Grad Students Display Talents in Research, Design

by Ken Lokensgard

WSU Native American graduate students have been busy during the fall 2015 semester. Danielle Guzman (Nez Perce), a master’s candidate in horticulture, presented posters at the PNW-COSMOS (Pacific Northwest Circle of Success: Mentoring Opportunities in STEM) Summit Meeting in Missoula, Montana in October. Undergraduate Shelby Leighton (Nez Perce) also presented a poster. Landon Charlo (CSKT), a doctoral candidate in Environmental and Natural Resource Sciences, attended as well. In addition to their research, the students shared with faculty their views on the effective mentoring of Native students in STEM disciplines. The faculty in attendance at the meeting are part of an alliance funded by a National Science Foundation grant (AGEP-T # 1432932) to recruit and retain Native students in STEM graduate programs. Besides WSU, the alliance includes the University of Montana, the University of Idaho, Montana State University, Montana Tech, Salish Kootenai College, Northwest Indian College, and Heritage University.

In November, Danielle Guzman also presented a research poster at the American Indian Science and Engineering Society annual conference in Phoenix. Undergraduate engineering student Josh Sandoval presented a poster too. Meanwhile, Dr. Ken Lokensgard (Plateau Center), Dr. Lori Carris (Assoc. Dean of the Graduate School), and Dr. Shelley Pressley (Director of Undergraduate Research) met with high school and college students interested in enrolling at WSU or participating in summer research programs at WSU. After AISES, Ken Lokensgard went on to the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in Denver to present his own work on Indigenous Research Methods.

Aric Washines (Yakama) also presented his research at AISES. Aric, a recent graduate of Heritage University, produced this research while participating in the NSF’s Research Experience for Undergraduates program at Washington State University during the summer of 2015. He worked with WSU Dept. of Horticulture professor Amit Dhingra (who is also Ms. Guzman’s advisor). Aric was awarded the CHS Foundation Special Award by AISES.

Of course, not all of WSU’s Native graduate students are scientists. For instance, Kalina Ebling (Quinault), a Graduate Assistant with Native American Programs, is a master’s student in Apparel Merchandising and Design. Kalina had the honor of showing some clothing designs at the Runway Renegades fashion show at the Northern Quest Casino in September. Kalina also modeled some of her designs, along with undergraduate Sequoia Dance (Shoshone–Bannock). Sequoia, an excellent student who plans to attend graduate school herself, happens to be the current “Miss Shoshone–Bannock.” Finally, it is important to note that Faith Price, our very own Assistant Director of Native American Programs, showed some designs at Runway Renegades as well. When she is not engaged in student support, she designs and sells fashionable clothing through her business, “Powwow Baby.”
While the WSU’s graduate students—those identified here and more besides—have been busily engaged in their work, the faculty and staff of the Plateau Center have been busy as well. In November, Tribal Liaison and Director of Native American Programs Barbara Aston (Wyandotte), Dr. Lokensgard, and Plateau Center Research Fellow Dr. Zoë Higheagle Strong (Nez Perce) attended the annual American Indigenous Research Association Meeting at Salish Kootenai College in Pablo, Montana. This meeting, organized by SKC professor Lori Lambert (Mi’kmaq/Abenaki), was attended by Indigenous and other scholars from across the globe, who came together to present and discuss their work on Indigenous Research Methods. Aston and Dr. Lokensgard continued on, from SKC, to Missoula to attend the PNW-COSMOS meeting mentioned above.

On November 2, the Plateau Center and the Graduate School hosted a meeting of WSU faculty and researchers interested in or engaged in mentoring Native graduate students and/or conducting culturally responsive research with tribes. Josiah Pinkham and Nakia Williamson, of the Nez Perce Tribe’s Cultural Resources Program, shared their views on mentoring and collaborative research with the attendees. Dr. Strong shared her thoughts, as a recent Ph.D. and current WSU faculty member, on mentoring. Then, Dr. Carris, Dr. Lokensgard, and Director Aston discussed some of the financial and other resources available to faculty and graduate students. This meeting was intended to create greater research coordination with tribes and more effective mentoring of Native students. It will also help revitalize the Plateau Affiliates Program discussed in previous newsletters. Further meetings focusing upon mentoring and research will take place in spring of 2016.

As always, I remind members of the tribal communities, faculty members, and staff who are interested in responsible, collaborative research or who simply want to know more about the Plateau Center and its activities to contact me, Dr. Ken Lokensgard, at kenneth.lokensgard@wsu.edu or at 509–335–1055.