

This Is VOICE at UArizona

By: Jordania Livingston



Members of VOICE

Standing (left-right): Rani Yamutewa (Zuni), Felisia Tagaban (Diné), Tony Viola IV (Pascua Yaqui), Trinity Norris (Tohono O'odham), Amanda Cheromiah, Ph.D., (Laguna Pueblo), Mia Armstrong (Diné, White Mountain Apache, Yaqui, Hopi)

Kneeling (left-right): Joshua Billy (Diné), Joshua Sandoval (Diné)

Voices of Indigenous Concerns in Education (VOICE) is a student organization that was formed in November 2019, in response to a need for improving services and increasing support for Native Wildcats at the University of Arizona. Since then, VOICE has been sharing the narratives and experiences of Indigenous on campus to raise awareness and to create change through in-person and social media engagement."

Two graduate members of VOICE are Native SOAR Director, Dr. Amanda Cheromiah (Laguna Pueblo) Ph.D., Higher Education, and Graduate Assistant Felisia Tagaban (Diné/Filipino/Tlingit) M.A., Higher Education and doctoral student. Shortly after UArizona transitioned to online only in Spring 2020, Dr. Cheromiah and Ms. Tagaban shifted gears to focus on the educational needs of Indigenous educators, students and communities. They created an online community called Indigenous Educators

Unite (IEU). IEU's goal is to raise awareness of the need of resources during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a result of VOICE's advocacy and the collective support of campus partners and allies, Dr. Cheromiah and Ms. Tagaban submitted a funding proposal to the Provost Office for a director, a program coordinator, and an operations budget for the Native SOAR program. The office approved the director position and the budget, citing austerity due to the pandemic as a reason for not approving the original proposal. Although Native SOAR received funding and is one of many Native-serving programs on the UArizona campus, VOICE continues to advocate for systemic change.

For environmental stewardship, both Dr. Cheromiah and Ms. Tagaban provide perspective through being current students and cultivating Native SOAR student's skills. For Dr. Cheromiah, VOICE, and Native SOAR, IEU are avenues to give back. The student led organizations, to Ms. Tagaban, are very personal. Throughout her undergraduate years, she didn't feel supported nor prepared for student life. With VOICE, Native SOAR and IEU, she's able to have a mentorship component that she didn't have in her time as an undergrad. As mentors and concurrent students, Dr. Cheromiah and Ms. Tagaban value the opportunity to uplift others.

Dr. Cheromiah adds, "It's important to recognize how [the work] morphs during the COVID-19 era. It's going to be interesting and fascinating to see how Indian Country will evolve with the pandemic occurring." Through sharing narratives and advocating for issues, Ms. Tagaban concludes: "it is the right thing to do when looking at disparities, a broken system, you can't ignore that".



Native SOAR students and instructors interacted with President Robbins during an in-class student outreach activity.