

# A Journey We've Taken Together: Dr. Eddie Brown

Molly Tovar and Sarah Kastelic

**Abstract:** Dr. Eddie F. Brown is an Indigenous social work scholar and policy advocate whose work has made a lasting impact on Indian Country. This narrative reflects on the many enduring contributions Dr. Brown made during his tenure as director of the Kathryn M. Buder Center for American Indian Studies at Washington University in St. Louis. The current director of the Buder Center, Molly Tovar, offers her reflections on the lasting influence of Dr. Brown's innovations on the Center itself, while American Indian/Alaska Native alumni of the Center share their thoughts on Dr. Brown's influence on their academic and professional achievements. The narrative concludes with a personal story by one Alaska Native alumna, Sarah Kastelic, on Dr. Brown's mentorship over her nearly 20-year career.

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Our fast-paced world does not resonate with the idea of a journey. Rather, a journey suggests traveling for a long stretch of time, admittedly at times hastening with specific purpose, but more often lingering in certain places that capture our interest, finding an unexpected but fascinating path along the way, even navigating unforeseen difficulties. Sometimes our life journeys present us with opportunities to be trailblazers. At other junctures, we accompany one another as fellow travelers. At certain crossroads, we meet those who become our guides and give us direction on our quest.

The life journey of Dr. Eddie F. Brown is an odyssey that has inspired countless Native American students and community members. His course throughout his life has been directed toward the betterment of the Indigenous Peoples he has encountered along the way. A member of the Pascua Yaqui Tribe, Eddie has been a guiding force in tribal, state, and national government positions. He has skillfully navigated the roadblocks that epitomize government, serving in leadership positions within the Tohono O'odham Nation, the State of Arizona and as the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs within the U.S. Department of the Interior. In this federal position, Eddie pioneered an agreement that recognized tribal government sovereignty; he took steps toward strengthening tribal capacity for self-governance and guided the restructuring of the Office of Indian Education Programs. His tireless work on behalf of the Native community was recognized by the American Indian Policy Institute in April 2015 with the Silver and Turquoise Ball's Honorary Leon Grant Award.

One of Eddie Brown's "stops" along his journey

intersected with the Kathryn M. Buder Center for American Indian Studies (Buder Center) at Washington University in St. Louis. His eight-year tenure at our institution in the early 2000's was marked with strength and forward progress for the Center and for Eddie himself. It was at this time that Eddie conducted extensive research and co-authored numerous publications on a wide variety of American Indian social welfare issues. He gained national recognition during this time for his efforts in the areas of child welfare and family services, welfare reform, American Indian youth and mental health services, and tribal asset development. Most importantly, however, he left a legacy of capacity building and American Indian scholarship before he traveled on.

I can still see the manifestations of his guiding spirit. Eddie's innovative planning and creative strategies for growth have helped build the Buder Center into a premier American Indian academic center, respected and recognized nationally for the advancement of Native social work students and the study of American Indian issues. His effort to procure almost \$4 million in grant monies continues to positively impact current scholars. Eddie piloted an American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) graduate recruitment program on a national scale and hosted the first National Pre-Graduate School Workshop for Native American College Students on this campus. These programs are still in effect today. The recruitment strategies he put in place continue to play a part in graduating AI/AN Master of Social Work students; 146, thus far. Each time we cross paths at national events, Eddie inspires me to persevere in my work at the Buder Center. His observation that "Indian Country needs more AI/AN social workers to practice in tribal and urban settings" continues to motivate my efforts at the Center.

Dr. Brown has also been a model in his family life. He has been married to Dr. Barbara Weems Brown for 47 years and has 6 children and 14 grandchildren. It is apparent that his family has given him much of the strength, inspiration and joy that enables him to continue his extraordinary journey, one that he has shared with so many others.

Because of his contributions, Eddie has paved the way for many first-generation AI/AN college graduates to be successful academically; in turn, they have been able to be examples and serve as mentors to other students and community members along their own journeys. Those students who were lucky enough to cross paths with Eddie during his stay in St. Louis found inspiration and direction in working toward policy changes in Indian Country. Amy Locklear Hertel (Lumbee/Coharie), 1999 MSW alumna, pointed to Eddie as the person who accompanied her on her quest to effect change and advocate for AI/AN students nationwide. As a result of his encouragement, Jordan Lewis (Aleut), 2000 MSW alumnus, applied for and received the Morris K. Udall Native American Congressional Fellowship – the first step in his career working with Native elder policies in Washington, DC. Eddie's passion, along with his commitment, says Lewis, "was infectious."

Contagious passion seems to be Eddie's trademark during his time here. Other alumni underscored Eddie's commitment to each student as an individual. Jessica Black (Gwich'in Athabaskan), 2004 MSW alumna, pointed out that "Dr. Brown was instrumental because not only was he a role model, he spent time with each of us students individually, helping us to reach our full potential as people and scholars."

Eddie saw to it that students did not navigate their graduate school journey alone. His approach was to share his experiences so that students felt that sense of traveling together. As Dale Chavis (Lumbee), 2002 MSW alumnus, said, "Dr. Brown created a space for me to ask the important questions." It was not uncommon, claims another former student, Kerry Bird (Lumbee), 1998 MSW alumnus, for Eddie to share his own stories, offering his successes as well as his missteps in an attempt to challenge MSW students to look beyond their initial ideas and opinions and to think how each person's personal

trek could result in making the world a better place.

Beyond that, Eddie Brown warned his students of the dangers of an easy path – the one of the status quo. Patty Grant-Long (Cherokee/Lakota), 2001 alumna, spoke of his encouragement to challenge individual and cultural beliefs and values. He believed that a degree from a prestigious university would open doors easily but that those opportunities should be used for the greatest good and should not be taken for granted. His shared wisdom and his personal concern caused Eddie's students, as Kerry Bird mentions, to remember him as not only a mentor, but a friend, an inspiration, and even a father figure.

Buder alumna Sarah Kastelic (Alutiiq), 1998, best captures the essence of Eddie Brown's ongoing encouragement of lifelong journeys of impact in Native communities in the following section.

#### **Dr. Brown, A Lifelong Mentor**

I met Dr. Brown in August 1996, when I became an MSW student at the Brown School of Social Work at Washington University in St. Louis. It seems funny now, but on the first day of graduate school, my mother came to class with me to meet my professors and see what I'd be learning about. Because he was the Buder Center director, my mother saw Dr. Brown as the key to getting the support and direction I needed in school. After meeting him, my mother said she could tell that I would be in good hands. And she was right. When we met him that day, I don't think we had any idea of the extent of influence he would have. Looking back now, I can see that Dr. Brown is the person who has had the single greatest impact on my professional development and career path – my journey.

Dr. Brown taught an American Indian Social Welfare Policy and Administrative Procedures course as well as a Community Development in American Indian and Rural Communities course. He developed the syllabi and the content from the perspective of an experienced practitioner, and his life experience enriched his teaching. I had had very little AI/AN specific content in my undergraduate program and to take whole courses dedicated to working with this population was a real dream of mine. Dr. Brown was a captivating lecturer and he hooked me on Indian policy from the very beginning! Not only were the readings thought provoking and his lectures articulate and challenging,

the assignments were designed to prepare us for work we would do in our careers. In assignments about preferred futures, he challenged me and other AI/AN students to see a different future for our tribal communities, one that used tribal self-determination as a tool to achieve what our citizens really needed by building on assets we already had. Dr. Brown's course was the foundation for my entire professional journey, and he spent endless hours outside of class talking and debating with me. He recommended books to read and supervised an independent study that allowed me to continue to devote time to Indian policy.

Dr. Brown helped arrange a concentration practicum for me at the Bureau of Indian Affairs Office of Tribal Services in Washington, DC. The practicum led to a full-time job with the agency when I completed my degree one semester later. When I received a job offer from a national Native advocacy organization a year afterwards and had to decide whether to leave government, I turned to Dr. Brown again for counsel. It seemed a huge decision. After only a year, should I take a different job? Would this path be a detour, a wrong turn? Was I even properly equipped? Did I have the experience and supplies for this new stretch of the journey?

With the benefit of his mentorship, I decided to work for the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) – the oldest, largest, and most representative national Native organization serving the broad interests of tribal governments. My position, welfare reform program manager, was offered to me because of the deep content expertise I gained in my MSW program. When welfare reform reauthorization began to heat up in the early 2000s, I worked closely with Dr. Brown, who was conducting research with colleagues about the impact of welfare reform on tribal communities in Arizona. With a national task force of tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program directors and tribal leaders, we developed a set of recommendations for reauthorization. We built a broad coalition of support from think tanks, mainstream advocacy organizations, and state government organizations. When a new administration was elected and welfare reform reauthorization lost traction, descending into a series of continuing resolutions, I despaired. It seemed I was at a dead end, and Dr. Brown asked me if I had ever considered getting a PhD.

With his support, I went back to the Brown School to pursue a doctorate in social work. Dr. Brown chaired my dissertation committee before he left for the University of Arizona. In the PhD program, I had the opportunity to update and teach his Indian policy course several times; it was a special honor to carry on his work that had so inspired me. I continued to work for NCAI while I pursued my PhD. When I was invited to establish a Native think tank – the Policy Research Center – within NCAI in 2003, Dr. Brown agreed to join my advisory board. For seven years, he continued to influence social policy priorities and research in Indian Country through co-chairing my board. Upon finishing my degree, I considered whether to take a job in academia or continue in the nonprofit sector in Native policy and research. In 2010, Dr. Brown helped me prepare for job interviews and assemble a set of requests to guide job offer discussions.

To this day, I seek Dr. Brown's counsel about major professional commitments and job decisions. As I am a first generation college student, his experience and support in weighing options and navigating systems that were completely foreign to me was invaluable.

Last year, Dr. Brown served as a member of the U.S. Attorney General's Task Force on AI/AN Children Exposed to Violence, an incredibly prestigious group that traveled the country to take testimony to inform policy and practice recommendations to ensure that the violence AI/AN children face is first and foremost prevented and, if these efforts fail, that the violence is adequately addressed and the trauma it creates is appropriately treated.

Our journeys coincided once again. I testified before the task force at two hearings and had the opportunity to share important information about Indian child welfare and to acknowledge and thank Dr. Brown for the influence he's had on my life. I claim Dr. Brown as my senior mentor. His counsel and direction, selfless interest in opening doors for me, and his sincere and genuine interest in supporting me on my journey have helped me to grow into the roles I've been able to assume. After many years of mentorship and support, however, Dr. Brown still has the capacity to use his humor to remind me where the journey we've taken together began. Nearly every time he sees me and asks after my family, he gleefully tells whoever may be standing near us about the student who came to her

first day of graduate school, nearly 20 years ago, accompanied by her mother.

### **A Journey, and A Legacy, Continues**

Eddie Brown's tenure at the Buder Center at Washington University in St. Louis could be viewed by some merely as a brief layover on his impressive itinerary. Yet the countless lives he touched and continues to influence by his compassionate commitment to the betterment of humanity shows a legacy reaching far beyond those brief eight years. We like to believe that Eddie found in St. Louis a "fascinating path" that caused him to linger here for a bit. Eddie's unflinching quest to make the Buder

Center a nationally recognized AI/AN academic center and change lives for the better has kept the Buder Center on track. We proudly continue the journey that Eddie has shared with us, pushing forward towards our destination.

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