



The Three Sisters Garden: A Cultural Approach to Cultivating American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) Psychological Service Providers

Psychological Services

Available at: <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2022-53783-001>

One-Sentence Summary: The Three Sisters Model training approach is for AI/AN behavioral health students to help address the need for culturally competent behavioral health services for individuals living in Indian country.¹

Reviewer: Nahla Holland

Methods: The Seven Generations Center of Excellence (SGCoE) program utilized the “Three Sisters Model.” The Three Sisters model was designed to help minimize psychological distress for AI/AN students by minimizing cultural isolation, experiencing microaggressions, lack of social support systems, and while helping students focus on their academic success.¹ The model was culturally tailored for AI/AN students, integrating common food staples found within most AI/AN meals as their foundation of core values. Corn represented cultural identity, which was shared through cultural events, ceremonies, and traditional meals. The Beans represented education—SGCoE program created an educational transition program for students transitioning from tribal schools to non-tribal academic settings. They also created a peer mentorship program for AI/AN scholars to help students during their first year of school. Last was squash, which represented spirituality. In partnership with AI/AN community groups, SGCoE gave students access to smudging, talking circles, and sweat lodges while they were away at school.

The researchers measured retention rates, using the number of students in the program and those that graduated in 4 years. Publications and presentations were documented that were conducted by the AI/AN students in the program.

Main Findings / Recommendations:

- The Three Sisters Model showed significant improvements in AI/AN students, specific to academic achievement and attaining academic goals by giving students tools to address physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs.
- Supporting AI/AN psychology students meet their academic goals will help to decolonize psychology research. Also it will help increase the number of AI/AN psychological providers and help make non-AI/AN providers more culturally competent for their AI/AN patients.

Potential Issues:

- Limited quantifiable data available on AI/AN student populations, meeting academic benchmarks, or comparisons to students who did not complete the program.





- Student academic achievements data appears low due to students not transferring into other programs in other locations or switching majors and thus needing more time to complete a degree.

Useful Summary Stats, Quotes:

- “Students who participated in and completed the student retention program were shown to have a 1.0 higher grade point when compared to students who did not participate in this program”¹
- Between 2012-2016 there were 83 publications and presentations through the SGCoE program by AI/AN psychology students.¹

Reviewers Opinions:

Not at all

The Most

	1	2	3	4	5
Impactful for Indian Country?			x		
Novel?		x			
Trustworthy?			x		

Reference:

1. Gray, J. S., Wheeler, M. J., & Bender, N. M. (2022). The Three sisters garden: A cultural approach to cultivating American Indian/alaska native (AI/AN) psychological service providers. *Psychological Services*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ser0000655>

