

# ASU Encourages Native Graduate Students through Support and Opportunities

**R**ichard Meyers (Oglala Sioux), who received his doctorate in Cultural Anthropology from Arizona State University (ASU) this spring, is one of less than 100 enrolled American Indians ever to receive an anthropology Ph.D. “Without the support I received at ASU, I don’t know if I would have finished my degree,” he says. “The Native support groups, my chair, project director and the American Indian faculty and staff on campus were all fundamental to my success.”

Meyers is now the only enrolled American Indian with an anthropology doctorate working at the U.S. Department of the Interior for the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, Office of Public Affairs. He works as a writer/editor on matters relating to Indian Country and its intersections with American mainstream, as well as teaching adjunct at American University in Washington D.C.

With 1,400 American Indians registered at ASU, including over 250 master’s and doctoral students, the support that Meyers’ experienced is not unique. Thirty faculty members and over 150 professionals and staff at ASU are Native American. Student support groups, partnerships with some of the 22 federally-recognized tribes in Arizona and other university resources dedicated to student success have resulted in ASU being consistently ranked among top U.S. universities in the number of doctorates and master’s degrees awarded to American Indians.

Significant programs specifically tailored for American Indian students include law, education and nursing, as well as numerous academic and social groups.

The Indian Legal Program (ILP) ([www.law.asu.edu/ilp](http://www.law.asu.edu/ilp)) is one of the largest groups of Indian law students in the nation. Part of the ASU Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law, ILP provides legal education, scholarship and public service to tribal governments, helps train Indian lawyers and promotes an understanding of the differences between the legal systems of Indian nations and the United States. ILP professors serve tribes as Appellate Judges for several reservations in the U.S. and some alumni currently serve in tribal government and tribal courts.



*President Obama congratulates Kishan Lara (Hupa/Yurok) as she receives her Ph.D. in Curriculum Instruction. Lara is the first in her tribe to receive a doctorate.*

“The ILP has worked hard to create a supportive community within the law school,” says Kathlene Rosier, Director of the program and a member of the Comanche Tribe of Oklahoma.

“The reason I came to ASU’s law school was their Indian Legal Program (ILP),” says Raymond Campbell of the Gila River Indian Community (Pima). He graduated with his Juris Doctorate (JD) this spring. “There is a real sense of community among the ILP, from the professors down to the students.”

The Indian Legal Clinic, guided by Director, Patty Ferguson-Bohnee (Pointe-au-Chien), provides law students with the opportunity to participate in real cases dealing with Native people and Indian issues. One of their recent successes was enabling an elderly Navajo grandmother in northern Arizona to re-establish the right to cast her ballot after new voter identification laws went into effect.



Left: Richard Meyers (Oglala Sioux), Ph.D. in Cultural Anthropology. Center: Jo Ann McClanahan (Navajo) earned her Master's in Elementary Education degree entirely online. Right: Gerald Vandever (Diné), Master's in Curriculum and Instruction. "AISS has been there for me since working on my bachelor degree. I never thought about getting my Master's, but they really encouraged me to keep going for it. Now that I've got my Master's, I'm thinking about going for my Ph.D."

For teachers in Indian country, ASU has several practical options for obtaining a master's or doctorate, without leaving their home or job.

The Native American Educational Leadership (NAEL) program ([education.asu.edu/nael](http://education.asu.edu/nael)) offers an accelerated doctoral (Ed.D.) degree exclusively for practicing administrators and teacher leaders. The rigorous, sixty-six (66) semester hours, accelerated program is geared to the needs of working administrators and teacher leaders. ASU faculty travel on a twice-weekly basis to Window Rock, Arizona to teach 23 courses, to students who are living and working on or near the Navajo Nation.

Regina Bitsoi (Navajo/Diné) graduated this spring with a doctorate in Educational Administration and Supervision through the NAEL program. She plans to become an administrator when the opportunity is available. "I would like to make a difference for my Navajo children, as well as all children, so they can be successful in their lives."

Navajo teachers can also get a master's degree in Education Administration through the Navajo School Administra-

tors Preparation Program (NASPP), funded by a U.S. Department of Education grant. The program prepares administrators for Navajo schools through a collaboration between ASU and Diné College ([cdte.dinecollege.edu](http://cdte.dinecollege.edu)) and courses are taught on or near the Diné College campus in Tsaile, Arizona.

Jo Ann McClanahan (Navajo) earned her degree entirely online through a long distance learning program ([asuonline.asu.edu](http://asuonline.asu.edu)). Her tuition was provided by the Tsaile, Arizona school, at which she teaches, and she was able to continue teaching as she earned her degree. Her first trip to the ASU campus was for commencement, when she received a Master's degree in Elementary Education from the ASU College of Teacher Education and Leadership "This provides a nice service for Indian students who can't come to ASU," she says.

The American Indian Students United for Nursing (ASUN) program ([nursing.asu.edu/asun](http://nursing.asu.edu/asun)) has, as its goal, to increase the number of Native American nurses providing care in Indian communities. The program was established by a grant from the IHS and provides scholarships



Agnes Laughter (Navajo) on the Navajo Nation. Laughter was assisted by the ASU Indian Legal Clinic to regain her voting rights.



Left: *Elfreda Marie Benally* (no caption provided). Center: *Regina Bitsoi* (Navajo), Ph.D. Educational Administration & Supervision, at spring Commencement. Right: *Rachel Carroll*, a Northern Cheyenne Traditional Healer, gives the Reading Day Blessing for American Indian Students United for Nursing (ASUN). Carroll has a master's degree in education and worked for many years in ASU Student Services.

to undergraduate nursing students who will work in IHS upon graduation. The local chapter of the Native American Nurses Association has partnered with ASUN to provide mentors to students and many ASUN graduates have become nurse leaders.

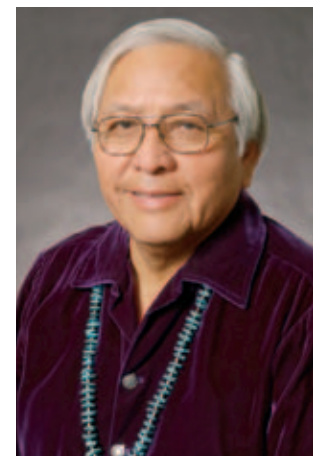
Social and cultural nurturing are also included in the program's goals, as well as academic support for both undergraduate and graduate nursing students. "Students can get lost in an educational system of over 60,000," states Jewel Bishop (Gila River Indian Community), who just completed her first year of Ph.D. studies in Nursing and Health Innovation. "ASUN sponsors events such as talking circles, holiday dinners and a reading day blessing, as cultural support to students in a rigorous academic program. Another component of the program is the nurse elder, who is available to meet with students for encouragement and inspiration."

At the center of support for Native American students at ASU is the office of Peterson Zah (Diné), Special Advisor on American Indian Affairs to ASU President Michael Crow. Dr. Zah, ([www.asu.edu/president/zah](http://www.asu.edu/president/zah)) who was elected the first President of the Navajo Nation, works to recruit, retain and increase the graduation rates of Native American students, as well as increasing the communication between ASU and American Indian tribes. "Our close connection with the ASU President and our commitment to the tribal communities gives us high visibility and

integrity among Indian people," says Dr. Zah. "Education can't solve everything, but it will help us find solutions to many challenging issues that face us."

As Coordinator of Projects and Operations, Jaynie Parrish (Diné) assists Dr. Zah. "In most cases, we are the first stop that many students and their families make when they want to connect with ASU," she says. "Dr. Zah is a grandfather, he's traditional, a Tribal community leader, a mentor and he truly cares about the well being of students."

The office has awarded a total of 196 scholarships to Native American students since 2004. Dr. Zah has helped countless students attain employment, as well as academic and financial aid opportunities, says Parrish. "He's just a great resource with a lot of good networks. He wants the students to be real contributors and informed leaders who can work to improve tribal communities."



*Dr. Peterson Zah, (Diné), Special Advisor to the ASU President on American Indian Affairs.*

A broad range of social and academic support and resources are available through the American Indian Student Support Services (AISSS) ([aisss.asu.edu](http://aisss.asu.edu)). Academic support includes tutorials, writing assistance, computer access, printing/copying services, skills workshops, study areas, meeting space, connection with faculty, academic performance tracking and a graduate support office.

Personal support includes individualized advising and counseling, referrals for services, cultural presentations and social events. “This all culminates in the recognition of student achievement through the Student Recognition Banquet, a display of student art/projects and the American Indian Convocation,” says Director, Michael Begaye (Diné). “In the past two years, the number of students with low academic performance has decreased and the number of students graduating has increased.”

Just a few of the other resources for American Indian students at ASU include:

- **American Indian Studies Program (AIS)** broadens the knowledge of students interested in the histories, languages, cultures, arts and contemporary situations of American Indian nations/people. ([americanindian.clas.asu.edu](http://americanindian.clas.asu.edu))
- **The Center for Indian Education (CIE)** is an interdisciplinary research and service organization. ([coe.asu.edu/cie](http://coe.asu.edu/cie))
- **American Indian Programs** at ASU Polytechnic campus collaborates with tribal communities and other partners to improve educational opportunities, emphasizing science, mathematics and technology. The One Nation Club at Polytechnic offers a social component with cultural activities, guest speakers, workshops, community service projects and fundraising events. ([www.poly.asu.edu/aip](http://www.poly.asu.edu/aip))
- **The Labriola National American Indian Data Center**, part of the ASU Libraries, is a research collection of historic information on government, culture, religion, social life and tribal history. ([lib.asu.edu/labriola](http://lib.asu.edu/labriola))
- **Native American Achievement Program (NAAP)**, within the Multicultural Student center, is a specialized program primarily designed to increase the persistence and graduation rates of Native American students from three Arizona tribes. ([www.asu.edu/studentaffairs/mmss/msc/naap.htm](http://www.asu.edu/studentaffairs/mmss/msc/naap.htm)) ♦

## Graduation 2009

Fifty-six American Indian graduate students received their degrees from ASU in spring 2009, including seven (7) Ph.D.s, nine (9) juris doctorates and forty (40) master's degrees. Over 120 American Indians received their bachelor's degrees. President Obama was the featured speaker at commencement and students found echoes of their Native philosophies in his speech:

*“I want to thank the parents, the uncles, the grandpas, the grandmas, cousins—Calabash cousins—everybody who was involved in helping these extraordinary young people arrive at this moment.”*

*—President Obama*

“President Obama included thanking your cousins,” says Gerald Vandever (Diné), Master's in Curriculum and Instruction. “That's the first time I've heard that from a president—he knows that extended family is very important.”

*“So, Class of 2009, that's what building a body of work is all about—it's about the daily labor, the many individual acts, the choices large and small that add up over time, over a lifetime, to a lasting legacy.... it's cumulative; it deepens and expands with each day that you give your best, each day that you give back and contribute to the life of your community and your nation.”*

*—President Obama*

“He touched upon how you can't really be successful without getting help and giving back,” said Charlton Long (Diné), Master's in Curriculum and Instruction. “Somebody has to sacrifice something for the future. Obama just hit it—trying to be there for someone else, not always just looking out for yourself.”

“His message was inspirational,” said Kishan Lara (Hupa/Yurok), Ph.D. Curriculum and Instruction. “He talked about how our body of work is not completed and we still have a long journey ahead of us. That's a real Native philosophy, because we are here because of our ancestors, because of our history, because of our parents, our grandparents and all our support. The majority of us have come here because we want to be instruments of positive change in Indian country and we want to make that contribution.” ♦