

New UO program helps Native American Oregonians go to grad school

By Rachael McDonald, KLCC; originally aired Nov. 10, 2015

A new University of Oregon program makes graduate school more accessible for members of the state's federally recognized tribes.

U of O Assistant Vice President Jason Younker is tribal liaison for the University of Oregon. Himself a member of Oregon's Coquille Tribe, he was the first in his family to get a higher education. Younker says for many Native American students, there aren't models of those who've succeeded in higher ed before.

Younker: "That's exactly what happened to me. I received and earned a Master's degree in education and I came home to Coos Bay to teach. And I was pulled aside by several members of my Tribal Council and they said well, we don't need any more teachers. This was in the 1990s when Kennewick Man was happening, when repatriation was happening. And they said, we need somebody to manage our cultural resources because we desperately needed somebody in the room. Other people were making decisions about our human remains. Other people were making decisions that we should have been involved with. And so we needed somebody in the room. They said you need to go to the University of Oregon. Actually, they 'recommended' that you go to the University of Oregon. I ended up being a cultural anthropologist and at



Courtesy photo by Rachael McDonald

Jason Younker at his office in Johnson Hall at the University of Oregon in Eugene

the same time helping my tribe build their cultural resource program, helping make it more efficient. Getting appointed to the state advisory committee on historic preservation, all of the things that my tribe intended me to do. And that's truly what the Future Stewards program is about is empowering somebody from a tribal community to come get their degree but also have them return and empower their Native community when they get back."

Younker says the Future Stewards program is a partnership between the U of O

and Native American tribes. The program offers tuition waivers for two years for those who qualify. **The first to benefit from the program is Kelly LaChance, a member of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz.** She's been studying in the U of O's Native American Teacher Education Program.

Younker: "Which is number one in the nation for Native Americans. And when she receives her Ph.D., I will be at the end of the line greeting her. I am very proud and excited for her, but also for the

Confederated Tribe of Siletz, because I know they're proud of her as well!"

Younker expects the program to benefit the larger U of O community by increasing the diversity on campus. I asked Younker to explain the pronunciation of the tribe he belongs to.

Younker: "It's kind of funny because, I like hearing the progression and we even had to train some of our tribal members to start saying it correctly. Because it'd been a hundred years people were saying it differently. But the easy way to remember is coke and then well. But you know it's funny because the name origin starts with [a word] which means eel. And so there were a lot of eel in the Coquille River. And when the Europeans came along they asked the Coos and people to the north, what do you call those people down there? And their word for eel [sounded like] sh-coke-well and so for a long time, people said sh-coq-well and then they dropped the sh and said coke-well and then the French came through and they said Coquille [coke-eel] and that stuck. But now we consider the river Coquille [coke-eel], we consider the town to be Coquille [coke-eel] but the people themselves they are the Coquille [coke-well] Indian Tribe."

Jason Younker is assistant vice president and advisor to the president on sovereignty and government-to-government relations at the University of Oregon.

More information is available at grad-school.uoregon.edu/node/2253.



Above: Bud Lane, language and traditional arts instructor, leads a feather dance demonstration during a session on Siletz culture.

Right: Youth learn about investing during a session on budgeting.

Below right: Junior Miss Siletz Felisha Howell, Seline Rilatos, Raymond Ben, Ron Butler Jr. and Tye Rilatos lead the group in song.

Below: Youth Development Director Sharla Robinson facilitates an icebreaker game to encourage participants to meet youth from other areas.



Siletz Tribal Youth Conference
Nov. 7-8, 2015
B'nai B'rith Camp
Lincoln City, Oregon

Left and below left: Courtesy photos by Kathy Kentta-Robinson

Below: Photo by Diane Rodriguez

Bottom photo: Courtesy photo from Seline Rilatos