

# Increasing Tohono O’odham Enrollment at UArizona

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What started as an idea in the middle of summer 2018, A Student’s Journey (ASJ), swiftly turned into a full comprehensive experience bridging two institutions together for the success of Native American students, specifically those from the Tohono O’odham Nation. At the time of its proposal, the University of Arizona had minimal student enrollment that represented the Tohono O’odham Nation. Tohono O’odham Community College (TOCC), at the same time, was seeking a stronger partnership from UArizona; one that was focused on transfer, student success, empowerment, and incorporation of career development. Naturally, a robust partnership formed between TOCC and the Southwest Environmental Health Sciences Center (SWEHSC) within the College of Pharmacy at UArizona. Both partners supported the idea of fulfilling a gap of representation while pursuing a streamlined approach to institutionalizing its work.

ASJ has assembled a comprehensive team from TOCC and SWEHSC to embark on establishing a clear path from tribal college to university. Simultaneously, this project has students from TOCC fully engaged in addressing topics in environmental and social justice while preparing for future careers within the Tohono O’odham Nation. A

three-year project (\$600,000 award) funded by the Agnese Nelms Haury Program will support three cohorts of students (60 total) to help develop: knowledge about environmental and social justice, skills and confidence to pursue bachelor’s degrees that are related to environmental impact, and work experience in Tribal departments.

Prior to the Pandemic of 2020, it was intended for TOCC students to have a unique opportunity to live at UArizona campus for 5-weeks, earn 3 units of college credit, and have a part-time work experience with a UArizona faculty member in their area of interest. Initially, during the 5-week stay, students would also have access to all campus resources such as the recreation center, libraries, academic advising, financial and much more. However, in summer 2020, ASJ offered the summer portion of its program virtually and enrolled students in PCOL 205, a new course designed specifically for the program. The course covered critical environmental health and social justice topics while incorporating guest speakers, guest lectures, home-experiments from UArizona graduate students, and life-skills styled workshops.

As for the fall portion of the program, it was intended for TOCC students to receive an internship placement on the Tohono O’odham Nation and apply their knowledge and skills from the summer to their fall practicum. Due to the pandemic, tribal departments remained closed and the program pursued other potential partnerships to coordinate student internship opportunities. While this has been an ongoing challenge, the staff is optimistic about the opportunities that will become available in the Pima County community for our students to fulfill their internship.



Orientation for the inaugural cohort of ASJ

ASJ will continue to connect and coordinate with other efforts at UArizona to improve the University's work on Native American student recruitment and retention as prioritized in the University's new strategic plan. What has made this effort unique is the strong and respectable integration approach that is being formulated around Native experiences, specifically that of the O'odham.

*"These workshops have helped me feel more comfortable in my own skin and better prepared on how to respond to other people's questions. I am looking forward to seeing what we all can learn as a group and what we can all contribute to and for each other on this journey."*

-Jamie Siqueiros (Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander), First Year

*"I feel more confident in myself when looking towards this new upcoming semester at a new college. The guests we've had in our Zoom meetings have all been very helpful and I am now having a better understanding of the transition to a university. Being from a native community where the native people get underestimated, I want to be that change and help others be that change."*

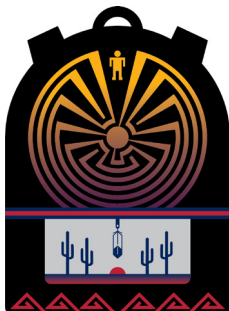
-Amanda Miguel (Tohono O'odham), Second Year

*"Moving forward as an Indigenous, queer, woman it makes me want to be more vocal. To represent not only my tribe, but the other communities I fall under. And to uplift the voices of my fellow minority kin to keep fighting the good fight and to keep moving forward despite the systems of oppression we find ourselves surviving through."*

-Pachynne Ignacio (Tohono O'odham), First Year

*"It was a privilege to hear from one of our own people to bring awareness about our water and how global temperature is going to keep rising over the years. We, as the next generation, need to be aware of these current situations that are affecting all of us, especially in our communities."*

- Ethan Antone (Tohono O'odham), First Year



For more information visit:  
<https://tocc.edu/university-of-arizona/>

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