

Cultural Context and Meaning in Research

Most everyone is aware that a person's understanding is shaped by his or her social and cultural history. Since higher education research on the Rosebud Reservation entails interactions with tribal members whose social and cultural history may be quite different from those of the researcher, this page gives you an opportunity to do some further reflection and preparation for doing research on Rosebud.

Some examples of social and cultural differences may be quite familiar. For example, looking directly at and making eye contact with someone when talking may be a positive interaction in most Western cultures but can be an odd or uncomfortable interaction for tribal members on the reservation. Similarly, "thanking" someone or showing a certain excitement regarding working together is a positive interaction off the reservation, but this "eagerness" may violate a growing sense of a close relationship or be interpreted as a common sign that a person plans to take advantage of a tribal member or group.

Carrying a sense of empathy for others means identifying with their experiences and feelings. But as the feelings and the meaning of experiences can vary across cultures, so "empathy" may be a mistaken projection of one's own feelings and meanings onto another. This kind of projection mistake may occur in a researcher's planning and interaction with research subjects.

A serious projection of this type occurs when a researcher adopts an interpretation of 'settler colonialism' as a movement of history that overwhelmed everything – and everyone – in its way, leaving tribes (and tribal members) destitute and desolate. This one-sided view overlooks the judgements and decisions of tribal leaders and tribal members that continue today. Fred Hoxie, a highly regarded historian of American Indian history, wrote regarding the settler colonialism viewpoint of history: "And yet Native leaders from the seventeenth century forward were willing to negotiate treaties, learn new languages, travel to foreign capitals, publish broadsides, and adopt new religions as they struggled to force newcomers to recognize their humanity and sovereignty." The work of self-determination and creative adaptation continues among tribal members today, and a researcher who adopts this perspective toward his or her research subjects will be clearing the way for honest and interesting responses to research questions and queries.

To assist in your awareness and recognition of cultural differences in your interaction with Rosebud tribal members, please review the source document linked below. After reflecting on the document, return to this page to offer a creative response vignette to the document as requested below.

Guiding Principles for Engaging in Research with Native American Communities

“This document is intended for use by researchers, both non-Native and Native, working with Native American peoples and their respective communities.”

https://hsc.unm.edu/vision2020/common/docs/guiding_principles_research_native_communities_2012.pdf

Your Cultural *Context Vignette*

In reviewing and reflecting on the *Guiding Principles for Engaging in Research with Native American Communities*, you have read a series of Vignettes. These stories described ways that researchers encountered challenges in doing research among an Indigenous group. Please take some time now and create a vignette that tells a story of a specific cultural challenge you (imaginatively) faced in doing research on the Rosebud Reservation and how the challenge was (or was not) resolved.