

Policy Memo

**Investing in Belonging: Personal Approaches to Increasing
Native American Enrollment at Washington State Institutions**

To: The Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity Advancement Team

From: Autumn Forespring

Date: March 19, 2024

RE: Investing in Belonging: A Multi-Day Workshop for Native American Students
Considering College

Executive Summary:

Currently, American Indian students are the least likely demographic to apply to and enroll in public 4-year institutions like the University of Washington (UW). While the UW offers programs specifically designed to support Native students, the number of enrolled students remains stagnant. This memo proposes a new initiative to address this disparity: a multi-day, overnight campus visit program specifically for Native American students in 11th grade. This program aims to create a sense of belonging at the UW before application season begins, increasing enrollment rates.

Current Situation:

- At the University of Washington, the percentage of Native American students is 0.397% (Data USA, 2021).
- The Native American community currently offers various support programs for prospective college students.

Problem:

Despite existing support programs, the number of Native American students attending UW remains static.

Goal:

Significantly increase the enrollment of Native American students at the UW and other public universities in Washington State.

Analysis:

Current recruitment efforts for Native students may not be addressing the core issue. Focusing solely on showcasing UW's prestige might not resonate with students who have concerns about cultural fit and affordability.

Solution:

This memo proposes a multi-day, overnight workshop program specifically designed for Native American students in 11th grade. This program will:

- **Shift the focus:** Move away from a promotional approach and focus on demystifying college life and building a sense of belonging.
- **Direct Engagement:** Provide a platform for open conversations about the realities of college life, including financial aid, academic expectations, and cultural support systems at UW.
- **Early Exposure:** Allowing students to experience the UW campus firsthand can combat the perception that the university is unattainable.

Benefits:

- Increased enrollment of Native American students at UW and other public universities in Washington State.
- Improved retention rates for enrolled Native American students through fostering a sense of belonging from the start.
- A diverse and inclusive student body that enriches the educational experience for all students.

Call to Action:

We urge you to invest in this multi-day workshop program to create a pathway for talented and motivated Native American students for our public universities. This investment is not just in education, but in creating a more equitable future for Washington State.

Next Steps:

We propose piloting this program with a small cohort of students in Fall 2024. Based on the program's success, we can advocate for wider implementation across public universities in Washington State.

Bibliography:

- 1) USA, D. (2021). *University of Washington-Seattle Campus Enrollment*. Data USA.
<https://datausa.io/profile/university/university-of-washington-seattle-campus#:~:text=Enrollment%20by%20Race%20%26%20Ethnicity&text=4%2C295%20enrolled%20students-,The%20enrolled%20student%20population%20at%20University%20of%20Washington%2DSeattle%20Campus,Hawaiian%20or%20Other%20Pacific%20Islanders.>

