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Letter from the Executive Director

December 13, 2018 faith.price

by Barbara Aston, Executive Director of Tribal Relations

Life is full of beginnings and endings. Since June, we have welcomed four new staff to Native American Programs. This newsletter features Tony Brave, our new Outreach Coordinator, and Joelle Edwards, our new Retention Specialist. I think that after the first of the New Year, we can drop the “new” before Tony and Joelle’s names. From their first days on the job, they both jumped in with great enthusiasm, creativity, knowledge, and a lot of heart to reach out and serve our potential and current students.

Our next newsletter will feature our “newest” staff, Zoe Higheagle Strong, who is currently serving as the Director of the Plateau Center for Native American Research and Collaboration and College of Education faculty, and Patty Iulo, who serves as Fiscal Specialist and Native Programs Assistant. Along with the old timers, Faith Price, Assistant Director of undergraduate student services, and Ken Lokensgard, Assistant Director for the Plateau Center and graduate student services, we have a great team!

Native American Advisory Board group photo and new Native American Programs staff introductions Friday, Nov. 9, 2018 at the Elson S. Floyd Cultural Center in Pullman, Wash.

What this means for me personally, is that it is an excellent time for me to bid farewell to my role as Executive Director of Tribal Relations at WSU, and leave this work in their competent, caring hands, under the leadership of Dr. Zoe Higheagle Strong, my successor as Executive Director. I am retiring after
nearly 32 years of service at WSU, first in the Native American Student Center, and then in my role as Tribal Liaison. My heart is full of gratitude for the honor and privilege that it has been to serve Native American students and tribes of the Northwest, and to work with the many fine, committed administrators, faculty, and staff of WSU.

With the support of the Provost and Executive Vice President, Dan Bernardo, Dr. Strong began her new position in August, allowing us to work together until my retirement January 9, 2019, thus assuring no gaps in service and an informed transition. During the course of my years as Tribal Liaison/Executive Director, I have worked for five presidents and nine provosts. Each of these leaders have provided support and resources for our programs to continue to grow and thrive.

In September, our President Kirk Schulz, and the Chancellor of WSU Spokane Health Sciences, Daryll DeWald, attended the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians fall conference. President Schulz presented to the general assembly and both leaders were able to have lunch with the ATNI Board of Directors and past WSU Native American Advisory Board members. I am excited for what the future holds as our university leadership continues to engage with tribal leaders and communities.

President Schulz demonstrated his support through the signing of the Indigenous People’s Day Proclamation and through his acknowledgment of Native American Heritage Month and the contributions of Native people.

Upon retiring, I look forward to continuing my commitment to lifelong learning and service to others. I hope to spend some extended time in Oklahoma working more closely with my tribe and with our longhouse. My family has been unconditionally supportive, as I have pursued my passion for education and greater justice for Native Americans. I will now be able to spend more time with family members. I just received news that my husband and I are to be great-grandparents in the New Year! Life is FULL of endings and beginnings.

Thank you and many blessings to all of you who are supporters and friends of the WSU Native American Programs. May you have a joyful holiday season and a New Year full of great challenges and wonderful friendships! You will always be close to my heart and in my prayers!
Retirement Party Planned for Barbara Aston

December 12, 2018 faith.price

After 31 years of dedication to WSU’s Native American community, Executive Director of Tribal Relations and Special Assistant to the Provost, Barbara Aston, is retiring from the university. A retirement party is planned for her last day January 9, 2019 at 4 pm in the Elson S. Floyd Cultural Center at 405 Southeast Spokane Street on the WSU Pullman campus.

Please join us as we honor her career and celebrate her next adventure! Light appetizers and refreshments will be provided starting at 3:30 pm with a program to begin promptly at 4. RSVP online by January 2.
Nez Perce Tribe Funds WSU Native Student Ambassadors

December 11, 2018 faith.price

by Faith Price, Assistant Director

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

Four current Native students have been hired as ambassadors to assist with outreach to prospective Native American students. The 2018-19 ambassadors are: Jaissa Grunlose (Colville Confederated Tribes), Austin Kicking Woman (Yakama Nation), MyKel Johnson (Nez Perce), and Sara Mills (Colville Confederated Tribes).

Austin Kicking Woman, (l) student ambassador, shows Native high school students around campus as part of the EXCEL camp.

Being an ambassador, “can show other Native kids that don’t think college is within their reach that Natives can go to school and accomplish anything they put their mind to,” said WSU senior Austin Kicking Woman.

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.
Kicking Woman has one more year at WSU before he will graduate with a general studies degree, emphasizing human development, humanities, and digital technology and culture. He went to college because he wanted to have a different path than some older relatives he saw get caught up in drugs and alcohol.

He first was exposed to WSU when he visited campus for a summer camp. This past October, he had the opportunity to give back as a camp counselor for Native high school students during the annual “Exploring College Emerging Leaders” (EXCEL) camp. Twenty-three Native high school students spent the weekend at WSU taking part in a variety of workshops to expose them to different college majors. The ambassadors served as camp counselors and also were panelists answering questions from EXCEL participants on what college is like.

“It was a good experience in being able to talk to students about what it’s like to be a college student,” said Kicking Woman.

Most recently, Kicking Woman and fellow ambassador MyKel Johnson spent a day at Lapwai getting kids excited about science. The WSU table at the Nez Perce Tribe STEM Fair featured simple wind-up robot kits and liquid nitrogen.

“When I went to Lapwai I was so thankful to be promoting an institution that values our homelands and Indigenous people,” said Johnson. “I remember being a senior in high school unsure what the future
held in Pullman. Now, everything has come full circle for me. I know that as a people we have so much to offer higher education from knowledge to insight. It is my hope that we continue to challenge the systems and rewrite our narratives.”

If you have an event you would like the ambassadors to come to in your community, please contact WSU Native Programs Outreach Coordinator Tony Brave. The ambassadors are also happy to give tours and host campus visits!

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

Read profiles of the 2018-19 ambassadors here.
Cowlitz Tribal Member Wins Prestigious Udall Scholarship

December 11, 2018 faith.price

by Faith Price, Assistant Director

Out of the hundreds of students who apply every year to be a Udall Scholar, Emma Johnson (Cowlitz) was one of only 5 in the nation selected for a scholarship in Udall’s Tribal Policy category for 2018. Johnson is a senior in cultural anthropology at WSU Vancouver.

Emma Johnson (center) being recognized at the WSU Distinguished Scholars Celebration with April Seehafer and Butch.

She was studying abroad this past spring when she found out she had been selected.
“It was 2 am and I was in a hostel with friends. I woke up and saw like three messages. The first one I read was ‘Good morning, Udall Scholar’ and I was freaking out,” Johnson said.

The messages were from April Seehafer, the director of WSU’s Distinguished Scholarships Program. Johnson and Seehafer had become close over the time it had taken to draft, edit, and rewrite Johnson’s application to the Udall Scholarship Program.

“I’d say it was like 6, 7, 8 drafts?” Johnson told students in the WSU Native Center who had gathered to hear about her experience.

“It’s hard to write about yourself, and in a way that Emma would say is ‘bragging,’” said Seehafer, adding that she had to encourage Johnson to expand on her experiences. “That was three drafts right there.”

Johnson and Seehafer visited the WSU Native American Student Center in October to encourage others to apply for the Udall Scholarship. Johnson was on the Pullman campus to be formally recognized by WSU for her achievement.

It was no easy feat to win a Udall scholarship. Johnson applied once as a sophomore and wasn’t selected. She said she wasn’t going to apply again but was convinced by Seehafer.

“My application changed so much over a year,” said Johnson.

The first time she had applied, Johnson had nothing to write about in the research section of the application. She rectified that during the year between applications, engaging in an undergraduate research project. She also gained experienced working for her tribe.

“I think the difference between her first and second applications was how much experience she gained,” said Seehafer, noting that Johnson sought out opportunities that made her application more robust.

Besides winning a noteworthy scholarship, the application process was beneficial to Johnson’s academics.

“It helped me become such a good writer, it’s insane,” said Johnson.

The scholarships are worth $7,000, plus travel to a 5-day scholars orientation in Arizona, and access to a network of former scholars and mentors.

“Everyday I get 5 emails for jobs all over the U.S. for Udall Scholars,” said Johnson. “It’s a very good family to get into.”
Native American Youth Sports Summit

December 10, 2018 faith.price

by Anthony Brave, Native American Outreach Coordinator

Heads up all Native athletes and basketball fans!

Native American Programs and WSU Cougar Athletics are combining powers once again to bring Native middle and high school students to campus for a college basketball game, lunch, and an informative conversation on sports opportunities at Washington State University.

On January 27th, 2019, sixth through twelfth-grade students are invited to get insider advice on playing college sports from successful Native athletes and sports staff during the Native American Youth Sports Summit, followed by the WSU Cougar Women’s Basketball Native American Appreciation game vs. Oregon State.

A panel of current WSU athletes will share their experiences in college athletics with Sports Summit participants. The group will share the lowdown on the skills – and grades – it takes to get a college athletic scholarship, along with tips on how to be a successful student athlete. The Summit starts at 9am and lunch will start at 11am. Both will be in the Bohler Gym.

All students attending the Native Youth Sports Summit will receive a t-shirt and complimentary admission to the WSU vs. Oregon State women’s basketball game at 12 pm.
The event is open to students in grades 6-12. *Family is welcome too!* Students must pre-register for the event online at [native.wsu.edu](http://native.wsu.edu). Please contact Anthony Brave at (509) 335-6718 or [anthony.brave@wsu.edu](mailto:anthony.brave@wsu.edu) in the Native American Programs Office with any questions.
New Outreach Coordinator Advocates for Higher Education

December 10, 2018  
by Shana Lombard, Communications Assistant

Anthony (Tony) Brave is settling into his new position as outreach coordinator after only being on the job for five months. Having come from another higher education institution, Brave said the transition was easy for him and he was eager to work directly with youth again.

Brave comes to WSU via The Evergreen State College where he taught undergraduate and graduate courses. He also taught classes at Northwest Indian College’s Nisqually site. Brave is a member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe located in South Dakota. He earned his master’s in public administration with emphasis in tribal governance from The Evergreen State College.
Brave first realized he liked teaching and working with school-age youth when he took a huge leap across the pond and taught English in Korea, adding that he didn’t know teaching and working in schools was going to be a passion of his before that job. Brave notes that he does miss teaching so he is looking forward to spring semester because he gets to help teach a class in WSU’s Tribal Nation Building Leadership program.

Over the last few months, Brave has travelled all across Washington, Idaho, Oregon and Montana representing the university as well as Native American Programs by sharing with students what the university and higher education itself can offer them. Brave sees his job as a way to connect with Native American students and to tell them that higher education is for them. He feels that he picks up where schools may tend to leave Native American students behind.

“It’s been my experience that most schools tend to only give this kind of information to kids who are already successful students,” Brave said, adding, “I wasn’t one of those students growing up. Nobody had even talked to me about my opportunities for college growing up and I think a lot of Native students just don’t have that. There’s this sort of ‘why bother’ attitude that a lot of schools unfortunately end up having towards Native students. I want to counteract that big-time,” Brave said.

Brave hopes that events he plans help plant a seed in the minds of school-aged youth that higher education is possible. Events Brave organizes are the EXCEL camp for grades 11-12, the Native Youth Sports Summit for middle school and high school, and the NY’EHE summer camp for grades 9-10.

Other new things Brave would like to include is an 8-bit video style videogame that allows the students to explore Native American Programs. He has already created a mock-version of the Native American Student Center. He would also love to develop a mentorship program with local area tribes and pair college students with middle or high schoolers to be of guidance to them throughout their education, and as life happens throughout the years in between.

“I think mentoring is really a powerful tool to engage youth, to improve their lives and self-confidence, to show them that they can do it in life and higher education,” Brave said.
NAU Grad Joins Staff as New Retention Specialist

December 10, 2018 faith.price

by Shana Lombard, Communications Assistant

WSU Native American Programs spent much of last spring looking for new staff to fill empty positions. After a thorough process, Joelle Edwards was the first of four new hires to the office.

Joelle Edwards was receiving her master’s degree one week then the next moving from Flagstaff, Arizona to Pullman.

Joelle Edwards

Edwards is a member of the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians where she was raised on her tribe’s reservation since she was four years old. Edwards was raised by parents with one goal in mind, a goal most parents usually want for their children: a life with more than they’ve ever had.
Edwards’ parents knew education was a key component in giving their children the life that they wanted and so they made sure Edwards and her younger siblings knew to take school seriously.

“To them education was important. I think that goes for my dad wanting better than he had – going to college for a good job and a good life,” Edwards said.

Edwards does carry on that same idea of education being of the upmost importance in the betterment of Indian Country, especially when students have support from many people, not just their parents, to help them navigate college.

“My parents were supportive at the college level too. Additionally there were people at the university supporting me from professors to those working in student affairs. It’s those other connections you make that help you to graduate,” she said.

Edwards’s collegiate years are as colorful as her personality. She went on immersion expeditions to places such as Pine Ridge, South Dakota, studied abroad in Italy, was a cabinet member of her university’s Native American student club and worked her last summer in undergrad as a camp counselor. She said the experiences really enlightened her to worlds outside the tribal community where she grew up.

“I really embraced all that college had to offer. I could have done more things but all of the activities I did really brought in my world view and what I thought or still think I want to do with my life,” Edwards said.

Edwards was originally pursuing a degree at the University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire with intentions of being a school counselor, but said once she took an American Indian studies class she was hooked. Her one class turned into a couple and a couple classes turned into a minor then into having a double major in both psychology and American Indian studies. She credits the professors in the program for keeping her wanting more.

By her senior year, Edwards evolved from wanting to be a school counselor to knowing she wanted to work with Native American students, in particular, at the university level. Once she was ready to apply to graduate school, Edwards had a plan to “strategically place herself” at a university with a large Native American student population.

She knew she wanted to trek right into graduate school since she originally was going for a profession in the psychology field, which does generally require a Master’s degree. She turned her eyes to Northern Arizona University because she was offered an assistantship to work with Housing Resident Life with Residential Learning Communities and that offered free room and board.

“To me, it was like a no brainer. I have to go here. It’s a beautiful place, its right in the mountains in Arizona. It actually has all four seasons,” Edwards exclaimed.

Edwards was also offered an assistantship with the Native American program at Northern Arizona University but because of the sweet deal she got working for housing, Edwards went for the seemingly obvious choice, keeping in mind she could still be just as active in the Native American student community on campus.
Edwards worked with Residential Learning Communities and gained a huge array of skills that helped add to her skill set. From working with budgets to helping plan programming events for students at NAU to supporting students through mental crises and supervising mentors, Edwards said her time at NAU really helped her grow in ways a classroom couldn’t.

“All of those experiences really helped me build my skill set and hands on experience to actually get a job after graduation, which is always the main goal,” Edwards explained.

When Edwards reached her final semester at Northern Arizona, WSU Native American Programs was starting the search for a new retention specialist. Edwards recalls seeing the job posting and getting excited because it was the perfect job for her and she knew she wanted it. After seeing others around her scurry to find a profession to start after graduation, Edwards jumped on the job hunt with them and applied for the specialist job.

A phone interview haunted Edwards as she waited to see if she made it to the next round of the hiring process. On her spring break relaxing at a hotel in nearby Phoenix, Arizona, Edwards got a call asking if she could make her way to the Palouse for an in-person interview. Ecstatic and hopeful, Edwards made her way to Pullman that same week.

“It’s really weird being out of state and trying to do interviews because I am pretty young still so I couldn’t rent a car because if you’re under 25 it’s so expensive to rent a car. So I needed to find a hotel I could walk to and from. I was googling how far things were and it was so complicated,” Edwards said laughing as she revisited the memory.

A little over a month later, she was sitting in a noisy cafeteria eating breakfast, taking in the last few weeks of graduate school and she got a call. She answered to assistant director Faith Price telling her that in a couple weeks she was needed in Pullman to start work.

“I literally graduated, moved here and started work,” she said.

Edwards hopes to develop good relationships with the students that come into the Native American Student Center. She knows that students need more than just family support to do well in college because the act of getting an education is greater than just yourself.

“For me I always said this to myself...my undergrad was for my family. Everyone pushed me to go to school,” she said, adding, “Grad school was for me. During undergrad and graduate school I’ve said to people ‘I want to work with Native American students in higher education.’ That’s what I said to people for probably the last three years and then to graduate and be sitting in this chair, working with Native students, doing this type of work, it’s kind of surreal.”
WSU, Pullman adopt Indigenous Peoples’ Day

December 10, 2018 faith.price

by Shana Lombard, Communications Assistant

On October 8, 2018, Washington State University and the city of Pullman celebrated Indigenous Peoples’ Day for the first time.

WSU students, staff and faculty initiated the idea for recognizing the holiday, and with their encouragement, WSU President Kirk Schulz signed a proclamation declaring the 2nd Monday of October Indigenous Peoples’ Day and the Pullman City Council passed a resolution doing the same.

Native American Programs Assistant Director Faith Price helped lead the initiative to bring the new holiday to WSU administration and the city council. She said the idea of recognizing Indigenous Peoples’ Day came up in a staff meeting for Native American Programs.

Price and her colleagues drafted a petition for community members and WSU students to sign to show their support in celebrating the day, Price said. The petition garnered over 300 signatures from tabling at the All-Campus Picnic at WSU and at the Lentil Festival. The petition was then sent to city council and WSU administration with a letter signed by the presidents of all the Native American student organizations on campus urging them to adopt the holiday.
“By saying that they welcome Native people, through the resolution and the proclamation, they send the message that the community and WSU welcome Native students here,” Price said. “This kind of makes sure that students and the campus community recognize that there are indigenous people here; they’re an important part of our community and it dispels myths that our students have to battle.”

City of Pullman Resolution

With a long agenda for the night, just about every seat in the city council meeting was filled. After listening to an hour of budget reports and public transportation reroutes getting approved, councilman C. Brandon Chapman was ready to introduce a resolution that would recognize the second Monday in October to be known as Indigenous Peoples’ Day.

“We have indigenous people that live and work among us and are making phenomenal contributions to Pullman and there are so many great resources, especially on campus that talk about the history of Palootspa,” councilmember Chapman said when introducing the resolution at the Oct. 2 meeting before reading the resolution to the council.

The idea for the holiday was first discussed at the previous council meeting on September 18. With everyone on council onboard with the idea, it was noted to the crowd that a resolution would be drafted and approved by the council at the next meeting, October 2.

The resolution began:

“Resolution R-86-18, a resolution declaring the second Monday in October as Indigenous Peoples’ Day in the city of Pullman, affirming the city’s unequivocal commitment to promote respect for and understanding of the region’s indigenous community, its long history and the continuing contribution of its people to our city...”

The resolution was passed unanimously by all councilmembers. Cheers rang out from the crowd. Council members thanked guests for coming to support the resolution. Supporters stayed until the end of the meeting to shake hands of each council member and thanked them for what they did for all indigenous people who reside in Pullman. Many members of Washington State University’s Native American community were present, both students and staff.

WSU Native American Programs tabled on Monday, Oct. 8 on WSU’s Terrell Mall, to promote the new holiday and share about the original inhabitants of the land that is now Pullman, Washington. The ASWSU Ku-ah-mah Native Student Organization partnered with the Hillside Café on campus to serve an indigenous menu for the day, including buffalo ribs, venison stew, wild rice, buffalo burgers, berry soup, frybread, and more!

Robert Shirley is pursuing a Master’s in electrical engineering at Washington State University. He agrees that having Indigenous Peoples’ Day benefits those who are recognized by the day.

“Generally speaking I think it’s a good step in every relationship, for any population to say like ‘we recognize that you’re here and you continue to contribute actively to our community,’” Shirley said.
Women spotlighted at “Honoring Indigenous Womxn”

December 10, 2018 faith.price

by Shana Lombard, Communications Assistant

Two keynote speakers and one artist were the talk of the night Sept. 28 at Elson S. Floyd Cultural Center.

The Women’s Resource Center, WSU Native Programs, and the Coalition for Women Students brought in three women with a background of empowering others through their work.

Amy Sharp, Women’s Center director, wanted to have this event to showcase the cultures that are represented at the university and on the Palouse. Leaders in the Women’s Center caught wind that a group was traveling to WSU from American Samoa and wanted to jump on the opportunity of culture-sharing, not only of the Nez Perce tribe but also other cultures represented on campus.

“There’s more to the Palouse than just football,” Sharp said.

As for the reasoning for the “x” in Womxn and not an “e”, Sharp said she wanted to make sure those who personally identify as women felt comfortable enough to feel invited to the event, to “leave the door open for our transgender folks.”
Rebecca Miles (Nez Perce) and Lemala Thompson (Samoan) spoke on how they, as women, dealt with issues they've faced in their professions.

After a long day with tribal elections, Miles was the first speaker for the night. She shared about challenges she’s confronted as a woman who’s held some of the top leadership positions for her tribe, including serving on the tribal council and now as the Executive Director of the Nez Perce Tribe.

Miles spoke of times when she received unwarranted discrimination for the relationships she’s developed with legislators she’s worked with to navigate her people’s issues and concerns. Some people did not take those relationships seriously, she said, and implied that something inappropriate was going on.

Miles went on to share how moments like those empowered her to grow past those comments.

“I can tell you now to take it as a compliment because they have to be threatened in some way of the movement I represent or the powerful message that’s coming,” Miles said.

Thompson took to the podium at the front of the room next. She shared of a struggle she went through with her mother on what a woman should be doing.

“My mother didn’t believe in education,” Thompson said. “I was the oldest of four and as the only female, she thought it was best that I find work after school and help support her younger siblings.”

Thompson wasn’t going to let her mother determine her path in life.

“My motivation was to prove her wrong and to change her frame of mind,” Thompson said adding she recently completed a second master’s degree with her mother now supporting younger family members to pursue higher education.

Another woman was showcased at the event, primarily through her artwork, painted tapestries and tablecloths.

Doe Stahr was adopted into the Tlingit tribe through her husband who is of the tribe. Stahr brought easily over 50 pieces of her artwork in her minivan to make sure she had enough to dress the room. Sharp appreciated Stahr’s willingness to teach how to paint and the stories behind her art pieces but to also recognize that she’s not Native American and approaches her tapestries in a way that is respectful of the cultures she’s painting.

Stahr also held a painting workshop at the Native American Student Center for students, staff and community members to create their own mini-tapestries.

Elsie Cree is a senior studying elementary education. She said the workshop was helpful to her in dealing with the semester.

“I learned a new skill and a way to de-stress,” Cree said.

Sharp said with the overwhelming support her office received from the event, that they plan to have more in the future, perhaps in conjunction with Indigenous Peoples’ Day now that it’s celebrated at the university and in the city of Pullman.
WSU Alumna Inspires at Welcome BBQ

December 10, 2018 faith.price

by Shana Lombard, Communications Assistant

Rebecca Miles, WSU alumna, encouraged WSU Native students to be bold and to not give up at this semester’s Welcome Back Barbecue in September.

“What I love about the generation today is that you’re not making any apologies in living our way of life,” Miles said.

Rebecca Miles, (center) flanked by Executive Director for Tribal Relations, Barbara Aston (l), and Director of the Plateau Center for Native American Research and Collaboration, Zoe Higheagle Strong.

Miles was the first female chairperson of the Nez Perce Tribe, a position she secured in 2005. While on the Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee (NPTEC), the tribe’s governing structure, she worked extensively on maintaining and strengthening her tribe’s treaty rights. She resigned from NPTEC in 2009 to accept her current position as executive director of the Nez Perce Tribe.

Miles graduated from Washington State University in 1997 with a bachelor’s of arts degree in criminal justice. She then went on to Gonzaga University to earn a master’s degree in organizational leadership in 2002. She was selected as the 2006 WSU Woman of Distinction.

Miles said she felt out of place on campus as a freshman, especially coming from a small high school located in Lapwai, Idaho on the Nez Perce Indian Reservation. She recalled a geology class with 1,000 students that left her feeling so overwhelmed, she went back to her dorm room in tears.
She found some comfort in the old Native American Student Center that was located in Wilson-Short Hall at the time. She credits lots of time spent with Barbara Aston (current Native Programs director and former retention specialist) that helped ease her transition to WSU, a transition that didn’t come easy.

Miles described her frustration with people on campus who were ignorant of who and what the Nez Perce people are. But that feeling ignited Miles to become active on campus to spread awareness of not only her people but for other Native Americans on campus. She became a member of both the Native American Women’s Association and ASWSU Ku-Ah-Mah student organization.

Miles shared two pieces of advice to the crowd: one; no matter what you get your degree in, it is going to help your tribe, and two; you may feel pressured to fit in but you don’t have to.

“Getting a college education is so promising to Native people because it’s going to help our people thrive,” she continued.

After she finished her master’s program at Gonzaga, Miles applied for a job at WSU. She was offered the position but with her tribe’s election coming up, she had a different direction she wanted to pursue.

“Something just bothered me inside to serve my people,” Miles said.

In May 2004, she was elected to NPTEC. On her first trip as a member of the council, she flew to Boise, Idaho with Anthony Johnson, NPTEC chair, and lawyers who represented the tribe, to meet with the then governor of Idaho, Dirk Kempthorne, and the Department of Interior’s secretary Gale Norton to discuss the tribe’s water rights claims on the Snake River Basin.

Miles left the meeting feeling uneasy about the settlement but she knew that if the settlement wasn’t accepted, it would have been detrimental for her people’s water rights.

“It was the biggest decision since treaty time,” Miles said.

The Snake River Basin Settlement was 17 years in the making with just nine months left to agree to its terms. The executive council decided to hold town hall meetings to explain the settlement to its members.

Miles saw the disconnect and distrust between her fellow tribal members and the tribe’s lawyers so she decided to take matters into her own hands. She told the other council members that the only way the people were going to really understand that accepting the settlement is the best outcome for the tribe, they were going to have to explain it themselves. Miles decided to spearhead these meetings.

She said she felt exhausted by her first big undertaking on council. Members on the council were given death threats, some even had their tires slashed. Because of the harsh outlash, she felt like she had made a mistake.

When confiding to her parents, Miles said she was going to quit the council. Her mother got upset with her, while her dad jokingly told her to, “just be like everyone else on council and travel.” Not wanting to do her people wrong, Miles chose to stick her term out.

July brought newly-elected people onto council and with that came a new year for Miles.

In May 2005, the seat for executive committee chairperson was up for election. Miles had never thought of running for that position. She didn’t think she was worthy of such a high rank in her tribe.
However, she decided to put herself out there for that kind of opportunity, and received the majority vote. She became the Nez Perce Tribe’s first woman Executive Committee chair!

After hearing the results of the election, a tribal elder, Bessy Scott came up to her and said, “I don’t know if anyone’s going to know that you earned that on your own,” adding that she was voted for not only by women in her tribe but by a majority of the men as well.

Miles recounted the feeling of winning the election as being wholly believed in by her tribe to lead them in the right direction.

“They believed in me when I didn’t believe in myself,” Miles said.

Miles wrapped up her speech by adding: “just about the time you’re going to give up is about the time you heed the lesson.”