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Tohono O’odham Community College alumna Iris Francisco returns as Academic Advisor

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Iris Francisco of Topawa, Baboquivari District, is the daughter of Earl and Marilyn Francisco. Francisco is enrolled in the Tohono O’odham Nation through Chukut Kuk District, where she also has family ties. Photo by M. Lee

By Martha S. Lee

Sells- Iris Francisco has an amused, faraway look in her eyes as she remembers the advice that launched her on her college journey. “When I was in high school, I wanted to go to college, but I didn’t do anything about it,” she says. “After I graduated, I was home for the summer. Then my mother insisted that I apply at the college [TOCC].”

As they say, the rest is history. Iris Francisco attended Tohono O’odham Community College full-time for three years, graduating in 2012 with an Associate of Science – Life Science Option.

She continued at the University of Arizona, where she graduated in 2016 with a B.S. in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology. At the University of Arizona, she joined and became a member of the Alpha Pi Omega Sorority, Inc.

Along the way, Iris lived an active college life, serving on TOCC's Student Senate Ka: g T-Ñi'oki, and working as a Student Success Center Agriculture and Circles of Care Intern. While at TOCC, she was a member of the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES).

She encouraged her mother and two of four sisters who are pursuing or have pursued higher education.

After graduating from the University of Arizona, Iris worked at United Tribes Technical College as an Americorps volunteer focused on local climate change views and landscape change.

During this time, she stayed in touch with Tohono O'odham Community College. When she returned from her one year posting in Bismarck, North Dakota, she applied for the Academic Advisor position at TOCC. Iris would like to thank Amber Tiokasin, Administrative Assistant, who encouraged her to apply.

Iris has plenty of personal experience for advising students. She has competed for scholarships, applied for university, changed majors, endured culture shock, dealt with "wanting to quit all the time," figured out her best method of studying, and survived "not knowing what I want to do."

Incidentally, her successful method of studying is to quit in a small way, which means to plan and take breaks. Her solution for not knowing what to do was to try the thing that sounded most interesting. In the case of her final, interdisciplinary major—Ecology and Evolutionary Biology—it turned out to be the "right amount of challenging."

Academic Advising takes place at TOCC's Main Campus in Schuk Toak District (Highway 86, Milepost 125.5 North). Francisco encourages appointments, but walk-in visits are also welcome. She can be reached at 520-383-8401 or ifrancisco@tocc.edu.

Francisco urges new high school graduates and others who are interested in college to investigate their opportunities at TOCC as soon as possible. Summer is a great time to start, she says, because you can focus on just one course, which helps you acclimate to the campus.

Registration is open at Tohono O'odham Community College for both summer and fall. Summer Session I has already started, but the five-week Summer Session II runs July 5-August 7. Fall classes begin on August 20. More information is available at 520-383-8401 or www.tocc.edu.