ABSTRACT

TITLE:	Navajo Students' Perspectives on Tribal Food Systems and Sovereignty
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PRESENTED AT:	2016 Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities Symposium, Fort Lewis College

ABSTRACT: The importance of tribal food systems is strongly related to the health, land, and culture of Native American people. I was interested in exploring the beliefs, knowledge, and perspectives of Navajo Fort Lewis College (FLC) students about tribal food systems and food sovereignty, and determining whether their access to traditional and healthy foods differed between the Navajo Nation and on campus. This study took place at FLC using an online survey (SurveyMonkey.com), which was advertised on the Fort announcement page and emailed to all the Native American and Indigenous students. The online survey included open/closed ended, multiple choice, Likert scale, and dichotomous questions. I collected 65 responses within a 7-day window. Results showed that majority of the participants agree that local food systems, face-to-face interaction, and farm-to-school programs are great approaches for revitalization of dietary changes for Navajo people and food sovereignty - for restoring Hzh (state of peace and harmony, Walking in Beauty). For Navajos, it is a sacred responsibility to practice with respect and reverence to our environment, as we are interrelated and interdependent as land, plants, animals, and people. Unfortunately, Navajo student participants reported feeling separated from tribal foods and culture while at FLC. One way to address this issue is to have a garden on FLC campus for indigenous students to plant and cultivate their traditional plant-based foods. Since I found out that not all students know how to grow, maintain, harvest, or prepare traditional foods; I would also suggest having a class or workshops dedicated to practicing food sovereignty and learning about the various types of traditional foods. This study provides an increased understanding of indigenous students' perceptions of tribal food systems, and identifies ways in which colleges could improve upon delivering access to healthy, traditional foods on campus.