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# Negotiating the Best of Two Worlds: Native American Student Success at a Small, Predominantly White University

Pat Beu

*Peru State College*

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# **Negotiating the Best of Two Worlds: Native American Student Success at a Small, Predominantly White University**

**Pat Beu**

Peru State College

Peru, Nebraska

**“Sharing the results of a qualitative research study, the presenter discusses reflections from Native American graduates as well as presents recommendations that predominantly white colleges and universities can employ to promote student success among Native American students.”**

The purpose of this presentation is to describe factors that contributed to the success of Native American students attending the University of Great Falls (UGF). UGF is a private, liberal arts university in North Central Montana that serves nearly 1,300 students. Of the student body, the largest represented minority are Native American students, most of which come from three reservations located within 200 miles from Great Falls or from the city itself, which has a population of more than 2,000 Native Americans. The retention and graduation rate of Native American students at UCF is nominal. Few efforts have been made to understand Native American retention and student success and currently no student success program is in place which takes into consideration the needs of Native American students. This presentation will acknowledge the experiences of those successful Native American students as well as the involvement UCF plays in their success.

The presentation examines the educational experiences of 18 Native American UGF graduates who were interviewed as part of a descriptive case study. The investigation of the educational experience of these graduates was categorized into five analytical areas. These areas included a general profile of the graduates, an examination of their cultural activities as a student, the impact UGF had on their educational experience, cultural behaviors and values of the graduates and barriers to success experienced by the graduates.

Several conclusions were drawn for each of the five areas of categories regarding the factors that influenced the success of these graduates. Recommendations were provided for each of these areas. Collectively, the testimony of students clearly reveals that they were focused on their educational goals. The support of family members contributed to their success. They were proud of the Indian heritage and were involved in cultural and spiritual practices that displayed that pride. Their education was an overall positive experience and yet most did experience some form of prejudice. Many also perceived barriers that inhibited academic success.

Recommendations of the presentation include: (a) an examination of the collaborative efforts between the campus and community /tribal colleges regarding educational and financial opportunities, (b) promote the improvement of efforts to sustain, support and maintain a multi-cultural program on campuses, (c) promote the improvement of campus support services for Native American students, (d) increase the

recognition of faculty members that impact Native American educational experiences, (e) increase efforts by institutions to hire qualified Native American faculty and support staff, (f) initiate efforts to foster self determination in Native American students, and (g) improve communication between Native American students and campus entities, especially the administration.

Overhead slides and group discussion will be the medium used to present this program.

**PRESENTER:**

**Pat Beu** has worked in the TRIO funded Student Support Services program since 1984. Thirteen of the fifteen years has been at the University of Great Falls, Montana. Dr. Beu was the SSS Program's Learning Resource Counselor at the University of Great Falls for over nine years and has been a program director for six years. He received his masters degree in Counseling and Guidance from Brigham Young University and his doctorate in Adult and Higher education from Montana State University. He has recently accepted the position of director of Student Support Services at Peru State College in Peru, Nebraska. He is married to the former Gail Therese Gordon and is the father of four children.