

2017 National UNITY Conference Report

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My UNITY experience was not what I originally expected. My expectations were quite vague; I expected to be inspired and to meet other Native American youth, that was about it. I came back home with more than inspiration and connections, I happened to develop a lot of leadership skills and knowledge. Leadership skills which include delegating and feedback. I picked up these skills from the workshops which I attended on July 9th. I went to the “We R Native” workshop, the presenters talked about how to be a great leader, you need to be able to handle feedback and give feedback. Our feedback should be as honest as possible but also respectable, this can help someone improve a specific thing. This is also the opportunity to grow and improve yourself. I also continued to master some skills that I already had such as motivation and communication. My motivation grew as I listened to the elders and speakers who spoke before me. I gained insight on other tribe’s living condition and how important our generation is to our elders. One particular presentation that really caught my attention and motivated me to speak on the state of Native Americans, was the Dakota Pipeline presentation. This presentation included many people who protested and live on the Standing Rock reservation, they expressed their honest thoughts on it. There was also a video that was included, the video was very emotional. It dealt with police brutality against water protectors. For me, it was hard to comprehend the amount of injustice protestors went through just to have clean water. I have heard about it through articles and news, but seeing it on video was so surreal. That was what really motivated to use my voice to educate people on the oppression that Native Americans face and it also motivated me to take my activism to the next level.

UNITY also made me come out of my comfort zone. When we first arrived there, I was shy and really didn’t talk to youth outside of my group. But I came out of my shell when we started doing ice breakers. I noticed youth who were invested in what I wanted to say and what I am all about, this allowed me to break out of my barrier. I met a good amount of youth who have the same interest as me and I made friends. I also got to learn about other tribes and their traditions. I found a new interest in other tribes such as the Hopi and Salt River Pima tribes.

I found their traditional songs very beautiful and amazing. I was surprised with the amount of Salt River Pima's there were and how many of them knew their culture.

All in all, my UNITY experience was beyond my expectations. I learned more from this conference than any other. I gained a lot of information ranging from leadership skills to other tribes. I enjoyed every moment and it was an awesome experience for me.

In my opinion, I feel like Native American youth need to get interested in their culture and history. I know a lot of youth who don't know their traditions, songs, language, beliefs etc. I also know many youths who don't know Native American history, they are only educated on Thanksgiving and Columbus, which is basically what we are taught in school. Public school systems rarely teach students on the history of Native Americans, when it is taught it is brief and whitewashed. My solution for this problem is to incorporate our history to our Saturday Academies.