Sequoia Dance, a member of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes of Fort Hall, Idaho, is graduating this summer with a degree in Human Development and a certificate in Adolescence.

Dance started at WSU in August of 2013 and finished her degree in three years. She had taken a few classes at Idaho State University while still in high school, so that helped. She has four older sisters and an older brother, so she’s the youngest of six, but the first to graduate from college.

While in high school, Dance attended the WSU Na-Ha-Shnee Health Sciences Institute for Native American high school students. “I fell in love with the campus,” Dance said. Additionally, Dance said that the fact WSU is “beautiful,” helped her decide to come to WSU and that people here made her feel welcome by asking question such as, “Are you a future Coug?”

During Dance’s last couple years at WSU she was very active, but it wasn’t always like that. Dance said that her first year, although she succeeded academically, having to find her place culturally on campus made it a difficult transition for her because she wasn’t involved with the Native American Programs at first.

Her second semester she got involved with the Native American Women’s Association. Then her sophomore year she was a mentor for the Native American Student Center, and she started going to the events. “I still struggle with that sense of identity, which is something Native Americans will struggle with once they’re off their homelands,” Dance said. WSU is on Native lands but “it’s not necessarily on my Native lands.”

It is difficult because there is nobody that she can speak her language with, nor relate when discussing ceremonies.

The Native American Center has made it easier to deal with those difficulties, she said. “It’s not alleviating the issue, but it’s letting me know I’m not alone.”

Dance, the reigning Miss Shoshone-Bannock, was very involved on and off campus. She was the 2015–16 Chair of ASWSU Ku-Ah-Mah, a peer mentor for the Native American Programs, and she played and coached volleyball. She also continued to take part in cultural activities such as jingle dancing at powwows, beading, and singing in Wazzu Singers.

During her time at WSU, Dance has earned numerous scholarships for her academic achievement. In addition to the Cougar Achievement Award, and a scholarship from the College of Agricultural, Human and Natural Resource Sciences for outstanding GPA, Dance received the Idaho Power Scholarship for writing an essay on more efficient ways to utilize energy, a scholarship for being a mentor, and one for being Miss Shoshone-Bannock. She also received a partial scholarship from her tribe’s education department.

She walked in May, but she will get her actual degree in August after she completes a ten-week internship with WSU Native American Programs and Native American Health Sciences. With Native American Programs, Dance will be looking at the Tribal Nation Building Leadership Program to see how they can better the program and to create an orientation for the next cohort. She will spend part of her summer returning to the Na-ha-shnee Health Sciences Institute as an intern and camp counselor. She will be job-shadowing the director and assisting by “alleviating her of stress while learning more of what it’s like to operate a summer camp.”

Dance’s ultimate career goal is to be a researcher or program developer. She is currently deciding if she wants to go back to school and pursue her PhD, or get experience in the field first and begin working with adolescents. She is interested in working with adolescents who are struggling with substance abuse issues, and developing better forms of treatment and treatment centers.

Although Dance will be moving on to bigger things, leaving Pullman is a bittersweet moment. She said the one thing she’ll miss most is, “being a Coug, and being here on campus.” She explained that she will miss going to various events and the sense of community here.

“Thank you WSU for helping me find my independence,” Dance said.