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WSU, tribes envision cultural program

■ Partnership being developed is called Language and Cultural Preservation Consortium

By TARA KING
OF THE TRIBUNE

PULLMAN — Washington State University and area tribes are developing a partnership to preserve and teach Indian language and culture.

Called the Language and Cultural Preservation Consortium, the idea is to form tribally directed programs that utilize higher education institutions in the teaching of native culture and languages.

Many Indian languages, including Nez Perce, have come close to extinction with few tribal members left who speak fluently.

Members of many area tribes, including the Nez Perce, the Salish and Kootenai of Montana and the Umatilla, joined faculty members and WSU administrators Thursday and Friday for a roundtable discussion of the proposal.

Some of the goals of the consortium are to develop certification requirements for tribal language teachers and develop model language programs for all ages.

Also, according to the proposal, the consor-

tium could develop classes and workshops in the preservation of manuscripts and artifacts.

During the proposal segment of the discussion, Barbara Aston, an assistant to the provost and a member of an Oklahoma tribe, gave a personal reason for believing in the consortium.

"My goal is to learn enough words in my language to say a prayer," she said.

Aston identified five WSU departments that could help in reaching the goal of preserving culture and language — the library, the extended university services program, cooperative extension, College of Liberal Arts and the College of Education.

Much of the proposal segment was spent with a representative of each department explaining what his or her department had to offer.

WSU's library, for example, could be used to serve as the consortium's official archive, said Nancy Baker, director of libraries.

Erich Lear, director of music and theater arts in the College of Liberal Arts, talked about a musical archive.

"How can we help the next generation sing their songs in native languages?" he asked.

Harold Crook, team leader of the Nez Perce Tribe's language program, raised some eyebrows when he raised the issue of funding.

"This is like having all the buckets and no huckleberries," he said. "This is a great idea but where is the funding? There needs to be a financial commitment in terms of personnel and funding."

Hiring faculty members to teach language was his first suggestion.

"We're not prepared to say yes we're going to hire this person or that person," responded Provost Gretchen Bataille.

The consortium is still in the proposal stages and needs more participation before WSU makes those commitments, she said.

The proposal suggests that some funding would come from participating tribes and institutions, which would pay membership fees, as well as grants and private donations.

The higher education institutions also could make their resources available to the consortium.

*Patty Zuck, Allan Olney
& Virginia Bennett
attended this meeting.*