. Noting that American Indian students were less likely to use counseling services, the qualitative interviews found developing relationships, understanding cultural patterns, bicultural identity, and enabling versus empowering were emergent themes. Also in 2010, Jackson, K.F. et al. completed a literature review that examined culturally sensitive interventions for Native American youth. Eleven outcome studies were examined for culturally sensitive interventions (CSIs). By incorporating culturally sensitive and relevant content in therapy, the studies found that client engagement and client/clinician



relationships were improved. In 2016, Keith et al. reviewed the literature to looking for influences on graduation and retention. Multiple studies in their review highlighted initial placement and preparation for post-secondary education as critical to retention through graduation. Using data from the National Indian Education Study, Vincent et al. (2017) researched the relationship between achievement provided by teachers

with Native Language and Culture (NLC) preparation compared to those without. They found that few non-Native teachers were knowledgeable of NLC and the majority of American Indian/Alaska Native students were taught by these teachers. Griese et al. (2017) examined undergraduate research experiences using the student-mentor dyad. Over the course of ten weeks, American Indian students were introduced to



interdependence models. Findings indicated that mentors were important to American Indian undergraduates. In more recent studies of mentorship, Chelberg & Bosman (2020) found increased self-efficacy in students who participated in a mentoring program. By stressing organizational and navigational skills of higher education, providing supportive environments, mentors increased participant confidence.



Most of the studies in this section (Relationships) highlight the importance of mentors and their relationships to students through matriculation. Mentorship highlights the inter-generational practices of many Tribal nations; linking these practices in institutions of higher education allow students to benefit from effective, timely, and sustained mentorship.

## REDISTRIBUTION

### *Orientation, 1st Year Activities, Learning Communities, Distance/Online Courses*

Early research on the first-year experience and college choice found that American Indian students prioritized location, academic programs, class size, cost, friendliness, and campus size when choosing where to apply (Urbanski, 2000). Additional variables studies on student retention and attrition, found that funding and lack of academic preparation, along with personal commitments contributed to American Indian student retention (Vermillion, 2005). Carmen (2006) looked at recruitment models for Native American students, exploring common recruitment methods. The study found that Native American students preferred working with Native American counselors/advisors and that “one size fits all” method does not work in Indian Country.

In reflecting on the learning climate, Fire (2009) proposed that online learning is not culturally neutral. The study found that Native American students responded to courses that used Native pedagogy. In 2011, Hooker studied 44 students in pre-algebra courses and found that using a culturally embedded pedagogy allowed students to apply concepts and work together more successfully. Growth was evidenced in personal, social, and academic skills. Flynn et al.’s (2012) study intentionally identified participants who came from reservations. In interviewing the students about their 1st Year experiences, the researchers found that social connection, family influence, and finances were critical. Other themes included racism and discrimination, institutional barriers, academic underpreparedness, and reservation life. Similar findings on the 1st Year experience are detailed in Tachine et al.’s (2017) research on “Home Away from Home.” The importance of language, sacred history, ceremonial cycle and land as connected to the post-secondary experience was reflected in racial micro aggression and structured disconnections. Motl et al.’s (2018) research on persistence



at a tribal university also explored factors associated with the 1st Year experience as it interfaced with second year enrollment. This study's findings included an inverse relationship with high school class ranking, trust of others at college, and levels of hope and continued enrollment. Creating and maintain life goals and values were seen to protect students from attrition. In 2019, Heimer, et al. explored learning communities through a case study of undergraduate early childhood education pre-service teachers. Using dialogic journaling and reflection before, during, and after their experiences, students described their journey. The study highlighted the cohort's experiences as non-Native students. In 2019, Fong et al. reimaged belongingness to determine the impact of learning communities on Native



American students. They found that both traditional conceptualizations of student relationships and Native-specific constructions of belongingness were important. Haudley's (2021) dissertation used the Peoplehood model of Indigenous identity to explore advising, learning communities, and 1st Year experiences of Native Americans. She found that Native college students seek places on campus that align with their values, such as the Native American Center or Native-specific retention services. They built a collective community identity as scholar-activists.

Studies in this section (Redistribution) were unique in that multiple studies had large sample sizes. Urbanski (2000) surveyed 270 students; Vermillion (2005) studies 782 students, Motl et al. (2018) surveyed 87 students, and Fong et al. (2019) sampled 887 students. Large sample size provides more accurate statistical analysis, allowing identification of outliers that could skew data in small sample size. The remaining studies in this section used qualitative research methods through content analysis of interviews and observations.

## RESPONSIBILITY

### *Academic Performance, Early Earning Programs, Experiential Learning, Internships*

In 2010, Gravidahl explored the experiences of Native American students who transferred from a tribal college to a four-year institution. The researcher identified three factors of adjustment, specifically, academic, social, and personal. The study



found specific early warning signs and the author provides a range of recommendations for both the tribal college and the four-year institution. Lundberg's (2014) study of student success included 647 Native American students from predominately white institutions. By increasing engagement through experiential learning, students felt supported and worked harder. Pete (2018) studied experiential learning through culturally congruent instructional practices that includes American Indian student's attitude and subsequently achievement. The

study followed students through four STEM courses. The author found no change in attitudes toward science, but agreement that use of Native languages, tribal guest speakers, and collaborative, experiential learning supported the students.

For Responsibility, studies in this section reflected a strong link between culture and success. Experiential learning and early warning programs are both tenets of native pedagogy. The intersection of each of the core values is even more obvious in the last section.

## RECIPROCITY

### *Persistence, Collaborative Learning Practices, Native Languages, Cultural Connectedness/Identity:*

In 2001, Winrow explored factors that contribute to college success. This is the predominate theme of the studies in this section that primarily explore persistence and culture and its connection to collaborative learning and identity.

Winrow interviewed eight students and identified five themes, specifically, creating goals, active steps to success, family support, role models and mentors, learning experiences, and connectedness. Winrow's (2001) discussion of the definition of success is relevant to the following studies as well. The following year, Cross's (2002) dissertation examined persistence of 1,135 tribal college students. The researcher found that tribal affiliation, enrollment status (full-time, part-time), and level of financial aid contributed to persistence. In 2003, Barta et al. researched the cultural disconnection in STEM for Native American students. They found cultural, cognitive, and technical institutional perspectives on content delivery to be important. Bowman's (2003) essay frames the cultural differences of teaching and learning for Native Americans by encouraging researchers to reconceptualize culturally relevant pedagogy, research, and evaluation as holistic. In 2004, Whitekiller's dissertation used a sample of 19 Native American students to look at cultural resilience. Themes supporting persistence include tribal identity, spirituality, family, elders, ceremony, oral traditions and support networks; each components of cultural connectedness. Tharp's (2006) essay on culture and pedagogy proposes a rubric of Standards of Effective Pedagogies to support culture and language in classrooms with Native American students. Korkow's (2008) dissertation reported that persistence in a white higher education institution was linked to support systems, culture and spirituality, self-confidence, abstinence, hard work, ability to ask questions, and determination. These themes are found throughout the persistence literature. Guillory, J.P.'s (2008) dissertation explored cultural connections through "giving back" to tribal communities. Resiliency was identified as a key variable to persistence. Also in 2008, Guillory, R. & Wolverton explored the connection between family and persistence in higher education. Persistence factors found across all groups included finance. Family was a significant contributor to persistence, as well



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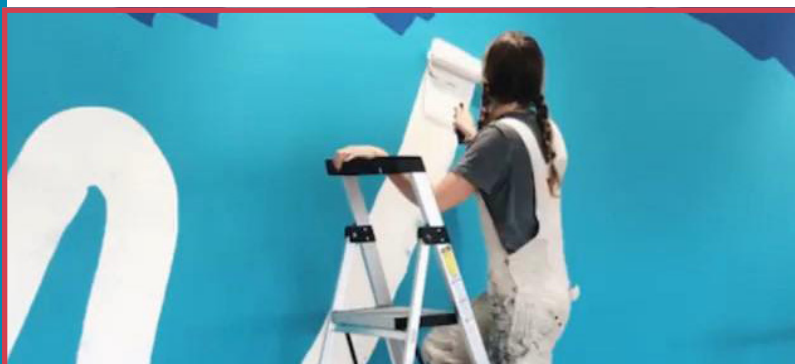


as on-campus support. Okagaki et al. (2009) also explored connections to the community and value on education as persistence factors. American Indian participant's belief in bicultural efficacy positively correlated to ratings of academic identity and belief in the importance of education. In 2010, LaFromboise et al. explored the relationship between hopelessness and cultural connectedness, specifically to identity.

Using the Living in Two Worlds Survey, they found that American Indians who live on reservations experience less hopelessness than those in urban areas. The Huffman (2011) explored American Indian college student's relationship with location and their plans to live on a reservation following their post-secondary experience in his exploration of cultural connectedness.

Tippeconnic & Fox (2012) compared tribal culture/values and discussed the challenges of American Indian studies programs in mainstream universities. The use of traditional tribal values can guide theory and practice in higher education. Family support was found to be critical to persistence in Conroy's 2013 study of persistence. Conroy's sample was drawn from institutions within geographic proximity of Native American reservations. Brayboy et al. (2014) assert that graduate programs using tribal nation building as an institutional orientation are more successful in connecting tribal students within their programs. They provide suggestions for working with tribal leaders to identify mutual goals. Nelson's (2015) dissertation explores American Indian college students as Native nation builders. This study found that financial aid was key to persistence of Native students. In 2015, Oxendine examined institutional integration and cultural integrity as they linked to persistence for American Indian students. A sense of belonging predicted intention to persist.

Reyes (2016) explores giving back to tribal communities and connects giving back to cultural connectedness need to persist. Students perceived giving back as a privilege and a responsibility. In Smith's 2017 student on American Indian tribal identity, student

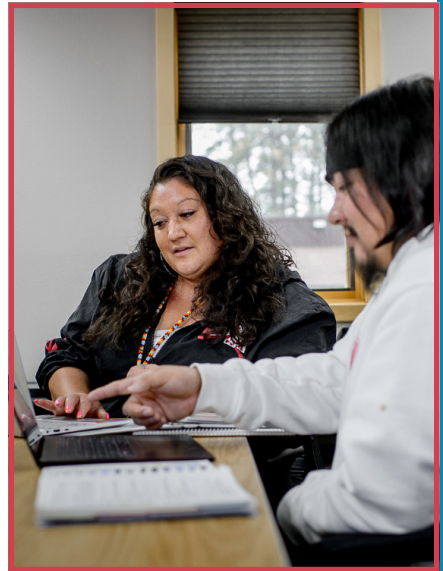


voices reported on spirituality, reciprocity, tribal enrollment, lineage, and language using "stories within stories." Jimenez's (2017) dissertation explored how Native American students shaped their experiences at four-year universities. Issues of identity informed persistence in this study. Fish & Syed (2018) propose a framework to explore Native American college students' experiences using an ecological systems model. Using the model, which highlights

cultural connectedness, the authors believe researchers and practitioners can unpack the layers of context that define Native American students' experiences in higher education. In 2018, Lopez compared American Indian/Alaska Native post-secondary persistence theories. The author reviewed 19 quantitative and 25 qualitative studies published between 1993 and 2016. Persistence was most often linked to family support, institutional support, tribal community, and academic performance. Chee et al.'s (2019) study of academic stress found that connection to culture allowed students

to have positive feelings about themselves and value being Native American, despite their beliefs that they did not “fit” on campus. Volpi’s (2019) dissertation on self-efficacy reinforced self-efficacy, optimism, proactive coping, and capability belief as key to persistence. Henry’s (2019) dissertation on influences on Native American students in STEM found cultural connections of language and traditions as key to persistence. Trammell’s (2020) dissertation on forces that impact Native American college students also found that family, expectations, and finances contributed to persistence.

This section (Reciprocity) included two Indicator Variables that feature predominately in research on American Indian students in higher education. Specifically, persistence and cultural connectedness/identity. These two indicator variables are also interconnected and often both are found within the literature complementing each other.



## SUMMARY

Culturally responsive Indigenous research and evaluation processes are essential to the reflection and framing of future projects. The American Indian Higher Education Consortium and the Lumina Foundation have partnered to support these efforts in the development of this document. Students, scholars, researchers, practitioners, and evaluators can use this foundational work to co-create projects that impact American Indian/Alaska Native students as they matriculate and grow into the leaders who will shape tribal communities.

### Key “Take Aways”

- ❖ Indigenous research methods blend Western and traditional research strategies.
- ❖ Post-secondary research on American Indians/Alaska Natives focuses on undergraduate students.
- ❖ Gender issues are rarely explored.
- ❖ Cultural values support qualitative inquiry.
- ❖ A significant number of primary inquiry studies propose avenues for future research to validate findings.



Literature reviews on American Indian/Alaska Native scholarship are especially critical for educators because offer a broad intellectual context, terminology, and other variables for a field that has been minimized. It also helps educators to understand what is currently known about a topic and what is not well understood. This thoughtful and detailed literature review indicates where intervention has been more and less successful in furthering important goals in Indian education, as well as demonstrating the instruments and methods that have yielded the best results.

Literature reviews offer an overview of foundational and recent scholarship in academic fields, and thus they provide an invaluable tool to scholars who publish in these areas and to educators who make critical decisions about the scope and direction of projects that directly affect their students. These reviews offer an accurate overview of the scholarly conversations among experts in the field whose work has passed a review process of their peers. By focusing on American Indian/Alaska Native samples in post-secondary, we capture current thinking by American Indian/Alaska scholars and their partners. By presenting these findings, we extract the main arguments and organize them using AIHEC’s framework so that other scholars can quickly gain a comprehensive understanding of key issues and can identify areas where the research demands further investigation or gaps where research is needed. An overview of these scholarly “conversations” in a literature survey opens avenues for scholars who work with Indigenous communities to engage Foundations for support in furthering our knowledge and understanding of the experiences our students have in higher education.

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# APPENDIX B

## Additional Useful Resources

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# APPENDIX C

## *Individual Abstracts*

Individual abstracts are available for all articles listed in Appendix A on American Indian Higher Education Consortium's website at <https://aihec.sharepoint.com/sites/ResearchTeam/Shared%20Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx?ga=1&id=%2Fsites%2FResearchTeam%2FShared%20Documents%2FLumina%2FFinal%20Documents%2FAppendices%2FAppendix%20B&viewid=a2f41dea%2Dbb1c%2D4ec0%2D96a9%2D0271d78d5420>



