

**STUDENT ACADEMIC SUCCESS WORKING GROUP**

**WORKING GROUP MEMBERS:**

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- Elizabeth Theta Brown - Associate Professor, Mathematics & Statistics
- Tyson Brown - Alumnus
- Chrissy Donald - Student
- Wilson Friend - Alumnus, Parents Council
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- Monyette L F Martin - Assistant Director, Admissions
- Aaron Noland - Assistant Dean, Libraries & Educational Technologies
- Renee Staton - Professor, Graduate Psychology
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- Colleen Waller - Career Advisor, Career & Academic Planning

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**TITLE:** Recruiting and Retaining Indigenous and Native American (I/NA) Students

**PROBLEM:**

- I/NA students have the lowest representation of any group on college and university campuses across the country, according to the US Dept of Education statistics
- I/NA students have the highest attrition rates in higher education
- Fewer than 0.12% of students enrolled at JMU over the last 11 years self-identified as Indigenous and/or Native American (I/NA)
- According to the admissions office, of the applications for the most recent incoming class, only 1.3% (N=61) self-identified as I/NA.
- According to the State of Transfer report, between 2016-2020 Fall cohorts, less than 1% of incoming first year and transfer students were I/Al or Alaska Native: 1-2 students each year in transfer (about one-quarter of one percent), 3-8 students in the first-year cohort (just over one-tenth of one percent).
- Although there are 11 Native American tribes officially recognized by the state within the Commonwealth of Virginia, we are not aware of any formal or informal partnerships/agreements made between JMU and the tribes to recruit and support I/NA students.
- 82% retention rate on average over the last 11 years for I/NA students at JMU; 78.5% over the last 5 years (~ 5 students/year across last 11 years)
- 67% 5-year graduation rate on average over the 11 years for I/NA students at JMU; 80% over the last 5 years (~ 1.5 students/year across last 11 years)
- According to the 2010 census, seventy-eight percent of those identifying as I/AN do not live on reservations or trust lands, many in urban/suburban settings. Efforts to access, welcome, and support this important group of potential students must be broad.
- There are several tribes in the region and within the US that have the resources and have set it a priority to fund students who are officially recognized on their tribal rolls who they can and will sponsor to attend college; however, JMU has not created a pathway for these students.

**WORKING  
GROUP  
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Hakseon Lee,  
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**PROBLEM STATEMENT CONTINUED:**

- Due to a lack of trust or feelings of being welcome that may exist between JMU, tribal leadership, or I/AN students, an on-going and meaningful relationship and effort will be required to yield a class.
- Sense of disillusion on campus “Getting Native American students to JMU is going to be a hard sell and then keeping them here even harder—because we don’t have the infrastructure to support them (Native American Center, Native studies curriculum, Native Studies major/minor, Native American faculty)”
- Administration has identified important reasons why JMU has not been able and/or willing to consider alternative tuition models for specialized populations:
  - ◊ There has been legislation that has attempted to advocate for in-state tuition for select populations such as foster children, victims of child and domestic abuse, and others, but JMU has historically taken the position that these legislative approaches are considered to be a “slippery” slope because if we let one student group become eligible for in-state rates, then other groups will make their case.
  - ◊ Although each group may have valid reasons, the concern is that the financial model would become unsustainable, and it is already tenuous.
  - ◊ One administrator stated, “Because there are so many different groups of students that can all make compelling arguments for why they should have reduced tuition, we don’t do this. From a revenue perspective, because our enrollment has been down for the last two years, we have budget issues as well. It’s just a Pandora’s box we can’t afford to open. I hope you understand and thank you so much for asking my opinion.”

**RECOMMENDATION:**

- Build Trust and Stronger Partnership with Tribal Nations and Tribal College
  - ◊ Listening Circles: Co-create listening circles with tribes and tribal colleges to first listen and learn what ideas, concerns, questions arise in the discussion.
  - ◊ Identify: Create “partnership profiles” for the in-state tribes that are federally and/or state recognized to determine best matches for immediate and long-term partnership development.
    - ◆ Some characteristics to evaluate may include number of members, leadership structure, higher education representative, and scholarship dollars dedicated for post-secondary education, and/or programmatic efforts.
  - ◊ Staffing support: to effectively build trust and maintain relationships with tribal leadership, key stakeholders and campus partners, it will be important to establish the roles and responsibilities of personnel. One administrator commented, “We would need to develop a process for that and a system for verification. That would be a partnership between my office, financial aid, and the residency office. Another question that I have is about the budget. Admissions will need resources to create and sustain a model to expand our recruitment footprint. It will be virtually impossible to manage the outreach without additional resources, especially out-of-state. But this is true for recruitment in general.”
  - ◊ Outreach: Establish contact with tribal leadership and Tribal Colleges to inform them about JMU’s efforts to recruit and retain I/NA students. The focus of this step is to learn about the Tribes’ priorities and their needs.
  - ◊ Partner: Extend an offer to establish a formal agreement to the tribes and tribal colleges that have been identified as top prospects to partner with JMU. Assign a JMU office that will manage communication and honor the long-term agreement.
    - ◆ Utilize a memorandum of understanding that formalizes the partnership between JMU and Tribe

*Recommendation continues on page 3 and page 4.*

**RECOMMENDATION CONTINUED:**

- ◇ Partner: There are 32 Tribal Colleges in the United States that JMU can partner with to build awareness of, and cultivate support for, this program. Assign a Tribal College liaison with the goals of a) Creating awareness; b) Learning what supports their students when need when transitioning to JMU; and 3) Developing strategic links within the community to support students attending JMU.
  - ◆ Utilize a memorandum of understanding that formalizes the partnership between JMU and Tribal Colleges.
  - ◆ Connect with TransferBoost Initiative: One colleague suggested, “I even find myself wondering about the possibility of connecting this initiative with Transfer Boost. Our current partners in Transfer Boost are NOVA and Germanna (Fredericksburg-Culpeper area). But I don't think there's any reason we couldn't extend that partnership to other community colleges if in-state tribes identified other VCCS schools that serve a high percentage of A/IA students. It would be great to be able to talk to prospective partners in the tribes about transfer affordability guarantees in select programs if we are able to make that happen.”
- ◇ Integrate: Although it will be important to honor the unique historical and current context of Indigenous and Native American lived experience, the effort should not focus on separating out this group of students. Instead, the objective should be to integrate into already infrastructure efforts, such as Valley Scholars, Centennial Scholars, Pell-grant lobbying efforts, retention efforts, etc.
  - ◆ Financial Aid strategy: Although there are limitations to how financial aid can be allocated, one administrator commented, “Unfortunately, this is pretty easy for us. We cannot use race, ethnicity, etc. when creating financial aid programs and/or awarding scholarships. So, we do not have the ability to create specialized scholarships for this population. With that said, we do have access to dollars for low income in-state students. We could partner with you (and others) creating documents to help encourage/guide these students in now to maximize their financial aid opportunities at JMU by making sure they submit the right applications at the right time. We would be happy to help with any work regarding the targeted development of those materials.”
- Building Community Knowledge and Allyship
  - ◇ Invite tribal leaders and key stakeholders to meet with university leaders to understand historical context, align common goals and desired outcomes, explore new initiatives, and establish long-term goals.
  - ◇ Co-design programming that introduces indigeneity to the broader community
  - ◇ Speaker series on indigenous topics
- Recruiting Indigenous Students
  - ◇ Offer:
    - ◆ All I/NA students: Early decision, explore how JMU can offer specialized financial aid programs to I/NA, such as early decision-like priority reviews for application, financial aid packages, explore ways to ease the registration process, living-learning community, faculty mentorship, peer coach/mentoring, career planning, alumni mentorship, etc.
    - ◆ Out of state: In addition to the above programmatic features, students will receive in-state tuition if they are members of any of the 573 tribal nations recognized by the Bureau of Indian Affairs across the region and US.
      - \* Eligibility would not be based on students' state of residence, such as North and South Carolina, New Jersey, Oklahoma or any other state. Instead, it would be based on if the tribe is listed as one of 573 federally recognized entities.

**RECOMMENDATION CONTINUED:**

- Retain and Support Indigenous students
  - ◇ Student Cohort: Establish a cohort of students where a “community of learners” will be facilitated.
  - ◇ On-campus Jobs: Connect students with on-campus employment opportunities through the student work and employment center
  - ◇ Career: create formal connections with the career center to further explore career pathways, internships and jobs after college.
  - ◇ Residence Life: Design and implement a Live and Learning community for students as part of this cohort. Create a community that supports diversity among tribal identities as well as common experiences. Partner with Academic Affairs to establish strong connections with I/NA students in meaningful ways, such as assigning a Faculty Fellow, alignment with fields of study, research and creative opportunities.
    - ◆ It may be likely that I/NA students may not want to be part of a separate group or specific learning community, so this topic may require further research
    - ◆ One of the Residence Life managers stated, “I think your proposal is fantastic, and such a need for this population of students. I love the community-of- learners idea, and I am inspired by framing the experience for these students in a cohort structure. There are two great models of gathering a demographic of students around a RLC experience right now on campus:”
      - \* [Madison International](#) invites ISC / Study Group students who are interested in sharing an experience with traditional JMU first-year students, and the classes they take are based on global leadership and issues facing international communities, and
      - \* [Haynes Scholars](#) brings together students from underrepresented identities and populations who are pursuing a STEM education with concentration in Mathematics.
  - ◇ Faculty Mentorship: Early, frequent, and on-going interactions with researchers and scholars in fields that the students have expressed interest in as well as other fields that may peak a newfound interest. Use of informal interactions and formal events to highlight the faculty support and interests. It would also be important to connect students to faculty who self-identify as I/NA and/or are an ally to the Indigenous community
  - ◇ Peer Support: Partner with University Advising and Learning Centers to connect I/NA students with Peer Mentors/Advisors/Coaches. Currently, Madison Advising Peers (MAPs) are the primary line of service that already exists; however, a new service line of Peer Coaches is being explored to provide support in the areas of short-term and long-term educational planning, learning strategies, goal setting, and serving as “connective tissue” to the many programs and services that already exist at JMU. Peer support from residence life, the tutoring centers, and other parts of the university could also be included or as the primary coordinator of campus resources.

*Recommendation continues and concludes on page 5.*

RECOMMENDATION CONTINUED:

- ◇ Other Campus Partners:
  - ◆ CMSS: Establish an initiative within CMSS to design programmatic opportunities for I/NA who are part of the cohort.
  - ◆ Programming and events for the participants to engage
    - \* Annual Pow Wow
    - \* Meet-up for campus activities such as sporting events, co-curricular activities, student mixers, faculty presentations, cultural events, etc.
    - \* Special Support for families for Parent’s Weekend, etc.
    - \* Running to Support Indigenous Scholars: <https://youtu.be/xrLTUUPuglc>
- Institutional Examples: At the University of Illinois at Chicago, the Vice Provost, Enrollment Management teamed up with the Native American Support Program to propose an in-state tuition model for all students who are members of a tribe that is recognized by the federal government. This campus is a good example of how the University leadership had to evaluate the associated challenges and opportunities, some of which are described above. Ultimately, the institution decided that the benefits outweighed the possible challenges. (<https://today.uic.edu/uic-to-offer-in-state-tuition-to-students-from-any-of-the-573-tribal-nations-in-us>). Below are examples of other institutions that don’t have an in-state tuition model but do have greater infrastructure to support students and faculty who self-identify as I/NA.
  - ◇ Buder Center of American Indian Studies—Washington University
  - ◇ Native American Center—University of Washington, SP
  - ◇ Wabanki Center, University of Maine
  - ◇ Myaamia Center, Miami University
  - ◇ Native American Support Center, University of Illinois at Chicago

*See Rationale and Measures of Success on Page 6*

**RATIONALE:**

- This effort would help JMU student body and broader community to acknowledge the cultural, linguistic, economic, etc. assets to our society, both historically and present day.
- By admitting and retaining academically prepared I/NA students it would support JMU's goal to diversify its student body, while also maintaining academic excellence, as students would be required to meet JMU's admission standards, including grade point averages, course requirements, commitment to civic engagement, etc.
- This effort would help JMU eliminate many of the financial, institutional, and cultural roadblocks, one of which is out-of-state tuition and recognize the historic tie between Virginia with the American tribal nations.
- The goal is to create a fairer playing field for Native Americans by recognizing that their nations did not recognize state boundaries.
- Support JMU's engagement priorities, particularly Civic Engagement, by further exploring tribal autonomy, self-determination, sovereign nations, and other key constructs important to the US.
- JMU is on the land of the indigenous Siouan, Algonquian, and Haudenosaunee communities and just because Virginia already has recognized 11 tribes, it does not mean that JMU should not have a responsibility and commitment to native people from the region.
- Stronger relationships between institutions of higher education and tribal nations will help produce stronger outcomes for I/NA students
- If current partnerships do not already exist, this would mark a new era for JMU to take a strategic approach to supporting I/NA students in the Commonwealth, the region, and across the US.
- Learning what it means to better support and serve I/NA students would take steps forward to correct actions that have historically marginalized and excluded students and families from education
- Increased access for native students by offering financial incentives and social/academic support is a wonderful way to improve the educational equity and remedy historical barriers to education experienced by Indigenous people.
- A step in this direction would illustrate the foresight and commitment university leadership is willing to take to support I/NA students, as well as an inclusive perspective on diversity.

**SUCCESS:**

- New tuition policy for I/NA students is established
- New relationships with tribes are created
- # of students enrolled because of this program by year 3 of the initiative
- # of students graduating in 5 and 6 years
- # of new tribal relationships are formed by year 2
- MOU is signed with 1 tribe by year 3
- Tribal leadership and native students report a strong sense of trust in its relationship with JMU evidenced by annual survey(s).
- JMU community reports that there is greater understanding and allyship for I/NA students and topics.