

American Indian Ancestral Cuisine

How student driven efforts have brought food sovereignty to Washington University in St. Louis

by Miquela Taffa

In 2013, a team of American Indian Masters of Social Work and Public Health (MSW/MPH) graduate students, at Washington University in St. Louis, recognized that although the university had a significant number of Native students, there was a distinct lack of accessibility to ancestral foods on campus. From this realization, the Hunt. Fish. Gather. project was conceived. Hunt. Fish. Gather. is a collaboration between the Buder Center for American Indian Studies – a graduate research center dedicated to the support of American Indian MSW students, Bon Appetit with Washington University Dining Services and Chef Nephi Craig – an Apache/Navajo chef. The vision of the project was simple: how do we bring ancestral cuisine to Washington University’s (WashU) campus?



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disparities in Indian Country, through public policy and programming, and the Brown School is the top school of social work in the United States and listed a myriad of

Food is a center point of culture, discussion and enjoyment.

I joined the WashU community in the fall of 2014. As an American Indian woman from the Southwest, who relocated to St. Louis, I was very aware of the lack of accessibility to American Indian food staples in Missouri, a state where no reservations exist. The concept of the project and its potential impact was inspirational to me. Food is a center point of culture, discussion and enjoyment. Bringing together people of different tribes, ethnicities and even nationalities, over a plate of Three Sisters Salad, was an opportunity: to connect, to discuss indigenous spaces within academia and to educate about Native concepts of health and wellbeing. But, most importantly, the project symbolized the empowerment and success of Native students at a predominantly white institution.

I was thrilled to receive an acceptance to WashU because of the educational and extracurricular resources the Brown School of Social Work has to offer. I knew that I wanted to make significant impacts on health

classes that would enhance my professional abilities. The true draw of the program, however, was the Buder Center for American Indian Studies. Having gone to other predominantly white institutions, I knew that I needed a center that would support me culturally, as well as educationally, as I confronted the difficult challenge of attaining my Masters.

The Buder Center has not only been a great support resource, but has given me the tools and encouragement necessary in order to create and develop programs within the University. When I joined the Hunt. Fish. Gather. Team, in the fall of 2014, the project had already had one successful year. The students who created the project had graduated with the knowledge that they had provided the Chefs of Washington University’s Dining Services ancestral recipes and raised awareness about what counts as truly traditional American Indian foods on campus. Through the continuation of the project into the second

and third year, I have been able to see the project flourish: academically, professionally and as an indoctrinated part of campus policy.

At the culmination of Hunt. Fish. Gather.'s third year, the project has resulted in not only an increase in the accessibility of traditional American Indian foods across campus, but in increased awareness of what traditional American Indian foods are nationwide. Since its inauguration, Washington University has incorporated ancestral foods into their regular menus. American Indian dishes are available as cold packed salads at all dining and food pick-up services, at Ibbey's (the fine dining restaurant on campus), as a catering service option across campus and the Brown School's cafeteria, "Grounds for Change," features a weekly American Indian dish. Beyond the Washington University Campus, the project has been accepted at multiple conferences nationwide has been featured in such publications as the fall 2016 edition of Social Impact Magazine and was also published by the Center of Disease Control in their Food Sovereignty Compendium, Part IV.



Hunt. Fish. Gather. cooking demonstration

As a student, seeing the exponential growth and success of the program has been exciting and rewarding. As a Native student at a predominantly white institution, experiencing the success and legitimacy of American Indian cuisine and concepts of health and wellbeing has been awe-inspiring. It can often be difficult to work with

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Social Workers Advancing through Grounded Education (SAGE): Building Capacity for Mental and Behavioral Health in Indian Country

The SAGE project will recruit, train, and financially support Native and non-Native students as they complete 360 hours of their concentration practica. SAGE students are awarded paid practicums and will complete their field education either in American Indian/Alaska Native Country or with American Indian populations, providing students with the necessary experience to transition into employment in Indian Country.



PRACTICUM REQUIREMENTS:

- Practicum should focus on Mental/Behavioral Health;
- Practicum should focus on working with either at-risk children, at-risk adolescents or at-risk transitional age youth;
- Practicum must take place either in American Indian country or with American Indian/Alaska Native populations;
- Students must participate in Center for Violence & Injury Prevention events;
- Must be a student at Washington University's Brown School & a US Citizen

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- To be eligible for the SAGE grant, students must take two courses from the American Indian Track and two courses from Mental Health or Violence Prevention/ Intervention Track

To request an application or for additional information, contact Molly Tovar, Director of the Kathryn M. Buder Center for American Indian Studies and Professor of Practice at 314-935-7767 or mtovar@wustl.edu.
Download an application at buder.wustl.edu/SAGEproject



Washington University in St. Louis