

AIBL Leadership



Photo credit: Lailani Upham-O'Donnell
Jerry Lamb: AIBL helps "prepare Native students for the future."

By Jade-Heather Lepotokisi

MISSOULA, Mont. — Jerry Lamb directs an organization that helped him prepare for his job.

Lamb is the executive director of the national student organization, American Indian Business Leaders. AIBL, pronounced "able," is headquartered at the University of Montana, where Lamb received two degrees.

When he was a student at UM, Lamb was president of the AIBL student chapter on campus.

"I have a real interest in this organization ... I see a need for it," said Lamb, Gros Ventre from the Fort Belknap Reservation in Montana. "It has helped diversity at the university ... [and] it's a way to prepare Native students for the future."

Lamb received his Masters in Business Administration (MBA) at the University of Montana in August 2001 and an undergraduate degree in business administration there in May 2000. He joined AIBL as its executive director last January.

AIBL's national headquarters is located at the University of Montana, because that's where the Native American student organization got started almost 10 years ago.

According to Lamb, the idea for AIBL came in the MBA thesis of Michelle Henderson, a Fort Belknap Assiniboine. Henderson, who preceded Lamb as AIBL executive director, patterned the organization after the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES).

Lamb said that through Henderson's efforts—and the guidance of Larry Gianchetta, dean of the UM School of Business Administration; Joe McDonald, president of Salish Kootenai College; Dave Archambault, former president of Sitting Bull College; and Sherry Salway Black of the First Nations Development Institute—AIBL evolved and grew.

AIBL has more than 50 student-based chapters at tribal colleges and state universities. There are also AIBL groups in high schools and even elementary schools.

'Hopes for the Future'

"My hopes for the future are that we expand it," said Gianchetta, the UM dean. "I would like to see a chapter in almost every tribal college ... and every mainstream university."

Gianchetta was the first AIBL chapter's faculty adviser—a position he holds today.

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AIBL "provides internship opportunities ... and it's also a great support group for students," Gianchetta said.

AIBL hosts annual national conferences and, according to associate director Tina Begay, they're the hottest place to be for Indian students and professionals to access business information and expertise.

The next AIBL national conference is tentatively scheduled for April 7-9 in Las Vegas, said Begay, Navajo.

Conferences feature AIBL chapter presentations, "hands-on" workshops, business and trade show competitions, career and professional development activities, awards banquets, entertainment and tours of local Indian-owned businesses. There also are panel discussions by motivational speakers.

"We need to further the educational, social and leadership development of our Native youth in order to further the well-being of Native people as we progress in this 21st century," Lamb said. "AIBL strives to do just that."

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