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Native BYU: Remembering Living Histories

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Maren Loveland, Dr. Michael Taylor, English Department

In collaboration with BYU's recently founded Native American Alumni Association, BYU's Special Collections, and Diné historian and BYU alumna, Farina King (Northeastern State University), the purpose of this project is to create a permanent physical and digital collection that documents the extensive and diverse history of BYU's Native American students. Though the scope of this project was indeed quite large, through the ORCA grant, I was able to lay the groundwork for successive generations of student researchers to eventually complete this vital project.

Because BYU once had the highest population of Native American students in the United States, I am extremely passionate about researching the histories of these students and preserving them through the creation of a formal collection. However, as the Church has focused more on global initiatives, the percentage of Native American students has slowly diminished. Today, Native alumni and current BYU students consistently report feeling underrepresented, forgotten, and ignored. This project has been vital in rebuilding a relationship between BYU and its current and former Native American students. Through the documentation of the rich culture and history of Native American experiences at BYU, which I have helped to accumulate over the past year, this project will help our Native American community feel respected and recognized as we collaborate to create a historical collection of artifacts within BYU's Special Collections as well as an accessible digital collection.

With the generous grant money I was awarded, I was able to work extensively with the BYU Native American Alumni Association. I began by working with Bryan Jansen and Elias Gold to connect with Native American alumni of the Provo area and collect a group of individuals who would be ready to be interviewed to retain their oral histories of their experiences at BYU. I attended an educational training meeting focusing on how to approach Native American alumni interviewees with respect and a consideration of their oftentimes difficult histories. This was an extremely enlightening opportunity for me to learn about the Native American culture in my community and to give nuance and expertise to my project.

A central aspect of the project was creating a foundation of resources of research to draw from as the digital and physical collections are built over time. I accomplished this by using the extensive expertise of many of the librarians in the Harold B. Lee Library, who I discussed my project with at length in person. Cory Nimer, the University Archivist, particularly helped Dr. Taylor and I discover the materials in BYU's archives that we could use to create our collection, and was especially helpful informing me of the necessary paperwork and legal parameters surrounding the extraction of certain resources that we would be using. Through Cory's help, I've been able to help in gathering and digitizing permitted documents, student records, writings, artworks, and Native student publications, such as the Liahona, Thunder Bird, United Israel, and Eagle's Eye, which were published from 1957 to 1985. Dr. Richard Hacken, who is incredibly familiar with creating "wiki" resources for BYU, help to familiarize myself with the technical aspects of creating an online research database, which we hope will be complete within the next few months. The guidance from these individuals helped enormously to get my project off the ground and through their expertise, I have completed the steps necessary to complete the creation of the digital and physical collections of BYU's Native history that is so essential for its population to understand.

One of the most impactful results of this grant has been the extension of this project as a research opportunity for a team of twenty students, myself included, to continue working on next semester as an internship. Through the English Department, Dr. Taylor and I are going to continue the work of this ORCA project because we feel strongly that the work is so extensive and necessary, and many other students

feel the same way. We were able to fill the positions for the internship in a matter of weeks. Through this concentrated team of student researchers, and using the groundwork of research materials that I've gathered over the course of my ORCA project, the reality of the creation of the physical and digital collections is becoming even more impactful and far-reaching than I ever thought possible.

This project has given me myriad opportunities outside of its scope that have directly benefited my scholarly experience and training. Most notably, the Native population in Provo, Utah has been extremely influential to my involvement in the community. As I've networked, communicated, and grown closer to these individuals over the course of this project, they have not only informed my paradigm of the world but given me the chance to utilize my research in a multiplicity of ways. Notably, last month I was awarded a grant to work with Native American mothers and daughters to create a rug-weaving class for the Native American Provo school district. Moreover, I've used my ORCA project to apply to several graduate schools where the project was one of my central talking points. Though I don't hear back from these schools for a few months, the ORCA grant undoubtedly gave me a professional mentored research experience that solidified my decision to apply to graduate school.

While my ORCA project had lofty goals, I believe I've accomplished these goals through creating a project that will continue on through other students who are equally passionate as I am at BYU about the Native American community and its rich history at BYU. Through my detailed and extensive compilation of research materials and my creation of a community of individuals within and outside of BYU, this project has affected myself and countless people, and I feel that it will continue to do so beyond my time at BYU as well.

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