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The World is Your Oyster

by Grayson Noley, President, Board of Directors

AIGC, over its lifetime of 45 years, has given more than 16,600 scholarships to American Indians and Alaska Natives. As AIGC Board President, I feel great pride in knowing that I am part of such an outstanding network of American Indian and Alaska Natives from all across the country.

At AIGC, we make it our business to help students do whatever they want to do. The landscape of higher education today includes over 21 million college students, attending more than 7,000 post-secondary educational institutions. Colleges and universities are expanding their degree programs to include everything from medicine, engineering, biology, education, communication and business to some rather specific degree programs, such as mobile applications, comedy, popular culture, floral management and auctioneering.

At AIGC, we make it our business to help students do whatever they want to do.

In higher education today, the world really is your oyster. American Indians and Alaska Natives, with dreams of becoming the president of a major corporation, a non-profit foundation, a golf course (yes, there is a degree program for that, too) or a nation, have every opportunity to, one day, achieve them. Colleges, universities and technical schools are catering their programs to students who aspire to change the world – be that through turf grass science, small business management, music, theater design, equine sciences, baking, medicine or terotechnology.

Whatever the path, AIGC aims to support it through higher education scholarships and student services. Each year, AIGC and AIGC Scholars award over 1200 scholarships to deserving American Indians and Alaska Natives in all areas of study. While some of our scholarship programs are focused on specific degree programs, most are broad-based to assist any educational journey.

The truth is, every industry has a need for solid leadership and strong talent. American Indians and Alaska Native students have every opportunity to seek out their specific area of interest, study it and make a career out of it. Whether it be high-ranking positions within Fortune 500 companies or high-impact positions within struggling school systems, there is a place for every student. Whatever the path, AIGC is a resource of support.

Grayson Noley (Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma)
AIGC Board President

The American Indian Graduate is now available in electronic form. If you would prefer to receive an email copy of our publication, please let us know at www.aigcs.org
This year, AIGC celebrates its 45th anniversary – nearly a half-century of efforts dedicated to improving cultural and economic wellbeing for individuals and tribes through graduate education. While the years speak to our tenure, our scholars speak to our progress: over 15,000 graduate fellowships and over $52 million in scholarships.

AIGC could not have come this far without the support of so many through the years, the very reason we are capable of achieving this milestone. Among those who stand out are the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians, who have generously supported AIGC for the past five years. Thank you to all our contributors, both past and present.

Also this year, the higher education industry was the subject of executive-level policy action. The Presidential Memorandum on federal student loan repayments, issued in 2014 to the Secretary of the Treasury and the Secretary of Education, is a move in the right direction for American Indians and Alaska Natives.

The Memorandum outlines proposed regulations allowing nearly five million additional federal direct student loan borrowers the opportunity to cap their student loan payments at ten percent of their income and mitigates a major problem for American Indian students – the burden of financing an advanced degree.

With the average student debt now equaling $29,400, we hope that this Presidential Memorandum acts as a catalyst in student debt reform – making higher education more accessible, affordable and feasible, for American Indians and Alaska Natives.

According to the National Science Foundation’s Survey of Earned Doctorates, American Indians and Alaska Natives are represented among their doctorate-degreed peers. The Presidential Memorandum on federal student loan repayments is an encouraging action that can shift this pattern and, hopefully, invigorate increased participation in graduate and doctoral programs among Native Americans.

In the year of AIGC’s founding, 1969, the world of higher education was very different. American Indians and Alaska Natives were grossly underrepresented – if not entirely missing – from advanced, graduate, professional and doctoral programs, across all industries. Thankfully, the environment of higher education has changed. Federal policy is supporting mechanisms that reduce the challenges of paying for college, after graduation. There is improved representation among American Indian and Alaska Native students engaged in undergraduate and graduate education. Many tribes have invested in their communities by creating educational funds and programs to prepare their members for higher education.

During our next 45 years, AIGC will continue its mission to improve the economic wellbeing of individuals and tribes through higher education. Thank you for being part of the AIGC community and contributing to our four and a half decades of progress.

Sam Deloria
AIGC is looking for Alumni to update our database and include you in our plans for the AIGC 50th anniversary in 2019!

Be a part of the celebration and share your story in *The American Indian Graduate* magazine.

Please register on the AIGC Alumni page of the website at this link:
http://www.aigcs.org/program-services/alumni-registration/
At this very moment, I’m sitting in Starbucks looking out a window, at the Plaza de Armas in Cusco, Peru. Yesterday, I was exploring the ruins of Machu Picchu in the rain. This is where my life has taken me. It has also taken me to 11 other countries in the last 7 months. I am in the final weeks of an 8-month world travel fellowship, from the University of Washington (UW), and this personal and solo journey has been the most incredible experience of my life. None of this would have been possible if I had not strived for a higher education or had the support of my family, community and various Native American scholarship funds like the American Indian Graduate Center Fellowship.

As a Diné (Navajo) woman of the To’ahani (Near the Water) clan and born for the Deeshchii’nii (Red Streak People) clan, I hold multiple roles in my life: daughter, sister, spouse, clan relative and friend, member of a small-knit community, student and scientist. My love of science was awakened as a student, at Chinle High School on the Navajo Nation, and has driven me to pursue research in human genetics and evolution. I attended Arizona State University (ASU) and graduated in 2006, with dual bachelor degrees in Biology and Anthropology. Joining the Minority Access to Research and Careers (MARC) Program at ASU really changed my career path and I grew to love research. After graduating, I joined the Post-baccalaureate Research Educational Program (PREP) at ASU to help me figure out if graduate school was for me. I was able to publish a first-author scientific publication, with my advisor, and my experience there, in a human genetics laboratory, inspired me to continue with my graduate degree. After 5 years of research in the laboratory of Dr. Willie Swanson, in the Department of Genome Sciences, in August 2013, I received my Ph.D. in Genome Sciences from the University of Washington. Graduate school remains one of the most difficult things I’ve ever done in my life. Being so far from home and under the constant stress of research and academics really wore me down over the years. But, by attaining my degree, I have become one of the few Diné with a Ph.D. in Genome Sciences and am very proud to have shared that moment with all of my friends and family last year.

Beginning with those hours-long bus rides to school, education and science have always been my ticket to seemingly unimaginable opportunities and exploration of the outside world. Since then, my research and education have given me the opportunity to travel across the United States and abroad. As I reached the end of the Ph.D. chapter in my life, I wanted to experience the world beyond research and academics. By my calculation, I had been
Education and science have always been my ticket to seemingly unimaginable opportunities and exploration of the outside world.

My perspective as a Native American scientist and traveler has changed my life and I'm continually thankful to all of the organizations that have supported me along the way. The American Indian Graduate Center supported me throughout my doctoral studies and is one of the reasons I have been successful in my academics. When I return to the United States, I will start the transition from my Ph.D. studies into a postdoctoral research position. Exploring the world and seeing new places has given me much personal joy, but I was also able to share my travels with my family, friends and community and inspire them to explore the world and seek novelty wherever they are.

Ahéhee’! Dr. Katrina G. Claw

(Katrina’s world journey took her through New Zealand, Australia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, China, Japan, Ecuador, Peru and Brazil! You can read more of Katrina’s story on her website, www.navajoworldexplorer.com.)
AIGC “Celebrating 45 Years of Providing Scholarships” Reception – a Tremendous Success!

by Linda Niezgodzki

The year 1969 marked an important milestone in American Indian post-secondary education. The National Indian Scholarship Program (the American Indian Graduate Center [AIGC] of today) opened its doors at the University of New Mexico under the auspices of the American Indian Law Center. This year, AIGC celebrated 45 years of providing scholarships, at the 6th annual reception held in Albuquerque, NM. AIGC hosted over 120 attendees and honored Native American advocates, AIGC alumni and supporters of the organization.

“There is a tremendous community of distinguished professionals, educators and advocates of American Indian higher education,” said Sam Deloria, Director of AIGC. “We honor these individuals for their commitment to advancing educational opportunities for Native Americans and Alaska Natives, and for their leadership in strengthening the power of scholarship.”

Those honored at the reception included:

Bruce Bleakman and REDW – REDW, CPA and Business and Financial Advisors, and Mr. Bleakman, who is an expert in accounting and financial reporting for tribal governments, were honored together, as generous supporters of various initiatives in Indian Country.

Dr. Grayson Noley (Choctaw Nation) – Dr. Noley is a Professor Emeritus of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Oklahoma. He holds a master’s and doctorate degree in Education from Pennsylvania State University and a bachelor’s degree from Southeastern Oklahoma State University. He has authored more than two dozen journal articles and book chapters and served for 13 years as Chair of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, at the University of Oklahoma.

Dr. Darlene Sorrell (Navajo Nation) – Dr. Sorell is an AIGC alumna and serves as Director of the Albuquerque Indian Health Service Dental Clinic, at the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute.

Steve Stallings (Rincon Band of Luiseno Indians) – Mr. Stallings is a Senior Vice President and Director of Wells Fargo’s Native American Banking Services Group. He is a key player in scholarship opportunities for American Indian students and served on the AIGC Board of Directors several years ago.

Dr. Wayne Watkins (Oglala Sioux) – Dr. Watkins is an alumnus of AIGC, who supports the “Power of Scholarship”, through continuous donations to the organization.
The AIGC Reception was made possible with the help of all those who attended, helped organize and worked at the event. We would like to express our gratitude for their generous donations and continued support:

Albuquerque Isotopes Ballpark
Amerind Risk Management Corporation
Conoco Phillips
Ovations Food Services
Public Service Company of New Mexico (PNM)
Wells Fargo Bank

The evening included a successful silent auction, with a number of exclusive items donated by artists, collectors, jewelers and other craftsmen, listed below. AIGC is most appreciative of these donated items, as they helped raise thousands of dollars toward scholarships for Alaska Native and American Indian students.

Thanks to our generous and talented silent auction donors!

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AIGC would also like to thank all those who attended, helped organize and worked at the event. **A big thank you to the AIGC Staff and all our volunteers!** Volunteers are a very valuable asset and vital to AIGC’s events, making them successful.

The evening also included a few words from AIGC and AIGCS/GMS scholarship recipients. Alicia Ortega (AIGC alumna), Craig Cheresposy (AIGC Wells Fargo Scholarship recipient) and Aisha Baloo (AIGCS/GMS scholarship recipient) shared stories about their educational journeys and how scholarships have made a difference in their lives. It was a very moving moment for all in attendance. Thank you to each of them for taking the time to share their stories!

AIGC is grateful for the support of so many, throughout our 45 years of providing scholarships! The gradual growth of AIGC has been made possible through the support of federal programs, private foundations, individual endowments, alumni giving and personal donations. Collectively, the spirit for education sustainment within the American Indian and Alaska Native community has benefited thousands of students who received scholarships or utilized student services offered through AIGC.

Fine art donated to AIGC is not sold during the silent auction, but remains available for purchase. The exquisite paintings, sculptures and baskets may be viewed on the aigcs.org website, at [http://www.aigcs.org/about-us/fine-art-for-sale/](http://www.aigcs.org/about-us/fine-art-for-sale/).

Please plan to join us next year, April 2015.
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From left: 2013 MJIL graduates Dwaynna Lucas, Cynthia Tiger, and Bennie Francisco Jr. with Professors G. William Rice and Tim Pleasant
AIGC Celebrates 45 Years of Providing Scholarships!

by Linda Niezgodzki

In 1969, Bob Bennett was completing his tenure as the first Indian to be Commissioner of Indian Affairs since Ely Parker in the U.S. Grant Administration. Bennett, an Oneida from Wisconsin and a lawyer, had just assumed the position of Founding Director of the American Indian Law Center (AILC) at the University Of New Mexico School Of Law. Two years before, Prof. Fred Hart had created the Special Scholarship Program in Law for American Indians, now known as the Pre-Law Summer Institute (PLSI), to encourage American Indians and Alaska Natives to attend law school, and prepare them to do so with an 8-week summer program. Bennett and his friend John Rainer of Taos Pueblo decided that the time was right to create a scholarship program for Indian graduate students in all fields, so they created American Indian Scholarships (AIS) as a spinoff of the AILC, with John Rainer as Director. Within a few years, AIS became a fully independent organization, with funding from the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

In 1971, AIS incorporated in the State of New Mexico as a non-profit organization and, in 1972, a seed grant from the Donner Foundation led to the development of a contract with the BIA. The Special Higher Education Program (SHEP) is still AIGC’s major funding source, along with individual and corporate donations, bequests, fundraising, individual endowments and alumni giving. Over 90% of every dollar goes to scholarships and student services.

The founders’ vision of American Indian graduate students pursuing masters, doctoral and professional degrees in all fields of study, has yielded over 16,600 graduate level scholarships, totaling nearly $52 million. Every year, AIGC awards over 500 scholarships, totaling more than $2 million, to both graduate and undergraduate students. AIGC is the oldest and largest national provider of scholarships for American Indian and Alaska Native graduate students. Additionally, AIGC has supported a variety of academic programs, including high school outreach, leadership, career development, retention initiatives and community building programs.

The gradual growth of the AIGC’s Fellowship Program has been made possible through the generosity of others and we would not be able to provide scholarships without that support. AIGC would like to thank those that have provided scholarship support to fund the programs (see column above).

Although we are not able to mention all those who have donated to AIGC throughout our 45 years, we are thankful to all of our donors and volunteers!

Our ultimate objective is access to, and support for, higher education. AIGC’s mission is “Build, promote and honor self-sustaining American Indian and Alaska Native communities through education and leadership.”

Thank you! We’re looking forward to another 45 years!
A few months ago, walking down the hill toward the Pit, the University of New Mexico’s (UNM) iconic basketball arena and site of graduation ceremonies, I saw two elderly Native American couples, scurrying like me, for a seat at the 2014 commencement ceremonies. We nodded to each other and our smiles were a silent acknowledgement of pride in witnessing our relatives’ graduation from college. This brief encounter made me think about the monumental progress Native people have made in higher education, since I first attended the University of New Mexico back in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when only a handful of Natives were students.

For me, the exciting and culturally-defining era of the 1960’s was an incredibly propitious time to be in college. I started at UNM, in the summer of 1966, only a few weeks after graduating from Albuquerque’s Valley High School. My motive for early enrollment had nothing to do with lofty goals, but a desire to have a summer income. My tribe, the Jicarilla Apache, had one of the best tribal college scholarship programs for its members at the time, providing funding for higher education tuition to living expenses. In addition, I was allowed $40 per month, for miscellaneous expenses, and that was my incentive – to have some extra spending money in my pocket.

My home on the reservation was, economically, no picnic. My widowed mother, six brothers and sisters and I lived on a cattle ranch, on the southern part of our reservation, near Lindrith. My mother’s income came from selling the calf crop in late fall. Her income was barely enough to keep the car company from repossessing our truck, keeping food on the table, running a household and maintaining a working ranch. Following an unspoken and unwritten family rule, as soon as my siblings and I became teen-agers and found employment, we left our mother’s household. My exodus came when I was a freshman in high school. I went to live with a white family in Albuquerque, to care for their invalid and bedridden mother. This allowed me to attend Valley High School. Throughout high school, I worked at whatever jobs I could find and lived with several different families.

Ever since I could remember, my grandparents and my mother pounded into our heads that only education would make a difference in our lives. If we wanted to have some choices, better ourselves and our lives, contribute to our people and even preserve our tribal culture, we had to go to college.

Freida Havens, Chairwoman of the Jicarilla Apache Tribe’s Chester E. Faris Higher Education Scholarship Program, presents Veronica E. Velarde Tiller a cash award of $1,000 for being the first Jicarilla Apache tribal member to receive a Ph.D.

by Veronica E. Velarde Tiller (Jicarilla Apache)
During my junior year of high school, I moved in with my oldest sister, who was a junior at UNM, and had the privilege of living off campus.

I did not view attending college so much as an educational or long-term opportunity, but as as the way out of my immediate economic predicament on the reservation. Ever since I could remember, my grandparents and my mother pounded into our heads that only education would make a difference in our lives. If we wanted to have some choices, better ourselves and our lives, contribute to our people and even preserve our tribal culture, we had to go to college. My siblings and I were expected to do well in school ever since we entered, as six year-olds. Living up to the family party line academically, we all did well. We were also expected to speak our Apache language and to respect and live by the principles and values inherent in Apache religion, customs and traditions. Today, five of the seven of us have undergraduate and advanced degrees.

The academic part of attending college was challenging, but I was willing to undertake it. The most difficult part was feeling so totally alone in a sea of young people whose world was so different than mine. With my “rez” background, I continually felt like a hillbilly in Beverly Hills. For me, the “assimilation” learning curve was steep and one I had to negotiate alone, on a trial-and-error basis, with limited resources. Besides being so country, when country definitely wasn’t cool, as far as I could tell, I was one of very few Indian students on campus, with even fewer in my classes. But, there I was, an awkward, ninety-five pound, seventeen-year-old Indian girl, who was more comfortable on the back of a horse, at an amateur rodeo in blue jeans and cowboy boots, listening to George Jones and Buck Owens on the radio. I just couldn’t find anyone who had grown up as I had. One late fall day, one of the white girls at my dorm was sitting next to a huge pile of clothes on her bed. I asked her, “Are you leaving school?” She laughed and said, “I am taking my summer clothes home, so I can make room for my winter duds.” I remember feeling foolish and ashamed as I looked at my all-season all-purpose clothes that filled about one third of my closet. How was it to know I was supposed to have a wardrobe for every season? I remember that girl left school early because she found a husband, which was, apparently, one of the principal objectives of her college experience. Again, was I supposed to know that was the reason so many girls went to college? My many social embarrassments made it easier to submerge myself in studies and spend most of my extra time at the library. Notwithstanding my lack of outside or extracurricular activities on campus, I was still barely making it academically and on the verge of quitting.

When was any of this going to seem relevant to anything in my life, either past or in any foreseeable future?

In my junior year, everything changed for the better. It was the height of the Viet Nam protests and the student and civil rights movements. Almost overnight, things like clothes, tea parties, sororities, homecoming queens, dating the right guy and everything that I thought was so important, that I had aspired to be a part of, and that defined my early college years, went out the window. The Indian students at UNM started meeting, professors began offering courses like Black, Chicano and Native Studies, and Indian students were now “in”. Even more surprising was the fact that I also no longer felt so alienated. My blue jeans and boots were no longer so embarrassing. My long straight hair was even cooler. Even being Indian did not seem so conspicuously out of place. I discovered many other minority students, not just Indians, had shared many of my insecurities and we began to hang out together. Even the university began to notice us; Black studies, Chicano studies and Native American studies courses began to appear on the curriculum. My interest in my tribal history had taken root as a child, with stories at my grandfather’s knee and my mother’s iron-clad insistence we speak Apache and participate fully in the ceremonies and traditions of our tribe. Now, I discovered I didn’t have to give up any of those in order to be a vibrant, fully-educated woman in two cultures.

Even my newly discovered passion for the scholarly world might not have blossomed into a lifetime of discovery and service, if it had not been for the American Indian Graduate Center (AIGC) program. When I graduated with a bachelor’s degree in political science in 1970, my tribal scholarship came to an end. I had applied and been accepted into graduate school at UNM’s History Department. I pieced together several financial sources, including tuition assistance from AIGC, for the first semester. This assistance came at a critical time when I needed it most and opened the door to other scholarships for my masters program. The Ford Foundation provided me with a Doctoral Scholarship to continue and I received my Ph.D. in 1976. I was honored by my Tribe for being the first Jicarilla Apache to receive a Ph.D. I went on to accept a tenured position, teaching American
Indian history at the University of Utah Department of History, where I taught from 1976-1980.

I left college teaching and founded my company, Tiller Research, Inc., in 1980 in Washington, D.C. Since then, I have been in business conducting research largely in support of litigation on behalf of Indian tribes, federal agencies and private companies, for over 35 years. I have been fortunate enough to work with tribes throughout the country on matters relating to their water rights, timber and other valuable resources. The cash portion of settlements in cases that utilized my research alone has now totaled more than $100 million, paid directly to tribes. The greatest personal satisfaction from these years of litigation support, however, has come from the opportunity to work with three generations of tribal leadership and their attorneys, from coast to coast.

Today, I am focusing primarily on my own writing and publishing. This fall (2014), my best known work: Tiller’s Guide to Indian Country: Economic Profiles of American Indian Reservations will be published in its 3d edition, probably as an e-book reference work and possibly as a print-on-demand hardcover edition. This work is widely used by Congressional staff, federal agencies serving Indian tribes many still know little about, as well as financial institutions and journalists. Tiller’s Guide has been cited by the United States Supreme Court and, even more often, by parties before the Court, as an authoritative source of demographic and economic information. Tiller’s Guide is the premier guide to Indian Country!

My advice to Native American students pursuing college and advanced degrees is never to give up, no matter how steep the assimilation curve or how long the journey may seem. And don’t be too concerned if you don’t know exactly what degree you want or what you want to do with it. In the 21st century, your form of livelihood, your career path, even your profession may change more than once. Change may well be the most constant factor in your life. Learn to deal with it, manage it, plan for it, even to cause it... but don’t spend your life simply reacting to it. By all means, don’t pull the ladder up behind you. There was never a more unlikely candidate for almost anything I have done professionally. Somebody believed in me and gave me the chance; someone has believed in you, too. You be that somebody for someone following behind you.

If I have a major regret, it is, perhaps, that I did not go to any of my college graduation ceremonies. I should have been more proud, at the time, and you should be, too!! Good luck and always remember – you deserve it! ✦

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My advice to Native American students pursuing college and advanced degrees is never to give up, no matter how steep the assimilation curve or how long the journey may seem.
Collaborating on Higher Education for All of Indian Country

by Stephine Poston

Three of the nation’s premier American Indian and Alaska Native higher education advocacy organizations united in a message, to address an audience at the 2014 National Indian Gaming Association (NIGA) Tradeshow and Convention. Their message, “Be Educated, Be Prosperous,” focused on the promotion of economic and community development, through education policy and programs.

American Indian Graduate Center (AIGC) Director, Sam Deloria, represented AIGC, which presented with the American Indian College Fund (AICF) and the National Indian Education Association (NIEA). Together, the three national organizations defended an investment strategy founded on training, certification, academic and professional programs for American Indians.

NIGA’s annual Tradeshow and Convention attracts nearly 6,000 attendees, including tribal leaders, Indian gaming commissioners and regulators, gaming executives and managers, tribal economic development properties and resort representatives. Employees representing a majority of the 420 casinos, operated by nearly 250 tribes in 28 states, were in attendance.

“Our message was that education is a community investment. By building ‘tribal brain power,’ we are keeping skilled workers in our communities,” said Deloria. “Through educational support in our tribal communities, we have the knowledge base to successfully manage our tribal businesses. From the economic development perspective, this keeps earnings within our communities and fosters a new capacity for entrepreneurship. It is a cyclical model of community sustainability and education is the primary input.”

At present, it is estimated that 80 to 90 cents of every dollar leaves the reservation within 72 hours. For tribes with major – or even minor – economic development operations, including casinos, resorts, golf courses, convenience stores, supermarkets or any other business marketing to the consumer audience, there is much

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My path to addictions work started with Gayle. Gayle was an ‘old hippie lady’, who ran a substance abuse treatment program. She recruited me from another company by offering an extra dollar an hour. Boy, I sure thought I was pulling one over on her and happily accepted what she offered, despite the uncertainty of what I was getting myself into. As a young behavioral health worker, I found myself plunged into the depths of humanity; I worked in groups where the discussion was centered around whether someone should drink alcohol, after having been asked to leave their family, because their drinking had caused destruction and ruin. I remember talking to a young man, who had been told by his doctor at the Indian Health Services that he’d die if he didn’t stop drinking, and him telling me he wasn’t sure what he’d do with his days if he stopped drinking. I learned about kinship and the beauty of transitions, those moments when things clicked and, all of a sudden, the sullen, sad person became lit from the inside and beamed with joy, fondness for recovery and passions of life. I was hooked.

In 2010, the National Survey on Drug Use and Health reported the following: the percentage of American Indian or Alaska Native adults, who needed treatment for an alcohol or a drug use problem, was higher than the national average for adults (18.0 vs. 9.6 percent). In 2012, over 20 million individuals needing substance abuse treatment in the United States went untreated (94% felt they didn’t need treatment); 38.2% of those people did not have health care coverage and could not afford the cost of treatment; 26.3% did not want to stop using and 10.1% had health insurance that did not cover the cost of substance abuse treatment.

As a behavioral health provider, I am concerned about young people. In 2013, the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) reported the following trends for national alcohol use: 10.2% of eighth graders, 25.7% of tenth graders and 32.9% of twelfth graders have used alcohol in the last month. Risky alcohol and substance use can be a precursor for addiction. Many of the people we treated in Arizona report that they started using substances at an early age.

What can we do to prevent risky substance use? Research suggests we promote and facilitate the following protective factors: giving youth and tribal community members a strong identification with culture, family time (frequent family dinners), connection with the past, traditional healing/ceremonies, adaptability and using the wisdom of the elders. We face challenges to our wellbeing and have the strength to overcome adversity. These words are not just some slogan we see on a bumper sticker, but a true opportunity to heal our nations.

Changes are being made, on the national level, to improve health outcomes for Americans. On March 23, 2010, President Obama signed the Affordable Care Act (ACA). This piece of legislature marked the beginning of a new era; on January 1, 2014 the Federal Marketplace opened for the first time. A historic number of Americans have enrolled in health care; Healthcare.gov reports 7.5 million Americans have signed up for “Obamacare” under the ACA.

by Jordanna Burkett Crist
The 10 essential benefits of ACA include the following: ambulatory patient services; emergency services; hospitalization; maternity and newborn care; mental health and substance use disorder services, including behavioral health treatment; prescription drugs, rehabilitative and habilitative services and devices; laboratory services; preventive and wellness services and chronic disease management and pediatric services, including oral and vision care. The congressional budget office predicts about 15 million Americans (in 2014) will benefit through tax credits and assistance with cost sharing - this means more money in your pocket (the White House predicts this could save an average enrollee $4700).

I am thankful to AIGC for helping fund my graduate education and their commitment to the health and wellness of Indian Country. When I go to work, I think about the progress I’ve seen in people’s lives, day by day, and I believe we are improving the health landscape for Indian Country. I sit in our lobby and talk with people about what they are hoping to achieve by getting treatment. Common answers are to comply with probation, to get their kids back or simply to feel better. I watch people progress through treatment and, for many, treatment works. They get off probation, they get their children back from CPS or tribal social services and they seek employment. Some service recipients make the courageous decision to join the ranks of behavioral health providers. There is hope.

For more information about the affordable care act, visit the health and human services website, http://www.hhs.gov/. For more information about Native American Connections visit, http://www.nativeconnections.org

(Jordanna Burkett Crist is the daughter of Ronald & Charlotte Saunders and is an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation. Originally from Crownpoint, NM, she received a Bachelor’s Degree in Psychology, with minors in American Indian Studies and Anthropology, at the University of Arizona. In 2002, Ms. Crist participated in Oklahoma State University’s American Indians into Psychology Fellowship and began her work in Indian Country. She obtained a Master’s Degree in Community Counseling from Arizona State University in 2007 and is an independently licensed professional counselor and clinical supervisor, at Native American Connections in Phoenix, AZ. Her passion is working with the underserved; she has worked in jails, tribal juvenile detention centers, public mental health facilities, frontier hospitals and substance abuse treatment programs. In March of 2014, Ms. Crist was selected as an emerging leader in the behavioral health sector and is participating in a national leadership program called Project LIFT (Leadership Initiatives for Tomorrow), facilitated by Abt Associates in Washington, D.C. The program is funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (SAMHSA/CSAT).

We face challenges to our wellbeing and have the strength to overcome adversity. These words are not just some slogan we see on a bumper sticker, but a true opportunity to heal our nations.

For Indian Country, this means greater health care resources and improved health outcomes, especially for those eligible for coverage under the ACA. As an emerging leader, I believe the future is bright - we have access to methods of treatment, funding and support that many of our predecessors have long fought to obtain.

Every day, I ask myself, what could Indian Country look like in 20 years? I have dedicated my career to answering this question. I supervise an urban Indian adult behavioral health program. Remember Gayle? I have Gayle’s job. It looks different than it did 12 years ago, but the basic principles are the same: we use science and traditional Native American spiritual practices to treat addictions and behavioral health concerns. My specialty is working with those who have co-occurring disorders (both a mental health disorder and a substance use disorder). In 2007, Nora D. Volkow, M.D., Director of the National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA), reported as many as 6 in 10 substance abusers also have at least one other mental health disorder. In 2012, 8.4 million adults were identified as meeting the criteria for a co-occurring disorder. According to NIDA, when we look at national substance abuse treatment, it is primarily sought for alcohol, pain relievers and marijuana.


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I am from the Pueblo of Laguna, where I grew up, and am an enrolled tribal member. In addition, I am also a member of Jemez Pueblo. From an early age, I knew I was expected to attend college because of the emphasis my parents put on education. My mother did not receive her degree until after she had three children and my father never completed his degree. Through their experiences, they realized the value of education and knew it could never be taken away. Choosing a field of study was not entirely difficult; while growing up I had always been fascinated with computers and technology. So, going forward, I had a plan and clear path to follow.

After completing high school on the reservation, I began college as an undergrad at the University of Arizona, which I attended from 2006–2009. It was a great experience and one I wish I could have continued, but escalating costs and debt persuaded me to move back home. Looking back, this was the best decision I made because, not long after moving home, my father passed away. After being away for two years, I was able to spend nearly every day with him for the last year of his life, which is something I will always cherish. However, this did make things difficult as I continued my education at the University of New Mexico. I had to retake some classes and, unfortunately, put myself a year behind. I could have easily been discouraged, but I moved forward one semester at a time. Eventually, I received my Bachelor of Business Administration Degree, with a concentration in Management Information Systems (MIS), in 2012.

During my last semester, I received an internship offer with the USDA Forest Service, to work within the Chief Information Office in Albuquerque, NM. However, my internship did not allow me to start until after I graduated and I was required to remain a student while working as an intern. I decided to pursue my graduate degree to remain in the internship program. This was an obvious, but difficult, decision I made for myself and my family. There were times when I saw my classmates more than my wife and son; times I would get home after they were asleep and leave before they woke up. As much as I sacrificed, my family sacrificed more and I am truly thankful for their support and encouragement. It is due to their support that I graduated with my Masters of Business Administration, with a dual concentration in Information Assurance and MIS, while I worked full-time for the Forest Service.

I am currently undergoing the conversion process to become a permanent employee and pursue a lifelong career within the information technology field. All my dreams and goals are within reach and, although the path was not as straightforward as planned, I have already made it. So, for those in college, planning to go or hopeful to return, I strongly encourage you to continue to move forward one day at a time. Anything worthwhile is worth working for and you should not let anything keep you from becoming who you were meant to be. There are going to be numerous obstacles and challenges, but never forget what you set out to achieve. You are never alone, as you strive to achieve your goals, so ask for help along the way. You will find that, many times, those who support you are just as relieved and excited as you are when you achieve your goal. In fact, my mother may have been more excited for me, when I received my Master’s Degree, than I was, but that goes to show you how invested everyone is in your success. Best of luck to all of you, as your work towards your goals. ✦
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Anne Ray Internships at the Indian Arts Research Center

by Elysia Poon

The School for Advanced Research (SAR), a 501(c)(3) non-profit, was established in Santa Fe, New Mexico in 1907, as a center for the study of Southwestern archaeology and ethnology. Since then, the scope of the School’s activities has embraced a global perspective, through programs that encourage advanced scholarship in anthropology and related disciplines and by facilitating the work of Native American scholars and artists. The Indian Arts Research Center (IARC), a division of SAR, works to fulfill this mission by bridging the divide between indigenous creativity and scholarship. To this end, the IARC supports initiatives and projects that illuminate the intersections between Native studies, art history and creative expression. This includes providing fellowship opportunities for artists; fostering dialogue among community members, artists, researchers and scholars, through seminars and symposia; promoting study and exploration of the IARC collection of Native arts and nurturing future arts and museums professionals through experiential training.

Since 2008, the IARC has supported interns dedicated to working with Native collections through the Anne Ray internship program. A forty-hour per week, broad-based training in collections management, registration and education/programming, the Anne Ray internship program requires previous museum experience. Throughout their tenure, Anne Ray interns work closely with the IARC collection, which was founded in 1922 and is considered, by many, to be one of the most remarkable assemblages of Southwestern Native art in the world. Representing a broad range of works including pottery, textiles, paintings and drawings, carvings and jewelry, the collection numbers over 12,000 items. Anne Ray intern, Melvin Sarracino (2012-2013), who came to SAR from the Haak’u Museum at Acoma Pueblo notes, “Working with the collections [at SAR] has given me ideas that can be applied at any museum...This internship has given me the chance to hone my skills in mount making, photography, community outreach and research.” After his internship was complete, Melvin was able to return to the Haak’u and apply the skills he learned at SAR.

Additionally, interns spend part of their time working with a mentor, an Anne Ray Scholar, to conduct independent research and prepare for a public presentation. Recent Anne Ray scholars have included Nancy Marie Mithlo, Margaret Wickens Pearce and Amy Lonetree. Topics of research explored by former interns have included, Connecting Collections to the Community: Best Practices and Recommendations for the California State Indian Museum’s Basketry Collection by Lisa Barrera (2012-2013); Gatekeepers and Traders in Alaska’s Northwest Interior 1800–1870 by Kelsey Potdevin (2011-2012) and Preserving Native Collections at the School for Advanced Research: Tribal Consultations, Conservation and Public Health by Dominic Henry (2009-2010). Since leaving SAR, Dominic Henry has earned two masters degrees and recently accepted a position at Bandelier National Monument as a preservationist. Of his time with SAR, he says, “The internship supplied me with unique resources that allowed me to develop my own sense of scholarship and philosophical thinking, as a rising Native professional in the field. This platform only became stronger throughout my academic career. I’m now a leader, ready to share my experiences and make an impact in cultural preservation initiatives for communities throughout the world.”

Applications for the Anne Ray internships are due on March 1. More information can be found on SAR’s website at: http://internships.sarweb.org.
Education Support in Our Tribal Communities

Continued from page 18

to gain in the way of extending the stay of that dollar. Creating opportunities for employment on the reservation, the group argued, generates sustained opportunities for the dollar to remain within tribal communities for longer periods of time.

“Advanced degrees equate to more than $570,000 in increased earning power over a lifetime,” explained Deloria. “Imagine the economic impact just one tribal member with an advanced degree can make. Now consider our collective aim – to increase the six percent of American Indians and Alaska Natives with a graduate degree to seven, eight, nine percent and beyond. The impact of that change will have a considerable effect on Indian County.”

While the panel of presenters discussed the overall community benefit of education, they also focused discussion on the benefits of education to business enterprises specifically. Educating and training local employees generally reduces turnover and, therefore, reduces overall hiring costs. It provides a source of talent for economic development growth and succession planning. These contribute directly to the bottom line.

Uniting in their message on the importance of higher education for all of Indian Country, the panelists made an appeal to tribal leaders and tribal enterprise representatives, asking for their support making education more attainable to their tribal members and employees. Through scholarships and innovative education-focused programs – such as educational leave, project-based learning and academic partnerships – tribal businesses have a tremendous opportunity to support education for American Indians and Alaska Natives.

“I am reminded of a woman who provides a great example of this concept of Native educational support,” Deloria recalled. “Kenora Crowfeather of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe was the first Native American MBA graduate from the University of Kansas. She received educational support during her collegiate years and went on to become a financial analyst for the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community. This is the crux of our message – support to Native American higher education nationwide ensures tribal enterprises nationwide will have skilled Native American employees.”

Anne Ray Internships

Interested in working with Native collections? The Indian Arts Research Center (IARC) at the School for Advanced Research (SAR) in Santa Fe, NM, offers two nine-month paid internships focused on working with Native collections. Interns participate in the daily collections/programming activities of the IARC and also benefit from the mentorship of the Anne Ray scholar.

Deadline to apply March 1

internships.sarweb.org

Anne Ray Fellowship for Scholars

Are you a Native scholar with a master’s or PhD in the arts, humanities, or social sciences? Do you have an interest in and commitment to mentoring students? Apply for a nine-month Anne Ray Fellowship at SAR. The Anne Ray scholar works on their own writing or curatorial research project while also providing mentorship to the Anne Ray interns working at the IARC.

Deadline to apply November 1

annerayscholar.sarweb.org
Hané ch’inish’aah; I have a story of how the Creator is with me. Sometimes, you have one chance to acquire a skill. That’s what I was told, by an 11-year old boy at Chinle Boarding School in the mid-1980’s, while he was teaching me a number of Navajo string figures. In Navajo society, many people are reluctant to share their knowledge. In order to master a skill or hear a lengthy traditional story, one must develop a relationship of trust, by listening and being persistent. It’s up to you to retain the knowledge received because you will not have a second chance.

I had the opportunity to attend American Fork High School in northern Utah, where I developed a fluency in English and where The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints administered the Indian Placement Program. The program helped thousands of Native children attend public schools, live in foster homes and learn skills needed to be successful in life. After high school, I returned to the reservation and gained short-term employment. I lived with my family, with many nieces and nephews and helped care for them. For a few years, I shared the knowledge acquired at my foster home, with my family at home, with some success. I taught monthly budgeting and personal hygiene to my nieces and nephews.

At time progressed, I felt an urge to pursue higher learning and realized the importance of helping my people. In the fall of 2004, I enrolled in the Elementary Education program at Haskell Indian Nations University, and completed eight semesters. With the financial support from my family, scholarships from my tribe, AIGC and other Native organizations, I was able to provide my own transportation, books and testing fees to complete my bachelor’s degree. Immediately after graduation, I was hired for six months to teach GED classes at Navajo Technical University. While my emphasis was basic math, I enjoyed teaching career and life preparation in English and Navajo. Other staff members and I were able to help a number of Navajo adults pass their GED exams and move on to fulfill military and career goals.

‘For everything created… is a solution to a problem.’ – Dr. Mike Murdock. My people are continually experiencing low educational attainment, substandard living conditions and high incidences of violence crimes.

As a teacher, I was often exhausted, emotionally and physically, as I worked one-on-one with some of my students and even those who were not enrolled in my class. When you are isolated in rural areas, you have to teach, protect and be a voice.

Due to social isolation, overcrowding in schools and alcoholism, many students did not complete their education. As a teacher, I was often exhausted, emotionally and physically, as I worked one-on-one with some of my students and even those who were not enrolled in my class. When you are isolated in rural areas, you have to teach, protect and be a voice.

Being a teacher is being a motivator, requiring energy to help those who need your encouragement. I
have shared a number of Navajo teachings from my upbringing. Njit’iih, you have to run, walk, wander the outdoors, where the wind, heat and cold help develop your mind, body and spirit to become stronger. I heard an elder speak about the importance of letting the harsh weather and climate ‘get to know you.’ That is why, in Navajo society, a long time ago, the elders encouraged the young ones to get up early and greet the morning dawn by running to the east. As an individual, I often walk to my destinations and sometimes hitchhike, like I did when I auditioned for the Navajo Star Wars dubbing casting call in June 2013. I am almost forty and my body has remained slim throughout my life.

‘No matter how much we want to be left alone, the new will always be with us. Today will be different from yesterday and tomorrow will be different from today.’ This quote was taken from the film, The Eagle Must Fly. In order to assist others in handling the changes in our society, to gain attention of an audience, I refer to quotes and passages from films, literature and lyrics, followed by a group activity. One problem-solving demonstration I use, to involve everyone, is the Magic Square math activity, similar to Sudoku. Up to nine persons can work together to solve a puzzle arranging numbers from 1 to 9, three-by-three. Three numbers in each row, column and diagonal must add to 15. Each group has five minutes to complete the puzzle. The objective is to communicate, share ideas and find a solution to the puzzle. The activity is applied to the real world, in a multicultural setting. It is up to us to use the resources available to find solutions to problems in our society.

Prior to and since graduating with a Master’s of Education in Curriculum and Teaching, from the University of Oregon, and securing an Oregon Teaching License in August 2010, I worked and volunteered with Native elementary students attending Portland Public Schools and Toledo Elementary School, short-term. At both locations, I emphasized cultural knowledge through hands-on demonstrations. In many Native American fine arts, there are repeated patterns similar to mainstream society. As students create patterns in art, they are able to predict in mathematics, literature and life planning. The more knowledge obtained, the more a person can identify destructive cycles in their lives and work to change their lives and communities.

‘You will be remembered for two things; the problems you solve or the ones you’ve created.’ – Dr. Mike Murdock. The mind is very impressionable, especially at a young age. I have learned that someone is always watching. Outside the home, you are a role model with many responsibilities. I was once asked by a prospective employer, “What do your students remember you by?” I believe it is by my intricate string figures and how I taught them to others. I can remember only half of what I learned back in the 1980’s, due to my inattentiveness. I never got a second chance to learn. When I teach the simple hand drum to students, I speak slowly, demonstrate for all to see and I repeat my designs. There are always second chances with my teachings.

During my years at Haskell, I had an opportunity to serve as an ambassador. I completed for and won the title Haskell Brave 2005-2006. I was part of the Haskell Royalty Committee, in which we promoted student and academic excellence through royalty competitions. To compete for the Miss Haskell and Haskell Brave title, students had to demonstrate public speaking, perform traditional and contemporary talents and answer questions for a panel of judges. If they won the titles, both had to maintain a high standard of conduct and academic performance and attend a variety of college-sponsored events throughout the year. Students appreciated the time I conducted a salsa dance demonstration and workshop. The theme of the event was, ‘The universe is made up of rhythms.’ – Patrick Swayne. Even though I was not an expert dancer, I was able to teach the basic steps to more than 50 attendees.

I feel the necessity of passing on my language, teachings and skills to the younger generation. It is important for my family and my people to witness the process of returning to your roots and building the community. Since last year, I have translated four children books, from English into Navajo: Alphabet Alliteration, Where Hummingbirds Come From, How the Fox Got It’s Colors and The Dance of the Caterpillars. In hope of maintaining the Navajo language, I speak it regularly, write my journal, read a variety of Navajo literature and listen to stories from the older generation. Having a voice means empowering individuals, communities and Indian nations. I found the gift of verbal expression a great mentoring tool for creating positive impact. I am sharing storytelling and quotes, to teach and maintain my cultural identity. I am pursuing an Arizona Teaching Certificate and plan to work as an elementary teacher in my community of Chinle, Arizona. Furthermore, I am writing a memoir of my life, using letters from friends and family, a personal diary kept since 1990, photographs and essays I have written.

In closing, I would like to share this: “Success without sharing is failure.” ✷
The bar was set high from the beginning. It did not matter where I was but, rather, where I was going. The circumstances were obvious, I was going to have to face and overcome arduous obstacles throughout my life, if I wanted to become successful. Being raised by my single mother on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation presented challenges. I could either succumb to my assumed destiny or create my own. I chose the latter. Despite socioeconomic disadvantages, I found ways to excel in the classroom. School became an outlet for my frustrations. I focused on my studies and set short and long-term goals to achieve. At first, the goals were small but, as time went by, I grew confident that by working hard I could achieve my dreams. During my freshman year of high school, I promised my mother that I was going to graduate both high school and college with honors. I kept that promise.

Moving alone, from Montana to Washington, to attend college was petrifying. I was leaving the support system of my family and quickly realized that my new peers not only had achieved great success in their high school years, but also had resources of which I could only dream. I had moments of self-doubt but remained focused, knowing my perseverance and commitment to education was not only a triumph for myself but, also, for my Native American community. With brothers and young cousins back home, it was essential that I serve as a positive role model.

After graduating with honors, from Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington, I felt a burning desire to achieve more. Thereafter, I was accepted into a Master's Degree program at the University of California, Berkeley. After graduating with my Master’s Degree in Education, I attended the University of California Hastings College of the Law, in San Francisco, California, where I earned my law degree in 2008. While studying law, I was an editor for Law Review and served as an extern for Federal District Judge, Charles R. Breyer, in the United States District Court, Northern District of California.

I had moments of self-doubt but remained focused, knowing my perseverance and commitment to education was not only a triumph for myself but, also, for my Native American community.

Moreover, I had the pleasure of earning a summer position in the legal department at Microsoft in Redmond, Washington, where I provided legal support for Xbox and game distribution through the Entertainment & Devices Group. During my time at Microsoft, I was afforded the opportunity to have dinner with Bill Gates. The vision and insight he shared with me continues to guide me in my career path today. I am currently a Senior Associate at an international law firm, Reed Smith LLP, in San Francisco, California.
Outside of law, I have recently co-founded a footwear and apparel company called TPwear, which will launch its e-commerce website (www.tpwear.com) by the third quarter of 2014. At TPwear, our vision is to provide customers with fashion that highlights Native American culture, while creating social awareness about high poverty rates and financial barriers faced by many Native American students. As Chief Executive Officer, I am dedicated to not only raising awareness about these issues, but also providing scholarships to well-deserving Native American students seeking higher education. TPwear is committed to ensuring that today’s Native tribal members have the opportunity to become tomorrow’s leaders.

Without scholarships and support from organizations such as the American Indian Graduate Center, I would not have had the opportunity to achieve my educational milestones. I stand determined to continue to be a role model for the next generation and look forward to partnering with those who champion our community’s success. ✦
Finding Your Way in the World

by Jessica Tyner

Like many English majors, I was told two things during my entire academic career: either that such a degree didn’t translate well to the “real world” (also known as the “English degrees are useless” cliché) or that my only option would be teaching (which, frankly, I’m not good at doing). To exacerbate things, I was also a first generation, low-income student. I got into college on a whim, unaware that my tribal membership with the Cherokee Nation could be a gateway into an easier educational experience—I didn’t figure that out until my junior year.

That was over 10 years ago. As I learned to be more financially savvy as a student (and apply for the scholarships and fellowships, for which I was qualified), graduate school become more feasible. With the help of organizations like the AIGC, I minimized my student loan debt while I was working towards my master’s degree in writing.

Today, I own my own business, MehtaFor, writing full-time for a variety of clients and projects around the world. I’m also the founder of The Jessica Tyner Scholarship Fund, an annual gift for graduate students, with a Native connection, pursuing an advanced degree in writing or a related field. My first anthology of poetry, “The Last Exotic Petting Zoo,” was released by Tayen Lane Publishing in August 2014. I’ve been fortunate to travel extensively, living in London, the jungles and beaches of Costa Rica and the buzzing Seoul metro.

However, it’s been a long, incredible and sometimes heartbreaking road from where I began.

Stacking the Odds

I grew up in Central Point, Oregon, a small town close to the California border, with a population of just 10,000. At the time, I was one of very few bi-racial kids in the area. My father was Cherokee, my mother white and the covert (as well as overt) racism and ignorance bred in a small, conservative town was something innate. As an only child of parents in an unhappy marriage and then divorced, I had one goal—to get out of town and into the “big city.” For many in southern Oregon, the big city is Portland.

At the time, I didn’t even think about graduate school. I didn’t even really know what it was. I was just so happy at the thought of building a life beyond what anyone in my family, town or schools thought possible for me.

I moved to Portland, on my own, at 16, after letting my grades slip from straight A’s to C’s and D’s. As luck would have it, I didn’t qualify to enroll at any Portland high schools. My previous school was so advanced that I only needed three classes to get my high school diploma and it was available via the local community college’s high school completion program. I graduated at 16 (commencement ceremony at a huge convention center) and immediately got a full-time job in retail and an apartment—both by lying about my age and betting on employers and landlords not looking too closely at IDs.
College as an Afterthought
At 20, I went to the local university, Portland State University, on a whim, to meet with an admissions counselor. I did zero research on schools, financial aid, scholarships or anything like that. It’s unbelievable thinking back, but I honestly had no clue how to do this, which is probably a side-effect of the whole “first person in my family to go to college” handicap. Plus, it had been four years since I’d heard from anyone in my family.

When the counselor told me I easily qualified as “independent” due to “abandonment by both parents”, I was hooked. Surely I could pay off that very generous loan amount, once I graduated and got a lucrative job. Four years seemed so far away and, at the time, I didn’t even think about graduate school. I didn’t even really know what it was. I was just so happy at the thought of building a life beyond what anyone in my family, town or schools thought possible for me.

Familial Territory
During my undergraduate years, I grasped at a few different majors, but it always came back to writing and literature. It’s what I was always naturally good at and it allowed for a cathartic release. I reconnected with my father, who had remarried and moved to Oklahoma. The last time I was with him, I was 22 and he’d taken a job as a caretaker. His last words to me, in person, were, “The next time I see you, you’ll have a different name.” Since he had a penchant for saying strange things, I thought nothing of it at the time. He died less than a year later, from liver cancer caused by Hepatitis C, which he’d unknowingly had for 20 years. It was from a prison tattoo of a squirrel on his forearm, something I loved when I was a child.

Meanwhile, my mother was going through a mental breakdown, from which she has never recovered. Links between mental and physical health are strong and she’s suffered countless heart attacks and strokes since I left Central Point. We’re in touch today, but the mom I grew up with has long been gone.

Educational Advancement
When I finished my undergraduate degree in literature, I’d racked up 19 scholarships, including one prestigious McNair Fellowship. I spent the summer before my senior year writing a dissertation on Poetry in the Community, presenting it at a symposium in Baltimore. I segued seamlessly into a graduate program in writing, beginning just one week after my bachelor’s graduation ceremony.

There were many ups and downs during my two years as a post-grad student. I had a boyfriend diagnosed with lymphoma cancer and I moved him in with me and cared for him, since his family was hours away. I wrote many papers curled up on a chair in the chemotherapy wing of the hospital. I spent the second half of my grad program in London, interning with The Fulbright Commission. I traveled all around Europe, walked to the top of the Eiffel Tower and ate at the oldest restaurant in the world, in Spain.

Things were often lovely and beautiful, at times heart-wrenching, but one thing was clear—I had no idea what to do next.

The Afterglow
During my graduate years, I began publishing sporadically in journals and magazines. I had one favorite poetry teacher, Michele Glazer (an impressive poet in her own right), who introduced me to the craft. I took every class she offered and still remember the best advice she gave us: “You need to memorize poetry because, one day, if you’re ever in solitary confinement, you need beautiful words besides your own in your head.”

After completing my master’s, I wasn’t ready for a “real” job. I’d been serving as a director for non-profits since my sophomore year of college, climbing up the chain from a humble work-study position. I couldn’t stand being in an office, abiding by what I saw as arbitrary rules and feeling creatively stunted. The answer was obvious—move to South Korea for a year and teach English.

Are We Grownups Yet?
Life in South Korea introduced me to an entirely new culture and experiences that are too numerous to count; however, one year was enough. Some teachers there are lifers, but I wasn’t. I went back to the US, took the first job I could find (not surprisingly at a non-profit) and merely existed for a couple of years. I wasn’t happy with many aspects of my life and, after two years, decided it was time for life to really begin—or perhaps it was decided for me.

Falling in love can change everything, especially when it’s with someone from such a conservative culture as India. The Last Exotic Petting Zoo is largely the love story between myself and my fiancé, Chintan, who was meant to be in an arranged marriage. He’s the eldest son of a Gujarati family. The turbulence of this relationship, in the early years, proved great writing fodder.

I moved to Costa Rica for a year to get away from him once, living deep in the jungles surrounded by creatures I’d never heard of before and on the beaches en paraiso, so many people dream of doing. I completed
Wells Fargo American Indian Scholarship for Academic Year 2014 – 2015

by Marveline Vallo Gabbard

The Wells Fargo American Indian Scholarship program was established in 2004 to build new and lasting relationships between the future leaders and managers in Indian Country and Indian gaming, tourism, hospitality and financial industries. The Indian gaming and hospitality industries are the largest and fastest growing industries in the Native American community and the United States. The Wells Fargo American Indian Scholarship program helps build strong relationships between Wells Fargo Bank and future Indian leaders seeking undergraduate and graduate degrees in banking, resort management, gaming operations, management and administration, including accounting, finance, information technology and human resources.

Wells Fargo selects two graduate and two undergraduate (college junior or senior) students who demonstrate character, personal merit and commitment to the American Indian community locally and nationally. Merit is demonstrated through leadership in school, civic and extracurricular activities, academic achievement and motivation to serve and succeed. In the academic year 2014-2015, four outstanding students have been selected for this opportunity.

Graduate Scholars
Raychel J. Larsen (Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation). Raychel is currently pursuing her Master of Business Administration in management and strategy at Western Governor’s University.

Nadine Thornton (Cherokee Nation). Nadine is currently pursuing a dual degree, with a Master of Business Administration and Juris Doctorate at Cornell University.

Undergraduate Scholars
Robert S. DeCoteau (Jamestown Klallam Tribe of Washington). Robert is currently a junior pursuing his Bachelor’s Degree in Business at Washington State University.

Melissa Streun (Port Gamble Indian Community). Melissa is currently a junior pursuing her Bachelor’s Degree in Tribal Administration & Governance, at Northwest Indian College.

Congratulations to the AIGC 2014 – 2015 Wells Fargo American Indian Scholarship recipients!

For more information on the Wells Fargo program, please visit aigcs.org.

(The American Indian Graduate Center has enjoyed a long relationship with Wells Fargo Bank and benefited from Wells Fargo’s outstanding financial services and dedicated community leaders, like Steve L.A. Stallings, Senior Vice President and Director of Wells Fargo Native American Banking Services in Phoenix, AZ. Mr. Stallings is widely recognized as a leader in Indian Country and previously served on the AIGC Board of Directors for eight years.)
The legacy of leadership

Great leaders leave a mark on the communities they serve. They bring people together, create a consensus and work hard to make positive change. What is accomplished today can last for generations.

American Indian Graduate Center, thank you for creating a lasting legacy of success.
My name is Kristina J. Halona and I am Navajo, originally from Sawmill, Arizona, on the Navajo Reservation. It is part of my culture to introduce myself with my clans; I am of the Black Streak Wood People Clan, born for the Folded Arms People Clan. The Bitter Water Clan is my maternal grandfather’s clan and the Salt Clan is my paternal grandfather’s clan.

My desire for higher learning is deeply rooted, though it is not supposed to be. I grew up in a poverty-stricken environment in Sawmill—a situation meant to make or break those involved. My dream to pursue engineering began in a very small home, without running water or electricity. Yet, it was easy to dream; I just had to look up. Seeing military aircraft flying over my home ignited the fire, the passion and the love for engineering. It was at that moment, as a young six-year-old, I grasped the concept of flight. My dream was to be part of the engineering world.

On January 28, 1986, the day of the Challenger accident, I told my mother that I wanted a baccalaureate degree, a master’s degree and a doctorate degree—all in engineering. I was young, but I wanted to be the “Navajo Sally Ride.” My mother taught me to dream big and set high goals, even if not quite achieved. I knew she was right, as I saw her struggle to raise five children in our tiny home. Everything was done while she worked full-time and took classes towards her baccalaureate degree. She was doing the impossible; I wanted to do the same. These impossibilities became more apparent in 1998, while I was an undergraduate in the Aerospace Engineering Program at Arizona State University (ASU). I was diagnosed with a gangrenous gallbladder—considered cancerous—and leaking inside my stomach. I underwent an emergency open-cholecystectomy. Though the surgery was successful in removing the gallbladder, there was still a danger of cancer. I was devastated. This danger, as well as the side effects, would be with me for the next five years. Due to the illness, my dream was dampened; semester grades fell to an all-time low in my scholastic career. Many advised me to give up my dream of becoming an engineer altogether. Little did they know how driven and motivated I was to accomplish my dream. I never let the possibility of cancer become a hindrance to success.

I pushed the limit, with an internship with the NASA Space Grant Program (SGP), at ASU and became a member of the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES). Interning with the NASA SGP provided hands-on experience in design, integration and testing satellite components. I took advantage of the opportunity to work in a team environment and develop managerial skills. As a member of AISES, I realized I had natural leadership ability, after becoming the ASU AISES President. I was able to assist fellow student members within the organization and we became a strong AISES chapter, which included the recipients of the prestigious AISES College Chapter of the Year Award. Soon after, I was elected, by my AISES peers, to serve as the National Student Representative on the AISES Board of Directors. This role intensified my desire to exercise leadership abilities in serving fellow Native American student members throughout the United States and Canada. Furthermore, this position included various aspects of planning student activities, working on student issues within the organization and taking direct
action in the management process of other regional representatives. Through serving in this position, interning and my studies, I took an interest in engineering management, after graduating from ASU in 2002 with a Bachelor of Science in Aerospace Engineering.

Although interested in a master’s degree in engineering management after graduating from ASU, I felt a need to obtain professional engineering experience. My first professional position, was as a Mechanical Systems Engineer with Space Works, Inc., in Scottsdale, AZ. I was involved in exciting projects like design and development of an asteroid sampler for the Jet Propulsion Laboratory. I also assisted in link design for a communication system named Geodetic Autonomous Inter-Spacecraft Network (GAIN), for NASA’s Glenn Research Center. After four great years at Space Works, Inc., I was, unfortunately, laid off; however, I used professional networks built up over the years and was soon employed as a Mechanical Systems Engineer, for Space Systems/Loral (SSL), in Palo Alto, CA. It was at SSL where I had the distinct pleasure to be one of two Mechanical System Engineers to work on the Sirius Satellite Radio satellite and was responsible for systems engineering oversight, ensuring that we met systems requirements, and was the technical consultant to other subsystems within the Sirius Satellite Program.

In my spare time, while working in Palo Alto and Scottsdale, I was a member of the Northern California AISES Professional Chapter and the Phoenix AISES Professional Chapter and had the pleasure of being able to network, mentor, tutor and help American Indian students the way so many within the AISES organization have helped me. One of the highlights, from my time with the Phoenix AISES Professional Chapter, was leading the Annual Phoenix AISES Professional Chapter Golf Tournament event, which raised scholarship funds for American Indian students attending college in Arizona. Leading this event was such an amazing feeling. Giving back to students and helping them become successful is one of my greatest rewards as a professional. It was these wonderful personal and professional experiences that prepared me for graduate school, was reinstated after being stagnant for many years. As a member of the AISES Professional Chapter and RAIN, I have the pleasure of doing some wonderful work in the community. For example, along with other colleagues, I recently had the opportunity to visit the University of Arizona to do an “Egg-Drop Workshop” for the Native American Engineering Program, which consists of American Indian students in high school interested in the STEM fields. We shared stories of how we became engineers, the work we do and how engineering can be fun. It really is hard to put into words what it means to help inspire students and encourage them to pursue higher education, but it certainly brings a feeling of contentment and one I hope to feel over and over again, as I continue to help my American Indian community.

It really is hard to put into words what it means to help inspire students and encourage them to pursue higher education, but it certainly brings a feeling of contentment and one I hope to feel over and over again, as I continue to help my American Indian community.

at George Washington University in Washington, DC and, with the help of the American Indian Graduate Center (AIGC Alumni 2007-2009), I was able to obtain a Master of Science in Engineering Management.

After I obtained my Master of Science in Engineering Management, from GWU in May 2009, I moved to Tucson, AZ and joined Raytheon Missile Systems (RMS), as a Systems Engineer. I used my MatLAB skills creating and updating Graphical User Interfaces (GUI) for the Non Line of Sight (NLOS) and Evolved SeaSparrow Missile (ESSM) programs. While at RMS, I became actively involved with the Raytheon American Indian Network (RAIN), which included being part of their Board of Directors, as Secretary and Events Coordinator. RAIN is dedicated to providing an employee forum for improvement and enhancement of its members professional development, promotes cultural awareness within and outside of RMS and promotes continuing education within the American Indian community. I am also a member of the Southern Arizona AISES Professional Chapter, in Tucson, which recently
The passion for engineering is forever with me, but it will be the drive and motivation, which I have always had, that will ensure my success at not only RMS, but in anything I do. My professional goals include leading and managing a successful and diverse engineering team at RMS, pursuing a PhD in engineering and to continuing with outreach, mentoring and tutoring students in my spare time. It is also imperative for me to remain active, within my American Indian community and within AISES, to stress the importance of education to American Indian youth.

My story began as a poor six-year-old growing up on the Navajo Reservation in Arizona, but it has been the dream I envisioned that has kept me motivated, including witnessing my hero, my mother, obtain her baccalaureate and master degrees under extraordinary circumstances. Life brings many obstacles and it is how you deal with those obstacles that ultimately makes you strong. In my Navajo culture we have a saying, “Walk in Beauty.” It means that, if you find beauty in all things, in all your surroundings, in everything you do, you will live a balanced and harmonious life. I have been tested, by growing up in poverty and overcoming a life-threatening illness, but I believe it is these life experiences, and the beauty that I found in those obstacles, that have prepared me for anything that may come my way. I want to show the American Indian people that, if a Navajo woman like me can achieve her goals and work toward her dream, so can they; it is indeed possible.

The American Indian Graduate
Summer Public Health Scholars Program

The Summer Public Health Scholars Program (SPHSP) is designed for undergraduate students to increase interest and knowledge of public health and allied health professions. SPHSP is a partnership of Columbia University’s College of Physicians and Surgeons, College of Dental Medicine, School of Nursing and the Mailman School of Public Health. Together they represent the broad spectrum of public health practice. SPHSP grant funding was awarded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Office of Minority Health & Health Equity.

SPHSP is a ten-week summer program that begins May 25, 2015 and ends July 31, 2015. The program includes:

- Orientation
- Trip to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention in Atlanta, GA
- Introductory coursework in public health
- Field Experience/Mentorship
- Field Trips
- GRE Test Prep
- Professional Development seminars
- Stipend
- Travel
- Housing

Program Eligibility:

- Rising juniors, seniors, or recent college graduates within one year of graduation. Must not be accepted to or enrolled in a graduate program.
- African American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian American, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, people with disabilities, and the economically-disadvantaged are encouraged to apply.
- Minimum GPA of 2.7.

To apply for admission into SPHSP, please complete the online application

For more information and program application, please visit us at:
www.oda-ps.cumc.columbia.edu/sphsp

Or email us at:
sphsp-ps@columbia.edu
I’m from Northern Arizona, the Navajo/Dine’ Nation, inspired to achieve by my grandmother and speaking only the Navajo language, until I started school. In high school, I was involved in sports activities and improved my attitude towards academic achievement, after my freshmen year, when I realized an education was important to escape the poverty that exists on the reservation. I was my high school’s valedictorian. I was very lucky that I had a very supportive family and a grandmother who encouraged me to attend college despite financial limitations, distance from home and culture. I was very fortunate to be accepted by the University of Arizona in Tucson, Arizona so I could remain somewhat close to home. The University of Arizona was an excellent school for me; I was well supported by U of AZ and felt I obtained an excellent education. I was grateful to the university’s pre-admission programs for minority students, which helped me get an early start, immediately after high school graduation. I graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree, from the College of Arts and Sciences, at the University of Arizona. I attended Harvard University and earned a Master’s degree in 1993, then on to medical school at Tufts University, also in Boston, Massachusetts, where I received my medical degree (M.D.) in 1997. I applied for an orthopaedic surgery residency, as that is the area of medicine I most enjoyed.

I started the process to become an orthopaedic surgeon in July 1997 and completed my residency in orthopaedic surgery, in 2002, at the University of New Mexico. (I am the first Navajo Orthopaedic Surgeon). I then proceeded to pursue a subspecialty fellowship training, in foot and ankle surgery, at Baylor College/University of Texas in Houston, Texas; then additional fellowship training in Orthopaedic Trauma at the University of New Mexico. I am extremely proud to have received board certification in orthopaedics from the American Board of Orthopaedic Surgeons.

My career in orthopaedics started in Alaska and then moved on to Arizona. In both locations, I provided orthopaedic care to Native people. I was left to focus my on practice of my subspecialty, but still perform some general orthopaedics surgeries while on-call. I am currently an orthopaedic surgeon at New Mexico Orthopaedics Associates (NMO), which is the largest orthopaedic group in New Mexico. I am currently the only woman in the group of about 25 orthopaedic surgeons.

On the way to becoming a board-certified orthopaedic surgeon, my influences and mentors were many. First, my family and, particularly, my grandmother inspired the Navajo (Dine’) traditions of a “strong Navajo woman” and the teaching of Navajo culture, where the woman is the center of all things good, tough and resourceful. From that I gathered a lot of inspiration and the determination to succeed, which provided my confidence the moment I left home. That has also provided tremendous inner strength, especially during the obstacles experienced while getting an education, during residency and board certification and as an orthopaedic surgeon. I think the concept of hard work is ingrained in me and I find inner strength and support by the “strong Navajo woman concept” which was taught to me as a child growing up on the Navajo reservation. I have always been a resourceful, strong, tough and determined Navajo woman. I can achieve “anything” through hard work and persistence. That concept has certainly helped me get
through difficult times. I continue to live by that concept, as I provide the best care possible to all my patients.

As a medical student, I had strong support from a very well-known orthopaedic surgeon with whom I had elected to work in my preliminary rotations. This surgeon is now retired from his practice as a musculoskeletal orthopaedic tumor surgeon and professor at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) in Boston. When I rotated on his service, I knew he was a well-accomplished orthopaedic surgeon, in the area of tumors and pathology, and considered a “pioneer” in orthopaedics and musculoskeletal pathology. I was informed, by other residents, that this professor and chairman of the department at MGH Orthopaedics gave severe grief to anyone who stumbled during morning rounds and during the oral examinations in Chicago. Somehow, I was able to get his attention, during my fourth year medical school orthopaedics rotation; he invited me to speak with him about my plans to apply and offered to be my mentor in the application process. He then wrote an excellent letter of recommendation for applying to orthopaedic residency. This provided a step towards getting interviewed and selected into an orthopaedic surgery program. I matched my first choice at the University of New Mexico orthopaedic program.

Anything is possible with hard-work, persistence and the support of family, individuals, instructors and organizations, such as AIGC, to achieve success in any area of study or career pursued.

At UNMH orthopaedic residency, I was fortunate to be selected as one of 4 orthopaedic residents and I had excellent teachers. I had one professor dreaded by residents and worse to be around when you were unprepared during lectures, presentations or during surgical cases. He made you feel like a real loser. Many times I felt that way and dreaded it when I was put in cases to assist him. Eventually, he provided me with tremendous support, during difficult times throughout residency and beyond. I fondly call him “Dr. D”, a UNM orthopaedic professor to whom I am indebted for helping me learn orthopaedics and eventually helping me pass my board examination to become a board-certified orthopaedic surgeon. He is a tremendous teacher and mentor and I am extremely grateful for all the support he provided me. I continue to ask his advice when needed.

Since completing my training, I continue to learn every day and there is always something new to learn. As one of my trauma fellowship instructors used to say, “every day is a school day”. I approach each case in that manner so that I am always trying to become a better surgeon, no matter how many times I have done a procedure. I try to provide the best care to all my patients and will continue to do that throughout my career. I am extremely grateful for all the inspirational people who have supported my endeavors to become the best orthopaedic surgeon I can be.

In the area of financial support, as I previously stated, finances weren’t part of my upbringing, as is the case for the majority of Native students. We have no finances – so how do we pay for school? I am extremely thankful to the American Indian Graduate Center (AIGC), for their financial support with grants/scholarships every year I applied, from the start of graduate school in 1991 to the end of medical school in 1997. It is the tremendous financial support received from AIGC that helped pave the way for my success. I am forever grateful to AIGC and the contributors/donators of AIGC, for helping me reach my goal. Anything is possible with hard-work, persistence and the support of family, individuals, instructors and organizations, such as AIGC, to achieve success in any area of study or career pursued. It’s the only way this Navajo/Dine’ girl from the “rez”, who did not speak English until second or third grade, has become the First Navajo orthopaedic surgeon! I am also proud to say, I still speak my Native language fluently, thanks to my grandmother; it will always be something I have that is different from any other orthopaedic surgeon in the United States. ♦

AIGC is pleased to thank San Manuel Band of Mission Indians for ongoing scholarship support for the 2014-2015 academic year.
All Native American High School Academic Team
Selected for the Academic Year 2014-2015

by Marveline Vallo Gabbard

The American Indian Graduate Center (AIGC) – All Native American High School Academic Team (ANAHSAT) is in its 9th year of honoring ten outstanding American Indian/Alaska Native high school seniors across Indian Country. This selection of high school seniors is based on academic achievement, honors and awards, leadership and community service. Each is given a monetary award, which may be spent at the student’s discretion.

The objectives of this program are: to increase awareness of academic achievement of Indian high school seniors among their peers, Indian Country and the public; to increase recognition of Indian student success and capabilities, as a positive motivation for pursuing academic excellence and higher education; to increase academic achievement and role models, as positive influences in Indian Country; to increase teacher, administrator, parent and community involvement, by recommending, nominating and supporting student participation, and to increase student participation in high school academic programs and the pursuit of higher education.

Congratulations to the 2014-2015 AIGC All Native American High School Academic Team!

Shawn Allison (Navajo Nation)
Graduated from Desert Ridge High School.
Pursuing a Bachelor’s Degree in Civil Engineering at Arizona State University.

Amelia Ashley (Crow Creek Tribe)
Graduated from Gretna High School. Pursuing a Bachelor’s Degree in Biology at Dartmouth College.

Shanice Britton (Round Valley Indian Tribe)
Graduated from Round Valley High School. Pursuing a Bachelor’s Degree in Biology at University of California – Davis.

Broke Curleyhair (Navajo Nation)
Graduated from Monument Valley High School. Pursuing a Bachelor’s Degree in Justice Studies at Arizona State University.

Aaliyah Dick (Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation)
Graduated from Nixyaawii Community School. Pursuing a Bachelor’s Degree in Liberal Arts at Washington State University.

Sarah Ferrell (Cherokee Nation)
Graduated from Tahlequah High School. Pursuing a Bachelor’s Degree in Elementary Education at Northeastern State University.

Colin Kerr (Chickasaw Nation)
Graduated from Frontier Academy. Pursuing a Bachelor’s Degree in International Studies at Fort Lewis College.

D’Aryn Lends His Horse (Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe)
Graduated from Cheyenne-Eagle Butte High School. Pursuing a Bachelor’s Degree in Biology at Black Hills State University.

Ashton Megli (Choctaw Nation)
Graduated from Mansfield Lake Ridge High School. Pursuing a Bachelor’s Degree in Biochemistry at Yale University.

Mark White Hat-Twiss (Rosebud Sioux Tribe)
Graduated from Proctor Academy. Pursuing a Bachelor’s Degree in Information Systems & Computer Sciences at Stanford University.
The All Native American High School Academic Team program was initially created by AIGC with a grant from the Tommy Hilfiger Corporate Foundation and is currently maintained using private funds.
Creating a Powerful Voice to Inspire Others

by Jasmine Michele Kindred

Hello! My name is Jasmine Michele Kindred, of the Northern Arapaho Tribe of Wyoming, a direct descendant of Chief Sharp Nose (Ta-Quavi), known as a brave, loyal warrior and a great orator. I’m sure he would be pleased to announce my completion (Class of 2014) of a specialized graduate psychology program at the University of the Rockies. I started this journey in September 2012 and successfully completed the Master’s program, as of June 2014, with a GPA of 3.47 and a cumulative GPA of 3.18. Prior to this milestone, my undergraduate experience was at Metropolitan State University of Denver, Class of 2011, majoring in Behavioral Science (emphasis in sociology) with a minor in Political Science (Bachelor’s Degree).

After this, I made the decision to continue my education and grow my leadership and academia skills. I believe that a solid foundation of knowledge fulfills a promise to my future and my family. The world needs more leaders who are passionate about making a difference in today’s society. I’m a lover of humanity and feel it’s important to embrace challenges and turn them into opportunities.

A few years ago, my cousin mentioned that the American Indian Graduate Center offers monetary support for individuals interested in expanding their journey of intelligence, through pride and excellence. The financial assistance that AIGC provides reduces the financial burden, allowing individuals to concentrate on educational studies. The service that the American Indian Graduate Center provides is truly valuable. According to AIGC, the mission is to “build, promote and honor self-sustaining American Indian and Alaska Native communities through education and leadership.”

During the journey of my life, I have the wonderful experience to serve humanity through acquired training in other non-profit organizations, such as SafeHouse Denver, Gateway Battered Women’s Services and Community Re-entry Project through the Denver Sheriff’s Department. Proudly, I represent AIGC alumni. Completing my education and reaching out to the community creates a powerful voice that inspires others to find theirs with poise and action. I’ve learned a meaningful life is about aiming high and working hard. Someone once said that “other people know who you are by what you have done, but you know yourself by what you’re capable of doing.” This is done with bold and tremendous effort of victory and excellence that I plan to share with others. This knowledge has given me a unique and balanced perspective to examine the reality of society and what living truly means.

For a student, nothing is more important than the spirit of “inquiry” – the paradox of knowledge is true;
the more we know, the more we are led to other realms in the system of human knowledge. My mission is to help others find their voices, as I have found mine. At the start of this journey in 2002, a professor asked what I wanted to do when I finished. I answered “give a gift to the world.” At that time I didn’t understand what that answer truly meant but, now, I can honestly say I’ve reached the point of giving back to the world.

Today, I find myself currently registered with the State of Colorado as a psychotherapist, specializing in addictions and domestic violence, working on creating a private practice. My main goal is to start a specialized facility, focused on a strength-based approach, targeted at people who are in transitional living, specifically females. The transitional living program will be offered as an alternative to the criminal justice system. The positive approach aims to reduce recidivism rates of incarceration. The practice will develop individual strengths, such as competence, connections, character, confidence, courage, compassion and commitment. People are not problems to be solved – they need support and empowerment. In the past, I’ve held employment at city and state levels but decided that my life is more than working 9-to-5. I want to build and leave a legacy to be remembered for teaching and serving humanity. The time is now to break the generational curse and create a new way of life.

“Be good, be kind, help each other.”
“Respect the ground, respect the drum, respect each other.”

– Abe Conklin - Ponca/Osage, (1926-1995)
Miracles Happen

by Sophia Cisneros

The best thing about having a PhD is getting to spend more time with my kids and trying to understand nature – I graduated with my doctorate degree a few years ago, in a path that seems a miracle to me, in retrospect – like skipping rocks.

I was making and selling baskets and writing for my tribal newspaper before I went to school. I always shake my head when somebody tells me, “It’s not as easy as making baskets…” The way the old timers do it is a technology, same as any other, astrophysics included.

My daughter was an infant and it was, largely, my desire to take care of her that sent me back to school. I wanted a career where I could take care of her and do something I loved. Finding out about physics was a miracle.

I am a postdoc now, after all the PhD struggles. Having three years to think about things is so beautiful. I went through school as a single mother. Being in school was the best decision I could have made. My daughter was only in daycare a few hours each week and I could pick her up after school when she got bigger, another miracle.

When my daughter was a baby, I went to the community college next to our reservation. I liked it, because I learned how to not be so shy, how to ask questions during office hours and go to the tutoring center to get help every single day. Having help makes a huge difference, rather than trying to reason through all the great minds that contributed their own miracles to physics over 200 years ago. Being not too shy or embarrassed to ask for help; another miracle.

It makes me happy, doing math and physics. I still miss home every day. Right now, the big red huckleberries are out back home. Grad school was really hard-scary. It’s worth getting over my fear, sometimes every day, because I am so fundamentally pleased with the way nature is put together and my fear just holds me back from learning more about that. The hardest part is leaving home. The other day, an Indian program liaison, at a big university, told me that single mothers are one of the biggest populations of Native kids in college now. That made me cry, because I am so happy, so pleased.

For me, it’s a miracle to make it this far, not because I’m not smart enough – I am – but because many strange things happened along the way. There’s good stuff, like a community college professor telling me that being a science-writer wasn’t the right career for me, based on the questions I was asking and that I needed to go to grad school in physics; and bad stuff, like starting grad school and not having the money to go home when your Ma dies. Good things, like an old professor explaining how to use physics to pass through grief – just practice, practice, practice. And it worked – another miracle.

The first Native American Indian physicist was a Navajo-Ute man, named Fred Begay. When I first met him and his wife, I was 18 or 19. He was a nuclear scientist at Los Alamos National Laboratory. I believe he never graduated high school – just went straight to college – very cool.

Today, there are only a few Native physicists in this country. In twenty years, the rate of graduating Natives, with PhDs in all fields, has not increased. There are four Native Maori PhDs in physics and I believe fewer than that in the United States. I saw a t-shirt the other day: “Maybe the first but not the last”. I liked that a lot.

We owe a debt to our old-timers, who suffered more than we can even imagine, which allows us to do what we love. I taught a lot during grad school – and I’m glad I did – I was good at it and tried to present the material in a way that would make sense to Native kids – I only had a handful of Native kids in my classes in all these years, but I believe having a Native physics instructor made differences for them in small ways.

Imagine what kids, who know what I know now and who can see farther than me, can do. It’s a miracle.
come from a long line of educators. In fact, my great grandfather, two aunts, three uncles, my mom and dad have all been educators in the public school system. So, when I graduated from Oklahoma State University in 1987, with a degree in Secondary Education with an emphasis in social studies, all my family members were surprised when I announced I wanted to pursue a career as an attorney.

Even though I had a family history and an interest in education, I was determined to pursue other interests. I took the LSAT and was accepted to the University of Tulsa for the College of Law. I even accepted a job as an intake counselor at the Juvenile Bureau District Court in Tulsa. However, I couldn’t deny my passion for education, did some real soul searching and decided to accept a teaching job at Catoosa Public Schools. My preliminary interest in education was my true calling, not law. Working with young people is where I get real inspiration and motivation. For over twenty years, I have taught my fair share of social studies courses: US History, Oklahoma History, Geography, Contemporary Affairs, Civics, Psychology, Careers and Sociology.

I loved teaching subjects such as the Holocaust, the Civil War and about the Indian removals. I tried to make my history classes engaging, interesting and thought-provoking. I brought in numerous guest speakers, such as judges, attorneys, policemen, mayors, tribal officials, etc. Rigor and relevance were important components in my curriculum development. I was delighted to get uninterested teenagers fired up about their history and culture. In the 2003-2004 school year, I was selected “Teacher of the Year” for the entire Catoosa District. In 2005, I was voted outstanding Serteen (Service to Mankind) sponsor for the region of Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas and Louisiana. However, I decided that, after 20 years in the classroom, I wanted to impact students’ lives in a different way.

Studying and teaching psychology prompted me to consider a career as a school counselor. At the time, my husband and I had two adult children in college and the thought of paying additional money for my education seemed daunting. As I researched financial resources, I decided to apply for scholarship money through AIGC. I taught my social studies classes during the day and went to graduate school full-time in the evenings, at Northeastern State University. Since then, I served as a high school counselor for a few years, pursued another masters in administration and am now an assistant principal at Catoosa High School.

As an administrator, I have been able to institute new programs in our high school. We have an advocacy program, where every teacher oversees a small group of students for the duration of their high school years. This program allows teachers to review grades, communicate with parents and provide college/career information on a personal level. In addition, we developed a student

I have now served in my home school district for over 25 years and love helping students find their career passion in the 21st-century workplace.
Born at Fort Defiance, Navajo Nation, Darlene Sorrell was to become the first Dine’ to achieve a dental degree in 1985. She is the seventh of nine children born to David and Melissa Sorrell. Remarkably, her father had no formal education, while her mother completed 8th grade, yet she and her siblings have achieved 14 college degrees, to date, and all attribute the tenacity to achieve to their parents.

Darlene’s father moved the family to Morenci, Arizona, in order to work in the copper mine. Darlene excelled academically, graduating as the salutatorian of Morenci High School. Her fondest memories are of returning to Sheep Springs in summer, where she herded sheep, grew corn and slept in the family’s one-room cabin.

In Morenci, the lines of segregation were clear, with Native American families relegated to Tent City, the only neighborhood where school buses did not pick up the students. This only changed when her older brother, as Student Body President, was able to alter the situation. He and four older siblings went to the University of Arizona, which laid the path for Darlene.

At the University, Darlene majored in Medical Technology and obtained her Bachelor of Science degree. This was only a step towards the goal she wished to achieve. Since she was 12-years old, Darlene wanted to become a dentist. At 13-years old, she decided that she needed braces, which her parents could not afford. She obtained her braces, which she paid for herself, by working at places like McDonald’s and ironing for families. Using earnings from these jobs, she made monthly payments for her braces.

As she applied to multiple dental schools, money for applications, especially for flights to go to interviews, became an issue. With assistance from the Native American advising office at the University of Arizona and multiple other resources, she completed the arduous process.

Darlene was accepted by several dental schools, including the University of Washington, the University of Southern California and the University of California at San Francisco, but decided to commit to the University of Oregon.

Darlene was initially reluctant to apply for the Indian Health Service (IHS) scholarship. Putting together the funding to pay for dental school, amounts of money that her family could never comprehend, was challenging, but several sources stepped up to assist her.

This was her first contact with AIGC, an organization that was more than willing to help. The second year she applied for the IHS scholarship, which she received.

In all medical programs, working with human cadavers is required. This posed a conflict for the traditional Dine’, as it is a taboo in their culture to be among the deceased. On breaks from school and over the summer, her parents would arrange the proper ceremonies and prayers to counter any ill affects. In 1985, she finished dental school and became the first Dine’ to do so.

Dr. Sorrell was anxious to return to the Navajo Nation to work with her people. Unfortunately, she was informed that there was not a single opening, which must have been the only time in history that this was true. Instead, she was placed on the Hopi Reservation, which normally would have been perfect, being that the Navajo Nation surrounds it. However, this was a time of high
tension, as the Navajo/Hopi Land dispute was broiling: 1,200 Navajo and 50 Hopi families were being moved off land they had lived on hundreds of years. Dr. Sorrell was the only Dine’ health professional serving with all Hopis, at the dental clinic at Second Mesa, Arizona. She became a clinical director there, for the first time in her career.

After two years there and after having married and given birth to her son, Chase, Dr. Sorrell went to Juneau, Alaska, to work with the Tlingit and Haida population. Her three years there sharpened her director skills and helped her develop the philosophy that a director can do 75 percent clinical work. This was contrary to other clinicals, where some directors did no clinical work. The weather was always a factor there, especially when flying bush planes into small villages. More than once, pilots had to take extraordinary measures to safely deliver the staff. During these village visits, the staff would work 14 hours straight to service the maximum number of patients.

To run larger clinics, Dr. Sorrell would need to obtain an advanced general practice residency. She was selected to do this in Anchorage, where she was to live the next two and a half years. While training in Anchorage, she flew to Kodiak Island and the Aleutian Chain to serve Natives in several villages. Finishing her residency, she wished to return to the Southwest, so her son would know his family and be exposed to the traditions of Navajo culture.

In 1994, Dr. Sorrell applied for the Clinical Director’s position at the Albuquerque Dental Program on the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI) campus. There were only a couple of American Indians, nationwide, with this advanced training. After working through a challenging human resource process, Dr. Sorrell became Clinical Director at SIPI.

There were many challenges associated with being a Native woman in a male dominated profession. Darlene again looked to the support of her family, spouse and Navajo teachings for positive support. Soon after coming to Albuquerque, IHS funding was significantly reduced. At one point, Dr. Sorrell was the only general dentist there, with minimal support staff.

Determination marked Darlene’s efforts and she quickly innovated third-party billing and recruited a staff that she could develop to provide superior public health dentistry at a private practice pace. To this day, Dr. Sorrell remains the Clinical Director of the Albuquerque area dental program. Today, there are 26 operatories, four general dentists, a pediatric dentist, two orthodontists, two hygienists, a specialist for root canals and crowns, as well as numerous assistants.

Throughout her time at SIPI, Dr. Sorrell has had numerous Native and some non-Native students shadow her. Many have become dentists, including Navajos, the first Mescalero dentist, the first Zuni dentist and soon an Isleta dentist. Currently, Dr. Sorrell is hiring another dentist and it is likely that there will be four Native American dentists working at this clinic, which is considered the “flagship” of the Albuquerque Area Dental Programs. It gives her extreme satisfaction knowing American Indians will have the opportunity to be treated by American Indian dentists.

Approaching 30 years of service, Dr. Sorrell has been recognized, by the University of Arizona, as a recipient of the Professional Achievement Award. She was also nominated by the Indian Health Service, to serve as the USPHS Chief Professional Dental Officer in the Obama administration, but was not appointed. Still troubled by the high rate of caries (cavities) within the American Indian children population, Dr. Sorrell plans to help address this problem, while employed with the Indian Health Service and outside the Indian Health Service through non-profit avenues. She can be found working late into the night on issues associated with being the Vice President of the Society of American Indian Dentists and being a Board member of Nizhoni Smiles, both which are non-profit organizations whose missions include helping improve the lives of American Indians.

When she is not at work in her IHS office or home office, she enjoys family on the Navajo reservation and visiting her son in graduate school at, where else, the University of Arizona. 

Putting together the funding to pay for dental school, amounts of money that her family could never comprehend, was challenging, but several sources stepped up to assist her. This was her first contact with AIGC, an organization that was more than willing to help.

Dr. Darlene Sorrell was one of the honorees at the 2014 AIGC Reception. Each year AIGC recognizes and honors those that make a difference in Indian country; exemplary persons and alumni who generously support programs and organizations that are unfailing in their support of AIGC and its mission.
The honeybee can fly at 15 mph, with wings that stroke over 11,000 times per minute. Honeybees are responsible for pollinating about 80 percent of all vegetable, fruit and seed crops in the United States. A single honeybee visits 50 to 100 flowers during a single trip out of the hive and, while a honeybee never sleeps, it is a social, adaptable and distinctive creature.

After just a few minutes spent with AIGC alumna, Alicia Ortega, one might understand why this feature opened with a description of the honeybee. Alicia, who works as a Procurement Specialist at Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) – a division of the U.S. Department of Commerce – is a constant buzz of energy and enthusiasm, when it comes to business in Indian Country.

11,000 Times Per Minute – Preceding her full-time entry into business, Alicia was the recipient of an AIGC fellowship, with which she completed her Masters of Business Administration degree, from the University of New Mexico, Anderson School of Management. She served as President of the American Indian Business Association and completed highly competitive, prestigious internships, with the NASA Glenn Research Center in Cleveland, Ohio, and the Argonne National Laboratory in Argonne, Illinois. She presented at the International Fostering Indigenous Business and Entrepreneurship in the Americas Conference, in Manaus, Brazil, and completed a student internship with a Native American-owned firm, Keres Consulting, Inc. From the moment she could spread her honeybee wings, Alicia was flying around the world.

Pollinating the Business Crop – Alicia, who is from the pueblos of Santa Clara and Pojoaque, is a familiar face at Native American business gatherings, including the American Indian Chamber of Commerce and Reservation Economic Summits. During these events, Alicia naturally networks through entrepreneurs, business leaders, elected officials, tribal leaders and others – making informal introductions, connecting professionals and educating her peers on the opportunities before them. Her words are spoken with a never-ending smile and intensity, yet reinforced with a depth of knowledge that only persistence and passion can yield.

MBDA is an agency that helps create and sustain U.S. jobs, by promoting the growth and global competitiveness of businesses owned and operated by minority entrepreneurs. Alicia, who specializes in Native American business, works to link American Indian-owned businesses with the capital, contracts and markets they need to grow. Perhaps representing the culmination of all her experiences, she is the proverbial queen bee of Native enterprise networking.

An Advocate of the Entire Colony – Like the honeybee, which lives its life for the benefit of the entire honeybee colony, Alicia has returned to the AIGC honeycomb to reciprocate its favor onto others. Alicia is always eager to volunteer for AIGC events and recently provided the organization with ideas to engage her fellow alumni and create a network of AIGC professionals, post-graduation. She shared ideas on fundraising opportunities and committed to making new inroads of opportunity for AIGC.

A single pound of honey is the collective work of 768 bees in their lifetime. That is the collection of nectar, from two million flowers, traveling over 55,000 miles by bee flight. If the AIGC scholarship represents a source of educational nectar, Alicia is a shining example of the sweet rewards educational support brings to Indian Country.
The American Indian Graduate Center (AIGC) Ad

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Professor Robert James Miller

In April of 2014, Professor Robert James Miller was elected to the membership of the American Philosophical Society (APS). Created by Benjamin Franklin, in 1743, the APS is the oldest learned society in the United States; there have been only 5,507 members ever elected to the APS. Thomas Jefferson was the President of the APS for 20 years, overlapping his time as United States President.

Bob received funding, from the American Indian Graduate Center, to attend law school, from 1988 through 1991. He practiced law for eight years, then taught at Lewis & Clark Law School from 1999-2013. Robert is now a professor in the Indian Legal Program, at the Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law, at Arizona State University.

Dr. Leslie Costa-Guerra, Pueblo of Tesuque

“AIAG helped me by providing stability in a doctoral world of chaos. I am grateful because I could focus on my school process and not on financial concerns. As a PhD scholar, I can now help my family and community grow in education. I have started my own business to serve Native students in assessment and language needs. I also hope to continue to research language issues to help Native communities evolve. Thank you, AIAG.”

Deanna M. Kennedy, Assistant Professor, School of Business, University of Washington Bothell

“In 2005, I embarked on my Ph.D. journey in Management Science, at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. I applied for and received AIGC funding that helped me manage the transition back to school and the need for school materials. In fact, receiving the support from AIGC helped me realize how valuable my Native American heritage was, by providing newsletters and updates that opened my eyes to various support networks and shared experiences by other Native American students. Now, having graduated with my degree, in 2009, and currently working as an Assistant Professor at the University of Washington, Bothell, I am constantly utilizing my education, through teaching and research. I have also started a new journey to promote access and contextualized delivery of college level education for Native Americans. In part, AIGC has motivated my efforts and has always been seen, by me, as one of the reasons for my success. Thanks, AIGC!”

Charlene Teters, Master of Fine Arts, University of Illinois

“My father was an artist, as were many individuals in my circle of friends, on the Spokane Reservation. As a group, they encouraged me to go to college and earn a degree. With the help of AIGC, I was able to do that.

My advice to the students who want to pursue a college education is: ‘Do your best. We need you out there because, only through us, will America hear and learn our stories’.

Jodie Gillette

In 2012, President Barack Obama named a member of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe to serve as his senior policy adviser for Native American affairs.

Jodi Gillette advises him on Native American issues on the White House Domestic Policy Council. President Obama stated that Ms. Gillette has been a key member of his administration’s efforts in Indian Country. He says she’ll continue to ensure that Native American issues will have a seat at the table.

Gillette is an enrolled member of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, in North Dakota and South Dakota. She holds degrees from Dartmouth College and the University of Minnesota and was funded through AIGC.

Jodi said she looks forward to continuing efforts to strengthen the relationship between the United States and various tribal nations.

Continued on page 51
mentoring program to assist incoming freshman students. Ninth graders are paired with upperclassmen to ensure a better transition to high school. We have made academic progress with our implementation of these new programs. Our school motto is “Importing Potential – Exporting Excellence”.

My passion is to help young people pursue their academic success and career development. Since I took over as the college/career counselor, we have increased our scholarship amounts. This year alone, our seniors earned over $1.2 million in scholarships. My new position has allowed me to promote a new high school class, Cherokee 101, to assist seniors with scholarships, FAFSA information and career assessment. We have partnered with the Cherokee Nation to bring in Junior Achievement to our Cherokee class, as well as providing college/career workshops for our Native American students. I have now served in my home school district for over 25 years and love helping students find their career passion in the 21st-century workplace. My older two children have graduated with their teaching degrees and are entry-level educators, carrying on the family tradition! ✷

Notes: To insure that we have all your current information, please take a minute to visit our web site (aigcs.org) or send an email to (susan@aigcs.org) to update your information (be sure to include your previous address so we know we have the right individual).

We’re very proud of all our alumni, so… while you’re updating your information, please let us know what’s been going on with you. Also, if you would like to submit an article, for our magazine, about your educational experience(s) and/or how education has changed your life, we would welcome your story.

Thank you.
American Indian Graduate Center Alumni:

What will your legacy be?

“As alumni, it is essential for us to support organizations like AIGC that provide funding to Native American students who will be our future tribal leaders, attorneys, doctors, engineers and other professionals. I call on my fellow AIGC alumni and others who are committed to Indian Country to join me in ensuring that these scholarship opportunities continue to be available to future generations.”

—Alvin Warren
(Santa Clara Pueblo)
Master in Public Administration,
Harvard University
John F. Kennedy School of Government

“I am so thankful that AIGC exists to advocate and provide much needed scholarships to Native American students. Now I can use my law degree in my staff attorney position at New Mexico Legal Aid for the betterment of tribal communities.”—Neomi M. Gilmore, JD (Navajo), University of Idaho College of Law (pictured left)

“Whereas I started in a position of needing money, now largely because of AIGC, I can give money; I am a donor. That truly brings things full circle.”—Shenan Atcitty, Esq. (Navajo), University of New Mexico School of Law, J.D.

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