UC SANTA BARBARA
THE Current

November 1, 2022
Andrea Estrada

‘Awareness and Access’

Seeking to make a college education more affordable and accessible for California’s Native American students, the University of California has established the Native American Opportunity Plan.

Announced in April, and beginning with the 2022-23 academic year, the plan ensures that financial aid, as well as other resources, fully cover in-state systemwide tuition and student service fees for California residents who are members of federally recognized Native American Indian and Alaska Native tribes. The legal status of these tribes makes it possible to administer scholarships and grants directly to their members. Tuition scholarships for California students from non-federally recognized tribes may also be available through external organizations.

The plan applies to undergraduate and graduate students, whether currently enrolled or newly admitted. To be eligible, students must be California residents for purposes of tuition and must be enrolled in qualifying UC degree programs.

“As an enrolled member of a federally recognized tribe — the Skokomish Tribe in Washington State — I am thrilled about the recent creation of the Native American Opportunity Program,” said Mike Miller, associate vice chancellor for enrollment services at UC Santa Barbara. “This is a resource that will go a long way in supporting both undergraduate and graduate students at the University of California.

“While this in no way corrects what Native communities have endured for years and years, it does show a good faith effort by the university,” Miller continued. “Higher education is key in changing the path of Native communities that have been ignored for far too long and I think this new program will create both awareness and access for the next generation of Native leaders. As a first-generation and low-income student who grew up on the reservation, I would never have been able to attend college without robust financial support, and I am hopeful this new program will uplift Native students across California. We need to recognize that this is just the first step and there is much more work to be done as we look to honor Native American people.”

According to Shawn Brick, UC’s executive director of student financial support, UC has one of the nation’s strongest financial aid programs, and 55% of California undergraduates — including most of UC’s Native American students — receive enough aid to cover their full systemwide tuition and fees.

The Native American Opportunity Plan will cover those who don’t already qualify for that level of aid. The program is being funded by a combination of existing and new financial aid funds.

“We hope that the number of students benefitting from the plan will grow in future years as more Native American students choose to apply to UC and accept our offers of admission,” Brick said.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.