

HEA 530 Interview With the Associate Director

Interviewer's Notes on Jesse

Jesse "White Feather" Williams is a Native American whose family has always lived on the Eastern Shore. She participated in Binchley's Native American Studies Educational Outreach Programs for high school students for four years before leaving the area for college.

She received her B.A. in sociology and anthropology from Howard University in 2001 and a master's in public administration two years later. For the next seven years she worked in administrative positions of increasing responsibility at the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. During her last three years at the museum, she directed fundraising efforts for exhibitions, publications, and educational programs. She assumed the responsibilities of associate director of the Binchley Alumni Office two years ago.

Below is a transcript of the interview that was conducted after the interview with Tom Fitzgerald, the director. The interviewer had met Jesse when he was first introduced to all of the staff he would interview, but this is the first interview.

Interviewer: Ms. Williams, thank you for making time for me today.

Jesse: Please take a seat and call me Jesse. I'm happy to provide you with whatever information you need. We didn't have much time the day we all met you, but I've blocked out an hour for us today.

Interviewer: I reviewed your curriculum vitae and job description before our meeting. What's it been like for you to return to the Eastern Shore after living in Washington for so long?

Jesse (laughing): It's been great! While I made it home frequently for visits and I loved being part of the early years after the museum was created, I'm very happy to be out of the city and close to my family again.

Interviewer: Has it felt like a step down to take this position and a pay cut after working in such a high-powered job fundraising for the Native Indian Museum?

Jesse: Not at all. True, it was a relief to be making enough money to pay off my school loans quickly, and I'm grateful for what I learned at the museum and the contacts I made. But I missed the Shore and my people. And I never forgot the exhilaration I felt in high school having even a small part in the archeological projects at Binchley and learning about the ways of my ancestors through the discovery of artifacts and recording oral histories that had been passed down through the generations long before Europeans arrived in America.

Interviewer: Have you become engaged with the Native American program again since you returned?

Jesse: Yes! And what a joy it has been to volunteer for hands-on work again and to have direct contact with the faculty and students and their research.

Interviewer: In my meeting with Tom, we discussed the decline in donations from donors over 55 and the reasons for that.

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When I took a closer look at the data we were provided for our evaluation, I noticed a slight increase in last two years in the donations from middle-aged and younger alumni, especially graduates of the Native American program. The percentages of graduates from the program have increased, but that can't be the only explanation for the improvement.

Jesse: We have noticed in the data for the past two years an increase in the pledge fulfillment rate for the younger and middle-aged graduates of the Native American program.

We felt like it was worth building a stronger relationship with these alumni. We've experimented in the past year with one small pilot program designed especially for graduates of the Native American program, and the results are promising. We invited them back for a long weekend to participate in our current excavation projects and research associated with it. It's served as a great social event for them and at the same time given them the chance to feel like they are directly involved in our important research here.

We've not only generated income from the tuition we charge for these educational weekends, the participants usually end up donating while they are here, and often again when we solicit donations for specific needs of the research projects throughout the year. We've been staying in touch with them in a number of ways including a blog written by some of our student interns.

Interviewer: Do you have ideas for more pilot programs for the Native American alumni or other targeted groups of alumni from other majors like marine ecology? The college is so well-known for these programs, and your data indicates there's been an increase in graduates from these programs for the past five years.

Jesse: We've batted some ideas around. We just haven't had the budget to do more. I'm sure you noticed that a large percentage of our budget has been directed towards all graduates over 55.

Interviewer: Have you been gathering data to justify reallocating some of that money to pilot programs?

Jesse: It's not clear to us what kind of data we would need to do that.

Interviewer: Maybe we could make some recommendations related to that. Thanks so much for your time today.