

## **Proposal Summary.**

### **Title**

Examining the Relational Space of Native Faculty Members in Higher Education

### **Abstract**

Currently, research on Native faculty experiences emphasizes the challenges of being a faculty member. Native faculty members are often underrepresented. This qualitative research study examines the experiences of 11 Native women faculty members within higher education. Conducting and analyzing the interviews' findings reveal a deeper insight into Native faculty experiences.

### **Proposal Text**

#### Objectives

This study demonstrates the complexities and nuances of faculty roles for Native American/Indigenous faculty in U.S. higher education, further referred to as Native faculty. Faculty roles are often framed through three primary roles: teaching, research, service, or TRS (O'Meara et al., 2008; Rosser & Tobata, 2010). Existing research includes barriers and access to institutions, road maps to tenure, challenges between family and institutional obligations as well as the ways Native faculty resist by overcoming and facing some of those challenges (Brayboy et al., 2012; Fox, 2005, 2008; Shotton, 2018a; 2018b). Previous research falls short of interrogating the value systems that inform how the higher education system creates and replicates the teaching, research, and service paradigm. For the TRS paradigm, each component encompasses several activities that vary within similar institutional types. They positively or negatively influence faculty productivity and performance. (Rosser & Tabata, 2010). The lack of interrogation of the TRS paradigm means Native faculty are then expected to conform to the TRS paradigm in order to remain faculty members through institutional standards.

The following two research questions guide this study:

1. How do Native faculty members describe and make meaning of their [faculty] roles in higher education?
2. How do Native faculty members describe the values informing their faculty roles?

#### Theoretical and Methodological Framing

I used a critical Indigenous qualitative methodology rooted in a (my) Diné (Navajo) understanding and way of life. Theoretically, I employ *Ké*, a Diné word that describes relationality (Denetdale, 2015; Maryboy et al., 2020) and is at the core of how we begin to develop principles and values to live by and how we as human beings make sense of the world. The full manuscript will discuss how Diné philosophy guides this study and the values that articulate the Navajo ways of being, which also align with the experience and values of Native faculty members who took part in this study. A key part of the

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philosophy is the Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hózhó. This concept was explained to me as our Diné way of focusing on the well-being of ourselves, all living entities, and non-living entities. I was taught that Hózhó is part of the beauty and balance inherent in communicating and working collectively as Diné community members.

Methodologically, I oriented my approach to align with Indigenous Storywork principles (Archibald, 2008; Tachine, 2022). The Indigenous philosophy from these authors helped to assess and understand Native faculty member narratives. Indigenous Storywork frames the principles that further the conversation of how we begin understanding Native faculty experiences. Storywork legitimizes Indigenous storytelling methods and stories themselves in research (Archibald, 2008). The outcome of Storywork research included the creation of an Indigenous theoretical and pedagogical framing with seven principles: respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy (Archibald, 2008; Archibald et al., 2019).

### Relevant Literature

For this study, I draw upon two main themes in the literature: 1) Value systems informing faculty experiences and 2) Faculty experiences, with an emphasis on BIPOC faculty literature.

**Value Systems Informing Faculty Experience.** Higher educational institutions center their values on individualism and meritocracy, which fall into distinctive teaching, research, and service categories. Arguably, these distinct categories limit our understanding of how faculty are measured and supported in terms of their faculty roles. When drawing from the growing body of research on how settler colonialism informs all facets of higher education (Stein, 2022), we can begin to critically examine aspects of the institutional structures and the external forces outside the institution that influence how faculty roles are shaped. By not addressing how settler colonialism informs value systems, research that examines faculty roles will continue to be conducted with an underlying individualistic tone, placing the institution's success at the center.

**Literature Exploring Native Faculty Experiences.** Relationality, as a critical value of Indigenous knowledge systems, can reframe the possibilities of faculty roles. Relationality allows us the space to think about other values and framing that could contribute to understanding and making higher education more accessible and relevant to faculty. In the full manuscript, I explore how existing literature demonstrates the ways faculty are asserting their values systems to navigate their faculty roles. What is notably missing in this literature is how institutions are not shifting their values systems to best support faculty. While this study focuses on Native faculty, I draw from Black and faculty of color literature to emphasize that large swaths of historically marginalized groups are navigating systems not meant for them to thrive.

### Methods: Data Sources, Data Collection & Analysis

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This is an Indigenous qualitative study attempting to employ decolonizing methods while simultaneously acknowledging the use of multiple non-Indigenous research methods (Shotton, 2008; Williams, 2012). The stories used in this study was through interviews with eleven self-identified Native faculty members currently working at institutions in New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, and Utah. I engaged with each faculty member at least three times, twice through one-on-one interviews (60-90 minutes) and once through a focus group with other Native faculty (60-90 minutes). All interviews and focus groups were held via Zoom platform. For analysis, I used open coding by grouping the codes that make more sense and the quotations that fit with these codes. Several of the NVivo codes threaded together to make a parent code, and from them, sub-codes were created that helped guide my deepening of Native faculty member experiences. Reflecting, notetaking, and conducting several rounds of storying analysis to draw upon the themes and engage the stories respectfully were all a part of the storying approach analysis and process.

## Overview of Findings

The findings are divided into two main parts. The first part focuses on the profiles of the collaborators. In this part, I describe how the Native faculty members choose their faculty pathway at different times in their lives. Through their stories, there is a relational aspect of how they engage their teaching, research, and service components, although these areas vary depending on their faculty lines.

In the full paper, I will highlight three Native faculty profiles to provide context for the first part of the findings. For the purposes of this proposal, I will highlight one profile.

Cora (all collaborator names are pseudonyms) is from a southwest tribal nation and grew up on her reservation. Cora speaks her Native tongue, which is useful when engaging with her Native community members and her research endeavors. Cora values family and several mentors who have significantly impacted her educational and professional pathway. She provides service through reciprocal relationships with her work, the Native families, and the institutional leaders who support the work.

Throughout these initial interviews, I learned that family ties and their critics were their biggest motivators, those entities that provided constant energy and shared a platform to engage in the most meaningful of conversations. These motivations helped me identify the values that were informing their meaning-making and inform how part two findings are presented.

Part two consists of revealing deeper themes explored throughout all three interviews. These findings showed how the Native faculty negotiated the teaching, research, and service components. I briefly highlight all the subthemes that fall under teaching, research, and service to demonstrate the depth of analysis within the findings.

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The first theme, Intertwined Nature of Service, contextualizes service as a dynamic context framed culture, collectivism and clanship, and upholding institutional responsibility. Service as a reflection of collectivism and clanship is highlighted. Crazy Fire Fly states:

I'm really; I guess you can say, a constructivist perspective at heart because I really honestly believe that I really need you to do that thing that you were given, but I need to be able to do the thing that I was given, and I'm going to build my world in that way. I believe that when you treat your world that way, and you treat your people that way, the things like respect and equity and humor and humility, and all of those things fall into place because you're living and working and breathing and dancing and loving with your equals.

Crazy Fire Fly shares how she finds herself intentional with naming how she needs the larger collective of communities to be recognized and have a role and responsibility to fulfill to be a part of the larger collective.

The second theme, Redefining the Research Agenda, describes research as affirming and strengthening one's responsibility, whether that be with four-legged relatives (beyond human) or practicing cultural protocols while resisting settler-colonial research. June states:

"I would say more recently; I thought a lot about working with my horse. I trained my horse to trail ride and stuff. I trained her how to be ridden. That was very similar to teaching because I'm like, "I don't really want to force you to do this. I don't want it to be this institutional training mechanism of you work for me, and you have to be a productive horse in society." That wasn't my vibe; it was more relational. A lot of the stuff that I taught her because she was a wild mustang, was just skills to help her survive in a human world, like leading, getting groomed, getting your feet cleaned, and all those kinds of things."

This example shows how research interweaves with teaching. These four-legged spirits are central to her indigeneity and her family. June has embraced wanting to make connections with horses in her teaching and her research.

The third theme derived is Redefining One's Teaching Philosophy, which highlights teaching as filling the void, honoring ancestral ties and grandparents in teaching, and strengthening Native identity and representation in and beyond the classroom, and teaching beyond the classroom. Fannie states:

"When we ignore certain stories, that is also — It's not an innocent decision to make; that's a decision that justifies our current power structure, and it intends to maintain that power structure indefinitely into the future. When you tell a different history, really what you're trying to do or what you can do by remembering these histories that aren't often told, or remembered, or given any era, is you're saying, "This power structure doesn't

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actually work for everyone. Maybe we shouldn't oppress people and assume that their oppression is justified because they haven't contributed anything to our country."

Fannie shares how she feels responsible for explaining the complicated nature of how history, the present, and the future connect and how the decision as a teacher can perpetuate a settler-colonial history or reimagine the history of Native contributions that are an integral part of the reality of history and today. Fannie explains to students that they can own agency and power.

### Significance

By adding nuance to the TRS paradigm, diverse faculty experiences, particularly Native faculty, can further inform how higher education institutions conceptualize, measure, assess, and structure faculty roles within their institutions. Institutions should be held responsible for shifting their approaches toward Native faculty to be more inclusive of their cultural values, which in turn would decrease the harm that Native faculty experience and increase the representation of Native faculty voices and ideas on how to strengthen areas within their ways of engaging with students, faculty colleagues, and staff (Minthorn & Shotton, 2018; Nelson, 2015; Tachine, 2015; Youngbull, 2017).

Three implications will be noted in this section to convey the need to recognize Native faculty members' contributions within higher education and several recommendations for institutions to consider seriously. The first implication addresses the need to build infrastructure within institutions that support pathways for New Native faculty members. The recommendation would be that institutions look toward external partnerships for Native faculty. The second implication is to recognize the self-determined pathways of Native faculty members. The recommendation is to have institutions reevaluate the faculty load to honor their work distribution. The third implication highlights the relationships Native faculty have with settler-colonial tendencies. The recommendation is for institutional leaders to travel outside their institutions and mindfully build relationships in areas where Native communities reside.

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