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So You Think You Hired an American Indian

Abstract

This session will focus on the importance of ethnic identity as it pertains to American Indians. Most predominantly white institutions of higher education do not verify the self-reported ethnicity of faculty, staff or students. Most tribally controlled institutions require documentation through enrollment/other proof How do universities verify Indian identity?

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"Ethnic fraud" is a term and an issue that is concerned with the accurate and real identification of race by persons who are applying at universities for positions on the faculty and staff, for admissions into special programs and for scholarship consideration. It involves not only the person who makes the false statement but those who interview, take the word and hire those individuals. While in most cases these university officials do not knowingly commit fraud but become party to it by not attempting to verify the authenticity of such statements. It becomes a conspiracy by negligence between the applicant and the institution, a twist on the phrase: "don't ask, don't tell." If the institution does not ask for documentation then it is allowing the fraud to go on. Both the institution and the individual benefit from this arrangement: the institution gets diversity credit and satisfies the affirmative action office and the individual has a better chance to get the job or scholarship, etc. that s/he is seeking.

A reporter for the Detroit News, Paige St. Johns "interviewed students who admitted they lied or at least embellished the truth by merely checking a box indicating they were American Indian in order to gain admission to colleges and universities in some cases and to obtain lucrative scholarships and jobs in other cases. They freely admitted that the reason they did so was to enhance their chances to obtain a scholarship that was set aside for American Indian students. The universities to whom these students lied made no attempt to verify the information given. "

This panel will discuss the implications of these acts and their impact on the American Indians for which they were established, the ethics and legal implications of such practices. Also, some guidelines for universities to use as a means to get at the issue. In 1993 the Association of American Indian and Alaska Native Professors developed some recommendations for institutions to use to help them insure and affirm Native Americans in the hiring process. These recommendations will be discussed as well as the results of a survey comparing predominately white institution's practices in hiring with American Indian institutions and tribal colleges. Most American Indian and tribal colleges have a verification form that applicants to their institutions have to complete which asks for

enrollment numbers, etc. It has been noted that American Indian individuals who have verification (i.e. Enrollment Card and/ or other documentation) are usually very willing to provide them, because they are aware of their importance.

Why is this such a big deal and why is it relevant to American Indians: a historical perspective will be presented to draw out the relationship between the Native people and the federal government. Many times it is the student or individual who needs it the most that is eliminated from consideration when institutions do not do their homework. The perspective from a college administrator will be discussed in terms of how universities can respond to such applicant. Who is and is not Indian will become more important as the economy gets tighter, the new racial categories of bi-racial and multi-racial become more prominent and people believe that there is financial gain to be achieved by claiming to be American Indian.

Presenters

David Cornsilk is an enrolled member of the Cherokee Nation who lives in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. He is a genealogist and has a Bachelor of Science Degree from Northeastern Oklahoma State. He is a leading Cherokee nationalist today. From 1989-1994, David was Admissions Counselor for Bacone College in Bacone, Oklahoma. He then served the Tahlequah Public Schools, working with Curriculum and youth groups from 1994-2000. He also held a voluntary position as Managing Editor for the Cherokee Advocate, the only non-tribally controlled newspaper in the community. He was also heavily involved in the passage of the Indian Arts and Crafts Act in 1990. This act made it illegal for non-Indian artist to identify his/her art as "Indian art" unless they show proof of tribal enrollment. He spends his life trying to answer the question: What is an Indian? He is not the Cherokee Nation Registration Specialist. The Dawes Act established lists of members; these lists are still used today. Any person who has an ancestor on the Dawes roles can be accepted into the tribe, "though all it takes is one drop of blood."

Dean Flechs is an enrolled tribal member of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma. He holds a bachelor's degree in Anthropology and a master's degree in Modern Language and Literatures from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL). He has worked in admissions and recruiting at UNL, Bacone College in Oklahoma, Southwest Missouri State University and was an administrative fellow with the Native American Program at Harvard University in Massachusetts. In the late 1980's, Dean was the first Native American in Nebraska to be named a Fulbright Scholar. While at UNL, Dean co-authored (with Helen Longsoldier) a proposal to grant enrolled members of twenty-five tribes historically tied to Nebraska in-state status for tuition and admissions consideration. He is the current president of the Nebraska Indian Education Association and a co-advisor for the Native Heartland Chapter of the American Indians in Science and Engineering Society (AISES) in Omaha. Dean is a Vietnam-era veteran and currently works as the Associate Director and Special Assistant to the Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs of the Office of Student Equity & Multicultural Affairs at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha

Mary Lee Jones is an enrolled member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe. She has been an advocate for Native Americans for 30 years. She is presently employed as a Native American Cultural Consultant with the Army Corps of Engineers where she assists in the

development and carrying out tribal consultation for projects that impact the 27 Missouri River Basin Tribes in North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Nebraska, Wyoming, Kansas, and Iowa. She has held the following positions: Director of Youth & Family Services for the Indian Center in Lincoln, Nebraska; Administrator for the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribal Health Department; Native American Program Specialist for the American Friends Service Committee. She has owned her own consulting business, Johns & Associates where she completed over 49 projects for tribal governments, tribal organizations, non-profit organizations, city, state and federal agencies. She is a member of the Nebraska Humanities Council Speakers Bureau and is a Cultural Consultant to the Nebraska Historical Society. She has a B.S. degree in Sociology and a B.A. degree in Human Services and Consulting.

Helen Long Soldier is an enrolled member of the Sicangu (Rosebud) Lakota Nation. She has a Bachelor's Degree in Secondary Education from Wayne State College and a Master's Degree in Guidance and Counseling, specializing in College Student Personnel from the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Helen currently serves as an Education Specialist for the Minority Assistance Program of Multicultural Affairs at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where she concentrates on working with and for Native American Indian students. Her responsibilities focus mainly on retention as well as recruitment of American Indian Students. Helen is past president of Nebraska Indian Education Association, National Indian Counselor's Association, served as advisor to Native American student organization-UNITE, Chair of the Board of Director's of the Lincoln Indian Center in Lincoln, Nebraska and a member of the University NAGPRA (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act). Currently she is a member of the State of Nebraska Indian Education Advisory Council working at the state level to improve Indian Education. Tribal Partnership Initiative, which consists of members from tribal groups and the university to do collaborative work on improving the quality of life for tribal members, she chairs the sub-committee on Recruitment and Retention. Previous accomplishments with which she was involved are: Coauthored with Dean Flechs a proposal to grant enrolled members of twenty-five tribes historically tied to Nebraska in-state tuition. Worked to help establish the Heritage Scholarships at UNL, for Native students entering either as freshmen or transfer students. Recognition and awards; Change Agent of the Year Citation 1981, Regent's Kudos Award-January 1992, Native American Woman of the Year, Nebraska Women of Color-1992, Tribute to Women Award, YWCA-1994, Recognition for Contribution to Students-1995.