



MEDIA RELEASE

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Free Lectures to Celebrate Indigenous Peoples Day South King County Community Invited to Attend Events Oct. 9

DES MOINES, Wash. — All are welcome to celebrate Indigenous Peoples Day with free lectures by three Native presenters at Highline College from 10-11:50 a.m. on Monday, Oct. 9, 2023 in Building 2 of [Highline College's main campus](#).

The day offers the chance to reflect on the ongoing struggles of Indigenous peoples. It also provide an opportunity to celebrate the thriving culture and value that neighboring tribes and other Indigenous nations add to the college. Local tribes include Muckleshoot, Puyallup and other Coast Salish tribes.

Presenters include Sara Marie Ortiz (Pueblo of Acoma), Dr. Denise Bill (Muckleshoot) and Elise Gerrish-Bill (Muckleshoot).

About the speakers:

Sara Marie Ortiz (Pueblo of Acoma) is a proud graduate of the Institute of American Indian Arts (Bachelor of Fine Arts in creative writing) and Antioch University Los Angeles' Master of Fine Arts program with a concentration in creative nonfiction. In addition to creative writing/literature, she's formally studied law, Indigenous education, global self-determination in Indigenous communities, journalism, radio, theater, critical theory, and film. Ortiz has worked in the realm of Native arts, education, and culture advocacy for over 20 years. She has published widely and has been featured in such publications as the Kenyon Review, Ploughshares, the Florida Review, the American Indian Graduate, Indian Country Today Media Network, and has presented widely at galleries/arts spaces, performance venues, literary centers, tribal schools, tribal colleges, conferences, and universities. Sara Marie Ortiz lives in Burien, Washington, is the urban west representative for the Washington State Native American Education Advisory Committee (which advises the Washington State Office of the Superintendent for Public Instruction on all things Native/Tribal education), she is the lead coordinator for the Northwest Native Writers Circle, and is currently the Native Student Success Program Manager for Highline Public Schools.

Dr. Denise Bill is a member of the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe. Denise comes from the Villages of Burns Creek, dʒidʒəlaɫiɕ, stəq, Little Herring House-Crossing Over Place, and Katilbc (Kah-til-bish) and Ilalqo. Denise's great grandmother was Annie Jack, a fluent Lushootseed speaker, and her grandmother Iola Bill-Lobehan, was also a fluent Lushootseed speaker. Denise's father is the late Dr. Willard Bill, Sr., a long-time Native Educator, and mother is MaryAnn Bill. Denise is mother to Elise, Andrew, and grandmother to Lily. Denise is currently the executive director of Adult & Higher Education for the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe. Denise has worked in K-12 educational systems, as well as adult and higher education in both the public sector as well as in Native Schools/Colleges. Denise has a Doctoral Degree from the University of Washington. Her dissertation is titled "Native American Educational Leadership in the Pacific Northwest."

Elise Bill-Gerrish is a Muckleshoot woman residing in the Southern Puget Sound. Elise comes from the villages of Burns Creek, Stuck, Herring House, Crossing Over Place, and Katilbc. She is a Muckleshoot Language Caretaker and Native Education Specialist. Elise graduated from Antioch University Seattle in 2014 with a Bachelor of Arts in leadership and organizational studies. Her research during that time inspired a lifelong passion for social justice by advocating for holistic healing in all of its forms. She believes that it is essential to address historical trauma in Native communities in order to move forward in a "good way." Elise is actively earning her master's in education at the University of Washington Tacoma with an Indigenous education focus.

Highline began official recognition of Indigenous Peoples Day in September 2016 through the signing of a [proclamation](#).

For more information, visit [highline.edu/indigenous-peoples-day-2023/](https://www.highline.edu/indigenous-peoples-day-2023/)

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Links within this release:

- <https://www.highline.edu/campus-guide/locations-and-directions/>
- <https://www.highline.edu/indigenous-peoples-day-2023/>

Founded in 1961 as the first community college in King County, Highline College annually serves 13,000 students. With over 75 percent students of color, Highline is the most diverse higher education institution in the state. The college offers a wide range of academic transfer, professional-technical education, basic skills and applied bachelor's degree programs. Alumni include former Seattle Mayor Norm Rice, entrepreneur Junki Yoshida, Dr. Tom Jackson, president of Cal-Poly Humboldt, and former Washington state poet laureate Sam Green.