

Bridging the Gap in Breast Cancer Prevention for American Indian Women in Missouri

by Caitlin Donald

My name is Caitlin Donald, and I am in my second year of the Master's of Social Work program at Washington University in St. Louis. I come from the Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma and I am an enrolled member of the Osage Nation. Additionally, my mother is of German descent. I grew up in a biracial and bicultural household, so I have always believed that my role professionally and personally is that of a cultural liaison. As a bicultural person I value cultural literacy as a way to foster a greater sense of community and to facilitate conflict resolution and understanding. In essence, my bicultural upbringing has led me into social work practice.

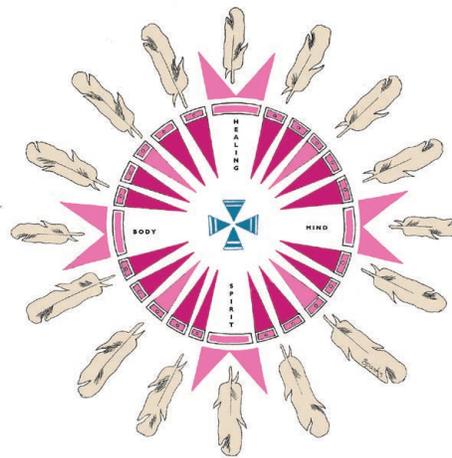
During my second semester in graduate school, I served as a practicum student in building a relationship-centered collaboration for breast cancer prevention for American Indian women in Missouri. This program was born from the partnership between the Kathryn M. Buder Center for American Indian Studies at Washington University in St. Louis, and the Program for the Elimination of Cancer Disparities (PECaD). PECaD is a partnership between several medical institutions in the St. Louis area. The mission of PECaD is to eliminate regional cancer disparities by working with underrepresented communities and the organizations that serve them. PECaD began working with the Buder Center for American Indian Studies in an effort to gain awareness and address the service need of American Indians in the region.



Caitlin Donald

Throughout my internship, I collaborated with PECaD to station a mobile mammography van at the annual Washington University Pow Wow, to increase the availability of prevention services for American Indian women. The program provided mammograms to women over 40 years of age who reside in Missouri. Regardless of insurance status, the mammogram was provided at no cost to the recipients. The program also provided local and national cancer support resources and preventative health materials. The medical team from PECaD reviewed the materials for accuracy. They were then screened for cultural appropriateness, and the content was adjusted to better serve American Indian women. Finally, a local American Indian artist created a culturally specific logo for all of the materials. Another local American Indian artist created feather pins to distribute to all women who received services at the van.

In addition to the van, I worked with American Indian women to create cultural literacy training for the medical practitioners



Project logo by American Indian artist Tina Sparks, Missouri

involved. The training facilitated an awareness of the local American Indian community while also providing insight into American Indian worldviews, health disparities, and notions of wellness. It also exposed the ways in which existing prevention services, policies, and procedures create barriers for American Indians.

There were many challenges while developing this program. Strict medical policies prevented some of our recommendations of cultural adjustments to services provided from being implemented. Cultural misunderstandings arose within planning meetings. We struggled in finding current research on cancer in American Indian communities. It was important for me to recognize throughout this project that every stakeholder came into the project with a different set of values and priorities. I considered this when issues arose, and it helped me to act professionally and work toward a mutually beneficial solution. I had to continue to remind myself and others that no matter what the end result, this project would be an innovative step forward in prevention services for American Indian women. In the end, we were

So many women were walking around the pow wow arena with pink feathers pinned to their shirts and prevention materials in their hands.

able to reach a final product that met most of the expectations for everyone involved, and despite challenges, everything went as planned.

With just four hours to complete all of the scheduled mammograms, the medical screeners were booked from start to finish. So many women were walking around the pow wow arena with pink feathers pinned to their shirts and prevention materials in their hands. Throughout the pow-wow, the breast cancer prevention

Continued on page 26



Kathryn M. Buder Center for American Indian Studies

GEORGE WARREN BROWN
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

The Buder Center for American Indian Studies is a premier graduate program in Social Work. We are committed to preparing and supporting future American Indian leaders to practice in tribal and urban settings, making significant contributions to health, wellness, and the sustained future of Indian Country



The Buder Center's Program:

- Provides opportunities for full scholarships to American Indian/Alaska Natives from the Kathryn M. Buder Charitable Foundation
- Offers a flexible curriculum that allows you to customize your course of study
- Presents course work focused on American Indian culture and values
- Assists with securing your practicum through our established network of sites within American Indian communities
- Provides assistance in career and professional development
- Offers dual degree programs with architecture, business, law, divinity, and public health



Molly Tovar, Director One Brookings Drive Campus Box 1196, St. Louis, MO 63130

E-mail: bcais@wustl.edu Phone: (314) 935-4510 Fax: (314) 935-8464 Website: <http://buder.wustl.edu>



Washington University in St. Louis

Continued from page 15

project maintained a positive and welcoming presence, inciting interest among Native and non-Native guests.

One of the most important accomplishments of this project was the relationships that were built over its course. Prior to this experience, the Buder Center had never partnered with PECaD. This was also the first time PECaD had considered working with the American Indian community. This project was the first of its kind and has created a strategic partnership that will last for many years. It will provide future students with opportunities to work on health-related projects with medical institutions and American Indian people. The work that was completed with this project has exposed the service need of American Indian women, which has substantial implications for American Indians in Missouri.

I first began the project in the abstract: researching, writing, and program planning. Over the project's course, however, it became more personal. Five hundred miles away my relative was diagnosed with late stage cancer, and another woman involved with this project discovered her mother was facing a breast cancer diagnosis.

I then realized that with every person diagnosed with cancer, an entire family is affected. With every woman screened at this event, the cancer could be caught early, and an entire family would be spared the anguish that I and this other woman were experiencing.

After only two semesters of graduate school, I have already seen the ways in which my developing competencies in social work practice have complemented my passion for cultural literacy, making me a much more effective practitioner. Just as this breast cancer prevention program will continue to be implemented at many pow wows to come, I will continue to benefit from this experience in my role as a cultural liaison for American Indian communities across the country. I know that this work is not easy, but advocating for American Indians is something that I was meant to do. ♦

Caitlin M. Donald is from the Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma and is an enrolled member of the Osage Nation. She is a Kathryn M. Buder Scholar from the George Warren Brown School of Social Work at Washington University in St. Louis.



Master of Public Administration
Tribal Governance Concentration

Provides current and future tribal leaders and administrators with the knowledge and skills needed to work effectively in Indian Country

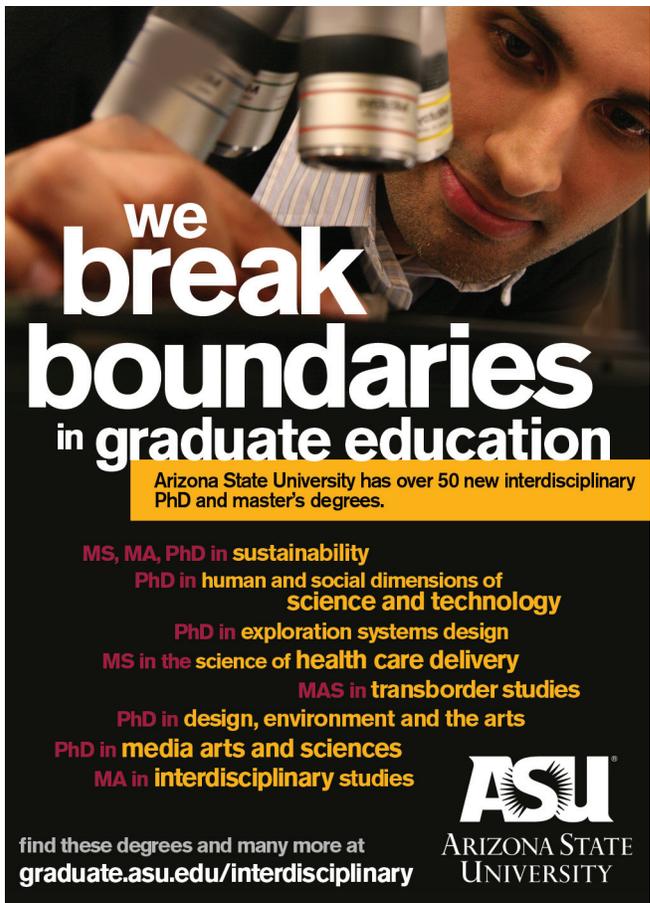
Focus on critical tribal issues such as health, education, land use, economic development, cultural preservation, self-determination, intergovernmental relations and more

THE PATH TO SOVEREIGNTY

www.evergreen.edu/mpa/tribal
(360) 867-6202

EVERGREEN
THE EVERGREEN STATE COLLEGE
OLYMPIA, WASHINGTON

*U.S. News & World Report ranks
Evergreen as a top public affairs school*



**we
break
boundaries
in graduate education**

Arizona State University has over 50 new interdisciplinary PhD and master's degrees.

- MS, MA, PhD in sustainability
- PhD in human and social dimensions of science and technology
- PhD in exploration systems design
- MS in the science of health care delivery
- MAS in transborder studies
- PhD in design, environment and the arts
- PhD in media arts and sciences
- MA in interdisciplinary studies

find these degrees and many more at
graduate.asu.edu/interdisciplinary

ASU
ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY