Podcast Transcription: Ty Smith

Mike Frank: This is Native Speak podcast, and I am sitting here with...

Ty Smith: Ty Smith

Mike Frank: Ok, this podcast is an introduction with the Native American Student Services director. I will be asking him several questions about his experiences here as a CSU student alum, and as the current director for the office. First off what is your tribal affiliation?

Ty Smith: I am Navajo.

Mike Frank: And your hometown?

Ty Smith: Hometown is a little community in northwest New Mexico, Upper Fruitland.

Mike Frank: Ok, and you are a CSU alum is that correct?

Ty Smith: Yes, I am, and very proud of it.

Mike Frank: And what degree did you obtain here at CSU?

Ty Smith: My Bachelor’s degree was in mechanical engineering, and my master’s degree is in business administration.

Mike Frank: Ok, and can you go over your basic role as director?

Ty Smith: My role is director of the Native American Student Services office, and my main role is to be an advocate for Native American students that are here at CSU; to provide them support in various aspects that include their academic setting as well as their social settings just really helping students to become adjusted to the university, and making a successful transition. My ultimate goal is to see students graduate and fulfill their goals, and getting a college degree and getting a career they enjoy.

Mike Frank: So you mentioned you were a student here as well, how many years have you been at CSU?

Ty Smith: Yeah, I was thinking about this, and it occurred to me that I have been in the Fort Collins community at least twenty years.

Mike Frank: So you know at lot about the community, as well as outside. So can you describe a little bit about life as a student? What years were you here?
Ty Smith: I came to CSU, back in 1986 around that time. Actually before that time I attended college in southwest Colorado, and then transferred up to CSU, so my undergraduate years I came in as a transfer student.

Mike Frank: Could you describe how it was back then? Did they have Native American Student Services?

Ty Smith: Yes they did, they had a Native American Student Services office, although it was not located as we are now in the Lory Student Center. We were located across campus. Yes, there was an office there to support students.

Mike Frank: So did you utilize the office back then, as well?

Ty Smith: Oh yes, I used the office to really help me make the transition to CSU, to meet other Native students, to really socialize and network with them. I made a lot of really good friends there. Also, I used the services like sending in scholarship applications and doing job searches; talking with the director and staff of that time to support the needs of my education.

Mike Frank: For those of you listening we do offer all of those services plus much more today as well. So what did you do for fun?

Ty Smith: I think here on campus I was an active member of the American Indian in Science and Engineering society as well as the Native American Student Association. So those were the two student organizations that I became involved in, and we held various activities back then that were pretty enjoyable. Outside of that here in the Fort Collins community there is a tremendous opportunity to do hiking, mountain biking, just getting out to the outdoors. We have a wonderful bike trail system here in Fort Collins, and those are the things I really took advantage of here in this part of Colorado.

Mike Frank: For those interested there are great activities within a thirty-minute bike ride away from campus. So now we will discuss your role as director. What does NASS mean to you overall? What do you best like to talk about, about the office?

Ty Smith: I think what I like the best talking about is the role we provide in the office as far as being really a strong support for Native students. I also want to point out that the things that we do in the office aren’t only here for native students, we are here for all students here on campus. What I am proud of is we really try to be proud of who we are as Native people here, in this part of Colorado. We have pride in our culture and our traditions, and really promote that to our students. We are still here after all of these years, and that is something to be really proud of so I think of our office as being a real strength for the Native students here on campus, and also for community members who utilize our services as well. Sometimes for those who are trying to learn more about Native culture they will call the office and we try to help them out the best we can.
**Mike Frank:** Us (Native Americans) being one of the smaller minorities on campus the office helps us establish a community at NASS. We also keep in touch with the other advocacy offices such as Black Student Services and El Centro. And, we all try to work together to help students out. As I mentioned our office is not strictly for any race or minority, it is for everyone. We do have that community structure here. So what would you say are achievements that you are proud of for NASS concerning the help we provide and the activities we sponsor?

**Ty Smith:** I think the biggest achievements that I am especially proud of are just the way that we have taken an approach to providing service here in the office. We have really taken on a very proactive approach to student retention, and have really gotten away from a reactive mode. Rather than having students come here when they might be having problems academically and then reacting our office has been very proactive in the types of programs and services that we have implemented. Since I have become director we have gotten a strong tutoring program, we have a mentoring program, we have an annual leadership retreat, we have a women’s talking circle. Right now we are implementing a wellness program, and really promoting the health and wellness of our students and giving information that can help them because sometimes that aspect of a students life is really overlooked in regards to their physical well being. I am especially proud that the achievements we have made are really well rounded. We try to help students in all aspects of their life, so those are some of the things I am most proud of.

**Mike Frank:** We discussed the other day that we have officially named the NASS athletic department-kicking NASS athletic department. That entails a bunch of us joining intramural sports such as basketball and volleyball, and keeps us all together. The program tries to emphasis staying healthy and keeping up with school. Closing up, what direction do you think NASS is heading, and were do you plan to take it from here?

**Ty Smith:** The important thing for us now is to really focus on the retention and persistence of our Native students here on campus. It is one thing to recruit students to come here, but once they are here we really need to shift our attentions and make sure they have made the transition successfully to a college environment such as the one we have at CSU. Focusing on what are our retention rates of our students? Are they going to graduate in four to five years or six years? It might take a little longer, but I think the important thing is they are here, continuing to enroll in classes, and they are successful in getting their degrees. So we are headed in that direction, really assessing what they do as well, keeping track of our student participation and making sure that when we talk about retention we understand the impact that this office has on students.

**Mike Frank:** Ok, that’s all we have for now. Ty, thank you for helping out with this, this now concludes this podcast stay tuned for more.