

CULTURE

Native American students preserve tribe culture

Students to host campus powwow

Wilborn Nobles III

Senior Contributing Writer

Three Baylor University students visited campus last Wednesday determined to experience one must-do activity — rolling down the Indian Mounds.

“We’re visiting LSU, and we’re told we had to roll down the hill,” said Kevin Cochran, referring to the University’s Indian Mounds. “How much trouble would we get into for jumping the fencing and rolling down the hill?”

But when they walked up to the fenced-off mounds and asked about rolling down the hill, they received a lesson on Native American culture.

“They gated this off because the Indian Mounds are actually older than the pyramids in Giza,” said Skye Byrd, vice president of the Native Student Association. She is a digital arts junior and a Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana member. “But the rolling down them is corroding them [so now] they’re not even a quarter of the size they used to be.”

Journalism freshman and Oglala Lakota Tribe member Jaclyn Wagers assured the visitors that no one would get in trouble for sliding down them, but the group discussed how the mounds were one of the last sacred landmarks in Native American culture for more than an hour before parting ways.

“I feel like people wouldn’t roll down it if they knew [the history]. ... There are other hills to roll down,” Cochran said.

Informing others about the significance of the mounds is just one of the ways members of the Native American Student Association, NASA, bring more awareness of their culture to the University.

“Our goal right now is just



TAYLOR BALKOM / The Daily Reveille

Jaclyn Wagers, mass communication freshman, shows off her Oglala Lakota College jacket on Wednesday afternoon near the Indian Mounds.

basically bringing awareness of Native Americans, and then next we’ll be able to bring awareness to the issues to Native Americans and their tribes,” Byrd said.

Native Americans make up the lowest minority demographic at the University, accounting for 0.4 percent of the student population.

Byrd said most students do not consider enrollment at the University as a big deal, but she emphasized how important it was to her tribe.

“It’s two hours away, and that doesn’t seem far at all, but usually people go to school 30 to 45 minutes away down the road at a junior college or at McNeese or they don’t go at all,” Byrd said.

Although Byrd has attended integrated schools before, she said she felt isolated at the University until recently.

“It was pretty much this year I came to realize that I got used to being at LSU, and I got used to being away from my tribe,” she said.

Many Native American youths in Byrd’s tribe are leaving their traditions, a part of her identity she holds onto dearly.

“When we have children, at four months old we shave their heads, and I’ve noticed that a lot of them have stopped shaving their heads and a lot of them have stopped wanting their children to dance in powwows and a majority of them don’t understand their language anymore,” Byrd said.

By age 15, Byrd was possibly the only one out of the 10 children her age who understood Koasati, the language spoken by the Coushatta people.

“It’s really sad because once our parents are gone, that’s it,” Byrd said, “We’re not going to have anyone speaking to us or speaking to our children or anything.”

Byrd balances school with her efforts to preserve the language and traditions of her tribe.

She continues tradition by visiting her tribe on holidays and weekends to travel and perform powwows. Byrd was excited to meet Wagers, who also continues her traditions through practices like powwow performances.

Born in Missouri and raised in New Orleans, Wagers’ mother, noted for being the first in her family to graduate college after attending the University of New

Orleans, received a Master’s degree from the University.

“I think that’s pretty sad that they don’t get the same opportunities as everyone else,” Wagers said, explaining how obtaining a college education in the Oglala Lakota Tribe was seen as a financially challenging accomplishment.

‘My house smells like sweet grass whereas other people’s houses smell like candles.’

Jaclyn Wagers

Oglala Lakota Tribe member

Wager said she misses her mom because she was able to embrace and understand her culture through her mother. Because she only visits her tribe once a year,

Wagers discusses her traditions with NASA members who either relate to her culture or desire to learn more about it.

“My whole living room is filled with beadwork and artwork,” she said, “My house smells like sweet grass whereas other people’s houses smell like candles.”

NASA will share its culture with the University with a powwow performance Wednesday in Free Speech Plaza.

Contact Wilborn Nobles III at
wnobles@lsureveille.com

NEWSBEAT. Your Issues. Your Voice.

LIVE
Monday - Thursday
6 p.m.
Campus Channel 75

TIGER TV

**140 characters?
try 30,000.**

GUMBO

Order Your LSU Yearbook Today
Representatives in Free Speech Alley
Every Wednesday 10:30-2:30
Or order online at www.lsgumbo.com