Metro State Hosts Expressions of Indigenous Knowledge Panel

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On Nov. 16, Metro State hosted Expressions of Indigenous Knowledge, an event held in honor of National Native American Heritage Month. The event featured a panel of three speakers, Linda EagleSpeaker, Dan Wendt and Harlan LaFontaine. The presenters shared their experiences and provided insight into Native American culture.

Margaret Vaughan, the evening's host, hopes that this event will inspire more focus and attention on Indigenous knowledge, which “covers the specialized local and place-specific knowledge bases, sciences and philosophies specific to individual Native nations,” she said. “I think and hope that events like this will inspire a push for more student interest in Native and Indigenous studies.”

Wendt was the first speaker, and prefaced his presentation, “Traditional Knowledge of Food Nutrition, Preparation, and Storage,” by explaining that he has taken a Western perspective on traditional Indigenous food during his research. “What you don’t know can kill you,” said Wendt, emphasizing that “food formulation processing and storage is the root of modern science and chemistry.” Wendt’s study of Native American food throughout history revealed that many traditional food practices have influenced the way food is stored, prepared and eaten today.

EagleSpeaker, from the Blackfoot tribe, spoke about the importance of mind-body medicine and the intersection of Native practices and social work. As one of the first Native elders to train in mind-body medicine, Eaglespeaker is collaborating with The Center for Mind-Body Medicine to develop a program for trafficked females from tribes in Canada and the Midwest. Currently, EagleSpeaker works at the Minnesota Indian Women’s Resource Center and leads Oshkiniigkwe, a program that helps at-risk Native girls between the ages of 11 and 21 reconnect with their culture and become independent.

LaFontaine presented “Dakota Indigenous Knowledge,” which detailed his journey from the city back to his Native roots. Even though he was not raised within his culture, LaFontaine immersed himself in a reservation community and struggled to learn as much as he could about his tribe and history. LaFontaine emphasized the influence Native language has had on how we currently understand the land around us. Although many Indigenous names have been lost, there now is an increasing push to connect the language back to the land.

Afterward, attendees were allowed to ask questions of the speakers. “As the panelists interact with each other and the audience, new ideas and connections are made that are tied to a collective sharing,” says Vaughan, “which may be harder to duplicate in other learning settings. I hope that everyone who attended woke up the next day and looked at the world in a different way.”

This event was sponsored by the Metropolitan State University Provost’s Office, the Equal Employment and Diversity Office, Voices of Indian Council for Educational Success, and the Ethnic and Religious Studies Department.