



EXCEL participants and camp staff get ready to run in an icebreaker led by student ambassador Elsie Cree.

High School Students Get to Know Cougs and Campus During EXCEL

by Edmund "Frazer" Myer

On the weekend of Dec. 4–6, 2015 students at the third annual Exploring College Emerging Leaders (EXCEL) conference in Pullman were introduced to what WSU has to offer.

EXCEL participant Dakotah Schmidt said at first everyone was hesitant to talk to each other, but, "after a while it felt like we've known each other for years." By the end of the weekend the students exchanged contacts and made potential plans to hang out once they are students at WSU.

EXCEL, an event for Native American high school juniors and seniors interested in attending WSU, is led by Native American Outreach Coordinator Autumn Jones.

The event was held on the WSU campus and most students traveled many miles to visit and gain a true understanding of what it's like at a major university.

Schmidt is a senior at Redmond High School in central Oregon. Although, both of his parents are UW alumni, he really wants to be a Cougar.

"I just really like the atmosphere. It's a cool environment," Dakotah said. "I tell my friends back home I like that Pullman is a college town."

He said he's really leaning toward WSU because of the Native American Programs and how many opportunities it offers for its students to get involved. He understands the importance of taking as many opportunities to get involved as possible.



(l-r): Dakotah Schmidt, Kendra Saulque, WSU Professor Allyson King, Jalissa Somers and Scott Abrahamson experiment with an ecosystem stream flow demonstration.



(l-r): Alexandria Tallis, Savannah Holliday, Taya Holliday, and Jay-J Jones anchor the news.

The EXCEL conference is designed to expose students to university academics through hands-on workshops, as well as student life by meeting current WSU students. The participants were greeted at the hotel by the Native Programs' student ambassadors Zach Bailey, Elsie Cree, Jay-J Jones, and Jessica Lawrence, and icebreaker games helped everyone get to know each other.

Over the course of the weekend, students toured and participated in various activities at the Murrow College of Communication, the Wildlife Conservation Center, multiple science labs, the Native American Student Center, and the Student Recreation Center.

At the Murrow College, EXCEL participants created a newscast on WSU's Cable 8 set, complete with news, weather, and sports. They experienced first-hand what it was like behind the anchor desk, the cameras, and in front of the green-screen. They also experienced behind the scenes where a lot of the work is done, in the production room.

The group visited the Native American Student Center on campus, where some current students got a chance to share their own stories and words of advice with the future college students. They also attended a round dance put on by ASWSU Ku-Ah-Mah Native student organization. This was a way to meet new people and socialize while enjoying Native American culture.

At the College of Agriculture, the group used a river-building simulator to increase their understanding about the functions of rivers, such as irrigation. When the group visited the WSU Wildlife Conservation Center, they had the chance to pet deer, and meet Tundra, the Snowy Owl, at the WSU Raptor Rehabilitation Program.

Scott Abrahamson, 17, a member of the Colville Tribe, said his favorite part of the whole experience was when the group pet the deer. Abrahamson really hopes to be attending WSU next year. He has been part of an engineering internship program at his high school, which he particularly enjoys because he gets to practice working in the field. It helped him realize how much he really enjoys engineering, which is what he wants to study when he's a student here at WSU.

In addition to exposure to different majors, EXCEL participants attended workshops designed to inform them of the many resources available for students, including the First Scholars Program which supports first-generation college students, enhancing their chances at success.

The group learned about scholarships and financial aid, the FASFA process, and when to apply for admissions. This was meant to ensure they are aware of funds available to them, and all of the deadlines students need to meet.

At the end of the weekend, there was an awards brunch where EXCEL students, their parents, and the staff all enjoyed a slideshow of photos taken throughout the weekend. Captain of the Nez Perce Tribal Police Department, Martin J. Antone, was the keynote speaker and encouraged the future leaders of Native America to get their education, strive for greatness, and not forget where they came from.



Matt Slagle pets deer at the WSU Wildlife Conservation Center.

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