
This paper will report on the results of a qualitative case study of a tribal college library’s preservation of tribal languages and cultures through its special collections conducted by the researcher from October 2009 until January 2010. Field data consists of a phone interview with the institution’s library director on October 2, 2009. The study seeks to explore the role of special collections at tribal college libraries in preserving and promoting still-living tribal languages and such cultural phenomena as oral literature, indigenous knowledge, and tribal history. The study attempts to provide, in its in-depth study of a representative institution, an overview of the work of TCU libraries’ in preserving and promoting tribal languages and cultures through Native American language and cultural collections. Specifically, it seeks to address staff members’ development of collections, community-based support for and use of special collections, and institutional collection development policies. The study also serves as one of the first qualitative studies of a tribal college library’s special collections conducted in the library and information science field.

Headings:

Tribal libraries

College and university libraries/Services to Native Americans

Community college libraries/Services to Native Americans

Special collections/Native Americans

Native Americans/book collection
THE ROLE OF TRIBAL COLLEGE LIBRARY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS IN TRIBAL LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL PRESERVATION: A DESCRIPTIVE CASE STUDY

by

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Introduction

Tribal colleges and universities (TCUs) are unique institutions within the field of higher education, providing access to associate’s, baccalaureate, and master’s degree programs for Native American students living on extremely rural, economically-depressed reservations. Without TCUs, most of these students would not have the opportunity to attain an education beyond the high school level, due to both large geographic distance from institutions of higher education and great financial need. Tribal colleges offer a quality, regionally-accredited academic curriculum infused with aspects of traditional tribal culture and respect for traditional tribal worldviews. Most are two-year community colleges, offering vocational programs geared towards fulfilling needs in the reservation economy, as well as academic preparation for transfer to four-year colleges and universities. Several offer baccalaureate degrees and two have master’s programs. Most operate on extremely limited budgets, especially when compared to macro-culture institutions. There are currently thirty-six tribal colleges1, located primarily in the western and mid-western United States, serving over 30,000 students representing more than 250 federally-recognized tribes. Most tribal college attendees are non-

1American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC). “About AIHEC.” Web. 26 March 2010. <http://www.aihec.org/about/index.cfm> This figure refers to TCUs in the United States. Red Crow Community College, located in Cardston, Alberta, Canada is also a member of AIHEC, but is excluded from this study because of the focus on TCUs in the United States.
traditional students over the age of 24 with dependents to care for and 85% of them were living at or below the national poverty level in 2008\(^2\). According to the American Indian College Fund’s 2008 documentary, “Hope on the Rez,” the typical tribal college student is “a single mother responsible for at least two family members.” Given the unique cultural, socio-economic, and socio-geographic characteristics of the reservation and off-reservation communities which tribal colleges and universities serve, the libraries that are attached to these institutions are tasked with special missions in providing support for academic curricula, in preserving tribal culture, and in serving the wider public. They often fill a dual role both as academic libraries supporting the overarching college or university curriculum and as public libraries striving to meet the educational, vocational, and cultural needs of the larger reservation community. Despite the enormous impact they have on their communities, TCU libraries have received relatively little attention in the library and information science literature. In particular, very few qualitative studies of these institutions have been conducted. There is a great need within the professional research literature for further study of these incredibly unique American libraries.

This study focuses on the role tribal college libraries play in tribal language and cultural preservation through on-site special collections, including archives and library website databases. It is a subject which has only briefly been touched upon in previous literature (Metoyer-Duran 1991, 1992, Patterson and Taylor 1996, Biggs 2000, Dilevko and Gottlieb 2002, 2004), but never fully studied. In previous studies special collections have served merely as a small component in an ensemble of information presented in general studies of TCU libraries as a whole, rather than as a singular topic meriting in-

depth research. This study seeks to explore how special collections at a single TCU institution are being used for preserving tribal languages and cultures, the role of staff members in developing these collections, current collection development policies which define special collection parameters, and how library patrons are using special collections in relation to tribal language survival and cultural preservation. Thus, the purpose of the study is to elucidate previously unsolicited information regarding special collection use and development at a single TCU library in the context of tribal language and cultural preservation in order to fill a large gap in the current knowledge of the subject in the library and information science field. It is also the hope and the intent of the researcher that publication of the study will bring greater cognizance of the socio-economic, socio-cultural, and political issues tribal college and university libraries face to the wider library and information science professional community and thus engender greater financial and professional support of these unique institutions.

**Literature Review**

As previously mentioned, scholarship within the library and information science field on tribal college libraries is extremely limited and TCU special collections have never been fully studied. While passing mention of tribal college libraries’ focus on developing special collections in tribe-specific language and cultural materials and broader Native American subject collections is present in several articles that have appeared over a broad time span—chiefly, Metoyer-Duran (1991), Patterson and Taylor (1996), Biggs (2000), and Dilevko and Gottlieb (2002, 2004)—, a full study of this unique mission of tribal college libraries does not appear to have ever been mounted.
Thus, the relevant literature which this study draws upon includes papers which reveal valuable contextual information—such as budgetary constraints, staffing shortages, the political context of tribal college administrations and tribal governments, inadequate library facilities, the cultural worldview of tribal communities, and the overwhelming poverty of many of the reservation communities and tribal college students TCU libraries serve—, which has an enormous impact on how these libraries develop their special collections, rather than focusing on the actual special collections.

Cheryl Metoyer-Duran’s “The Role of Libraries in American Indian Tribal College Development” (1991) is the first (qualitative) study of tribal college libraries by a library and information science professional and utilizes the Carnegie Special Report, *Tribal Colleges: Shaping the Future of Native America*, as a departure point. The Carnegie study, as Metoyer-Duran reports, developed three goals unique to TCU institutions that it proposed were in need of immediate addressal in the research literature: “(1) preserving and communicating traditional culture; (2) enhancing economic opportunity within the reservation community; and (3) improving health care at the community level through support or participation in alcohol and drug abuse programs” (as cited in Metoyer-Duran, 1991, p. 396). Metoyer-Duran notes the preservation and promotion of tribal culture as an institutional mandate of TCUs, particularly in light of the history of forced assimilation of Native American peoples into Euro-American culture through Christian missionary- and federal government-controlled education and the government-sanctioned destruction of Native cultures which accompanied it. She hypothesizes that TCU libraries which contain an archive may witness greater use of special collections by patrons than TCU libraries which do not have an archive. However,
as her hypothesis has yet to be tested in an empirical study, it remains to this date an unsubstantiated musing. Rather, what is important about Metoyer-Duran’s groundbreaking study, is that it is the first publication in the library and information science field to explore the subject of tribal college libraries. Beyond that veritable distinction, it is also the first to note the unique importance of tribal cultural preservation at TCU libraries.

Metoyer-Duran expanded her research with tribal college libraries in 1992 by conducting a focus group, followed up by personal interviews with TCU presidents, in a study entitled “Tribal Community College Libraries: Perceptions of the College Presidents.” Here, Metoyer-Duran considers TCU presidents’ visions of the future for their institutions and how these visions relate to the libraries attached to them. Again, the special emphasis on the preservation and promotion of traditional tribal culture through the curricula of tribal college institutions and the concomitant mandate for developing tribe- and Native American-focused special collections and archives in tribal college libraries is reiterated. One critique of the study worth noting, however, is the potential for political conflict between TCU administration—including institutional presidents—, and TCU library directors as a result of differing visions, viewpoints, expertise, and experience. Metoyer-Duran fails to take this into account in her study. The problem is a significant one, as cited in Dilevko and Gottlieb (2002), which can greatly impinge upon the ability of library staff to develop special collections in a manner they feel to be appropriate given the tribal college context.
Lotsee Patterson and Rhonda Harris Taylor’s 1996 study, “Tribally-controlled community college libraries: A paradigm for survival,” used a mail survey of tribal college library administrators at all of the 24 then-recognized tribal community colleges in an effort to derive what they considered to be the fundamental characteristics of these institutions. The survey included questions about “budget, personnel, service population, advisory committees, collections, facilities, services, networking, and computer utilization” (Patterson and Taylor, 1996, p. 317) and garnered a response rate of 66.66% (16 individuals). Based upon these survey results, the study concluded that tribal college libraries evinced characteristics of both a small academic library and a small public library, evidence of the unique dual role TCU libraries often play. Patterson and Taylor’s section on collections is of especial, but all too briefly articulated, importance, for it mentions the presence of and commitment to the development of tribal- and Native-focused special collections on the part of tribal college administrators. It also points out the lacuna of evidence concerning the archival functions of library staff members.

Bonnie Biggs’ loosely-organized, qualitative study of tribal colleges in “Tribal libraries: And still they rise” (2000) is based upon her own field site visits to “tribal libraries”—a broad term which in her paper encompasses both TCUs and tribally-run public libraries—in Oklahoma and New Mexico (including Dinai [sic] Navajo Community College) to observe how tribal values were being infused into the architectural, social, and collecting structure of tribal libraries, with particular regard to special collections. She also sought to study how these libraries were identifying sources of tribal oral traditions in their local community, with an eye towards exporting quality ideas to Biggs’ native San Diego County tribal libraries. One quite significant aspect of
Biggs’ paper for the current study is her representation of the cultural and dialectical atmosphere of tribal libraries, which is quite distinct from the atmosphere typified in non-tribal, mainstream “macroculture” libraries: “In every case,” Biggs writes of her experiences during the site visits, “the tribal library served as a social gathering place. The sacred hushed environment and intellectual façade of a macroculture library is not to be found in a tribal library. This is not to say that patrons are not seeking information, but often this is a secondary purpose. Every library we visited had a group of children hanging out or interacting with the library staff, seniors passing the time in conversation with others or with library staff, and casual visitors who were more interested in the information within the people than within the books” (Biggs, 2000, p. 21-22). This socio-cultural context can have profound implications for how tribal college libraries gather and collect special collections materials, such as audio recordings of interviews with tribal elders for oral history projects, the multi-generational audience TCU libraries develop their collections for, and the use of special collections by patrons. Further, Biggs’ discussion of tribal libraries’ emphasis on cultural preservation, such as the various formats cultural materials are collected in (print, non-print, audio, electronic, etc.), children’s literature written for Native American readers, and archival collections greatly informs this researcher’s study.

Dilevko and Gottlieb’s study of the work life of tribal college library staff, “Making a difference in their own way: The role of library directors and non-directorial staff at tribal college libraries” (2002), sought to examine “the different viewpoints of library directors and non-directors about their jobs at tribal colleges…[which] may be useful in developing successful recruitment and retention strategies for tribal college
library staff” (Dilevko and Gottlieb, 2002, p. 306). A survey comprised of work-related questions was sent out in print form and e-mail attachment to 81 staff members at tribal college libraries, with a return rate of 41.3%. The study’s results provide great insight into the joys and frustrations associated with staff positions at tribal college libraries. They also provide a picture of the unique political, cultural, and social context of TCU libraries and the reservation communities in which they operate. Dilevko and Gottlieb summarize their most important findings in the conclusion section:

In general, “existing ties” to a particular trib[e], tribal community, or previous employment at a tribal college was the main reason that library directors took their current jobs. Although directors mentioned the desire for personal growth and the achievement of personal goals as an important factor in their decision, this factor was not as important to them as it was to non-directors, for whom ‘personal growth/goals’ was the single most important factor in deciding to work [at] a tribal college…After assuming their positions, two-thirds of library directors and just over half of non-directors noted that the reality of their job fell short of their expectations…For directors and non-directors, this was chiefly because of the unexpected range of job responsibilities, financial and infrastructure constraints, and the negative influence of tribal politics and college administrators…Non-directors, however, looked more positively upon unexpected job duties because such duties allowed them to develop new skills and grow professionally (Dilevko and Gottlieb, 2002, p. 317-318).
Perhaps the most important information which can be taken from the study is the political, budgetary, and infrastructure context in which tribal college libraries operate, which can have a crucial and often circumscribing effect on the ability of tribal college libraries to fulfill their unique missions, including the preservation of tribal languages and cultures. It is an important factor which is taken into consideration throughout this study and must be also for any future studies of TCU libraries.

Dilevko and Gottlieb expound further upon their 2002 findings in a 2004 study, “Working at tribal college and university libraries: A portrait.” Here, they focus entirely on the daily joys and frustrations which respondents described facing in their jobs, as well as participants’ motivations for remaining in, or choosing to leave, their current tribal college library positions. Several aspects of the portrait they paint are of particular relevance: One is the finding that eight respondents “found that the library’s Native American or tribal collection in particular garnered praise” (Dilevko and Gottlieb, 2004, p. 11), an indication of the excellence of at least some tribal college libraries’ tribal and Native American special collections. Another is an expansive, detailed discussion of budget constraints, which can significantly impede a library’s ability to develop its special collections, as well as other resources: Respondents were asked what they would do if their library received a grant of $250,000:

“Eighteen individuals wanted to use the theoretical funds for collection development, citing particular needs in the reference and children’s collections. Seventeen people would use the funds for new computers, online databases, and online cataloging services…While eighteen respondents allocated funds for
general collection development, only eight did so for Native American/tribal collection development. Some of the ideas mentioned here were oral history projects and digitization of existing archival holdings. This discrepancy might reflect the fact that tribal college libraries simultaneously function as tribal archives and therefore emphasize the collection and preservation of original tribal materials, as well as the acquisition of relevant books and journals about particular tribes. Tribal collections within these libraries might therefore be more complete than general collections. This notion is supported by the high number of compliments paid to the libraries’ tribal collections and the low number of complaints about these collections” (Dilevko and Gottlieb, 2004, p.14)

The 2004 Dilevko and Gottlieb discussion of their 2002 study provides, perhaps more than any other study in print, a portrait of the severely limited budgets which TCU libraries must somehow operate with in order to fulfill their mandates. It also provides a glimpse of the often inadequate building facilities and/or furnishing provided to TCU libraries. Despite overwhelming financial and socio-economic limitations, TCU libraries appear to be succeeding in the fulfillment of their mandates, particularly with respect to tribal special collections. The 2004 Dilevko and Gottlieb study is a testament to the dedication, perseverance, and passion of many tribal college librarians and library staff in supporting tribal college students, faculty, and staff, as well as tribal community members.

The American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), a national consortium of all 36 accredited tribal colleges and universities, in collaboration with the
Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) and the American Indian College Fund (AICF), published “The Path of Many Journeys—The Benefits of Higher Education for Native People and Communities” in February 2007. It is a florid critique of the socioeconomic, historical, cultural, and geographic factors contributing to the poverty cycle in many Native communities, as well as providing one of the most up-to-date pictures of TCU finances. It first notes the unique funding situation TCUs find themselves in because of the location of most institutions on federal trust territory: reservations. “States have no obligation to provide funding for TCUs because of their location on federal trust territory. At the same time, the federal trust territory status prevents the levying of local property taxes, which are often used to support community colleges elsewhere in the United States” (IHEP, AIHEC, and AICF, 2007, p. 47). As a result, TCUs are dependent upon the federal government for the majority of their funding. The federal government has an obligation to fund TCUs as a result of the treaty obligations it entered into with various sovereign tribes, beginning in the 18th century. The most critical source of federal funding for most TCUs is the Tribally Controlled College or University Assistance Act (TCCUAA) of 1978. The document describes several means through which funding is distributed in the TCCUAA: 1) the Indian Student Count (ISC), a formula predicated on the actual number of American Indian students enrolled at a TCU, through which funds are distributed to 26 of the TCUs; 2) core operation funding for Diné College, the first tribally-controlled college; 3) “funds to eligible institutions to increase their self-sufficiency by improving and strengthening academic quality, institutional management, and fiscal stability” (IHEP, AIHEC, and

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3 Note that no funds are allocated for non-Native students enrolled at these institutions, who comprise 20% of the student body across TCUs.
AICF, 2007, p. 48); 4) local development project funding; and 5) funds for facilities renovation and technical assistance. Indian Student Count funding is authorized at $6,000 per student, for a total of $40 million. However, in 2005, total TCCUAA appropriations funding per Indian student stood at $4,447, well below the authorized total. When inflation is taken into account, appropriations have actually decreased by almost 30% since 1981.

In addition to TCCUAA, 29 TCUs were awarded land-grant status in 1994, which opened up funding for agricultural-related research. Most TCUs “receive funding from Title III under the Higher Education Act’s Aid for Institutional Development Program. Finally, specific tribal colleges may receive minimal funding from other sources, including state block grant programs for adult education; the Department of Education[’s] Minority Science and Engineering Improvement Program; Environmental Education Grants through the Environmental Protection Agency; and rural development grants through the U.S. Department of Agriculture” (IHEP, AIHEC, and AICF, 2007, p. 49).

Also of important note is the fact that TCUs which are administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) do not receive funding through TCCUAA. In summary, while all TCUs receive some form of federal funding (and some receive state or other funding), the amount is usually not enough to meet the needs of TCU students, many of whom come from impoverished socioeconomic backgrounds.

Moving beyond TCU finances, “The Path of Many Journeys—The Benefits of Higher Education for Native People and Communities” also paints a complex portrait of the socioeconomic, cultural, historical, geographic, and health risk factors which
contribute to the poverty cycle in many Native communities and have a profound impact on students’ success or failure in higher education. “American Indians, especially those who live on reservations, are among the poorest in the country. In 1999, 26 percent of the American Indian/Alaska Native population lived below the official poverty level, compared with 12 percent of the total population. Factors such as geographic isolation, limited opportunities for upward mobility in rural areas and on reservations, and low labor force participation rates contribute to a continuous poverty cycle among American Indians. This poverty is often accompanied by a range of social problems—juries and violence, depression, substance abuse, inadequate health care and prenatal health care, unhealthy or insufficient diets, and high rates of diabetes—that can greatly affect the ability and desire to pursue education” (IHEP, AIHEC, and AICF, 2007, p. 1-2). It also highlights the greater likelihood that older, non-traditional Native American students will later drop out once they have begun their studies, as many are forced to choose between pursuing education and earning an income to support themselves and their families through a part- or full-time job. It also punctuates the statistically-rendered TCU landscape with brief snapshots of several unique students’ personal stories and how their pursuit of higher education has helped them rise above devastating circumstances or channel unique traditional knowledge for the benefit of their communities. In summary, this 2007 document provides what is arguably the most vivid and up-to-date picture of the impact of access to higher education on Native American individuals and communities, as well as the obstacles that have yet to be overcome.

Biggs’ “Bright Child of Oklahoma: Lotsee Patterson and the Development of America’s Tribal Libraries” (2001) discusses the groundbreaking work of Comanche
librarian Lotsee Patterson, whose tireless efforts in the 1970s and 1980s at lobbying for federal funding to establish tribally-controlled libraries on reservations led to the National Indian Omnibus Library Bill—which established libraries on tribal lands for the first time—, the inclusion of Title IV: Library Services for Indian Tribes and Hawaiian Natives Program in the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA), training for library aides in Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools in New Mexico, and the establishment of community libraries on several reservations through library demonstration projects. In 1985, Patterson set up the Training and Assistance for Indian Library Services (TRAILS) project, which had great success in training Native American librarians in librarianship. Patterson’s more recent work has also included recruiting Native Americans to the library profession, as well as her teaching post as professor in the University of Oklahoma’s School of Library and Information Studies. Lotsee Patterson is undoubtedly the leading expert on tribal college libraries and a review of her decades-long work informs this study in a multitude of ways, particularly with regards to the history of the development of tribal college libraries.

A. Rousey and E. Longie’s case study of Cankdeska Cikana Community College on the Spirit Lake Reservation in east central North Dakota, “The tribal college as family support system” (2001) paints a rich portrait of the social environment of many tribal colleges by studying a representative institution, though any generalization must be made with extreme caution. In the study, the researchers sought to answer the following question: “What is it that tribal colleges are doing, thinking, or providing differently than mainstream institutions that might explain their success at retention of very high-risk students?” (Rousey and Longie, 2001, p. 1492). Their findings portray tribal colleges and
universities, in so far as the unique circumstances of Cankdeska Community College can be generalized to other TCUs, as all-encompassing family support systems, providing child care, counseling, tribal cultural support and promotion, and personal investment in each and every student on the part of every faculty and staff member. This close-knit family structure creates a communally and culturally supportive atmosphere that is strikingly different from that found in mainstream higher education institutions. Rousey and Longie write,

“The tribal colleges serve as a family support system in multiple ways. Most visibly, it provides the coordinated system of social services that many students need. Second, the college incorporates Dakota culture throughout every facet of its operation. Third, and perhaps most important, it enables many individuals to pursue their education while remaining on the reservation in the context of a strong family network available for social support…Paradoxically, it was in a quantitative measure, the calculation of attrition, that the difference between tribal and nontribal institutions was made most evident. In particular, the fact that in the equation used by the CCCC to calculate graduation rates, the denominator subtracted students who were deceased spoke eloquently to the very high-risk, atypical nature of the student population” (Rousey and Longie, 2000, p.1500, 1502).

The study’s findings speak to the impoverished socio-economic context of the reservations on which most TCUs are located, where rates of alcoholism, drug abuse, suicide, and such chronic diseases as diabetes are far higher than those in the mainstream
population. It is also eloquent testimony of the close links between academic and public community members in the face of these overwhelming odds. When Rousey and Longie asked administrators at mainstream institutions whether they included student deaths in calculating their attrition rates, the researchers received responses indicating that there was no way administrators could really know if students were deceased or had simply dropped out. This finding was contrasted sharply with CCCC, where the very small size of the academic and wider reservation communities, as well as the many links between the two through the social services tribal colleges provide to their students, made it impossible for a tribal college administrator to not only be unaware of the death of a student, but also to not be personally affected by it. In concluding the article, Rousey and Longie write, “At Cankdeska Cikana, faculty and staff know the students from an average class size of six, know their preschoolers from child care, and know their school-age children from summer academic enrichment programs. At other institutions, literally, no one knows if they are alive” (Rousey and Longie, 2000, p. 1503).

The Rousey and Longie (2000) paper has a number of implications for this study, including the impact of the socioeconomic and socio-cultural context—most tribal college students are older, non-traditional students with children—of tribal colleges, the overwhelming poverty of the populations tribal college libraries serve, the curricular and communal support of tribal culture, and the personal relationships established between library staff and patrons. These unique characteristics of TCUs and their libraries provide an important context which may significantly impact staff development of special collections depending on community needs and desires.
James Thull’s “Lifelong learning: libraries promote literacy throughout communities” (2008) provides a general overview of the multitude of services tribal colleges and universities provide to their academic and wider public communities from the perspective of a TCU librarian. Written in clear, concise language, it provides an excellent introduction to the world of TCU libraries as seen through the eyes of an insider and should probably be second on anyone’s agenda when first looking into the subject of tribal college libraries. It is the author’s first-hand perspective which makes the paper vital to the study, unmitigated and unadulterated by the lens of an external academic researcher approaching from the outside, looking in. Writing about the dual institutional role of both academic and public library that TCU libraries often play, for example, James Thull writes in the first line of the paper, “Tribal college and university (TCU) libraries try to be everything to everyone. In addition to the typical college students working on papers, they serve mothers with small children, faculty working on advanced degrees, and community members seeking photos or recordings of their ancestors” (Thull, 2008). From this sentence alone, the reader can get somewhat of a sense of the unique trans-generational, trans-educational, and trans-cultural communities that are created within the shared space of a TCU library, as well as of the constraints in faculty hiring and retention (i.e. faculty who are hired may not have terminal degrees and newly-graduated professors with PhDs may not be willing or financially able to take a relatively low-salaried position at a TCU located in a rural area) and of the multiple purposes for which collections may be used by multiple patrons (i.e. academic research, personal research about one’s ancestors or tribe, etc). Thull goes on to mention the various programs for various audiences TCU libraries may offer, such as Fort Belknap College
Library’s ten-workshop series “on topics ranging from making buckskin bags to consumer rights” and Sinte Gleska University Library’s “Sizzling Summer Reading Program for Young Adult[s].” He also highlights the obstacles many TCU libraries face, two chief concerns being constrained and often inconsistent yearly budgets and difficulty hiring and retaining TCU faculty and librarians due to low salaries, the geographic isolation, and other factors associated with many TCUs. Thull’s paper provides an up-front view of the pivotal role TCU libraries play in many Native American communities and of the common hardships many face.

The Case for Case Studies

Robert K. Yin, in his insightful Case Study Research: Design and Methods, defines a case study as “an empirical inquiry that

- investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when
- the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2003)

In other words, the case study method in social sciences research is most relevant to studies where it is believed that the context is influencing the phenomenon being studied. A well-researched case study can draw upon a wide and rich array of resources within the context to produce an accurate, full-colored portrait of the subject being studied within its context. As noted previously, the real-life socio-economic, cultural, and political context of the communities TCUs serve appears to have a great impact upon
TCU libraries and their abilities and motivations for developing Native American-subject special collections. To study a TCU library outside of this incredibly complex context would be to ignore crucial elements that are part and parcel of these institutions. For this reason more than any other, the case study was chosen as the best method available within the social sciences for studying TCU libraries and their special collections.

**Methods**

Field data for the study consists of a 26-minute phone interview with the library director at a TCU institution on October 2, 2009. Other data for the study comes from the collection policies found on the library website, from other pages on the institution’s website, from a published history of the institution, and from two professionally-orchestrated videos posted on YouTube campaigning for the protection of disputed lands adjacent to the institution which figure prominently in Odayin’s representation of its cultural and spiritual past. To maintain the confidentiality of the institution’s identity, the published history cannot be given a full citation when it is referenced. Where possible, however, it will be made clear in footnotes that the information being discussed came from this published history.

For the purpose of maintaining participant confidentiality and masking the identity of the specific institution, the institution has been given the pseudonym of Odayin4 Tribal College, by which it will be referenced throughout this text. During the course of the interview, the researcher asked the interviewee questions about her work

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4 *Odayin* is an Anishinaabe (Ojibwe) word, meaning “heart,” and bears no relation to the tribal affiliation or the geographical location of the actual institution.
duties, the nature of the institution’s special collections, use of the special collections by
patrons, and library funding sources. The recruitment e-mail sent to prospective
participants appears in Appendix A; consent documentation appears in Appendix B; and
interview questions appear in Appendix C. The interview was audio-recorded and later
transcribed, and the participant’s responses revealed much about the numerous hats a
TCU librarian or library director may have to wear, and about the nature and use of
Native American-specific special collections at a TCU, as discussed below.

Discussion

Odayin Tribal College, 2000-2010

Odayin Tribal College reveals as many institutional faces as it masks. Primarily
student-generated campaigns to conserve disputed lands adjacent to Odayin that appear
both on the college’s website and in YouTube video documentaries present a history of
tribal cultural and spiritual resistance to federal assimilationist policies in the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th}
centuries that is a far cry from the official history on the college website. Odayin’s
official, sanitized history does not even mention the era of assimilation in federal policy
or the disputed lands. This divergence in representation of the institution’s history and,
thus, of its identity, raises many questions about the motives of the myth-makers in both
camps: about, on the one hand, institutional redaction of history as a method of
depolticization of dialogue between a minority institution and the majority macro-culture
which it seeks to join, and, on the other, of the regeneration of vanished traditions
through the non-institutional presentation of an alternative history which contends that these traditions never completely vanished. In other words, is Odayin sanitizing its history in an effort to join the macro-culture elite and present itself as any other institution of higher education with long-hallowed traditions rather than historical baggage? Benefits that Odayin could reap as a result of greater integration into the macro-culture academic elite include a higher profile, increased enrollment and funding, and an ability to influence other TCUs as a result of its successes. It could also open up new dialogue and new opportunities for establishing cooperative or transfer programs and partnerships with macro-culture institutions outside Odayin’s local geographic area.

And are Odayin students, along with allies in the environmentalist community in the “Save the Disputed Lands” campaign, using a myth of Native historical resistance to cultural, spiritual, and linguistic repression not only to further their campaign, but also to revive these traditions? This question is hardest to answer and to substantiate, due to the lack of an online version of the student newspaper or some other alternative medium of student political expression. A look at YouTube videos featuring Odayin student newscasters reporting on local events at the school did not come across any mentioning of the “Save the Disputed Lands” campaign. Indeed, the online student news reporting seemed to be more in keeping with official administrative representation of OTC: of a Native American macro-culture school. Indeed, the only page on the OTC website which mentioned the “Save the Disputed Lands” campaign and a history of resistance was that of a student club. Thus, it seems that students may be using alternative, unofficial means of political expression, such as the previously mentioned YouTube campaign videos and the student club website, to avoid administrative filtering. It is hoped that in raising these
questions, readers may gain a greater awareness of the different faces an institution presents to the wider world.

**Native American Special Collections and Collection Policies**

Odayin Tribal College Library’s Native American-related collections include four distinct collections: a Native language collection, an American Indian collection, an American Indian reference collection, and special collections. The American Indian reference collection is comprised of non-circulating subject-specific reference materials, such as encyclopedias and dictionaries, while the special collections contain non-circulating rare books, including rare ethnographic material. The interview with the library director focused on the Native language collection, which includes study materials (primarily audio) on the indigenous languages taught at Odayin, and the American Indian collection, which consists of print resources on various tribes’ histories, cultures, and traditions, as well as information on treaties and treaty law. In addition, the library website provides links to online language-learning and tribal law websites, as well as to the websites of relevant Native organizations.

Before proceeding with a discussion of these collections and the information gained about them from the interview, it is important to note the library’s collection policies. According to Odayin Tribal College Library’s general collection policy, the collections serve the needs of the College’s current students, faculty, and staff and these users take priority over any other type of user. The collections are also designed to meet the academic, cultural, and leisure needs of current students. This more narrow definition of library users is a critical one and makes Odayin unique within the tribal college and
university community where, as has already been noted, many TCU libraries serve both academic and wider public communities. Odayin Library is somewhat more democratic in its acquisition policies, allowing for students, faculty, and staff to make acquisition suggestions, but, again, this is limited to the academic community. The policy appears to be another institutional hallmark of Odayin’s efforts to promote itself as a member of the larger U.S. college and university sphere—albeit one with a Native American focus—where many academic libraries elevate their academic users above users from the local community.

Native Language Collection

The Native language collection serves to supplement language courses at Odayin primarily through audio material. During the interview, it became apparent that this collection was not used by native speakers of indigenous languages and that material in languages others than those taught through the curriculum were not represented. Again, this seems to confirm the elevation of students as the primary users of Odayin Library’s collections. The library director could not provide information about how much the Native language collection is used, but indicated that students used it for supplementing their classroom-based language studies. When asked to rate the collection on a scale of 1-10, she gave it a 5, owing to how small the Native language collection is. This would seem to indicate that the preservation and promotion of traditional Native cultures at Odayin does not include a major Native language component. The fact that Native language support is limited to the curriculum reveals a perceptual distinction in the treatment of Native languages that is perhaps similar to the teaching of major Western
European languages at macro-culture schools: A perception that these languages are part of an accepted linguistic macro-culture, reflecting a Western European heritage tradition. Perhaps curricula Native languages reflect an accepted Native heritage rather than the more bleak reality of the inter-generational death of Native languages due to the history of 19th and 20th-century assimilation policies and boarding schools, the marginalization of Native languages in an English-speaking Euro-American-dominant society, and the creation of generations of Native people who have no knowledge of their tribal language due to older generations’ refusal to speak these languages to their children for fear of societal reprisals and the economic marginalization associated with indigenous languages and their speakers.

*American Indian Subject Collection*

Moving beyond the Native language collection, Odayin Library’s American Indian collection is an impressive repository of tribal subject materials, including information on tribal history, cultures, treaties, and law. According to the interviewee, patrons utilize this collection to “find out more about their tribe, [more about Native art for an] arts class, or how to [make] their regalia…or ceremonies of other tribes.” The director also said that scholars from Europe have travelled to Odayin Tribal College to use the American Indian collection, a fact which speaks to the uniqueness as well as the visibility in scholarly circles of the collection. Odayin Library’s American Indian subject collection appears to be representative of the excellence and depth of Native subject collections in most TCU libraries. However, it also highlights a danger that the transfer of
indigenous knowledge will be restricted to an English-only medium, discussed further below.

Summary and Conclusions

This study presents a portrait of a representative tribal college or university library in its exploration of the preservation and promotion of Native languages and traditional cultures in special collections at TCU libraries. While the results of the study are certainly not generalizable to all TCU libraries, they do raise questions and concerns which are paramount to discussions of the nature and future of Native American language and subject special collections at TCU libraries: chiefly, questions of authorship, of authenticity, of transmittance, and of continuity. Can endangered indigenous languages survive in a world which views them as archaic and vestigial remnants of a vanished time? And what is the place of Native languages within the cultural preservation and revitalization context at TCUs? Odayin Tribal College identifies itself as a tribal college promoting the preservation, celebration, and flourishing of Native cultures in an academic environment, yet the development and use of the Native language collection only as a supplement for language courses raises questions about the very definition of culture. Does the resuscitation and reinvigoration of traditional Native American cultures not include the preservation of Native languages? Mark Cherrington, editor of Cultural Survival Quarterly, writes of the uniqueness of Native languages and the importance of revitalizing them as the critical *sine qua non* component of cultural preservation:

“English cannot substitute for Native American languages, because these languages are based on entirely different histories, spiritual beliefs, scientific and
natural-world understandings, and political and legal ideas. In essence they are
dbased on different realities. Native languages capture concepts that do not exist in
English. They define  kinship relationships that are unique to their speakers. They
are the sole vehicles by which indigenous peoples can speak to their ancestors or
their Creator. And they express the ideas on which Native American cultures are
anchored. In other words, a native language does not just reflect a culture; in a
functional sense it is the culture.”

In other words, without the world-shaping role played by Native languages, the
concept of traditional Native American cultural revitalization is a hollow one, lacking the
language framework upon which the cultural edifice is built. This fundamental role of
Native languages as the heart and, indeed, the lifeblood of Native cultures and
worldviews is eloquently captured in a March 2007 article, “Keeping A Language Alive:
Co-founder of Blackfoot immersion school in Browning visits UM,” which appeared in
the Montana newspaper Missoulian. The article focuses on the Cuts Wood School in
Browning, MT, a K-8 Blackfeet language immersion school founded by Darrell Kipp, Dr.
Dorothy Still Smoking, and Edward Little Plume in 1995. Kipp highlights some of the
unique features of the Blackfeet language, such as the non-distinction between gender,
the ability to count much more quickly than in English through the simple shifting of a
suffix, the presence of a fourth and fifth grammatical person, the non-division between
what in English are termed “animate” and “inanimate” objects, and what Kipp calls
“timeless verbs,” which are often in the present tense and describe something in an active
state (i.e. the Blackfoot word for “moose” is translated literally as “dark moving into the
brush”). He relates Blackfoot timeless verbs to discussions of what in ordinary English
are inanimate objects, but which become animate in the (English) language of science:

“In an office in the Native American Studies building on [the University of Montana] campus, [Kipp] pointed to a bowl of apples, a table, and a reporter’s shirt. ‘Using English, they’re all dead,’ he said. ‘But you make the next step up to science, and you get into physics and chemistry, then you realize the table’s not dead, and there are things going on in your shirt.’” The example highlights the different vocabularies for different spheres found in any language and underscores the importance of revitalizing Native languages which inform their speakers about the world around them in unique, untranslatable ways. The importance of Native languages for cultural preservation cannot be overstated. The fact that Odayin Library only collects in curriculum languages reflects the needs of its more narrowly-defined community, a fact which raises questions about who TCUs serve and/or should be serving.

A question for the future raised as a result of this study is how much students who are native speakers of an indigenous language would use a Native language collection if it included books or other materials in these languages. Literate, native English speakers are able to take for granted the fact that they can walk into any public or academic library in the United States and pick a book up off the shelf that will most likely be in English. Native speakers of indigenous languages do not have this same ability in most places. If TCU libraries were able to offer more extensive Native language collections, would speakers of these languages use them? Or, as expressed so eloquently in the writings and work of Argentinian librarian Edgardo Civallero, should there even be written forms of traditionally oral indigenous languages? Should libraries—as Civallero argues in “Libraries, indigenous peoples, identity and inclusion” regarding indigenous libraries in
South America—serve instead as repositories of “living books:” recorded oral traditions, stories, genealogies, etc.? Is the American library model which TCU libraries are replicated upon the right framework for preserving Native cultures and languages or is it only the mausoleum of these cultures and languages with its oral history recordings, English-language books on tribes and tribal history, and limited Native language collections? Can this model be modified to better serve the tribal and reservation context or does there need to be a different model entirely? In the 21st century-world of Web 2.0, global interconnections, the role of English as a lingua franca, and receding distances, can a divergent model be developed to save endangered indigenous languages spoken on isolated, economically depressed reservations? In particular, can Native languages survive in a world and a time where the primary language of discourse in most contexts, including the reservation context, is English? Is the language of indigenous peoples now—or soon to be—irrevocably English? Or can communities of multi-generational speakers be established where the everyday language of living is an indigenous language?

The role of TCU libraries in such a space would be of great import as a place for the collection of oral histories, ethnographic materials, and perhaps expanded Native language collections. TCU libraries must be more than a repository for objects of the past or even advocates of traditional Native culture. They must become places where Native people can gather to reclaim, reinvigorate, and reshape their cultural and linguistic identities to create and pass on vibrant, living, evolving traditions to the next Native generations.

Moving beyond the language component, Native American subject collections are the concrete manifestation of the dedication of all TCUs to the preservation and
perpetuation of knowledge of Native cultures and Native histories. The work that has
gone into developing these collections is to be applauded. However, these collections also
represent one of the greatest dangers to the perpetuation of traditional indigenous culture:
That English will become the only communicative medium for the transfer of this
knowledge. As already discussed in the section on the Native language collection, so
much crucial information is lost when crossing from an indigenous language to English, a
problem exacerbated by the fact that many English-language materials on Native history
and culture are written by non-Native authors who do not have the intimate familiarity
with Native cultures that Native people raised in those cultural contexts would possess.
Even beyond the crux of language, there are many questions to be raised in the validity of
transmitting cultural knowledge via non-native channels. This includes the medium of the
book: can whole histories, cosmologies, beliefs, and knowledges be written down in a
succinct form, or are they better passed down through oral tradition? And, as living
traditions, do we transmute them in writing them down? Not all questions relating to
Native American subject collections are resolvable, but it is hoped that in raising them, a
constructive dialogue on the development and future of these collections can be initiated.

Finally, Odayin College Library’s focus on serving students over the wider
public, as reflected in its collection policies, is a departure from the dual role many TCU
libraries fill as both academic and public libraries. As discussed above, it may be
indicative of the school’s efforts to join the higher academic macro-culture. Or it could be
reflective of the school’s wider geographic and cultural context, set in an area where
there is no major population of indigenous language speakers. In either case, the library’s
primary focus is on supporting the institution’s curriculum and the preservation of
traditional Native culture in support of that mission, rather than traditional cultural preservation as a separate and unique goal.

In conclusion, the case-study of Odayin Tribal College revealed a complex portrait of a TCU library and the use of its Native American subject and Native American language collections. It is hoped that this research can provide fodder for a multiplicity of related research endeavors in the field, including the role of libraries as cultural heritage institutions, the functions and development of special collections at specialized academic libraries and at small academic and public libraries, and the roles libraries can play as repositories of culture-specific collections. It is also hoped that publication of the study will bring greater awareness of the many budgetary, socio-cultural, and political issues tribal college libraries face to the wider library and information science professional community and thus engender greater financial and professional support of these unique American institutions and their tribal language and cultural preservation efforts.
Bibliography

1. A published history of Odayin Tribal College, 2008. Citation information cannot be provided for confidentiality purposes.


12. Two YouTube videos on the “Save the Disputed Lands” campaign. Citation information cannot be provided due to confidentiality.

13. Various YouTube videos of student newscasts. Citation information cannot be provided due to confidentiality.
Dear [Prospective Research Participant],

I am a graduate student in the School of Information and Library Science (SILS) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill conducting a research study for a master’s research paper on how tribal college and university (TCU) librarians and library staff develop tribal and Native American special collections in order to preserve tribal languages and cultures. As a part of this study, I would like to conduct phone interviews with staff involved in managing these special collections, if they are willing to participate. In the interview, I will ask each participant a series of questions about how they develop special collections, about the collection development policies which inform their decisions, and about their perceptions of patrons’ use of special collections. Each interview will last no longer than an hour and will be audio recorded using a digital audio recorder. Every effort will be made to ensure the privacy of participants and their identities will be kept anonymous in the master’s paper. There will be no cost to participants for participating in the study and participation is completely voluntary. Anyone who wishes to participate must read his or her copy of the consent form which I have attached to this e-mail and then contact me either by e-mail (fleetwud@email.unc.edu) or postal mail (612 Hibbard Drive Chapel Hill, NC 27514). The consent form provides each participant with information about the study and about participants’ rights so that each person can make an informed decision about whether he or she wishes to participate.

I would greatly appreciate it if you could forward this recruitment e-mail and the attached consent form to the staff member(s) responsible for tribal and/or Native American special collections at your institution. I would also like to request a copy of your institution's collection development policy, if it is available, by e-mail or postal mail for this study. If only a hardcopy can be sent, I am more than happy to send you a self-addressed envelope so that you do not incur any cost in sending it. I would also ask you to please neither encourage nor discourage participation in this study, as participation must be completely voluntary on the part of each participant. Though there is no financial benefit to be gained by your institution from participating in this study, it is my belief that publication of this master’s paper may raise awareness of tribal college and university libraries among library and information science professionals. It is my hope that this potential for increased awareness may lead to greater professional support of the work of TCU libraries and of the dedicated librarians and library staff who keep them running. If you have any questions at all about this study, please feel free to contact me by e-mail at fleetwud@email.unc.edu at any time.

Sincerely,

Kristin Fleetwood
APPENDIX B: E-MAIL CONSENT FORM

“The Role of Tribal College Library Special Collections in Preserving Tribal Languages and Cultures: A Qualitative Study”

Consent Form

As a researcher interested in understanding how tribal and Native American special collections are developed and managed at tribal college and university (TCU) libraries, I am conducting phone interviews with TCU library workers about their work with tribal or Native American special collections. If you decide to participate in the study, please read this form and then send me an e-mail at fleetwud@email.unc.edu within two weeks of receiving this form indicating your desire to participate. Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

If you choose to participate, please contact me by e-mail to indicate your desire to participate and we can then set up a date and time that is agreeable to you for the phone interview, which will be audio recorded and will last no longer than one hour. In the interview, I will ask you a series of questions focusing on how you develop and manage tribal or Native American special collections at your tribal college or university library, about any library collection development policies which you use as a guide for developing these special collections, and about your perception of library patrons’ use of tribal or Native American special collections. You are completely free to answer or to not answer any of my questions and you are not obligated to complete the interview once it has begun. The audio recording and the transcript I will make of your interview will be stored in password-protected files on a password-protected laptop computer that can only be accessed by myself. Your name and any other identifying information about you, such as your contact e-mail or telephone number, will NOT be included in the research paper that will publish the results of this study. Your identity will be kept completely anonymous in the research paper. The audio recordings of your interview, the interview transcripts, and any other document identifying you as a participant in this study will be destroyed no later than September 1, 2010 by myself. This is to ensure the protection of your privacy.

There are neither any risks nor any direct benefits anticipated with your participation in this study. Should you choose to participate, however, you will be making a laudable contribution to the professional scholarship on tribal college and university libraries, about which little has been written to date. There will be no cost to you nor any financial benefit from your participation in this study.
If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me by phone at (757) 678-3763 or by e-mail at fleetwud@email.unc.edu. If you would prefer to contact me by postal mail, please write to:

Kristin Fleetwood

612 Hibbard Drive

Chapel Hill, NC 27514

All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 919-966-3113 or by e-mail at IRB_subjects@unc.edu.

Thank you for considering to participate in this study. I look forward to sharing your unique perspective on tribal and Native American special collections with other scholars in the library and information science professional community, should you choose to participate.

Sincerely,

Kristin Fleetwood
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

“The Role of Tribal College Library Special Collections in Preserving Tribal Languages and Cultures: A Qualitative Study”

Research Study Phone Interview Questions

1. What is your current job title?

2. How long have you worked under your current job title?

3. Could you describe your job responsibilities?

4. What would you say are the most important of your job responsibilities?

5. Could you describe your work with tribal or Native American special collections at your institution? What do your job responsibilities in this area entail?

6. Could you describe your tribal or Native American special collections? Do you collect all formats (i.e. audio, books, etc) or do you focus on a particular format? Are there pushes to collect in certain directions, such as oral histories or to develop online databases or to collect in certain subject areas within special collections?

7. Could you describe the acquisitions process for adding new items to the special collections? How do you decide what to include and what to exclude from special collections? What do you aim to add to your collections? Asked for by faculty, being taught;

8. Are there written collection development policies specific to tribal or Native American special collections which you follow? If not, what do you use as a guide in managing and developing these special collections? OR: How closely do you follow your library’s collection development policy in regards to special collections? Do you have more free reign with collecting?

9. On a scale of 1-10, 1 being non-existent and 10 being the best special collection on the subject, how would you rate the strength of your tribal and/or Native American special collections? How would you rate tribal or Native American special collections in relation to other collections in the library? 5, not very large; small percentage, 200; best; 10; one of the highest pr

10. Could you describe the budgetary aspect of your special collections? Is money set aside for special collections development or does it all come from a common library budget? How much money do you typically have to work with in adding to your special collections? Do you apply for grants in order to fund special collections acquisitions? Are
there competing interests for money within your library? Federal institution; allocated (salaries, resources.). Uni does

10. Do you see patrons using the special collections?

American Indian collection. Native Langua

11. How often would you say special collections are used?

12. How do you see patrons using items from special collections? Research, browse.; BRIDGE (network with U. of

13. Do patrons have any input into what is collected for special collections?

Form at circulat

14. Do you think special collections are a help or a hindrance to preserving tribal languages and cultures?

15. Should there be any changes made to how your institution currently develops and manages its special collections? Do you think too much or too little emphasis is placed upon special collections at your institution? Encourage department

16. Do the special collections at your library have an impact on your community that goes beyond language and cultural preservation? Is there a personal or social component to your special collections and how they are used by your community?

17. Is there anything you would like to add about your work that you think wasn’t covered in the interview? Is there anything else you would like to say? Unique collection!