Entry Information

Entry Title: Wandering Stories
Name of PSO: Student Planning Association
School and academic program: Arizona State University, School of Geographical Sciences and Urban Planning
Nominator: Genevieve Pearthree, Student Representative
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Project Description

On November 30, 2017, the Arizona State University (ASU) Student Planning Association (SPA) hosted Wandering Stories, featuring six Native American planners and architects who shared their insights on Native planning. This unique event was an official part of ASU’s Native American Heritage month, and was co-sponsored by ASU’s American Indian Council (AIC). SPA believes Wandering Stories meets the APA Outstanding PSO criteria in several ways.

Support of planning: Wandering Stories highlighted the planning opportunities and challenges in Native communities, as well as how Native planning theory and practice can contribute to mainstream planning. It exposed students from underrepresented groups to leaders from marginalized groups themselves. Speakers discussed the challenges of fostering economic development and meeting housing, transportation, and other needs in sparsely-populated tribal communities, and the important role that elders play in planning for sacred spaces and passing this cultural knowledge to the next generation. Speakers also highlighted how they engage with Native communities in visioning, capacity-building, the development and updating of land-use maps, and the use of GIS technology where internet and computer access is sparse. The event also introduced students to non-Western concepts, such as Native American ideas of fluid time, and how indigenous methods can help non-Native communities become more sustainable through environmentally- and context-sensitive design.

Contribution: Both graduate and undergrad students from a variety of disciplines—spanning planning, engineering, architecture, and American Indian studies—were exposed to perspectives rarely covered outside Native planning elective classes. Wandering Stories was likely the first time some students considered how Native planning differs from mainstream planning. Increasing appreciation of Native planning principles is good for Arizona and Native American Nations, given the important role these Nations play in the Southwest.

Arizona has 22 Native American tribes, and tribal areas cover more than 25% of Arizona’s land. Tribal politics have a big influence on rural, city, regional, and statewide planning. Tribes determine the type of activities and infrastructure allowed on their lands, and many tribal lands—including sacred sites—are adjacent to, or surrounded by, urban areas. Arizona’s key commercial and transportation corridors, tourist attractions, and resource-intensive activities also pass through, or occur directly on, tribal lands. Thus, Arizona planners need a good understanding of Native planning principles and concepts to move city and regional planning forward.

Innovation: Wandering Stories was innovative in several ways. It came about due to a partnership between SPA and AIC—the first of its kind. SPA organized the speakers, and AIC arranged the blessing and provided guidance on decorations and design of the event space. The speakers also discussed ways in which Native planning principles can help foster sustainability, resilience, and sense of place—all of which have gained greater importance in planning, but were unique as they were not constrained to Western European notions.
of resilience or sense of place. For example, speakers discussed how the longest continually-inhabited communities in North America are Native communities, and that Native communities were traditionally planned to help their inhabitants survive, which relies on building communities to be sustainable and be in harmony with their surrounding environment. As the *Wandering Stories* speakers noted, modern cities could use Native communities as models and case studies on how to make the built environment more sustainable, bringing principles of resilience, context- and place-sensitive design, and ecological stewardship to the forefront of planning theory and practice. *Wandering Stories* introduced students from a variety of disciplines, and members of the public, to Native communities reviving these principles, and how other communities could similarly approach planning more holistically.