

Native Eyes: Native Activism Programs, Fall 2016, Evaluation Melodie Lopez and Lisa Falk

In September 2016, Native Eyes held a two-part program dealing with activism in Indian Country. The focus was both historic and contemporary, examined through the lens of film and discussions.

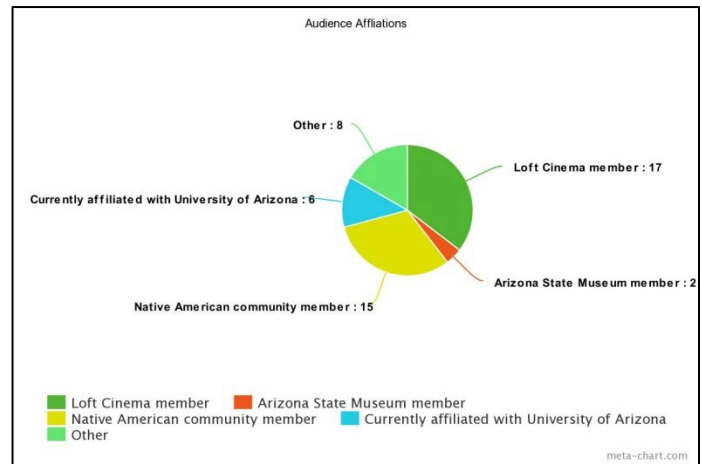
The first part of the program, *Native Activism: Then and Now*, was held during the afternoon at the Loft Cinema and was open to the public. It had a mixed audience of 200, consisting of Native and non-Natives, Loft Cinema and Arizona State Museum members and others.

The program began with the screening of *The Activist*, which tells a fictionalized story of two activists from the American Indian Movement at Wounded Knee. A panel moderated by Native Eyes member Melodie

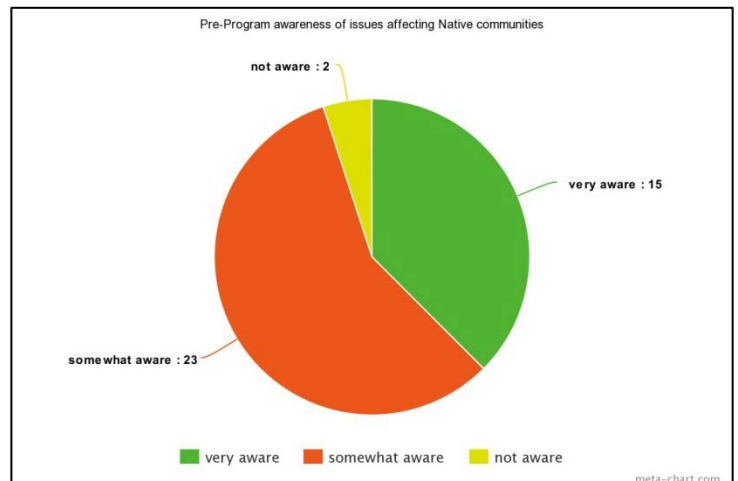
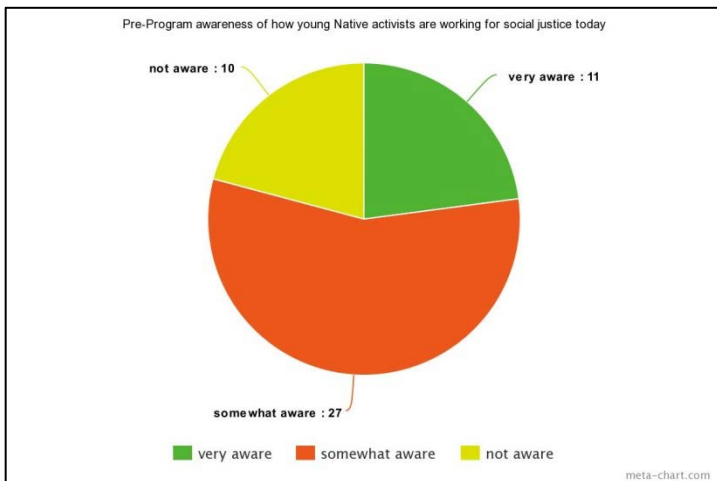
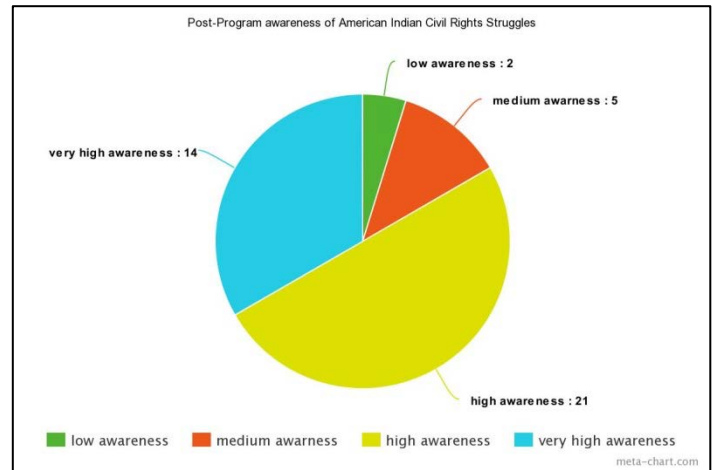
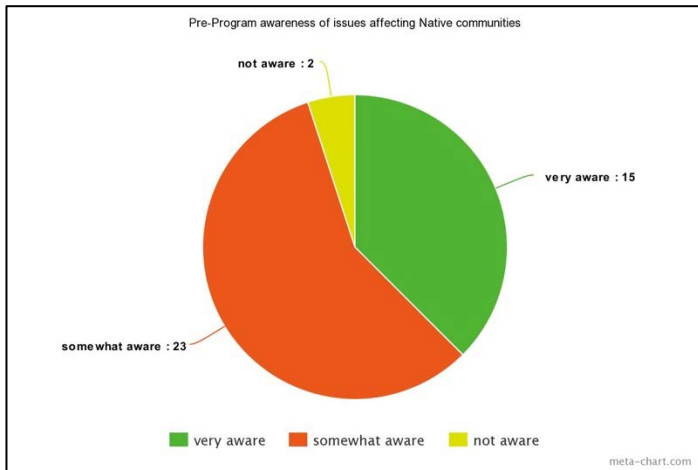
Lopez (Hopi/Navajo) included Dr. Selso Villegas (Tohono O’odham), head of Tohono O’odham Water Authority and former Southern Arizona AIM member, and Della Warrior (Otoe-Missouria), Director of the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture and co-founder of the American Indian Youth Council. The discussion linked the film to the discussants’ own experiences during that time. Dr. Villegas shared what he did after that period and how he views his work today as a form of activism. At times, quite emotional, the discussion drew in the audiences’ questions and reflections. Much of the discussion focused on the emotional impact of activism as well as the need for college education to create change in tribal communities. Both Dr. Villegas and Ms. Warrior emphasized to the youth in the audience that education is activism.

This discussion was followed by two films showcasing how young Native activists are addressing issues in their communities today. The film *Rebel Music: Native America* focused on four young people who used their music to address teen suicide, violence against women and environmental degradation. Also shown was a short about the struggle to protect the sacred lands of the Apache at Oak Flat from mining development. Della Warrior moderated a related discussion with Naelyn Pike (San Carlos Apache) about her work to protect Oak Flat and with Frank Waln (Sicangu Lakota), about how he is using his music to bring awareness to issues such as the Keystone Pipeline while empowering youth.

The audience evaluation tried to ascertain people’s awareness of American Indian Civil Rights struggles in the past and issues affecting Native peoples today. It also asked if this program inspired them to become involved in making a difference in their own communities. The data in the charts shows that the program succeeded in building people’s awareness of civil rights



struggles by Native communities and inspired them to get involved in issues affecting the world or their own community.

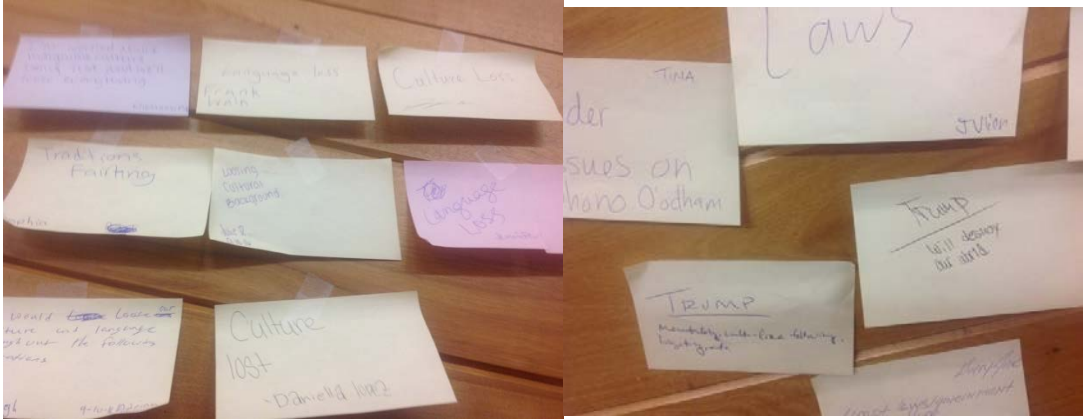


The second part of the program, the *Native Youth Activism Think Tank*, was held in the evening at Ha:sañ Preparatory and Leadership School. It was specifically for Native students from 8th grade through doctoral candidates. There were 85 participants in the Think Tank representing the Tohono O’odham, Pascua Yaqui, Apache, Navajo and Cree tribes alongside other tribal students and their chaperones. Each participant had also attended the film and discussion program earlier that day. It served as background and inspiration for the Think Tank, which focused on what activism means to the students, issues in their communities, and how they can use their passions and skills to make a difference.



While eating dinner together at large tables, participants shared reflections from the film program. After ice breaker activities, Lisa Falk (Arizona State Museum) introduced the students to a Venn Diagram activity focused on “Issues in the World,” “Opportunities for Change in their Communities” and “Personal Passions/Personal Skill Sets.” Adult facilitators (including the Native Eyes team and the speakers from the afternoon program) helped students examine each of these areas, and fill out the Venn Diagram with friends helping to fill out areas of excellence for other students.

Afterwards, Jennifer Juan (Tohono O’odham Nation Cultural Center and Museum) led the students on a “free write” about one issue they would like to change. Participants filled out a sticky note with their one major concern. The Native Eyes Team organized these notes into major groupings: Tribal Land Use/Extraction, Bullying, Alcohol/Drug Abuse, Suicide, Healthy Lifestyles, Language Revitalization, Keep Traditions Alive, Tribal Water Issues, Child Abuse/Violence and Current Politics. Students were then re-grouped according to their interest area as written on their sticky note.



Each group was facilitated by a Native Eyes team member, afternoon program speaker or a doctoral student who had interest in the topic area. Then students shared their small group ideas for change. As an unexpected outcome, several student leaders decided to come forward to the group and share stories of suicidal attempts and ideation that they experienced in the past. Each student shared the message of reaching out to each other and finding new strength

inside themselves to make the community a better place. As they told their stories, they transformed them from ones of sorrow to ones of power. They themselves modeled being leaders to the others in the room. Melodie Lopez (Indigenous Strategies) and Dr. Selso Villegas reacted to the students by making personal statements, offering prayers and sage smudging.

It should be noted that 65% of the participants stated having a history of community activism. 20% of the students said that the entire afternoon program was meaningful. 25% cited the showing of Rebel Music and discussion with youth activists as the most important part of the afternoon program. A twelve-year-old Tohono O'odham participant stated the afternoon program made her feel that "I will be an activist and inspire people who will trudge on." Nearly 85% of the participants felt so inspired by the youth presenters, they wrote about feeling more motivated to take action in their respective communities at the close of the day. One participant wrote "Native Americans have the ability to change the system in a positive way, others may see us as an aggressor, but we are defending for our rights, our land and our people." Environmental issues of tribal water and land were the areas cited by 50% of the youth as where they wished to take action upon. 30% of the participants cited specific local issues and larger national concerns. Another 20% of youth wished to take action in the area of keeping traditions and culture alive as a form of resistance.

The Native Eyes team asked a series of questions on the evaluation about *how* a participant would create change. It is interesting that 43% wrote about educating themselves more in their interest area. Of those students, 30% specified learning from elders and participating in ceremony as part of their necessary educational process. 29% of respondents felt prepared to take a leadership role in community change and 27% wished to work in a team alongside other community members. When asked what types of resources are needed to create change (including people, spaces, and materials), 33% stated that they would need people and unification in order to create change. Students, elders, family, and tribal council were specified as key people to assist change. One Yaqui student wrote, "All I really need to be successful are the people that believe in me and encourage me to do new things." Interestingly, 45% of students said that they needed personal changes to occur in order to create change. They listed needing more confidence, love for my people, encouragement and determination. One Yaqui participant shared: "Be proud of who you are, learn about your culture and start making and speaking up for a change."

A sample of quotes from the youth evaluations:

Every day we survive colonist policies is an act of rebellion.

They treat us different because they don't understand.

We are all different and be who we are! Be awesome!

We live in two worlds & we need to go in between.

I learned alot about what others are going through and I know I'm not alone. (TO/Navajo)

All I really need to be successful are the people that believe in me and encourage me to do new things, which is my family and my closest friends. (PYT)