

Dr. Joe Coulter

Dr. Joe Coulter, Potawatomi, grew up in Oklahoma where his father managed a former naval air station that was part of the University of Oklahoma. The family lived right on the base, which was nestled on the north campus of the university. Coulter and his four siblings went to grade school right on the university campus. This immersion in a scholarly setting from such an early age helped set Coulter up for success when he embarked on his academic career.

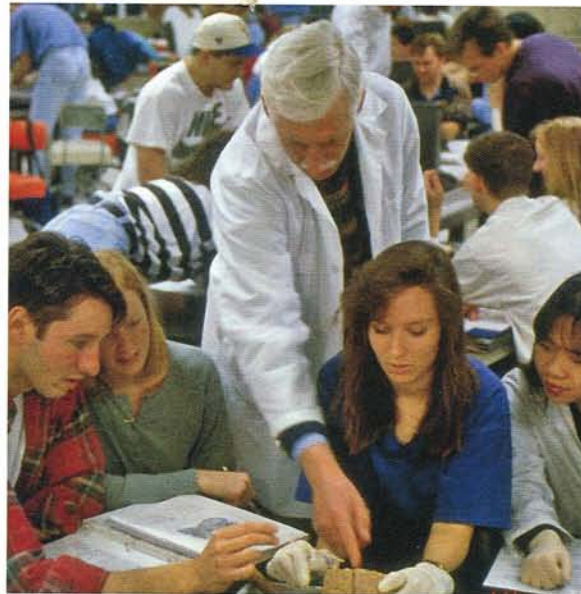
Coulter stayed in Oklahoma to attend the University of Oklahoma in Norman, where he got a bachelor's degree in psychology. He then went straight into a biological psychology PhD program at the University of Oklahoma, attending their medical center in Oklahoma City.

For the last 24 years, Coulter has worked at the University of Iowa in a variety of different positions, from research and public health to advising and administration. He was head of the anatomy department and later directed the graduate neuroscience program. He's pushed for increasing diversity at University of Iowa as well, and is an active American Indian Science & Engineering Society (AISES) member.

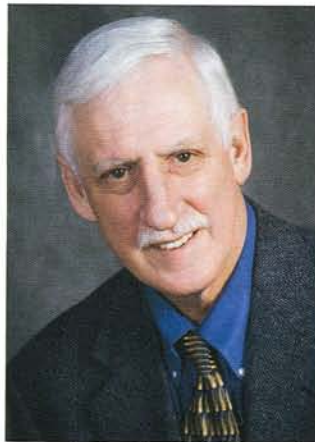
Most recently, Coulter joined the College of Public Health at the university and spends most of his time developing educational and research training programs in tribal health. He actively works in partnership with regional tribal health boards, reservation communities and tribal colleges.

His Introduction to Neuroscience

I actually became interested in neuroscience during my senior year of college when I was offered a job being part of a sleep deprivation study at the University of Oklahoma Medical Center. They were also studying the effect of



Dr. Coulter assists medical and graduate students in the medical neuroscience course lab at the Carver College of Medicine at the University of Iowa.



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psychotropic drugs on human sleep.

Foundation of a Life-Long Career

The laboratory leader, Dr. Harold Williams, ended up hiring me to work in the lab because I took an interest in what the researchers were doing. I continued to work there through my senior year in college. While I was working as a technician, the department of psychia-

try had started a PhD program in biological psychology there at the medical center and they were looking for people, so I applied and was accepted.

Secret to Success

You should do the thing that makes you want to jump out of bed in the morning. Do the thing that really interests you, not what your parents told you, and not what everybody else thinks is the thing. If you do what makes you excited and really motivated, then you will do well.

The Brain

The brain is by far, at least to me, the most interesting organ in the body. Regardless of which direction you care to take, I think there is a lot of potential there.

Indian Health and the Brain

A lot of things that negatively affect Indian health are related to the nervous system. Depression, substance abuse, alcohol—you always hear about the liver—but when you are talking about addiction to alcohol or anything else, you are talking about the brain.

On Using Your Brain

The economics and other social determinates of health are bad in a lot of reservation communities. We need more Indian people working on American Indian health issues. You have to make the most you can with your own brain.

Where Neuroscience Can Lead

I've really come full circle because now I am in public health. At the time I closed down my lab, I was involved in studies of nerve development and my work was becoming more and more molecular. Being able to tie lab work to improving someone's health is really remote. But what I do now in public health, I can see direct positive effects on people's health.

Why We Need to Get Youth into Research Programs

It really wasn't until I was in a laboratory that I became interested in science. I am a good example of how becoming involved in science, regardless of your background, can motivate and inspire you. I was a blank slate until I had the opportunity to be in the lab and actually do science. It was doing hands-on science that hooked me and then I just took off with it.

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