June 2020

What we are doing now: Happy Pride month for our Two-Spirit and Indigiqueer relatives! In the course of June, we will be planning our annual Community Read with the Office of Health Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion and the University of Utah Health Science Library. Starting on June 15th from 2:00—3:00 PM (MST) we will be meeting via virtual video to share and reflect on COVID-19 and how it has impacted scholarly spaces. The Community Read will be a virtual space to discuss current public health climates related to COVID-19. NARI-led Community, Cultural, & Academic Mentoring Professionals, Drs. Franci Taylor and Ed Napia, will be facilitating these discussions with other native University of Utah students, staff, and faculty. In past Community Reads, we used outstanding literary works from “I'll Go and Do More,” “The Scalpel and Silver Bear,” and “Braiding Sweetgrass” to help shape our discussions as they related to indigenous health.

What are we planning: With the continuous theme of summer opportunities, We, the Research Education Office, is putting together a Graduate Mini-Symposium to provide readiness and prepare undergraduate students for graduate and professional schools on July 16, 2020. The symposium will be virtual for all students to voluntarily attend these academic/professional development sessions. Maija Holsti, MD, MPH will be joining as a presenter to talk about the importance of graduate/medical school interviews and providing skills/tools for interviews. Along with Dr. Holsti’s Interview Skills workshop, there will be sessions that include academic and professional development. Additional information regarding the Graduate Mini-Symposium will come via email.

Participant Recognition Spotlight: 2020 is a year that has been difficult for the entire world as we overcome a pandemic, earthquakes, nationwide protest, etc. but there is also light amidst the emotional roller-coaster. This month we celebrate the achievements of our former NARI participants who have successfully completed their academic degrees. 2012-13 NARI participant Steven Just, PharmD (Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate) received his Doctoral of Pharmacy degree from the University of Minnesota—College of Pharmacy. Dr. Just writes, “After four long years of studying and interning, plus four years to get my bachelor’s degree - I have earned, and today I will be awarded, my Doctor of Pharmacy degree. My academic journey has afforded me extraordinary opportunities to tour The White House, the NIH, and HHS campuses; spend a summer fellowship at the CDC, and perform pharmacological research.” Prior to pharmacy school, Dr. Just was the NARI

Steven Just, PharmD
Program Coordinator from 2015-2016, Dr. Just writes, “As a first generation AI college student, I did not even know such a world existed. I recently graduated with my Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD) degree with a research emphasis in experimental and clinical pharmacology. If it was not for NARI, I truly doubt I would have performed research while earning my PharmD. A big part of NARI for me at the time was the mentorship. I had a research mentor, and graduate student mentor, and a cultural mentor.” Dr. Just’s future goals includes working as a pharmacist for his Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate community in South Dakota Indian Health Service Hospital.

From Minnesota to Arizona, we recognize the achievements of 2017 NARI Participant, Marissa Tutt, MPH (San Carlos Apache) and 2014-15 NARI participant, Damon Nez, MPH (Diné) who both received their Masters of Public Health degrees. Marissa received her masters degree from Northern Arizona University, Health Science, Masters in Public Health—Health Promotion, Indigenous Health Track. Marissa writes, “When I applied to NARI, I had no understanding of what I was getting myself into, but I say that with every life experience I’ve had so far. The day of orientation, I realized I was sitting amongst the next generation of Native doctors and wondered if I was in the right place. What could NARI offer an upcoming public health professional? My mentor, Dr. Gibson, exposed me to innovative techniques that could help patients understand their diabetes data. He used virtual reality for patients to see their diabetes data in 3-D. Therefore, I think NARI is important because it allows upcoming medical and/or public health professionals to be a part of innovative research to one day implement in our Native communities. This program not only provided an experience to use innovative technologies, but it also provided a lifelong support system.” Marissa now works as a Program Coordinator for NAU’s Center for Health Equity Research on the Navajo Native American Research Center for Health grant.

Spotlight Mentor: In 2018, American Indians/Alaska Natives were 50 percent more likely to be diagnosed with coronary heart disease than their white counterparts.1 At the Nora Eccles Harrison Cardiovascular Research Training Institute, Dr. Sarah Franklin aims to understand the mechanistic basis for how remodeling of chromatin induces the re-expression of fetal genes in the heart during the development of hypertrophy and failure. Dr. Franklin is the Assistant Director of Regional Affairs at the Univ. of Utah—Rural & Underserved Utah Training Experience (RUUTE) which aims to improve medical education and training, health-care access and long-term socio-economic benefit for rural and underserved communities of Utah. Dr. Franklin served as a NARI Research Mentor to 2018 NARI participant, Ryan Bia (Diné) who is now a Research Associate in the Franklin Laboratory. Ryan writes, “Reflecting on my journey, it is amazing to see my growth as a researcher. Dr. Franklin has been a phenomenal mentor and my research skills are on another spectrum from when I first started. My achievements are running my first western blot, operating an Orbitrap Mass Spectrometer, and submitting a publication to an academic journal. Currently, I am applying to medical school to attain my dream of becoming a Navajo Physician.”

Community Events:
Office of Health Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Community Read Series—June 16 at 2:00PM
Office of Health Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion: Patient Voices—LGBTQIA+
Office of Undergraduate Research Education Series—June to July

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