Anthony Choke, 23, Nisqually tribal member, took time out of his busy class schedule to teach others how to weave cedar, a Native American tradition that has been taught in his family for generations.

Choke is a senior majoring in business. After he graduates, he hopes to go back and work for his tribe. He explained that the biggest difference between community college and WSU is that his studies here are more time consuming.

Choke transferred to WSU in fall of 2015 from Centralia College. He said that he already had a strong work ethic when he came to WSU, so doing the work wasn’t hard, it’s just more of a time commitment.

In addition to the big work-load his major demands, he somehow finds time for fraternity events and club rugby. Also, earlier this fall, he held a cedar headband workshop where he taught the attendees how to weave cedar.

“I was seven years old when I started weaving,” said Choke. “In my family, we’re really big into our cultural background.”

Choke explained, “Everybody weaves. My aunts taught me how to weave; my great-grandmother taught me how to weave.”

It’s family tradition to pass on the skills to the children while they’re young. The range in skill varies from beginner to master weaver. Choke became a master weaver after seven years of practice at the age of 14.

Choke can weave many different cedar items, in multiple patterns. He can make cedar baskets, headbands, hearts, mats, Christmas bells, pouches, hats and visors.

He said that to be a master weaver, one must know how to make a majority of the baskets.

One day, Choke mentioned to retention specialist Kay Kay Weso that he has a background in weaving and that he has taught youth and adults for nine years. He usually teaches at the Hazel Pete Institute of Chehalis Basketry, but because of his commitment as a student he couldn’t be a part of this year’s conference.

Although he wasn’t able to attend the conference and teach, he put on a workshop for WSU’s Native Programs.

“I like teaching our people about basketry,” said Choke.

He said it’s a great feeling to teach someone how to make something, and it’s really “empowering.” Choke said that teaching others is a fun experience for everyone because “it’s more of a social thing.”

“We get to talk with people we know. There is always laughter,” said Choke.

Teaching others has also served as a great opportunity for Choke to meet people.

“My family really believes that teaching people something new creates a good feeling, and a good environment.”

Choke’s grandma helped prepare the kits. She measured and cut the cedar, so they were ready to go.

One thing that a lot of people don’t consider is how the cedar is gathered and prepared. He explained that gathering the material is a process. His family gathers cedar, cattail, bear grass and sweet grass. To gather the cedar, his
family goes into the forest, and pulls the bark off the tree. Then they split off the outer part, and it’s the inner part of the cedar that is used for weaving. After the cedar is split, they have to harvest it for a year before it can be used as material.

Hosting the workshop was a great opportunity for Choke to be a part of the Native community here on campus.

He’s balancing a busy schedule, so when he comes to the Native Center he spends most of his time studying.

“It’s awesome, I love it,” Choke said about everything the center has to offer. “I’m really happy we have it here on campus, especially for our people.”

Choke got to share his WSU experience this fall when he was a camp counselor for EXCEL. EXCEL is a youth conference hosted by WSU Native Programs for Native high schoolers interested in college.

He hopes to get more involved with the Native Programs before he graduates in the spring. He plans on holding another cedar headband workshop spring semester 2017.