



## Recommendations for Connecting with Native Students

To serve you as you serve your students...

### Things I wish my staff worker understood about being Native:

- As you get to know me, don't be in a hurry. You may not always be welcomed in my community very quickly and it may take awhile for me to trust you. Don't be offended or scared off when I try to push you away. Be patient. Love well. Trust that when I am ready, I will share.
  - Native people have stereotypes about white people (especially white missionaries) just as white people have stereotypes about Native people. If you feel angry about being stereotyped, just remember -- this is what I deal with every day. Instead of "fighting back," see it as an opportunity to walk a mile in my shoes.
- My family has a profound impact on my day to day life right down to the way I use my finances.
  - It is very likely that unlike many college students who are asking for money from their families back home, I may be sending any extra money I can come by home to my family.
  - It is also very likely that I am one of the first people in my family to attend college. This may create extra pressure as my home community expects me to have a job and be contributing in that way but also may mean I've got a whole community back home cheering me on.
- I don't need you to become Native, but I would appreciate it if you learned more about native history.
  - Knowing your own story is important. Understand how your history and my Native history intertwine. Learn about your culture so that your cultural identity crisis does not become my problem.
- Don't always trust what you read in books about Native religion- much of our religious knowledge is very sacred and kept private.
  - Don't ask direct questions about what my tribe believes, the meaning of a ceremony or about a sacred story. To do so is offensive. This is knowledge you must earn through trust and relationship. I'll share it with you when it feels appropriate and I know I can trust you.
  - Don't ever ask me to share about what my tribe believes, our ceremonies or sacred stories with a group of people I don't know.
- It's not appropriate for you to apologize to me, outside of the context of relationship, for what your people have done to my people. I am more interested in relationship than in words from a stranger, no matter how heart-felt.
  - When and if a specific point of hurt arises, THEN an apology may be appropriate, but please do not spend all of your time trying to overcome your guilt by putting it on my shoulders through your apology.
- Although I am Native, I may or may not know very much about my culture. It is much more helpful to ask me about my family than to ask me all of my tribe or all Indians everywhere.



- Please don't be shocked by the hardships in my life. It is very likely that I will know someone in prison, that either myself or someone I know has been sexually abused, that I've been to many funerals in my short lifetime. Don't sensationalize this. Love me through these things, help me to find solutions and deal with issues when they arise- but know that making a big deal out of these things will be polarizing for me.

**Topics that would be helpful to learn about and Questions that would be helpful for my staff worker to ask me:**

- Learn about social justice issues that may be impacting their community and culture.
- How does your family do \_\_\_\_\_?
- How many hours per week are you working?
- What is happening in your community back home?
- Where are you from?
- Take time to learn about different areas students are coming from- they may be from a small town on a large reservation- knowing more about the actual town they are from will help to build trust.
- How is your family? (be careful to not ask this question lightly. This is a question that should be asked frequently when you see a student, but to which you need to remember their answer and follow-up with.)
- Does your family have livestock? How many? What are your responsibilities in caring for the animals?

**Additional helpful resources for learning about Native culture:**

- *Bury my Heart at Wounded Knee* by Dee Brown
- *One Church Many Tribes* by Richard Twiss
- *Shalom and the Community of Creation* by Randy Woodley
- *The Absolutely True Diary of Part-time Indian* by Sherman Alexie
- *Neither Wolf Nor Dog* by Kent Nerburn
- *Eternity in Their Hearts* by Don Richardson