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AIR News

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"OUR MISSION IS THE PROMOTION AND SUCCESS
OF AMERICAN INDIANS WITHIN EDUCATION"

*Celebrating 33 years of community service
to our Native Communities*



Celebrating Our 2026 Student Leadership Honorees

We are pleased to announce our 2026 Student Leadership Honorees and celebrate their outstanding accomplishments, leadership, and commitment to higher education and community service.

It is a privilege to have been part of these students' journeys as they pursue their educational goals and work to create greater opportunities and a brighter future for themselves, their families, and their communities.

The Student Leadership Honorees were selected in recognition of their academic achievement, participation in AIR Programs and Projects, ability to inspire and motivate others, commitment to their communities, and determination to pursue higher education. Through their dedication, perseverance, and leadership, these students exemplify the values we seek to foster through our programs.

This year's honorees are:

- Justice Brown** (Campo Band of Kumeyaay Indians)
- Temevish Leo-Saavedra** (Pala Band of Mission Indians)
- Precious Dahlia, Zambrano-Tercero** (P'urhepecha)
- Juliana Garcia** (Manchester Point Arena Band of Pomo Indians)
- Elizabeth Grace Lynn Fletcher** (Pechanga Band of Indians)
- Xavier Riggs Kearns** (Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria)

We are proud to recognize their accomplishments and look forward to celebrating their continued success as they pursue their educational and personal goals.

AIR Programs 33rd Annual Awards and Fundraiser Banquet - 2026

Date: October 15, 2026 **Time:** 5:00 -8:00 pm
Location: Singing Hills Golf Club at Sycuan



Please join us for our 33rd Annual Awards and Fundraiser as we celebrate and honor the outstanding Native students and mentors who have been part of our programs. This year has been especially meaningful, with outstanding accomplishments from our collaborative Honors Program and the final class of students preparing to enter college through our program. Their achievements reflect the dedication, perseverance, and commitment of our students, families, mentors, and community partners.

We extend our sincere gratitude to everyone who has supported our work this year and helped us create meaningful opportunities and positive change for Native youth and their communities. Your partnership makes it possible for us to continue investing in the educational success, leadership, and future of the next generation.

We invite you to join us as a sponsor of our Native Youth Banquet, an inspiring evening where you will have the opportunity to celebrate the accomplishments of our students, hear directly from the remarkable Native youth we will honor, and learn more about the impact of your support. Together, we can continue creating pathways to higher education, leadership, and a brighter future for Native youth and communities.

For more information on our Banquet please go to: <https://www.airprograms.org/air-fundraising>

Student Honorees Bio's

Justice Brown *(Campo Band of Kumeyaay Indians)*

Hello, my name is Justice Brown, and I am a descendent of the Campo Band of Mission Indians and part of the Kumeyaay community. I grew up in Campo, where being involved in community events and spending time with my community has helped me stay connected to my culture. Being connected to my community has taught me the importance of family, culture, respect, and giving back to the people around me.

I am currently a freshman undergraduate student at San Diego State University, majoring in American Indian Studies. I always planned on going to college, but my original plan was to attend a community college first and then transfer to a four-year university such as San Diego State University. Through the AIR Program, I had the opportunity to take college courses, including a course through UCSD and an English course through SDSU. These experiences helped me become more comfortable with college and encouraged me to apply for SDSU. With the support and encouragement of people in the AIR Program, I decided to apply even though I was unsure of what would happen. When I found out that I had been accepted, I was extremely happy and proud because I realized I had the opportunity to attend SDSU right after high school.

Throughout high school, I was involved in several organizations and activities including Key Club, ASB, and my school's Unity Native American Club, where I served as Vice Chairwoman my senior year of High School. One of the accomplishments I am most proud of is graduating from high school and continuing my education at SDSU.

I am grateful for everyone who has supported me throughout my journey, especially my family, the AIR Program, and the people who helped me with the challenges I overcame getting to college. My grandpa has also played a huge role in motivating me to pursue higher education. He attended college and served in the military, and seeing the life he has built for himself has motivated me to work towards creating a successful future of my own.

As I continue my education in American Indian Studies, I hope to learn more about Native history, culture, communities and tribal issues. I want to use what I learned to give back to my community. I would describe myself as caring, outgoing, and hardworking, and I am excited to continue growing through my college experiences and see where my education takes me.

Justice has completed both SDSU and UCSD coursework and has started SDSU in Fall 2026!



We thank Sycuan Band of the Kumeyaay Nation, the Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians and the Soboba Band of Luiseno Indians for all their support and charitable giving for these many years. Your support has not only strengthened our work with Native Youth but has made them future leaders among our Tribal Nations.





Juliana Garcia *(Manchester Point Arena Band of Pomo Indians)*

I am seventeen years old and I live in Santa Rosa, California. My father's tribe is Manchester Point Arena Band of Pomo Indians. I come from a big family, being the third oldest of seven. I enjoy dancing and I am a Polynesian dancer. I love performing in shows with my hula group all over Sonoma County. My favorite style of Polynesian dance is Māori from New Zealand. I am also a part of the Intermediate dance team at my High School and I like doing contemporary and hip-hop dances.

Some things I like to do during my free time are going on runs, play the ukulele, reading my Bible, line dance, go to the beach, and hang out with my friends. I am looking forward to applying and attending college and see where the Lord guides me.

I am so grateful that I got the opportunity to participate in the AIR program and learn more about Indian Country.

Juliana has successfully taken our SDSU Tribal Governance course and is the UCSD Introduction to Tribal Legal Studies course.



Precious Dahlia, Zambrano-Tercero *(P'urhepecha)*

Hello everyone, my name is Precious Dahlia Zambrano-Tercero. I am P'urhepecha from Michoacán, Mexico, through my maternal side. I am the oldest of three children in my family and currently a senior at Charter Schools of San Diego.

Throughout my schooling, I often found myself feeling lost or out of place because Indigenous history, cultures, and perspectives were not represented in the curriculum. Learning about my own heritage was something I had to seek out beyond the classroom, which made me realize how important representation and cultural education are. Despite this absence, my P'urhepecha identity has always been an important part of who I am. My family, my roots, and the traditions passed down to me have helped shape my understanding of where I come from and the person I want to become.

Back in 2024, I was invited by Larry Edmonds and Carlos Ramos from San Diego American Indian Youth Center. This event changed my education path for the better. It has been a pleasure taking various courses at SDSU and UCSD while challenging me academically.

As I prepare to pursue higher education, I hope to use my experiences to connect more deeply with my roots and contribute to my community. I want to carry my identity with pride and continue learning from the generations before me while helping create opportunities for the generations that come after me. Being P'urhepecha is not only a part of my background; it is a meaningful part of my identity and a source of strength that I will carry with me throughout my education and beyond.

Precious has taken SDSU Tribal Governance course and is the UCSD Introduction to Tribal Legal Studies course



We thank the Southern California Tribal Chairmen's Association for all their support and charitable giving for these many years. Your commitment to our Tribal Communities has not only strengthened our work with Native Youth but has made them future leaders among our Tribal Nations.



Temevish Leo-Saavedra (*Pala Band of Mission Indians*)

My name is Temevish Leo Saavedra, and I am a senior in High School. I'm Kupa, Kumeyaay, Pueblo and Nhanho. During high school, I have tried to take advantage of different opportunities that have helped me grow, learn more about myself, and think about what I want to do after graduation. My family has always encouraged me to take those opportunities and has taught me to be independent and responsible for my own future.

Through the AIR Programs, I was able to take college classes, including Written Communication and Youth Introduction to Law. Taking college classes while in high school helped me become more confident with college-level work, speak up more, and improve my writing and communication skills. Youth Introduction to Law was especially meaningful to me because I learned about how tribal law and U.S. law interact. With so many Tribal Nations in San Diego, it gave me a better understanding of tribal governments and how it connects to the larger legal system. It also made me more interested in learning about my own community and its history.

I also had the opportunity to take part in the Healthcare pathway in High School. It introduced me to different areas of healthcare and gave me experience with things like patient care, first aid, anatomy, and the responsibilities that come with working in healthcare. I also took Spanish as a separate class. Learning a new language was challenging for me because languages are not something that comes naturally to me, but it taught me to keep working at something even when it is difficult.

As I have gone through these different experiences, I have learned more about the type of work I enjoy. I like working with my hands, figuring things out, and being able to see the results of my work. That is what has led me toward pursuing HVAC after high school. I plan to enter a trade, gain experience, and eventually start my own HVAC business. I want to build something of my own that gives me independence, financial stability, and control over my career.

Temevish has completed the SDSU Tribal Governance course and the UCSD Introduction to Tribal Legal Studies course



Elizabeth Fletcher (*Pechanga Band of Indians*)

Hi, my name is Elizabeth Fletcher, and I am from the Pechanga Band of Indians. I am 17 years old and attend Great Oak High School in Temecula. Throughout high school, I have completed 140+ hours of community service with my tribe and served on the Pechanga Youth Council for two years as secretary. I am also a board member of Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA) and am currently working on a service project for Active Civic Engagement called "Rooted in Native Communities."

I have taken four AP courses, studied Chamtéela through Palomar College for four years, and am currently completing CTE Kinesiology and CTE Child Development. These experiences have helped me realize how much I want to work with children in the medical field. They have also helped me decide that I want to major in Native American Studies and Speech-Language Pathology. My goal is to become a medical speech-language pathologist.

Elizabeth has completed the SDSU Tribal Governance course and the UCSD Introduction to Tribal Legal Studies course



Thank you to SDSU Dept. of American Indian Studies for working and supporting our program from the beginning and thank you to the SDSU Native Resource Center for all your support for our Program and supporting Native Students at SDSU!





Xavier R Kearns (*Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria*)

Oppun towis, my name is Xavier Kearns, and I am a citizen of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria of California. I am 17 years old and a senior in high school, where I am undertaking the International Baccalaureate program. In addition to participating in the AIR program, I participate in my district's Title VI program here in Bellevue, Washington.

Outside of academics, my interests include water polo and wrestling. I am currently the captain of my school's water polo team and a state-level wrestler. I aspire to major in Biology or Biochemistry in college, and I plan to apply to a variety of UC campuses, particularly UC San Diego and UC Davis, to pursue this goal.

Xavier has completed the UCSD Introduction to Tribal Legal Studies course



Anouncing our AIR & Colusa Indian Energy Scholars - 2026

We are pleased to announce our 2026 AIR Programs and Colusa Indian Energy Scholars and celebrate their outstanding accomplishments, leadership, and commitment to higher education.

These scholarships are made possible through the generous support of our donors and ongoing fundraising efforts. We are proud of our partnership between Colusa Indian Energy and AIR, which provides scholarship funding to students pursuing degrees and careers in energy and other STEM-related fields of study.

Congratulations to our 2026 scholars! We are honored to support their educational journeys and look forward to seeing all they accomplish in the future.

Isabella Guevara (*Algonquin Descendant*) / UCLA

Sophia Mercado (*Ysleta Del Sur Pueblo (Tigua)*) / UCI

Eshpaa Leo-Saavedra (*Pala Band of Mission Indians*) / SDSU

Mia Quinn (*Rincon Band of Luiseno Indians*) / UC Davis



UC San Diego

Thank you to Native Oaks Golf Club and UCSD for your generous donations. Your donations helps to continue our programming to our Native Youth. Thank you!



Honors Project: Student Admissions



Celebrating Our Native Youth and 33 Years of Support

It has been an exciting and inspiring year!

Our students continue to excel and pursue higher education at a number of nationally recognized universities. This demonstrates that our students can—and do—compete with the best in our nation.

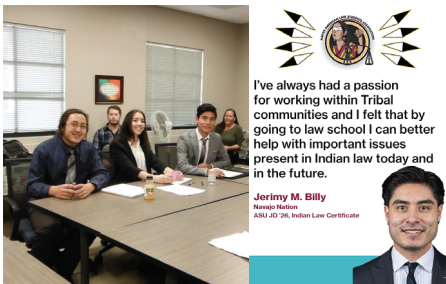
While we are proud to have supported and assisted our students along their journeys, it is truly our Native youth who continue to reach for the stars when given the opportunity, encouragement, and mentorship. So many of our Native Programs have come together to provide that support, creating opportunities for our students to thrive and succeed.

As we reflect on our efforts and accomplishments, we are proud to see our students becoming lawyers, Tribal leaders, nurses, veterinarians, and professionals in so many other fields. Their achievements are a testament to their determination, resilience, and the strength of our Native communities.

We extend our deepest gratitude to our Tribal and Native communities for your unwavering support throughout the past 33 years. Your commitment has helped make these opportunities possible and has allowed generations of Native youth to dream bigger and reach higher.

We look forward to continuing this journey together and celebrating many more years of success, achievement, and opportunity for our Native youth.

Thank you for believing in our students and for helping them reach for the stars!



I've always had a passion for working within Tribal communities and I felt that by going to law school I can better help with important issues present in Indian law today and in the future.

Jeremy M. Billy
Navajo Nation
ABA JD 36, Indian Law Certificate

Congratulations, Glo!

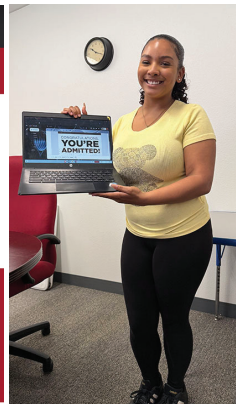
SDSU | San Diego State University | Office of Admissions

CONGRATULATIONS,
**YOU'RE
ADMITTED!**

WELCOME TO THE
SDSU FAMILY,
GLO!

We are so excited to welcome you to the San Diego State University community!

You're about to join the SDSU family, where you'll find inspiring mentors, lifelong friends,



AIR PROGRAMS

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