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Respondent

16

Michelle Naese

05:05

Time to complete

Final Project Report

1. Date of this final project report submission *

5/15/25

2. Name of project exactly as it was listed in your award letter *

FFCC & NAH Speaker: Tara Houska

3. Date (or semester/year) of original award letter *

Fall 2024

4. Expiration date of award as listed on original award letter or approved scope change letter - whichever is more recent *

12/05/2026

5. Enter the amount of the award, including any budget increases as a result of a previous scope change. *

\$10,000

6. How much (in dollars) of your award (including previous approved budget increases) is remaining? *

\$0

7. Briefly describe the goals of your project. *

We are seeking to invite Tara Houska to visit UIUC for two events: a presentation for the Lunch on Us program at DSJE, and an encouragement dinner with NAH students. Tara Houska, from the Couchiching First Nation, is a tribal attorney and environmental, climate, & Native activist. We hope to bring Tara to campus for these events to share her wealth of experiences and knowledge for students at the University of Illinois. Her speaking fee is \$10,000, and will be what the SSC funding would be put towards. We hope that students attending these events will be able to learn about social-environmental justice through an indigenous lens-- something they may not be normally exposed to.

8. Did you complete your project as it was outlined in the original award letter or in a subsequent approved scope change? *

- ☒ Yes, the project was completed as originally outlined.
- ☐ No, the project was not completed as originally outlined.

9. On what date did you consider the project finished or that you stopped working on it? *

04/19/2025

10. Describe, in detail, the challenges / obstacles your project faced. *

One main challenge our project faced in terms of getting Tara Houska as our main speaker was not having enough funding in order to cover her speaker fee. Typically, the Friday Forum Lunch On Us has a good amount of sponsors to cover the cost of all the speakers. However, Tara is an accredited lawyer and advocate in the Native American community and land policies, who has been on TedTalk which significantly increased her speaker fee. Figuring out the best pathway in order to get the funding for her was challenging, yet when we became aware of the Green Fund and the support it provides students in environmentally charged events and spaces, the feat we faced became clearer. After securing funding, the project ran smoothly, and there were minimal obstacles to completing the project.

11. Describe, in detail, the successes your project experienced. *

Tara Houska made a great impression on campus with the students who met her. Her lecture at the DSJE Lunch on Us e was inspirational for University students and staff where she showed the power of her journey to become an attorney and an environmental advocate. She also showcased the trials and tribulations associated therein, the successes and challenges of the work she does. Participants asked meaningful questions regarding her work and broader concerns about social justice, indigenous sovereignty, and human impacts on the environment. At the Native American House Encouragement Dinner, Tara gave a motivating speech to encourage the pursuit of academic excellence for our indigenous students. The Encouragement Dinner was an impactful venue for the students and staff that attended, and was highly appreciated among attendees, wherein Tara continued to serve as an inspirational figure for students at the end of this academic year.

12. Describe, in detail, how your implemented project addressed sustainability. *

Our project contributed to sustainability by amplifying the voices of Indigenous leaders like Tara Houska, who advocates for environmental justice and the protection of natural resources. By hosting her at the YMCA Conversation Café and a dinner event at the Native American House, we provided a platform to discuss sustainable land practices, climate resilience, and Indigenous stewardship of the environment. This initiative not only educated the campus community on sustainable activism but also fostered meaningful dialogue on how traditional ecological knowledge can inform modern sustainability efforts. Engaging with local and global environmental issues through an Indigenous perspective encouraged participants to reflect on their own environmental impact and consider more sustainable practices in their daily lives.

13. Describe, in detail, how your project integrated student involvement and community outreach. *

Student outreach and involvement was an integral part of the whole project: where Tara Houska shares her perspective and experience to the benefit of our campus community by lecturing for groups of students and directly speaking with them. The Lunch on Us included a significant portion dedicated to Q&A for participants which integrated direct student involvement. After her lecture at Lunch on Us and her speech at the Encouragement Dinner, there were many opportunities for students to talk with Tara at these events, not including the time she met with students at Native American House.

14. Describe how the project engaged individuals from underrepresented groups and/or how it promoted diversity, equity, and inclusion. *

The lunch talk gave a spotlight to indigenous concerns over environmental exploitation and indigenous land sovereignty, informing our campus on the conflict over the pipeline at Standing Rock Indian Reservation, and the challenges on her journey as an environmental advocate. This increased participants' awareness of the scope and impact of land sovereignty issues of indigenous americans. Her participation at the Native American House Encouragement Dinner was impactful for the Native student participants, and was inspirational for Native student academic success. It was especially impactful, as she was able to provide words of strength desperately needed during the precipitous academic climate Native students find themselves in this semester.

15. What key takeaways should the campus community know about your project? *

- The sovereignty of Native American tribes continues to be threatened by environmental exploitation, and that this is still a major social, economic, and political issue. That environmental health is critical for the health of Native Americans, and for American society as a whole. That supporting Native sovereignty is naturally aligned with supporting ecological health.

- Education is a critical component of strengthening Native communities: although tackling higher education is hard—especially as a Native student—the payoffs of that work are invaluable to personal development and community well-being.

- That Native interests, indigenous land and water sovereignty, indigenous student success is a boon for everyone, and is not just vital for the well-being of Native Americans.

16. Describe the marketing material developed for promotion of your project, including but not limited to advertising (including digital) and/or signage related to this project. All marketing must include SSC's logo and/or a statement of which fee funded the project. Projects must coordinate with SSC to ensure the promotion appropriately highlights the SSC's contributions to the project. *

Promotional materials were created by the marketing team for Student Success, Inclusion and Belonging and highlighted SSC as a co-sponsor for Tara's visit to campus. It was also added to the full lineup for the lunch on us series (in which SSC was listed as a sponsor on the reverse side of as well as highlighted in our social media posts.

17. Upload project marketing and/or media not previously submitted in semester progress reports. *

 [NAH TaraHouska_1080x1350_v2 \(2\)_Michelle Naese.png](#)

 [NAH TaraHouska_1920x1080_v2 \(3\)_Michelle Naese.png](#)

18. Complete and upload the final financial documentation for your project. You should reflect all expenditures since your last semester project report. We strongly suggest that you also upload supporting financial documentation from Banner for your award's CFOP. Any remaining funds will be transferred back to the SSC. It is the sponsoring department's responsibility to close the CFOP after the account is at a zero balance.

<https://studentengagement.illinois.edu/sites/default/files/2024-09/SSC-Budget-Timeline-FINAL-PROJECT-REPORT-template.xlsx>

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 [SSC-Budget-Timeline-FINAL-PROJECT-REPORT-FFCC Michelle Naese.xlsx](#)

 [Summary - PO P2792801 Tara Michelle Naese.pdf](#)