

On my first day of 6th grade, I was walking along the hallway preparing for my first recess when I saw all of my classmates run under the covered area to play volleyball. I tried to participate, but I felt out of place. So I left, and participated in the Native Arts Beading Workshop held every Thursday in Mrs. Allen's room where we carved baskets and color coordinated necklaces. However, as Mrs. Allen and I beaded our necklaces, I could not help but feel segregated from those around me. It was at this point where I recognized a strange inequality between what others expected of me and what I wanted to pursue.

As I have grown to understand segregation in many forms, especially in my own culture, I see more students leaving their peers to a separate place where they can express their cultural appreciation, instead of spreading it outwardly. This is what I want to change.

Throughout the few days I was a part of the Dartmouth Indigenous Fly-In Program, I experienced an unfamiliar feeling of outward expression, something I hadn't felt since my 6th grade recess with Mrs. Allen. I learned of the Indigenous American Museum eloquently described by the program's Coordinator: Steven Abbott and the engaging reactions of student's in regard to their time at Dartmouth. Even through the Psychology and Brain Sciences workshop held by Prof. John Pfister I could see values of Indigenous culture being intertwined with their teachings. Each professor I spoke with embodied a desire to create an educational and cultural environment that allowed their students to thrive. Whereas Mrs. Allen's haven of cultural expression ended as soon as the bell rang, the professors, counselors, and students at Dartmouth intended to expand upon that expression into the world around them.

Soon, I will be taking my seat in Dartmouth's class of 2026, and I will be a new barrer of rich Alaskan Culture. For me, Dartmouth is the place where I can appreciate and engage others in my culture, but what happens in the year 2030? I will be a Dartmouth College graduate and I will be expected to leave their campus and venture out into the world. This is frightening for many reasons. One being that I typically thrive in small, connected communities, and often crinkle into a ball when in the presence of thousands of people. And as I am writing this now and picturing my future, I am taken back to Ms. Allen's classroom. I was a free being in her classroom, but the moment I stepped out into the hall, I crumpled up my cultural expression into a small ball. I don't want this to happen when I graduate from Dartmouth. In fact, I refuse to take the knowledge I will learn throughout the next four years and not use it to spread cultural awareness all across the globe. But, ironically, the place where I see my most world-wide success begins in Ketchikan.

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The AASB Annual Conference is asking me how I will work to advocate for others in a lifelong journey to spread cultural inclusivity, but I see no world-wide change occurring without refining the roots of where the richest cultures are from. I was born and raised in Southeast, Alaska and I am beyond proud to say my lineage is rooted in the Haida and Tlingit Tribes of Alaska. I am proud, but I often think of the thousands of other Alaska Natives whose values are repressed rather than celebrated. My first act in working towards the recognition of these cultures is to create the Cultural Center for Connection or CCC. This center is already in its construction stages, and will essentially recruit members from the Ketchikan Community to learn and teach younger generations to love their ancestors and admire their culture.

If this Program is successful, there will be thousands of students across the nation proudly sharing their heritage, and significantly less children hiding their passions in an enclosed Elementary School classroom.