Native American High School Students to Attend "College 101" at Utah State

Thursday, Oct. 15, 2015

Jalynn Jones (Navajo/Diné) transferred from the USU Eastern-Blanding campus to Logan last year to complete her degree in animal, dairy and veterinary science. Jones is Miss American Indian USU 2015-16 and the president of the USU Native American Student Council. (Photo credit: Leopoldo Torres-Reyes, USU sophomore.)
Members of USU's Native American Student Council participated in USU's 2015 Homecoming parade in downtown Logan. Council members Kyra John, along with her sister and cousins, performed Native American powwow dances throughout the parade, including the Fancy Shawl and Jingle Dress styles of dance. (Photo credit: Jalynn Jones.)

At the end of October, more than 200 Native American high school students will travel from across Utah to visit Utah State University's Logan campus for Native Aggie Day. The first day of its kind at USU, Native Aggie Day is a recruitment outreach effort to show native high school students the resources USU has created to help them succeed in college.

“USU benefits from the culture and experience Native students bring to our campus,” said Angela Enno, the USU Native American Program advisor. “But they also face unique challenges. They’re often far from home and the first person in their family to become a college student. Our program is designed to help Native students succeed academically and give them a home away from home.”

The Native American Student Council, which began in the 1970s, is a big part of that, according to Miss American Indian USU Jalynn Jones.

“I came from Blanding, Utah, knowing almost no one, but within a few months I cultivated many friendships and felt like I was part of a loving community,” said Jones. “USU has been beyond welcoming to me and I cannot wait to extend the spirit of welcome to my peers and incoming students.”

That is what USU and Jones, along with the rest of the Native American Student Council, will be doing on Oct. 30. High school students will begin arriving as early as a day before to get acquainted with the Logan campus.

“Native Aggie Day will be like College 101, showing what it’s like from a USU student’s perspective and what they can expect if they choose to become Aggies after high school,” Enno said.

Several USU offices will provide workshops, including Financial Aid, Admissions, Campus Recreation, the Museum of Anthropology and the Academic Success Center.

Creating programs to help Native American students succeed is nothing new for USU. The USU Eastern-Blanding campus has built a student services system to specifically meet the needs of its Native American students who make up three-quarters of its student body.

“Eighty-five percent of our students are the first generation to go to college,” said Garth Wilson, USU Eastern-Blanding associate vice chancellor. “They don’t have the same introduction to the college experience that students whose parents are college graduates have. We meet our students where they are, and through a combination of counseling, advising and tutoring, we get them started off right from the very beginning.”

USU Eastern-Blanding’s graduation rate for Native American students shows this approach is working. Of the 205 students who graduated with an associate’s or certificate last year, 160 were Native American. Some of these students will go on to get a bachelor’s degree as well. By helping students find internships to work with faculty on the Logan campus, they introduce students to what is possible with a bachelor’s degree.
Native Aggie Day is sponsored by USU’s College of Humanities and Social Sciences, the Access and Diversity Center, the Department of Psychology, the Native American Student Council, the Office of the Provost and the USU Gear Up partnership.

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