The MPA-Tribal Governance Concentration History:

Since its inception, the Evergreen State College has nurtured its commitment to serving Tribes and Tribal students. This has been accomplished through the work of academic programs focused on undergraduate Native Studies, The Reservation Based Community Determined Program, and public service centers like the Longhouse Education and Cultural Center. Over the years, Evergreen’s institutional commitment is demonstrated through a large percentage of Native American students, graduates, and faculty. As a result of this commitment, our institution has graduated students who have brought the lessons they learned at Evergreen into their communities and worked to provide solutions to the myriad issues facing Tribal communities. It is within this context that the Master of Public Administration – Tribal Governance concentration was developed and implemented.

Evergreen’s mission and five foci are proven effective methods for teaching Native students and serving Tribes. Achieving our goals of interdisciplinary and collaborative learning, enhancing critical thinking skills, encouraging social justice, public involvement and environmental stewardship gives students the tools to effectively contribute to their Tribal communities, and affect positive solutions for their people. In addition, the mission and foci are aligned with the principles of successful Indian education.

When the MPA-Tribal Governance program was introduced, tribes in Washington State were facing unprecedented governance issues as their community needs evolved, and economic and political impacts increased. Due to this climate of tremendous vitality and change, the demand for professionals with culturally appropriate skills in policy development, human resources, finance, regulation, intergovernmental relations and other areas related specifically to Tribal sovereignty has become paramount. Concurrently, the State of Washington enacted the Centennial Accords, a unique model of state-Tribe cooperation which has enhanced the ability of both Tribes and the State of Washington to meet the needs of all residents. Ongoing discussions of tribal leaders, through such assemblies as the National Congress of American Indians, the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians and other inter-tribal governing organizations, were centered on the increasing necessity of Tribes to effectively and appropriately manage their institutions and internal organizations.

Many of these leaders came from the Pacific Northwest, and due to Evergreen’s proven track record and positive reputation with tribes, they approached our institution to discuss the feasibility of creating a public administration degree at the Masters level with a specific focus area on tribal governance issues. There were several meetings organized with tribal officials and MPA faculty to discuss the feasibility of such a program of study in the late 1990s and through the early part of the new millennia. During this time, Tribal leaders and academicians were surveyed and consulted to discuss issues around curriculum, support services, recruitment, funding and implementation.

In 2001, the Evergreen Board of Trustees approved a Major Substantive Change in Curriculum within the MPA Program for a Tribal Track, and later that year, it was approved by the Higher Education Coordinating Board.In 2002 the restructuring of the MPA Program to include the new Tribal Track, as well as a reduction of core credit from 8 credits to 4 credits occurred, and the faculty supported a 25% curricular difference between the general and tribal tracks.

The first cohort of 11 students graduated in Spring of 2004. In the formative years of the program, the MPA - Tribal Governance concentration was funded by Tribes, as well as a federal grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE). In 2006, the Northwest Indian Applied Research Institute conducted a survey of Tribal leaders to order to provide guidance on the needs of tribal government for specific curriculum. Over the past decade, the MPA-Tribal Governance program has graduated nearly 100 students, and currently has a new cohort of 25 students.

Alongside the Public Policy and Public and Non-Profit Administration concentrations, the Tribal Governance concentration is a course of study which has been developed to be responsive to student needs. The Public Policy and Public and Non-Profit Administration concentrations form one cohort, and courses are delivered in an evening and weekend format in order to accommodate the schedules of local graduate students who have full time jobs, many of whom work in state government in Olympia. The Tribal Governance concentration attracts students from throughout the region, and as such, is a low-residency program delivered in an intensive weekend format. This allows students the opportunity to travel to campus to attend class several times per quarter. Students from Northwestern, Eastern, and Southwestern Washington, as well as the Olympic Peninsula, Montana, Oregon and elsewhere in the region are the norm. The Tribal cohort also consistently maintains a significant contingency of Evergreen graduates from the Reservation Based Community Determined Program, Evergreen Tacoma, and on-campus undergraduate curriculum. These students choose Evergreen again because Evergreen’s mission and foci, and well-developed tribally-focused curriculum, provides them with the tools they need to succeed.