

THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA NATIVE AMERICAN CENTER: Empowering Tribal Nations Through Education of Future Generations

The University of Montana Native American Center, a symbol of goodwill and unity, will create a national gathering place and academic center for Native American education, support, and outreach programs. Native American education is more progressive in Montana than in any other state nationwide: Montana is the only state that has a tribal college for each Indian reservation, and UM was the first in the nation to establish dual-admission agreements with all of its home state's tribal colleges. In a showing of support unusual in these economic times, the Montana state legislature has agreed to fund operations and maintenance of the Center in perpetuity. UM will again lead the way nationally by establishing this academic center and unification point.

The time is now. Current space constraints inhibit further growth in the Department of Native American Studies and affiliated programs. As of fall 2006, 570 Native American students from across the U.S. and Canada were studying at the University. The number of students has increased approximately 10 percent per year for the past several years. Additionally, last year the Department of Native American Studies served almost 2,000 non-Native American students through its courses. The University anticipates significant increases in the number of American Indian students in coming years as a direct result of proactive efforts to recruit them and to enhance collaboration with tribes and tribal colleges. The Native American building committee has worked carefully to ensure that all Montana tribes had a voice in the decision-making process as the building design evolved. From the architectural plans to the general scope of the building, this project has truly been an act of self-determination from tribes across the state.

The University of Montana will construct a \$6 million facility to serve as the home for academic and support services and provide an intellectual and social hub for all those interested in learning about Native American history, issues, culture, and perspectives. Space in the building will also be available for other campus programming. The 19,900 square-foot facility will create a venue for:

- Exploring the intersections between the traditions of Native American and mainstream American cultures;
- Providing an epicenter for tribal leaders across Montana and beyond to gather, join forces, and tackle some of the most pressing issues they share;



LEFT TO RIGHT: Salisha Old Bull and Lani Old Dwarf

- Collaborating among the diverse Native American educational programs across the campus; and
- Providing a space for students to gather, to assist in the transition to life on campus.

The Native American Center, as the first facility in the nation built expressly to accommodate a Department of Native American Studies and other related campus programming, positions the University to continue its trajectory of excellence and responsiveness in Native American education. UM is a regional or national leader in nine different disciplines and areas—a testament to its commitment to provide a high quality, comprehensive set of offerings in Native American education. The building was given the last, prime piece of land on the campus oval—a focal point for the campus—underscoring its importance and the strong support of the UM administration. Fittingly, it is the site of an historic Salish Indian encampment, and the building is designed to reflect that legacy as well as the heritage and cultures of all Montana tribes.

As a symbol of goodwill and unity, the Native American Center will bring together Native Americans and non-Native Americans, fostering deep respect and understanding between cultures. In the words of Native American alum Jon Swan (B.A. Business Administration '03), "I see this as a place in which we can share how we can turn our trials and tribulations of the past into optimistic visions of what type of world we will leave our children and grandchildren." We hope you will consider an investment in this powerful opportunity to build the bridges of mutual understanding between cultures.