

## Native Leadership Panel

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### Tribal Leaders Share Knowledge with WSU During Panel

by Faith Price

WSU Tribal Nation Building Leadership Program students kicked off the spring semester by hosting a panel discussion of Native leadership January 14.

Consensus was the theme that emerged throughout the evening as two tribal elders (and Cougar grandfathers!) shared their experiences with tribal leadership.

"Leadership is a misnomer in terms of how we move things forward, how we progress, how we achieve what we need to achieve. One person cannot do that," stated Alfred Nomee, Coeur d'Alene tribal council member, vice president of the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, and grandfather of WSU student Tillie Torpey.

Nomee explained that in the old ways among tribal communities, everyone had a voice in decision making. Traditionally, the people would gather and discuss and when it came time to make a decision, spokespeople for each family would provide input.

"If you don't have consensus, leadership won't help you very much," echoed Lawney Reyes, an author and artist from the Colville Confederated Tribes, and grandfather to WSU student Cherrise Reyes.

"I don't consider myself a leader," said Reyes. "I'm more of an observer."

His observations led him to publish three books featuring tribal leaders and historic events. Two of his books are focused on the effects of Grand Coulee Dam on the Colville people, and another is a biography of his brother Bernie Whitebear, the first director of the Seattle Indian Health Board. His fourth book, "The Last Fish War," tells the story of Native people standing up for their fishing rights in the northwest.

Both Reyes and Nomee attended Indian boarding schools as children. While they were taught a trade and to read and write, explained Nomee, they were not allowed to speak their language, sing or attend ceremonies.

In spite of this, Nomee maintained his traditional knowledge and cultural values, something that influences the way he serves his people on the tribal council and in his day job as director of the Natural Resources Department. Nomee strives to listen and build consensus among his constituents and employees.

"When my time is up on tribal council, does that mean I'm no longer a leader?" asked Nomee, reiterating, "I still have a voice."

The panel event was organized by students in the 3rd year of the WSU Tribal Nation Building Leadership Program. The program aims to help develop leadership skills in Native students.



*Lawney Reyes (center) responds to a question while Alfred Nomee (right) and panel moderator John Reichel (left) listen in.*