

## **Tony Viola – Outstanding Senior**

Tony Viola IV came to the College of Education from Coolidge, Arizona in 2016 as a proud first-generation college student eager to start a new tradition among his family and community.

Over the past four years, he has been involved in numerous educational spaces and programs in addition to his studies in the college's Literacy, Learning, and Leadership program. A natural mentor and role model, he served as a Cat Coach in the First Cats Peer Mentoring program to help support other first-generation college students. A proud member of the Pascua Yaqui tribe, he continued to serve tribal communities throughout his academic career in roles as an Engaging Native Boys intern, Indigenous Intellectual Warrior, founding member of VOICE, and Native SOAR mentor with focus on engaging and supporting Native youth in higher education.

For the last year and a half, Tony has demonstrated his leadership abilities as a project coordinator for the college's Linking Southwest Heritage Through Archaeology program. Throughout the program, which helps local Latinx and Indigenous high school students learn about their heritage while gaining exposure to a higher education setting, Tony modeled for the students how to speak with pride of one's culture, identity. He also taught them how to have dialogues with others that are respectful, yet challenging about inequity, access, and diversity. To take his dedication to the program further, Tony focused his research on the program as a research fellow in the UROC Access, Wellness, and Relational Determinants of School Success (AWARDSS) program.

Those who know Tony will easily describe him as innovative, compassionate, and insightful on supporting the pathways of underrepresented students to higher education. To continue learning how to best serve as a mentor and role model, he is fortunately returning to the college in the fall to pursue a Ph.D. in Language, Reading, and Culture. His dedication, positive attitude, and solutions-driven mindset is noticed by all around him and is what deems him the college's May 2020 Outstanding Senior.