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Trending, as Urban Dictionary describes it, is the mutilation of the English language that means “currently popular.” The term itself has emerged as a popular trend, with social media sites, news broadcasts and television shows using “trending” to highlight the most-talked-about people, events, things and hashtags.

So what’s trending in higher education?

#highereducationrules

Career-focused learning is also trending in education. Coined “technical education,” this approach blends on-the-job experience with the higher education curriculum. Students at many institutions can gain college credit for internships supporting their field of study. #willworkforcredit

Rising college prices and student debt aren’t currently popular, but they’ve pushed the cost of higher education onto the agenda of policymakers. In 2014, we saw this issue elevate to the White House and put the student-debt crisis into the spotlight. I’m sure we’ll see much more on this issue in 2015. #brokebutbright

Also trending in higher education are forums that allow students to evaluate their professors. Websites such as ratemyprofessors.com provide student feedback on professors from higher education institutions nationwide. Before registering for classes, students can compare course professors and select an instructor that ranks highly. While forums like these provide insight on what to expect from a professor, students should beware of biased opinions. #keepingitreal

A final trend in higher education is the “prior learning assessment.” A selection of colleges and universities are granting college credit for a student’s experience on-the-job. Military and law enforcement training and volunteer experience are, at some colleges, being considered for credit toward a degree. #experienceisknowledge

There are exciting things happening all across higher education. We at AIGC are proud to be part of the community. Please join us in making #AIGC and the #powerofscholarship a trending topic this year.

✦

Grayson Noley, President, Board of Directors
How do you measure the positive outcomes of higher education? The answer undoubtedly varies by individual and personal circumstance, but my best guess is that most of us would say improved earnings and acquisition of a specialized knowledge base to begin a career, or some combination of each.

When we sign-up for post-secondary education – whether it takes the form of a technical school, Ivy League institution, small town community college or major university – we do so with expectations. Expectations of ourselves to prosper and learn. Expectations of our instructors to challenge how we think. Expectations of our peers to support and encourage one another. Expectations of obtaining a job and higher wages post-graduation.

We can control many of these expectations, like disenrolling from a class with a lackluster instructor, or choosing to study with peers who share similar interests and career goals. Expectations associated with post-graduation earnings and job availability, however, can be influenced by our decisions, but not controlled.

The good news is that – despite an uncertain economy and uncontrollable outcomes – graduates of post-secondary education have a sunny outlook. According to a 2013 report from CollegeBoard\(^1\), college graduates experience larger increases in their earnings as they age. Full-time workers with bachelor’s degrees earn about two-thirds more on average than high school graduates over their lifetime. They are also more likely to receive fringe benefits. College graduates exercise more, smoke less and are more likely to practice health-related behaviors. They are engaged, involved citizens and are more likely to be employed than those who did not attend college.

How do you measure the positive outcomes of higher education? Broaden your lens and know that, in the law of averages, college graduates are in good company. Higher education opens our world to more than a skillset and improved opportunity for employment. Education offers us a plethora of positive outcomes when we apply ourselves. 

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The American Indian Graduate
My journey into international service started in the heart of Indian Country and was shaped significantly by my connection with the traditional Tewa culture and language. I grew up in Ohkay Owingeh, one of the Eight Northern Pueblos of Northern New Mexico. Like kids for generations before me, I loved swimming and fishing in the Rio Grande, which ran a few dozen yards from my house, playing in the dirt hills and collecting centuries-old pottery shards and arrowhead chippings, learning and performing Tewa songs and dances and, most of all, eating large bowls of red chile stew with fresh-baked Indian oven bread, during feast days.

At that age, the thought of living in another country was only slightly more plausible than moving to Mars. At the same time, like a kid dreaming of space travel, I often wondered what the world was like beyond the familiar geographical edges I’d experienced. In second grade, one of my classmates, who was a distinguished Eagle Dancer, told me he’d been invited to Vancouver, BC, to dance in one of their big pow wows. I was in awe. First, because someone I knew was able to visit a country so far away. And second, because he was going in order to share Tewa culture with others, through dance. “What a lucky guy!” I remember thinking. In hindsight, this was probably when the idea of being a cultural ambassador was planted in my mind, though it wouldn’t be until I was much older that I would ever use the term or see myself in that way.

What I started to realize more as I got older, especially in high school and college, was just how significant a gift it was to have Tewa culture woven inseparably into the fabric of my childhood. It was clear that, for my tribe as for many others, keeping our cultures alive and vibrant into future generations was a monumental task, with many uncertainties and hurdles. One way my pueblo cultivated Tewa traditions was through the summer camps I volunteered with, which revolved around activities that would strengthen kids’ connection and understanding of Tewa culture. Even though I’d grown up in the pueblo, it was an educational experience for me, as much as for the kids, as we would visit historical sites, listen to stories from the elders and learn traditional arts and crafts. As a musician, I was also excited to see how music could be such a powerful tool for conveying and celebrating culture and language, especially with youth and children.

During college, I also had the tremendous opportunity to do what I’d once considered impossible – visit another country. I was accepted to a university program to participate in a month-long service and cultural exchange trip to central Russia. My
host family, it turned out, was Udmert, an indigenous people group that had tenaciously held onto their culture and language during the Soviet Union, despite attempts by the authorities to dismantle their cultural and ethnic identity. Over the month I spent with them, I was astonished to discover so many similarities with my tribe, despite being on opposite sides of the world. These experiences had a profound impact on me and, when I finished college and was thinking about what I wanted to do professionally, I began contemplating how I might bring together my varied interests in music, language, culture, teaching, service and youth development.

The eureka moment came a couple years later, when my wife showed me the Peace Corps website and said, “I think I’ve found the program for us!” As we dug into the website, we knew we’d come across something unique and right up our alley. To start with, Peace Corps emphasized the necessity of learning the language and culture of the local community and affirmed this commitment, by providing Volunteers with more than two months of intensive language and cultural training, while living with host families in the country of service. At that time, there were approximately 8,000 Peace Corps Volunteers serving around 70 countries and working in assignments from Business Development to Youth Development to Education. I had experience teaching music and English and my wife had studied business, so our skills and interests seemed to align very well with what Peace Corps offered. Another very important factor for us was finances. Though Peace Corps is a volunteer service organization, it provided everything necessary for living and working abroad: travel, training, housing, health care and a living stipend which, though not an American salary, was plenty to live on. It was also important to know that, after finishing 27 months of service, Peace Corps would provide career transition resources, a wealth of graduate school opportunities and transition funds (currently over $8,000) to help returning Volunteers get resettled in the U.S. The 27-month commitment was substantial, but this was an

As I learned more about Mongolian cultural traditions from my host family and teachers, it was fascinating to explore connections with my own tribal culture.
I learned that service, at its best, whether in one’s own community or on the other side of the world, starts with the simple act of giving and receiving hospitality and taking the time to learn from and love the people and culture around us.
Khuumi (Throat singing) that completely blew me away. During the summer festival of Naadam, before a wrestling match, Mongolian men perform an eagle dance, which any Tewa person would immediately recognize as a cousin to our own sacred dance.

It was a paradox to be so far away from home distance-wise but, in terms of culture, to feel as if I was visiting a neighbor or relative. In my work over the next two years, my cultural heritage, education, talents and values converged and intersected more than I ever could have imagined possible. I taught English to students who were, at the same time, my best Mongolian teachers. I worked with a group of Peace Corps Volunteers in my area to write songs for teaching English that were culturally relevant and combined both American folk styles and Mongolian folk melodies. In my upper level classes, I incorporated lessons on Native American life and history that highlighted and mirrored many of the challenges Mongolia faced, such as cultural perpetuation, natural resource management, domestic violence and alcoholism and relationships with powerful external entities, like mining companies and foreign governments. It was extremely satisfying to see my students celebrating the value of their own culture, while learning to communicate with people and cultures outside their own. Furthermore, as a musician and youth developer, I worked hard to help my students discover their own unique voices and strengthen their confidence in communicating – advocating for themselves and their community, though the mediums of language, music and art.

True to the vision of Peace Corps’ first director, Sargent Shriver, the experience of being a Volunteer in Mongolia helped me recognize the shared humanity of people in a part of the world that had once been far off my radar. My Peace Corps experience not only brought the idea of being a cultural ambassador full circle, but gave it a deeper meaning. There were certainly challenges and differences that had to be navigated but, over the 27 months my wife and I spent in service, the circles of who I considered to be part of my family, clan and tribe expanded exponentially. I learned that service, at its best, whether in one’s own community or on the other side of the world, starts with the simple act of giving and receiving hospitality and taking the time to learn from and love the people and culture around us.

Anthony Trujillo served as a Peace Corps Volunteer with his wife in Mongolia from 2005-2007 and in Ukraine from 2007-2008. Since returning he has worked in Peace Corps recruitment and is currently the Regional Recruitment Supervisor for the Northeast Recruitment Office in New York City. He can be contacted at atrujillo2@peacecorps.gov.
My name is Belinda P. Eriacho, I am Dine’ (Navajo), Hona’ghaanhnii (One-who-walks-around clan) and born for the Naasht’ezhi’ (Zuni people); Dibe’lzhini’ (Black Sheep clan) are my cheii (maternal grandparents) and Naash’ezhi’ are my paternal grandparents. I grew up on the Navajo (Dine’) reservation and, as a child, spent my summer months herding sheep for my grandparents and enjoying the outdoors. For me, this experience gave me an appreciation of the language, culture, traditions and the environment in which we live.

During high school, I spent my summer months attending engineering and health career academic enrichment programs at universities in California and Arizona. At the age of 17, I graduated from high school and went on to attend Arizona State University (ASU). One of the biggest challenges of being the first in my family to attend college, aside of some of the coursework, was getting through all of the paperwork associated with going to college. I eventually learned to navigate through the maze of (admission, financial aid, housing) applications and forms. Fortunately, the summer college experiences gave me the confidence to get through this. One key lesson I learned during this process was how to advocate for myself in order to get through college. This is something that AICG students can also anticipate.

Upon entering ASU, I initially enrolled in a civil engineering program. Within a few days of starting college, I discovered engineering was not my calling. I frantically began looking through the college catalogue and found a program in agricultural-business (Ag business), which sounded interesting. I signed up for classes and found myself in a 7:15 a.m. class, anxiously waiting to find out what Ag business was all about. As I sat in class, the instructor stood up in front, introduced himself and began to pull down a chart. As the chart unrolled, what happened next changed my career. What appeared was a picture of a cross-section of a gallus gallus domesticus (chicken). For an instant, I thought: what did I sign up for? I exited the classroom. I followed my intuition and enrolled in the Health Science program at ASU. In 1986, upon completing my undergraduate course work I became the first person in my family to receive a college degree from Arizona State University, with a Bachelor of Science in Health Sciences. Subsequently, I worked for various health organizations in the Phoenix area and on the Navajo reservation.

In 1990, I was given the opportunity to complete a Masters of Public Health degree in Occupational and Environmental Health, at the University of Hawaii (UH) at Manoa, in Honolulu, Hawaii. I had never been to an island. Living in Hawaii taught me many things, including the importance of the ecosystem in which we live. This graduate degree allowed me to combine my interest of health with the sciences. Upon graduation, I was inducted into the Honorary Society of Public Health, Delta Omega. During the summer and winter breaks, while working on my masters degree, I worked as a Junior Officer in the United States Public Health Service, Commission Corp, on the Navajo reservation.

After completing this degree, I was hired by Arizona Public Service Company as an environmental scientist. As an environmental scientist, I provided industrial hygiene services to prevent occupational exposure from chemical, physical and biological exposures in the workplace. This position was very specialized and I decided,
a few years into my career, to pursue a second masters degree in Technology with an emphasis in Hazardous Materials and Waste Management. This degree was a springboard for me to work on programs to preserve and protect the environment. In 1995, I received a second masters in Technology, from ASU, while working a full-time job. I also took additional coursework at the University of Michigan, in Ann Harbor, in occupational epidemiology and occupational risk assessment.

As a minority-female and Native American, there were situations during my academic and professional career that required me to dig deep within myself to find the perseverance and motivation to overcome challenges. This is something that AIGC students can anticipate and may encounter along the way. In addition, sometimes this meant I had to work harder than my peers. As I look back on those situations, I can see now that those experiences made me a stronger person and I was able to demonstrate that I had what it took to succeed.

I encourage AIGC students to stay focused on their goals, to look at the challenges they may experience along the way as life lessons and see them as preparation for bigger and better opportunities. Dream big and set your intentions in motion.

Since completing my educational degrees and working for 23 years, I have been promoted. I am currently responsible for a team of professionals who ensure compliance with federal, state and local environmental, health, safety and transportation requirements for an investor-owned utility in Arizona. As a team, we inspect coal-fired, gas and oil and nuclear power plants, as well as electrical transmission and distribution operations to ensure compliance with requirements. In addition, we are also responsible for performing due diligence site assessments of waste facilities throughout the United States, to ensure that waste streams are being managed appropriately. I am currently on a rotational assignment at the Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Station (PVNGS). PVNGS is the largest nuclear generating station in the United States. While on this rotational assignment, my focus is to gain knowledge on nuclear operations, groundwater and dam safety, as well as other environmental programs.

As a child, one of the values I was taught was to always help others and I continue to carry this value into my personal life today. As a professional, I believe I have a responsibility to give back to communities I live in, including the reservation. Over the years, I have been involved with a number of organizations, including the Saint Michaels Indian School, American Indian Science and Engineering Society-Arizona Professional Chapter. Currently, I am a member of the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority (NTUA) Management Board (NTUA) and the NTUA Wireless Board of Directors. NTUA is tribal-owned multi-utility organization, located in Arizona, providing utility service on the Navajo Nation and surrounding areas. In addition, I also volunteer my time as a board member for a Seed Bank whose mission is to preserve, collect and protect heirloom seeds, located in the State of New Mexico.

First and foremost, I encourage AIGC students to stay focused on their goals, to look at the challenges they may experience along the way as life lessons and see them as preparation for bigger and better opportunities. Dream big and set your intentions in motion. See yourself receiving your degree(s), see yourself working in your chosen profession and believe in yourself and your abilities. I encourage AIGC students to give back to their communities, by getting involved in those things for which they have a passion and help build a strong foundation for those generations who will follow. Finally, while going through your academic studies look for opportunities to gain experience, through volunteering or an internship program in your chosen profession. This will strengthen your resume upon completion of your degree and as you pursue your career. 

Fine Art For Sale
AIGC has several pieces of donated art for sale, they may be viewed at aigcs.org.

If you are interested in purchasing any of the AIGC art pieces or, if you would like to donate art to AIGC, please contact linda@aigcs.org.
Ya’ateeh (Greetings)! My name is Candice Yazzie. I am Diné (Navajo), Salt People Clan and born for the Red Running into Water Clan. My home is on the Navajo reservation. I am currently pursuing my Master’s Degree in Social Work, at Washington University in St. Louis (WUSTL), with an individualized concentration in “Criminal and Juvenile Justice in Tribal Communities.” I am honored and humbled to be a Buder Scholar. I would like to thank the Kathryn M. Buder Foundation and the American Indian Graduate Center for giving me the opportunity to improve my professional and academia ambitions with the George Warren Brown School of Social Work. With your financial assistance, I am empowered and equipped to create positive social change for all tribal communities within Indian Country.

I have two wonderful parents, Kenneth and Brenda Yazzie, who raised me to be strong and to never give up in life. I have four siblings; Jeannette, Kimberly, Kendrick and Breanna. In addition, I am blessed to have five charming nieces and nephews, whom I admire very much. Home, family, relatives and mentors have become lifelong friends, coaches and professors assisting me to navigate adolescence and adulthood expansion. Home is where I can truly express my personal identity and humanity. It is the only place I can draw strength, wisdom, knowledge and pride, as a Diné woman. My family continues to uplift, empower and encourage me to earn my Master’s Degree and return to my tribal community to implement positive change.

As a second year graduate student attending a university, away from tribal communities, I’ve experienced various struggles, difficulties and loneliness. “Having the Best of Two Worlds” begins with my journey living between two worlds, the world of western education and the Diné Philosophy of Life. During this transition, I have experience a full classroom of Native students at Haskell Indian Nations University (HINU) and a full classroom of non-Native students at WUSTL. Transitioning from an Intertribal college to a predominantly non-Native institution was a culture shock for me and created a very difficult situation to overcome. I felt like I was on the outside looking in and became isolated and disconnected from everything and everyone.

The morals I have learned, from both cultures, has molded my understanding into a more holistic worldview.

As my life moves forward, I begin to realize that one of the biggest disadvantages of living away from a tribally-enriched environment is that it is hard to maintain cultural identity because I am no longer surrounded by people that exemplify my cultural individuality. It has been hard, but I realize how important it is to keep
my identity alive. The second disadvantage is when I go home I notice how I’ve been affected by living in the outside world. I’m not the person I would be if I stayed. I transformed! Living and growing in the outside world is a sacrifice but worth it.

Bridging the gaps between two worlds can be extremely difficult, especially if you live in one, and favor one over the other. The morals I have learned, from both cultures, have molded my understanding into a more holistic worldview. I utilize my corn pollen and say my prayers every morning before I start my day, burn cedar when I suffer negative possessions and wear my traditional outfits and moccasins when it’s appropriate to do so. However, when I get dressed, fix my hair, talk in class or at work, I begin to recognize that I act more like my non-Native friends, as opposed to socializing among my Navajo people. Before leaving the Navajo reservation, I always favored my traditional beliefs regarding how I should present myself, which hindered making connections within the western society. Years later, I find myself reflecting on this overwhelming journey and ask myself, “How in the world did I do it?”

Navajo people are very traditional when it comes to the Diné Philosophy of Life. At a young age, I went through the Navajo Puberty Ceremony, which is a coming-of-age ceremony. The ceremony is intense, due to the amount of work contributed by family and relatives. It is a Blessing Way Ceremony that embraces maturity, responsibility, independence, endurance and beauty for a young Navajo girl. This transition into maturity offers guidance from a generation of mothers, sisters, aunts, grandmothers and great-grandmothers. This method has taught me that Navajo women have the strength to grow and overcome obstacles, challenges and provides life lessons. I can attest to the innate qualities in becoming a strong and resilient woman. The empowering ceremony has paved my way for success in higher education.

The skills and abilities established throughout my adolescent years have proceeded into another passage in my life. Sports! A trip to Haskell Indian Nations University (HINU) has unlocked another door of opportunity. I pay tribute and respect to former HINU Women’s Basketball Coach, Phill Homeratha, who granted me the opportunity to have a spot on his basketball team.

The Buder Center for American Indian Studies is a premier graduate program in Social Work. We are committed to preparing and supporting future American Indian leaders to practice in tribal and urban settings, making significant contributions to health, wellness, and the sustained future of Indian Country.

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team. Coach Homeratha introduced me to the collegiate student-athletic regime. My journey in higher education began with one phone call from the late Coach Phil Homaratha, a memory I will never forget. During this stage in my life, I have accomplished my dream and goal of playing collegiate basketball and having the opportunity to compete at that level. This experience built a variety of relationships with peers, colleagues, teammates, professors and mentors.

Life at HINU opened many doors of opportunities such, as earning a Bachelor’s degree in Indigenous and American Indian Studies and granted numerous internships and seminars related to Native American issues and concepts. During the season of 2010-2011, I was honored to receive the Midlands Collegiate Athlete Conference (MCAC) Scholar-Athlete Award, which rewards you for maintaining a high GPA as a student-athlete, within multiple consecutive semesters. In addition, our basketball team made its first appearance in the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletes (NAIA) basketball tournament. Thanks to outstanding teammates, a remarkable coach and multiple recognitions to the team.

One of the critical challenges I faced, during my time at Haskell, took place my last semester. I had 21 credit-hours remaining on my class schedule and, in order for me to graduate, I needed to complete every course within that semester. At the time, I was working part-time for the American Indian Record Repository in Lenexa, Kansas. In addition, I was approached by the athletic department and I was told that I had one more semester of eligibility to compete, so I tried out for the HINU Cross Country Team and was selected. At the time, I did not know how I was going to juggle all this in one semester, but I was very determined to graduate so I had to find my way.

With hesitation in sight, I felt that I had to make a trip home. During times like this, I turn to what I have utilized for many years, empowerment of the Navajo people. Navajo women are the core of Navajo culture. Thus, they continue to have strong ties with their children, offering advice, teaching, coaching and mentoring. My mother is a strong woman. She is the number one supporter in my life, who I depend upon to help me get me through difficult times. I recall coming home to her home-cooked meals and warm, heartfelt hugs, which she has for me each time I return home. No matter how far I go in life or how far I am away from home, she reminds me that my strength comes from home, which is the foundation of our culture, our language and all that it encompasses. “Don’t ever forget that”, she exclaims. She has taught me how to utilize the fireplace for strength and endurance to overcome what life has to offer. Around the fireplace, I can pray and reconnect with the holy people who provide the steps to succeed. Along the way, I made visits with traditional people and mentors, for direction and prayers. I was able to honor my Navajo female role and responsibilities with the ceremonies that were conducted on my behalf. I restored my relationship with Mother Earth, Father Sky and the holy deities that exist within the four sacred mountains of the Navajo Reservation. This is home, a place where I come from and a land that resonates with me.

A Navajo woman living alongside the dominant society, requires navigating two worlds. I am developing strategies and mechanisms to increase my chances of success in western education.

I am prepared to take the next step and envision what I had to do to make it happen or destroy what I had begun. Navajo culture begins and ends with me because it determines the life I choose for myself. I have a strong, cultural foundation, including mentors and traditional people, who offer teachings, prayers, ceremonies and cultural knowledge. They always appreciate that I come to them for advice and that I take full responsibility of my life, by acknowledging the Navajo culture, teachings and language. To this day, they continue to motivate me and empower me as a true Diné woman. I was once told that, when you meet the Creator half way, the Creator will take care of the rest. As a result, I earned my Bachelor’s Degree in Indigenous and American Indian Studies with high honors, earned my first NAIA Cross Country 2nd Team All-Conference and went from part-time to full-time status at work. I share this with you to let you know that anything is possible if you set your mind to it. The journey starts and ends with you.

My interest in the legal sector began when I started working with the St. Louis City Trial Public Defender’s system as a practicum student. My plan is to become a tribal advocate in the tribal, legal and social service sector. Research conducted on American Indian, Alaskan
Native and other minority populations, indicates disproportionate rates of criminalization and oppression by the criminal and juvenile systems. This practice has allowed me to explore the legal system within a larger metropolitan area. I was able to understand my role as a social worker, which requires knowledge of law, legal defense methods, law enforcement, parole, probation and mental health treatment programs.

As I sit by myself today, I think of all the young, talented Native Americans beginning their pursuit of higher education. These individuals come from tribal reservations and are aware of limited opportunities, lack of social and economic resources and disparities that exist within their boundaries. My point in sharing my upbringing is to help you understand that anything is possible, if you set your mind to it. To tell you that hope and possibilities are within your reach. The journey begins with you. When that opportunity arises, when the time comes, no matter what life throws at you, remember to stand tall and strong. Everything that is happening right now is happening for a reason. Don’t run from the struggle, it’s there to make you stronger. Have faith!

I truly believe that our cultural identity is inherited from our ancestors and carried in the history of Native people. Native people fought for our existence in this country and we must follow in their footsteps. My cultural responsibility is to continue the legacy of my Navajo history and culture. A Navajo woman living alongside the dominant society, requires navigating two worlds. I am developing strategies and mechanisms to increase my chances of success in western education. My goal is to ensure that my tribal identity remains intact and includes world views as part of obtaining my Master’s Degree. I plan to enroll in a Juris Doctor program, during my time at Washington University in St. Louis and hope to work in a legal setting when I complete my studies.

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- Focus on working with at risk children, adolescents, and transitional age youth.

To request an application or for additional information, contact Molly Tovar, Director of the Kathryn M. Buder Center for American Indian Studies and Professor of Practice at 314-935-7767 or mtovar@wustl.edu.

Download an application at buder.wustl.edu/SAGEproject
I come from a Cherokee family that is tight-knit but several hours away from northeastern Oklahoma, the center of Cherokee country. I grew up in a rural, central part of the state and, after I graduated high school, I attended Yale University, where I got a BA in psychology, with a focus on American Indian mental health. After teaching high school English for several years, I went back to graduate school at Cornell University to study American Indian literature. When I completed my coursework, I moved south of Tahlequah, so I could study the Cherokee language and write my dissertation on Cherokee literature, within the thick of Cherokee communities. I had ambitious plans to be finished with the work in short order, but things don’t always go as smoothly as we imagine they will and I eventually found myself without funding and without a dissertation.

At the same time, through a special program that the Cherokee child welfare office created to move children in their care into permanent homes more swiftly than usual, my wife and I had taken in two foster daughters, with the goal of adopting them. Going from zero to two children turned out to be much more work than I had planned and my work was further delayed. After a year, we wound up painfully losing the girls, but the lessons I learned helped me understand how important it is that we reach out to and do what we can to help people in our communities, especially those who have been pushed to the margins. Although it took a long time to get there, this subject became the focus of the conclusion of my book that argues against the Cherokee Nation’s disenfranchisement of the Freedmen.

Like many graduate students, I was in danger of having the final degree slip away from me, with the finish line in sight. At a crucial time, AIGC offered me a fellowship that helped me to complete my project. With more good fortune, a position in American Indian literature at the University of Oklahoma opened up at just the right time and the English department was kind enough to give me a chance. I’m now teaching the books and films by Indigenous people that I love to many other Indigenous students here in Norman, surrounded by my family and friends, a luxury that few academics have. Additionally, I’ve been given opportunities to reach out beyond the university’s walls to share Native people’s stories with communities all over the world, through the Native Crossroads film festival that I help organize (http://cas.ou.edu/
In August of 2014, my book, *Progressive Traditions: Identity in Cherokee Literature and Culture*, came out with the University of Oklahoma Press (http://www.oupress.com/ECommerce/Book/Detail/1908/progressive%20traditions). It’s about using a wide range of cultural values and practices to understand Native identity, instead of constantly stuffing us into just two “traditional” and “progressive” boxes. By looking at religious and political traditions, and some literature about them, I also suggest ways that we can help our communities without constantly relying on the nation-state, whether it’s federal or tribal. With this book now on the shelf, the faculty in my department recently recommended me for tenure and promotion and, also, nominated me for an award for Outstanding Assistant Professor in the College of Arts and Sciences. Whether I’m lucky enough to get either of these, I’m humbled and grateful not only to them, but also to the many people and institutions that helped me along. AIGC is especially important to me among them. I don’t know how many of these blessings I would lack had it not been for AIGC’s help. I’m deeply thankful to the organization and those who support it, and I hope that a portion of the proceeds donated from the sale of *Progressive Traditions*, the book that grew out of my dissertation that AIGC helped me finish, will help it continue its good work of helping American Indian scholars succeed.

Joshua B. Nelson is an Assistant Professor for the Department of English at the University of Oklahoma. AIGC thanks Joshua for the donation of proceeds from his book to help provide scholarships to American Indian and Alaska Native students!
The Love and Legacy of Language

by Stephine Poston

Despite their individual sounds and pronunciations, the intent of all these words is to express a common greeting. Yet, beyond the intent, these words represent a unique culture. They carry an identity with them. They show a connection with community. They embrace tradition. They honor ancestors.

In a world where American Indians and Alaska Natives must straddle the divide of two linguistic spheres – English and Indigenous – there emerges a personal struggle to keep both alive. Language is essential to every aspect and interaction – and, naturally, the predominant language poses a threat to the secondarily used language and everything tied to it.

The Indigenous Language Institute (ILI) recognizes this struggle and aims its efforts to provide vital language-related services to Native communities to ensure individual identities, traditional wisdom and values are passed on to future generations in their original languages.

The organization’s guiding philosophy succinctly describes the need: “This work is urgent. Collectively, we must work to turn the tide of language decline so that indigenous languages become a vibrant component of everyday life in Indian communities.”

In October of this year, ILI hosted a powerful two-day workshop, dedicated to the methodologies and strategies in language learning. ILI brought in Mr. Finlay Macleoid of Scotland to guide the workshop dedicated to “learning language at a super-fast speed.” Finlay Macleoid is the founder of Moray Language Centre, Gaelic Immersion School in Glasgow, Scotland.

Macleoid, who spent eight years learning Scottish Gaelic with the help from fluent speakers in his extended family, developed language learning strategies that place a focus on helping adults become fluent speakers. Macleoid’s language learning approach places the emphasis on adult speakers because they can surround children with the language in their homes. This, of course, creates a natural environment for interaction with the language and, ultimately, results in more language speakers.

While English may rule the roost in mainstream media, workplaces, colleges and universities and beyond, there exists a special, sacred place for indigenous languages.

Called the “Total Immersion Plus” approach, the workshop guided participants through a scene in the kitchen. Centered on mealtime conversation, ILI workshop attendees participated in role-play activities around the kitchen table, group conversation and interaction with fluent speakers, among other activities.
Mr. Macleoid and ILI are planning a two-week workshop, in summer 2015, to teach methodologies and techniques to those who wish to establish intensive adult language “boot camps” in their communities. This training for future tutors of adult immersion camps is designed to help communities engage adult learners to become proficient in their heritage languages so that language can flourish in the homes.

The Administration for Native Americans (ANA) believes language revitalization and continuation are two of the first steps taken in preserving and strengthening a community’s culture. ANA administers a number of language preservation funding opportunities – ILI was the recipient of one such grant – geared toward community-based projects that plan, design and implement a native language curriculum and education projects.

Through organizations like ANA and ILI, indigenous languages have a fair fight in today’s world. While English may rule the roost in mainstream media, workplaces, colleges and universities and beyond, there exists a special, sacred place for indigenous languages. Programs like the ILI workshop, or those funded by ANA grants, breathe new life into indigenous speakers and carry their words into new environments so that haáhe, maiku, apaa, wuxtuygi, yawa – and all the hellos in between – have their place in the future.

Inée Y. Slaughter is the Executive Director of the Indigenous Language Institute, located in Santa Fe, New Mexico. For more information, the website for ILI is www.ilinative.org and Inee may be contacted at ili@ilinative.org.
“Climb the ladder, shi yazhi (Navajo for my child)”. I’ve heard this encouragement many times growing up on the Navajo reservation. It is referencing what one of our former leaders, Chief Manuelito, said about education: “My grandchild, the whites have many things which we Navajos need. But we cannot get them. It is as though the whites were in a grassy canyon and there they have wagons, plows and plenty of food. We Navajos are up on a dry mesa. We can hear them talking but we cannot get to them. My grandchild, education is the ladder. Tell our people to take it.”

Even though times have changed and we are no longer on the “dry mesa,” it is still true that education is vital to our success as Native people. Because of this, we should not take lightly the quality of education we provide to our Native students. Instead, we should be critically evaluating what we do have and transforming it to meet the needs of the future; namely, innovation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

When I entered my Rio Grande Valley science classroom as a Teach For America corps member, I constantly reminded my students how quickly our society is changing, to emphasize the importance of studying STEM. Just think, in 2007, no one knew what an iPhone was, and now we have its sixth version. The jobs of the future will increasingly require STEM skills, like critical thinking, creativity and resourcefulness. By 2018, eight million STEM jobs will be available in the United States but,

1st grade students at Little Wound School
because of the disparity of access to an excellent STEM education, the vast majority of U.S. students will be unprepared to fill them.

For my high school students about to go to college or enter the work force, I know that my work as a science teacher is invaluable and could make all the difference in helping them fulfill their dreams.

I believe a strong STEM program will benefit Native students tremendously, by preparing them for college and other rigorous programs that will lead to their academic success.

Education should never be a limiting factor for a student working hard to be successful. Especially for Native students, who tend to endure a lot of emotional and physical adversities outside the classroom. As one of those students growing up on the reservation, school was an outlet and I thrived at it. I worked hard and graduated high school with top honors and received a full scholarship to Columbia University in New York City.

It was there, however, when I realized that my hard work was not enough. I lagged behind most of my peers in science and math and often had to study three times as much to pass a course. This experience affected my confidence and made me doubt my ability to be successful as a science major. Nonetheless, I managed to get my degree and graduate on time.

While I’m certainly not the first student to have ever felt unprepared for higher education, what’s more concerning is the high number of Native students who never reach a college campus. Only 49 percent of Native students graduate from high school and just 11 percent obtain a college degree, compared to the national average of 86 percent and 29 percent, respectively.

To help combat statistics like these, in 2010, Teach For America launched its Native Alliance Initiative to strengthen relationships with Native communities and help improve outcomes for students. Because teachers who share the backgrounds of their students have the potential to have an additional impact by serving as mentors and role models, the initiative has prioritized recruiting teachers of Native background. Since its inception, the percentage of corps members from American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian backgrounds has more than doubled. And the Native Alliance Initiative is expanding – originally serving New Mexico, Hawaii, Oklahoma and South Dakota, the initiative is now operating in Washington State and Twin Cities.

I became a science teacher to help ensure that other students would not feel the inadequacy and unpreparedness that I felt. It’s because of this experience that I believe a strong STEM program will benefit Native students tremendously, by preparing them for college and other rigorous programs that will lead to their academic success. For many Native students leaving for college, it is their first time experiencing a non-Native setting. They should not feel any less competent or skilled. Instead, they should feel confident in what they have learned and continue to work hard to contribute to a changing society.

It is also due to this experience that I continue to work in education. While at Harvard University’s Graduate School of Education, I researched how some national education policies have impacted Native students and collaborated with a tribe in NM to strengthen their education plan. After obtaining my master’s degree in Education Policy and Management, I went back into the classroom to teach freshmen science. Currently, I am in the process of entering a Ph.D. program in school psychology.

As a Native, I often hear of self-determination. For tribes, this means they can make tribal and systemic changes that benefit their citizens, without governmental oversight. As a result, Indian Country is finally being recognized as having a meaningful presence in the country. Even though we still have a long way to go, this is a great time for Native communities to decide who they want to be and where they’d like to go in the future.

Native students should feel the same way. They should feel like they can make a positive change in our world. I believe that great STEM programs, and having more Native teachers in our classrooms, can do this. Scientists, engineers and mathematicians have changed the world. Technology is the way of the future. We can invite our Native children into this by offering them the necessary knowledge and skills through STEM.

I encourage you to have an impact on a student’s life, by choosing to teach. If we can have more educators who share the background and experiences of our students and understand the importance of STEM skills in today’s society, serving in Native communities, we, too, can encourage every student to “climb the ladder” toward academic success.

LeAnn Tadros is a 2010 Teach For America-Rio Grande Valley alumna and member of the Navajo Nation.
Recently, I was afforded the honor of being invited to attend the first annual Educational Testing Services (ETS) High School Equivalency Test (HiSET®) conference. Among many members of my family, the high school equivalency seems to be a popular option; however, I had never given much thought to this option and what it means to those who choose it. The high school equivalency offices and staff of tribal colleges are quite visible and accessible, so I probably made some assumptions as to the common-ness of this option. It’s not that there are a disproportionate number of tribal college students choosing this option; rather, it’s a testament to the importance of options provided by these institutions being visible. During one meeting, I found myself ‘bragging’ about this visibility in a room of Adult Basic Education (ABE) providers, who were discussing the lack of space and community support. What I didn’t realize is what my new colleagues at HiSET® describe below – within the high school equivalency testing circles, there are now more options and there are reasons for that.

In 2011, the American Council on Education (ACE) and Pearson VUE announced a new business venture resulting in significant changes to the GED®. Concerns regarding access, affordability and content drove adult education state directors to form a GED Options Workgroup to help find solutions that would work best for ALL test takers. As a result, two new high school equivalency tests were developed: The High School Equivalency Test (HiSET®), by Educational Testing Service (ETS), and the Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC™), by CTB/McGraw-Hill. Since January 2014, twelve states have adopted the HiSET® exam; seven states offer it exclusively, while five offer it an option. ETS has worked diligently with the intent of developing and administering an affordable and accessible high school equivalency test alternative. ETS has consulted and worked with 11th and 12th grade teachers, adult educators and correctional facility education specialists to develop a test that assesses high school equivalency standards and college and career readiness.

After hearing from multiple tribes that some high school equivalency exams were posing challenges for accurately assessing their students’ weaknesses and...
Tribes will have a choice in determining the exam their students take – regardless of which test their state administers – thus taking an important step in exercising tribal sovereignty in their education systems.

strengths, the National Indian Education Association began an investigation into alternative testing solutions. As a result, NIEA has entered into a memorandum of understanding with ETS, to provide the HiSET® high school equivalency exam to tribes as an alternate means for assessing tribal students. Through this agreement, tribes will have a choice in determining the exam their students take – regardless of which test their state administers – thus taking an important step in exercising tribal sovereignty in their education systems.

At AIGC, we don’t make a distinction as to the type of diploma a student holds. We provide funding to students, who have been accepted to a college or graduate school, and begin our services there. I was just struck by the heart and soul my new colleagues put into these options and the fact that they reached out to Indian Country by inviting us to the table early in the process, a privilege we don’t often enjoy, but one that is changing, in large part, due to the work that AIGC and NIEA, among other national Native organizations, are doing and will continue to do.

In closing, it’s important to realize that, for most young people, the traditional high school experience is vital in their transition to adulthood. The lessons learned, memories, friendships, and college preparation is all part of the high school climate. However, for those individuals who, for whatever reason(s), cannot complete high school in the ‘traditional’ classroom, I’m happy to report that the options are growing.

About NIEA: NIEA, founded in 1969, is the most inclusive Native organization in the country—representing Native students, educators, families, communities and tribes. NIEA’s mission is to advance comprehensive educational opportunities for all American Indians, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians throughout the United States. From communities in Hawaii, to tribal reservations across the continental U.S., to villages in Alaska and urban communities in major cities, NIEA has the most reach of any Native education organization in the country.

Melvin Monette is the Director of Graduate and Special Programs at the American Indian Graduate Center (AIGC), Gladys E. Recinos is the Director of High School Equivalency Testing (HiSET™) Educational Testing Service and Ahniwake Rose is the Executive Director at the National Indian Education Association (NIEA).
The Ultimate Crown of Education

by Mykhal Mendoza

Dagoteeh! Hello, my name is Mykhal Mendoza; my traditional name is Yellow Pollen Girl. I am White Mountain Apache, born for the Mexican, and my parents are Dominick and Melissa (Colelay) Bonney of Hondah. I am the grand-daughter of Ermon and Katherine Colelay, of Whiteriver, and Rosie Bonney, of Dilkon Arizona. I am also the big sister of Jake and Dylan Bonney. This is how I identify myself as a young Apache woman. I am a 2010 Gates Millennium Scholar and currently a senior at Arizona State University, pursuing joint degrees in Political Science and American Indian Studies.

I’ve been competing in pageants since I was 2 years old, starting with my tribal Baby Girl of the Year, which I was judged for my behavior on stage and my outfit. I believe I was born to be on stage because I won “Best Behaved” during the pageant, in addition to winning the title. I may not remember competing, but it was the beginning of my pageant life. Ten years later, I finally won my next title, in 2003; I became Miss Apache Missy, a title my mother held many years before me. So far, that was the most memorable title I ever held. In November of 2003, I was asked by Andrea Siow, Miss Indian Arizona 2003-2004, to try out for Miss Indian Arizona the following year. I was only twelve but she encouraged me to try out when I was older. From that moment she had inspired me to continue pageantry to one day go for the big title; little did I know her inspiration would lead me to becoming a Gates Scholar one day.

I continued competing in pageants; winning some and losing some and each one taught me something new about myself. In junior high, I ventured into “White girl” pageants, because my mom wanted me to experience being in a different setting. Unlike the tribal pageants, these pageants required you to go through an interview. My first pageant interview was so much fun; if you give me a chance to talk about myself I won’t stop. I was able to really show my spunky personality, which always made the judges laugh. I enjoyed these pageants because I got a completely different vibe from the girls, they were always smiling and complementing each other on their outfits and wishing one another good luck. I learned that pageants weren’t all about winning but making friends and having a good time.

Then, my freshman year of high school began. That was the year I found out how much it costs to go to a university. Back then, it was around $14,000 a year and I knew that my parents did not have the means to pay for college. For a brief moment, I truly believed going to school was not an option because my family could not afford it. Then my mom gave me some excellent advice. She said, “Here are scholarships, look at the requirements and see what kind of student you have to become in the next four years.” I noticed that many of them had certain GPA’s, community service, leadership roles and essays. Being a pageant girl, I had already fulfilled my community service, as well as holding leadership roles. I was serving my community by being a title holder and traveling to various locations to share my language and cultural knowledge. Now it was up to me to get the grades that were needed to earn these scholarships.
In 8th grade, I saw a trophy at my Nalii’s (paternal grandmother) house, which said Valedictorian. She told me that my dad graduated from 8th grade at the top of his class and was awarded the title of Valedictorian. To me, it was a challenge I wanted to accomplish while I was in high school. During my freshman year of high school, the students were given planners; the first few pages are rules about high school and there is an award section. In that part, I saw the definition of Valedictorian and grabbed my highlighter and marked it, with every intention of fulfilling that description. I still have that planner. The decisions I made when I was just fourteen are what shaped my future and I am always thankful for that fourteen year old girl, who knew she could accomplish anything if she set her mind to it.

My junior year of high school came around; it was the first time I met Christa Moya. She had come to our high school to speak to students about the Gates Millennium scholarship. For some reason, only a few students were notified of this workshop and I wasn’t one of them. I had a friend who told me about this event and asked if I could tag along. Even though we were only juniors, Christa encouraged us to start filling out the application to help us prepare for our senior year. I started to fill out the application. I inputted my leadership roles I’ve held, as well as community service I have completed. I didn’t know much about the Gates Scholarship, but I knew I wanted to apply for it.

Following that year, I decided to apply for other scholarships because there is no limit to the amount of scholarships for which a student can apply. Trying out for pageants is like applying for a scholarship. I had competed at the Miss Navajo County Outstanding Teen and was awarded 1st runner-up, which became very important, as I was asked to compete at Miss Arizona’s Outstanding Teen pageant, as the first Miss White Mountains Outstanding Teen. I loved this pageant because it was the first time my mom couldn’t be there to help me get ready behind stage. It was finally my job to make sure I could tie my hair up in the traditional apache way and make sure I kept myself calm. That little challenge became handy when I went on to try out for Miss Indian Arizona. Just like Outstanding Teen, we couldn’t have any helpers backstage. Miss Indian Arizona is a scholarship pageant for Native American women and that year I was awarded “1st Attendant” winning two categories. There was a monetary award of $2100, which seems like a lot, but was just a dent in my college expenses, so I knew I had to keep applying.

If there is one thing that has changed since high school, it is that I’ve become a lot better at procrastinating. A week before the application was due I asked our high school counselor if the deadline for the Gates scholarship was the final deadline and she responded “yes”. I’ll never forget that feeling of, “Oh well.” I’m not sure what changed my mind, but I asked my mom if I should just try to apply and she agreed that I should. The night before the deadline, I stayed up until 2 am and wrote all my essays. No one ever read them or revised them; I wrote from the heart and that was it. The next day, my mom and I spent 8 hours completing the rest of the application. For the community service portion, the scholarship wanted specific dates of your service. Thanks to my mom’s handy calendars of all the events I attended we were able to complete the whole section. My leadership roles didn’t just consist of pageant titles but included my leadership roles in sports and clubs. I may not have been the best player on the team, but I had the spirit of a leader that I’m thankful many of my coaches saw that. I loved being a part of clubs because it gave me a chance to spend time with my friends after school. My mom and I completed the scholarship application with a few minutes to spare and, with those moments, we said a prayer before pressing the complete button. If there is one thing my parents have given me, it was faith, and I am always thankful for that. Now it was a waiting game.
A Gates Millennium Scholar’s Story

I was a part of an organization called The Travel Club, which consisted of me and my 6 best friends from high school. During our sophomore year, I brought up the idea to travel to Europe for our senior year. Within 2 years, we made that possible. From the middle of March to the beginning of April, during my senior year, my friends and I, with Mr. and Mrs. Frank, were off to travel London, Paris and Rome. While on my “vacation”, I received my second letter from the Gates Scholarship saying I made it to the second round. Let’s just say I am forever in debt to my Mom! Also, thanks to the NAU Upward Program I was aware of what was needed for the second part of the scholarship. Once my mom received the letter, she sent the rest of the information needed by the end of that day, while I was somewhere in Europe.

April 18, 2010. My mother and I were driving to school and work that morning. Randomly, I brought up the Gates Scholarship and she said she was going to check the mail after she dropped me off. She said if she showed up abruptly at my school then I would know she got it. Halfway through 3rd period my mom hadn’t shown up yet, I said to myself, “At least I tried.” At that very moment, there was a knock at the door. I ran toward the door and opened it up to find my mom holding my “congratulations” letter! Tears ran down both our faces.

The good habits I obtained in high school continued into college, I’ve been an active member of the Tribal Nation Tours at ASU, where a group of current college students travel to Arizona K-12 schools promoting higher education. My freshman year of college I competed for the title of Ms. Indian ASU and won. With that title and a scholarship, I have become the coordinator of the pageant. I found the best job for me at ACCESS ASU, where I was able to promote and inform K-12 students about higher education and share my story of becoming a Gates Millennium scholar. I competed in the Miss Indian Arizona pageant again and won more scholarship money.

In August of 2014, I won the title of Miss Gallup Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial Queen 2014-2015, at the 92nd Annual Gallup Inter-Tribal Ceremonial. I won another scholarship, as well as some amazing jewelry, a sewing machine, some outfits, gift certificates, etc… Throughout my years in pageantry, the main thing I have won is the opportunity to have met the people who inspired me to chase my dreams and become a great leader for my Apache people.
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Dr. Noel Baker – Little did 10-year-old Noel Baker know that chasing tornadoes in Nebraska with her father would eventually lead her to a postdoctoral fellowship in climate research at NASA. Back then, Baker was just a California kid who liked traveling with her dad, a Native American who taught students about weather, and appeared on TV, as a part of The Weather Channel’s Cable in the Classroom program.

Atmospheric science dominated her middle school years, but when Baker entered college, she decided to study mechanical engineering. “I viewed engineering as an applied science,” she described. While working to earn her doctorate degree in mechanical engineering at Arizona State University, she found her passion from her storm tracking days had re-emerged.

“What began with my father and Cable in the Classroom, just never left me,” Baker explained. “And it’s my biggest reason for pursuing climate research now. My childhood interest planted a seed which transformed into a passion much later. Studying climate is important because it’s an area that can make a difference – a true change for society.”

Baker applied to the NASA Postdoctoral Program (NPP) after completing her doctorate because conducting research at NASA was a dream of hers – one that became a reality when she was selected for a NASA appointment. As an NPP Fellow at NASA Langley Research Center, in Hampton, Va., Baker takes data from existing climate models and applies an innovative technique to make accurate predictions.

Baker’s novel technique weighs each climate model’s performance against certain evaluation metrics, and then assigns each model a numerical value. She uses NASA satellite data, including data from the Clouds and the Earth’s Radiant Energy Systems (CERES), to validate the accuracy of the models’ predicted climate processes. That correlation is a key factor in the model’s assigned weight – a valuation of the model’s predictive accuracy. Specifically, Baker’s project focuses on the climate processes of temperature and precipitation, two critical components of the Earth’s energy budget and water cycle.

The ultimate goal for her research is to make improved climate predictions for the 21st century and assist communities in planning for a changing climate – which is exactly what Baker helped to do at a recent intergovernmental meeting in her local Virginia community.

Standard climate models predict that sea levels will rise several feet in Virginia coastal communities over the next 100 years. Baker acted as a scientific advisor to the Hampton Roads Sea Level Rise Preparedness and Resilience Intergovernmental Planning Pilot Project committee, where she discussed predictions that those standard models make with economists, politicians and other community leaders. She also gave advice on ways to plan for and mitigate the rising sea levels.
That outreach experience taught Baker the value of NASA to communities, and helped her to better understand the need for scientists to communicate their research to those who are not immersed in the subject. “We need to interact with others outside of the laboratory to get the word out about the science that we’re doing,” she said, “because science has the potential to benefit our society as a whole.”

Baker delivers that message every chance she gets. Recently she hosted a Skype session with a class of ninth-grade students from the High School for Enterprise, Business and Technology in Brooklyn, N.Y. During the video conference, she discussed basic facts about climate change and talked about NASA’s climate research efforts and satellite missions. “Just as my father fostered my interest in weather and climate,” she said, “now, I’m able to give back and, hopefully, inspire scientific curiosity in young students as well.”

“We need to interact with others outside of the laboratory to get the word out about the science that we’re doing, because science has the potential to benefit our society as a whole.”

But her interest in climate was not the only thing that Baker’s father passed on to her at a young age. “My father has always been very proud of his Native American heritage and always wanted me to know that it was a part of my heritage, too,” she said.

Her grandmother’s family was a part of one of the Algonquian tribes close to Ohio and the eastern Midwest. Though, over time, Baker lost touch with her Native American heritage, she still feels a strong connection to it. “My heritage has always been something that I’ve wanted and now plan to get back in touch with,” she said. “I’ve always regretted that I was not able to talk about it with my grandmother more before she died.”

As for the future, Baker hopes that she can incorporate her Native American heritage into her life in the same way that she’s incorporated climate research into her present and future career path. Her current goal is to continue conducting climate research and scientific outreach at NASA, even after her postdoctoral fellowship ends.

“I can’t imagine doing anything else with my career right now,” she said. “NPP has given me the invaluable opportunity to continue my research and enhance my career. The people at NASA Langley are brilliant and a joy to work with; there is an incredible diversity here, which I love. There are scientists and engineers, who worked on the original NASA space program, as well as researchers from dozens of countries and backgrounds. I’m thankful to have had the opportunity to participate in NPP and I highly recommend the program to other young scientists looking for a great place to start their careers.”

Though The Weather Channel’s Cable in the Classroom no longer airs, Baker’s passion for climate science lives on through her laboratory research and community outreach. But, she may well find herself tracking storms once again – tracing the clouds she first studied as a kid, now as a climate researcher, who hopes for the future of a renewed connection to her Native American past.
From the Reservation to “Big Law”
Reflections on Being Indian In Law School

by Rose Nimkiins

My name is Rose Nimkiins Petoskey and I am Anishinaabek (Odawa). I am a member of the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians and I grew up on the Grand Traverse Band rural reservation in Peshawbestown, MI. It is based on this life experience at a very young age that I developed a commitment to focusing my educational and professional goals on sustaining a positive future for tribal communities. Growing up in a tribal community and experiencing the community struggles first hand has given me insight, empathy and compassion for the needs of Indian country. I chose to attend law school to become a well-prepared advocate for tribal legal interests in tribal, state and federal forums.

I am a child of tribal government and, over time, the development of tribal policy and federal Indian law has become my passion. When I was born, my mother was serving on the Grand Traverse Band Tribal Council and my father was General Counsel for the Tribe, a position he held for 26 years. My parents have always been eager to instill, within me, the same passion they have for tribal interests. I grew up learning about the importance of sovereignty and, by the age of twelve, decided I would pursue law school in hopes of contributing to our community in the same meaningful ways my parents have. Both my parents and I have been supported by the American Indian Graduate Center in our pursuits of higher education and are certainly grateful for the support and the longstanding and continuing work the AIGC does to support Indian students.

After graduating from Michigan State University in 2012, with a BA in Political Theory and minor in American Indian Studies, I began law school at Cornell University.

In order to give context to my experiences as an Indian student in law school, I would like to briefly describe one of the first times I realized I am part of what some people may call an almost “invisible minority.” When I was 10 years old, one of my cousins was sent to stay at a down-state juvenile facility. I don’t remember exactly why she was sent, but I do remember that, when she returned, the first thing she told me was about a conversation she had with other girls staying at the center. Generally, in the Indian community the question, “where are you from?” usually translates into ‘what tribe are you from and where did you grow up’. Thus, when my cousin was asked, “where are you from?” by other girls at the center, she replied with the standard answer describing her tribe and her home community. The other girls were shocked and astonished to meet a “real Indian.” The girls proceeded to ask questions, such as, “do you have running water?” “do you live in a teepee?” “do you wear feathers?” As my cousin spoke, I remember thinking how ridiculous those comments were, and why anyone would make them. We finally came to the realization that ‘being Indian’ is something that many people don’t think even exists. As a 10 year old, this type of realization is fairly shocking, to realize that, ultimately, the life you grew up knowing is something that other people believe is a relic of the past, something they may have learned about for ten minutes in history class or chose to dress up as when they were in girl scouts. Upon moving away from the reservation and pursuing higher education, I’ve had many experiences that parallel this experience I had as a child.
Entering to law school, I had strong convictions about working to help tribal communities like my own and, eventually, returning home to work for my own community. Although I certainly still have these goals, at the end of my first year partially because of pressure from student loans and because I thought it might be good to experience “big law” before I went back to working for a tribe, I decided to participate in the Cornell August Job Fair.

Many of my classmates had been looking forward to the fair for quite some time as the beginning of their career in corporate big law. I went into the job fair with a far less intimate knowledge, to say the least, than most of my classmates about how the recruitment process worked or what could be expected from a summer associate position. Nonetheless, I prepared for interviews and hoped for the best.

At the August Job Fair, I can recount interview after interview, during which I was asked things like “you’re really Native American?” (As though a racial identity is something you question when a person identifies themselves. Unfortunately, being Native American is utterly shocking to some people), “what are reservations like?,” “you actually lived on a reservation!,” “I hear Indian gaming is very lucrative—I went to an Indian casino once”, and, of course, the question I grew to resent the most—“you’re resume indicates that you are very interested in Native American issues, so why do you want to work at a big law firm?”

The Cornell August Job Fair is an intimidating and exhausting experience on its own, 8-10 interviews per day, with high-powered partners from the largest law firms in the country. Interviewing, while having to defend and explain your existence, identity and culture in each interview, is almost an impossible task for one person. In many situations, I am more than proud to represent my culture, my community and my way of life, but constantly experiencing the feeling that I was viewed so definitively as the “other”, in the eyes of each interviewer, was frightening and disheartening. It is not that I have never had the experience of being the only Indian person in the room and having to speak on behalf of my entire community, race and diverse cultures; I have had these experiences on many occasions and learned to cope and react accordingly.

What struck me about my job fair experience is that I felt as if interviewers were really saying to me, “you’re Indian, so why do you want to work at a big law firm?” I think the reason I saw this statement as so alienating and disturbing is that it was a poignant reminder of my “otherness”, in a very high stress situation. Because of my specific upbringing and life experience, I identify very closely with the practice of Indian law, as an integral part of my family.

I felt as if my upbringing, in which my parents taught me that my well-being as an individual Odawa person is defined by the well-being of our larger community, had just collided head-on with the culture of competition and individualism. I was staring my “otherness” directly in the eye, as a result of the demeaning questions of each interviewer.

Throughout the three days of the job fair I would hear many students comment that they wish they were “diverse”, in order to have a better chance at getting a job. At the Cornell August Job Fair, the initial interviews are only 20 minutes long and, when you spend 15 minutes explaining your identity, there is little time left to discuss your pertinent legal skills such as writing, oral advocacy, general first-year experience etc. This is not an advantage, as many other students saw it.

I almost felt as though I needed to hide the fact that I am Indian, to even begin discussing the fact that I had made it through the writing competition and was on the Cornell Journal of Law and Public Policy, wrote for the Cornell Legal Information Institute and participated in Cornell Moot Court.

As you could imagine, I did not feel as if I was somehow gaining a competitive advantage through my diverse background. There were many times when I just felt like screaming, “I am like every other student here!” I think that, until this point in my life, I had never conceded the fact that sometimes I feel like I just want to be like everyone else (a nearly paralyzing and all too common thought for Indian students in higher education, generally).

My culture teaches me that the way to success and, possibly, the way to gradual institutional change is to work hard, persevere, remember to always define myself as not just an individual, but as a contributor to the continued resilience of my tribal community, and rely on the strength of my community.
There has been great progress in attempting to make higher education institutions more welcoming to minority students. The creation of student affinity groups, like the National Native American Law Students Association, preparation programs, such as the American Indian Law Center’s Pre-Law Summer Institute and outlets for cultural expression have certainly improved the experience. Prior to coming to law school, I participated in the American Indian Law Center’s Pre-Law Summer Institute Program (PLSI). Since 1967, the program has helped prepare American Indian and Alaska Native students for law school through an intensive two-month “boot camp”, essentially replicating the first year of law school, in the summer before students begin. For each Indian student, PLSI provides more than just preparation for law school. It provides a network of Indian alumni who have gone through the program. The Indian students with whom I went through the program have become my family and we have supported each other throughout the past two and a half years of law school. Most importantly, my PLSI classmates understand the challenges of being Indian in law school and, through sharing our mutual experiences, we are able to lift each other up and come together to work for change.

Although groups and programs, such as the National Native American Law Students Association and the Pre-Law Summer Institute, have certainly improved the experience of Indian students in higher education, what I have been focusing on throughout this article and what many Indian students in higher education struggle with, on a daily basis, are the subtle and underlying issues of ignorance and racism that persist within educational institutions. Recently, in her dissent in Schuette, Attorney General of Michigan v. Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action, 134 S. Ct. 1623, 1676 (2014), Justice Sotomayor powerfully expressed the core of this issue, when she stated: “Race matters because of the slights, the snickers, the silent judgments that reinforce that most crippling of thoughts ‘I do not belong here.’” Justice Sotomayor describes the feeling as “crippling” and that is certainly how I have felt it. I can’t be altogether sure what the answer is to resolving this crippling feeling. As an Indian student, from a rural reservation, I certainly believe in the affirmative action system. My culture teaches me that the way to success and, possibly, the way to gradual institutional change is to work hard, persevere, remember to always define myself as not just an individual, but as a contributor to the continued resilience of my tribal community, and rely on the strength of my community. It is through relying on these core teachings and the strength and support of the mentors in my life that I have been able to get this far in my educational life and I will continue to rely and find strength in them as I move forward.

Through my experiences, I have found the pain and promise of federal Indian law is a journey across time, leaving traces of destruction and, yet, still representing a beacon of hope. I want to understand that journey in all its detail. Tribal communities struggle to defend their right to exist as sovereign nations with beautiful and rich cultures. Coupled with this struggle, individuals, families and entire communities suffer from the impact of inter-generational trauma and poverty. Alongside these problems, there is also great strength and resilience. I want to be part of honoring our struggles, by cultivating our strengths. I have never wanted anything more than to be a source of positive change in tribal communities. As a lawyer, I want to embody and realize the hope and promise federal Indian law can provide for Indian people and communities. But, for now, I look forward to meeting the challenges I face every day as an Indian student in higher education. I believe that all we can do is embrace the existing challenges and work for change. I am eager to get outside the walls of the law school and work directly to impart positive change in my community and across Indian country. After graduation, I will be working in the Indian law practice group of a firm in Washington, DC. Ultimately, I see my success as a student, as the success of my community as a whole, and this is the driving force that makes me face each challenge and move past those times I feel like I don’t belong. I know that I come from a community of everlasting strength and resilience and I will always take comfort in that.

AIGC Alumni

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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.
Please join AMERIND Risk and The American Indian Graduate Center (AIGC) for the annual “Protecting Tribal Families” Golf Fundraiser. Funds raised will assist non-insured Native American families affected by catastrophic events or loss. Additionally, a portion of the proceeds will be donated to AIGC!

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For more information, please contact Minerva Diaz at (505) 404-5000 or MDiaz@amerindrisk.org. To register, please visit our website at AMERINDRisk.org.
The Accenture American Indian Scholarship program is celebrating 10 years of providing scholarships to undergraduate and graduate students. The Accenture scholarship was established in 2005, to build personal and lasting relationships with students who are the future leaders in American Indian communities and could, potentially, be employed by Accenture. During the past 10 years, the Accenture scholarship has funded 97 students; 62 undergraduate and 35 graduate. The scholarship seeks the very brightest American Indian and Alaska Native undergraduate students pursuing degrees and careers in engineering, computer science, operations management, management, finance, marketing and other business-oriented fields. The Accenture scholarship program is sponsored and funded by Accenture LLP and administered by the American Indian Graduate Center.

Each academic year, Accenture selects students demonstrating character, personal merit and commitment to the American Indian community locally and/or nationally. Merit is demonstrated through leadership in school, civic and extracurricular activities, academic achievement and motivation to serve and succeed. This year’s selection of the very brightest Accenture scholars includes:

- **Tristan Brown (Cherokee Nation)** – Graduated from Sallisaw High School in Oklahoma, with a 3.98 GPA. Tristan is a freshman at the University of Oklahoma, pursuing a bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering.
- **Brooks Butler (Choctaw Nation)** – Graduated from Joplin High School in Missouri, with a 4.00 GPA. Brooks is a freshman at Yale University, pursuing a bachelor’s degree in business.
- **Victoria Garcia (Navajo Nation)** – Graduated from Piedra Vista High School in Farmington, NM, with a 3.85 GPA. Victoria is a freshman at Texas Tech University, pursuing a bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering.
- **Tanner Heath (Choctaw Nation)** – Graduated from Hobart High School in Nobart, Oklahoma, with a 4.00 GPA. Tanner is a sophomore at Oklahoma State University, pursuing a bachelor’s degree in business.
- **Cassandra Poitra (Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians)** – Graduated from Central High School in Aberdeen, SD, with a 3.8 GPA. Cassandra is a freshman at Northern State University, pursuing a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice.

Congratulations to the AIGC 2014-15 Accenture American Indian Scholarship Recipients! For more information on the Accenture program, please visit aigcs.org.

(About Accenture – Today, Accenture is a global management consulting, technology services and outsourcing company, with approximately 319,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries. Combining unparalleled experience, comprehensive capabilities across all industries and business functions and extensive research on the world’s most successful companies, Accenture collaborates with clients to help them become high-performance businesses and governments. The company generated net revenues of $30 billion, for the fiscal year ended August 31, 2014. Its home page is www.accenture.com.)
This year’s selection of the very brightest Accenture scholars includes:

Cassandra Poitra

Tanner Heath

Victoria Garcia

Tristan Brown

Brooks Butler
Interested in getting an inside look at the legislative policy process? Since 1975, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) has provided the Congress with the objective, nonpartisan analyses needed for economic and budgetary decisions. Each year, the agency’s economists and budget analysts produce dozens of reports and hundreds of cost estimates for proposed legislation. Their analyses span a wide array of important policy issues, including the federal budget and tax policy, health care, national defense, the environment, education, retirement and other income assistance, regulation, public investment, and legislation that imposes requirements on the private sector or state, local, and tribal governments.

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AIGC Scholarship Opportunities

• All Native American High School Academic Team, High School Seniors: Deadline March 6, 2015

• Accenture American Indian Scholarship, Undergraduate: Deadline ended January 2015

• Wells Fargo American Indian Scholarship, Undergraduate and Graduate: Deadline May 15, 2015

• AIGC Fellowship, Graduate: Deadline is June 1, 2015

• BIE - Loan for Service, Graduate: Deadline is June 1, 2015

• REDW Native American Scholarship in Accounting, Undergraduate and Graduate: Deadline is June 1, 2015

For more information, visit the AIGC website at aigcs.org. Email all inquiries to: fellowships@aigcs.org
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A Pueblo Perspective on Higher Education

by Matthew J. Martinez

As the First Americans, indigenous peoples are not new to becoming the first in our educational endeavors. Whether we are the first in our families to go to college, to earn graduate degrees, or the first to hold academic and professional appointments, we can all point to some aspect of being the first of something among our respected tribal nations, communities and families. Like many of my peers, my parents and community leaders often told me to, “Go out, get an education, come back and help your people.” Growing up at Ohkay Owingeh – the first capital of New Mexico – I took these words to heart, with great responsibility. As an educator, it has become clear working with students that going out and getting an education does not necessarily equate to leaving home and traditions. In contrast, carrying traditions of health, well-being and spiritual practices can and should coexist while we are away from our traditional homelands. These values and practices must not occur in isolation. It is important for our families, community members and leaders to recognize that they, too, are part of the educational pathway of success. As a graduate student, perhaps away from your tribe in another state, it is easy to be isolated and fall victim to feelings of being an imposter in Western society and questioning if higher education is the place to be. At times, I still continue to experience isolation in the academy and ask myself if this is the right fit for me and my family.

Certainly we are not the first to confront experiences and feelings of isolation. Our grandparents, their grandparents, and so on, came from a long line of firsts, who experienced culture shock and belief systems not conducive to indigenous values. What was it like for our relatives to withstand the Indian Relocation events of the 1950s, World War II, World War I or forcibly taken to the boarding schools at the turn of the 20th century? It is critical to recognize and reflect that we exist today in the academy because of those who came before, those who carved these pathways, so that we can persist in higher education for those who will endure after we have moved on.

By reflecting beyond our contemporary lenses, it is comforting to be reminded that indigenous peoples have always been writing history. We continue to be shaped by our historical texts in pottery, weavings and petroglyphs that document migration patterns and seasonal markers. Often, not fully knowing or understanding them entirely, we continue to call upon them in dance and ceremony for guidance. Our dance rhythms and motions are stories within stories. We are a people of stories. Through story, life is created, and it is this poeh (pathway) we continue to follow. Your educational experiences as AIGC Fellows are stories in the making.

Carrying traditions of health, well-being and spiritual practices can and should coexist while we are away from our traditional homelands.

Indigenous peoples were skilled at creating and navigating thousands of trails across the Americas, utilized for trading, hunting and gathering places. As an AIGC community of scholars and educators, we carry the responsibility to continue in our educational pathways. We certainly are not the first but, more significantly, we must remember that we are active contributors toward the coiling of a larger pot known as our enduring tribal legacies.

Ewanini kuundawhoha, blessings and thank you!

Matthew J. Martinez, Ph.D., is an AIGC Alumnus and an Associate Professor of Pueblo Indian Studies at Northern New Mexico College in Española, New Mexico.
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Sometimes a high school class and a teacher can have a profound and lasting effect on a student’s outlook on life and historical understanding of his/her country. I had one such exceptionally formative course in eleventh grade called, The American Dream. It depicted the reality of the Native American experience since colonization. By the end of the semester, as a non-Native student, I was left feeling shocked, saddened and angry, as well as desirous for some type of social change.

In this class, I realized how I knew almost nothing about American Indian history, heritage, culture, or Native American contemporary life. I came to understand how poorly formed my childhood and teenage images were of Native Americans due, in part, to the way in which Hollywood movies had depicted the stereotypes.

The emotional and physical healing that can be seen taking place in Indian communities today will benefit the next Seven Generations of Natives and non-Natives.

It turned out that this high school class planted a seed deep within me, which, decades later, germinated, grew and inspired me to produce/direct a one-hour documentary entitled, “Our Fires Still Burn: The Native American Experience.” So, as a filmmaker, I finally found a way to depict and express what I had begun to learn and feel about the Native American experience, as a sixteen-year-old student, in a small Catholic high school, in suburban Michigan.

“Our Fires Still Burn” depicts the personal stories of Native American role models, from all walks of life including a successful businessman, journalist, artist, social worker and youth advocate, as well as tribal and spiritual leaders. The interviewees share how they are learning to walk between two worlds, uniquely face social challenges, such as alcohol abuse and educational barriers within their communities; reclaim their Indian heritage; creatively utilize ancestral teachings in their daily lives and begin to heal from a long, long history of traumatic experiences and upheavals, such as the Indian Boarding School era.

What I have learned about Native Americans experiences, while creating this documentary, is immense. What comes to mind, foremost, is that American history is fraught, even more deeply than I previously understood in that high school class, with the systematic destruction of a people. The tragic history of Native Americans is our “American Holocaust.”

On the other hand, I have been deeply inspired by the fact that, amidst the debris of suffering and historical trauma, American Indians today are expressing their incredible resilience, as well as living their commitment to reclaim their cultural heritage and preserve their unique identities as Native people. The emotional and physical healing that can be seen taking place in Indian communities today will benefit the next Seven Generations of Natives and non-Natives.

“Our Fires Still Burn” is currently airing nationally on PBS. A DVD of this documentary can be purchased on our web site, at www.OurFiresStillBurn.com.

Audrey Geyer has been an independent video producer/director for over 15 years, and many of her programs have aired locally and nationally on PBS. She is the Founder and Executive Director of Visions, a non-profit 501(c)3 independent video production company located in Metro Detroit. Visions’ focuses on the production of public affairs documentaries, which tell the stories of communities underrepresented in the mainstream media. She graduated with a BA in Film/Video Studies from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and has a Master’s degree in Social Work from NYU. Contact: AudreyGeyer@aol.com/810-772-9628
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—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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