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## College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

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Keith Martinez (left) with Lakota Children's Enrichment President Maggie Dunne

### Martinez is working to advance the youth programs of his home community on the Oglala Lakota Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota

12.09.13 VILLANOVA, Pa - Villanova University student, Keith Martinez '16, a sophomore in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, a Gates Millennium Scholar and a Presidential Scholar from the Oglala Lakota Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, was one of 51 students from across the nation selected by Youth Service of America (YSA) and the Festival of Children Foundation to serve as a National Child Awareness Month (NCAM) Ambassador. For the next year, Martinez will represent the state of South Dakota by working to advance the youth programs of Lakota Children's Enrichment, Inc. (LCE), a nonprofit that empowers youth from the Oglala Lakota Pine Ridge Reservation.

"We are very proud of Keith and his accomplishments," said Terry Nance, PhD, assistant vice president, Multicultural Affairs. "We have every confidence that Keith will bring the same intelligence, humor and humanity to his National Child Awareness Ambassadorship for South Dakota as we have seen in everything that he has done on Villanova's campus."

Martinez, a Communication major, will focus his NCAM Ambassadorship on the issues surrounding the extreme poverty on the Pine Ridge Reservation, one of the most marginalized and historically wronged indigenous communities in the world, according to United Nations' reports.

Martinez spent many of his childhood years on the Pine Ridge Reservation and hopes to help empower children in the community and reduce the inequality of educational resources.

"We must let the youth of the Reservation blossom in order to change the future, but the only way the youth will blossom is if they are given the motivation and support they need," said Martinez. "Knowing the potential is what keeps me motivated and striving for a better future for those on the Reservation. Receiving this award as Youth Ambassador has been a true accomplishment; I never thought I would become the representing figure of my state for such a program, at least not this early in my life. For this I am truly humbled and very excited to see what we will accomplish in this upcoming year and years to come."

As part of the Ambassadorship, Martinez received leadership training from YSA in Washington, DC, where he met with South Dakota's U.S. Senator, Timothy Johnson, and was awarded a \$1,000 grant to support youth projects he will run with LCE, an organization he already serves through his position as Chair of the Youth Advisory Board. Among the youth projects he will run with LCE, Martinez has proposed a Reservation-wide spelling bee which will group both students and teachers in teams to make learning fun and to combat the community's problems with literacy. Schools on the Pine Ridge Reservation report drop-out rates as high as 70% and the average Reservation-wide reading rate falls between the fifth and seventh-grade level.

"We are so proud of Keith for applying for and receiving the NCAM Ambassador position," said Maggie Dunne, LCE Founder and President. "It is gratifying to see Youth Service America and other national organizations focusing on the positive and talented youth from Pine Ridge. When Keith spoke at LCE's Youth Summit this summer, he encouraged teens to follow their dreams and to ignore negative forces that may surround them. We look forward to Keith's continuing success and can't wait to see what the future brings. He's a rising tribal leader to watch!"

To learn more about Keith Martinez and his efforts, visit:

<http://lakotachildren.org/video-message-from-keith-martinez/>

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Villanova University was founded in 1842 by the Order of St. Augustine. To this day, Villanova's Augustinian Catholic intellectual tradition is the cornerstone of an academic community in which students learn to think critically, act compassionately and succeed while serving others. There are more than 10,000 undergraduate, graduate and law students in the University's six colleges.

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