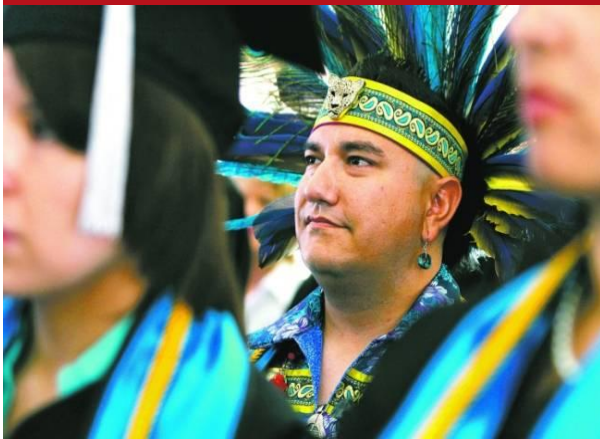


# Fostering Success: Need and Resiliency among Tribal College Students

October 2012



*"My goal is to pursue my field of oncology and work at a hospital or private healthcare facility. I am determined not to let my financial situation get the best of me or change my goal of getting my degree."*

- Full Circle Scholarship Recipient



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community research

Mekinak Consulting

Educating the Mind and Spirit

Since 1989, the American Indian College Fund (the Fund) has been a major supporter of American Indians' postsecondary success. The Fund works to educate the mind and spirit of American Indians by distributing more than \$5.6 million in scholarships and program support for American Indian students. This translates into scholarships for more than 4,200 American Indian students annually at one of the nation's 34 accredited tribal colleges or universities.<sup>1</sup> The mission of the Fund is to improve the educational outcomes of American Indian students while also maintaining their ties to their tribal languages, traditions, and culture. The benefits of the Fund's scholarships to recipients' academic and career achievement, socio-personal success (i.e., self-esteem, positive sense of self), and cultural perpetuation have been established by earlier studies.<sup>2,3</sup> The study highlighted below examined the differences between Full Circle scholarship recipients who attended tribal colleges and mainstream colleges, and compared their outcomes to national student outcome data.

## Full Circle Study Overview

The Full Circle Study explored three areas: Student Financial Need; Program Retention and Completion; and Cultural Perpetuation. Data sources included a national survey of Full Circle scholarship recipients, analysis of Fund student records, and a review of national comparison data.

## Key Findings

- + Survey respondents most commonly identified the Fund's scholarships as a key influencing factor to their educational success.
- + Respondents exhibited multiple risk factors to completing their education. The majority:
  - did not access student or private loans
  - had minimal familial financial support (24% received some assistance compared to 60% nationally)
  - worked while attending school
  - cared for dependents (62% compared to 23% nationally).
- + Despite these risk factors, program completion was higher for the study participants than for the national comparison group, suggesting high resiliency among scholarship recipients.
- + Cultural perpetuation was more pronounced among students attending tribal colleges than mainstream colleges.

While this study cannot establish the direct causality of the Full Circle scholarship's influence on educational success and cultural perpetuation, the comparison of scholarship recipients' results to other populations offers suggestive evidence of the critical importance of Full Circle scholarships.

<sup>1</sup> Figures based on 2011-12 fiscal year.

<sup>2</sup> Harder+Company Community Research. (2003). *Redefining success: The long-term impacts of tribal colleges on their students*. San Diego, CA: Author.

<sup>3</sup> Harder+Company Community Research. (2003). *Cultivating Success: The critical value of American Indian scholarships and the positive impact of tribal college capital construction*. San Diego, CA: Author.



## Student Financial Need

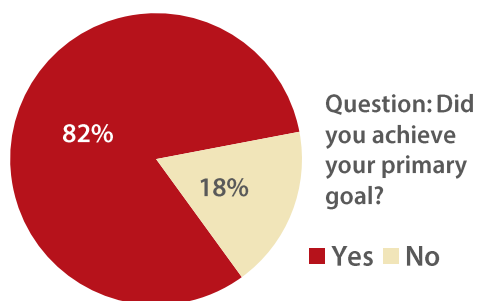
The Fund's Full Circle scholarships provide critical support to American Indian students who might not otherwise have the financial means to attend college. This study found both need and resiliency among respondents and identified the critical role the Fund plays in accessing higher education.

- + Half of survey respondents had incomes six times lower than national age comparison groups.
- + Over half of survey respondents had household incomes twice as low as national age comparison groups.
- + Survey respondents are twice as likely to have dependents as mainstream college students.
- + The average student financial need for the surveyed population is \$9,836.
- + Survey respondents were most likely to report reliance on other scholarships, grants and jobs in addition to their Full Circle scholarship to help finance their education.

## Program Retention and Completion

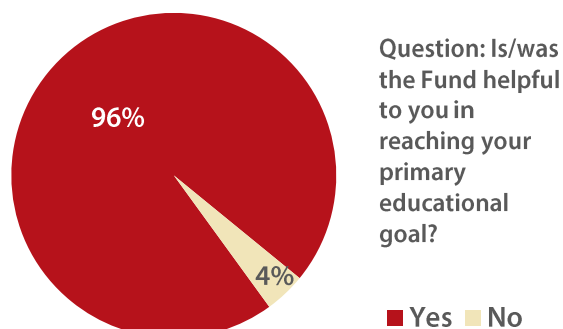
The Fund's support has a clear effect on survey respondents' program retention and completion.

- + Of the Full Circle Scholarship alumni who pursued a degree, 82% achieved it – almost double that of the closest national comparison data.

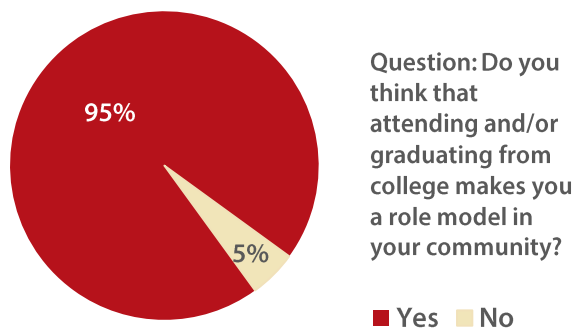


- + Survey respondents obtained a higher GPA than the general college population; 3.35 compared to 3.10<sup>4</sup>, respectively.

- + Eighty percent of survey respondents achieved their primary educational goals, and nearly all respondents (96%) noted that their Full Circle scholarship was helpful in reaching that goal.
- + Nearly all survey respondents (96%) reported that the Full Circle scholarship had “some” to “a lot” of positive impact on their educational achievements and their ability to achieve their career goals.



- + A majority of survey respondents indicated that the Full Circle scholarship engagement activities, such as leadership training, internships, conferences and résumé building workshops were critical supplements to ensuring success.
- + Over three-quarters of Full Circle Survey respondents were retained semester to semester.
- + More than half of the survey respondents (51%) plan to earn a Master's degree or PhD in their chosen fields.
- + Over 95% of survey respondents believed that attending and/or graduating from college made them a role model in their communities.



<sup>4</sup>Rojstaczer, S., & Healy, C. (2012). Where A is ordinary: The evolution of American college and university grading, 1940-2009. *Teachers College Record*, 114(7), 1-23.

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## Cultural Perpetuation

Support from the Fund assists students at tribal institutions to pursue higher education and achieve their career goals within the framework of perpetuating strong tribal ties and cultural understanding. This survey investigated respondents' views regarding the relationship of their college experience to cultural perpetuation. These students were asked to respond to statements that ranged from increased cultural understanding to increased engagement on a five point scale.

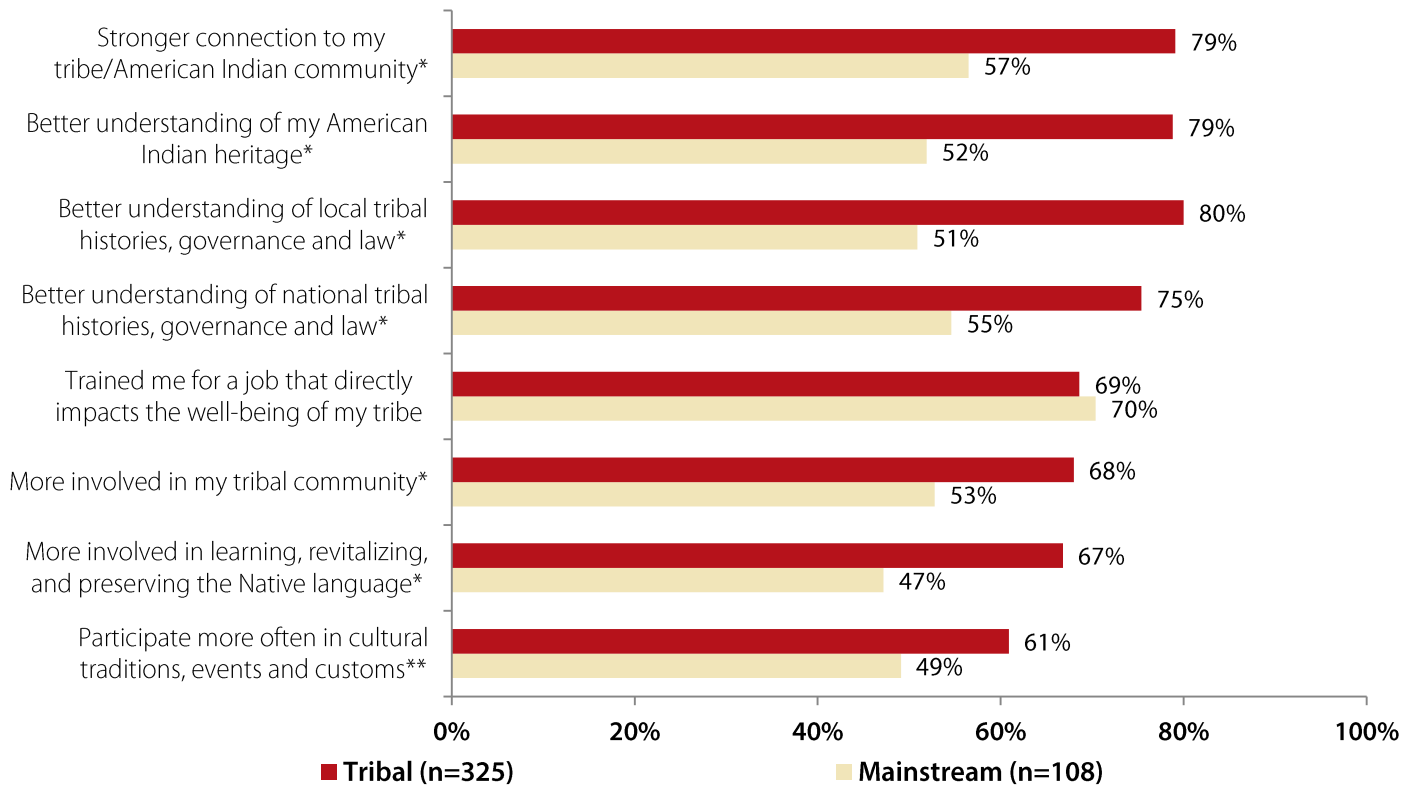
- + Overall, students reported that their college experience positively influenced all cultural understanding and increased engagement areas.
- + Tribal college respondents viewed their college experience as having a greater effect on cultural perpetuation than mainstream college respondents.

Tribal college respondents were significantly more likely than mainstream college respondents to state that their college experience facilitated stronger connections with their culture and tribal community. Of particular note, is the positive relationship between attending a tribal college and being more active in cultural perpetuation activities than students attending a mainstream college. This finding emphasizes that tribal colleges have a positive effect on cultural perpetuation.

"I want to help my peers and get them excited about science, technology, engineering, and math, and to inspire them to become better students and role models. I want to lead the way to show other Native American students how they can succeed in college and how to become a success."

- Full Circle Scholarship recipient

Cultural Perpetuation Endorsements\*\*\*



\*Differences between the Tribal and Mainstream respondents is statistically significant at  $p > .01$ .

\*\* Differences between the Tribal and Mainstream respondents is statistically significant at  $p > .05$ .

\*\*\*An endorsement refers to a rating of a 4 or higher on a 5 point scale.



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