Table of Contents

New Elson S. Floyd Cultural Center Recognizes Nez Perce Tribe
WSU Student Wins Indian Relay’s Biggest Event!
Traditional Foods Brought to the Plateau Center!
Nez Perce Tribe Continues Funding of Native Student Ambassador Program
WSU Welcomes Native Students to Fall 2017
Grad Students Attend AISES, New Funding Opportunities through Nez Perce Tribe
Haskell Transfer Student is New Communications Assistant
New Elson S. Floyd Cultural Center Recognizes Nez Perce Tribe

October 10, 2017 faith.price

by Barbara Aston

On August 17, 2017, members of the WSU community gathered in the Elson S. Floyd Cultural Center (ESFCC) for a pre-opening ceremony of blessing led by Nez Perce Drum Waahp Qaqun and Mr. Nakia Williamson, Director of the Nez Perce Tribe Cultural Resource Department. Mr. Williamson also served as a cultural consultant to the architectural firm, GGLO, and a contributing artist for the ESFCC.

The Wípwip Wéecet – Wildcat Dance troupe from Lapwai, coordinated by Angel Sobotta, Nez Perce, graced the audience with their beautiful Welcome Dance and Swan Dance. President Kirk Schulz welcomed the guests and recognized the establishment of Washington State University on the ceded lands of the Nez Perce Tribe. Mr. Sam Penney, member of the Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee and Nez Perce delegate to the WSU President’s Native American Advisory Board also addressed those present.

Located at the gateway to campus off of Main and Stadium Way, the ESFCC is a celebration of cultural diversity. With its main entrance facing east, the elongated building reflects the rolling hills of the Palouse in its roof design, honoring the land. A sculpture at the east entrance represents the historic homelands of the Nimiipuu and the land base diminishment through treaties. Artistic expressions throughout the building, in the meditation pavilion, and outside of the west entrance further reflect the cultures of the First Peoples of this region.

The building is a physical expression of a dream of our late President, Dr. Elson S. Floyd, a dream for “spaces that will help us develop programming that in turn will help students, faculty, staff, and community come together and learn about each other’s culture and share the uniqueness that everybody brings to the table.”

I was honored to be a part of the steering committee charged with working with the design team to construct a space that recognized and celebrated the diversity of peoples and their cultures that are a part of WSU – past, present, and future. This building represents the first visual concrete, formal acknowledgement by WSU that the Pullman Campus was established on the ceded lands of the Nez Perce Tribe. It is my hope that each of our WSU Campuses will follow suit in a formal, structural recognition of those First Peoples whose traditional lands they have been established upon.

To learn more about the Elson S. Floyd Cultural Center and catch a glimpse of the pre-opening ceremony, visit https://culturalcenter.wsu.edu/.

I hope you enjoy the rest of the newsletter and welcome to the newest member of our team, Shana our student communications intern! Have a great fall!
Scott Abrahamson, Colville, is a sophomore in the Mechanical Engineering program here at Washington State University. His future engineering career, however, is being planned to support his true passion—horseracing.

“I started riding before I could walk, probably,” said Abrahamson, sharing that his parents had him out on horses as a young child.

He got his start in horseracing in the 7th grade, but fell out of racing for quite some time. However, after his father’s death, Abrahamson wanted to continue his father’s legacy on the racetrack competing in Indian Relays. With horseracing on both sides of the family, he felt the need to do so, and began competing in relay around age 16.

Indian relay as Abrahamson describes it consists of a team of three people: a rider, a “catcher,” and a “holder,” and three horses. Abrahamson is the rider for his team A critical part of his role is to “jump on and off a horse as fast as you can.” The rider completes three laps around a racetrack, exchanging horses each time around the track. They must leap off one horse (that is then caught by the catcher), and from the ground, leap onto another mount being held by the holder. Timing is everything, said Abrahamson, from when to start and when to jump, and “every second, every horse-length counts.”

“And it’s all done bareback,” said Abrahamson.

Abrahamson said he picked up some knowledge of relay racing from his uncle Jonathan Abrahamson who had been a member of the Omak Express team and is now part of Abrahamson Relay. The bulk of his Indian Relay education, however, came from watching videos on YouTube and then putting in long hours on the track. It has taken him two years of consistent practice to become a championship rider.

The competition season begins for him in June, though practice begins in spring. Over the summer, he and his team family-owned Abrahamson Relay, are on the track every day practicing exchanges and working with the horses to ensure sure they’ll stand still and keep calm when it comes to race day. It takes dedication. Abrahamson lives in Coulee Dam, but travels 45 minutes each way to Omak to practice daily during the summer. The race season extends into the school year.

“Once school starts, I don’t ever get to practice, because we go straight to the races on the weekend,” said Abrahamson. It also becomes a challenge to balance his schoolwork. “It’s hard. I try to finish everything by Friday or even Thursday. One race was in Pendleton during exam week. It was tough. I didn’t really get to study.”

They took first place in Indian Relay at Pendleton Roundup this fall, however, and Abrahamson is also doing well in his courses. He treats his academics with equal dedication and has found success in the classroom as well as on the racetrack. Abrahamson was nominated by his tribe for the MOU Tribal Scholarship and was selected for the WSU Tribal Nation Building Leadership Program that prepares students with the skills needed to be future tribal leaders. He plans to use his mechanical engineering
degree to go back and work on his reservation as an engineer at Grand Coulee Dam. His engineer’s salary will go to “buy more horses and better horse trailers.”

When on the track, Abrahamson does his best to stay focused on the race and use the other competitors as a source of motivation, adding, “everyone makes everyone better and we kind of push each other.” The final event for Indian Relay 2017 was the “Champion of Champions Indian Relay Race” in Billings, MT, during the last weekend of September, hosted by the Horse Nations Indian Relay Council.

Before the race, there was an issue of whether or not the rain was going to be a tough factor all weekend. There were weather predictions for possible rain all weekend. Because of the heavy rainfall, the dirt track at the MetraPark stadium turned into thick mud before the weekend came. Race officials decided to still hold the race. For his team, Abrahamson recalls racing in mud before but not to the extent of the thickness there.

 “[The mud] was so deep and muddy. We just wanted to keep the horses safe.” To do so, the team made sure they wrapped the horse’s ankles well to give them stability and strength to combat the track.

While at the “Champion of Champions” race, Abrahamson Relay had a couple goals in mind: to do better than last year’s race and to continue their winning streak that they were currently on.

“We just wanted to keep our motivation, everything going... as we went into the race.”

Last year, the team’s horse collided with another team’s and did not qualify for the final round of the relays so the stakes were even higher this year. When it was time for the last round of racing for the weekend, the team did their best to keep their excitement and nerves at bay.

“We had a lot of momentum going into that last race,” said Abrahamson, adding that his team won both of their heats prior to the final round and were feeling pretty confident going into the last race of the 2017 season.

As the race played out, Abrahamson broke off from the pack relatively early to take home the win! Abrahamson Relay has now successfully won the title of “Champion of Champions” among numerous other accolades they have won this season. Congrats, Scott!
Traditional Foods Brought to the Plateau Center!

October 10, 2017  faith.price

by Shana Lombard, Communications Assistant

Emma Noyes (Colville), the Native American Outreach Coordinator for the WSU Spokane campus, came down to Pullman to exhibit some traditional foods of the area. Students and community members showed up for the session and quickly packed the classroom.

Noyes started by giving a brief family history of herself and who influenced her to gather the plants that the people of this region once wholly used to live on. Noyes’s grandma, Jeanette Timentwa, added a lot of drive for her personally in addition to many other relatives.

“For a lot of people they might not be able to get extensive information from family members or they don’t have the opportunity because they have passed on,” said Noyes.

She asked students how they had learned about their people’s traditional plants. Noyes explained that besides family, people turn to other ways to learn, some to books, others to the internet and by coming to sessions like the one she was holding to learn from people with that knowledge. Noyes also relied on books written by another relative, Christine Quintasket aka Mourning Dove, to get information on shellfish and its preparation, adding that reading her books aids as “a voice of a different era.”

As for the food samplings given, Noyes shared the importance of them to her people and the others of eastern Washington. She had jars filled with some huckleberries, soapberries, dried salmon, camas, and bitterroot along with a few more samples. In reference to the Colville traditional diet, and for other tribes in the region as well, a diet for them was “roots, berries, meat and fish.” Noyes’s PowerPoint included many other foods that she wasn’t able to bring in such as wild strawberries, deer and elk, and other types of camas.
Nez Perce Tribe Continues Funding of Native Student Ambassador Program

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by Faith Price, Assistant Director

WSU’s Native American Programs received a $10,000 grant through the Nez Perce Tribe’s Local Education Program Fund for the third consecutive year in support of the Native American Student Ambassador Program.

2017-18 Native Student Ambassadors (l-r): Miranda Cleveland, Jay-J Yarbrough-Jones, Kimberly Marquez, and Urijah Willis.

Four current Native students have been hired as Ambassadors to assist with outreach to prospective Native American students. The 2017-18 ambassadors are: Miranda Cleveland (Colville Confederated Tribes), Kimberly Marquez (Yakama Nation), Urijah Willis (Quinault), and Jay-J Yarbrough-Jones (Nez Perce).

“I’m excited to be able to be a rep as a Native ambassador for WSU,” said Urijah Willis, a junior in wildlife ecology and conservation.

The ambassadors travel to local Native communities to give presentations and participate in college fairs, serve as tour guides when Native students visit WSU, and make personal calls to prospective students to answer questions about the Native student experience at WSU.

“I want to get Native students to go to college,” said WSU senior Jay-J Yarbrough Jones. “We need more educated Indians.”
Yarbrough-Jones, a kinesiology major, is serving in his third year as a Native student ambassador. His father is from Pullman, so he spent a lot of time in the area as a youth. He also had fond memories of WSU’s Native Youth Exploring Higher Education (NY’EHE) camp he attended as an 8th grader.

“The highlight for me as an ambassador has been to be able to be a camp counselor at a camp that I attended seven years previously. I think that’s pretty cool,” said Yarbrough-Jones.

Miranda Cleveland is a senior in biology, and also attended NY’EHE as a kid.

“I am excited I get to have an influence on the next generation of the Cougar Family!” said Cleveland.

The ambassadors will be tabling at Clarkston High School’s “Family College Planning Forum” on October 26, and doing a panel presentation on the Native student’s experience at WSU. They will also be hosting a group of Wellpinit High School freshmen this month on the WSU Pullman campus.

“I want to make an impact on Native students because I wish I had more exposure to Native Programs at WSU before I came to college,” said business management senior, Kimberly Marquez. “WSU offers a lot of resources that are geared toward Native students and it’s possible that you can have your entire school paid for by scholarships.”

If you have an event you would like the ambassadors to come to in your community, please contact WSU Native Programs Assistant Director Faith Price. The ambassadors are also happy to host groups or individuals on campus!

Qe ‘ci ‘yéw ‘yew to the Nez Perce Tribe for supporting programming for Native students at WSU!
WSU Welcomes Native Students to Fall 2017

October 10, 2017 faith.price

by Faith Price, Assistant Director

WSU Native Programs welcomed 597 new and returning Native Cougs to campus in Fall 2017, with multiple activities designed for students to meet each other and faculty and staff.

New students in the Tribal Nation Building Leadership Program participated in a two-day orientation in August at the Coeur d’Alene Tribe’s picturesque Camp Larson. Thanks to the coordination of LoVina Louie, director of the Coeur d’Alene Wellness Center, the Leadership students spent a full day in and out of the water learning about the canoeing traditions of the Plateau region.

Leadership students had the opportunity to learn from WSU alum Shawn Brigman (Spokane), who is using his architecture background to design traditional Salishan Sturgeon-nose canoes. Brigman has made a small fleet of canoes for the Coeur d’Alene Tribe, which students had the opportunity to paddle for themselves on a mini canoe journey. WSU Outdoor Recreation staff taught the group paddling skills and safety and led the students and staff on a two-hour paddle along the shoreline.

The agenda also included a laughter-filled stickgame lesson from Norma Peone of the Coeur d’Alene Tribe’s Education Department. On day two, students made a visit to the Education Department to meet Dr. Chris Meyer, who gave background on the development of the Tribal Nation Building Leadership Program, which Dr. Meyer was involved in through her service on the Native American Advisory Board to the WSU President.

The students also got to know Leadership Program instructors and become familiar with the coursework and requirements of the Leadership Program. The overnight campout was made possible with funding from the College Board, and collaboration from the Coeur d’Alene Tribe’s Wellness Center and Education Department, whose staff provided cultural and educational activities.

The larger Native student body was formally welcomed back to campus during the Native American Programs’ “Welcome Barbecue” held September 14 in the new Elson S. Floyd Cultural Center. Cougar alum Quanah Matheson (Coeur d’Alene) returned to campus to share some words of wisdom as the keynote speaker for the dinner.

Matheson received his bachelor’s degree in Anthropology in 2003, and currently serves as the Cultural Affairs Director for the Coeur d’Alene Casino. He entertained the crowd with commentary from his years on campus, and also reminded students to keep thankfulness top of mind even as they meet obstacles along their educational path. Happiness and thankfulness are so closely tied that they are the same word in his language, Matheson explained.

Attendees at the Welcome Barbecue also were introduced to faculty and staff from around campus, as well as the Multicultural Peer Mentors, and Native Student Ambassadors. Dinner included pulled pork sandwiches and lots of door prizes. We look forward to a great year!
Grad Students Attend AISES, New Funding Opportunities through Nez Perce Tribe

October 10, 2017 faith.price

by Ken Lokensgard, Assistant Director, Plateau Center

Native graduate students and prospective graduate students have some great opportunities offered through funding available from WSU Graduate School and the Nez Perce Tribe.

Graduate students Danielle Guzman (Nez Perce) and Daylen Isaac (Yakama), both of whom are studying horticulture, and undergraduate Jay-J Yarbrough-Jones (Nez Perce), a kinesiology student, were able to attend the National American Indian Science and Engineering Society meeting in Denver, Colorado in October. All three students presented research posters.

Their attendance was supported by the Graduate School, through their participation in the PNW-COSMOS Alliance (funded in part by NSF AGEP-T grant #1432910) to increase numbers of Native graduate students in STEM disciplines. Students from several of the other Alliance institutions—University of Montana, University of Idaho, Montana State University, Heritage College, Northwest Indian College, and Salish-Kootenai College—also attended, as did Native American Programs Assistant Director Dr. Ken Lokensgard, Dr. Lori Carris of the Graduate School, and Dr. Shelly Pressley, Director of Undergraduate Research.

Developments closer to home include more funding for WSU Native graduate or professional students or students interested in advanced degrees. This funding comes in the form of a Local Education Fund grant awarded by the Nez Perce Tribe to the Plateau Center for the 2017-2018 school year.

Through this grant, current Nez Perce students can receive small scholarships during both the fall and spring semesters. Prior to receiving these funds, students must meet with Dr. Lokensgard about applying for external scholarships. They must also meet with representatives of the Nez Perce Cultural Resources Program to discuss ways that their academic work can promote Nez Perce Culture. The Tribe and the Plateau Center hope that these requirements will help students to gain even more funding and to know that their research will be valued by the community. This grant also helps Nez Perce students considering an advanced degree prepare for graduate entrance exams and to develop strong applications for admission. Anyone interested in learning more should contact Dr. Lokensgard. The Plateau Center is very grateful for the support provided by the Nez Perce Tribe.

Importantly, the graduate and professional school preparatory program described above can benefit all Native students considering advanced degrees, although there may be some small costs for Non-Nez Perce students. Moreover, there are many other means of support for Native students interested in continuing their studies. Those who would like to know more only need visit or call the Plateau Center.

As always, we also encourage other members of the tribal communities and WSU faculty members and staff, who are interested in responsible, collaborative research or who simply want to know more about the Plateau Center, to contact us. You can reach Dr. Ken Lokensgard at kenneth.lokensgard@wsu.email or at 509-335-1055.
Haskell Transfer Student is New Communications Assistant

June 10, 2017 faith.price

by Shana Lombard, Communications Assistant

Kla-how-yah! My un-tum is Shana Lombard and I am the new Communications Assistant for the year! I am an enrolled member of the Cowlitz Indian Tribe. I am at Washington State to finish my bachelor’s degree in Journalism Production. I transferred in after I received my associate’s degree from Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, KS.

At Haskell, I wrote for the Indian Leader and managed social media accounts and was a reporter for the Haskell News and Haskell Minute News. I also interned for and earned a freelancing gig with 6 News Lawrence, a local broadcast news station. In September 2016, I had the privilege of being selected as a Native American Journalist Fellow (NAJF) and helping report for the Empowering in Journalism Conference 2016, a conference held by the Society of Professional Journalists in cooperation with Native American Journalism Association.

Now that I’m here at Washington State, I am continuing to expand on my journalism and communications skills. So aside from working here at the Plateau Center, I am involved with Cable 8 working as their Production Manager and as one of their Master Controls Operators. With both of those combined, I hope to pick back up where I left off in Kansas but just at a new school!

Thank you for reading our newsletters and make sure to follow us on social media! That’s going to be a big focus of mine this year helping revamp those outlets. Go Cougs!