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AIR News

focus

“OUR MISSION IS THE PROMOTION AND SUCCESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS WITHIN EDUCATION.”

Created in 1993 the AIR Program has set out to create a greater future for our American Indian Community through education.



Spring Program exceeds our expectations...

(San Diego) This year our program has exceeded our expectations in tremendous fashion. To our accomplishments, we are in our 19th year of continuous

operation and we are seeing more and more of our students impacting our communities in many ways. Recently, while in Washington we have seen our students pictured in the National Museum of the American Indian within the San Diego region discussing culture. We have former students graduating from UCSD this year (as well as last year) and some that have gone to law school and are now working abroad in different countries. It is amazing to see and hear the many successes of a program that originally had inspirations of changing the life of one student as a measure of success.

This last semester we operated three programs (AIR Sr. /AIR Jr. /AIR Tutorial) and a private project assisting college mentors. Noticeably, we have re-introduced AIR Jr. into our program projects as we feel this project is imperative in providing academic assistance to our students who are not yet in high school. Many times (if not all) our students do not get information on requirements to qualify for the CSU/UC systems and therefore they never have the opportunity to pursue higher education within the university based system. Further, these students strive for some understanding of cultural ideals and how being native is part of their identity. We introduce tacit amounts of cultural concepts with the mixture of Native mentors who help shape ideals through our mentoring process. Overall, the program (based at California State University, San Marcos) went off successfully (see our program on Facebook or on our website on our photos page) and we look forward to maintaining this project within our program for many years.

Finally, our Tutorial project is continuing to add more and more students who are taking advantage of our free academic services. Working in partnership with the University of San Diego, Center for Community Service-Learning, we have been able to have our students who come to our program increase their GPA by a minimum of one letter grade.

We are very enthusiastic on what we have accomplished these last two semesters and congratulations to our three seniors who have been accepted to two California State Universities. Additionally, congratulations to our students for being honored (award winners) for their essays at the University of California, San Diego, Annual California Native American Day (CANA-Day) High School Essay Contest. Truly, this is a tremendous year!



AIR Students Honored with Awards at UCSD

By Christy Garcia for AIR Programs

Congratulations to both Cheyenne Garcia (Lakota/Gabrieleño Tongva/Mescalero Apache/Yaqui) and Rachele Venegas (Navajo) for winning the University of California, San Diego's Annual California Native American Day (CANADay) High School Essay Contest. This year's theme was "Bridging Native Identities: Past, Present, and Future." We are very proud of our students who participated within this program as each of them has been in our program for many years now. They both received scholarships. Cheyenne Garcia will be attending CSUSM in the fall and Rachele will be completing her final year in high school. We also want to congratulate Katy Davis (Omaha) and James Ambler (Luiseño/Kumeyaay), graduating seniors from All Tribes Charter School and have participated in our AIR program, both who will be attending college in the fall. Katy will be attending Humboldt State University and James will be attending CSUSM in the fall.

We also wanted to thank the UCSD Class of 2012, Native American Student Alliance group for all their help and support this year and previous years! It takes a special group of people to volunteer their time (along with completing their studies) to work with our American Indian high school students and our Native community. We are honored to have had them participate in our program and wish them the best success as they move on to fight for American Indian rights in each of their prospective professions and change the world for all.

We also wanted to take this time to thank the American Indian Student Alliance and the California Indian Culture and Sovereignty Center for their assistance in helping us re-introduce our AIR Jr. Program. As with our UCSD student group they have made our program successful through their time and dedication mentoring our Native youth. Additionally, thank you Tishmall Turner, Tribal Liaison at CSUSM and Dr. Joely Proudfit, Director of the California Indian Culture and Sovereignty Center, Director of Native American Academic Strategic Planning, Associate Professor of Sociology and Native Studies, for allowing us to utilize the resources at CSUSM and for their support and partnership. Truly, CSUSM has a special program and commitment in furthering the education for Natives students!



We thank the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians for their continued support of our Native Students. Together we continue to bring a greater future for our Native children.



We thank our community partners who have donated and support our Native students under our AIR Program. We cannot express our gratitude enough how these organizations, Tribes, and Universities have supported our program through these many years. Together we are creating change for our Native Community so that our future will be of the greatest in our nations history.



The importance of Continued support for our College students

As mentioned previous, we are developing a smaller project designed to help those who have gone from our program into college. Often our students come from partnered community-center based programs. These programs inherently are designed to give the students more opportunities to succeed based on their structure and community based support (often family). For instance many provide academic services, time management, career planning, mentoring, to name a few. Naturally, when entering the college arena these students often fail because such services are not there, sort of a cold turkey approach towards supportive services and even though such services may (or may not) be present, it is often not at the same level of support as our community centers provide. Therefore, we have been working with some students on continuing these services that we provide during the freshmen and sophomore year and it is working successfully. Students continue to get supportive services (tutoring, time management, and career planning services) but more important a familiar person who is there for them.

The counter argument and many academics have mentioned this, is that college is a time of becoming an adult and the structure is there for that purpose, so when do we stop treating them as teenagers without responsibility or when do we treat them as adults? Our approach and vision of college is that it is a learning experience and, as within our Native communities, we approach life guided by family and our community to become a better person. Native communities are inherently different in means of learning and lifestyle than Western philosophies of capitalism and approach to learning. So why would we abandon our approach because philosophies of learning are premised by others? It is comparable to why would we give up our sovereignty as native people which gives us the right to live by our cultural norms (specific to our individual tribes) for those in mainstream America? We feel comfortable in our approach and plan to make this a regular process for our students who go on from our program to college as life is often too short not to reach our greatest potential and dreams.



We thank Procopio, Cory, Hargreaves & Savitch LLP, one of the largest business law firms in Southern California for their sponsorship of our American Indian Recruitment Program. Procopio is part of a public interest collaboration serving the Native American Community. For more information, contact Procopio's Native American Practice Group Leader, Ted Griswold at ted.griswold@procopio.com.

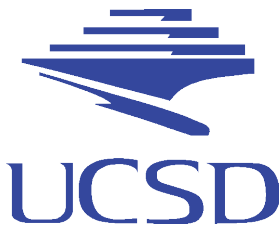


Kate's Corner *From time to time we have our students and mentors contribute to our newsletter by giving their thoughts on Native issues and events. Here, Katherine Gordon (USD Alumni/AIR Mentor/and AIR Youth Service Specialist) has agreed to contribute to our newsletter.*

As a youth service specialist for the AIR Program, I have learned the importance of establishing strong relationships with our Native students' schools. I make school visits and calls on behalf of the AIR Tutorial Program, where I inform teachers about AIR and ask that we work together to support student progress. Only by working directly with teachers can the tutorial program track how students are performing and identify necessary interventions. However, it is not always an easy task—it takes time and commitment. To gain the trust of schools, parents/guardians sign academic release forms that allow me to receive information on behalf of the parent. Schools are often resistant, but when they see the release form they are obligated to speak with me.

In forming relationships with our students' schools, we are bridging a historic gap between Native parents and academia. Often times, our parents don't know how to approach the school system and are unable to advocate for their children's needs. But by acting as an intermediary, I bring the parents and teachers together and help them understand one another. Teachers become more empathetic to students' needs and parents feel more comfortable approaching them. Communication between the two parties improves and as a result, the student does better academically.

This week, AIR staff will be attending a training at California Indian Legal Services on parental rights in education. We will replicate that training for our parents so that they too will gain a clearer understanding of the school system and their ability to be advocates. As a result, everyone will benefit!



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On Meeting Mr. Darrell Kipp (and conversations at the table)

I am often humbled when I go back out to Hopi where cultural norms from my reservations often, if not always, differ from life within the non-native community. Most of our lives on Hopi revolve around our crops, ceremonies, art dealings, family obligations and even the kitchen table. It seems like everything in the world is discussed at the kitchen table, from the planning of our corn to its harvest, stories about life and our experiences, to even the soap operas where I first heard about a marriage between Luke and Laura. In other words, when I was young and on the reservation we would sit and listen to the older folks discuss these issues with such passion, and often laughter, on how they viewed life. As children we were taught to sit and listen and when spoken to, to give answers. A short answer was always followed by more questions until we eventually gave a full answer. So the trick here was to give an answer that was long enough to leave the table and play. To this day no one has ever figured out this specific amount that was just enough.

This last week I went to Washington and chose to go to a "Listening Session" sponsored by ANA. I felt that the session was a great opportunity to discuss what can be done in Indian Country and how we could bring more resources to our communities. Usually, listening sessions are given to a select few whom no one knows or never have the chance to hear what they say nor the change that comes as a result of that session. So not wanting to be speaking first I looked for others who were rustling around to go and speak. I figured I would be fifth to speak after we lined up behind the mic. So I proceed up to the mic and fell prey to the oldest trick in Indian Country, those who rustled like the wind to go up to the mic all sat down. Of course this was just my luck, I wasn't that prepared, I thought I would have time to collect my thoughts so I said my spiel and thought I did well, of course the people behind me said everything so much better.

So while in the lobby, after the session, I sat down reflecting on how I was served up, when I met Mr. Darrell Kipp who sat down in the same general area. I started off by complimenting him on what he said but then had to mention, he got me during the session. Mr. Kipp stated I fell prey to an OIT (old Indian trick) and how true this statement is. We have many OIT's (coined by another friend of mine) and it is the older folks in our communities that seem do this so well. This OIT is comical as we actively do this in our communities as we fight to be last on the agenda to expound the knowledge we have and to remedy the clumsy people who spoke before us. Of course being younger I attempted to be serious in my conversation with Mr. Kipp but the conversation would reflect more on our experiences and what we have done to resolve our problems that occur more often than not. In other words spend less time complaining and laugh at ourselves lest we take ourselves too seriously.

We continued our conversation with the Director of Health and Human Services from Montana over dinner and somehow I felt I was transported back to the kitchen table out at Hopi. Etiquette dictates that I wait for everyone to eat first, then speak when Mr. Kipp and the Director were finished in stating their fancy. We went through people we knew until we eventually we honed down a person that we all mutually knew from Montana (this took about 5 minutes-its a small community).

We thank our USD, SDSU and the Rincon Band of Luiseno Indians for all their support for our program.



Kipp (cont.)

He asked me many questions and I explained various things about myself and my experiences. In all I laughed and felt reassured on many fronts about working in Indian Country and felt resolved in what I have done and what I will do. Just like those older folks on my reservation I felt like I was at home but this time I was a little closer to talking more at the kitchen table.

When we left I realized I never told him exactly what I did. I never gave him the spiel that the non-native community requests in various gatherings. I never sold him what I do. I ponder this and realized what has occurred. When I sat there he was not gathering simple mundane conversation or discussing cures for our problems. What he and those who sit at the kitchen table do is to find out who you are and if you truly care. We all do good work for our communities and many of us work all our lives in Indian Country but do we really care about what we do and how we do it? These are the real questions that we don't really hear but are asked at the kitchen table all the time. The kitchen table is really as part of our culture as much as our ceremonies, our dances, and our songs. They are the means in which many of us have that forum to talk to our elders and to each other. Mr. Kipp may or may not care what I do for work in life but he did care if I had the heart for what I accomplished and will do in my life. He looked at me to find out my character and the measurement of that character that makes me who I am. I felt very much a part of Indian Country as this was the way I grew up but until now didn't realize why the kitchen table is as very much a part of Indian Country as everything else.

Working within the non-native community and in part, in our own, we will listen to those who just go on and on about themselves and give their canned spiel. We will always have to bear through the downward leveling that many of us go through, in Indian Country, as we fight one another over each mundane issue in life. But truly, in meeting Mr. Darrell Kipp, I can say it brought me closer to my home and in understanding the importance of my culture and family. I write this as our program discusses cultural identity and attempts to improve our lives through the understanding of culture and how it plays out in our lives to build our self-esteem and to empower us to reach our greatest potential. This article is not only about meeting Mr. Kipp but meeting with our families around the kitchen table talking and understanding the culture embedded within families, communities and Tribal Nations. Truly, culture is everywhere. So if you are in Montana or at a conference and see Mr. Darrell Kipp say Dwight says hello and have a bite or a cup of coffee with him and learn from an Indian Country friend, but don't fall for that OIT. Thank you, Mr. Darrell Kipp, for our great conversation, truly it was great meeting you.

AIR Programs Summer Program to Begin

AIR Summer Program: June 25, 2012, at San Diego State University: This Summer, we will introduce the topic of Cultural Preservation. Our Native Communities are rich in history, traditions and culture but when denied cultural artifacts or items of cultural significance, where rock art and petroglyphs that tell our stories are vandalized, or where our ancestors are paved over for the progress of others, then we lose part of our history and culture. As future leaders, students must understand these ideals of our past that validates our being in the present and carries us into the future as a Native Nation.

To understand this topic we will cover concepts of cultural artifacts and their significance, legal concepts of some laws designed to protect Native Culture, and current issues within Indian Country, that are having significant impact on our Native Nations. We will we accomplish this research on the university campus, through interviews with local leaders and those that are leading and protecting Native cultural items, and through on-site visits to many areas of significance locally.

Using this topic as a basis, our students will learn about our university, the campus libraries, learn research methodology from our mentors, learn effective presentations, and learn more about these issues affecting our communities. Overall, we hope you find great interest on this topic.

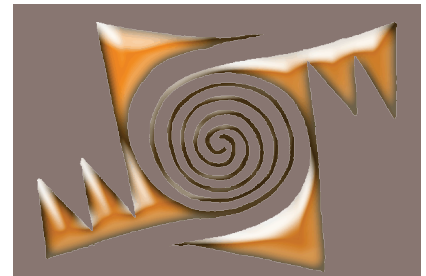
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