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AMERICAN INDIAN LAW AND TRIBAL COLLEGES

Images courtesy of the National Museum of the American Indian

The Growing Market for Indian Lawyering

By Matthew L.M. Fletcher

IN 2005, I SERVED AS AN INSTRUCTOR FOR AN ONLINE undergraduate course entitled "Contracts/Torts for Project Peacemaker" at Turtle Mountain Community College. Preparing for the class reminded me of my own experience leading into law school, where I knew (or thought I knew) what a contract was, but had no idea what torts were. My law school torts professor described torts as a class in "what happens after s*** happens." Virtually everyone will enter into a contractual relationship at some point in their adult lives, such as by purchasing a house or a car, or signing a rental agreement. Unfortunately, most people will become aware of torts at some point too, when they have a car accident or when an accident happens in the home.

Halfway through the class, I noticed many of my students stopped signing on. The college administrator informed me that portions of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate reservation, where many of my students lived, had flooded, and several students had been relocated or had lost power and could no longer attend the online course. It occurred to me that some of the doctrines we had talked about in class would soon become acutely relevant to these students—questions about their housing leases, car payments, employment relationships, and so on. But because this was Indian Country, Indian law would also permeate the legal issues that could arise from their displacement and troubles. I imagined that my students who one day hoped to go on to law school would be rudely introduced to concepts they would someday study with other students who had no experience with such matters, as was my case when I started law school. The flood and disruption to my students also reminded me that American Indian students often face obstacles to their education, and many Indian people who dream of legal education might never get the opportunity to pursue it.

For many Indian students, tribal colleges and universities (TCUs) are the best option for acquiring a basic understanding of Indian law. Some of these students may go on to law school and some may not, but all of the students who hope to work in tribal government can benefit greatly from Indian law survey classes at TCUs.

A SHORT HISTORY OF INDIAN LAWYERING

In 2000, the U.S. Congress finally repealed the technical statute that required Indian nations to seek approval from the Secretary of the Interior for attorney contracts. Imagine that—before 2000, Indian tribes were forced by federal law to get permission to hire an attorney. Think of all the disputes Indian tribes have had with the United States, state governments, and others before the year 2000, and in each instance the federal government had to approve the arrangement between the tribe's lawyer and the tribe.

The tribal attorney contract approval requirement begs the question—did the Interior Secretary ever refuse to approve an attorney contract to prevent a tribe from asserting its legal rights? Of course! Felix Cohen, the father of modern federal Indian law and a former federal government attorney, detailed instances in 1953 where the Interior Department interfered with the relationship between Indian nations and their preferred legal representatives. Cohen himself was the subject of some of that interference, in that the Interior Department attempted to prevent him from representing Indian nations after he left governmental service.

Indian tribes now may retain any lawyer they wish without interference from the United States government or anyone else. And many tribal governments actively seek to be represented by American Indian lawyers.

THE MARKET FOR INDIAN LAWYERS

The market for Indian lawyers has never been greater in the history of American law, and it is likely to keep growing for the foreseeable future. American Indian people interested in higher education, interested in serving as Indian law advocates in tribal, state, and federal justice systems, or interested in tribal governance should seriously consider law school as an option. There literally has been no better time to do so.

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In the mid-1960s, there were fewer than 25 American Indians who were practicing lawyers. Many people, law school admissions officers included, apparently believed that American Indians from reservation communities could not handle a law school environment and could not perform the kind of work law school required. In response, University of New Mexico Law School administrators formed the Pre-Law Summer Institute for American Indians (PLSI) as a demonstration project of sorts, to prove to admissions officers and others that Indian students actually could do the work. PLSI is an eight-week program designed to introduce Native students to the rigors of law school. Nearly 50 years later, more than 90% of the approximately 1,000 PLSI alums who matriculated to law school eventually graduated. Upwards of half of the American Indian lawyers who have practiced since the mid-1960s attended PLSI, a remarkable figure. It is the single most successful program of its kind, and it continues to be highly recommended.

Today there are approximately 2,400 American Indians who are lawyers, amounting to only about 0.2% of all lawyers in the United States, even though the U.S. Census estimates that American

Indians make up 1.6% of the population. In contrast, more than 88% of American lawyers are White, although only 77% of the population is White. American Indians are sorely underrepresented in the legal field in general and in the federal judiciary in particular. Out of more than 800 federal judges, only one is a member of a federally recognized Indian tribe: Judge Diane Humetewa (Hopi) in the District of Arizona.

There are now 567 federally recognized Indian tribes and 426 tribal court systems. Tribal governments are staffing in-house counsel for executive, legislative, and judicial departments. They are staffing prosecutor, public defender, citizen's counsel, and Indian child welfare presenting officer positions all over the country. Indian gaming is a $30 billion-a-year industry and tribal natural resource extraction enterprises generate billions more. Lawyers are needed to manage and regulate tribal business operations, negotiate contracts, and occasionally litigate disputes with businesses, other tribes, states, and the federal government. Federal self-determination and self-governance contracts direct another billion dollars to tribal governments, and those funds require precise accounting and monitoring—usually with a lawyer's advice.

PREPARING FOR LAW SCHOOL

Tribally controlled colleges and universities are in a great position to prepare American Indians for law schools and legal careers, but legal education is changing and schools and mentors must be knowledgeable. Gone are the days when pre-law programs were the predominate feeders of law schools. In fact, pre-law programs should be discouraged in some circumstances. Law school admissions officers look to a well-rounded student experience in undergraduate and graduate programs. The most prepared law students major in philosophy, physics, chemistry, engineering, literature, mathematics, statistics, and several other fields.

Perhaps most critical to law school preparation is a heavy emphasis on reading, critical thinking, and writing—three skills that, at their core, law schools are best at teaching. Learning rules and procedure is secondary to these tools that are needed to be a lawyer, not to mention passing the bar exam. Incoming law students without a strong grounding in these three intellectual tools are at a serious disadvantage. Undergraduate courses that have a substantial reading and writing component are premium courses for preparing students for law school.

Relatively new to legal education is an emphasis on financial and technological literacy. Lawyering has always required practitioners to read, understand, and generate spreadsheets, and to comprehend complex financial operations. Also, in new and important ways, technology has permeated legal practice, requiring many lawyers to understand coding (programming) in order to advise tech clients, to manage their business operations, or even just to advertise online. Incoming law students grounded in math and sciences have important advantages here.

In addition to the regular curricular requirements for Indian students interested in law school, TCUs should encourage and offer support for Law School Admission Test (LSAT) preparation. Although it is well established that LSAT scores are poor predictors of law school success, and even worse predictors of lawyer success, every law school admissions office depends heavily on

LSAT scores. Law schools admissions are practically governed by the *U.S. News* rankings that focus on test scores. What is very well established empirically is that good LSAT test prep dramatically improves LSAT scores. Most law student candidates cannot afford the expensive LSAT test prep classes and materials. Tribal colleges can provide those resources, and can also offer LSAT prep classes for credit. The upfront costs will be more than covered by the outcomes—more Indian people taking the LSAT, more Indian people succeeding at the LSAT, and more Indian people going to law school and becoming lawyers.

INDIAN LAW AND TRIBAL GOVERNANCE

Not every student interested in Indian law and tribal governance need pursue law school. Tribal colleges and universities can devise Indian law and tribal governance courses that offer surveys of American Indian law and policy, and the specific tribal laws of Indian nations. Tribal government officials, elected, appointed, and employed, are all routinely required to understand, interpret, and apply legal rules in their day-to-day work.

In a given week, a tribal leader may be called upon to visit Congressional leaders or federal administrators in Washington, D.C., on Monday. On Tuesday, the tribal leader may be in the state capitol discussing gaming or tax issues with state leaders. On Wednesday, he or she may be in a tribal council meeting dealing with local reservation concerns. On Thursday, that leader may be serving in meetings as a member of the tribe's corporate board of directors to discuss business operations. Will the tribal leader rest on Friday? Perhaps not, if there's a meeting with county officials on a law enforcement cooperative agreement issue. On the weekend, he or she may be in strategy sessions with Indian lawyers and other tribal officials. No other elected officials in the United States deal with so many branches of the American government as tribal leaders do routinely.

Elected tribal officials will be called upon to learn and understand complex principles of Indian law. Tribal attorneys will be advising elected officials on federal issues such as gaming, natural resources, self-determination and self-governance compacting, and criminal and civil jurisdiction over members, nonmember Indians, and non-Indians. Elected officials will be making critical decisions on dealings with states and counties involving taxation, land use, law enforcement, and other issues. Elected leaders will be drafting, studying, and voting on tribal legislation and regulations, and they must intimately comprehend the many intricacies of tribal government. Elected leaders will become familiar with—and even experts on—health care, law enforcement and public safety, intergovernmental cooperation, housing, social services and child welfare, environmental regulation, and many more areas.

Tribal managers must be experts in their respective fields, but must also become familiar with financial legal issues, employment

law, administrative law, and numerous aspects of tribal law and governance. Tribal law that governs enterprise and government departments will be supplemented by applicable federal and state law. For example, tribal managers and employees should be aware of federal Labor Department wage and hour regulations. Undergraduate courses surveying federal Indian law and policy and offering real-world governance experience would be especially important to prospective non-lawyer tribal leaders, managers, and employees.

LAY ADVOCATES AND JUDGES

There is also a market for non-lawyer advocates and judges in tribal justice systems. Many Indian reservations are home to active tribal justice systems that depend on lay advocates to fill a void where lawyers are scarce or too expensive for reservation residents. Indian tribes also hire and train non-lawyers to serve as advocates in tribal court for a variety of purposes, representing either the tribal government or individual tribal citizens. Tribal managers and employees, especially social workers in Indian child welfare matters, may also appear in tribal courts or tribal administrative hearings. Lay advocates grounded in Indian law from TCU courses will have a strong advantage and be virtually practice-ready.

> The market for Indian lawyers has never been greater in the history of American law, and it is likely to keep growing for the foreseeable future.

Many Indian tribes also appoint or elect tribal judges who are non-lawyers. Many tribes require as a matter of tribal law that tribal judges be citizens of the tribe, elders, or fluent in the Native language or culture. Lawyers may or may not meet these qualifications, and so many tribal judges are non-lawyers. Lay advocates and judges, however, are not favored in tribal criminal cases, especially where jail time is a possibility.

INDIAN LAW AND TRIBAL HISTORIES

Finally, tribal governmental history often cannot be understood effectively without grounding in Indian law. Every reservation and tribal history differs and is unique, but federal Indian law and policy has imprinted numerous commonalities onto these histories. Indian lawyers often offer summaries of Indian law concepts and doctrines to elected tribal leaders and to tribal managers, but these summaries are poor substitutes for undergraduate surveys provided by tribal colleges and universities.

For example, hundreds of tribal constitutions and tribal corporate charters originated with the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. These constitutions and charters are often called, rightly or wrongly, "model IRA" documents. Tribal constitutions and charters from Alaska to Michigan likely will share structural similarities, if not exactly the same provisions. All affected tribal leaders should understand why this is the case.

Another critical example is Indian treaty language. Tribes in the Great Lakes region and the Pacific Northwest entered into treaties that preserved rights to hunt, fish, and gather on lands no longer owned by the tribal parties. In 1868, several tribes from Montana to Arizona entered into treaties that include a provision commonly called a "bad men clause." Modern federal courts interpreted these provisions largely to the benefit of tribal interests, sending federal and state agencies scrambling to implement and negotiate modern incarnations of these treaty rights with Indian nations. Tribal leaders and officials should be aware of the origins of these treaty rights and why, in some instances, these rights remain after 100 or 200 years of latency.

Each reservation and tribal history also has been affected in some part by the changes and eras of federal Indian law and policy. The United States has pursued often contradictory policies throughout American history. Many tribes entered into early treaties with the federal government that ceded massive acreages of Indian lands to the United States, and sometimes forced the removal of the tribes to western lands. Many tribes entered into treaties establishing large reservations later divided or shrunk by federal laws such as allotment statutes. Many tribes have been terminated and restored by Congress. Where tribal and reservation histories fit into these eras often affects modern tribal governance.

Surveys in federal Indian law can provide this grounding to students at TCUs who are interested in tribal leadership and governance.

CONCLUSION

Tribal members and reservation residents likely know this already, but Indian law touches them and affects their daily lives in a manner unusual for most American citizens. As a tribal lawyer, I followed my tribal leader, manager, and employee clients around the reservation and the rest of the country to advise them on a wide variety of matters. I was amazed at how much law these non-lawyers had to learn to do their jobs effectively. Still, there is no doubt that they could have been better educated in Indian law. If they had taken Indian law courses from tribal colleges or universities, perhaps they would have become Indian lawyers themselves.

Miigwetch.

Matthew L.M. Fletcher is an enrolled member of the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians and a professor at the Michigan State University College of Law.

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CAMPBELL

On Becoming an American Indian Law Professor:

2021 Update**

2026 Update***

Matthew L.M. Fletcher*

There are only a few dozen American Indians who are enrolled tribal members who are tenure system law professors in American law schools.[1] In fact, in our quick review of the American Association of Law Schools roster of teachers who list themselves as Native American Law instructors, we found ~~fewer than 30~~ ~~28~~ **32** tribal members who are currently tenure system law professors (plus at least one who will join a law faculty this fall), ~~**a slight drop from 2012 when**~~ **a slight increase we first conducted this quick survey**.

Between 2012 and 2021, several law schools have ~~closed~~ ~~or~~ merged, a few others declined to replace Indian law profs that left (looking at you Minnesota, Syracuse, Oregon, and Lewis & Clark), and at least one school shuttered its Indian law program. However, a few law schools have founded or rebooted Indian law programs in recent years (Tulsa, Oklahoma City, perhaps others), hired new faculty (Stanford, Michigan, NYU, etc.), and many more are offering Indian law classes regularly. The trend is continuing to be solidly

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** **The 2021 version of this paper was an update from a paper I put together with the help of MSU ILPC students in 2012. Updated and changed text from the paper is bolded and in red.**

*** **This paper is a partial update of a paper most recently updated in 2021. Updated and changed text is bolded and in blue.**

* **Henry Burns Hutchins Collegiate Professor of Law and Professor of American Culture, University of Michigan**. JD, Michigan Law School. Enrolled member, Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians. Miigwetch to Elaine Barr for her research help, and to Kristen Carpenter, Kate Fort, Catherine Grosso, Angela Riley, and Wenona Singel for comments and suggestions. **For the 2021 update, I received helpful suggestions from Carpenter, Fort, Riley, Singel, and Stacy Leeds.** The author has ~~six~~ **nine** years of experience as a member of faculty appointments committees at Michigan State (~~5~~ **8** years) and North Dakota (1 year), including ~~two~~ **three** years as hiring chair at Michigan State. **The author has also chaired a law school dean search committee and served on two other law school dean search committees (Michigan and MSU).** Fletcher presented the first version of this paper at the annual meeting of the National Native American Law Students Association's career panel at the 2012 Federal Bar Association Indian Law Conference at the Pojoaque Pueblo, New Mexico. **He presented an updated version for Arizona State O'Connor College of Law's 2021 conference "Transforming the Academy."**

[1] *E.g.*, Robert B. Porter, *A Seneca Indian in King Arthur's Law School: Observations Along the Journey*, 7 MICH. J. RACE & L. 529 (2002).

in favor of more Indian law since 2021. Overall, this is a very good time to seek a law teaching position.

We study this group **of 33**, as well as ~~a few~~ ~~8~~ **7** additional tribal members who either are in a non-tenure clinical position or have left the academy for loftier pursuits, for purposes of identifying the profiles of tribally enrolled American Indians on the tenure track in American law schools.

A quick disclaimer – the faculty hiring process is subjective, and other faculty recruiters (including those at my law school) may have significantly different views on this question.

I. The Profile of a Law Professor

Tenure system law professors come with a fairly uniform professional profile. They are graduates of one of the ten law schools that supply about 70 percent of the tenure system law professors in the nation – Yale, Harvard, NYU, Columbia, Virginia, Berkeley, Penn, Chicago, Michigan, and Stanford.[2] **More than 94 percent of tenure system professors at top 10 law schools went to a top ten law school.**[3] They were editors on their law school's law review, and usually had the grade point average commensurate to the honor of earning a law review position. They clerked for one or more federal judges, or perhaps a state supreme court. They published one or more significant law review articles (or four of five, and perhaps a book) after graduation and before they earned a tenure system position. An increasing number of law professors have additional graduate degrees, such as an LLM or a PhD. Finally, more and more of these professors spent a year or more in a VAP (visiting assistant professorship) or teaching fellowship designed to prepare the law teaching candidate for a life of teaching and scholarship, as well as assistance in finding a law teaching job. Many could draw upon professional references that include famed, reputable law professors, not to mention the judges for whom the professors clerked. Not all of these qualifications are necessary – in fact, none of them are – but the vast majority of successful law teaching candidates have earned most of these credentials. It is well established that white males with financial security are most likely to meet this profile, though anyone can meet them.

Law schools examining law professor candidate profiles look for these criteria as indicators about the potential success of the candidate as a law professor both in terms of scholarly potential and teaching capacity. However, law faculties value scholarly potential far, far more than any other indicator mentioned above. Once a law school hiring committee identifies as a candidate, on paper, as a potential scholar, they will want to meet that candidate

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[2] *See* BRANNON P. DENNING, MARCIA L. MCCORMICK, AND JEFFREY M. LIPSHAW, BECOMING A LAW PROFESSOR: A CANDIDATE'S GUIDE xiii & n. 2 (2011).

[3] **Eric J. Segall & Adam Feldman, *The Elite Teaching the Elite: Who Gets Hired by the Top Law Schools?*, 68 J. LEGAL ED. 614, 616 (2021).**

online in a screener interview where ~~at the Faculty Recruitment Conference (FRC) administered by the AALS **or in a short virtual interview**. At this conference, also called the "meet market" (or by some, the "meat market") **(or virtually),**~~ the faculty hiring committees will press the candidate ~~in short, intense interviews~~ for more evidence of scholarly potential and intellectual curiosity. They will make judgments about the candidate's character and personality in these meetings as well. If the candidate impresses the faculty hiring committee ~~at the FRC~~ during the screener, they may be invited back for a day-long series of meetings with the entire faculty, a day highlighted by a presentation of the candidate's most recent or development piece of scholarship (the "job talk").

Nearly all law professors teach in mainstream subject areas like property, tax, torts, corporations, and constitutional law. Typically, law school professors teach at least one required or highly recommended course, always a mainstream topic, sometimes called a bar course (in that the subject likely appears on a bar exam). Law professors often, but not always, also teach courses that are not required, such as law and economics, contract theory, First Amendment law, or environmental law. Some professors also teach classes that are not considered by many observers to be mainstream law school subject areas, such as critical race theory, feminist legal theory, law and literature, and American Indian law.

Faculty hiring committees are inundated with impressive scholars at the outset of the hiring season, so many hiring committees will narrow down their search based on teaching interests, which usually are tied to scholarly interests. A faculty may have a need for a tax professor, and so the hiring committee will look only for candidates with an interest in teaching tax and, usually, an accompanying scholarly interest in tax.

Faculties may also narrow their search, to some extent, based on geographic considerations. East and west coast-based law schools, and other schools located in major metropolitan areas, have considerable advantages over schools located in rural areas. Faculties sometimes talk about certain candidates in terms of their "gettability," and so some candidates with a tie to the law school's region often receive extra consideration. "Gettability" has other meanings as well, especially when lower ranked law schools are in a recruitment contest over highly credentialed faculty candidates.

Some law schools have specialized programs and centers that require highly specialized professors. Most of these programs and centers are focused on aspects of mainstream legal subject areas – for example, intellectual property, international law, immigration, and legal ethics and the legal profession. Some centers and programs are more focused, even niches. American Indian law is one of these. There are a few dozen law schools that harbor an Indian law program. And so we turn to the discussion of American Indian law professors.

II. A Profile of ~~31~~ ~~36~~ 40 ~~Tenure System~~ Law Professors

Our research on the profession profile of a selected group of ~~31~~ ~~36~~ **48** American Indian law professors[4] ~~indicates~~ **revealed** a few unusual conclusions. Tribally enrolled American Indian law professors often do not meet many (or *any*) of the acknowledged criteria for law professors,[5] **which of course shows the generally acknowledged thinking about law prof qualifications is basically a sham. This survey updated in 2021 – and again in 2026 – confirms that the overall profile remained the same.**

First, while roughly 70 percent of all American law school professors within the tenure system graduated from one of ten law schools, ~~about~~ **more than** half of the American Indian law professors reviewed (2012: 15 out of 31) **(2021: 18 out of 36) (2026: 27 out of 48)** graduated from schools outside the traditional ten **(~~three~~ four others graduated from T14/T15 or equivalent schools, that is, UCLA. Georgetown, and Toronto)**. Nearly all of those that did not graduate from one of the ten graduated from a law school nestled in the heart of Indian country, schools like **Arizona State, Mitchell Hamline,** North Dakota, Tulsa, New Mexico, Minnesota, Oregon, Kansas, Washington, Utah, Oklahoma, Lewis & Clark, Idaho, and Wisconsin.[6] A few of these ~~fifteen~~ ~~21~~ **27** enhanced their educational profile by going on to acquire a graduate law degree (LLM or SJD) – ~~one at Yale, one at Arizona, one at Tulsa, and three with~~ **Arizona's Indigenous Peoples Law & Policy LLM/SJD program, ~~and~~** Wisconsin's excellent and nationally-reputable Hastie Fellowship, **~~for example, have placed multiple graduates in law teaching jobs~~. and UCLA Law School through their fellowships in critical race theory and Indian law (Milanovich Fellowship) have placed several current Indian law profs.** Others have doctorates in other subject areas like history, and a few have MBAs.

Second, relatively few of the professors studied acquired the other hallmarks of law professors. A few clerked for a federal court judge after law school **– more and more Native law grads are clerking party thanks to the work by the American Indian Law Center's Pre-Law Summer Institute clerking programs**. A few earned memberships on their school's law review, while a few participated in secondary law journals at their law school. **In recent years, a few American Indian lawyers have entered the teaching market through elite VAPs (visiting assistant professorships) or teaching fellowships run by schools like Harvard and Chicago.**

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[4] It is not without controversy that this paper limits discussion to law professors whom I know or believe are members of federally recognized Indian tribes. If there was doubt, I excluded the professor from the study. There are many law professors who most certainly are American Indians or Indigenous peoples from other countries who are excluded. Identity politics, however, is an issue in the field as it is elsewhere, and I hope limiting our study to members of federally recognized tribes helps us to avoid much of this controversy. I believe the study size is sufficient and representative of the entire corpus of American Indian law professors, tribal members and nonmembers alike. Moreover, there are probably some errors in the data collected, no fault of Elaine's **or any of my other researchers**. The list of ~~31~~ **37** is probably over- and under-inclusive, but serves our purposes for this paper. If any faculty member thinks they're included in the study improperly or is misrepresented somehow, I encourage that faculty member to update their public profile immediately.

[5] *See* Porter, *supra* note 1, at 529.

[6] **The exceptions include** graduates of ~~Northwestern and Georgetown~~ **UCLA and Toronto**, law schools with similar reputations as the traditional ten schools.

We do not, at this time, have access to information that is usually considered personal, confidential information, such as grades. We also do not have access to the professors' Faculty Appointment Register forms used by the AALS to allow law schools to quickly scan for criteria such as teaching preferences and references.

Moreover, we don't really know *how* many people in this group became law professors. Not everyone proceeded through the AALS process, for example, so we don't know how many who did. More importantly, every professor has a different story. American Indian law professors are nontraditional professors, as the data indicates, and so their stories differ from the stories of the vast majority of law professors.

III. On Becoming an American Indian Law Professor

This section offers a wide swath of advice and recommendations to American Indians for establishing oneself as a viable candidate to become a law professor. There is never a guarantee in the law professor market – even successful scholars can fail – but American Indians can and should succeed. American Indians are desperately underrepresented in the academy and in the profession, and the field to which Indian legal scholars usually gravitate (American Indian law) is a growing one.

But there are pitfalls, and the process is designed to weed out the vast majority of potential candidates. In fact, it is very likely that faculty at law schools outside the traditional ten feeder schools do very little (perhaps for lack of experience) to groom their graduates for a teaching career. Most candidates operate in the dark. Hopefully, this paper will shed some light on the process.

Related to this point are the serious changes occurring in the academy. Observers have been criticizing law schools for not teaching enough practical skills for decades, and that criticism has begun to reach intense levels given the lousy state of the legal job market. Meanwhile, many law schools have been looking for interdisciplinary candidates – that is, candidates with economics, science, and math backgrounds with the skills to conduct empirical research (usually someone with a doctorate in the social sciences). These two trends are somewhat in conflict, but suffice it to say that an American Indian law faculty candidate with a math or science background that has an empirical research-based scholarly agenda would be an especially hot commodity.

Laying the Groundwork

Find a mentor that is already a tenure system law professor. Really the only people in the world who know anything about what it is like to find a law teaching job are current professors. It doesn't have to be someone who is an Indian law expert, and that person might not even be a

reference for you, but it's someone who can guide you in the process beyond what this simple paper can do. However, a mentor who will read and comment upon your draft scholarship, and who may become a reference is ideal, of course.

Personal infrastructure matters. Personal infrastructure is the unwritten profile of the candidate that doesn't appear on the CV. Many law teaching candidates have incredible advantages – close family members might already be lawyers or law professors, or are otherwise benefitting from grooming by people (personal or professional or both) that law faculties may already know. **Law faculties are notorious for equating privilege with "less risk" in hiring an entry-level candidate.** If candidate A is the daughter of law professor B (or federal judge C or Senator D), or is the mentee of powerhouse law professor E, candidate A is a lesser risk. If candidate A is a graduate of a prestigious law school, then candidate A also is a lesser risk. If candidate A has none of these "names" in his or her professional profile, often (but not always) hiring committees consider the candidate a larger risk. **While more and more American Indian faculty candidates are benefitting from these connections, family and otherwise, these connections might not mean much to a law school hiring committee without much knowledge or experience in diverse hiring practices or Indian law.**

Many faculty members think of hiring (or say they do) as a risk analysis – what factors indicate that an entry-level candidate will succeed or fail? A "name" is a positive for many faculty members. Non-traditional faculty candidates without a name backing them up have to earn and acquire other credentials that replicate factors associated with reduced risk. Entry-level faculty members are relatively big risks for faculties. And so faculties will look for reasons not to hire someone. Don't let them find one.

Writing (and Law Practice)

Writing is absolutely essential.[7] This is by far the most important consideration in making oneself a viable law professor candidate. And one must publish even prior to entering the law professor market.[8] Writing is the core of being a law professor, and many American Indian law professors feel it is an obligation to write. While a law professor may write law review articles, books, casebooks, amicus briefs, editorials and op-eds, bar journal articles or other short articles such as book reviews, and even legislative testimony or other policy briefs, a candidate should focus exclusively on law review articles. Law faculties reward law review article

[7] *See* Denise C. Morgan, *Advice for Law Professor Wannabes*, 7 MICH. J. RACE & L. 458, 458 (2002) ("Whatever you do, write.").
[8] *See* Tanya K. Hernández, *Placing the Cart Before the Horse: Publishing Scholarship Before Entering the Legal Academy*, 7 MICH. J. RACE & L. 517, 517-18 (2002).

publications over all the others, even books, because they usually believe they can judge the quality of a law review publication, in large part, by the placement of the article.[9]

Luckily for those interested in writing about American Indian law, there is plenty to write about. But that does not mean that faculty candidates should write about just anything. Strategy in legal scholarship is important. And there are pitfalls to writing in a field that most law professors think of as a "niche" or narrow or, worse, unimportant.

It is my view that American Indian legal scholarship should be informed by practice experience. Practice allows for a greater appreciation of both sides of an issue. Relying entirely on primary and secondary documents is like trying to appreciate the nuances of an oral argument by reading a cold transcript. The issues addressed in appellate opinions are by definition outlier issues, and often distort the reality on the ground. Reliance upon law review articles and other materials that in turn rely upon cases and other articles repeat the distortion. All but one or two American Indian law professors practiced before they entered the academy, **but only ~~five~~ seven (including non-Indian profs, too) current American Indian law profs worked full-time in Indian country before they entered law teaching**. Many law professors practice before teaching, but only for a couple years. **Several American Indian law profs practiced for many years before they entered the academy**. There are many points of view on this question outside of Indian law, but in the Indian law context, it is my view that practice experience is indispensable.[10]

A scholar's first works of scholarship usually are descriptive works, where a writer may identify a problem or an interesting issue, and describe that issue comprehensively. It may be a case, or a series of cases, or a statute and its implementation, or something like these. The papers usually criticize the cases or statutes, and that's the article. A normative, or prescriptive, article is much more big-picture oriented, with many more cases and statutes discussed, along with the application of dense theory, leading to a normative recommendation. Many early scholars do not see the difference. That's okay. Successful, big-picture articles sometimes don't come to scholars until after tenure. Still, a candidate should know the difference.

Some kinds of law jobs in Indian country are better suited to establishing a writing profile than others.[11] As a general matter, law practice informs a candidate's scholarly agenda. In other words, write what you know. If you worked exclusively in-house for Indian tribes, as I did, then

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[9] For example, the perceived value of a candidate's publication of an article in a law school's general law review is higher than with that school's secondary law journals. Moreover, the perceived value of a law review publication improves along with the ranking of the law school that publishes the review.

[10] I am also of the view that much of the best and most influential law review articles in Indian law are written by practicing lawyers. That's another topic, however, for another day.

[11] For advice on writing while a practicing lawyer, see Rebecca E. Zietlow, *Writing Scholarship While You Practice Law*, 7 MICH. J. RACE & L. 511 (2002).

you're likely to be best at writing about tribal government practice questions.[12] High-intensity firm life usually forecloses much opportunity to develop law review articles, despite the unusual amount of interesting law review fodder that one may become involved in. Federal and state government service may afford more opportunity and still allow for interesting issues. A few American Indian law professors worked for Congressional committees with jurisdiction over Indian affairs. In terms of developing a broad expertise in Indian affairs, those jobs may be the best.

Knowing how to write a law review article, and how to successfully publish the article, is also terribly important. Luckily, there are some resources available for making that a reality; probably the best being the short book written by UCLA law professor Eugene Volokh.[13] Even before one submits an article, the writer should vet the article with people they trusts and who have experience in writing. Find an Indian law professor if you don't already know one, and establish a relationship. Some practitioners are experienced legal writers, too. Show these people whom you trust your draft article before you show it to anyone else. Take their feedback seriously. **In recent years, thanks to the leadership of Angela Riley and others at UCLA and Trevor Reed, Kate Rosier, and others at ASU, Indigenous law scholars have gathered to provide advice for junior scholars at a meeting called the Gathering of Indigenous Legal Scholars.**

A final note about law review publication. There's an enormous amount of talk about how to place articles, and most of it is garbage. Talk to your mentor(s), and learn their tricks to the trade. Do what they say. If a candidate is writing in a field like American Indian law, placement can be incredibly difficult. Non-faculty law review authors face a terrible hurdle in that their first impression with the people who usually select law review articles for publication – that is, second and third year law students – will use your job title and your subject area as their chief proxies for determining quality. If you're a practicing lawyer writing about Indian law, it's often a tough sell. Have heart. Some will publish their first article in the top ten law reviews, but the vast majority will not.[14] It doesn't matter. Publish the paper in the best place you can, and move on to the next paper.

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[12] *E.g.*, Matthew L.M. Fletcher, *The Drug War on Tribal Government Employees: Adopting the Ways of the Conqueror*, 35 COLUM. HUM. RTS. L. REV. 1 (2003); Matthew L.M. Fletcher, *The Power to Tax, the Power to Destroy, and the Michigan Tribal-State Tax Agreements*, 82 U. DET. MERCY L. REV. 1 (2004); Matthew L.M. Fletcher, *Tribal Employment Separation: Tribal Law Enigma, Tribal Governance Paradox, and Tribal Court Conundrum*, 38 U. MICH. J. L. REF. 273 (2005).

[13] *See* EUGENE VOLOKH, ~~ACADEMIC LEGAL WRITING: LAW REVIEW ARTICLES, STUDENT NOTES, AND SEMINAR PAPERS (4th ed. 2010)~~ **ACADEMIC LEGAL WRITING: LAW REVIEW ARTICLES, STUDENT NOTES, SEMINAR PAPERS, AND GETTING ON LAW REVIEW (5th ed. 2016)**.

[14] Fletcher's first articles didn't crack the top 50. *E.g.*, Matthew L.M. Fletcher, *Comparative Rights of Indispensable Sovereigns*, 40 GONZ. L. REV. 1 (2004-2005); Matthew L.M. Fletcher, *Dibakonigowin: Indian Lawyer as Abductee*, 31 OKLA. CITY U. L. REV. 209 (2006). Top tier law reviews rarely publish Indian law review articles. *See* Matthew L.M. Fletcher, *Federal Indian Law in General Law Reviews*, Turtle Talk blog post (March 9, 2009), *available at*

In recent years, several top law reviews have acknowledged a dearth of authorial diversity. They have taken steps to remedy those concerns. Some have adopted a blind review policy, which helps to prevent article selection editors from privileging writers based on the writers' background. Some have ramped up efforts to recruit authors from underrepresented backgrounds or who write in Indian law issues. Several top law reviews have published Indian law articles in the last few years, some more than a few. This is a hard-to-believe change from my perspective. When we put this study together in 2012, only a small handful of American Indian law professors had published in a top 10 law review. Now several more have.[15]

Enhancing the First Law Degree

The meritocracy[16] is in full force in the legal academy. Law school faculties continue to use the first law degree as a proxy for quality perhaps above all other criteria in law faculty candidates. There's a reason why the top ten schools supply 70 percent of all tenure system faculty **and 94 percent of all faculty in top 10 law schools**. American Indian law professors are a slight exception to that general rule, as noted above. Only about half of the ~~31~~ **27** professors studied graduated from top ten law schools, but many of those remaining enhanced their law school degree with a graduate degree.

A graduate degree program[17] can enhance a law degree from a lower tier school, but can also afford an opportunity to write. In practice, lawyers may not have adequate access to primary and secondary resources – let alone a proper research library – necessary for good legal scholarship. Moreover, the faculty members at the law school may provide ready-made mentors and advisors. Graduate programs at Wisconsin (especially), Arizona, Tulsa, and top 15 law schools have been jumping off points for American Indian law professors. **Teaching fellowships and VAPs at Harvard and Chicago have been jumping off points for some recent hires.** Others have acquired doctorates in non-law fields as well. For future candidates, know that law schools are looking for candidates with graduate degrees in economics, business, and science. A doctorate degree in history, anthropology, American Indian studies, and, other "soft" sciences is nice, but may not improve a candidate's chances all that much (unless a law school is looking specifically for that profile). Political science is somewhere in the middle, probably closer to

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http://turtletalk.wordpress.com/2009/03/09/federal-indian-law-in-general-law-reviews/. That must be the reason why. ☺

[15] ***E.g.*, Maggie Blackhawk, *Foreword: The Constitution of American Colonialism*, 137 HARV. L. REV. 1 (2023); Matthew L.M. Fletcher & Wenona T. Singel, *Lawyering the Indian Child Welfare Act*, 120 MICH. L. REV. 1755 (2022); Elizabeth Hidalgo Reese, *Tribal Representation and Assimilative Colonialism*, 76 STAN. L. REV. 771 (2024); Lauren van Schilfgaarde, *Restorative Justice as Regenerative Tribal Jurisdiction*, 112 CALIF. L. REV. 103 (2024).**

[16] **"Merit" and "meritocracy" are absolutely fake; the word "meritocracy" comes from a satirical novel mocking the concept. MICHAEL YOUNG, THE RISE OF THE MERITOCRACY (1958).**

[17] For additional reasons why a graduate degree program may be helpful, see Gabriel J. Chin, *Graduate Degree Programs*, 7 MICH. J. RACE & L. 481 (2002).

being more highly regarded, given the links between law and politics and the increasing emphasis of empirical research in American political science departments.

Surviving the FRC

Perhaps the most surreal experience a faculty candidate may face is the Faculty Recruitment Conference, known as the meet market (as I mentioned before). Several hundred people pay the AALS several hundred dollars, pay the airlines for the trip to DC, and then pay hundreds more to a DC hotel for the privilege of meeting law school hiring committees and deans. Over the course of two days, you may meet as many as 32 law schools – that's how many 25 minute time slots are available. It could be more as well, depending on how interesting your profile is, or significantly less.

The first step to the FRC is (after paying the money) filling out the electronic, one-page form that appears in the Faculty Appointments Register (FAR) that provides the superficial details about your professional profile. The FRC form asks you for your contact information, gender (optional), race (optional), law school from which you first graduated and any post-graduate degree programs, job experience (including teaching), teaching preferences, publications (if any, and there should be), and professional references. You will also submit a detailed academic C.V. that the law school committees can access if they want more information. First impressions are everything, and if your FAR form isn't up to the task, there is a 99 percent chance that you won't get another look from that school. Not every blank must be filled out – and it is unusual that anyone can answer all the questions (for example, not everyone has taught a class before). But law faculty remark on the white spaces on the form – spaces where publications or job experience might go.

Every eye reading the FAR forms looks for something specific, and admittedly each eye misses things and must make quick, subjective decisions. There are often 800 or more of these FAR forms for hiring committee members to peruse. And there are three or four different distributions – try to be in the first distribution along with everyone else that knows how to meet deadlines. Hiring committee members will look for law school, publications, recognizable names on the reference list, and teaching preferences. They may look for people with a geographic connection to the law school. In my experience at Michigan State, most everyone on the FAR list with a connection to Michigan gets a more searching look than most candidates. It might not be much more searching, but it is real. Teaching preferences also tend to elevate people who happen to fit the niche a hiring committee is looking for, as well as disqualifying good people who don't fit the search parameters. One could say the search often is over-inclusive and under-inclusive.

Once candidates submit a FAR form, the law schools then contact the candidates they want to meet ~~at the FRC~~ **in a screener**. Not everyone is guaranteed a meeting, and many candidates may only be asked to meet one or two schools. ~~If the candidate has few meetings, it~~

~~might not be worth the travel expenses.~~ Others will have so many invitations to meet that they will be forced to cancel some of the meetings.

These meetings are super-short and sweet (well, maybe not always so sweet) for the candidates, but they often grow to be tiresome for both candidate and committee member. It's a chore but that's the start of the process. Candidates should be ready to talk about their scholarship a whole lot, and to answer every question they possibly can with reference to their scholarly agenda. For example, hiring committees will ask why a candidate wants to be a law professor, perhaps the most ridiculous question that can be asked given the circumstances. But it will be asked, and candidates should have a pat answer that gets them back to talking about scholarship. Other generic questions one can expect at the meet market:

- Tell us about your background.
- What is your teaching philosophy?
- There's a gap of time on your CV. What were you doing?[18]
- What is your scholarly agenda?
- Do you know Professor [NAME] at [YOUR] Law School?
- Are you interested in teaching [A CLASS LOW OR NOT LOCATED ON YOUR TEACHING PREFERENCES]?

Candidates with an interest in Indian law will have additional questions at the meet market that may include:

- [Looking at the city on your name tag] Where is [CITY] located? And how did you end up in a place like that?
- Have you considered writing in another area?
- What else are you interested in teaching besides Indian law?
- Are there any Indian tribes near [CITY WHERE LAW SCHOOL LOCATED]?
- Why are you interested in Indian law?
- **[SOMETHING SOMETHING]** ~~**Standing Rock or *McGirt*.**~~ ***Brackeen*, plenary power, or equal protection.**

[18] **My favorite dad joke about this question goes like this: A is interviewing for a job with a company owned by B. B asks the question, "There's a four year gap on your C.V. what were you doing?" A answers, "That's when I went to Yale." B is impressed. "Well, then, you're hired." A relaxes. "Whew. Thank you so much. I really needed this Yob."**

• **What is your view on [TERRIBLE THING AN INDIAN TRIBE DID THAT WAS IN THE NEWS, *e.g.*, DISENROLLMENT]?**

~~Bring a reprint or two of your articles to each meeting, along with~~ **Ask if they need** a copy of your updated CV (emphasis on updated, because an ambitious candidate is always adding items to their CVs) ~~and offer them to the hiring committees~~. Know every detail about your article – you wrote it, after all. You won't be asked about footnote 111, probably, but if you cite to a powerhouse law professor, be prepared to explain why. Your scholarship is the one factor you can control, and it is the most important factor for the hiring committee, so nail it.

Another thing about ~~meet marketing~~ **screener** questioning – hiring committees often think you've included or excluded something from your FAR form to avoid being typecast as something. There's a longstanding discussion about the FRC – most of the candidates see themselves as ~~Kathleen Sullivan~~ **Leah Litman** or ~~Lawrence Tribe~~ **Neal Katyal** in 20 years (that is, high-powered constitutional law scholars who **run their own podcast and** are on the Newshour and CNN all the time) but will do anything to get their foot in the door, even it means teaching torts or commercial transactions for five years first. Law schools are often wary of these people, even if there's no one who is like that on their roster of interviews. They're still looking for them, and many of their questions are coded to elicit a response (a "gotcha!"). Just answer the questions, and don't play that game. I'll repeat this again – don't try to be something you're not or have no intention of being. But be flexible. If the committee says they're interested in an Indian law scholar who can teach contracts, be that person.

~~A few notes about the FRC. It is an intense, emotional event for many of the candidates. AALS offers lounges for non-traditional candidates. Take advantage of them. Stay away from political debates with anyone, and don't listen if another candidate wants to talk about their qualifications or how difficult the process is. Try not to make it harder on other candidates, either. Above all, be nice to other candidates and be gracious to your hiring committee hosts. Stay grounded in who you are, and don't try to pretend. Most everyone at the FRC is pretending to be something they're not. Authenticity may set you apart.~~

After the ~~FRC~~ **screener,** the hiring committees then call some of ~~the meet market~~ candidates back. Maybe 10-25 percent of meetings result in a call back, although many law schools call back no one. A call back is a good thing, but yet another surreal experience.

Surviving the Call Back, Jobs Talks, and Faculty Politics

The next surreal event in the process are the call back interviews with the law school faculty.[19] You may meet 20-30 law school faculty members, or more, during this day long (and occasionally longer) series of meetings. Each of these meetings is similar to the ~~FRC meetings~~

[19] For helpful advice, see Danielle Conway-Jones, *A Recruit's Guide to the On-Campus Interview Process and the Job Talk*, 7 MICH. J. RACE & L. 523 (2002).

screeners, but candidates can be expected to know more about the law school in question. It is a whirlwind, and candidates will be answering the same questions again and again while waiting and invariably receiving odd questions.

During this visit, candidates will conduct a job talk. A job talk is a 20 minute talk on the candidate's most recent, most developed scholarly paper, followed by 40 or so minutes of questions from the faculty audience. The time limits *are not discretionary*. ***Do not read* your talk. It is a conversation, not dictation. Do not be boring, but do not be crazed or outlandish.** The job talk can be a make-or-break moment for the candidate and should be expected to be the most important time in a visit. **Practice your job talk with your friends and colleagues. Listen to some of their suggestions but be yourself. And if anyone offers conflicting suggestions, just pick one and go with it.**

Job talks on subjects like American Indian law can be very strange, even considering how strange a call back is in the first place. Except in rare circumstances, candidates can expect that no more than one or two faculty members will have much experience in engaging in Indian law. In one sense, this is a minus because some of the candidate's 20 minutes will be eaten up in developing a background for the paper's argument that candidates in contracts or tax or constitutional law will not have to use. On the other hand, most of the questions will be relatively superficial, comparatively speaking.

Both the FRC and the call backs involve an incredible amount of subjective assessment of the candidate that the candidate can do very little to control. It may seem to an American Indian candidate that may be the first or second person in his or her family to attend law school (or even college for that matter) that many of the faculty members assessing the candidate are speaking in a sort of code. For the most part they are, and the code may be one of support for the candidate or not. Frankly, a candidate shouldn't even try to worry about it. It's out of the candidate's control.

That said, class, gender, and race based discrimination is absolutely real, but incredibly difficult to observe, document, and remedy.[20] Recent empirical scholarship shows that "law schools appear open to nontraditional candidates in the early phases of the hiring process but when it comes to the ultimate decision—hiring—they focus on candidates who look like current law professors."[21] American Indian candidates should be

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[20] ***E.g.*, Meera E. Deo, *Trajectory of a Law Professor*, 20 MICH. J. RACE & L. 441, 457 (2015) ("Empirical findings . . . show that there are ongoing structural barriers preventing entry for women of color into legal academia."). *Cf.* Meera E. Deo, *The Ugly Truth about Legal Academia*, 80 BROOK. L. REV. 943 (2015) (study on discrimination against faculty members). Professor Deo's work culminated in a recent book, UNEQUAL PROFESSION: RACE AND GENDER IN LEGAL ACADEMIA (2019). *See also* PRESUMED INCOMPETENT: THE INTERSECTIONS OF RACE AND CLASS FOR WOMEN IN ACADEMIA (Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., eds. 2012); PRESUMED INCOMPETENT II: RACE, CLASS, POWER, AND RESISTANCE OF WOMEN IN ACADEMIA (Yolanda Flores Niemann et al., eds. 2020).**

[21] **Tracey E. George & Albert H. Yoon, *The Labor Market for New Law Professors*, 11 J. EMPIRICAL LEG. STUD. 1, 1 (2014).**

aware of this reality, but perhaps the saving grace of the field is that more law schools are taking Indian law seriously. There is more of a market for Indian law academics now than ever before.

The Virtual Interview Process

~~We are in a~~ In the post-pandemic world, ~~and~~ many law schools have turned to a virtual appointments process. All of the complexities and difficulties of the process are heightened where the process is virtual. Expect technology problems. Expect the law school staff members (who are *amazingly competent and patient* people – you *have* to be to work in an environment populated by law profs) to make mistakes or omit important information by accident. Shit happens, be patient. American Indian candidates may be relying on home WiFi where they have to compete with family members for broadband or be living in rural or Indian country areas where the WiFi isn't any good. Be open with the law school about those difficulties in advance.

The Long View

An offer may come out of this process for a candidate or not. A candidate with a growing pile of publications should keep plugging away. Law teaching isn't for everyone, but every article an ambitious candidate publishes pushes the candidate toward the goal. Failure at first is a given, and many fine scholars take years before they find a tenure system home.

If the hiring process appears to have failed, there are alternatives to returning to practice. Many law schools have developed teaching fellowships or VAPs. Look into it. Let faculty members already in the field know you're looking for a position like that, and there's a good chance it'll happen. And once you secure that position, spend the year improving your professional profile.

The effort makes you stronger.

Miigwetch.

NALSA at Michigan

Yesterday, Michigan Law alumna Ann Coulter, responding to a decolonial Native scholar, stated "we didn't kill enough Indians." The implication that the United States should have been more aggressive in its genocide of Native people is morally repugnant and indefensible. We, the Native American Law Students Association at the University of Michigan, condemn Coulter's remarks in the strongest possible terms.

Despite its disgusting nature, this rhetoric is not new. The centuries-long policy efforts of the United States—including not only the active genocide of our ancestors, but the theft of their land and resources, segregation and ostracization on reservations, and forced assimilation—were informed by the same principle: that Native social and poltical ideologies are irreconcilable with American life.

As Native law students, we still feel this legacy's reverberations in our lives. We navigate underrepresentation and bias as we pursue our education. It is more than historical; it is deeply entrenched. Coulter's words are a reflection of the institutions that have allowed it to go unfettered. This has no place in our society today.

We call on all of our classmates, alumni, and broader communities to join us in publicly denouncing this type of hate speech.

We are left with the extraordinary responsibility to live with the same resilience as our ancestors did, to shape the very institutions that were premised on their eradication. Standing up to this speech is the very least of our efforts to do so.

In community,
Michigan NALSA

NALSA X MDEFENDERS

NALSA at Michigan

PUBLIC DEFENSE IN INDIAN COUNTRY

TUESDAY, MARCH 10
12 PM - 1 PM
HUTCHINS HALL 138

Lunch will be provided!

NALSA at Michigan

NALSA x CHLS invite you to:

NAGPRA TALK

oin us for a lunch talk on the Native American Grav
Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) featuri
speakers from the Native American Rights Fund.

Thursday, March 19, 12 pm - 1 pm

Hutchins Hall 220

Lunch will be provided!

(OPEN TO NALSA MEMBERS ONLY)

COFFEE TALK WITH JUDGE DIANE HUMETEWA (D. ARIZ.)

MONDAY, MARCH 30

HUTCHINS COURTYARD

2 PM - 3PM

JUDGE HUMETEWA IS THE FIRST NATIVE AMERICAN WOMAN AND FIRST ENROLLED TRIBAL MEMBER TO SERVE AS A FEDERAL JUDGE. A MEMBER OF THE HOPI TRIBE, SHE CURRENTLY SERVES ON THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF ARIZONA.

NATIVE AMERICAN POWWOW

APR 01 1991

NEWS PHOTO • JOHN HEIDER

Jerry Cleveland, who traveled all the way from Milwaukee to attend this weekend's Ann Arbor Powwow, dances on the floor of Crisler Arena during a competition for men Sunday afternoon. Jerry is also known by his Native American name, Walking Bear. The event attracted participants from as far away as New York and South Dakota.