**Opening Remarks**

Good afternoon!

I’m Cheryl Simrell King, Director of the MPA Program and a member of the PNAPP cohort 1st year Core faculty team.

We are honored to have Delbert Miller, an artist, culture bearer, and spiritual leader of the Skokomish Tribe to begin our work together with a blessing.

We are standing on ground ceded in the Medicine Creek treaty by the Puyallup, Nisqually, and Squaxin Island tribes.

We honor this land and those tribes through this blessing. This blessing also honors the important and serious work we are beginning together today, work that we hope will benefit all of the peoples and governments in our region.

Thank you Delbert. I’d also like to introduce Tina Kukkahn-Miller, Director of the Longhouse Education and Cultural Center (The House of Welcome) and architect of a new initiative on our campus creating an Indigenous Arts Campus at Evergreen. Also Delbert’s wife. Thank you Tina for being here.

Some housekeeping:

* agenda
* bathrooms
* refreshments

Hopefully, you’ve met the MPA staff but in case you haven’t, let me introduce:

* Puanani Nihoa – Tribal Governance AD
* Randee Gibbons – PNAPP AD
* Jan Hays – Program Assistant and all around gal Friday

Thank you to you three for all the hard work you put into organizing this event.

You’ll hear from the MPA faculty later, but let me quickly introduce the 1st Year Core faculty (stand or wave):

* Jenny Serpa, Adjunct Faculty and Tribal Governance Teaching Assistant.
* Michael Lane – Tribal Governance Core and PNAPP cohort in Spring.
* Doreen Swetkis – teaching in both cohort’s Core’s this quarter.
* Marc Baldwin – PNAPP Core.
* Larry Geri – PNAPP Core all year and Tribal Governance Core in Winter. Larry can’t be here for the faculty panel so Larry quickly tell us a few things about yourself and what you are doing in the MPA program this year.

So, here we are at an important beginning.

You are beginning a program that has come a long way in the last 12 years. 12 years ago, we admitted our first Tribal Governance cohort – the cohort beginning today is our 7th cohort, and the largest cohort to date – around 35 of you. (round of applause)

12 years ago we redesigned our program to better meet your needs and those of you starting in the PNAPP cohort are in the largest cohort to date – 64 of you! (round of applause)

We believe there is such demand for our program because we are delivering results, results that matter all across our region.

You are beginning a program that is unique in many ways:

* our cohort model is unique.
* Our seminar model is unique.
* Our focus on social justice and democracy is, if not unique, rare among schools in public administration.

What you are beginning today is to form the learning community that will see you through your MPA program.

You will travel through Core with your cohort and you will get to know each other very well, as a result. You’ll be there to support one another, to study together, to commiserate, to do projects together, to complain about the faculty…

You will get to know your faculty and we’ll get to know you.

You’ll create networks and connect with the networks of your cohort members.

We will all work together. You will become like family to each other.

This is part of what comprises a learning community – these close connections.

Our Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education says that learning communities: “create a collaborative environments where students thrive, faculty and staff do their best work, and learning fosters the habits of mind and skills to tackle complex real-world issues.”

Another definition of learning communities says: “in a learning community the goal is to advance the collective knowledge and in that way to support the growth of individual knowledge (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1994). The defining quality of a learning community is that there is a culture of learning, in which everyone is involved in a collective effort of understanding.”

Let’s parse out these definitions:

1. learning communities are collaborative
2. the focus is on thriving and doing our best work (some people call this results based education)
3. the intention is to foster habits of mind and skills to tackle complex issues
4. we advance collective knowledge, in order to support the growth of individual knowledge
5. everyone is involved – students and faculty.

For those of you who did your undergraduate work at Evergreen, the idea of a learning community is not new. For those of you who had more of a typical undergraduate education, this is new!

We have no grades – you will not be competing with each other to “set the curve,” instead you will be collaborating with each other to maximize learning and to thrive.

Your individual knowledge comes from the collective knowledge, not the other way around!

It’s revolutionary! (Even though it has been around for a long time).

Our work together this weekend is to begin to build our learning communities.

To start this work, I’d like you to take about 5 minutes and write responses to two questions. When you are done writing, then take a few minutes to introduce yourself to your tablemates and talk a bit about the answers to your two questions. Note you all have the same sticker on your nametags and this sticker matches…

Tomorrow morning, we’ll begin our session with a scavenger hunt that is designed to do more work around building the learning communities – right now we want you to start thinking about what this means for you.

Ok, here are the questions:

1. What are your expectations for yourself, as a member of this learning community?
2. What are your expectations of others, as members of this learning community?

**Introduce self:**

First generation student – only person in family with an advanced degree. It took me until about 5 years ago to know why I do what I do. I took part in an activity at a conference – write the answer to the Q, “why do I do what I do?” Sat there and it was revealed to me “Because the ancestors expect it.”

Directing, teaching in Core – won’t be doing electives until 2016. When I do electives, design focus – “portals”

Grandmother of 3 and they live here. If I knew grandparenting was going to be so much fun, I would have done it first.

What are the necessities for creating a successful learning community in your MPA program?

What practices will you commit to in order to ensure a successful learning community in your MPA program?

What do you need from your colleagues to ensure a successful learning community in your MPA program?

What do you need from the faculty/staff to ensure a successful learning community in your MPA program?

What goals should we set for our learning communities?