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Covid-19, Stress Factors of Native American and Caucasian College Students, and Implementing Classroom Dialogues

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This article explores issues associated with the academic and greater health, relational, and financial stressors of rural, low socioeconomic status (SES), Native American college students, compared with those of regional Caucasians, during the Covid-19 pandemic. Additionally, the study considers concerns about both populations' low proclivity within the classroom for discussing students' individual and group identities, as well as their pandemic stressors and experiences, in order to seek community and provide mutual assistance regarding their academic and larger needs. Further, the study offers faculty important dialogical strategies for reaching their Native, rural, or similarly marginalized ethnic/racial minority, geographically disadvantaged, and/or low SES students during stressful periods of difficulty and epic proportion, such as the current pandemic. Utilizing an exploratory case-study design with a mixed-methods approach and a convergent-parallel strategy, the study involves 114 Native and 114 Caucasian students from a U.S. university. During the pandemic, both Native and Caucasian students surveyed reported stress levels in 12 areas affecting their educational, health, relational, and economic outcomes. As an issue, overall, Native students were affected more adversely than Caucasians by the pandemic, but both populations, suffering from stressors, might have benefited or profited more from sharing and processing their experiences within a classroom setting, if desired, and if such a forum had been made available. Nonetheless, in turn, another conflict arose as many students were also reluctant to cover the pandemic, including its effects on themselves; were fatigued of the subject; and thought their beliefs would be seen as insignificant. Accordingly, this article calls upon teachers to engage in greater efforts to support peripheralized students during perilous and monumental times, such as the current pandemic, by implementing a classroom dialogue and curriculum supporting students' academic, personal, and larger identities and needs as students wished to share them.

Keywords: Native American college students, identity, covid-19 pandemic, stressors, student/teacher engagement

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INTRODUCTION

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Native Americans, including students at the study's university in the U.S.'s Southwest region, faced stress and isolation (Hilleary, 2020). According to Wade (2020), in terms of contracting the virus, Natives were one of the ethnic/racial groups placed at highest risk. Compared with Caucasians, Natives were three and half times more likely to obtain the virus and almost twice as likely to die from it. Additionally relevant to more traditionally aged, Native college students, the Natives who died from the virus were younger than those on average, with 35% of deaths occurring in Native people under age 60, as opposed to 6% amongst Caucasians. Within the pandemic, Native Americans possessed numerous risk factors impacting their educational, health, relational, and economic outcomes. According to Carbajal (2020), Natives have endured continuing disparities in infrastructure spending; public funding; and the availability of healthcare, housing, food, education, and insurance coverage as diverse influences affecting their ability to navigate the pandemic. Meanwhile, according to Griswold (2020), academically, Native students graduate from high school and college in lower numbers than their peers of other races, a divide the pandemic has exacerbated, including in the study's region. As stressors affecting Native college students, including those at the study's university, during the pandemic, the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (2020) found that many were required to endure institutional closings, a move from living on-campus to returning home, job and internship losses, and a shift to online classes, issues impacting students' access to and persistence in academia, as well as their stressors. Comparably, nationally, during the pandemic, according to the American Psychological Society ([APA], 2020), most students had their schoolwork, careers, and lives disrupted, and they experienced the resulting increased psychological distress, especially if handling existing health and/or socioecomonic status (SES) risk factors, a condition(s) relevant for most at the study's university. Notably, according to Goldrick-Rab's and colleagues' (2020) findings at select universities cross-country, approximately 83% of students reported moderate to extreme anxiety. Furthermore, in Wang's and colleagues' (2020) study at a Southwestern university, a regional descriptor of the current study, 38% of students reported anxiety, 48% were depressed, 18% had suicidal ideation, and 85% observed sleeping-pattern changes, with this very high stress rate for sleeping changes arguably comparing with the 83% stress rate reported for generalized anxiety that Goldrick-Rab's and others' (2020) students displayed. As other types of pandemic stressors connected with students' SES, Wang and others (2020) also found that 20% of students were bothered by financial and employment problems. Furthermore, Aucejo and colleagues (2020), similarly located at a Southwestern university, discovered that 35% of students were anxious about their health, others' health, and their ability to contract the virus, stressors influencing students' health, financial, and employment concerns altogether.

Within the pandemic, university presidents reported that colleges' first requisite should be to meet marginalized students' needs, especially those students of an ethnic/racial minority background and/or a low SES (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2020). Assuming the initiative to strengthen university responses during a crisis, faculty must continue to seek additional avenues by which to reach their students (Kecojevic et al., 2020), including

peripheralized ethnic/racial minority, geographically disadvantaged, and/or low SES populations. Indeed, during the pandemic, teachers could not assume that students would engage with faculty and classmates of their own volition and direction, especially when classes were moved online (Chu, 2020), as they were at the study's university after the pandemic began, an incident prompting more courses and sections to be offered remotely from then on as a continuing course of action. Fanning out from academia to all social arenas, the Covid-19 pandemic, as an international disaster, has filled many news conversations. Meanwhile, traditionally, as Tanaka and Gilliland (2017) maintain, the university has acted as a place where teachers and students could hold conversations about timely, controversial subjects promoting critical thinking. However, dialogues about students' identities, including their pandemic experiences and stressors, may be hard for some to broach during the current period of upheaval, even as some time has passed. Resultantly, the current study sought to investigate comparisons between Native and Caucasian students at a Southwestern university regarding their potential pandemic stressors and willingness to discuss them in the classroom, including topics linked to the epic catastrophe's effects upon themselves and their families and communities.

Context and Review of Literature

Nationally, according to the APA (2020), during the pandemic in the U.S., almost 90% of adult students enrolled in higher education deemed that attending college was a great stressor for them. At a Southwestern university, Wang and colleagues (2020) found that 74% of students were unable to pay attention to their classes, and 59% had online learning problems. As further conflicts to matriculation, at another Southwestern university, Aucejo and colleagues (2020) reported that some students felt upset about the grades they earned, with 11% dropping classes and 12% switching majors. Overall, within the pandemic, many students participated in remote learning as an alternative curricular format for colleges necessitating a shift. Yet, according to Hindun's and colleagues' (2021) university study, most students disliked the unexpected move online, especially if the new model afforded them little involvement with teachers and classmates, as it did for many at the current study's university, including Natives valuing groupwork designs matching their learning style and cultural worldview, and being integral to their persistence patterns (see Hembrough, 2019). Certainly, within the pandemic, for some Native students, including those at the study's university, the fast and jarring evolution to online coursework engagement may have been intense. Yet, in one pre-pandemic study, Trammell (2020) found that Native students face multiple obstacles in attending college more generally, including transitioning to an academic setting; finding mentors and friends; and depicting their beliefs at an often Caucasian-oriented institution, a trait of most colleges, even those with a Native subpopulation.

Upon enrollment in courses, students, including Native, rural, and/or low SES students, amongst other peripheralized groups, bring differing skills, knowledge, and beliefs to the classroom that, being unique, are of great import in addressing the status quo. In following, Webb-Sunderhaus (2016) calls upon faculty to continue their efforts to support students in applying their personal and group worldviews to the curricula in beneficially self-engaging and self-reflecting manners, just as teachers also remember

simultaneously to accept and honor students' boundaries in portraying themselves. As a curricular ideal, the practice that Webb-Sunderhaus espouses remains primary, especially in light of the current pandemic, an epoch when many students are pondering and reformulating their identities already, as well as investigating their needs and desires related to their academic standing and other social arenas. Within the pandemic, faculty might foresee, realistically, the types of risks that they could assume in asking students to evaluate rhetorics connected to multisided Covid-19 subjects, including those concerning students' identities themselves. Such obstacles might involve students' possible reticence or even refusal to tackle pandemic dialogues, as well as their ability to be retraumatized in reliving pandemic-ridden memories (see Molloy, 2016). Yet faculty should also consider the value of students' potential to select, formulate, and shape aspects of their own pandemic events as integral to the stories that they tell others. In a general context, Wilkerson (2017) finds that students participating in class discussions and assignments about controversial themes become both better critical thinkers and purposeful members of a democracy. Moreover, Molloy (2016) contends that, often, students who choose to communicate information involving their identity, including stressful or traumatic details, can grapple with it psychologically and come to recognize their own individual and collective pain more distinctly, as well as speak or write about it more cogently, including by sharing narratives with their locale and those beyond it in order to create needed change. Presently, such transformative change as might be engendered could affect Native students' framing of their tales of triumphant survivance (see King, Gubele, & Anderson, 2015) within the pandemic, as well as area Native students' sensitive portrayals of their ancestors' past paths along the historical and genocidal Trail of Tears, circa 1831 to 1850.

Because currently, as well as foreseeably for the near and perhaps even extended future, students who leave college have a decreased chance for higher socioeconomic attainment than graduates, for the study, identifying the causes of Native, rural, and/or low-income students' academic and outside social stresses, including their potential failure to matriculate from the university, remain crucial, just as it is also mandatory for faculty in higher education to understand and address persistence factors amongst their disenfranchised ethnic/racial, disadvantaged geographically, and/or low (SES) student populations. In the literature reviewed, nationally, students' pandemic reactions and Covid-19 stressors have been presented. Likewise, within the pandemic, studies depict Natives' educational, health, economic, and relational needs more sweepingly. Nonetheless, a gap in the research exists concerning Native students' pandemic stressors and their potential willingness, as well as that of all student populations' inclination, to discuss their stressors in their classes in order to both solicit and share information with their peers about campus and community resources in addressing students' academic, health, relational, and economic needs. Furthermore, a lack of research has also been established documenting practices that teachers employed within the pandemic in order to generate and sustain pandemic dialogues between faculty and students, including ethnic/racial minority, geographically disadvantaged, and/or low SES populations.

Thus, the article employs an exploratory case-study design utilizing a mixed-methods approach with a convergent-parallel strategy comparing regional Native and Caucasian

students and their individual and group identities as aligned with their potential pandemic stressors and possible willingness to communicate about them in any regard in the classroom, including not only students' academic but also their greater outside social needs, especially within the pandemic as a time of monumental crisis. Further, the study asks faculty to invite students' participation in pandemic conversations by implementing a dialogical pedagogical design in their classroom discussions and assignments for Native, rural, and similarly marginalized ethnic/racial minority, geographically disadvantaged, and/or low SES students. For the study, the authors asked these research questions about regional Native and Caucasian students: What stressors do Native students, compared with Caucasians, possess, and how did the pandemic contribute to or affect these stressors? Additionally, during the pandemic, in a region where many Native students are committed to sharing individual and group stories, generating an informational exchange about available resources for local needs, promoting inclusion amongst not only tribal but also all areawide ethnic/racial populations, and honoring teachers as local leaders and thinkers, how willing were Native versus Caucasian students to tackle pandemic topics in the classroom, including those related to their own potential pandemic stressors, and why?

METHOD

Research Site and Sample Demographics

We conducted the study at a rural, public, Oklahoma university serving the state's lowest income counties. Of the 228 diverse student participants, there were 114 Caucasians and 114 Native Americans, including Choctaw, Cherokee, Creek, and Chickasaw. Most students lived in low-income areas and were first-generation college students. Of the sample, 25% (n = 57) were sophomores, 50% (n = 119) were juniors, and 25% (n = 57) were seniors, with students enrolled in a range of courses and having an array of majors. Refer to Table 1 for other group demographics.

Table 1
Students' demographic characteristics

Gender	Male 25% (*n* = 57)	Female 74% (*n* = 168)	Other 1% (*n* = 3)		
Occupation status	Student 28% (*n* = 63)	Part-time work 30% (*n* = 69)	Full-time work 42% (*n* = 96)		
Age	17-19 20% (*n* = 46)	20-29 46% (*n* = 104)	30-39 19% (*n* = 43)	40-49 11% (*n* = 24)	50+ 4% (*n* = 10)
Marital status	Married 31% (*n* = 71)	Cohabitating 10% (*n* = 22)	Separated/Divorced 2% (*n* =6)	Single 57% (*n* = 129)	
Financially responsible for children under 18	None 66% (*n* = 151)	1 child 8% (*n* = 19)	2 children 13% (*n* = 29)	3 children 7% (*n* = 16)	4+ children 6% (*n* = 13)
Annual household income	$0-15,000 9% (*n* = 21)	$16,000-30,000 15% (*n* = 35)	$31,000-45,000 11% (*n* = 25)	$46,000-60,000 15% (*n* = 35)	$61,000-76,000+ 47% (*n* = 107)
Residency, town size	Under 5,000 40% (*n* = 92)	5,000-10,000 14% (*n* = 32)	11,000-20,000 25% (*n* = 58)	20,000-50,000 11% (*n* = 26)	60,000 + 8% (*n* = 19)

Note. $N = 228$; White/Caucasian, $n = 114$; Native American, $n = 114$. There are missing data for one participant concerning age, for five participants concerning income, and for one participant concerning residency, but this did not meet the critical cut-off point for participants' exclusion as reporting responses for these criteria was optional.

Research Design

Having Institutional Review Board approval, the authors designed an exploratory case study utilizing a mixed-methods approach to collect and analyze data by applying a convergent-parallel strategy (Creswell & Cresswell, 2017). An exploratory case study provides researchers with a learning opportunity to locate ideas, identify perceptions, and broaden a phenomena's knowledge. Because the study investigated students' COVID-19 pandemic-related stressors as a recent phenomenon, the authors' selection of an exploratory case study as a research design was fitting. Likewise, the authors' choice of a mixed-methods study employing a convergent-parallel strategy for data collection and analysis facilitated the research questions' contemplation via multiple research phases and compounded method types. A mixed-methods study depends upon both quantitative and qualitative research methods to explain the study's results and examine them further. For the study, applying a mixed-method design enabled the authors' use of quantitative data (numerical) and qualitative data (open-ended questions) in employing a survey model featuring both Likert scale questions with answers ranging from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree" and paired open-ended questions enabling participant commentary and elaboration (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The survey consisted of 110 questions. Together, the Likert scale and coinciding open-ended

questions focused on students' backgrounds, reported pre-pandemic and pandemic stressors, and possible preferences for discussing the pandemic in their classes. The authors employed a convergent-parallel approach to the exploratory study by simultaneously collecting both quantitative and qualitative data and merging it at the end by pairing each set of associated survey questions, Likert scale with open-ended, to yield additional important information about students' understandings or elaborations upon their Likert scale responses (see Creswell & Cresswell, 2017). The basis for selecting the convergent-parallel approach is that the interlinking analysis of quantitative and qualitative data provides a fuller comprehension of the research questions and assists authors in evaluating participants' ideas in further depth. Likewise, to offer greater credibility to the study's claims, the authors collected an adequate participant sample and contemplated the research questions over an extended time frame as other methods of considering the study's findings.

Having an understanding of the current literature and following the protocols of other researchers reviewed to ensure the research design was appropriate and the methodology consistent with the practice, the authors aimed to explore how regional Southwestern Native American and Caucasian students' individual and cultural group backgrounds and pandemic stressors, including those linked to their academic standing, health and psychological status factors, existential mindset, relationships, job, and income, influenced students' inclination to discuss the pandemic in their classes. Under the larger, umbrella-type stress categories, students were questioned about 12 different specific stressors relevant to college students. Additionally, the authors investigated whether significant differences between Native and Caucasian students would arise regarding their stress types and levels, with a focus on Native students' outcomes as primary. Concerning the timeline, the authors compared students' reported recollection of their stressors from up to six months before the pandemic began to be discussed in the U.S. in January 2020 versus those within the pandemic from January 2020 to July 2021, when pandemic discussions were at a social forefront. Data collection took place in early April 2020 through July 2021, and in comparing students' stressors between these pre-pandemic and pandemic timeframes, the authors' goal was to ascertain whether students' types and stress levels rose, fell, or maintained equilibrium. Some survey stress factors were utilized from David Lester's (2014) *Stressful Life Events Checklist*, focusing on college students, and the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs' (2020) *Life Stressor Checklist-Revised*. As the study's pandemic timeline of events, in March 2020, the university's campus site closed, with all coursework being shifted online; in fall 2020, the campus grounds continued to be shuttered, with almost all classes offered online; and in spring and summer 2021, most courses remained online. Within the study's timeframe, participants were enrolled in one or more classes that shifted online initially and/or were offered in an alternate remote format instead within the proceeding semesters after the pandemic began. The university provided masking and COVID-19 reporting procedures through its website, as well as on all syllabi.

FINDINGS

Students' COVID-19-Affiliated Stressors

As the study's aim, the authors sought to compare Native and Caucasian students' types and levels of stress that both populations suffered within the pandemic versus pre-pandemic. Furthermore, the study focused on Native students' outcomes, not Caucasians'. The overarching stress categories about which Natives and Caucasians were surveyed concerned their academic standing, health and psychological status, existential mindset, relationships, job, and income. Grouped within these categories, the specific stress factors about which students were surveyed were these: 1) experiencing problems with a teacher; 2) undergoing difficulty in choosing a major/career; 3) managing a personal injury/illness; 4) managing a family member's injury/illness; 5) having a psychological condition, including depression or anxiety, selections students indicated via short-answer response; 6) sleeping; 7) eating, including procuring food, undereating, overeating, or eating unhealthy food, choices students indicated in their short-answer response; 8) posing existential questions, including suicidal ideation, as indicated in students' short-answer response; 9) socializing; 10) caring for a partner and/or child; 11) navigating a job conflict; and 12) having a reduced income. Within this context, acknowledging that students' 12 pandemic stressors were also potentially interrelated is an important consideration in that, according to the APA (2020), people's stressors may be intersecting and cumulative in effect, especially in an event such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Summarily, Native students responding to survey questions about pandemic stressors reported higher stress levels for all 12 factors than Caucasians, except regarding two: a job conflict, where the rate of difference was negligible, and problems with teachers, where an additional 3.6% (n = 4) of Caucasians reported the stressor. As the top seven stressors for both populations, 39.5% (n = 45) to 49.1% (n = 56) of Natives (n = 56) and 29.8% (n = 34) to 44.7% (n = 51) of Caucasians experienced the following pandemic stressors in this order: 1) socializing, 2) sleeping, 3) having a reduced income, 4) eating, 5) having a psychological condition, 6) caring for a partner and/or child, and 7) navigating a job conflict. As Native students' eighth stressor, 36% (n = 41) of Natives suffered existentially, as did 22.8% (n = 26) of Caucasians. Likewise, as Natives' nineth and tenth stressors, 32.5% (n = 37) experienced a family member's injury/illness, and 29.8% (n = 34) suffered their own injury/illness, as did 23.7% (n = 27) and 24.6% (n = 28) of Caucasians, respectively. Finally, as Natives' eleventh and twelfth stressors, 18.4% (n = 21) had difficulty in choosing a career/major, and 9.6% (n = 11) experienced teacher issues, as did 9.6% (n = 11) and 13.2% (n = 15) of Caucasians, respectively. See Table 2 for students' stressors.

Table 2
Native and Caucasian students' pre-pandemic and pandemic COVID-19 stressors

Personal stressors	Experienced pre-COVID-19				Experienced during COVID-19				Rate of change/ Number of student increase			
	White or Caucasian		Native American		White or Caucasian		Native American		White or Caucasian		Native American	
	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*
Socializing issue	22.8	26	28.1	32	44.7	51	49.1	56	96.1	25	74.7	24
Sleeping issue	16.7	19	26.3	30	31.6	36	47.4	54	86.8	17	80.2	24
Income reduction	26.3	30	28.9	33	34.2	39	46.5	53	30	9	60.9	20
Eating issue	14.9	17	28.9	33	29.8	34	43	49	100	17	48.8	16
Psychological condition, including depression/ anxiety	28.9	33	37.7	43	34.2	39	43	49	18.3	10	14.1	6
Caring for a partner/child	26.3	30	33.3	38	31.6	36	40.4	46	20.2	6	21.3	8
A conflict at one's job	22.8	26	28.9	33	40.4	46	39.5	45	77.2	20	36.9	12
Existential issue	15.8	18	28.1	32	22.8	26	36	41	44.3	8	28.1	9
A family member's injury/illness	21.1	24	24.6	28	23.7	27	32.5	37	12.3	3	32.1	9
Personal injury /illness	10.5	12	18.4	21	24.6	28	29.8	34	134.2	16	62	13
Difficult choosing a career/major	7.1	8	14.9	17	9.6	11	18.4	21	35.2	3	23.5	4
Teacher issues	7.9	9	7	8	13.2	15	9.6	11	67.1	6	37.1	m 3

Note. N = 228; White/Caucasian, n = 114; Native American, n = 114

Within the pandemic, Native and Caucasian students experienced the seven top stressors in the same order of degree. Almost 40% (n = 45) to 50% (n = 56) of Natives reported suffering stress concerning the following factors: 1) socializing (49.1%, n = 56); 2) sleeping (47.4%, n = 54); 3) having a reduced income (46.5%, n = 53); 4) eating (43%, n = 49); 5) having a psychological condition, including depression or anxiety (43%, n = 49); 6) caring for a partner and/or child (40.4%, n = 46); and 7) navigating a job conflict (39.5%, n = 45). Within the pandemic, Caucasians, also feeling stress regarding these issues, reported their stress rates, between 29.8% (n = 34) and 44.7% (n = 51) for these factors, as being similar but slightly lower by 4.4% (n = 5) to 15.8% (n = 18) than those of Natives in all areas but one, that of job-conflict stress, where Caucasians ranked less than 1% (n = >1) higher than Natives. First, 44.7% (n = 51) of Caucasians suffered a socializing problem, down 4.4% (n = 4) from Natives. Second, 40.4% (n = 46) of Caucasians navigated job-conflict stress, up .9% (n = >1) from Natives. Third, 34.2% (n = 39) of Caucasians felt stress regarding a psychological condition, down 8.8% (n = 10) from Natives. Fourth, 34.2% (n = 39) of Caucasians experienced stress concerning a reduced income, down 12.3% (n = 14) from Natives. Fifth, 31.6% (n = 36) of Caucasians suffered stress involving a sleeping issue, down 15.8% (n = 18) from Natives. Sixth, 31.6% (n = 36) of Caucasians faced the stress of caring for a partner

and/or child, down 8.8% (*n* = 10) from Natives. Seventh, 29.8% (*n* = 34) of Caucasians had eating-oriented stress, down 13.2% (*n* = 15) from Natives.

In measuring students' stressors pre-pandemic versus pandemic, the rates for both Natives and Caucasians also rose similarly. Pre-pandemic, Natives' stress rates for the seven main stress factors ranged from 26.3% (*n* = 30) to 37.7% (*n* = 43), and within the pandemic, they rose to between 39.5% (*n* = 45) and 49.1% (*n* = 56), a growth of 5.3% to 21.1% per the factors overall and a rate of change increase of 18.3% (*n* = 10) to 100% (*n* = 7). Pre-pandemic to pandemic, Native students experienced these stress rates for the seven big stressors, along with these percent increases and rates of change: 1) a psychological condition (37.7%, *n* = 43), up 5.3% (*n* = 6), with a change rate of 14.1% (*n* = 6); 2) the care of a partner and/or child (33.3%, *n* = 38), up 7.1% (*n* = 8), with a change rate of 20.2% (*n* = 6); 3) a reduced income (28.9%, *n* = 33), up 17.6% (*n* = 20), with a change rate of 60.9% (*n* = 20); 4) an eating issue (28.9%, *n* = 33), up 14.1% (*n* = 16), with a change rate of 48.8% (*n* = 16); 5) a job conflict (28.9%, *n* = 33), up 10.6 % (*n* = 12), with a change of 36.9% (*n* = 12); 6) a socializing issue (28.1%, *n* = 32), up 21% (*n* = 24), with a change rate of 74.7% (*n* = 24); and 7) a sleeping issue (26.3%, *n* = 30), up 21.1% (*n* = 24), with a change rate of 80.2% (*n* = 24).

Comparably with Natives, Caucasians' pre-pandemic to pandemic stress rates also increased, if between 10% (*n* = 8.8) to 15% (*n* = 13.6) less. Pre-pandemic, Caucasians' stress rates were between 14.9% (*n* = 17) and 28.9% (*n* = 33), and within the pandemic, they rose to between 29.8% (*n* = 34) and 44.7% (*n* = 51), a growth rate of 5.3% (*n* = 6) to 26.3% (*n* = 30) and a rate of change increase of 18.3% (*n* = 10) to 100% (*n* = 17). Thus, pre-pandemic to pandemic, Caucasian students experienced the seven big stressors, but to differing degrees, both lesser and greater than Natives, with Caucasians having the following percent increases or decreases and change rates for their pre-pandemic to pandemic stressors: 1) a psychological condition (28.9%, *n* = 33), up 5.3% (*n* = 6), with a change rate of 18.3% (*n* = 10), but down 8.8% (*n* = 10) from Natives' pre-pandemic level; 2) a reduced income (26.3%, *n* = 30), up 7.9% (*n* = 9), with a change rate of 30% (*n* = 9), yet down 2.6% (*n* = 3) from Natives' pre-pandemic level; 3) the care of a partner and/or child (26.3%, *n* = 30), up 5.3% (*n* = 6), with a change rate of 20.2% (*n* = 6), but down 7% (*n* = 8) from Natives' pre-pandemic level; 4) a job conflict (22.8%, *n* = 26), with a change rate of 77.2% (*n* = 20), yet down 6.1% (*n* = 9) from Natives' pre-pandemic level; 5) a socializing issue (22.8%, *n* = 26), up 21.9% (*n* = 25), with a change rate of 96.1% (*n* = 25), but down 5.3% (*n* = 6) from Natives' pre-pandemic level; 6) a sleeping issue, (16.7%, *n* = 19), up 14.9% (*n* = 17), with a change rate of 86.8% (*n* = 17), yet down 9.6% (*n* = 11) from Natives' pre-pandemic level; and 7) an eating issue (14.9%, *n* = 17), up 14.9% (*n* = 17), with a change rate of 100% (*n* = 17), down 14% (*n* = 16) from Natives' pre-pandemic level. Overall, in gauging the percent adjustments and change rates for Native versus Caucasian students' various stress factors, the study found that Natives' pre-pandemic to pandemic growth rates for the top seven stressors were higher than those of Caucasians' concerning the factors of having a reduced income (60.9%, *n* = 20 versus 30%, *n* = 9) and caring for a partner and/or child (21.3%, *n* = 8 versus 20.2%, *n* = 6) but were lower than Caucasians' rates in the stress factors of socializing (96.1%, *n* = 25 versus 74.7, *n* = 24); having a job

conflict (77.2%, *n* = 20 versus 36.9%, *n* = 12); sleeping (86.8%, *n* = 17 versus 80.2%, *n* = 24); eating (100%, *n* = 17 versus 48.8%, *n* = 16); and having a psychological condition (18.3%, *n* = 10 versus 14.1%, *n* = 6). Thus, despite the sometimes sharp pandemic percent increases and rates of changes for Caucasians, Natives experienced higher pandemic stress rates for all seven main factors, except that of a job conflict, where Caucasians' pandemic rate was a negligible .9% (*n* = >1) higher.

Students' Preferences for Discussing Their Pandemic Stressors in Classes

As the study established, within the pandemic, between 39.5% (*n* = 45) and 49.1% (*n* = 56) of Natives and 29.8% (*n* = 34) and 44.7% (*n* = 51) of Caucasians suffered from seven top stressors connected with their ability to socialize, sleep, earn an adequate income, eat, manage a psychological condition, care for a partner and/or child, and navigate a job conflict. As other stressors, between 29.8% (*n* = 34) and 36% (*n* = 41) of Natives and 22.8% (*n* = 26) and 24.6% (*n* = 28) of Caucasians suffered from existential issues, including suicidal ideation, and managed a family member's injury/illness, as well as their own injury/illness. Furthermore, academically, between 9.6% (*n* = 11) and 18.4% (*n* = 21) of Natives and between 9.6% (*n* = 11) and 13.2% (*n* = 15) of Caucasians experienced difficulty in choosing a major/career and had problems with teachers. Nonetheless, in reaction, most students also did not want to discuss the pandemic in any of their past or current classes or were ambivalent about this potentiality. Responding to questions about students' possible preferences for conversing about the pandemic in the classroom, only 41.2% (*n* = 94) from both races combined, 21.9% (*n* = 50) of Natives and 19.3% (*n* = 44) of Caucasians, reported they had desired to tackle the pandemic, such as by talking or writing about it, and had also done so in any of their past and/or present courses. Opposingly, 41% (*n* = 94) of students, 21.9% (*n* = 50) of Natives and 19.3% (*n* = 44) of Caucasians, reported that they had not talked or written about the pandemic in any classes and had not wished to either, while another 40.8% (*n* = 93) of students, 18.9% (*n* = 43) of Natives and 21.9% (*n* = 50) of Caucasians, were neutral regarding these questions. As a similar area for consideration, during the pandemic, less than half or 40.8% (*n* = 93) of students, 17.5% (*n* = 40) of Natives and 23.2% (*n* = 53) of Caucasians, had enrolled in at least one course in the past or were enrolled in one course in the present in which a teacher had offered any discussions, readings, and/or writing components, including assignments with open topics, where students feasibly could explore the pandemic, including how it affected them, if desired.

More specifically, for the study, of the 228 participants, 107 students (41 Native and 66 Caucasian) also answered optional, further survey questions in six areas about their potential preferences for discussing the pandemic under varying circumstances in any present courses. First, concerning the question of whether and how the pandemic affected students and/or their family personally, 18.7% (*n* = 20) of students, 19.5% (*n* = 8) of Natives and 18.2% (*n* = 12) of Caucasians, reported that they wanted or had desired to discuss this matter in at least one current course. Contrastingly, 56.1% (*n* = 60) of students, 65.9% (*n* = 27) of Natives and 50% (*n* = 33) of Caucasians, wished to avoid any classroom conversations about the pandemic's potential effects upon themselves and/or their family, while the remainder were neutral. Second, regarding the question of whether students wanted or had desired to discuss the pandemic in at least

one current course because they felt that their opinion would be valued, 15.9% (*n* = 17) of students, 10.6% (*n* = 7) of Natives and 24.4% (*n* = 10) of Caucasians, agreed. This left 56.1% (*n* = 60) of students, 80.5% (*n* = 33) of Natives and 40.9% (*n* = 27) of Caucasians, who thought their opinions about the pandemic would be discredited if communicated, with the rest being ambivalent as to their position. Third, as a similar question linked to students' potential desire to discuss the pandemic in at least one current course, 18.7% (*n* = 20), 22% (*n* = 9) of Natives and 16.7% (*n* = 11) of Caucasians, indicated an interest in pandemic topics. Opposingly, 55.1% (*n* = 59) of students, 58.5% (*n* = 24) of Natives and 53% (*n* = 35) of Caucasians, wished to skirt pandemic conversations, being bored or tired of them, with the rest staying neutral. Fourth, concerning whether students regarded pandemic dialogues as being relevant to their major or the coursework presented in any current class, 25% (*n* = 27) of students, 21.3% (*n* = 9) of Natives and 17% of Caucasians (*n* = 18), both agreed and wanted or had desired to discuss the pandemic for this reason. Contrastingly, 44.9% (*n* = 48) of students, 48.8% (*n* = 20) of Natives and 27.2% (*n* = 18) of Caucasians, viewed COVID-19 dialogues as extraneous to their major or coursework, with the remainder being neutral. Fifth, as an associated item, 30% (*n* = 32) of students, 26.8% (*n* = 11) of Natives and 30.3% (*n* = 21) of Caucasians, saw the pandemic as an important current event to consider in at least one current class. This left 30% (*n* = 32) of students, 48.8% (*n* = 20) of Natives and 18.2% (*n* = 12) of Caucasians, who reported the pandemic as being an inconsequential event to cover, with the rest declaring themselves neutral. Sixth, regardless of any potential privacy concerns, 43.9% (*n* = 47) of students, 48.8% (*n* = 20) of Natives and 40.9% (*n* = 27) of Caucasians, reported their willingness or past readiness to discuss the pandemic in at least one current class. Contrarily, 22% (*n* = 24) of students, 26.8% (*n* = 11) of Natives and 19.7% (*n* = 13) of Caucasians, did not wish to broach COVID-19 subjects due to privacy issues, while the remainder were neutral.

DISCUSSION

As the study established, within the pandemic, both Native and Caucasian students experienced 12 stressors associated with overarching stress categories involving their relationships, job, income, health and psychological factors, existential mindset, and academic status, with these following specific stressors from greatest to least: 1) socializing; 2) sleeping; 3) having a reduced income; 4) eating; 5) having a psychological condition, including depression or anxiety; 6) caring for a partner and/or child; 7) navigating a job conflict; 8) facing an existential dilemma; 9) managing a family member's injury/illness; 10) managing a personal injury/illness; 11) choosing a major/career; and 12) experiencing problems with a teacher. According to both national and regional pictures before and during the pandemic, it is devastating but perhaps unsurprising, given the lack of existing area resources, that Native, as well as Caucasian, students, suffered from a range of 12 stressors, with their stress rates for the first seven factors spanning from between almost 40% (*n* = 45) and 49% (*n* = 56) for Natives and nearly 30% (*n* = 34) and 45% (*n* = 51) for Caucasians. Yet, for the study, what is both unfortunate and perhaps even more startling is the student-reported lack of a teachers' greater concerted effort to initiate and lead pandemic dialogues with students, even as faculty ostensibly were navigating pandemic-associated conflicts of their own in

academia, as well as hypothetically elsewhere. Nevertheless, alongside the more than half of teachers' student-identified, lack of input and emphasis on pandemic issues in the classroom, only a small number of students, Native as well as Caucasian, wished to raise pandemic conversations in any of their courses either, despite this time frame being an unprecedented one historically. Sadly, as rationales for students' reticence to tackle pandemic subjects, perhaps some felt that conveying their potential pandemic stressors would demand too personal of a response or, by contrast, even be deemed inappropriate despite area traditions of respectful exchanges, especially for Natives, with any larger possibility for classroom dialogues being hampered by both faculty and students alike, even if students' greatest pandemic stressor was the need for socializing.

Compared with the study's university and its regional location, cross-country, during the pandemic, most students' coursework, jobs, and personal lives were disrupted similarly, a context causing many increased stresses, especially those navigating existing high-risk health and SES factors (see APA, 2020), with Native Americans ranked as a population at great risk for contracting COVID-19 (Wade, 2020). Indeed, according to Aucejo and colleagues (2020), located at a Southwest university, 35% of students were anxious about their physical health, others' health, and everyone's potentiality for contracting the virus, stressors, by association, linked with students' health factors and SES. Similarly, during the pandemic, for the current study, 29.8% (n = 34) of Natives and 24.6% (n = 28) of Caucasians suffered from the management of their own personal injury/illness, down 5.2% and 10.4%, respectively, from Aucejo's and others' study. Meanwhile, 32.5% (n = 37) of Natives and 23.7% (n = 27) of Caucasians also managed a family member's injury/illness, down 2.5% and 11.3%, respectively, from Aucejo's and others' study. Overall, the current study's stress rates for the health-oriented factors of both protecting oneself against existent morbidity factors and caring for others during the pandemic, including those who may have contracted COVID-19, are lower than those in Aucejo's and colleagues' study. Nonetheless, offsetting this difference, in the current study, 40.4% (n = 46) of Natives and 31.6% (n = 36) of Caucasians faced the conceivably similar, health-associated stressor of needing to care for a partner and/or child, including expectedly in the case of illness, and 49.1% (n = 56) of Natives and 44.7% (n = 51) of Caucasians also addressed the ostensibly health-related stressor of socializing with others, including fulfilling the potential need to address others' requisites. Socioeconomically, concerning the pandemic's impact on students, according to Wang's and colleagues' (2020) study, located at a Southwestern university, 20% of students were also bothered by financial and employment problems. Comparatively, in the current study, 46.5% (n = 53) of Natives and 34.2% (n = 39) of Caucasians experienced stress from a reduced income, up 26.5% and 14.2%, respectively, from Wang's and others' study, while 39.5% (n = 45) of Natives and 40.4% (n = 46) of Caucasians navigated stress from a job conflict, up 20% and 26%, respectively, from Wang's and others' study. As an arguable explanation for the current study's students' higher financial and employment stress rates, both studies are located in the Southeast, but the current university is situated in one of the country's lowest-income areas, a geographical factor affecting Native and Caucasian students alike, with Natives having some additional tribal assistance and networking opportunities.

Within the pandemic's bigger picture, at universities cross-country, according to Goldrick-Rab and colleagues (2020), approximately 83% of students experienced generalized anxiety. Likewise, in the Southwest, Wang's and colleagues' (2020) students also reported anxiety and psychologically related pandemic stressors: 38% were anxious, 85% observed sleeping changes, 48% were depressed, and 18% had suicidal ideation. Compared to the pandemic stressors that students in both Wang's and others' (2020) and Goldrick-Rab's and others' (2020) studies experienced, the current study's students suffered similarly from stress connected to their 1) sleeping; 2) eating; 3) managing a psychological condition, including anxiety or depression; and 4) dealing with existential questions, including suicidal ideation. First, linked to abnormal sleeping processes, 47.4% (n = 54) of Natives, down 37.6% from Goldrick-Rab's and others' study, and 31.6% (n = 36) of Caucasians, down from 53.4% from Goldrick-Rab's and others' study, suffered stress. Second, connected to eating, including the inability to procure food and eating too little or too much, 43% (n = 49) of Natives and 29.8% (n = 34) of Caucasians reported this as a concern. Third, in managing a psychological condition, including anxiety or depression, 43% (n = 49) of Natives and 34.2% (n = 39) of Caucasians experienced comparable stress rates in this larger category as Wang's and others' (2020) students. Specifically, Native students' stress rate from experiencing a psychological condition was 5% higher than that of Wang's and others' study's anxious students, but Native students' rate of having a psychological condition was 5% less than that of Wang's and others' depressed students. Meanwhile, Caucasian students' stress rate for a psychological condition was down 3.8% from that of Wang's and others' anxious students and down 10.3% from that of Wang's and others' depressed students. Fourth, in dealing with existential problems, 36% (n = 41) of Natives and 22.8% (n = 26) of Caucasians reported this as being a factor, including suicidal ideation, while 18% of Wang's and colleagues' students also had suicidal ideation. On an additional note, overall, during the pandemic, Native students also experienced greater psychological stressors than before as part of a pattern for Natives cross-country (see Hilleary, 2020).

Linked with pandemic stressors affecting students' health and psychological status, existential mindset, relationships, job, and income, current students also faced academic stressors, which they navigated amidst the campus's closure in order to slow the spread of COVID-19 beginning in March 2020, an event precipitating on-campus students' move out of the dorms to return home or go elsewhere, including becoming homeless; job and internship losses; and the shift to online classes, situations impacting students' educational access and persistence, including for Natives, as was the case nationally (see American Indian Science and Engineering Society, 2020). According to the APA (2020), cross-country, during the pandemic, almost 90% of students deemed that attending college was a stressor. Likewise, in the Southwest, for Wang and colleagues (2020), 74% of students could not pay attention to their courses, while for Aucejo and colleagues (2020), 12% of students switched majors, and 11% dropped classes, outcomes creating obstacles for faculty who teach, mentor, and advise students in achieving their goals. In the current study, 18.4% (n = 21) of Natives, up 6.4% from Aucejo's and others' students, and 9.6% (n = 11) of Caucasians, down 2.4% from Aucejo's and others' students, had difficulty choosing a major, while 13.2% (n = 15) of

Caucasians, down 2.2% from Aucejo's and colleagues' study, and 9.6% (*n* = 11) of Natives, also down 1.4% from Aucejo's and others' study, had issues with teachers. Thus, altogether, Wang's and colleagues' (2020) study, Aucejo's and others' (2020) study, and the current study highlight the similar types and levels of pandemic stressors that students faced, contributing to their often faltering academic persistence patterns. Largely, as a focus during the pandemic, university presidents declared that higher education's priority should be to address marginalized students' needs (Goldrick-Rab & colleagues, 2020), a plan of action the current study's university sought to undertake. Nonetheless, in students' past or present course enrollment within the pandemic's time frame, only 59.2% (*n* = 135) or over half had taken a single class where teachers referenced the pandemic beyond defining masking and reportage protocols, so students might investigate pandemic dialogues, as desired, via discussions, readings, and/or writing assignments, including those with open topics. Indeed, between 39.5% (*n* = 45) and 49.1% (*n* = 56) of Natives and 29.8% (*n* = 34) and 44.7% (*n* = 51) of Caucasians experienced the following seven pandemic stressors arguably influencing their academic behavior, whether or not faculty were aware of this context: 1) socializing or connecting with others, including teachers, holding a respected local profession, and peers, being integral to students' learning community participation; 2) sleeping, including to engage properly in students' coursework; 3) earning an adequate income, including to pay for college; 4) eating; 5) managing a psychological condition; 6) caring for a partner and/or child; and 7) navigating a job conflict. As the eighth stressor for Natives and the tenth for Caucasians, students also suffered existentially regarding their life's purpose, with 36% (*n* = 41) of Natives, up 7.9%, with a change rate of 28.1% (*n* = 9), and 22.8% (*n* = 26) of Caucasians, up 7%, with a change rate of 44.3% (*n* = 8), experiencing this factor. Because for the study, almost half of students, Native and Caucasian, suffered one or more stressors linked to their health and psychological factors, existential mindset, relationships, job, and income, it was difficult conceivably for some to persist, let alone formulate a path toward matriculation and their desired career. Indeed, during the pandemic, the university's enrollment dove, with the greatest number of students dropping and failing their classes, and many not returning, in its recorded history.

In the national state-of-affairs, people feared contracting COVID-19 but also attempted to ignore the virus, as they worried about the pandemic's possible effects upon themselves and their families, including their health and lives (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020). Relatedly, for the current study, it must be conceded that, according to students, over half of teachers chose not to foster or implement any pandemic conversations in their curriculum, including in minor ways, despite the vibrant university culture, especially for Native students, of viewing teachers as local leaders, sharing individual and group stories and broadcasting important events, promoting all local ethnic/racial populations, and locating resources for others before considering oneself. Nevertheless, during the pandemic, a monumental moment, many students, on their side, also wished to forgo broaching pandemic matters in the classroom or were neutral in their stance about this potentiality, even if nearly half of all students experienced the need for socializing or group engagement as their top stressor. Again, only 21.9% (*n* = 50) of Natives and 19.3% (*n* = 44) of Caucasians wished to discuss pandemic themes, including

speaking or writing about them, in any of their classes, and only this same number of students actually did so in any course. Contrastingly, 21.9% (*n* = 50) of Natives and 19.3% (*n* = 44) of Caucasians reported they had not participated in any pandemic discourses in their classes and had not wished to either, an outcome reflecting the thought processes of some in society who demonstrated an evasion to contemplating the pandemic's effects despite the damage wrought (see Pfefferbaum& North, 2020). Nonetheless, as a potential bright spot, 18.9% (*n* = 43) of Natives and 21.9% (*n* = 50) of Caucasians remained neutral in their stance regarding the question of whether they wished to discuss the pandemic in at least one course, an outcome providing some room for teachers to create a more uplifting environment for hesitant students who might share their pandemic experiences under certain circumstances. Notably, of those rationales that the subpopulation of 107 students optionally reported concerning their willingness to converse about the pandemic in one or more classes, 43.9% (*n* = 47) had wished to discuss it despite potential privacy concerns; 30% (*n* = 32) believed the pandemic was an important current event to cover; 25% (*n* = 27) thought pandemic themes were relevant to their major or the coursework; 18.7% (*n* = 20) appreciated the ability to analyze the pandemic's impact on themselves and/or their family; 18.7% (*n* = 20) were interested in pandemic topics generally; and 15.9% (*n* = 17) felt their opinion about pandemic issues would be valued in a classroom setting, with students' overall responses highlighting the wider potential for faculty to foster support for students' expression of their identities associated with the pandemic in the classroom. Indeed, without both teachers and students raising dialogues about obstacles that the pandemic, like other epic disasters, has generated, some students might assume that they are alone in addressing their stressors, including not only those affecting their academic path but also those impacting potentially all aspects of their background. Surprisingly, students' greatest reason for avoiding pandemic subjects did not revolve around privacy concerns as might be expected. Instead, students' largest stressor, socializing, was linked to their desire to be listened to and heard, including conceivably in a classroom environment.

Significantly, during an epic crisis, such as the current pandemic, it is teachers' job not only to attend to and assist students in identifying and attaining their academic goals but also, arguably, to aid them in bridging the gap between their academic and greater health, relational, and economic needs by pointing students not only to campus services but also to the potential outside community resources they may require. Particularly in the study's region, in the past, many students, both Native and Caucasian, have faced stressors linked to continuing elements of their marginalized ethnic/racial background, rural location, and low SES as part of the area's larger ongoing history (see Hembrough, 2019). Despite the unknown aspects associated with any colossal crisis, including that of the COVID-19 pandemic, over which most media coverage has been simplistic, more faculty, especially those teaching in remote course formats, must engender a continuing dialogue with students about events of local, national, and global impact, so that students can engage in analyzing and benefiting from communicating their related ideas and experiences while also listening to peers' portrayals of their own settings and obstacles. For Chu (2020), during the pandemic, faculty who promoted students' participation in strong peer relationships, including via discussions and assignments, supported their

students in feeling less anxiety, as well as having a greater sense of closeness with peers than many students had possessed with anyone else beyond family members during this time period. More generally, many students like to hold dialogues about controversial subjects, including those linked to diversity and social justice, and they learn at higher levels through such discourses (Jones & Renfrow, 2018), while students in classes where diverging beliefs are raised possess a better capacity to tackle current happenings and have larger community and political participation rates (Wilkerson, 2017), all outcomes that could empower students, such as those navigating the pandemic, in exploring, addressing, and possibly alleviating their stressors.

In the end, teachers should be aware that conceivable obstacles exist in asking students to participate in classroom discussions and coursework referencing epic crises, such as the current pandemic, yet such potential conflicts should not prevent teachers from attempting to raise pandemic matters with their students, including those needing potential assistance not only with their academic but also their relational, economic, and personal matters. Foremost, in engineering conversations and coursework about possibly stressful matters, such as the pandemic, teachers should be respectful of their students by presenting them with neutrally worded questions and assignments prompting them to choose their specific subject matter and also engendering an open presentation of ideas (see Wilkerson, 2017). Of course, according to Webb-Sunderhaus (2016), any time teachers assign tasks where students may decide to share their backgrounds, the quandary as to how faculty, classmates, and the public might react could arise. Conceivably, according to Molloy (2016), students who present painful and private information could suffer loss in conveying it, as opposed to communicating their experiences in a manner promoting healing and generating change in their locale. Moreover, according to Carello and Bulter (2014), one must also remember that most faculty have not received clinical training in dealing with traumatic disclosures, and by prompting students to share their personal stories, teachers may cause them to reexperience their trauma instead of gaining validation and healing. Nonetheless, for Molloy (2016), one path for faculty to support students in sharing their identities while circumventing the disclosure of potentially private information is to request that students portray their community's responses to a larger social event. For example, utilizing Molloy's framework, during the pandemic, instead of focusing on personal details surrounding students' own pandemic encounters, they could examine and depict their locale's larger connected experiences and reactions to the pandemic, including the option for relaying stories about stressors that an entire group has faced. For Native students, the benefits of such a communally focused assignment are many, including participation in dialogues depicting their tribal identity, inclusion within a community of learners addressing regional concerns by sharing them with others in order to uphold those in crisis, and the production of tribal narratives about overcoming hardships in perilous times, such as currently.

LIMITATIONS, DIRECTIONS AND CONCLUSION

During the pandemic, between almost 40% (n = 45) and 49% (n = 56) of Natives and almost 30% (n = 34) and 45% (n = 51) of Caucasians reported suffering seven main

stressors connected with their ability to socialize, sleep, earn an income, eat, manage a psychological condition, care for a partner and/or child, and navigate a job conflict. Nonetheless, only about 22% (n = 50) of Natives and just over 19% (n = 44) of Caucasians wished to cover pandemic topics in any of their classes, even if doing so might have provided them or peers with information about resources. Likewise, less than half or almost 41% (n = 93) of students had taken at a class where a teacher offered discussions, readings, and/or writings in which students could investigate the pandemic if desired, a context that faculty must consider addressing, especially in light of future scenarios where students might also wish to tackle epic occurrences and concerns. As a study limitation, the authors did not ask students to identify regional or national events along the pandemic's larger timeline or continuum to which they reacted with greater, the same, or lesser stress than previously as influencing their stress levels. Nevertheless, future studies could do so. Additionally, as a future direction, researchers might investigate to the extent to which area Native, rural, or marginalized ethnic/racial minority, geographically disadvantaged, and/or low SES students might prefer to discuss themselves and their backgrounds in connection with other controversial and monumental events as being topics of interest beyond that of the current pandemic.

Significantly, even before the pandemic, many Native Americans students suffered from intergenerational trauma as a problem affecting every aspect of their lives, including their university matriculation rates (Trammell, 2020). In terms of the picture drawn, it is important for faculty to evaluate how they can assist their own Native, rural, or similarly marginalized ethnic/racial minority, geographically disadvantaged, and/or low SES students during the pandemic, including by valuing their individual and group identities and addressing not only students' academic but also their greater personal and community needs in order to foster a supportive setting where students discussing diverse topics can feel uplifted. Regionally, most Native students yearn to have their identity, culture, and ideology not merely acknowledged but also celebrated by their university, and in deciding which institution to attend, they are concerned with the teachers, student population, and academic environment. Ostensibly, Native students' expectations of systems inviting discourse, acceptance, and unity are ones that many peripheralized students may also share, with many students' sense of isolation having only grown during the pandemic, a time when some students believe their voices have gone unheard (see Liu et al., 2020). Significantly, regional Native students who interact regularly with faculty and students, including those of their race and other races, experience a greater feeling of belonging in college (Hembrough, 2019), an outcome worthy of consideration within the pandemic as being a period when students may be or feel separated from teachers, classmates, friends, and even family, with many students left to navigate their academic and greater worlds alone, online, and remotely, with fewer opportunities for face-to-face engagement and socialization than existed before.

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