

The College Tour - Cougs Leave Their Legacy

Gerra Shock, an enrolled Yakama Nation Tribal member, shared her experience as a Native student finding her home away from home at Washington State University (WSU) in the award-winning Amazon Prime series The College Tour.

SEPT. 8TH 2024

Hosted by Amazing Race winner Alex Boylan, the series gives audiences insight into different colleges and universities through students' perspectives. Each episode focuses on one college and highlights its resources, opportunities, and experiences through multiple students' personal stories, showing what students gained from college.

According to Joelle Edwards, director of Native American Student Services, Shock is a distinguished student in WSU's Native American Student Center (NASC) and a strong pick for the episode because of her active involvement in WSU's Native student community.

According to Edwards, Shock has helped plan and take part in many NASC and WSU community events through her roles as president of the Ku-Ah-Mah Club, Tribal Nation Building Leadership Scholar, and the 2023-2024 Miss Pah-Loots-Puu Powwow Royalty.

Shock's segment in the episode titled "Cougs Leave their Legacy at WSU" highlights her involvement in the NASC and how she found community through the friendships she developed and the Native American Program's (NAP) staff who mentored her. Shock said she is grateful her community was featured and attributes much of her personal growth to those bonds.

"Joelle had to help me. Vinny (NAP Recruitment Specialist) had to help me. I thought I just knew everything. Obviously, I didn't. But it's ok to ask for help, and I'm glad I asked for help, because then I wouldn't be able to take the opportunities that were given to me." Shock said.

In addition to highlighting her leadership roles, the episode shared Shock's plans to use her education and creative skills to help her tribe preserve the Ichishkiin language so future generations can continue learning and speaking it.

Shock said that after she was picked for the show, the directing team had her work on a script for her segment. However, it did not feel real that she would share her story until filming day, when she had to plan what she would say, wear, and how she would present herself.

Months later, after filming the episode, The College Tour and WSU hosted an Episode Premiere Party on campus, where the students featured in the episode could bring others to see the final cut for the first time. Shock attended with her family, friends, and NASC staff. After watching the episode, she was happy with how The College Tour crew portrayed her experience at WSU and her story.

Shock said she really appreciated that the editors included pictures of her dancing at powwows. She said she has been powwowing since she was a small child, and having the pictures in her segment helps show an authentic side of her. She also said the film crew captured

many shots of her and others in the NASC laughing together, which was nervous laughter at the time because of the odd feeling of being filmed; the shots show her joy and what she does often—laugh.

“It’s the best feeling. I get to show other Native students that they can leave home and break that cycle. I have been doubted too, but I can show students on video now. It is nice to represent my tribe but also other Native students so they can have these opportunities also. That’s why I accepted the opportunity.” Shock said.

The final message Shock hopes other young Native students take from her story is to believe in themselves and their ability to do great things.

“You can be from a small reservation and do big things in a big university.”