



Verbos, PhD Project, strive to diversify corporate America

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Since 1994, The PhD Project has encouraged African American, Latino American and Native American college students across the United States to enroll in Ph.D. programs.

This, in turn, will put more professors of color at the head of business classes, which may help to diversify corporate America.

For close to a decade, Amy Klemm Verbos, Ph.D., J.D., an assistant professor of management at USD, has been working with The PhD Project to encourage Native Americans and others to consider business-related academic careers.



"It's just a great organization," she said. "It's very well-run, very professional."

A member of the Pokagon Band of the Potawatomi Indians, Verbos was asked by the project itself to get involved in 2003. She said she attended her first official conference the next year.

"There's a Chicago conference that they have every November, and at the Chicago conference, they pre-screen potential PhD students, and then bring them in," she said. "There are a number of sessions to get them to understand what the life of an academic is like, what you do as an academic, and to give them a realistic preview of what it would be like to be a professor."

Generally speaking, the students who get involved already have their master's degrees.

After they sign on, they become Doctoral Student Members.

"The support is fantastic," Verbos said. "When you graduate The PhD Program, you become a faculty member, and as a faculty member, I have presented three times."

Verbos also has presented to Native American students in the First-Year Experience class for the past three years, encouraging them to consider a business major.

"I talk about what's going on in Indian Country in respect to economic development and the exciting things that are going on with businesses that are owned by tribes, how business degrees can be beneficial to the community because of all of this new business development that's been going on," she said.

She also has made similar presentations for high school students.

According to The PhD Project, there were only 12 Native Americans enrolled in business doctoral programs last year.

“(The program) has been very successful with African American and Latino American (students), less so with Native Americans because of the limited population,” Verbos said. “There are just a few of us around the country, but one thing that’s really great about The PhD Project is, we know each other from working together, and we’re doing a number of research projects together.”

Verbos has collaborated a number of times with Deanna Kennedy, assistant professor of operations management at the University of Washington Bothell; Joseph Gladstone, assistant professor of public health management of New Mexico State University; and Dan Stewart, associate professor of management at Gonzaga University.

“We’re trying now to set something in the literature so we know that in the future, people can find that literature and say, ‘I see that there’s a good connection between Native American values and business,’” she said.

Verbos said she’s glad she became involved with The PhD Project.

“There are always a few students who are interested (during my presentations),” she said. “This is a relatively small population that we would have in any given class, so a few students is a good start. That’s kind of how I look at it.

“A few students is a good start,” she said.

In addition to her involvement with The PhD Project, Verbos also serves on her tribe’s economic development board, the Mno Bmadsen Board, which conducts all the non-gaming, for-profit businesses for the Pokagon Band. She has taught at USD since 2009.

For more information about The PhD Project, visit www.phdproject.org/.