



Washington State University

First Scholars

Home
 Contact Us
 Tribal Liaison Office
 Native Student Center
 Native Grad Student Center
 Outreach & Recruitment
 Plateau Center
 Leadership Program
 Newsletter
 Events Calendar
 Resources

First Scholars Program Helps Students Achieve a Big First

by Stevee Chapman & Faith Price

Washington State University's First Scholars Program gives first-generation college students the support needed to be the first person in their family to achieve a college degree.

The First Scholars Program selects twenty participants each year based on financial need and academic standing. To be eligible for the First Scholars Program, students must be an incoming freshman at WSU whose parent(s) have less than two years of education beyond high school.

The program is in its second year on the WSU campus. WSU alumna, Eva Navarajo was hired in May as the program coordinator.

"I think the biggest benefit of the First Scholars Program is its commitment to providing our students support in any way the student might need it," says Navarajo. "We take the time to truly understand each student, and then use that knowledge to create a buffer that will move with the student throughout their time at the university. We can anticipate the student's needs and guide him or her toward the resources that will best lead to his or her version of success at WSU."

During their freshman year, students create a customized plan with Navarajo which identifies their areas of strength and areas in which they made need growth. Through this plan they determine strategies in order to help the students reach their goals.

In addition to personalized academic support, First Scholars receive a \$5,000 annual scholarship which is renewable for four years to total \$20,000 of financial assistance.

"I am a first-generation college student. The biggest challenge facing me was always worrying that I didn't have the resources available to attend college," says Navarajo. "I knew that if I wanted to attend college, I would need to find a way to pay for it myself. The challenge is having the constant burden of worry, and needing to anticipate what needs and obstacles I might expect to encounter. It's unfamiliar territory and I remember always having to think about what calculated moves I would need to make next to make sure I'd be okay."

Navarajo is originally from California, and moved to Washington during high school. She earned her bachelor's in English, with honors, at WSU. She is now working on her PHD in American Studies through Saint Louis University.

"I'm most excited about being able to share in our students' experience at Washington State University. I love our university so it will be great to see our students develop their own sense of Cougar pride!"

Both freshman and sophomore students in the First Scholars program participate in peer mentoring. As they transition into upperclassman a Pay-It-Forward service requirement gives them the opportunity to transition into a leadership role where they can become peer mentors themselves.

Other benefits for participants are the opportunities to be involved in group activities that include social events, educational programs, service opportunities, resource awareness and enrichment opportunities. The program also encourages students to join different student organizations on campus based on their interests.

Readers interested in learning more about, or applying for WSU First Scholars should visit their website at <http://firstscholars.wsu.edu/>.



First Scholars Program coordinator Eva Navarajo was the first in her family to achieve a college degree.

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