

Dancing Towards Survivance; Indigenous Arts and Sciences  
United States of America  
Brown University  
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- a. Ideally two pages not to exceed three pages in length
- b. A two-sentence summary of the goals of your project

My project, *Dancing Towards Survivance* seeks to develop culturally and structurally relevant educational courses drawn from Lakota concepts of Art and Science to lift up community health standards. The goal of my project is to provide Indigenous students with the tools needed to strive and succeed within modern society, utilizing the skills of Indigenous knowledges surrounding forms like dance and biology to make conceptions around health care relevant.

- c. Did other fund-raising efforts contribute to your project? What were they?

No, my project was not aided by the efforts of fund-raising this summer, nor did my project receive any funds from other organizations this summer. Although, I have been in communication with the Oglala Sioux Tribe Child Care & Development Program about sponsorship/funding in future job projects. They were eager to hear and understand the mission rooted within my project and would like to discuss the possibility of partnering a class with their Diabetes Prevention Program in the future.

- d. How did you come up with the idea for your project?

According to the Black Hills Knowledge Network, the Oglala Lakota Sioux of Pine Ridge Reservation face high rates of obesity and teen suicide within a broader context of poverty. The Oglala Lakota Sioux have access to one hospital and two small health centers, which makes where the Lakota live a federally recognized “medically underserved area.” Despite this lack of health access, representations of the Lakota in media tend to portray their poor health as the result of a damaged and deficient “culture.” Health experts, in turn, have attempted to solve Lakota health issues by importing Western medical doctors, prescriptions, and institutions from outside the Lakota community in ways that regard indigenous ways of knowing health as backwards, unscientific, or non-existent.

My intentions behind designing this project was to create a space my younger self would have dreamed of having within my reservation growing up, while also using the knowledge acquired through my Science, Technology, and Society; and also Ethnic Studies courses taken here at Brown University. I wanted to come up with a project that allowed me to use the information learned within the classroom and share it with my community through a real life participatory project. The Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, a community overflowing with culture and creativity and deserves much more than it is given, is missing a continuous and sustainable creative space within it to serve its people.

- e. Why do you think the issue your project is responding to exists?

I think the issue my project strives to help change exists because of present day effects of colonization, assimilation, and the lack of extracurriculars specific to artistic and culturally expressive opportunities within the Oglala Lakota County school districts. Indigenous ideologies and methodologies are constantly ignored and invalidated within Western education. By Western academia teaching a curriculum that forces Indigenous scholars to disconnect their Indigenous culture from their academic work perpetuates the idea that there is no space for Indigenous knowledge to coexist within contemporary society or education.

- f. Why did you choose your host site to work in?

I originally chose my host site based on the connections made through being an alumni of Red Cloud High School. In the past they have given priority of space to athletic groups or cultural activities, and seeing how my project proposes the combination of both I had no worries of being turned away. Had I known prior to submitting my project proposal that Red Cloud Indian School (RCIS) was undergoing some major internal administrative issues, my commitment to continue working with my chosen host site would have been different.

g. What was it like to work in your host site?

In all honesty it was difficult to work in my host site as space within the gym was not given as promised. My main source of contact was with the former principal of Red Cloud High School, and with an unexpected resignation from Ms. Clare Huerter my project was now overseen by interim principal Ms. Anne Marie Amiottee. Ms. Amiottee was not informed of what was originally planned for the summer between Ms. Huerter and me, which felt as if I was starting all over in having to find a time and space that accommodated to Amiottee's summer schedule as well. Seeing how we did not have a stable room for our project there was some difficulty in having to move and store the dance equipment continuously, but it was resolved after finding a large enough truck to haul the equipment to and from the site. That was a quick and sufficient solution for this summer, and this unforeseen challenge did allow for the opportunity to understand the need of a positive and communicative relationship between future host sites of my project. Having a constant place would allow for participants to feel comfortable within a stable environment, and remaining within the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation it would promote Native youth involvement and community development.

h. Did you feel at any point that the project was not going to work? In what ways?

There were times when I felt as if my project was not going to work, especially when attendance was little to none at first or when most of the guest Indigenous choreographers were booked for their Summer 2019 schedules. I quickly understood another problem I would face with my project would be the need of accessible and reliable transportation to and from my host site for participants. As reported by Red Cloud Indian School, "the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation covers more than 2.8 million acres in southwestern South Dakota, making it the second-largest reservation in the United States and larger than Delaware and Rhode Island combined." In the future I would like to work out a better system of transportation for all participants, and ideally renting a travel vehicle specifically for my project that could be driven around and grant rides to all those wishing to attend would be beneficial.

i. What were the challenges you encountered in communicating with people?

A challenging aspect with my project was trying to condense goals and project intentions to become understandable for all community members. I wanted to be aware of the privileges I hold by attending Brown University and did not want to develop any hierarchies or elitist mentality within my own community or project. As the main foci of my project was: 1) look to Lakota uses of the medicine wheel; 2) examine ideas around western biology in relation to Indigenous science; and, 3) explore dance as an alternative and culturally relevant form of education around health and healing, I wanted participants to understand that this was more than just your average dance class. I wanted to reconnect communications and ideas around health to more than physical approaches, and that although this may be a dance centered project, there are ways to engage one's mental, emotional, social, and cultural wellbeing as well. Luckily many community members began to understand what I was trying to solve within the work my project was doing, and as they were able to understand my project they became more acceptable and open with engagement. Along the way, I did find it easier to work with participants one on one, as sometimes they felt more comfortable expressing what issues they had with their own bodies and how dance or any other form of movement could best fit their lifestyle.

j. How do you define peace?

I define peace as equity for all marginalized, underserved, and underrepresented groups within our Mother Earth.

k. How does or will your project contribute to peace? Short-term? Long-term?

My project contributes to peace by providing an opportunity for Indigenous youth and elders to reconnect with their love of art and sciences. A short term goal for my project is to secure a solid space of our own that allows full control and flexibility of hours. I would like to rent out my own building or room where I can run classes on weekends or bi-weekly throughout the year, which can eventually turn into a full-time project operating daily within the community. I have looked into partnering with the Thunder Valley Community Development Care, as they are working on opening and renting out their own retail spaces in the near future, which will be a great opportunity in securing a solid space.

A long term goal of mine would be to implement a curriculum condensed and suitable enough to operate within the reservation school systems. Towards the end of my project and summer I was in contact with a middle school reading teacher within my community who was pleased to hear of my project and had actually proposed the idea of creating a lesson plan she could implement within her own classroom. With this opportunity arrives the potential of accessing classrooms across the entire Pine Ridge Indian Reservation and the start of introducing the combination of arts and sciences taught as one, even reaching those Indigenous children who might not voluntarily sign up for dance on their own merit and like it!

With the remaining funds of this summer, I would like to continue with anticipated plans of utilizing project funding for travel and lodging expenses of the diverse Indigenous choreographers booked in thought of future classes for my project, as planned within the proposed budget form. I also would like to use the rest of the project funding for advertisement supplies, as increasing the knowledge of my project will aid the longevity of its future.

l. Has your project changed the way you think about the world? How has it changed you?

Yes, my project has allowed for my views upon this world to alter in some ways. More specifically, my project allowed me to think about the ways in which I can utilize my own academic studies, university support and resources, and lived experiences to create positive and sustainable change within Indian Country. My project has helped allow myself to find validation and urgent need within my own course of studies, and how I can then apply my undergraduate research to my home community. I have always wanted to return home to the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation after my academic studies, but now I feel as if my passion for the arts and sciences can return with me ~ kind've as if the wind is guiding me in the right direction and I am not fighting back. This project provided some clarity within what my future path in life may look like when serving my home community, and I have become very fortunate and appreciative for this opportunity.

m. Please provide a 1-2 personal statement sentence, suitable for use as a quotation, addressing how and why this project was valuable and what was the most important thing you learned as a result.

"This project was an opportunity to center and cultivate new Indigenous methodologies and health practices for Indigenous youth, as they are our future. By creating a space specifically for Native children, elders, and other tribal members to expand upon their knowledge of arts and sciences, we remain to coexist and to be heard within contemporary society. Never doubt your own creative craft. " - Jacob Cousin

