

New CSUSM center celebrates American Indian culture

By Dr. Jan Jackson

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In November, Cal State San Marcos celebrated the grand opening of its new California Indian Culture and Sovereignty Center (CICSC), a place that fosters further collaboration and understanding between the university and regional Native American communities.

Located in the Social and Behavioral Sciences Building, the center serves as a focal point for Native Studies and American Indian activities on campus.

"The center represents an important, positive development in the history of CSUSM's work with American Indian students and communities," said Dr. Joely Proudfit, CICSC director. "It serves California Indian communities throughout the state and enriches the campus community by increasing the visibility of Native American culture and programs."

Native American students face particular challenges in graduating from a 4-year institution; they are disproportionately first-generation students, and leaving reservations often requires a significant cultural adjustment.

According to the U. S. Census, American Indians have lower educational attainment rates than persons from other racial/ethnic backgrounds, and the numbers are even lower for those who live on reservations. In addition, universities across the country have disproportionately low rates of retention among Native American students, and the number of bachelor's degrees granted to Native students is lower than their numbers in the population overall might indicate.

Since 2004, Cal State San Marcos has set a precedent in working with area tribes.

CSUSM is the only campus within the California State University or University of California systems with a tribal liaison and the university was the first to establish a Native American Advisory Council, which meets regularly with President Karen Haynes to articulate the educational needs of local reservations and American Indian communities to the university.

CSUSM continues to make history with the opening of CICSC – the first of its kind in the state and the only center of its kind headed by a California Indian.

With office space, workstations, a lounge and more, CICSC is a welcoming place for the entire university community and for tribal communities across the state.

The center focuses on conducting and supporting research and analysis of tribally identified concerns and questions; supporting the recruitment and retention of Native American students, faculty and staff; creating a sense of community and belonging among the Indian population on and off campus; and preparing graduates who can serve Indian communities well in support of their multiple and complex needs.

