

One of the biggest motivations that have empowered me as a student, athlete, and person, is my culture. My culture has instilled confidence and power in my life. I am Inupiaq and Siberian Yupik, and grew up surrounded by language and tradition in the small city of Nome. My culture was key in shaping me into the person I am today. Subsistence, language, and culture awareness have provided the foundation for my life. Without my culture, Nome would just be the town I grew up in; however, Nome taught me cultural values such as respect, compassion, and humility, giving it a much greater meaning.

Because of my culture, I have been given countless opportunities. I have become more interested in my community, and have taken the steps to become more involved. In the summer of 2016, I attended the George Washington University INSPIRE Pre-College Program. A program for Native Americans across the United States to participate and earn college credit in a political science course. While I was there I learned a lot about myself. That program helped me get an idea of what I want to do as an occupation when I'm older. I want to be a lawyer for my native corporation. I want to give back to the community that gave so much to me. I want to become a leader.

Not only has my culture given me the power to conquer my dreams of becoming a lawyer, it gave me the dream to give back to my community. I plan to attend Fort Lewis College in the fall. College has always been an option but it hasn't always been a priority. Like a lot of families, my family can not financially support me through college.

But I've always been told to follow my dreams. Therefore, with the support of scholarships and financial aid I am pursuing my degree.

Currently, Nome struggles with the youth and their lack of involvement in the community. Alaska Natives are responsible for keeping their political economy continuously growing. Elders and tribes entrust and depend on the youth to create the future. Generation after generation, elders have taught the youth how to maintain their identity and culture; however, the youth are not often taught the Westernized political processes and protocol that their corporations and tribal councils adhere to. Alaska Native youth have an obligation to continue the growth of their community; to do so, it should be required that the youth learn about the history of tribal governments, the voting process, and participate in cultural involvement. The most important factor to preserving culture, so youth can obtain the same empowerment I did, is education.

The students in Nome weren't given the same opportunities as I was, most of them are uneducated and unaware of the importance of their tribal governments. I want to change that. I want to provide a high school class in the local schools on tribal government specifically. The course can encourage participation in cultural involvement and provide an opportunity for students to reflect on their lives and potentially inspire them to make a positive impact in their community. This program will help prepare the youth to become future leaders. This program will empower them.