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Cultural education to increase with new American Indian Studies major



Tiana Morton (https://csusmchronicle.com/staff_name/tiana-morton/)

Dr. Joely Proudfit stands beside film director and producer, Chris Eyre.

Cory Kay (https://csusmchronicle.com/staff_name/cory-kay/), Assistant Features Editor
November 27, 2015

CSUSM is expanding its educational opportunities with the development of an American Indian Studies program to broaden cultural education and inclusion.

After years of pushing for the creation of this degree program, American Indian faculty and students have set the foundation for the program which will go beyond the Native Studies minor that was previously offered.

The extensive program, which will involve American Indian philosophy, arts and humanities, is expected to officially start next fall. The transition of the Native Studies minor into the American Indian Studies minor will also occur in Fall 2016.

Dr. Joely Proudfit, a CSUSM Native Studies professor and Director of the California Indian Culture and Sovereignty Center, is a descendent of the Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians and has been aiming toward the development of this new program since her time at CSUSM began.

"I came here in 2008 and I answered the job description to be the program coordinator for Native Studies... with the goal of creating a major and a department," said Proudfit. "So it's taken almost a decade... but I think we're really close to having that major ready to go for Fall 2016."

Going beyond the classroom, the American Indian Studies program will enlighten students through research and participation in projects that involve the American Indian culture in our society.

"It's a research-based, interactive program that's grounded in culture-based higher learning," said Proudfit. "We have so many tribal communities within driving distance. Our students are able to participate in internships... and the tribal communities come into our classrooms."

Not only is the location of CSUSM greatly beneficial to American Indian Studies

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students, but the courses themselves offer a range of advantages that will benefit students long-term, according to Proudfit.

“Because my students have the opportunity to engage and work with tribes they also can possibly have first access to employment opportunities,” said Proudfit. “I’ve been very aggressive in helping my students find positions.”

While this program will provide numerous opportunities for its students, it has also been recognized as a highly enjoyable and active program. Students have expressed enjoyment of the field trips, projects, discussions and the guest speakers they’ve heard from throughout their experiences within the American Indian Studies coursework.

The development of the new program is a huge step forward for the American Indian Studies department, but it is not the only goal in mind. The California Indian Culture and Sovereignty Center does not receive state funding, but that has not inhibited the goal of aiming toward the development of a new space on campus for the department to allow for further expansion.

“The goal is to one day have our own building... that has classrooms in it, and has faculty offices... and student support services in it,” said Proudfit. “That’s a dream, but it’s always good to dream big.”

Proudfit emphasized the importance of this expansion, especially the expansions that will be made within the classroom that will allow for increased cultural awareness among CSUSM students.

“I want [students] to be aware of what their role is as global citizens and I always say I really want them to think about their impact, what they’re doing and have a better understanding of the people and their neighbors,” said Proudfit. “When you know better, you do better.”

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