Topic:
Community Engagement in Indian Country

Each tribe is an **INDEPENDENT, SOVEREIGN NATION** with a **DISTINCT CULTURE** and **GOVERNMENT**.

**Speakers:**
Dr. Paulina Velez (Director; Center for Sovereign Nations)

**Summary:**
Elizabeth Payne began by discussing the history of tribal nations and sovereignty in Oklahoma. She emphasized that tribes are sovereign governments that have independent relationships with the United States federal government. Students, staff, and faculty members interested in partnering with a tribe must therefore be aware of the relevant laws and regulations, including how they might differ from US and Oklahoma law. Payne also noted that the exact nature of each tribe’s sovereignty is an ongoing question, a portion of which is currently being debated by the Supreme Court of the United States. This relationship can be complicated because of the manner in which each tribe was forcibly relocated to Oklahoma by the United States government during the nineteenth century and because of the need to share natural resources like water. She noted that many tribal governments have agreements with the US government to determine the limit and nature of each government’s authority.

In addition to their own governments, tribes also possess differing cultures, titles, and distributions of power. Payne noted that this can affect local expectations of where and how an interested scholar should first explore the potential of a partnership. A tribal citizen, for example, may or may not be able to connect a faculty or staff member with appropriate offices or leaders, even if the citizen is a personal friend of the individual from OSU. Several tribes have their own institutional review boards (IRB) that must review and approve all potential projects in addition to review by the OSU IRB. Relevant IRB and other tribal officials must provide direct approval before a project that operates on tribal land or centers on tribal citizens can begin. Payne emphasized that respect for and knowledge about tribal sovereignty is at the core of everything at the OSU.
Center for Sovereign Nations. She therefore encouraged anyone with questions about how to approach a tribal partnership to visit with her office first so that first contact between an individual at OSU and a tribe is more than an unsolicited email. **Dr. Susan Stansberry** agreed that starting with positive connections is a win-win for everyone involved in a tribal partnership. **Sara Siems** shared that she has found the most success when meeting with tribal officials face-to-face, adding that email correspondence can sometimes be delayed.

**Payne** noted that most tribal governments have positive, long-lasting relationships with Oklahoma State University. Many tribes use their own funds to provide scholarships for their citizens to attend OSU partly in the hope that the students will return to and benefit their tribe. **Payne** shared some of the many examples she has seen of students with tribal citizenship attending OSU because of its connection to Oklahoma as a land-grant institution. She also noted, however, that tribes have an interest in institutional partnerships with OSU in order to develop resources and opportunities for their citizens (who may live throughout the state or country). She encouraged those present to consciously build on this positive relationship by approaching tribes with a heartfelt desire to learn in a respectful setting. This will include being willing to listen and recognize the expertise possessed by each tribe.