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Academia

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# Federal Unenrollment Impacts on Scholar Careers: A Study of Indigenous Identity and Membership in Academia

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*Abstract: As universities across the country are becoming more diverse, responding to the impacts that assumptions about others have on the way we interact with colleagues, research participants, and communities is crucial for all scholars. In particular, the politics of identity, both actual and perceived, for Indigenous scholars in the Western Hemisphere are uniquely complex. Through a review of the relevant literature, I describe influences on scholar identity formation, and discuss individual impacts of working within campus climates while experiencing microaggression. Utilizing Indigenous voices as the focal data, I explore the experience of scholars in post-secondary institutions in the United States in relation to historical factors that have determined Indigeneity by colonial and racist measures. This was a mixed-methods study, utilizing an online survey and oral history interviews to explore the multiple interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples pertinent to academic scholars who are not federally recognized yet still identify themselves as Indigenous. Demographic characteristics and relevant experiences of Indigenous scholars in tertiary institutions throughout the United States are described. Obstacles to scholar confidence and support systems were identified within families, communities, and institutions. Participating scholars' experiences ranged from being comfortable with the difference between themselves and their colleagues to reports of ignorant remarks, conflicts between those with Recognized and non-Recognized statuses, and work environments where Indigenous selves were masked to the point of not existing beyond the assumptions of others based on skin color. This preliminary work is the first project of its kind and provides groundwork for further exploration about the marginalization of Indigenous scholars in postsecondary institutions and the impact of disparate experiences on unrecognized Indigenous scholars in a variety of academic fields.*

*Keywords: First Nations, Indigenous Peoples, Identity, Multiple Methods Research, Colleges, Universities*

## Introduction

Though still experiencing low participation rates in postsecondary education, scholars of color are increasing their presence in academic institutions.<sup>1</sup> Yet, it is known that institutions continue to struggle with recruitment and retention of scholars of color in a variety of fields. The complex, interwoven identities that are created when scholars of color embark on academic careers require careful consideration and study. These are key areas for colleges and universities to address when determining how to create sustainable, long-term relationships with an increasingly diverse pool of scholars.

Identity in its most basic form, of having membership with a group of peoples, and the politics of authenticity, community, and r/Recognition<sup>2</sup> creates a challenging academic space for Indigenous scholars. For Indigenous people without Recognition, gaining recognition of one's Indigenous identity by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities can be difficult. The impacts of an Unrecognized Indigenous identity are little-researched outside of casual sharing of stories, and research situated in the academy is nonexistent. However, questions of authenticity and authorization to speak from an Indigenous position may affect scholars without

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<sup>1</sup> In the most recent year for which data is available, the U.S. Department of Education's National Study of Postsecondary Faculty found that 30% or less of full-time instructional faculty for participating institutions were non-white.

<sup>2</sup> In this paper, I am using r/Recognition and u/Unrecognized to denote the difference between community recognition and federal Recognition after; Sara-Larus Tolley, *Quest for Tribal Acknowledgement: California's Honey Lake Maidus* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 300.

r/Recognition.<sup>3</sup> Such challenges to one's membership identity in the academy may affect a scholar's psychological sense of belonging as well as their participation in research with other scholars, conference proceedings, and publication opportunities. Through the development of research that can reach Unrecognized scholars throughout the United States, pathways are opened to understand these issues.

Identity, membership, and their links to self-determination and sovereignty are extremely important in Indigenous communities in the United States. However, careful consideration of how we as scholars talk about and study Indigenous identities, and Unrecognized Indigenous identities in particular, is critical to understanding how to create a more inclusive scholarly community. Identity exists and is constructed in many ways beyond tribal enrollment, but the effects of enrollment status may have very real consequences for the daily lives of Indigenous scholars. Bowman, and McClellan, Tippeconnic Fox, and Lowe have made calls for specific research for and of Indigenous peoples in the academy.<sup>4</sup> Others, such as Ramirez have noted the multi-faceted conflicts around Indigenous identity that continue to separate and marginalize some people from tribal and intertribal community spaces.<sup>5</sup>

While no single study can completely unpack the complexity that is Indigenous identity, this paper aims to begin the conversation about ways in which we as Indigenous people have allowed a European approach to defining Indigenous identity affect our interactions with one another. Additionally, I seek to highlight the difference between academic interaction of Unrecognized Indigenous scholars with other Indigenous scholars and with non-Indigenous scholars. This study is guided by the research question:

How do Unrecognized Indigenous scholars perceive that their identity and membership status, and their relationship to Indigenous communities, affects their participation and access within the academy for the purpose of conducting research?

The research focuses on four categories of Unrecognized Indigenous identities in the United States: (i) Indigenous scholars from Unrecognized tribes (including scholars from state recognized tribes), (ii) Indigenous scholars from terminated tribes, (iii) Indigenous scholars who cannot enroll in their Recognized tribe due to blood quantum, documentation, or other membership policy, including those who come from a mixed Indigenous heritage where one of their Indigenous identities is recognized while another or others are not, and (iv) Indigenous scholars from Western Hemispheric groups not traditionally from lands within the United States.<sup>6</sup> Unrecognized Indigenous scholars were selected for this study if they were a graduate student, research staff, or faculty member at a postsecondary institution.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, the Association of American Indian and Alaska Native Professors have established recommendations for colleges and universities to use in their hiring process that prioritizes documentation of enrollment above all other ways to identify and rank the authenticity of a potential Indigenous candidate.

<sup>4</sup> Nicole R. Bowman, "Cultural differences of teaching and learning: A Native American perspective of participating in educational systems and organizations." *American Indian Quarterly* 27, no. 1/2 (2003), 1-102.; George S. McClellan, Mary Jo Tippeconnic Fox, and Shelly C. Lowe. "From discussion to action." *New Directions for Student Services*, no. 109 (2005), 95-98.

<sup>5</sup> Renya K. Ramirez, *Native Hubs: Culture, Community, and Belonging in Silicon Valley and Beyond* (Duke University Press Books, 2007) 288.

<sup>6</sup> Powhatan-Renape/Delaware-Lenape scholar Jack D. Forbes explored a Hemispheric analysis of Indigenous identity. He asserted that geopolitical lines drawn by colonizing nations do not actually denote true differences between Indigenous groups of the Western Hemisphere. Following Forbes, this study sought to transgress artificial boundaries by acknowledging the long-standing connection to the land of all Indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere by including scholars from Indigenous groups traditionally from lands North or South of the United States border.

## Background and Perspectives

In order to engage in research on Indigenous peoples, one must first define who Indigenous peoples are. Horse writes that the realization and consciousness of being Indigenous is where such an identity begins.<sup>7</sup> Garrouette's analysis in *Real Indians: Identity and the Survival of Native America* shows how each definition of Indigenous identity – legal, biological, cultural, and personal – offer both constraints and opportunity to reflect on the “Indian” and “non-Indian” dichotomy that emerges from each.<sup>8</sup> Ultimately, each Recognized tribe in the United States is the sole authority that determines who is or is not a citizen of that given nation, and accordingly eligible to call themselves a member, thus intertwining identity and membership.<sup>9</sup> Someone desiring to obtain legal status as an Indigenous person (in the United States) is required to enroll through a Recognized tribe. But, depending on the requirements imposed by any particular tribe, some people who are validly descended from Indigenous bloodlines might not be able to gain Recognition. In addition, other tribes that are Indigenous to the United States are not Recognized as such by our federal government (though some of them do have state-level recognition). Still other groups were once Recognized as Indigenous tribes by the federal government and have since had their status and rights terminated. Moreover, in the growing global community of academia, Indigenous peoples from other countries are also coming to United States institutions and influencing discussions about Indigenousness. While Horse ultimately claims that an Indigenous identity is personal, his discussion of legal status validated through one's tribe indicates a defining of (United States) Indigenous identity that is exclusive of Unrecognized peoples.<sup>10</sup> This intersection between identity and law (Recognition) is the focal point of my research – a Recognized Indigenous person is a citizen of the United States as well as of their tribe, while an Unrecognized Indigenous person cannot be legally Recognized if they are from an Unrecognized Indigenous nation within the land now known as the United States or cannot enroll in a Recognized group.<sup>11</sup> This research also included scholars from Indigenous groups from beyond the borders of the United States who can also never gain status as belonging to a sovereign nation of peoples within this country.<sup>12</sup>

## Identity in Academic Environments

Identity and experience may also intertwine with the paths taken in one's scholarship. Schuster and Finkelstein's 2006 *The American Faculty* points out that women and ethnic minority graduate students have the most difficult socialization process into academia, leading to increased stressors and difficulties throughout their careers.<sup>13</sup> In particular, they note that minorities are often discriminated against because of their research agendas. Schuster and Finkelstein's report pairs this finding with Clark and Corcoran's notion of cumulative disadvantage.<sup>14</sup> Despite a “disadvantageous” struggle through the Eurocentric university, Schuster and Finkelstein established that faculty of color are more likely to advise student

<sup>7</sup> Perry G. Horse, “Native American identity.” *New Directions for Student Services*, no. 109 (2005): 61-68.

<sup>8</sup> Eva Marie Garrouette, *Real Indians: Identity and the Survival of Native America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003) 223.

<sup>9</sup> Santa Clara Pueblo v. Martinez, (1978) 463 U.S. 49.

<sup>10</sup> Horse, “Native American identity,” 61-68.

<sup>11</sup> The exceptions to being a dual citizen of the tribe and the United States are the Onondaga, Tuscarora, and Tonawanda Senecas whom have no BIA relationship and travel under passports issued by their own nations.

<sup>12</sup> For a more in-depth discussion on the challenges of defining Indigenous peoples globally, refer to Jonathan Friedman's chapter “Indigeneity: Anthropological Notes on a Historical Variable” in *Indigenous Peoples: Self-determination, Knowledge, Indigeneity*. Henry Minde (Delft: Eburon, 2008), 29-48.

<sup>13</sup> Jack H. Schuster and Martin J. Finkelstein, *The American Faculty: The Restructuring of Academic Work and Careers*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006) 600.

<sup>14</sup> Shirley M. Clark and Mary Corcoran, “Perspectives on the American socialization of women faculty: A case of accumulative disadvantage,” *Journal of Higher Education* 57 (1986): 20-43.

groups, pledge to provide services to the community, value the moral and civic development of students, and have higher levels of commitment to research in terms of both personal importance and time devoted than their peers.<sup>15</sup> The report in *Faculty Career and Work Lives* found that Umbach had similar conclusions.<sup>16</sup>

Trower and Bleak's extensive satisfaction survey of faculty members also highlighted the discomfiture of faculty of color within a variety of spaces within the academy.<sup>17</sup> Experiences with discrimination, lack of strong peer and mentor relationships, feelings of isolation, and a stronger focus on students and communities were more prevalent among faculty of color. Worldview and cultural paradigm shapes us as a product of our experiences. Conflict over identity – such as those faced by Unrecognized Indigenous scholars - might also impact the relationships one has with academic peers, superiors, and within or between disciplines.<sup>18</sup> Exploring these impacts is the focus of this study.

## Strategy of Inquiry

I used a mixed-methods approach in this study and sought to place Indigenous voices at the very core of the work, relying on surveys and oral history narrations as the primary source of data. Patricia O'Reily notes that whether research is cultural regeneration, language revitalization, history, education, health and well being, housing, economic renewal, or about research, there is an overwhelming presence of non-Indigenous people fulfilling the roles (professors, teachers, consultants, advisory boards, entrepreneurs, researchers).<sup>19</sup> In the self-selection process for participation, I have allowed narrators to define themselves in order to reduce research bias in defining participants beyond the initial screening requests of the study.

## Results and Discussion - Questionnaire

Eleven participants were eligible for the study based on the screening questions. All responses were complete, however some respondents chose to use comments boxes to explain their answer to a question rather than to identify a scale answer on some questions. Six participants went on to participate in an oral history interview.

More graduate students participated in the survey than faculty (N=7, 4 respectively), and no research staff responded. One participant indicated they were located at a private institution, with the remaining participants being located at public institutions. Among respondents, four were members of Unrecognized tribes, four could not enroll in their Recognized tribe, and three were from groups traditionally outside the United States borders.

Most of the respondents indicated a multi-racial identity (N=7) and about one-third indicated a Hispanic or Latino/a identity. The gender identities of the respondents were 45.5% of respondents being male and 54.5% female. Several academic disciplines were represented among survey respondents and were balanced between Professions (N=3), Sciences & Engineering (N=4), and the remaining categories falling under Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (N=3).

The relative location of tribal lands from the respondents' current institution exhibited a response pattern based on the way in which the respondent identified as a Unrecognized Indigenous person. Scholars from Unrecognized tribes were attending institutions within the

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<sup>15</sup> Schuster and Finkelstein, *The American Faculty*

<sup>16</sup> Paul D. Umbach, "The contribution of faculty of color to undergraduate education." *Research in Higher Education* 47, no. 3 (2006): 317-345.

<sup>17</sup> Cathy A. Trower and Jared L Bleak. *The study of new scholars. Institutional Type: Statistical Report.* Atlantic. (Cambridge, MA, 2004).

<sup>18</sup> George J. Sefa Dei, "Rethinking the role of indigenous knowledges in the academy." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 4, no. 2 (2002): 111-132.

<sup>19</sup> Patricia O'Riley, "Shapeshifting Research with Aboriginal Peoples: Toward Self-determination." *Native Studies Review* 15, no. 2 (2004): 83-102.

same state as their tribal lands, whereas almost all scholars who could not enroll in their group due to a blood quantum or other identification policy were further away from their group's traditional lands. Most of the respondents indicated visiting their group's land infrequently with the exception of one scholar who is able to live just minutes from her nation's reservation.

Three respondents answered the item regarding fluency with their tribe's traditional language that they had a complete lack of knowledge about the language; but an additional three respondents did answer in the comments. One reported that she is one of a few people in her tribe working on language revitalization, and there are currently no living speakers of the traditional language. A second respondent also indicated that she works on language revitalization projects and has an advanced proficiency. The third had a very small knowledge, outlining specific things that she can say in the traditional language such as greeting someone and the names of the sun and the water. Together, these three participants represent some of many contemporary issues facing Indigenous languages.

A major objective of this research was to investigate how the imposed approach of identifying membership—federal recognition—affects Indigenous scholars. It was clear that the general academic community, as perceived by participants, was ignorant of the distinctions of r/Recognized Indigenous identities and community membership. Comments about this pair of items also illuminated differences in experiences dependent upon the way in which the person was an u/Unrecognized Indigenous person. One respondent commented, “in general, people outside of the Latino ethnicity do not recognize our Indigenous heritage. When I make note of being ‘Mestizo’ I must make detailed descriptions to what I mean” (*Male, Indigenous from a Western Hemispheric group outside the United States*). A second respondent with a similar background touches on the same thing in her comment:

Only my professor knows I identify as [my tribe]. He's never asked me about enrollment though ... I've noticed my peers either immediately assume I identify as 'Mexican' because of my last name and assume I must speak Spanish fluently, or that I'm Iranian, all three of which are not true.

*(Female, Indigenous from a Western Hemispheric group outside the United States)*

In a contrasting comment, a graduate student notes, “it is not a secret...if they hear me introduce myself as [my tribe] and are familiar with the fact that [my tribe's] people are not Recognized, then they know” (*Female, Indigenous from a Federally Unrecognized Tribe*). A second respondent from a Unrecognized tribe also notes, “both of my advisors and lab mate know my status as an Indigenous person, but none know that it is federally Unrecognized.”

For items regarding the amount of pressure to conform within the academic environment, responses indicating a high level of pressure to conform were less common among faculty than graduate students. Although most of the respondents answering these items indicated that they were not pressured, one respondent in particular felt substantially pressured in her department and noted that her feelings come from being a multicultural woman in a STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) field.

Only one of the respondents answered the item “how satisfied are you with how well you ‘fit’ or belong in your department” with a scale score and felt “completely unsatisfied” with her current position. Conversely, two scholars who used the comments box and touched on feelings of not fitting in, but being okay with that status.

I am the type of person that never really fits anywhere but I am comfortable with my acceptance in my department, even though some may think I don't 'fit'.

*(Female, Indigenous from a Federally Unrecognized Tribe)*

I would be lying if I said I was completely satisfied. It's uncomfortable, which I think is the hardest part ... I spoke to my advisor about this and he let me know 'I am alone' and that this is part of the experience ... and being alone in the research I've chosen because it's so different, and because I'm so different.

*(Female, Indigenous from a Western Hemispheric group outside the United States)*

One respondent from a Unrecognized tribe who worked in a social sciences field indicated that he was satisfied with the responses by colleagues to the focus of his research, as was a faculty member who is not enrolled in a tribe due to blood quantum policies. Two other participants commented on their colleagues' responses though, again showing how a different identity and a different academic field can affect one's experiences. The first, a woman from an Unrecognized tribe said, "I believe that those who don't like my research focus keep it to themselves." In a contrasting comment, a woman in a STEM field responded, "they don't get it, or they may romanticize it, or believe it's insignificant".

One scholar indicated the impact of the romanticization of her work affected her on a more personal level because she felt that outsiders to her nation diminished her identity even though her nation embraced her and her identity completely. Some scholars acknowledged the growing impact that policies of "proof" will have on future generations that do not always enroll regardless of being raised on a reservation with their communities.

## Results and Discussion - Testimonies

Four of the narrators discussed in this paper identified themselves as Indigenous from groups traditionally outside the United States, with a fifth belonging to a group that straddles a national border. The sixth scholar identified with an Unrecognized tribe. All the narrators were situated in large, public universities. Anna<sup>20</sup>, a graduate student, explained her experience of meeting with criticism and struggling to find support in the academic world. Conversely, Juan felt that his graduate experience was generally positive and found that his colleagues were willing to discuss and listen to an alternate viewpoint on an Indigenous identity. Janet saw that her conflicts in graduate school came from others not understanding or accepting her research. Manuel, a faculty member, described an experience where his identity in many ways didn't even exist in the workplace. Kyla, another faculty member interviewed, described her interactions with colleagues as generally positive with only a few exceptions who disliked her position as an Unrecognized Indigenous person that was prominent in the local Indigenous community. The third faculty member, Elinnore, told me that her experiences in academia and with her adopted community have been almost completely positive despite conflict when standing up for Indigenous values within the academy.

One particularly strong theme for Anna and Manuel was the support received from their families when they began to (and as they continue to) assert their Indigenous identities. Both come from families that immigrated to the United States from another country during their parents' generation; Anna and Manuel were both born in the United States. For both families,

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<sup>20</sup> All names have been replaced with pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of the participating scholars and any other people mentioned in their stories.



identification as *indio*<sup>21</sup> in their home country was considered negative. Anna's family left this identity behind upon coming to the United States and converting to a Christian religion, choosing not to teach Anna and her siblings any traditional languages or cultural practices. Similarly, Manuel found his family more resistant than his colleagues when he began to assert his Indigenous identity in college. Reacting to the pejorative nature of being called *indio* in their country of origin, Manuel's family wondered at his desire to participate and learn about it in the United States.

Almost all of the narrators were explicit that they felt there were few resources for them, in their families and in the surrounding community, to learn about their Indigenous heritage. Neither Anna nor Manuel had contact with people of the same heritage outside of their families while they were growing up. Manuel still has not met anyone in his community or workplace that shares his heritage, although he has made some connections to other Indigenous groups from lands traditionally south of the United States. Elinnore, Kyla, and Janet lived in areas quite separate from their Indigenous communities and only began to explore and understand their specific heritage as they reached their late teens despite some contact with Indigenous communities in their early lives.

When asked to speak about the culture of her academic department, Anna responded with a number of stories of conflicts that had occurred, highlighting the impacts of her identity on the relationships she is able to build among her academic community. In one, she explained her Indigenous-focused research to a department chair who in turn indicated to her that she would be much more suited to Anthropology or History rather than a Science & Engineering field. When preparing for a seminar presentation, Anna relates an incident in which a graduate student in her department romanticized Anna's position as an Indigenous person rather than taking her work as an expression of research:

I didn't have a formal presentation [on my academic work] so I was like, you know what? I'm gonna do a performance piece and just collect a lot of my different songs and writings and put something together so that I could try to win that prize. That's what it came down to. I wanted to fund my research and I had to do it on my own. So, I went to the workshop on how to do presentations and then they broke us up into groups and lucky me, I got broken up with three other people, all [in my discipline] ... And we all went around explained our work and so I explained it and the first thing I got was from the girl [in the group] and she said 'Ahhh! That is gonna be so exotic! To see a real Native American, you know, perform. Ohhh'. And my heart stopped. I was like, this is exactly what I didn't want to happen. They're all supportive, but it was in a way that I did not want them to take it. I was like - No no no no no I don't want you to romanticize my stuff; I don't want you to use me as the token Indian and then you know place everybody in that kind of like framework!

In contrast to Anna's experience, Manuel has found that his Indigenous identity is essentially masked in the workplace. While concepts that come from and are influenced by his background as an Indigenous person are central to the way he teaches and carries out research, Manuel has found that neither faculty nor students in his department seem to care about understanding his perspective as specifically rooted in Indigenous epistemologies.

Regardless of the contrast of experience, both Manuel and Anna are struggling with the same thing – other people defining them based on their own criteria instead of the criteria that Manuel

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<sup>21</sup> Spanish translation of "Indian". In the Central and South American countries, being an *indio* is tied also to being of the lowest economic class and is still used today as a term for someone who is poor and seen to be backwards or beneath the speaker of the insult. For discussion, see: David Maybury-Lewis, *The politics of ethnicity: Indigenous peoples in Latin American states*. Vol. 9 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 410; Deborah Poole, *Vision, race, and modernity: a visual economy of the Andean image world* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 272; Alcida Rit Ramos, *Indigenism: ethnic politics in Brazil* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 336.

or Anna have set for themselves. In Manuel's case, although he has not been met with contempt or animosity, he has been broadly defined by colleagues as a minority and then treated as the expert on minority issues, regardless of his association with (or non-association or knowledge about) particular groups. For Anna, she has been the romanticized Indian *and* the target of being told that she cannot be Indian based on others' definitions. Yet, Manuel expressed feelings of being an imposter, while Anna remained strong in asserting her Indigenous self.

Juan and Kyla generally told of quite different experiences. For example, Juan spoke extensively about his connection to the community he moved away from in his early life and of the continued connection that he and many others struggle to maintain. Yet, Juan's connection to his identity lies somewhere in-between that of the other narrators. Juan knows specific traditions and customs of his community but faces scrutiny over the claim of their Indigenousness. Juan feels that most of his colleagues were receptive to allowing him to explain his position and generally were content with assigning him an insider position in the community.

Interestingly, being from a traditionally recognized group, Kyla found that it was only when she became more prominent in the Indigenous community and her academic field that people focused on her non-Recognition. She describes her own views on identity:

I kind of believe in the older ways, the pre-enrollment, BIA enrollment identification which are like, you know, not just by birth but by community, by marriage, by adoption, by who you are, and by what you do. And that's in my heart, how I think of it, and the majority of people accept us and know who we are.

However, unlike Anna and Manuel, who continue to endeavor to find places within their professional communities to construct space for themselves as Indigenous scholars, Juan and Kyla, both scholars in multidisciplinary humanities fields, have been able to fit into existing structures or create new spaces of meaning through multi-discipline collaborations. Likewise, Elinnore has established herself as a member of her Indigenous community and has integrated her Indigenous values despite the career conflicts that have resulted. Janet's position has not resulted in specific conflicts like those experienced by Anna, although she has felt a similar division among colleagues in their acceptance of her research:

I think that ... there are certain people who are creative people who think my research is awesome and new and intuitive, and they jumped on board the whole way and wanted to help me and I think there are people who don't really understand it and don't really know how to make the connection between [what I study] and [our field] and really that's my whole dissertation ... And I think some people have accepted it and respect it and some people choose to ... nobody's ever said ... that my work was not valuable. No one has ever said that to me. Um, I really don't care *laughs*. But I do.

## Conclusions

There is great diversity in the way that Indigenous people experience identities and group membership in relation to families, colleagues, scholarship, and within themselves. This study has the potential to open discussion about these delicate issues in Indigenous communities with specific reference to questions about r/Recognition. As a whole, this research explores the ways in which Indigenous peoples' complicity with the blood quantum and membership approach of Europeans to defining community membership have affected interactions among scholars. So far, there is evidence to suggest that some Indigenous scholars are attempting to approach their disciplines in a way that challenges the accepted practices with different degrees of success. One objective of this work, to understand the difference between academic interaction of Unrecognized Indigenous scholars with other Indigenous scholars and with non-Indigenous scholars, can be seen in the preliminary results. In some cases, it appears that the Indigenous

scholars are bringing a more interdisciplinary approach to their work than their non-Indigenous peers. However, as Anna's case shows, due to their u/Unrecognized status, they may feel snubbed by Indigenous colleagues as well as non-Indigenous colleagues, creating barriers that might prevent them from persisting in their research.

The parameters of this study are quite broad and this iteration suffers from a small sample due to the difficulty of identifying scholars willing to participate. It is not necessarily typical for someone to specify their identity as a Unrecognized scholar and many eligible scholars may wish to remain anonymous, preventing them from participating in more than the online survey. At this point, the study is only robust enough to consider the oral history participants as a variety of case studies that provide initial evidence of the multiple and complex systems under which Indigenous scholars construct their academic identities and the survey data can only be used descriptively. The applicability of the data to other Indigenous scholars will be left to the judgment, education, experience, and context of the reader.

However, this piece, as a starting point in the conversation about the intersections of identity, membership, and academia for Indigenous researchers, calls attention to the need for further study. Future results may indicate the need for institutions to more carefully consider the specific complexities of Indigenous identity construction and membership, as well as how Indigenous research methodologies get positioned within the wider culture of the academy. In her work, *In the Pursuit of Knowledge: Scholars, Status, and Academic Culture*, Rhode claims that most critics of the academic world cite the "mismatch between public needs and academic priorities."<sup>22</sup> Yet the public needs, as cited above, are attended to within the relational structure of Indigenous methodologies described by Shawn Wilson's and Linda T. Smith's frameworks and are exemplified in each of the oral history interviews conducted for this research.<sup>23</sup> Rhode writes further that, "with increasing knowledge [comes] increasing specialization, and corresponding tendencies toward more esoteric subjects, technical approaches, and arcane styles,"<sup>24</sup> all of which in turn require scholars who attend to translating their academic knowledge into prose accessible to the communities it is most meant to benefit. If Indigenous scholars, and other scholars of color, who Trower and Bleak found to be more active outside the academic community, are pushed out of scholarly institutions, universities will be more likely to struggle to meet public needs.

Universities might give attention to these issues in re-constructed diversity trainings and/or policies that create spaces to support the interdisciplinary nature of Indigenous scholarly research. Most importantly, as the number of Indigenous scholars graduating with advanced degrees continues to increase, administrations will need to model practices that places Indigenous researchers and Indigenous research in respectful dialogue with mainstream academic practice. Clues about areas of particular import can be gleaned from this research. Additionally, it is anticipated that relating in-depth educational experiences of these scholar participants will be beneficial to educational professionals as they assist Indigenous students in their classrooms to remain in high school and prepare for college.

Thus far, we see that the perception of one's identity by those surrounding them can greatly impact the way scholars are experiencing the academic world. Initial results indicate that there are different patterns of how a scholar's Indigenous identity is recognized, challenged, and supported by peers that are dependent on the way in which the scholar is u/Unrecognized - by their Indigenous community or by the federal government. Even for those scholars who are surrounded by people who don't particularly understand the politics of identity and enrollment

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<sup>22</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *In Pursuit of Knowledge: Scholars, Status, and Academic Culture* (Stanford: Stanford Law and Politics: 2006), 3.

<sup>23</sup> See Shawn Wilson, *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Halifax & Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2008), 144; and Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London & New York: Zed Books Ltd, 1999), 208.

<sup>24</sup> Rhode, *In Pursuit of Knowledge*, 114.

for Indigenous peoples, their identity can be marginalized. As this research continues with additional interview participants, I look forward to extending this exploration of the possibility of different patterns of experience based the type of Unrecognized Indigenous identity claimed by the participant.

In a time when Indigenous populations are declining due to restrictive blood quantum policies, we may see a future where tribal sovereignty is eradicated.<sup>25</sup> Indigenous people, as they attempt to hold on to their rights as sovereign nations, have created a conflict around enrollment with real consequences for non-Recognized members. This study investigates just one aspect of those consequences in its exploration of how Unrecognized scholars navigate the complexity of their identity as it intersects with membership policies and an academic career. As universities become more diverse places, scholar positionality to oneself, one's colleagues, and one's community warrants further study.

## **Acknowledgement**

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<sup>25</sup> Philip M. Zastrow, "Tribal Extinction: A Model for the Long-Term Consequences of Tribal Enrollment Rules", master's thesis, Humboldt State University, 1995, 150 pp.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

*Nicole Blalock:* A mixed-heritage scholar and artist, the author's research is largely interdisciplinary and incorporates her interests in contemporary society and how its policies and practices influence learning and achievement. She currently holds a post-doctoral fellowship from the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University in educational equity in diverse schools.



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