

Grad motivated to create change among tribal communities

By Crystal Jimenez, ASU News
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Editor's note: This story is part of a series of profiles of notable [spring 2025 graduates](#).

Sadie Red Eagle came to the [Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law](#) at Arizona State University for one sole purpose: to help tribal communities and families just like hers.

“Several tribes in Oklahoma don't have their in-house counsel and, like my own tribe, are outsourcing all their legal work to firms,” she explained. “With the recent Supreme Court decisions in *McGirt v. Oklahoma* and *Oklahoma v. Castro-Huerta*, the political landscape between the state and tribes changed overnight. Because of those decisions, I decided to finally apply to law school because I wanted to help Oklahoma tribes protect their governmental interests and promote self-determination.”

During her time at ASU Law, Red Eagle was a student ambassador for the [Indian Legal Program](#); the vice president of the [Native American Law Students Association](#) at ASU; an Area 1 representative for the National NALSA; and the co-chair of the Law Journal for Social Justice symposium. She also competed in two National NALSA Moot Court Competitions — all while keeping up with extracurricular activities and all the coursework that came with law school.

“Being an active member of the Indian Legal Program has been the most rewarding experience of my time at ASU Law,” Red Eagle said. “The ILP is the best Indian law program in the country, and I am so grateful for the support and mentorship I received.”

Red Eagle wants to work within the U.S. Department of the Interior or the Department of Justice Office of the Solicitor General advising on federal Indian law issues. Down the road, she wants to create an in-house legal department for her tribe back in Oklahoma.

Note: Answers may have been lightly edited for length and/or clarity.

Question: Do you have any scholarships funded by individuals, businesses or organizations?

Answer: I've been really lucky to receive scholarships from amazing organizations and communities that are committed to supporting Native students. Thanks to the Indian Legal Program at ASU Law, the Otoe-Missouria Tribe of Indians, the National Congress of American

Indians, the Ak-Chin Indian Community, the Native American Bar Association of Arizona, Native Forward and the American Indian College Fund, I've been able to keep moving forward in my education without carrying such a heavy financial burden. I'm truly thankful for their support.

Question: What was your “aha” moment when you realized you wanted to study the field you majored in?

Answer: I've wanted to be a lawyer since I was 6 years old, but the real turning point came during my freshman year of college. I had to advocate for myself while seeking legal protection after being sexually assaulted, and that experience opened my eyes to just how overwhelming and intimidating the legal system can be, especially for survivors.

As I began speaking out and supporting others, I became deeply passionate about advocating for sexual assault survivors like myself on my college campus. Later on, while working in Washington, D.C., for the National Congress of American Indians during the COVID-19 pandemic, I saw firsthand how the law could be a powerful tool for change in Indian Country. That's when I knew law school wasn't just a dream — it was the next step in becoming the advocate I wanted and needed back then.

Q: What's something you learned while at ASU Law — in the classroom or otherwise — that surprised you or changed your perspective?

A: I remember sitting in Professor Jessica Berch's criminal procedure class when she said something that stuck with me: “We're all criminals. Every one of us breaks the law, even if it's something small.” She talked about traffic violations, even ones we don't realize we're committing. That moment shifted how I think about criminal law. It made me reflect on how harshly we treat people who commit nonviolent or victimless offenses. They're often judged far more harshly than they deserve.

Q: Which professor taught you the most important lesson while at ASU?

A: Professor Derrick Beetso had the most lasting impact on me during my time at ASU. I had the opportunity to take three different Indian law courses with him, and through his teaching, he offered a unique and practical perspective on how Indian law plays out in the real world. He helped us understand how attorneys, organizations and the federal government engage with these complex issues. These insights have shaped how I approach the law and advocacy for tribal communities.

Q: Highlight an interesting moment, story or accomplishment while at ASU Law.

A: One of the most memorable experiences I've had at ASU Law has been competing in the National NALSA Moot Court Competitions. It's a rigorous and rewarding process that not only sharpens your legal writing and oral advocacy skills but also builds strong bonds with other Indian law students at ASU and across the country.

The Indian Legal Program goes above and beyond to support us, organizing practice rounds with 20 to 40 volunteer judges throughout January and February. This past year, I competed alongside Justice Oglesby, and we were proud to place fifth for Best Overall Advocates and advance to the elite eight out of 66 teams. What made it even more special was the way the ASU Law teams supported one another; we pushed each other to improve and celebrated each other's successes. It was truly a highlight of my law school career.

Question: If someone gave you \$40 million to solve one problem on our planet, what would you tackle?

Answer: If I were given \$40 million to solve a problem, I would invest it in tribal schools and universities. Many of these schools are reliant on federal funding, and unfortunately, funding fluctuates depending on the presidential administration and its priorities. While I wouldn't be able to fully fund all of them, I'd focus on helping bridge the financial gaps that often limit their ability to provide quality education.

I am a proud graduate of Sequoyah Indian Schools in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, where my mom also graduated from, and I believe supporting Native education is crucial to empowering future generations and strengthening our communities. Going to Sequoyah reshaped my educational path, and without it and their teachers like Sara Barnett, I don't know if I would be here.

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Sadie Red Eagle. Photo by Danielle Williams