Chapter 14 – Thinking Positively about the Future


We are now at the end of the book and at the gateway to your future college and career success. This chapter has covered life stages and provided you with a foundation for choosing happiness and creating positivity in your life. As the chapter states, “You are what you think.”

One of the main goals of this course and this book is to help you to understand the demands and responsibilities placed upon college students. If you are one of the first in your family to attend college, or if you have lived a rural life and are now attending college in a city, you will have to develop a strategy for your own personal success. We talked to some of the experts and asked them for suggestions to help you to be successful in college.

Ms. Carmen Moffett, Director of Indian Education for the Gallup-McKinley County Schools recently said that most Native American college students need to build English and math skills for college success. She added, “Native American students need support programs that will help them develop skills such as writing and building a social support network at the college.” Ms. Moffet explains that the world of higher education can create “culture shock” for students who are living far from home, off the reservation, and interfacing with students from different tribes and cultures. Ms Moffet also stated, “In most tribal communities, education and health offer the highest number of employment and highest paying positions. Generally, these high paying positions are held by non-Native Americans. We need more Native Americans to hold these positions, which often require education beyond a bachelor’s degree. If Native American communities had more Native Americans in these positions, Native American communities would benefit.” Ms. Moffet went on to quote Navajo Chief Manuelito, “go my son, go and climb the ladder…Get an education.”

Dr. Mario Aguilar, Assistant Director of the Early Academic Outreach Program at UCSD and a San Diego State University lecturer in the College of Education states that “Native American students face great challenges that students from other communities never have to think about. An example is the Hollywood and mass media stereotypical portrayal that we are either “noble savages” living in peace and harmony with nature (and thus incapable of being engineers, doctors, lawyers or state governors,) or we are “wild savages” who cannot escape alcoholism, drugs, or violence, (and therefore cannot possibly be successful in college.)” Dr. Aguilar goes on to state, “We are all part of a historic chain of experience that goes back thousands of generations. We know where we come from, we know where are ancestors are buried, and we need to know where our future generations will come from. We cannot become the weakest link in this chain; we need to be that strong and educated link so that in the future there will be those to speak for our tribes.”

Larry Gauthier, Director of Student Success Services at the First Nations University in Regina, Canada, also offered some suggestions. As part of their culture, Native Americans are taught not to ask questions. Students need to develop the skills of critical thinking and asking questions to be successful in college. If students lack confidence in their educational skills, they
should attend a tribal college first to gain the skills needed for success and then transfer to a mainstream college to complete their degree. Larry likes to use the phrase, “education is our buffalo.” In the past the buffalo gave us everything we needed to exist. Now that the buffalo is gone, education has taken its place. It will give you the tools you need to be good providers for your families and also help with self-determination and self-government.

We have exposed you to many ideas in this book that we believe will help you to be a successful college student and a contributing member of our world. Through the great tradition of storytelling, we have tried to connect Native-American history, spirituality, and philosophies to fundamental concepts related to college success. Read this story with intentionality about your college and life success.

Coyote Creates the Earth

As told by Larry Gauthier based on story from his great grandfather, Kem ma soom bun, an elder of the Woodland Cree

Long ago there was no earth, only water. Coyote was floating around on a small raft when he met the ducks. They were the only other creatures. "My brothers," he said, "There is no one else around. It is no good to be alone like this. You must get me some earth so I can make things right."

He turned to the red-headed mallard. "Dive beneath this water and try to bring up some earth. We’ll use it as a means of living."

The red-headed mallard dove into the water. He remained down for a long time but came up without bringing any earth.

Coyote turned to the pinto duck, "I sent the older one, but he was not able to get any earth. Now I will let you try."

The pinto duck came up after a long time and said, "My brother, I was not able to get any."

"How is that? I thought surely you would bring some."

Then Coyote asked a smaller, blue-feathered duck to dive. "If you do not bring up any, we will have no land to live on."

He dived down, but he came up with no earth.

Coyote did not know what to do.

Then the grebe spoke up. "My older brother, you should have asked me to go before you asked these others. They are my superiors, but they are helpless." He took his turn diving and stayed down a long time. When he came up, Coyote asked, "What sort of luck did you have?"

"I have brought some." He had a little dirt between his webbed feet.

Coyote said, "To every undertaking there are always four trials. You have achieved it." Then he
took the mud and said, "I will make this into the earth. You will live in the ponds and streams and multiply there where you can build your nests. Now, I am going to make this earth."

Coyote took the mud in his hand and he started in the east. "I will make it large so we have plenty of room." As he traveled along he spread the mud around and made the earth. He traveled like this for a long time going toward the west. When he had finished he said, "Now that we have this earth, there are some things that want to be here."

They heard a wolf howling.

"Already there is one howling," said Coyote.

He pointed toward the Sun, which was going down, and said, "Listen, there is another one out there now." It was a coyote. "That coyote has attained life by his own powers," said Coyote. "He is great."

Then they all went for a walk. Out on the plains they saw some shining objects. When they got up close they saw that these were medicine stones.

"This is part of the earth," said Coyote, picking up one of the stones which looked like a buffalo, "the oldest part. There shall be stones like this everywhere. They are separate beings."

When they had gone on some ways they saw a person standing near a hill.

"Look." said Coyote, "there is a human being. He is one of the Stars, but now he is down here standing on the ground. Let's go look at him."

When they got up close, the star-person changed himself into a plant. It was the tobacco plant. There were no other plants around at the time. It was the first. Coyote said, "From now on all people will have this plant. Take it in the spring and raise it. It is the Stars up above that have come down like this. They will take care of the people. Take care of this plant. It will be the means of your living. Use it in dancing."

After that, Coyote found there was no grass. "This is no good." He made it. "Let us make some mountains, hills and trees." He made them all.

He saw there were no fish in the creeks, so he put some there. This is the way he started the whole thing.

**Talking Circle**

Use these questions for discussion in a talking circle or consider at least one of these questions as you respond in a journal entry:

1. Coyote created the world. He saw what was needed and he made it. What do you see that is needed in your world? How will you create that which you need in your life?
2. The story talks about the interconnectedness of all things, living and nonliving. But all things are important and have a place and a contribution to the earth and to the universe. Even the small grebe, who saw himself as inferior to the others, was able to make a huge contribution to the creation of the world. Sometimes, we all have felt like a small grebe, but we go on and with perseverance and commitment, we accomplish things. Have you thought about the contributions you wish to make to the world? What are your top three contributions you would like to accomplish?

3. Coyote asked several creatures for help in bringing up some earth with no results. Just when he was wondering what to do, the grebe, his older brother, offered to help and was successful. Is there someone who can help you if you feel like giving up?

4. In the story, the human being was once a Star in the universe, then came to earth as a human, and changed himself into a tobacco plant to be used in ceremonies and in dancing. The human intentionally changed himself--transformed himself into a useful medicine. How will you intentionally change yourself while you are in college? How will your college education transform your life and your tribal or community world?

5. The concept of four is large in many Native American cultures. The four directions, four colors, four rounds of songs, four years of commitment to a sun dance ceremony, and so on. In this story, Coyote talks about four trials for every undertaking. Can you name four trials or obstacles you have had to overcome since you entered college? How does the concept of perseverance relate to the four trials for every undertaking?

**Quote for the Margin:**

Like the Thunderbird of old I shall rise again out of the sea; I shall grab the instruments of the white man's success, his education, his skills, and with these new tools I shall build my race into the proudest segment of your society. Chief Dan George

**Notes:**

None