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The Evergreen State College
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Native American students at The Evergreen State College in Olympia show a success rate more than five times higher than the national average for Native Americans who complete college, according to a study recently completed by Washington State's newest four-year college.

Eighty out of nearly 400 Native Americans enrolled since Evergreen opened its doors in 1971 have earned their bachelor of arts degrees, representing a whopping 22 percent success ratio. National trends show that four percent of most Native American students who begin actually complete their college educations.

Revealed in a report on Restructured Undergraduate Learning Environments (RULE), sponsored by a grant from the National Science Foundation, information also portrays Evergreen's typical Native American student as being at least 30 years old (the median age), a Washingtonian (in 95 percent of the cases), attending college for the first time, and as likely to be male as female (49 and 51 percent, respectively).

In addition, records show that both current Native students and alumni tend to focus on a wide variety of academic areas, including management and administration, health, counseling, education, and social services, as well as the more culturally specific Native American studies.

Evergreen's central location to major Native American population centers in Western Washington has been a major factor in serving the state's largest minority group, observes Evergreen Academic Dean Dr. Will Humphreys.

However, Native American faculty like Mary F. Nelson, a Colville tribe member, believes the college's policies toward numerous evening courses and individual study contracts or more advanced students enable even those who work full-time and/or live on the

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reservation to attain their four-year degrees. In addition, Nelson and others feel that increased hiring of Native American teaching and support staff make it possible for many students to maintain a critical link in identity once they arrive on campus.

More than five years ago, Evergreen deans and faculty planners sought to broaden the school's study offerings in Native American studies. As a result, Native and non-Native students alike now have the opportunity of zeroing in on issues and academic research specifically related to northwest and other Native peoples. Programs such as this year's "A Separate Reality," for instance, make it possible for students and faculty together to probe the matter of cultural identity and to understand anthropology, sociology, politics and other subjects within a Native American context.

By their very nature, other programs and courses offered at Evergreen incorporate subject matter of specific interest to Native Americans today. Two examples are "Cultures of the Pacific Northwest," and "Exploring Southwest Native American Art." Currently in planning for the 1978 academic year are courses related to the salmon industry, social and family structures, myths and folklore, and earth/environmental sciences, among others.

Faculty members such as educator/sociologist Mary Ellen Hillaire Hkaytillwit (Lummi), media expert Lovern King (Creek/Cherokee), artist and art historian Mary Nelson (Colville), early childhood education planner Jacqueline Delahunt (Lakota), and others assure that even traditional disciplines will contain an often overlooked Indian perspective.

Poet/author Don Jordan (Iroquois-Chippewa), also a member of the Evergreen faculty, feels strongly that an interdisciplinary approach to learning can best include Native American views, but that Native Americans also have the right to focus on any subject of personal interest to them. Jordan enjoys teaching enthusiastic, creative people of many backgrounds to explore their own experience more fully and to build on their abilities. He frequently schedules informal sessions for students and others to share their own writing or to discuss others' works in order to foster learning and the creative process.

Those who articulate the meaning behind the graduation statistics most clearly,

however, are the Native American alums themselves.

Speaking on his experience at Evergreen, Jim Brieler of Omak (class of '74) says he found most of his motivation through working with Native American instructors, and in learning to look at issues through a multi-subject (cross-disciplinary) approach. Currently a cultural researcher for the Colville Tribal Museum, Brieler focused his studies on political science as it relates to Native Americans.

Colleen Neal, a minority advisor for the Bainbridge Public School System, hopes she can continue to grow in her cultural awareness and values and share them with others. Of mixed Phillipino and Suquamish heritage, she had waited 12 years to finish her four-year degree. After talking to Evergreen Native faculty three summers ago, she enrolled and was soon on her way toward meeting requirements for graduation.

Olympian Rocky Watts, a Rosebud Sioux, is one of five in his family to graduate from The Evergreen State College. An accounting services staff member at the State Office of Financial Management, he gained his assignment through a pilot program to provide upward mobility for minorities in state government. Evergreen, Watts asserts, allowed him to develop his interests in the legislative process and prepare for a significant role in government. During his last two years of school, he served in a series of off-campus internships for non-governmental agencies, monitoring bills as they affected Native Americans.

Rocky's brother Richard Watts is a vocational rehabilitation counselor for the Port Angeles branch of the State Department of Social and Health Services, where he assists Indian people and others to prepare for occupations. A class of '75 graduate, he gained experience in counseling while serving an internship in the North Thurston School District during his last year at Evergreen. "The drop-out rate among Indian students is a real problem," he says thoughtfully. "We need our own people to work with them."

Viola Lewis, mother of Rocky and Richard Watts, had thought off-and-on about going college while raising her family and working 11 years for state government. Encouraged by her own children, she took the big step in 1973 and has just completed graduation

requirements. Beginning in Native American studies, Lewis shifted to business administration in order "to prepare for working with Indian people in social health and welfare." Noting that "Indian people should be working with Indian people," Viola Lewis recounts her efforts recently in establishing the Thurston County Indian Center. For her, Evergreen allowed her the dignity of her age ("somewhere between 40 and 60") in that she could be informal and study information in line with her experience and interests. As for being on campus with her children, she claims "It was great -- I'd recommend it for any parent."