



Why Here, Why Now: The Genesis of a Native American Business Journal

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EDUCATION



ABSTRACT

IBAPA is the culmination of a decades-long journey in which there has been much progress in the development of Native American economies, but still rather modest progress in the development of Native American academic theory in the fields of business and public administration. There are multiple reasons why academic progress has been sluggish. One of the primary reasons is the lack of business professors who publish research about our community. This journal seeks to address this problem straight on. The editorial provides background on our purpose.

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Welcome to Indigenous Business and Public Administration (IBAPA). IBAPA is the culmination of a decades-long journey in academia in which I have seen much progress in the development of Native American economies, but still rather modest progress in the development of Native American academic theory in the fields of business and public administration. There are multiple reasons why academic progress has been sluggish. One of the primary reasons is the lack of business professors who publish research about our community. This journal seeks to address this problem straight on. But first, how did we get here?

THE PHD PROJECT

The genesis of our journey is really the PhD Project, a program developed by Big 4 accounting firm KPMG in the mid 1990's. The PhD Project's purpose was to increase the number of under-represented minority faculty members in business schools. I attended the PhD Project's annual meeting in Chicago in the fall of 1996, where I was introduced to an academic career. The PhD Project was instrumental in helping me find appropriate schools to apply to and, more importantly, helping me establish a social network to help get me through my doctoral program and beyond.

To facilitate these networks, the PhD Project developed Doctoral Student Associations, one of which, the Management Doctoral Student Association (MDSA), became a common point of reference through which a few students (now the editorial team at IBAPA) were able to find the small number of others in the academy who were also interested in American Indian issues. Moreover, the MDSA held a pre-conference each year before the annual Academy of Management meeting, which became the focal point for emerging scholars-of-color to collaborate and nurture our common interest in topics which were, at that time, often not widely supported at our home institutions. As such, the PhD Project and MDSA were, and continue to be, key resources in the development of our scholarly pursuits.

BUILDING A SCHOLARLY FOUNDATION

Upon graduation from my PhD program, I found myself at a typical research-based institution. Unfortunately, I was discouraged from pursuing my interest in Native American issues. Nobody said directly, "don't do that," but I was told that, in order to be tenured, my work should be published in highly visible journals and, moreover, my publications in those journals should be influential, as measured by citations. Thus, I felt immense pressure to pursue

mainstream research topics that would be publishable in mainstream journals. I think this is a story that is familiar to many of us.

Nonetheless, I did start a small number of research projects related to Native American business and, post-tenure, I began to pursue these papers with more vigor than I had before being awarded tenure. I guess this is the nature of the beast. It also helped that, although I was the first of our editorial team to graduate and receive tenure, there was a group of new scholars just a few years behind me who were starting to develop their own interests in American Indian scholarship, especially in the fields of management and business.

Several of us began to meet at the annual Organizational Behavior Teaching Conference (OBTC), sparked by an invite from board member Maria Humphries from the University of Waikato. The OBTC meetings were pivotal in as much as we, the few Native American scholars, were able to meet our Indigenous colleagues from across the Pacific and learn from their academic experiences. Over late night meetings and several conference presentations, we were able to observe how our brethren had been able to build their scholarly network and begin to establish an impressive stream of research that impacted both Indigenous scholarship, pedagogy, and real-world practice in their own communities. These were lofty goals that we began to feel were attainable for our small group of Native American business professors.

Over the subsequent years, this core group, that eventually formed the core IBAPA editorial team, has been able to make good progress towards that goal, with each of us contributing both scholarship and service to the Native community. Professor Kennedy (University of Washington) and myself (Gonzaga University) both take leadership roles in innovative academic programs developed specifically for Indigenous business students. Professor Gladstone (Washington State University) has been highly influential in establishing a broad, global social network that has given our Indigenous academic community much needed acknowledgement and visibility within the Academy of Management.

So, the wheels are in motion, so to speak. Given our progress, a natural step forward in our evolution is to create a scholarly outlet that allows us to create our own space to publish on the issues and topics we feel are important to Indigenous business scholars. This space will serve as a complement to other initiatives which aim to increase economic development within Indigenous communities. For example, the Renewing Indigenous Economies Project at the Hoover Institution (Stanford University), co-directed by Professor Stewart, and the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development both seek

to increase our understanding of Indigenous economies. Yet, both initiatives focus on economic policy rather than business or public administration. It is our opinion that macro policy must have a natural complement of applied practical knowledge in order to be effective, especially in tribal communities, where advanced business knowledge is latent or altogether non-existent, given the dearth of privately-owned businesses.

OUR MISSION

IBAPA is a peer reviewed academic journal which shall publish articles in the fields of Indigenous business and public administration. Our mission is to promote scholarship which advances understanding of the creation and management of Indigenous (Native American, First Nation, Maori, Aboriginal) organizations with the intent of enhancing economic development, organizational well-being, and social service delivery in these communities.

Although the primary audience is the academic community, IBAPA encourages scholarly contributions which have the potential to directly impact practitioners, students, and leaders in the Indigenous private and public sectors as well. We encourage contributions from multiple academic fields including, but not limited to, business, management, entrepreneurship, economics, public policy, and the social sciences. Empirical, qualitative, and theory-building studies are all encouraged.

In addition to original research articles, IBAPA encourages contributions highlighting best practices by Indigenous organizations as well as pedagogical contributions focusing on best teaching practices for students studying Indigenous business and public administration.

THE IMPORTANCE/IMPACT OF THE ISSUES UNDER STUDY

There is currently no peer-reviewed academic outlet dedicated to scholars wanting to pursue research focusing on Native American business and public administration. There are a limited number of niche economics journals that review papers focusing on macro-economic and policy issues within tribal and Indigenous communities, but these journals' scopes exclude scholars from other fields, such as management, whose research focus on creating and managing new businesses at the firm-level.

Unfortunately, this lack of legitimate academic outlets has led to a dearth of new scholarly activity in this area. **This scholarship is needed.** Native and Indigenous communities globally continue to suffer from systemic

poverty and substandard living conditions. Although a few Native Nations have found success with casino operations, they are outliers. Most Native Nations continue to suffer from persistent economic depression (Davis, 2015).

One path out of economic and social distress is through entrepreneurship and business education (Van der Berg, 2008). We know that there are many government and private programs which focus on training Native Americans how to create and manage new ventures. For example, Gonzaga University's MBA in American Indian Entrepreneurship was founded specifically to train tribal college instructors to teach business at tribal colleges (Stewart and Pepper, 2011). Unfortunately, the educational tools and theories that are available to educators in this space consist primarily of generic materials taken from mainstream business textbooks/journals and applied to Native American communities.

While this approach can be successful, it fails to acknowledge the uniqueness of doing business in Indian country. American Indian nations have their own unique legal, social, and economic structures as a result of government influence and the slow shift towards self-determination, which makes the straight application of mainstream theories into an Indigenous context problematic (Wilkins, 2018). Scholars from the world's other Indigenous communities (Australia, New Zealand, and Canada) also face this issue (Cornell, 2006) and, as such, this journal should be an outlet for them as well.

In sum, this new academic journal dedicated to American Indian and Indigenous business has the potential to affect global change by increasing the quality and relevance of business education and research available to Indigenous populations. Supporting the creation and publication of peer-reviewed research focused specifically on tribal business will help generate relevant educational, research, and training materials that can directly affect education and policy in this domain. Moreover, this cause is directly related to social justice. Anything we can do to increase the economic and organizational well-being of tribal citizens will help mitigate part of the long-term societal damage that persists from well-documented social and political injustices of the past.

Unfortunately, the current catalog of peer-reviewed journal articles in Native American business is small because mainstream journals tend to perceive Indigenous issues as niche topics. This perception marginalizes Native Americans and Indigenous people by the academic publishing community. Much of the existing knowledge of Native American business has been compiled into recent books which have been targeted towards both the practitioner and academic communities (Kennedy et al, 2017; Miller, Jorgensen, and Stewart, 2019). These books summarize the state of the art in Native American business

research. The texts have been well-received by both the practitioner and Indigenous educational communities. The goal of IBAPA is to *create enough new scholarship to fill subsequent editions* of these, and similar, books. It has taken decades to reach this point, we need not take decades more.

OUR GOAL

The ultimate goal of IBAPA is bold. We seek to enable tribal sovereignty and self-determination through business education and scholarship. Each member of the initial editorial team is a member of a tribal community. As such, we are all deeply interested and invested in the success of tribal organizations and communities. We are aware of the complexities involved in ensuring prosperity for Native American tribes. It is our contention that true sovereignty can only be achieved when tribes are able to create and control their own financial resources, eventually with zero dependence on government agencies.

Finally, it must be added that we see an opportunity to decolonize our own academic space. As noted by Doucette, Gladstone, and Carter (2021), it is important for Indigenous scholars to communicate in a manner that is culturally acceptable and effective for our own people. As such, and following their lead, IBAPA will purposely encourage a conversational tone with authors who are comfortable writing in such a manner.

So, I welcome you all to the inaugural edition of *Indigenous Business and Public Administration* and thank our sponsor, the Gonzaga University MBA in American Indian Entrepreneurship program. Together, we can build an academic home for all who wish to contribute to the current and future prosperity of Native people.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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