For Immediate Release
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Note: Please use the official name of the College –
The Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law at Arizona State University.

ASU’s Indian Legal Clinic hosts conference on broken federal recognition process

TEMPE - The broken process for federal recognition of Indian tribes is the focus of a conference on Jan. 16-17, hosted by the Indian Legal Clinic at the Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law at Arizona State University.

The conference, “Who Decides You’re Real? Fixing the Federal Recognition Process,” will be the first of its kind nationally, and will discuss the history of federal recognition, current issues with recognition, the existing federal administrative criteria, proposed changes to the federal acknowledgment process, and the results of a unique survey conducted by the Indian Legal Clinic.

It will be held at the Memorial Union on ASU’s Tempe campus.

The conference will bring together tribal leaders, tribal members, consultants who have assisted unrecognized tribes in establishing and exercising rights, and others to discuss challenges faced by unrecognized tribes, and identifying obstacles and proposing solutions to the current recognition framework.

Currently, the U.S. government officially recognizes 566 Native American tribes. These communities have certain legal, regulatory and financial rights and privileges that are not available for non-recognized communities. The recognition process has been controversial, slow and inconsistent, resulting in tribes held in limbo while lacking the legal means to help meet the needs of their citizens.

The Indian Legal Clinic recently conducted the first comprehensive survey of unrecognized tribes. At the same time, the U.S. Department of the Interior has announced that it will propose new regulations in an effort to improve the federal recognition process.

“Those tribes that are struggling with gaining U.S. federal recognition have an even more difficult time in meeting the governance and social needs of their citizens,” said Frank Ettawageshik, a member of the Conference Committee and former Chairman of the Waganakising Odawa – Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians. “This conference will give anyone interested in the issues surrounding the U.S. federal recognition process, and the exercise of inherent sovereignty, a chance to engage in discussions and hear how tribal leaders and professionals in the field are working on improving the process.
“Additionally, panels have been organized to give examples of how tribes have been exercising sovereignty, even when other surrounding sovereigns do not acknowledge that sovereignty. This lack of respect for tribal governments is an issue that can affect all tribes whether federally recognized or not.”

Professor Patty Ferguson-Bohnee, Director of the College of Law’s Indian Legal Clinic and conference committee chair, said tribes are looking for solutions.

“The Clinic is hopeful the conference will provide a renewed interest with pragmatic solutions to address the critical issue of federal recognition of Indian nations,” said Ferguson-Bohnee, who has testified about federal recognition before the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs and the Louisiana State Legislature and has successfully assisted four Louisiana tribes in obtaining state recognition.

For more information on the conference, go to http://conferences.asucollegeoflaw.com/triberecognition/

About the Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law
Arizona State University’s Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law is one of the leading public law schools in the country. Currently ranked No. 29 nationally by U.S. News & World Report, and No. 11 among all public law schools, the College has moved up further and faster in national rankings than nearly any other law school. The College is the preeminent law school in metropolitan Phoenix, the nation’s sixth-largest city. In addition to its renowned faculty, the College is home to several leading centers and programs recognized for excellence, including the Center for Law, Science & Innovation, the Center for Law and Global Affairs and the Indian Legal Program. Its students choose and benefit from numerous opportunities for experiential and practical-skills training as well as an array of theoretical courses. With a writing program that is ranked No. 5 nationally by U.S. News, a wide range of clinical opportunities, a breadth of externship offerings, and a pro bono program that annually contributes more than 100,000 hours of legal and law-related services to the community, the Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law is pursuing a path of boundless impact, excellence, engagement and opportunity. For more information, visit law.asu.edu.

About the Indian Legal Clinic
The Indian Legal Clinic, founded in 2005, provides law students with an opportunity to participate in real cases dealing with Native peoples and Indian issues. It serves both Indian Country and the nation’s urban Indian populations by providing high quality legal services, with attention to the special legal and cultural needs of native peoples. The Clinic works with tribal courts, undertakes tribal legal development projects, and works on federal policy issues affecting native people, such as federal recognition.