



Linfield Magazine

Volume 10
Number 3 *Winter 2014*

Article 10

Winter 2014

Native Americans Explore Heritage

Mardi Mileham
Linfield College

Linfield Magazine Staff

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/linfield_magazine

Recommended Citation

Mileham, Mardi and Linfield Magazine Staff (2014) "Native Americans Explore Heritage," *Linfield Magazine*: Vol. 10 : No. 3 , Article 10.

Available at: https://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/linfield_magazine/vol10/iss3/10

This article is brought to you for free via open access, courtesy of DigitalCommons@Linfield. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@linfield.edu.

Native Americans explore heritage

Native Americans make up only a small percentage of the Linfield student body, but a group of students is aiming to change that.

The Native American Student Association (NASA), chartered in 2012, is raising awareness on campus and helping students re-examine their own culture.

Five students have taken the lead – all with ties to native cultures in Montana. Shelby Hollenbeck '14 of Gresham is a member of the Assiniboine of Northern Montana. Julianna King '16, Arianne King '16 and Nicole Wilson '16 are all from the Northern Cheyenne tribe in eastern Montana. Faron "Gabe" Iron '17 is from the Crow tribe, also in eastern Montana. The five are taking leadership roles in NASA, which has attracted some two dozen members, not all from a native background.

For Hollenbeck, helping organize NASA awakened an interest in her heritage. Although she visited family in Montana every year, it wasn't until high school that she began learning about her culture in earnest. She connected with Jason Rodriguez, multicultural director at Linfield, and he encouraged her to explore her background. As she

learns and explores, she's deepening her connection to her heritage as well as with her mother.

"A lot of people in college are learning about different cultures and backgrounds," she said. "It is important for me to understand my background, my roots and how I am connected to the Native American culture."

Hollenbeck is a reminder that cultural heritage can't be determined merely by looks. As a blue-eyed blonde, most people don't think she's Native American.

"NASA is a place where Native American students can feel comfortable and we hope will draw more of them to Linfield," she said.

Hollenbeck served as the first president of NASA, but as she prepared to study abroad in Australia last spring, Wilson and Arianne stepped in as co-presidents with the support of Julianna. The three were close friends since their days at Colstrip High School and their mutual support has been instrumental in their success at Linfield.

The three friends were seeking a change and after a visit, Linfield seemed a perfect fit. It has been an adjustment from their



small tight-knit reservation community where even if you didn't know someone personally, you knew who they were. The broad plains of eastern Montana have given way to the lush Willamette Valley.

The small college environment has made the adjustment easier, but the lack of Native American students has presented its challenges. For example, they've been asked if they are Latino or Hawaiian, which reinforced their desire to share their culture.

"I think it's important to explain my culture, my upbringing and our cultural ways," Julianna said. "Northern Cheyenne (people) are taught to be respectful, considerate and tolerant of ignorance. I would like to educate others by example and share and give them a sense of our community. I want to learn about other cultures, because I think everyone's culture is as important to them as mine is to me."

Julianna said talking about her culture has forced her to come out of her shell, improve her communication skills, stand up for what she believes in and given her the opportunity to talk with others who have vastly different perspectives.

Arianne has become immersed in the teaching and learning environment and has been impressed with Linfield's small classes and supportive faculty and staff. Now, some of her best friends are from completely different backgrounds.

Listening to Wilson's and the Kings' experiences piqued Iron's interest in Linfield. But another inspiration was Joseph Medicine Crow '38, also a member of the Crow Tribe and a recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2009.

Iron said his decision to enroll in First CLAS, a week-long service-learning and leadership program for incoming students held prior to orientation, helped his adjustment to college. In addition to learning about campus and community resources, he connected with students and engaged in community service projects.

"I would like to educate others by example and share and give them a sense of our community. I want to learn about other cultures, because I think everyone's culture is as important to them as mine is to me."

– Julianna King '16

"That had a big impact and helped establish a bond with other students," he said. "It really helped me adjust and ease the transition to school and in making friends."

He has joined the others in exploring ways to share his culture and heritage.

"Where I live, a lot of people don't go to college," Iron said. "One of our missions is to encourage people to look at Linfield. I want them to know that this is a great school."

NASA members have shared dinners featuring Indian tacos and fry bread, and hosted a game night and a pumpkin carving. They visited the long house at Oregon State University as part of a spiritual discovery trip. They have also connected with Grand Ronde and plan to volunteer at the school. Julianna and Arianne plan to share their beading skills with anyone interested in learning.

Students are also reaching out to area native clubs including at Chemeketa Community College.

"We hope to build more connections with the schools nearby, to provide them support and hopefully they in turn can support our efforts and events," said Julianna.

One goal of the club is to develop a cultural festival at Linfield that will highlight the native culture. Wilson, Julianna and Arianne are rekindling their interest in learning the native dances they performed as children.

"Now that we are away, I've realized that I have to be the teacher," Arianne said. "I was the one hearing the stories at home, now I have to tell the stories. I have to represent us and do my part." 🌿 – Mardi Mileham

Commitment to diversity

NASA is one of nine multicultural clubs active on the McMinnville Campus that help students adjust to college life and promote their cultural experiences, emphasizing Linfield's strong commitment to diversity.

This fall, 30 percent of the McMinnville Campus is made up of U.S. students of color, compared to almost 12 percent in 2006.

Helping students organize and hold educational and cultural events is just one aspect of Jason Rodriguez's job. As multicultural program director, he provides support and advice to students on the McMinnville Campus.

"This office serves as a catalyst to create links between students, faculty, staff and the community," Rodriguez said.

Five students with ties to the Native American cultures in Montana have been instrumental in organizing the Native American Student Association, chartered in 2012. Members include, from left, Nicole Wilson '17, a nursing major from Lame Deer, Mont.; Arianne King '16, an intercultural communication major from Busby, Mont.; Faron "Gabe" Iron '17, a biochemistry major from Crow Agency, Mont.; Julianna King '16, a sociology major from Busby; and Shelby Hollenbeck '14, an environmental science major from Gresham.

