



# Buder Center Scholars

## Gain Expertise to Make a

## Difference in Indian Country

by ***Brittney Bennett***

***Cheyenne River Sioux member Jasmine Grika contemplated taking a year off before starting graduate school.***

But when she received her acceptance from the Kathryn M. Buder Center for American Indian Studies, she was suddenly hitting fast forward and paying student deposits.

**Lindsey Manshack**, a member of the Choctaw-Apache Tribe of Ebarb, toured Buder before applying. She thought getting admitted was “a long shot,” but a whirlwind two months later, her acceptance would come via email.

While both students were eager to apply to the Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis, it was the excitement they felt over the Buder Center housed inside the school that spurred them on.

Because if there is an absolute about one of the most respected programs in the country, it’s that the Buder Center inspires American Indian students to dream big.

Since 1990, the Buder Center has worked alongside the Brown School to recruit

and train American Indian students wishing to perform social work in American Indian and Alaskan communities.

For Buder Center Director and Brown School Professor of Practice Molly Tovar, each graduate is “crucial.”

“Social workers must find ways to demonstrate their commitment to the community, and must, in any program or intervention, integrate cultural content and involve the American Indian community,” said

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Tovar. “Indigenous social workers have vital roles. Who better to implement interventions with cultural appropriateness? Who better to dispel cultural barriers and suspicion? Recruiting and retaining American Indian and Alaska Native MSW students who wish to practice social work in Indian Country is crucial.”

Tovar has expanded the Buder Center’s vision by developing research opportunities, increasing partnerships, crafting relevant Indigenous classroom curricula, and increasing funding opportunities for new cohorts of students each year.

“The Kathryn M. Buder Scholarship Fund has grown to provide funding for approximately 10 Native MSW students to be admitted to the Brown School each year,” said Tovar. “The MSW Buder Scholarship provides tuition, living expenses, profes-

sional development stipends and assistance toward the purchase of books for two years of study for eligible recipients.”

For current and alumni students like Jasmine Grika, being named a Buder Scholar goes beyond monetary value. “I believe getting through grad school was



Molly Tovar

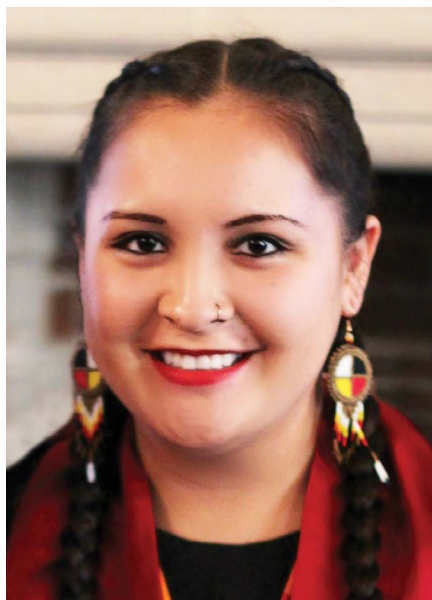
due in part to the Buder Center. The professors that are part of the Buder Center are super supportive.”

Grika completed a double concentration in American Indian/Alaskan Native studies and children, youth, and families studies while earning her MSW in 2017. Her passion for social work seemed fated from childhood – Grika went through three foster homes before being adopted herself at 10. But she also feels a trip to see her cousin in Amsterdam contributed to her career path.

“She’s an international social worker, so she helps families around the world find kids to adopt,” said Grika. “She showed me her ‘Wall Hall of Fame’ - photographs of kids with their new families. It hit me in that moment, that’s the work I want to go into.”

Another Native student at the Buder Center includes 2017 Master of Public Health graduate Lindsey Manshack. During her time on campus she engaged in public health research projects and was exposed to research-related issues in Indian Country.

“A lot of research lumps American Indians and Alaska Natives as ‘other’ race or into a mixed race without really capturing the data,” said Manshack. “Public health data is missing the most important groups of people, and I say the most important because they have the highest disparities in cancer, heart disease, cardiovascular disease, respiratory diseases, diabetes. That’s one of the hardest things in terms of making interventions.”



Jasmine Grika

Through her work at the Buder Center, Manshack developed a network of connections that still have an impact today. “I was on the Committee for Diversity Inclusion and Equity at the Brown School. I’m a member of American Public Health Association, American Indian/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian Caucus. I’m at the table because of the work I’ve done with the Buder Center. I’m at the table to help give recommendations and input for decision making that sometimes wouldn’t have Natives at the table.”

Manshack conveyed her gratitude to the AIGCS/Gates Millennium Scholarship Program for supporting her education journey.

“If I had any questions, I knew that AIGC would answer them and take me seriously, even though I was in a school of 30,000 people,” she said. “The AIGCS/Gates Millennium Scholarship Program wanted to see if people are given an opportunity, would they take it? And what they found is that Native students and other minority students excelled. I think that tells you something, that we need to fund more Natives and we need to give them more opportunities in higher education.”

Grika, who received an AIGC Fellowship, echoed Manshack’s message. “Having [the AIGC] fellowship helped me focus on my internship experience and my studies. I think Native students are underrepresented in higher education, and having someone believe in you and understand, helps you believe in yourself.”

Tovar is in part responsible for AIGC’s commitment to students, as she served as AIGC’s chief operating officer from 2001 to 2006. There, she created several fellowships and scholarships, developed training modules for staff, and collaborated on the content and design of the *American Indian Graduate* magazine. When she became director of the Buder Center in 2010, Tovar vowed to continue the legacy of former directors Dana Klar and Dr. Eddie Brown.

"Ms. Klar focused early efforts on social and cultural aspects of the program. She recruited talented American Indians and developed a real sense of community among the students who left their homes for St. Louis, a city with a relatively small urban Indian population," she said. "Dr. Brown contributed to the growth of the center by developing a research agenda, procuring almost \$4 million in grant monies and piloting a national graduate recruitment program for American Indian and Alaska Native students."

For Tovar, supporting students like Grika and Manshack become successful professionals is part of what makes dreams a reality for students in Indian Country.

In January 2019 Grika will celebrate her two-year work anniversary with the Ain Dah Yung Center, an emergency shelter for runaway and homeless American Indian youth in Minnesota. She has been named a Nokomis Circle Liaison, a newly created position building bridges between American Indian families and the foster care system.

"My dream always has been about advocating for 100 percent compliance of the Indian Child Welfare Act. I had my personal experience of being in child protection and now I'm on the other side," said Grika.

Manshack is now working with Washington University School of Medicine as a public health research coordinator. She

often collaborates with the Buder Center in their research efforts.

"I've done some work with the Buder Center and continue to do so," said Manshack. "Molly Tovar, Kellie Thompson, the Buder Center were all a driving force in my education. There'll never be a point where I think, 'I've reached my goal.' I'm constantly thinking about the future and what more I can do."

*Brittney Bennett is a 2011 AIGCS/Gates Millennium Scholar and graduated from the University of Oklahoma in 2015. A member of the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma, she is the editor for its tribal newspaper, the Giduwa Cherokee News.*

## Current MSW Buder Center Scholars



"Understanding detriments [such as historical trauma] drives me to use higher education as a tool to gain knowledge and best practices for increasing information regarding mental health, while decreasing the stigma within the American Indian Community and other marginalized communities. This stigma needs to be eradicated, and our communities need to be lifted up. I intend to give back. I intend to create change, no matter how small it may seem."

Jamie Bruner, Muscogee, Creek Nation  
MSW, Washington University in St. Louis (in process)  
BA, Psychology, Oklahoma State University, 2014



"I believe that Indian Country needs more Indigenous scholars. We hold our own unique perspective on what success means and what confidence is. I believe my dad planted seeds years ago, so that I could one day turn around and plant seeds in others. Getting a degree isn't easy, but it's certainly worth it. I will continue to stumble and fumble my way through systems that are not designed for me to succeed and hope to encourage other Indigenous students to do the same."

Jenifer Van Schuyver, Citizen Potawatomi Nation  
MSW, Washington University in St. Louis (in process)  
BA, Psychology, Oklahoma State University, 2012