



# OSU Offers Educational Opportunities Program

By Chris Mercier

Administrator Delphine Jackson says program is unknown, needs a higher profile among Natives.



"We're a minority among minorities," said Delphine Jackson rather calmly of Native Americans.

Indeed she is right. Native Americans form a smaller group than any other ethnicity in the United States. And quite contrary to popular (and misguided) belief, the eruption of casinos across the American landscape, while offering solutions to many of the Tribes' financial problems, has done little to mend the educational woes that abound in Native communities.

Jackson grew up in Klamath Falls, a member of the Modoc Tribe, and knows firsthand that Natives are fighting an uphill battle to improve their situation, especially in the pursuit of education. Jackson decided to make a career out of that battle and that is why she attended the University of Oregon. That is why she studied hard and achieved her doctorate in Education. And that is why six years ago she joined the team with the Educational Opportunities program (EOP) at Oregon State University (OSU).

As an Academic Coordinator for the EOP the past six years, Jackson has transcended her role as a recruiter for nontraditional students. After a visit to the EOP program on OSU's campus it becomes obvious that Jackson is also a mentor, and more importantly, a friend.

Yet, she is not alone, a quick view of the program reveals that every member of the EOP faculty shares Jackson's convictions that college and perhaps higher education in general is not as accessible to underprivileged students as it should be. To remedy that is the mission of the program.

The EOP was started more than 30 years ago, in 1969. The intent of those who founded the program was to attract more "nontraditional" students to OSU. The category of "nontraditional" encompassed students of color, older than average students, students with disabilities, single parents, low-income students and students from isolated, rural areas. That inaugural year saw 48 students take advantage of EOP chances, and the number has blossomed handsomely to well over 700 students today. More than 1,600 EOP students have graduated since its first year into a myriad of professions — law, social work, teaching, counseling and even professional sports. Former Los Angeles Laker Forward A.C. Green of the National Basketball Association and Seattle Seahawks Safety Reggie Tongue of the National Football League (both of whom were student-athletes at OSU) have also participated in the EOP program.

Recruiting students, Jackson said, is only one part of what the EOP does. The heart of the program lies in its ability to get students to stay, which very often presents a much greater challenge than simply recruiting them.

"For many students, especially those who hadn't planned on coming to college, their initial experience here on campus in the academic environment can be overwhelming," Jackson said. "And that is pretty scary for the students who needed help just through the admissions process."

But that is essentially where the EOP steps in, during the "process" of attending college. The program offers numerous services for all the bumps and grinds that can intimidate newcomers. They provide orientation for all new students. Academic, personal and financial aid advising are available as well as courses to offset deficiencies in reading, writing and math. Fellow upperclassmen often

provide tutoring. EOP students considering graduate school are helped with assistance in finding jobs, internships and workshops. Resume and cover letter writing classes are also offered.

On campus, the program that occupies the third level of Waldo Hall also provides facilities such as a computer lab, writing labs, math labs and the offices of the faculty. All of who appear to maintain an open-door policy for virtually anyone.

The faculty, to give due credit, may be the biggest draw of the program.

Jackson became part of the crew in 1994, yet compared to most of her co-workers, she is still a rookie. Most of her peers have been part of the EOP for well over a decade, and some of them approaching the 30-year mark. As Jackson can attest, there may not be a more cohesive, earnest, hard-working and devoted group on campus.

And their legacy is a continual one.

This year, OSU and EOP began to represent the Ronald E. McNair Scholars program. McNair was an African-American Astronaut who had a PhD in Physics. He came from a low-income background and overcame many obstacles on his way to success. Sadly, he was part of the crew of the

of authority. As OSU's Coordinator for the Indian Education Office, she has dealt with hundreds of Native American students in the EOP and out of it. While many Native students may possess the requisite ambitions and eagerness to learn they are nonetheless quite unprepared to enter the demanding abode of higher education.

"Lack of preparedness is without a doubt one of the biggest deterrents for Native American students," she said.

One problem White Eyes points to is the disparity of education between urban high schools and rural. She and Jackson do quite a bit of recruiting and often target Native students from the more rural parts of the state, often on reservations.

"The chemistry you learn in some small-town high school in rural Oregon is going to be a lot less advanced than what you would learn in a Portland-area high school," White Eyes said.

That is why the EOP helps students get on par with their peers. White Eyes claimed that OSU is perhaps the best college in the state for Native Americans.

"OSU is a great place for Indian students," she said. "We offer so many activities, we have a spring pow-wow, a longhouse..."

"And we offer lots of support," she added.

Jackson offers a tour of the longhouse, which is technically not a part of the EOP. But she does this to illustrate once again the diversity of services extended to students. The longhouse is roughly 70 feet by 20 feet, and the interior is cozy. The building often serves as a meeting place for various Native American groups. It also has couches, a stereo, CD player, a large TV and VCR, assorted Native artwork along the walls and throughout, and other amenities that give the place a homey feel and are conducive to just relaxing and hanging out.

With all this less than 50 miles away, Jackson still can't quite understand why so few Grand Ronders have made the journey down Highway 99 to partake of OSU's rare opportunity. No single explanation seems to work. Jackson sees the Tribe, however, as one of the great success stories among Native Americans.

Jackson has been to Grand Ronde a few times, usually to attend the pow-wow when she likes to dress down and take part in the ceremonies. Last October she drove in to meet with Tribal Council, and ask them what they saw in the future of the Tribe. To sum it up in one word — "ambition."

Her visit hasn't been forgotten.

"People like her are good," said Tribal Council Chair Kathryn Harrison. "They set an example for us all."

*Tribal member Shonn Leno attended OSU from 1996 through 1998 and encountered Delphine Jackson soon after his arrival on campus...*

"She (Delphine) assisted me with getting orientated down there. She showed me who to talk to get through what I needed. She helped me out tremendously. Because it was a new school to me, I had no idea were to go, what to do. She was very helpful in showing me the ropes down there and showing how the EOP program works. It (the EOP program) was more one-on-one coverage with students and it made things easier for me coming from a small community. It made it less intimidating. She was very helpful and a very sweet lady. She helped me a lot."

~ Shonn Leno

Space Shuttle Challenger that exploded in 1986 after takeoff, killing all aboard.

The McNair Scholars program is federally funded and was developed to provide academic preparation for low-income and first-generation students, many of them underrepresented with the ultimate goal of sending them on to graduate school.

Jackson is proud of the program and glows with excitement when discussing it and giving a tour. But strangely, she expresses disappointment in one aspect.

"We're successful," she said. "But we're unknown among Indian people."

A glaring statistic from the EOP 2000 Annual backs Jackson's claim. Of the 1,600 graduates during the program's three decades of existence, only 58 have been Native Americans.

Why the disparity? Jackson has her theories.

"Parents just don't develop those expectations for their kids," she said.

Jackson speaks from personal experience. She cited her grandfather as a catalyst in her decision to go to college.

"My grandfather believed in education," she said. "And he never passed up a chance to remind me of that."

Jackson, however, sees herself as an exception rather than a norm. She is lucky to have had someone impress upon her the value of education.

One of Jackson's compatriots, Allison Davis White Eyes, can't help but back her up.

"Education is not an ingrained value among Native Americans," she said.

Like Jackson, White Eyes can speak with an air



Education Opportunities Program Administrator Delphine Jackson (left) of Oregon State University and Grand Ronde Tribal Chair Kathryn Harrison.

Photo by Brent Merrill