

My name is Cammi Wittwer. I am Chehalis Native and reside on the outskirts of the Chehalis Indian Reservation. While growing up, I always had a hard time with education. I never could figure it out until I enrolled in NWIC. You see, when I was in high school, I would often challenge the teachers of the non-Indian school I went to about what happened to the Indians? Questioning the events that led to the colonization of Indian people and was always met with detention or asked to leave the classroom until I could act appropriately. I was made to feel that wanting to understand where I came from and how we got to be this way was wrong. So needless to say, extended education didn't stick well with me once I graduated high school. I attempted a university and was met with the same minded answers. I dropped out shortly after starting.

As time goes on, I found myself working for Tribal enterprises, having a deep connection to what it meant to be tribal and work for an enterprise that my tribe owned. I took a deep passion with being a successful tribal member and strived to lead others like me to get up and work for our people. As I grew older and my career path became more in depth, I needed to obtain a degree in order to move forward. Ugh the education piece again. I really struggled with education the first time and was not thrilled to have to go back to school to get a piece of paper to show people that I knew how to be successful. I then enrolled in NWIC. From the first class, my life has changed. I am engaged to my people on a whole new level than before.

Growing up I was always told by my elders to support my people and to be successful for my tribe. It wasn't until NWIC opened my eyes to what that actually meant that I now see how I need to do that. I have always cooked in the kitchen for events, participated in the programs that my tribe has held and enrolled my children into learning our ways. It wasn't until now, that

I am beginning to understand the deep connection that we as a people have lost in the colonization process.

I would like to be a leader for my tribe and would be honored to be elected into tribal council so that I can bring the knowledge of what I am learning in my classes at NWIC into the modern day society that has been created through colonization for us to live in. I would like to be the voice that my people can confidently listen too. Once I have achieved my bachelors degree, the next steps would be for me to get my Masters of Public Administration from Evergreen College.

Evergreen will be able to fill in the gaps of my learnings from NWIC to be able to allow my mind to think and consider multiple factors of Tribal relations as I work in the enterprises of my Tribe. Learning how to have the elevated thinking and putting my own thoughts into action is what I am hoping to achieve through this MPA program.

When I was first challenged with the idea of expanding my education further, Evergreen was first choice. Not only was it because of the proximity to my home, but because the amazing and talented people of all diverse backgrounds that I have met from Evergreen in these past few years. The teachings are aligned with what I am craving to learn and the classes will be taught at just the right pace for me to learn.

I hope by the end of my classes here, I am more aware of the opportunities available for tribes and tribal people, so I can continue to grow my education no longer for just a piece of paper, but for a clearer picture and a deeper understand of who we are and how we got to here and where do we go now as a people.