NAVAJO NATION AT THE LOBO RAINFOREST

In early 2018, the Navajo Nation and the University of New Mexico announced a $1.4M partnership to provide a unique housing experience for Navajo students at the Lobo Rainforest Building. The Navajo Nation signed a contract with UNM to offer Navajo students inexpensive housing at the Lobo Rainforest Building. The Lobo Rainforest is located in downtown Albuquerque and serves as a gateway for internships and innovation. The top two floors of the building are available to house up to 118 Navajo students attending UNM. As of early spring 2018, 77 slots have been filled.

With this partnership, the Lobo Rainforest has created a sense of community to ultimately increase retention and decrease the college dropout rate of Navajo students, alleviating some of the burden of the students and supporting them in reaching their full potential. Even though some Navajo students may receive scholarships for tuition and books, it is still difficult to find and afford housing. The President of the Navajo Nation, Russell Begaye, has discussed that one of the primary reasons for the high college dropout rate for Native Americans is due to financial distress.

The partnership grants occupancy rights of the entire fifth and sixth floors of the Lobo Rainforest Building to the Navajo Nation through July 31, 2021. UNM provides all utilities, internet service, and routine maintenance. The Navajo Nation determines eligibility for Navajo students who wish to live in the Rainforest Building. Eligible students pay discounted rent. The innovative living space creates a Navajo community within a community at UNM while offering students access to the latest technological and entrepreneurial opportunities.

The Lobo Rainforest provides a place to nurture students’ entrepreneurial spirits. With proximity to innovative organizations on the first floor including the UNM Innovation Academy, Sandia, the Air Force Research Lab, STC.UNM, General Atomics, and start-up companies, it provides a gateway for students to pursue internships, entrepreneurial endeavors, and secure jobs after college.

SUPPORTING AMERICAN INDIAN STUDENTS AT UNM

In addition to the housing opportunity, the American Indian Student Services (AISS) provides cultural and academic programming for American Indian students attending UNM to ensure their academic achievement and assist in the development of personal, cultural, and social success. The AISS runs the Summer Bridge program. This program started as a collaboration with the Navajo Nation, establishing services that would help bring American Indian students to UNM, support...
them in their transition from high school to college, and see them through to graduation. AISS is also a liaison for Native students attending local high schools and schools located on or near tribal reservations; tribal and community colleges; tribal governments; and tribal higher education programs and organizations that directly impact the recruitment and retention of American Indian students at The University of New Mexico. Since this partnership, the program has grown and expanded. Since its inception, 376 students have matriculated and completed the program, representing 50 different tribal nations from all over the US.

Other programs at UNM, such as the Native American Policy and Budget Institute, are focused on improving the health, education, and economic well-being of Native American communities. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation has supported the work of the Institute through a grant to the Regents of UNM of $1.5 million for a period of five years. The NABPI will conduct research, budget and policy analysis, social justice advocacy, litigation, and community lawyering to encourage Native American communities to create self-determined and systematic change. UNM will continue to work on supporting the Native American community and grow more programs in the future through the UNM Innovation Academy, specifically with the partnership at the Lobo Rainforest Building.
ABOUT APLU

The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) is North America’s oldest higher education association. APLU is a research, policy, and advocacy organization dedicated to strengthening and advancing the work of public universities in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. The association’s membership consists of public research universities, land-grant institutions, state university systems, and affiliated organizations.

APLU’s mission is to: expand access and improve student success to deliver the innovative workforce of tomorrow; advance and promote research and discovery to improve society, foster economic growth, and address global challenges; and build healthy, prosperous, equitable, and vibrant communities locally and globally.

Based in Washington, DC, the association’s work is furthered by an active and effective advocacy arm that works with Congress and the administration as well as the media to advance federal policies that strengthen public universities and benefit the students they serve.

ABOUT THE IEP UNIVERSITIES PROGRAM

APLU and its Commission on Economic and Community Engagement (CECE) established the Innovation and Economic Prosperity (IEP) Universities Program to help higher education institutions codify, elevate, and advance their campus enterprise supporting economic and community development.

The IEP designation program recognizes institutions that have demonstrated a meaningful, ongoing and substantial commitment to economic and community development, growth, and economic opportunity.

The IEP awards program recognize exemplary and innovative projects in university-based economic and community engagement:

- **Talent** and workforce development
- **Innovation**, entrepreneurship, and tech-based economic development
- **Place** development through public service, outreach, and community engagement

Learn more at: [www.APLU.org/IEP](http://www.APLU.org/IEP)