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Announcer (00:01):

This is the Inclusion Interchange, a podcast from the University of Pittsburgh's Office for Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion. And here's the host of the Inclusion Interchange, Dr. Clyde Wilson Pickett.

Clyde Wilson Pickett (Host) (00:14):

Welcome to the Inclusion Interchange. I'm your host, Dr. Clyde Wilson Pickett, and I serve as the Vice Chancellor for Equity Diversity Inclusion here at the University of Pittsburgh. I also serve as the university's Chief Diversity Officer on the Inclusion Network. We talk to people from across the University of Pittsburgh who are making a difference with regard to the work to support diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. Today I'm pleased to welcome to our microphones Dr. Tessa Provins, who's an assistant professor of political science here at the university and is one of the organizers of the Indigenous Cultural Festival, which is set to happen September 18th through the 24th here on the Oakland campus. Dr. Provins, welcome to the Inclusion Interchange.

Tessa Provins (00:56):

Thank you for having me, Dr. Pickett. It is a pleasure to be here today.

Clyde Wilson Pickett (Host) (00:59):

Well, we're excited to have you here. Excited to hear more about the work that you're doing across the campus and of course to hear more about the indigenous cultural festival. So let's begin with you. Tell us more about your journey to the University of Pittsburgh, your history, what brought you here and more that you'd like to share with the audience.

Tessa Provins (01:18):

So I am a California native. Don't hate me yet. And I did my undergraduate work at Stanford and my graduate work at UC-Merced. I study two different areas or I have focused in two different areas of research. The first is I look at legislatures. I'm interested in how we design institutions and how that impacts outcomes for groups divided by race, gender, and party status. And my second vein of research, which is connected to why I'm here today, is that I look at indigenous institutions and behavior and I'm focused on looking at the political economy of indigenous nations right

Clyde Wilson Pickett (Host) (01:57):

Now. Okay, very good. It's helpful obviously to get your background and what brought you to the University of Pittsburgh, and of course we would never hold it against you from being outside of the state of Pennsylvania and the city of Pittsburgh for that matter. So we're here of course to talk more about your journey and more specifically the work that you're doing, but of course to highlight the indigenous cultural festival. If you would tell us more about the festival, what's coming up in the time ahead and why the audience might be interested in knowing more and how can they get involved?

Tessa Provins (02:26):

Absolutely. This came about last year and a group of interested people at the university along with COTRAIC, the Three Rivers American Indian Center, just outside of Pittsburgh, got together and had some meetings and said one of the things that we can do as a university is to better educate the community about indigenous matters and how can we do that in a way that includes students, faculty, and staff. So the indigenous cultural festival came out of lots of meetings with all of these different units across the university that said, we have some indigenous facing work. This might be something that we can share with other community members. How can we help? Because we're interested in investing in our indigenous community and the relationships that the university wants to build with it. And so last year was the first annual indigenous cultural festival and it included art exhibits, a couple of lectures, and obviously an all day powwow that was held in the middle of the week with roughly 25 dancers in a full drum circle. It ran from 10 to 6 and we're doing much the same this year. We're adding some additional events including pouch making workshops, drum workshop, excuse me, the all day powwow of course. And also we just signed on a great meet the author. And so we're having something that everybody can enjoy for the indigenous cultural festival and come and learn.

Clyde Wilson Pickett (Host) (03:57):

Well, as you point out, this is a chance for the entire community to take advantage to learn and more specifically an opportunity to be engaged. And so as you look at that chance to be engaged as you look at the opportunity, talk to me about what you would encourage folks to do to prepare to come and join and be a part of the festival.

Tessa Provins (04:15):

I think the biggest thing is to come excited and with an open mind. One of the things that drives ICF and one of the pillars of this moving forward is just for people to feel comfortable and safe and know that this is a space for learning. As people prepare, check out the diversity.pitt.edu ICF webpage. And so you can see not only the schedule for powwow because that's an all day event, but also the other events that we have coming up for ICF, again sort of mentioning that pouch making workshop, the drum circle and all of the other events that are going on, and you can actually sign up directly from that website. So check out the things that you might want to go to that you're interested in, tell other people about them and then sign up and come.

Clyde Wilson Pickett (Host):

One of the major questions is can I go to a powwow? Is this something that I'm allowed to go to?

Tessa Provins (05:09):

Yes, it is something that is important for people to go to. It's not only an experience that can be shared with other people, but this is powwow is specifically set up so that individuals are learning about the different cultures and dances that people bring to powwows. And the mc for this is actually really well known for doing sort of educational powwows in this way. So it's a great experience for everybody. There's going to be blankets on the lawn, bring a blanket if you want our chairs, we'll have hay bales and other seating opportunities, and it's just there for as long as you'd like to see the event.

Clyde Wilson Pickett (Host) (05:47):

Absolutely. I guess a follow-up question, would you invite them to bring families? What is our thought in terms of who should come, who they should invite and what that should look like?

Tessa Provins (05:55):

Absolutely. So the powwow is going to be the 20th from 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM and we invite everybody to come. This is a great event to bring kids to and your families to spend your lunch hour if you're going to have lunch and come and see everyone. This is something that we actually hope that community members come to and we've certainly tried to get different parts of the community involved, not only through other outreach efforts and the media, but also in partnership with Pittsburgh City Schools and other places that we've tried to really make sure that people know that they're welcome.

Clyde Wilson Pickett (Host) (06:27):

And so I guess I'll shift just a bit as we're thinking about being prepared, being educated and looking forward to coming to the festival. Part of this is about exposure and opportunity for the festival, but I'm also interested in ways in which you would encourage our listeners to become better informed, better connected with the indigenous community in general.

Tessa Provins (06:50):

This is a great question and one that I think a lot about when I'm having these conversations getting connected with the indigenous community is going to events like powwows and doing some self-learning. We actually have a good reads book list so that you can start with educational materials. We have a Spotify playlist so that you can support indigenous artists. We have a Pinterest page going where you can look at indigenous artwork and photographers and learning is part of getting involved with the community. Now, certainly other ways that you might get involved at the institution here is not only by going to these types of events but pursuing research in these areas. As a research institution, it's a wonderful place to be able to link in with faculty and other initiatives in schools so that you can pursue projects that are respectful to the indigenous community and give you avenues to learn and pay back to that community in some cases.

Clyde Wilson Pickett (Host) (07:52):

So tremendous opportunities obviously to learn and thinking about those things. I want to shift just a bit and talk about you specifically your journey. And so you are a member of a native community, and so if you would talk to us more about the specific nation that you are involved with, the history associated with the experiences you've had personally and the ways in which that factors into your journey here to the University of Pittsburgh.

Tessa Provins (08:17):

Yeah, I'm a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. I feel so connected to the community. I wasn't raised on the reservation in Oklahoma. I was raised in California, but we were deeply connected to the native community when I was growing up, going to powwows, being close to other reservations, and that shaped my worldview. When I went to undergrad at Stanford, one of

the places that I felt most at peace at home was the native center that they had there. We had fry bread nights and community dinners and Stanford powwow itself, which was one of the ideas that I had sort of coming into ICF itself. And that was a huge part of my life and identity and undergrad and going to grad school, there was less of a community that was available to me regarding that. And then I came to Pittsburgh and felt somewhat the same way until I found COTRAIC and then started in some of my surface work here at the Indigenous Cultural Festival. And it's given me a sense of purpose outside of my research work, which I feel pretty deeply connected to. I am interested in understanding how indigenous nations interact with the US government between each other and within, and how we can make indigenous lives, indigenous stories and lives more mainstream going forward.

Clyde Wilson Pickett (Host) (09:52):

You're listening to the Inclusion Interchange. I'm your host, Dr. Clyde Wilson Pickett, and we're talking about this year's indigenous cultural festival, which begins September 18th on the Oakland campus here at the University of Pittsburgh. You can find out more information by going to Pitt.ly/ICF2023, and we're going to take a quick break and I'll be right back with more from our guest, Dr. Tessa province.

Announcer (10:18):

For more information about the Office for Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion, visit our website, diversity.pitt.edu or find us on social media at pittdiversity.

Clyde Wilson Pickett (Host) (10:33):

Welcome back to the inclusion interchange. I'm Dr. Clyde Wilson Pickett talking to Dr. Tessa Provins here from the university. And so we're talking about the indigenous cultural festival. Talk to me about some of the ways that we can use research to inform our preparation to come to the festival.

Tessa Provins (10:51):

Absolutely. So the University of Pittsburgh obviously is a research institution, something that if you are a part of the university, you can go to the university library system and they have lots of articles that are available to you in books so that you can prepare for the indigenous cultural festival. Something that's certainly not necessary, but something that you can do if you're interested or afterwards if you're interested in events to do some further introspection and some research. So the other things that you might do as from a research university to prepare is honestly there's tons of wonderful online resources. If you're interested in going to our powwow on Wednesday, powwows.com is a great place to go. You can see different information like the history of powwows, how people are supposed to engage in powwows, maybe things like what should I wear, what should I bring in addition to other information about some of the cultural significance of different dances and ceremonies and drumming that happens at these cultural festivals.

Clyde Wilson Pickett (Host) (12:00):

I guess I'll follow up with a question that you teased out just a bit. What should people wear to a powwow and what should they be prepared for with regard to showing up?

Tessa Provins (12:12):

Absolutely. So it's always a little warm in the middle of September still. So arm yourself with a water bottle. We will have a large water jug wear what you would normally wear. One of the things that I am always asked is, can I wear a T-shirt and jeans? Yes, you can wear a T-shirt and jeans to powwow. One of the things that I would stay away from though is anything that would be considered cultural appropriation. You do not want to wear any indigenous like outfits or regalia if you are not indigenous coming to this, likely it would, it's something I would shy away from, but come as yourself, right? There's nothing special that you have to wear. Just come with an open heart, open mind, and interested in seeing some wonderful dancing and hearing some interesting drumming.

Clyde Wilson Pickett (Host) (12:59):

Very good. Well, you talked a bit about some of the ways in which research can be used to prepare for coming to the powwow, but we'll shift just a bit and give you a chance to talk about your own research. Talk to me about what you're working on and your own research that you specialize in.

Tessa Provins (13:14):

So many projects going on right now. I think one of the ones that I'd like to highlight the most is something that's also on our minds. I've been looking at how indigenous nations are reacting to climate change, and so what are the determinants of whether or not tribal nations are able to and want to react to climate change. So reactions to climate change, you might be going like, well, how do you react to climate change? I'm looking at a plethora of different factors, things like do they have community outreach order program so that they can explain what is going on with climate change all the way to are you installing a wind farmer or solar grid? And there's lots of ways that indigenous agents are in fact adopting or adapting to climate change. And what I find is really an interesting result that is not like some of the other subfields might expect that look at climate change.

Tessa Provins (14:11):

I find that water, as you have more water on a tribal area, that you are less likely to actually try to adapt to climate change. As you have more land, you're more likely to adapt to climate change. And that socioeconomic factors of tribal members like median household income are major contributors to whether or not nations are adapting to climate change and specifically that they want to protect their populations. So some interesting results coming out of the study and I think there will be further studies that really follow up on some of the initial findings I have in this case.

Clyde Wilson Pickett (Host) (14:48):

Well, exciting. Definitely looking forward to reading more about that and hearing more about that as we look at the discussion specifically around the nations. Some of our listeners may not be familiar with understanding sovereign nation status and if you would provide some information just so folks get an understanding of what you're talking about.

Tessa Provins (15:10):

So there are 574 federally recognized tribes in the United States, and as many people learn very quickly, there are sovereign status or that they are independent entities in government from the United States. So very different than what we would think of as our federalist system of state and local governments. They're independent governments that run their own nation, people, et cetera. And in some cases, not all tribes, but many tribes have reservations in which they have authority over their people, their land, their economies, et cetera. That's separate from the United States government. So there've been a number of US Supreme Court cases and legal battles, congressional interactions about sovereignty, but it's something that is an important identity and interesting aspect of thinking about indigenous nations and their place in the US and even local communities in some cases.

Clyde Wilson Pickett (Host) (16:13):

Yeah, appreciate you offering that. I think the more we engage with our community and expose and educate to the ways in which we learn more about the native indigenous community, it can help us out and of course paying attention to your research. And so I'll ask another question similar to the ways in which many are uninformed with the understanding of sovereign nation status. The question often comes up about the use of language. Should we be referring to the community as native, indigenous or the term American Indian? And so to put you on the spot just a bit, talk to me about the ways in which you're having discussions with other colleagues and specifically other people who are in higher education or academicians with regard to the use of those terms and what you would inform our listeners to think about.

Tessa Provins (17:03):

Yeah, this is a really important question and it's something that we think about a lot right now in terms of how people want to be identified on its broadest stream. And when we say indigenous, there are a number of indigenous populations that are non-US based, right? We have indigenous communities on almost every continent in the world. And so indigenous is really broad sweeping and is the most inclusive term that one might use for indigenous populations. Now, with respect to the US context, there's Native American, native American and Alaskan native tribal governments and villages. And so this is something where there's different preferences and guides whether or not you should use Native American Indian, et cetera. And one of the important things is that people should be able to choose how they'd like to be identified. It does depend, and some of my friends prefer American Indian, some prefer Native American.

Tessa Provins (18:06):

When we actually look at this, one of the most important thing is this is oftentimes collapsing the unique identities of tribes and villages. And so most people would actually prefer to be identified just by the tribe that they're a member of. So I would prefer to be a Choctaw woman as compared to Native American, but it is obviously more broad sweeping, and many of my friends have that similar sentiments in research. We see across the board, Native American, American Indian, and indigenous, depending on the different disciplines that people are in, political science, economics, anthropology, public health. And so there seems to be differences in terminology.

Clyde Wilson Pickett (Host) (18:58):

Appreciate you answering that. I think it's important for listeners to understand, much like you point out that each of us is individual and has a preference in terms of the ways in which we want to be identified, and that relationship and building relationship is a critical part of that conversation. I want to go back to your research just a bit, and so you talked specifically about indigenous, indigenous climate issues. I want to lean in just a bit in terms of the work that you do in understanding legislative priorities for native communities. And so if you would talk a bit about that work and some of the current priorities that are emerging in your research and things that you would want our listeners to know about.

Tessa Provins (19:36):

As I'm thinking about my research and what I'm looking at and some of the different priorities that might be considered by indigenous nations, obviously you've brought up sovereignty, adapting to climate change. Some of my areas of research and a number of other areas that people might be interested in are things like the missing and murdered indigenous women's Initiative and many of the aspects that are going around that issue. Thinking about other issues with regard to rights to land and how that is actually working into other fossil fuels and conversations that we're having in the United States, and obviously issues surrounding public health is indigenous people oftentimes face some of the worst outcomes with regard to issues like obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and other mental health issues and substance abuse issues. And so it's something to really think about as those are all part of the conversation.

Clyde Wilson Pickett (Host) (20:37):

Thank you much for that answer. We'll pause and pick up our conversation in just a moment. This is the inclusion interchange, and I'm your host, Dr. Clyde Wilson Pickett.

Announcer (20:48):

If you have a question or comment, we hope you'll write to us. Our email address is diversity@pitt.edu.

Clyde Wilson Pickett (Host) (20:58):

Welcome back to the inclusion interchange. We are here with Dr. Tessa Provins, talking about this year's indigenous cultural festival. So Dr. Provins, certainly this doesn't happen without concerted effort by a group of committed parties to make this a reality. Talk to me about who we should be thanking for bringing this to our community.

Tessa Provins (21:21):

Absolutely. So this event has support from so many within Pitt and outside of Pitt partners. I will say thank you. OEDI has been a huge supporter of this and obviously is the major hub organizing this. There's also been a ton of support from the Center for Creativity, the Division of Student Affairs, the University Library System, and other partners outside including Pittsburgh Parks Conservatory and COTRAIC themselves who is a partner with us putting on this event.

Clyde Wilson Pickett (Host) (21:58):

So certainly a robust effort from colleagues and community groups that have made this a reality. And so I want to add my voice of course, to thank and appreciate everyone including you for your effort in making this a reality. So we are so appreciative of that, so excited and look forward to seeing everyone at the festival. I'm going to pivot just a bit and give us an opportunity to talk about native and indigenous issues in the academy. As I have you with me, I want to make sure that we lean in just a bit and talk about experience. Talk to me, if you would, about the current state of affairs of native and indigenous scholars in higher education.

Tessa Provins (22:38):

Yeah, there's not many, and this is something that universities can work on. When I think about this, I spread this into basically three different areas. One is undergraduate education, so thinking about making sure that you are recruiting students and indigenous students, but also giving them support in undergraduate education. Also offering classes that deal with indigenous issues, whether that be global or more localized to the us. And the next part is graduate education, not only again, recruiting and supporting indigenous graduate students, but having opportunities for them to be involved in research that oftentimes include field work with indigenous nations. Then finally, recruiting and hiring and supporting faculty members that are doing this type of work. I want to make a note about this that's really important. It's not just indigenous scholars who are studying indigenous nations, but indigenous scholars are represented in graduate programs that are and are studying things that have nothing to do with indigenous nations, and it's important to think about diversity in all of our departments and what can be brought to the table with regard to more diverse departments and for our student bodies as we're teaching.

Clyde Wilson Pickett (Host) (23:57):

Yeah, I so appreciate you offering that. I think we need to be attentive in the compositional representation and our effort to continue to attract support and give voice to our native indigenous scholars no matter the field of study or endeavor, and specifically our willingness to fund them I think is a critical priority in higher education, and one that I don't think it's enough attention. And so I think as someone charged with moving that work for the University of Pittsburgh, it's something that we need to make sure that we put our attention on,

Tessa Provins (24:30):

And I can definitely say I know your office has been doing a lot of support work towards this, and I look forward to all of the other aspects that you start impacting the indigenous community. I really appreciate that Dr. Pickett.

Clyde Wilson Pickett (Host) (24:41):

I appreciate you. The work continues.

Tessa Provins (24:42):

The work always continues.

Clyde Wilson Pickett (Host) (24:45):

And so as we move towards the end of our time, one thing I did want to ask you about, something that's garnered attention from a number of institutions around the country, organizations, colleges and universities alike is land acknowledgement statements, and so want to get your thoughts there in general about the use of land acknowledgement statements and what we should be thinking about as institutions that adopt them.

Tessa Provins (25:11):

Absolutely. I know that Pitt is going through this themselves with regard to a land acknowledgement, many other higher education institutions, but frankly the private sector is also dealing with whether or not they should be using land acknowledgements. Land acknowledgements are a wonderful first step at signifying or acknowledging that you are oftentimes on stolen land from indigenous people and being able to recognize that now, going past recognition of this and actually doing things to help the indigenous community for higher education. That might mean supporting indigenous research and supporting indigenous classes for private sector that might be giving back and other ways to indigenous communities, whether that's indigenous nonprofits or some other way, but land acknowledgements at their face value are good for creating and the conversation and starting that conversation, but they certainly shouldn't be the end all be all for institutions.

Clyde Wilson Pickett (Host) (26:16):

Absolutely. You remind us that in any situation, it's about commitment that goes beyond statements and that all of our institutions, organizations that are committing time and attention to land acknowledgement statements must acknowledge the history associated with where they are placed and more specifically the expectation to support those who have a legacy to that land. And so we like other institutions, need to continue that effort. And so we are at our time, Dr. Provins, appreciate you being with us. Anything that you'd like to add before we culminate our time together?

Tessa Provins (26:51):

I'd just like to say thank you for having me, and also just a quick shout out to all of the people who have worked on this across the university. There's a lot of heart and soul that's gone into this week and I'm looking forward to seeing so many people there.

Clyde Wilson Pickett (Host) (27:03):

Well, thank you so much. Of course, I want to add my appreciation to all who made this a reality and who helped to organize the festival, so excited about that to come and more specifically, all of our listeners who are joining who will be there with us. And so I'd like to thank you once again, Dr. Provins, for being with us, and I look forward to all of you joining us at the Indigenous Cultural Festival, which begins September 18th on the Oakland campus, and you can find out more information by going to pit.ly/ICF2023. Once again, thank you for listening to the Inclusion interchange. I'm your host, Dr. Clyde Wilson Pickett, and we will see you again soon. Be well.

Announcer (27:44):

This is an automated transcript. There may be some errors in transcription.

You've been listening to the Inclusion Interchange, a podcast from the University of Pittsburgh's office for equity, diversity, and inclusion. Technical support for this podcast is provided by the Center for Teaching and Learning. For more information about the Office for Equity diversity and Inclusion, visit our website at diversity.pitt.edu or find us on social media at Pitt Diversity. The inclusion interchange is produced by Jay Togyer for OEDI.