Reuben Kitto Stately: This is an APM documentary.

Archie Yellow: Being good in school meant you're trying to be an apple, like red on the outside, but white on the inside. It just wasn't like what we represented, as like we thought being Native was.

Reuben Kitto Stately: Most Native American people don’t go to college. But we did.¹

Nevaeh Nez: I remember talking to people and they're like, ‘Oh, you're Native American? Like, that's pretty cool. Like you're the first Native I've ever met’ like and I was like, Okay….code red. This is a problem.

Reuben Kitto Stately: In the coming hour three Native American students take the mic to tell our stories…. about how we’re learning our own languages and history…in places that weren’t designed for us.

Eric Buffalohead: We represent a really interesting worldview, in that we are, whether we like it or not, a conquered people in our own land.

Reuben Kitto Stately: Coming up, Standing in Two Worlds: Native American College Diaries from APM. First, this news.

¹ https://pnpi.org/native-american-students/#:~:text=24%25%20of%2018%E2%80%9324%2D,to%20116%2C400%20in%202019%E2%80%9320.
PART 1 INTRO

[music]

Nevaeh Nez: From American Public Media, this is an APM documentary.

(music)

Nevaeh Nez audio diary: One thing about my education journey is that there are times where I have felt so alone. And alone in the sense that like, I'm physically alone, but also mentally, emotionally. And as an Indigenous student, I've oftentimes felt so alone that like, it is kind of scary. Like being the only person in the classroom, like, there are times where like, I have not seen someone who looks like myself in months.

(music fades under)

Nevaeh Nez: You’re listening to Standing in Two Worlds: Native American College Diaries. I’m Nevaeh Nez. And I recorded that entry about my tough start in college. I’m Hopi and Navajo. I chose a majority white university\(^2\) far from home to study pre-med. All my life, I had to learn to navigate two worlds. It’s extra work a lot of my classmates didn’t have to worry about.

America’s education system isn’t the same for Native students. We come with different histories. A lot of people don’t know it…but education was actually used to erase our cultures….to stop our parents and grandparents from speaking our languages. Now we’re learning to go to college on our own terms. We’re finding ways to make our own use of a system built by the white people who took our lands. We’re strengthening the ties to our Native roots and also creating ways to support our communities. We want the Native youth coming up after us to see that this can be done. So over the next hour, we’ll tell you our stories.

\(^2\)https://datausa.io/profile/university/university-of-minnesota-rochester#:~:text=The%20enrolled%20student%20population%20at,Hawaiian%20or%20Other%20Pacific%20Islanders.
The first story comes from Reuben Kitto Stately, a student at Augsburg University in Minneapolis. From his earliest memories, Reuben saw education as truth-seeking… filling in what was missing. Where were the stories of Native people in his history books?

Reuben starts his story at a high school in St. Paul Minnesota, where he’s giving a presentation.

SPA student: We are super excited to welcome everyone to SPA’s first ever assembly in honor of Indigenous People’s Day. We are thrilled to introduce Reuben Kitto Stately. His stage name is Kitto. He is a 21 year old recording artist from Minneapolis, Minnesota and a college student currently attending Augsburg University.

(applause)


That’s how you say hello in Dakota. (laughter). Totally kidding. Alright, but if I’m going to come speak to you all, I need to speak to you all in my mother tongue. The Dakota Language. The original language of the land that we are standing on–Mnišota Makoče we called it. For many thousands of years before anyone else was here. Anyway, that was my introduction. I told you I’m from the White Bluffs. Then I said, nowadays, in English, we call it St. Paul.

[Rap song]

Reuben Kitto Stately audio diary: I grew up in an urban place where a bunch of Native kids had long hair. And it wasn't uncommon for us to have long hair. We could joke and play and we could be ourselves. And it was me being surrounded by other boys that were just like me, being among my own people.

music pop: “I was 11 years old when I was first cuffed up” (hold music low under)
Reuben Kitto Stately: I'm pretty sure it was like my first week in a public school. And I'm pretty sure I was four. But I remember meeting a white student, he was the only white student in the class. He asked me, where are you from? And he thinks I'm Mexican. And I told him, Oh, I'm not Mexican… I actually think this is the first time I ever had to specify who I was. And he says, Well, if you're not Mexican, like, where are you from? And I said, I'm from here. I'm an American Indian. I'm a Dakota and he laughed in my face. And he told me, “There's no Indians left. They're all dead.” So I remember my mom picking me up from school, and me going home that day. And I asked her, looking out the car window, ‘Why do other people think that?’

Ramona Kitto Stately: Well, clearly remember that day, I knew that public schools were misinformed. And I knew the miseducation of other students about indigenous history was prevalent. And at the time, we really didn't know—except to kind of avoid public education—how to change that narrative. And so since that moment, of that little boy was kind of like a reminder, a trigger. Hey, this is the work that we have to do.

(sfx outside)
Ramona Kitto Stately at Bdote: There were no trees here. Find a spot? (hold under)

Reuben Kitto Stately: My mom, Ramona Kitto Stately, made her career in Indian education.

Ramona Kitto Stately: This is the Bdote.

Reuben Kitto Stately: One day she and I took a visitor from out of town to a place that’s sacred to Dakota people. It’s called Bdote. It’s an island between two rivers in St. Paul.

Ramona Kitto Stately: This is the confluence of the Minnesota River and the Mississippi River. We refer to it as Bdote. and we also refer to it as Makhá čhokaya kìn and that means center of our universe, because this is our creation story… (hold under)
Reuben Kitto Stately: The best teachers I ever met were my family members. My mother and my dad and my grandfather, who took good care and nourished my headspace to become a Dakota thinker, speaker and leader.

Ramona Kitto Stately at Bdote: Reuben, did you want to share a song?

Reuben Kitto Stately: Yeah. So I have this song I usually share when people come here. It's good when people come here and they find some truth. And then, you know, they let the land tell the story, and then they let Dakotas tell the story. Because anywhere else often it's often not us telling our own story.

(Reuben sings and plays drum) then fade under

Reuben Kitto Stately: To a Dakota way of thinking and believing everyone can be a teacher at any given time. That's why when people speak, we give them the floor. It doesn't matter if you're the oldest at the table, it doesn't matter if they're the youngest at the table. All the people that I looked up to, they gave me the time, energy and kine of space to be the leader sometimes or be the teacher sometimes. And what that did is it just strengthened that place for me to speak up and say what I felt like I needed to say.

music drumming up and out

Reuben Kitto Stately: In this western culture of teaching, there's one person in the room who gets to be the teacher the whole time. So I think there's a culture shock when we walk into a school. And I also think that teachers have been taught things in school...they could be totally uninformed about Native people. or misinformed. So I had to be the student in the classroom in seventh grade, where my teacher had—and this is a non white person, mind you, this is a non white person, —and they're teaching a history class, seventh grade history class, and they start talking about the Indian Removal Act. And they started talking about the white perspective and the Native perspective. And my hand shot up, and I said, I don't think you know, the Native perspective. And I don't think you should be teaching it. And she said, I have a degree, I have a
master's degree in history. And I said, Well, I know that white men wrote all those books. And you cannot tell the Native perspective, like I told her, I said, you're doing a terrible job, saying how Native people thought about the Indian Removal Act. And she sent me out in the hall for, I don't know what you'd call that, but insubordination of some kind or whatever but I wasn't supposed to be the teacher. At the time, I was supposed to be the student. And I was supposed to shut up and learn or whatever, you know. So my mom, my dad, and my grandpa, they didn't really raise me to be that way. They raised me to, you know, speak up when I know something. And so that's what I did. What kind of Native student does that? A normal Native student would take the shame and put the shame on themselves. Even when they know better, which is crazy, like, but basically the weight of that scenario is on our shoulders. And for one moment, I put it on my teacher's shoulders, and she did not like it, she hated it.

Reuben Kitto Stately: This song is called “Dear My Future Son” (music)

Reuben Kitto Stately: I was very young and my parents were talking about my future and they just said very matter of fact ‘You’re going to college.’ So I didn’t question it. I was like, Oh, I’m going to college. Cool. And I pictured it for a long time.

Ramona Kitto Stately: That was really the goal when we had children was to prepare them to be Native, but also to be able to navigate this white world. It’s important. We can’t ignore it. We have to be able to navigate jobs and owning property and all those things and be competitive. And we also have to acknowledge and understand our cultural lifeways.

Reuben Kitto Stately: I was pretty dead set on American Indian Studies. And that was by the time I was in 10th grade. I knew that American Indian studies would help me fill in the gaps for all the times in which I don't understand colonization here in America, you know, how have Native people from all these different nations, you know, hundreds of nations, how have we all become American or in what ways have we totally assimilated but in what ways have we resisted, you know, like, there's so many things that I wanted to know. And I was hungry for it. So I said American Indian Studies. I'm like dead set on that…When it all came down to it. I have an amazing scholarship to come here to Augsburg.
Reuben Kitto Stately: All right, we're live. So yeah. Tell us about yourself, Eric. Tell us who you are.

Eric Buffalohead: I'm Eric Buffalohead. I'm from White Eagle, Oklahoma. I'm Ponca. And my job is being the chair of the American Studies Department here at Augsburg University in Minneapolis.

Reuben Kitto Stately: So I think I'm just going to reverberate some questions that were asked of me. What could universities do to support Native students?

Eric Buffalohead: Part of the issue is even today, even though it's 2022 there's a lot of Native students are first time, it's they’re the first person in their family to go to university or college. And so, that's always a really tough experience because you don't have your parents’ advice to fall back on. That's big.... Native students are already facing the huge issue of having such a high dropout rate in high school that, the number of them here is small to begin with, and then you run into the same problems: lack of role models and mentors. I mean, what do we have, two Native employees at Augsburg now? Or maybe only me? I don't even know, maybe only me. I think there might be two.

Reuben Kitto Stately: So what are some things that Native students bring to their universities that's invaluable?

Eric Buffalohead: Well, I think the one of the most important things is that they’re representatives of the …574 sovereign nations, and to other students, that's maybe the first time they ever really have been able to really understand what that means. Hey, we have this big United States, but there's 574 federally recognized tribes, and they're sovereign nations.... we represent a really interesting worldview, in that we are, whether we like it or not, a conquered people in our own land. I mean, we're like, we're almost like POWs in a way, we're on our own land.
But mainstream Americans need to understand, because I think they don't really grasp the idea of themselves being immigrants...hey, you guys are foreigners here (laughs) and we were here before you, and you really should, you know, grasp and understand the complexity of the relationship that has existed in the last 500 years for Native peoples.

….all of the traditions and everything has been kind of stifled down by policies of assimilation. And as we try to prop up as much of that culture as we can and embrace things like language and spirituality, and just worldview in general…and having all these Native students around and the experiences they bring is really cool.

sfx: classroom scene
Reuben Kitto Stately: can you read that to me?
(Little girl reading in Dakota)
Reuben: (responds in Dakota) hold under

Reuben Kitto Stately: So for my whole education, I have known that whatever I learned here at Augsburg, I'm going to take back to my people, And the people of mine that I focus on, are young ones.
And I’ve got an internship at Native charter school in Minneapolis, Bdote Learning Center, teaching kindergarteners

[Speaking in Dakota]
Reuben Kitto Stately: What does that mean?
Girl: The sun is a big star
Reuben Kitto Stately: Yeah, the sun is a very big star that’s what we’re saying (fade out)

Reuben Kitto Stately: They're at this age where you can spark their inspiration and tell them, hey, you could go to school further. And you could learn the truth like I did. Even if you're not inspired by all the same things that I was, there's so many things that you could do, like, maybe you're talented at something in school, and you've never been given the space or time to flourish
in that. College is a space where you do that, you know, if you're in high school, and you've only experienced High School. It's terrible. You know, you have like seven classes a day, you're expected to be good at seven things at the same time. Like, come on. Young people trying to go to college, I always tell them, you got like four classes, dude. And you're telling them what you want to learn. You're telling them what time of day you want to learn it and it's way better….so I, I think that it's an act of resistance because in the end, whether we like it or not, this is a capitalist system and the best way that we can support our people and ourselves and our families is to make money and then also that degree, you could bring it back to your people and get a job for your tribe. Or you know, maybe you can go to a non-Native space and you can help create Native space in somewhere new. To me, it's an act of resistance because you're able to indigenize new space or you strengthen the space that your people are already in.

(music track by artist Reuben Kitto Stately, used with permission)

Nevaeh Nez: That’s Reuben Kitto Stately. Reuben graduated from Augsburg University in May of 2022. In his first year out of college, he’ll be creating an album with Native Youth in Minneapolis, exploring themes of wellness and drug prevention.

I’m Neveah Nez. You’re listening to Standing in Two Worlds: Native American College Diaries.

Next up, we’re going to hear from Archie Yellow. He’s a student at Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College. It’s in Cloquet, in northern Minnesota, near the Fond du Lac Indian reservation, where he’s a member. Archie has an amazing story about taking a second run at college…and this time he’s on fire to succeed.

The Ojibwe language. Some might know it as Chippewa.

Archie Yellow: I was born in Minneapolis, ‘91, in Hennepin County, you know right downtown Minneapolis. My family was living in the projects. But, like most Native families and most Natives that lived in The Cities, we bounced around, you know that I’m saying, I spent summers in the rez, going to grandma’s house (laughs)

Archie Yellow: In my family I’m the oldest and I have seven siblings. Five brothers and two sisters. Our ages range from what me, I’m 30, the youngest is 15? 16?

Archie Yellow: Me and my brothers, we all used to be like in this huge Native gang. It’s probably like something everyone’s heard of. Native mob? It’s like a huge Native gang in the cities, all over Minnesota… getting fast money and then like, just living that fast life. That was like the goals, the lifestyle.

Archie Yellow: I’m one of the blessed lucky few that even were able to escape anything like that.

Archie Yellow: I had a lot of homeboys that didn’t even make it to 18. You know I thought I was going to be in prison or just you know stuck in this loop of gang-banging and living that life. I thought that was going to be it. But something always told me that there was more.

(sniff)

Archie Yellow: So my story, I want y'all to know, is like of me, getting my life together. For me and my family. And it happened. It worked. It really happened.

Archie Yellow: My first experience at college, it wasn't a great one.

ad clip: Hey you! Yeah, you. Starting out? Well, Lake Superior College can prepare you (fade under)
Archie Yellow: I went to Lake Superior College. It was just like the first school I knew about and it was a community college.

Clip: Lake Superior College offers training in a plethora of programs from healthy to business (fade under)

Archie Yellow: And I didn't know what to go for. I didn't even know what what you should do. It was just like total shoot in the dark. I just went there, signed up. I think there was only like two other Natives that I knew. And those guys both left within the first few weeks (laugh). Yeah.

Archie Yellow: Yeah, so I did my math, writing, took this one class that was really nice. It was titled like, “Finding Success in College” or something like that. And it was the only class out of all the other three that I actually passed because I liked it. And I was the only one that I was interested in. Like the stuff she talked about really hit me, like what you needed it to succeed in school and just in life. She talked about having this foundation, like you know what I’m saying, having a stable job having a stable house, a stable life and then you can move on and then you can look at schooling and then you can look at higher education and I was completely blown away by how right she was because I was completely like, you know what I’m saying, not stable. I didn't have a good home and I was couchsurfing going from homeboy’s crib to homeboy’s crib. So yeah, it was just really bad. Bad experience. I did not do too well my first time around in school.

Archie Yellow: Yeah, I moved down to the cities and my dad helped me get a job moving furniture. That was a good paying job, you know, like 16-17 an hour.

Archie Yellow: I had a son when I was 18 or 19 but that didn't like do much to motivate me at the time. Because all the people around me, they were all deadbeat dads too, and having kids left and right. So that's all I saw, right? I missed out on my son's, the first part of his whole life. Something I'll never be able to get back.
Archie Yellow: Then I had my twins. Y’all, and that's when they like it all changed. Like, I was like, 24, 25. I knew I didn't want to gangbang and stuff no more. But I knew like I couldn't do this, like moving furniture stuff forever. Me and that that girl, we weren't weren't at all fit for parenting. My twins and her, she moved back to South Dakota, to go stay with her mom and her parents and her family said you know what I’m saying, it'd be easier living for her.

Archie Yellow: So after my twins left, I knew if we got up north closer to the rez and stuff, they’d help us out, get us on the casino payroll. It’s been a real good place to like get work. They’ve always had my back. They’ve always gave me a job.

Archie Yellow: The pandemic hit.

Archie Yellow: So I knew I had to do something. So I said, alright, let’s see if I could go back to school.

PART 1 OUTRO

Neveah Nez: You’re listening to Standing in Two Worlds: Native American College Diaries a documentary from American Public Media.

We’ll take a short break, and then get back to Archie’s story. At age 28, he decides to take a second shot at college. And at making a new life.

Archie Yellow: I'm defying mad odds, you know, look, I mean, I'm supposed to be here with all these guys on the rez walking around, you know? No life and no goals. That was me, man. I was, I had nothing.

Nevaeh Nez: You can find portraits of the three of us on the APM Reports’ web site – APM Reports dot org. You can also browse APM’s entire archive of education documentaries.
Nevaeh Nez: Support for this program comes from Lumina Foundation, the Spencer Foundation and the Education Writers Association. More in a moment. This is APM, American Public Media.

PART 2 INTRO
Nevaeh Nez: From American Public Media, this is an APM documentary: *Standing in Two Worlds: Native American College Diaries*. I’m Nevaeh Nez.

Nevaeh Nez: Let’s jump back into Archie Yellow’s story. The Covid pandemic shut down the tribal casino where he had been working. So Archie decides to try college again. Archie washed out of community college when he tried it a decade before. This time, he enrolls at a tribal college. There are more than 30 tribal colleges across the country. Indian students who start out at a tribal college have a much better chance of finishing than if they go to a mainstream college right out of high school.

Nevaeh Nez: Archie signed on.

Archie Yellow audio diary: I always wanted to go back to school and I always knew if I went back to school, I was going to go back to school at Fond du Lac.

ad audio: I’m Josh, I’m the admissions director of Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College. We have American Indian Studies, law enforcement… (fade under)

Archie Yellow: It was my Rez’s school so I had that going for it.

Man: I think it’s important to pick up all that we can from our past

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3 http://www.aihec.org/who-we-serve/TCUmap.cfm
Woman’s voice (fades up): …We want you to be who you want to be and we’ll do the best we can to help you (fade)

Archie Yellow: When you go to Fond du Lac, our tribal flags are hanging. Anywhere you go, there’s like Native artwork laying around. So when you walk in there you know what I’m saying, it feels nice.

Archie Yellow: I knew right away I wanted to go for Native American studies. I knew if I learned my language and my culture that would just like open up mad doors, put me down the right path.

sfx click of audio recorder
sfx Archie practicing learning Ojibwe: What day was it yesterday? (ojibwe)

Archie audio diary: If I just like got in tune with my culture, got in tune with my language learned it right.

sfx: What is today? (Ojibwe) What day will it be tomorrow?

Archie audio diary: Being a teacher would be my way to atone. I lived a horrible life. I did horrible things. That’s the whole thing I’m trying to do with this schooling and becoming a teacher, heal my community for all the damage and destruction I’ve done my whole life.

sfx: (turn signal)

(sfx in car) Archie Yellow: We’re going out to the rez, place where I grew up, my grandma's house they call it East Pine. This turns in the Rez right here. Look at how messed up it is. See how that's all paved? That’s there's white people stuff then boom. Here we are. Right here and this is Rez it turns into a dirt road.

(sigh)
Archie Yellow: That used to be blueberry fields. Right here is where I used to stay. Teal Drive, right there, gram's house. When I think about education and like when I look at my honor role, little certificates and stuff, I think of her, how that would make her feel.

Archie Yellow: I feel like she's still watching over me because man, I've had so many close calls and this is a crazy blessing that I'm here, you know, doing this and I'm here going to school. Shoot, man, I'm defying mad odds, you know, look, I mean, I'm supposed to be here with all these guys on the rez walking around, you know? No life and no goals. That was me, man. I was, I had nothing.

Archie Yellow: Drinking everyday, you know? I saw that all the time. That’s a major, like you know what I’m saying, disease in our culture and our community. My dads and my grandpas were, you know what I’m saying, drunks. That’s all I saw was partying, you know? I slowly saw it trying to swallow my life and trying to swallow me.

Archie Yellow: I can't wait to be a teacher here though. So I can teach the younguns and teach the older ones. I want to be the old wise BNative (laugh)... you know, I want to be that guy… even though I’m not wise right now, (laughs) When I become super dope with all this and get acquainted with this, I want to go down to The Cities and start getting them guys because those are the ones that are really lost and, man, I remember down there I just always felt hopeless and lost like no one was gonna come save me. I had no role models, you know? And there was no one I could look up to. There was no one there…I just hope that I can be that guy….become some hope for these kids out here. Yeah.

SFX: Treuer video: (intro in Ojibwe)
Archie Yellow: So Anton Treuer is an Ojibwe professor at Bemidji State University. He’s also been like a huge like language warrior in the Ojibwe community.

Treuer video clip: When you asked me to come and give a TED talk, nobody said anything about speaking a foreign language like English! (crowd laughter, fade under)

Archie Yellow: After we read his book, I started watching all his stuff online, watching all his videos on YouTube

Anton Treuer video clip: I’m speaking to you in Ojibwe, one of nearly 200 tribal languages still spoken in the United States but somehow mine is the one often ends up being thought of as “foreign.”

Archie Yellow:: This is someone like I look up to, someone I look towards becoming. The main goal and dream of mine is to go to Bemidji State so I can go learn under Mr. Treuer and take his classes. I haven’t had much practice with the whole interviewing people but I’m mad excited.

(knock)
(greetings)
Archie Yellow: How’s it going?
Anton Treuer: It’s going good! Well, come on in, welcome…. I kind of feel like I got one foot in, in a wigwam still and one sitting here in the ivory tower, but I really like living at home, you now?

Archie Yellow: Since like, I've started going to school, like, I feel like my whole life got, revived. And I turned a whole new page….I was wondering, like, is it even worth it? You know, I think this is all effort is going to be like, you know, saying, like, destroyed at the end because like what I did in the past?
Anton Treuer  Well, there's no way to purge all the like negativity from the world. But what you can do is create a center for yourself, starting with your body, you know, your community, your circle the people around you. And if you fill that full of light, love and good things, then it pushes all that darkness out. It might be swirling around the edges, it'll be out in the world, but doesn't have to be running your world. You know what I mean? And we talk about the body like Niiyaw my body, and it's kind of like a cup. You know, it's temporary housing for our soul. And when you fill your cup up with good stuff, it pushes all the bad stuff out.

Archie Yellow: Yeah

Anton Treuer: Every time you're learning a new word, a new song, new whatever, you’re filling it up with the good stuff, and it's pushing that bad stuff out. So it's hard to cure the whole dang world of all its ills and substance abuse and everything else. But you can recenter your own space and will make all the difference.

(music)

Archie Yellow: I’m in college, learning my language and culture and man, it’s something I’m like proud to tell people. And what we thought going to school you know what I’m saying getting whitewashed, losing your culture, losing who you were. That’s how I remember like how school was. Why I was never felt I succeeded at it at it. Being good in school meant you were trying to be an apple, you were trying to be red on the outside, but white on the inside. So you’re trying to be someone else. It just wasn’t what we represented what being Native was.

Anton Treuer: One of the things about colonization is that it's about taking one language, culture, religion and using it to supplant all the other ones….And that's what education is… we're still doing colonization….we are still assimilating, colonizing and indoctrinating people into that. And as a Native person, especially like a brown-skinned native person, like, you will never be accepted as a white person, you will still be like hyper visible, racially profiled, you know, mistrusted, downtrodden, less safe …Like when they go to school, whiteness is the operating
norm… 2% of the world's population is blonde but like 90% of the beauty icons are blonde, we're told the worship that, you know, it's weird.

Anton Treuer: But when we get a chance to learn about ourselves, when it's okay, being me in my body….and then embrace and love who we are as Anishinabe, then you know we’ll truly succeed and I don't mean just succeed in terms of like getting a paper credential I mean succeed in having our best chance that a long healthy happy life

Archie Yellow: Man, he was more like down to earth and I thought. It was very easy talking to him. And like how he talked about like if you just fill your circle right, everything will be right yeah. He really liked me just reminded me that like yeah, if I like build this up right, I don’t think nothing can come by and knock it down. I just gotta like, believe in myself and believe in my work.

Music

Archie Yellow: It's crazy how far I've come with this. And how far I'm going with this. I gave the gang life at least ten years of my life. So I figured what if I gave schooling, higher education, my language and my culture, what if I gave them then years of my life? Where would I go? What, what would happen?

Archie Yellow: My success at college is finally rubbing off on everyone else here and like my two siblings–three siblings actually! I got I got I forgot my brother Dennis is getting his GED. And he's like one test away from getting it. I think he has to do his math, which I'm helping him. My sister signed up for Fond du Lac school. I can't believe how happy that makes me. My brother, George, who I thought he was never going to go to school. And now he's finishing school and planning on going to college too.

Archie Yellow: Man, I tell my son all the time, like yo boy, I'm doing something big, yo. You're trying to make things happen for us. Something for you to be proud of like, man, I just can't wait
for that day to just say to my son like Yo, your dad's a teacher. (sigh) Man, those are stuff to think about (laugh).

(music)

Nevaeh Nez: That was Archie Yellow. He’s a student at Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College in Cloquet, Minnesota. You’re listening to Standing in Two Worlds: Native American College Diaries, from APM.

I’m Nevaeh Nez. And now, it’s time to hear my story.

(running sfx)

Nevaeh Nez: When I'm out running. I think a lot about my childhood. I spent a lot of time outside and like any kind of typical rez kid, I was always outside. Our parents encouraged us to be anywhere but indoors. And then eventually my mom would make us go running with her and we would run as a family. At first I was not really about it. I think it was not, I thought it was hard. Like it definitely is something hard. And I think being a kid like you don't want to be forced to run like you'd rather go play. But it was nice to have that pressure from my mom. And I think that's the biggest thing I think about when I'm going running and I remember my mom always asking us like, who are you running for today? Like who needs more strength today?

In Hopi, you're running for other people. You're making sure that you're keeping someone in mind.

Running is a healing force, and I want to be able to tie healing that is present within our culture and apply that to my work as a doctor. My dream is to become an orthopedic surgeon in sports medicine and work with Native athletes around the nation.

Nevaeh Nez audio diary: Ok, let's see. I'm just going to start by introducing myself.
Hello, my name is Navaeh Nez. My Hopi name is Tors’maysi which actually means Bluebird Girl. I am Badger Clan born for the Towering House People from the Hotevilla on Third Mesa in northeastern Arizona and the Hopi reservation. And I'm currently a third year at the University of Minnesota Rochester.

Nevaeh Audio diary: Honestly, I didn't even want to be a doctor. I didn't know what it took to be a doctor. I didn't even consider medical school. I thought medical school was beyond people like myself. In all honesty, I had no idea how to even get there. I like, that just seemed very much not for myself or anybody like myself. My mom worked in office like human resource at the time…My dad’s been a fence builder since my sister was born.

The science, all of it was very new to me. STEM was very new to me. I remember being in middle school taking a high school biology class and being so amazed with mitosis and meiosis and looking at them under microscopes. I just could not believe you know, I was looking at at something that was inside of you and what happened inside of you every single day. I realized that I really loved hands-on activity. And I did a lot of basic laboratory work. I did pipetting, I made agar plates, I was able to grow bacteria. I was just doing all sorts of stuff that honestly, like I didn't even know people did that.

Going into how I got to where I am (laugh) I actually have a friend and her name is Tulsi and her brother was actually working towards going to medical school. And I told her I was like, that sounds pretty cool, but I don't think I could ever do that. And she's like, Nevaeh, she was like, you're the perfect person to be a doctor. Why stick to like, being an athletic trainer? Why won't you be something beyond that? And she's like and you’re Native American. And she's like, do you know how many Native physicians are in the program? She's like, none. So I went home.
And I was like, what does it take to be a doctor? I searched it on the internet. I did my research. And later, found out that less than 1% of the American physicians are Native American or identify as Native American. And I was like, this makes so much sense because personally, I have never, I repeat, never met a Native doctor. So for me, I was like, this is crazy. Like, there needs to be more Native doctors.

Nevaeh Nez: As far as moving to Minnesota, my uncle, the one that played basketball–

Uncle Pete: My name is Pete Nez.

Nevaeh Nez: He was the person that I talked to a lot about this. He was very much a father figure for me.

Pete Nez: I moved away in 2002 from Arizona. You guys were so young. You know, like I remember going to college always stopping by to see you girls before I had left…because you guys were like my kids…You're my nieces but I see you as my own daughters also. And when you had first mentioned about coming down to Minnesota, or to going to school, I was very supportive and tried to tell you about some schools that had tuition waivers and stuff like that.

Nevaeh Nez: And then one day, I got an email from the University of Minnesota, Rochester asking me if I'd like to share my application for free. I did so. I didn't know where Rochester was, I had no idea what the school is all about. I just knew it was a new school. And it was next to the Mayo Clinic. And they only had two degrees to choose from, which is Health Sciences or Health Professions. And I told my uncle about it. And he told me, he's like, Oh, I've heard about that school.
Pete Nez: I felt that if you stayed anywhere closer to home, it was so easy to give up. And that was one of my things about going to college was that I had to leave or else I would have got stuck. So, that was like the easiest decision for me. And I'm glad you made your decision to coming over too.

Nevaeh Nez: I remember telling my family when I was deciding to go to Minnesota, that a lot of them didn't think that I could actually do it. And that a lot of them believed that I was going to lose myself. And not saying I agree with them. But I also was scared of that. And I think that's why I've made it a priority to remember who I am and continue to embrace my identity.

[dance music]

Nevaeh Nez: I'd always try my best to return back to Arizona to dance in different ceremonies.

[music up, then hold under]

Nevaeh Nez: I was very much unaware of what “diverse” meant in the sense of Minnesota. Because diverse for me back home was extensive. My graduating class was 350 students. And 100 of those students were Native American. Probably another 100 were of Hispanic descent. And the rest were white. So it was very much even playing field and I’ve always seen someone like myself all the time. [music out]

Nevaeh Nez: And when I came here, I was like, I'm sure I'm going to meet so many Native students…. But when I got here, that was not the case. And I remember talking to people and they're like, Oh, you're Native American. Like, that's pretty cool. Like you're the first Native I've ever met like, like and I was like, Okay, this is this is a problem. like code red. This is a problem. Later to find out I was like one of the three students that identified as Native American at my campus and when I asked if they had like a Native American Center, there was nothing. When I asked if they had any Native faculty, there was nothing. I asked for volunteer opportunities within Native communities. There was nothing. And I was shocked. I, there's no other way I can describe it, but shocked. And I called my mom, it was like, mom, I'm the only
Native here. …And so I ended up applying for a program called Native Americans in Medicine, which is through the University of Minnesota-Duluth. It's like I hit a pot of gold, like I finally found Native individuals who are interested in medicine. And I found this community that I longed for.

I could actually stay at the University of Minnesota Rochester, but I’d I’d also be part of a mentoring program.

Mary Owen: You and I could talk forever, you and I could.
Nevaeh Nez: The founder is Dr. Mary Owen who's a Tlingit physician. So for me, that was super inspiring.

Mary Owen: You are not alone, and your need to be connected to your community. So many students come from far away. Even if you're going to a local school, you're still not in your community for the most part, except for our tribal colleges, right? So, …that's number one, that connectedness, it has to be there, we are not individually driven, we’re community driven.

Mary Owen: The statistics say that one in three of us is living in poverty, I would, I would say that's probably more like one in two. So….that impacts the students who are coming to us…like me, I was raised in four different trailer courts, ten different homes. And….also most of us are first generation, our parents don't know how to guide us through the system…. So we have to supply those resources that are the norm for 80% of the kids. 80% of kids in medical school come from families that have doctors or other highly educated folks in their families. Right? So we have to provide the books, we have to help people remember how to study given the environment in medical school, that it is that firehose of information, you don't have to be brilliant, but you have to be able to organize quickly and take in tons of information. So when students aren't ready, we have to be able to help them do that. …Students aren't always able to afford everything. Even though you have these financial aid packages, more students in Native communities come in with debt load that's higher than other students. Native students also often come in wanting to help family members, that's just what you do. I've had medical students, Native medical students, who've worked jobs, one even worked two jobs, to support family. So,
making sure that you're covering for the resources that you assume are there, but often are not
because our families, our communities, are living in....much more dire circumstances for the
most part, that's a generalization. So community connectedness, resources that you don't often
think of, having a safe place that they can go when they're hearing microaggressions and racism.
They need to be able to go and talk with other people who help them... so that they don't feel
like they're losing their minds that they're not off base, that what they heard was, indeed,
something that wasn't appropriate, they shouldn't have to deal with it while they're trying to go to
medical school, or succeed in undergraduate school. Those are some of the key factors.

Nevaeh: When I came to you UMR, I felt like I was representing a whole community. And
because I was representing a whole community, I felt like I needed to be like something like a
family medicine doctor or general surgeon or something that wasn't an orthopedic surgeon
because I felt like an orthopedic surgeon wasn't helping the majority of the population.

Mary Owen: Yeah, I would argue that if there's any place we need Natives, that that we really
need Natives in the specialty care because we already know family docs are so nice. And for the
most part, (laughs) pediatricians and generalists are not as the big as big a problem, right? But
we need we need to see our faces everywhere. And to help those professions recognize that there
are different models for health, right?

Nevaeh Nez: Yeah.

Mary Owen: You're going to bring to orthopedics this emphasis on community as far as healing,
and some more of our traditional beliefs, right? Respect, honor, humility, all of those.

Nevaeh: Yeah, definitely.
Nevaeh presenting capstone: Today I'll be presenting my capstone, Two Worlds: Walking the Path of Higher Education as an Indigenous Student in Health and now before I do so, I would also like to do a land acknowledgement as the University of Minnesota Rochester is located on the homelands of the Dakota, Hochunk, and other Native peoples…(fade under)

Nevaeh audio diary: You know, my time at UMR more has been different than most people. I don't think people understand exactly who I am and where I come from. Because this is a university centered around future health care professions, cultural competency is super important, because not only are you serving people that look like you, but you're serving people that don't look like you. And you know, healthcare is a system that was not designed for others to succeed. So you know, essentially this university is the change for all that. And I think that's why it's so important for the students around me to learn more about who I am, who other people are, who refugees are, who people that are being overlooked are.

(applause hold under)

Nevaeh Nez: They gave me the opportunity for my Hopi name to be said at graduation.

Speaker: Nevaeh Tors'maysi Rose Nez. Distinguished Capstone (hold under)

Nevaeh audio diary: I'm not gonna lie like, I think that's pretty cool, And I think it just means that there's a lot more room for change than I thought here. There was one moment where my chancellor came up to me and was like, we're gonna miss you, like, you have done so much for this university that, you know, you're not gonna go unremembered…. like one thing she asked me was if I was going to continue to be on the American Indian advisory board…she was like because you– you jump started this. That's a huge honor to know that I have that, that impact on people. But also to know that, like, I have left my mark here.
I'm gonna be honest, if you would have asked me a couple years ago, maybe even my first year of college, if I would graduate college, if I would make it, I probably would have said no. Like, there are multiple times that I believed that I did not belong here. Maybe I was making the wrong decision going into health. But like, you know, everything I've done during college has really led me to feel that I belong. And like, it's so crazy to think that like, I have a degree, I have something nobody can take away from me. And it's amazing to know that I possess something that my family couldn't.

music up, then fade & hold under

So these are our college stories. You’ve heard from Reuben Kitto Stately, Archie Yellow and me, Nevaeh Nez. We’re just three of a hundred-thousand Native students across the country⁵, so our stories don’t represent everyone. Not by a long shot. But one thing we hope you’ll take away is the power of our resilience. We’re speaking up when people don’t know our stories… or that Native American people even exist. We’re overcoming all kinds of barriers to be the first in our families to go to college. And we’re finding a way to be successful in two worlds… To stand among our people…and to stand in the larger society. We’re motivated to make a difference for future generations of Indian people. For all those who come after us.

Reuben Kitto Stately reads credits: You’ve been listening to Standing in Two Worlds: Native American College Diaries, a documentary from American Public Media. It was produced by Nevaeh Nez, Archie Yellow and me, Reuben Kitto Stately.

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⁵ https://pnpi.org/native-american-students/ (more than 100,000 Native students in college in 2019-2020)
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