In the chilling city of Boston, Massachusetts, the students of NACP participated in the Harvard Biomedical Science Careers Student Conference. The two-day conference was a unique experience. They were exposed to Ivy League representatives from Harvard, Dartmouth, Stanford, Yale, and other private institutions that were interested in the students’ endeavors.

Upon arrival, the students checked into their hotel and attended a network dinner with other aspiring students and faculty mentors. Dinner was accompanied with a keynote address by Dr. Freda C. Lewis-Hall, Executive Vice President and Chief Medical Officer of Pfizer Inc., which is one of the world’s largest pharmaceutical companies. Her encouraging speech lingered throughout the conference. The workshops continued throughout the conference, but the most engaging were the panel groups and student/advisors luncheon.

The panels were separated based on topics, which included *Getting into Medical School and Succeeding*, *Funding and Research Opportunities*, *Transitioning from the University to the Workplace*, and other academic topics. The panel varied and consisted of recruiters, professors, and directors that answered the students’ questions based on their interest. The panel was so successful that each session lasted for about an hour and a half. There was another networking opportunity
during the break. The students were able to converse with the panelists and exchange business cards.

On the final day of the conference, the students participated in a banquet that celebrated the success of the conference and those involved. This included Dr. Michelle A. Williams, the Dean of Faculty at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. It was a celebratory event that highlighted the student/advisors luncheon. The luncheon was a huge success because it was an informal event that paired the students to mentors from Harvard University. The exchange was intimate and its impact was long-lasting especially with contact exchanges.

Overall, the students thoroughly enjoyed their participation in the conference and visiting the City of Boston. Some of the NACP students concluded their trip with a visit to the acclaimed Harvard University campus.
This year’s NACP Program Steering Committee (PSC) meeting was held in Flagstaff, AZ at the DoubleTree Hotel. The yearly event included representatives under the NACP umbrella and attendees from the National Cancer Institute, Dr. Nicholas J. Kennedy and Dr. LeeAnn Bailey. PSC members Dr. Norman Drinkwater, Dr. Thomas Becker, Dr. Shiraz Mishra, Dr. Raymond Bergan, and Dr. Raymond Reid were in attendance.

The meeting began Monday morning with a closed session among the PSC and NCI members and transitioned to breakfast and a welcoming address by Principal Investigators, Dr. Jani Ingram (NAU) and Dr. Margaret Briehl (UA). Their warm invitation filled the room with anticipation for the many presentations led by NACP affiliated members. The presentations lasted throughout the first day of meeting and provided insight to the NCI and PSC members who are responsible for ensuring that NACP is delivering and accomplishing their project outcomes.

Each attendee was given a booklet that highlighted the students’ involvement with NACP and how NACP nurtured their success. The booklets were an excellent introduction to the students who were invited to have dinner with Dr. Michelle Zacks on Monday night. The following day the PSC and NCI members then had the opportunity to meet with the student fellows in a private setting where the students vocalized their opinions about NACP and provided positive feedback about their involvement. Johnathan Credo,
an MD-PhD student at UA College of Medicine and PSC student fellow, claimed that NACP was a valuable advocate to his academic journey and his mentor, Dr. Jani Ingram, continued to support his endeavors after departing NAU. The NCI and PSC members were thoroughly pleased with the students’ responses and extended their appreciate for their attendance and offered their support.

In conclusion, the PSC meeting was a success. NACP showcased their progress and strive to have an effective communication among the partnership.

The 33rd Annual Dakota Conference on Rural and Public Health

June 13-15, 2018

The UBRP students and Program Coordinator attended the 33rd Annual Dakota Conference on Rural and Public Health in Grand Forks, North Dakota this June 2018.

The goals of the conference were to provide continuing education to health and human service administrators, managers, researchers, and clinical providers who focus on the areas of healthcare administration, health promotion and prevention, environmental and occupational
health, and health disparities in diverse populations. The Dakota conference creates an environment of learning and provides participants with the opportunity to informally network and fosters a collaboration environment between different organizations and communities.

The students learned about North Dakota health statistics and major health issues including opioid abuse, which is prevalent among the state. Their time at the conference was eye-opening and they provided positive feedback:

"During the North Dakota Conference I enjoyed the variety of presentations that I was able to attend. I also enjoyed the hospitality of the presenters and openness to network."

- Brenn Belone

"The trip to ND was really fun! It was great to get out of the AZ weather. I learned a lot from the conference. It opened my eyes to different public health presenters."

- Shanoa Nez

"I enjoyed being able to choose topics to sit in and listen to. I thought it was interesting to hear the issues that affect North Dakota."

- Nancy Pham
"I liked the fact the hotel was so close to the conference center and that we had vegan options after the conference (not during). Also that there were epidemiologist there.”

- Alyssa Little

Interview with a NACP student: Featuring Meucci Illunga

Tell me a little about yourself:

My name is Meucci Illunga. I grew up in St. Michaels, Arizona. I’ve been at the U of A for almost 2 years and I’m about to begin my 3rd year as an undergraduate in both biochemistry and mathematics. I started here [U of A] when I was only 16.

How did you get interested in science?:

Part of the reason I came [to the U of A] when I was so young regards the reservation, because it limits opportunities. Despite this, science was always there in the sense that it’s something you can do. When I came to the U of A, I honestly wasn’t too sure what I was going to do. So, I chose biochemistry. Biochemistry made perfect sense because it combined the pre-med requirements alongside my passion for chemistry. I love the chemistry courses I’m doing now and the research I’m able to do.
What experience have you had in research?:

My experience with research started my freshman year. One of the courses I was enrolled in was in the Honors College and it required students to email professors about research opportunities. Throughout the course, I eventually got a response. It was great exposure to the research field and it fueled my curiosity. I have spoken to some undergraduates who have done some research with graduate students and their general mentality was, “You got to start somewhere.” I agreed and continued working in the laboratory, until I was introduced to the Partnership for Native American Cancer Prevention (NACP) program.

The benefits of NACP sounded fantastic. I applied in the summer. I was excited when I met Margaret, Tiffani, and Jennifer. I thought the opportunity was just for the summer because I had no idea it was for the full year. So, I was really confused in August *laughs*. My new lab is a better fit with what my interest were.

What are your career goals?:

When I first started, I was pre-med oriented and, before that, I was engineering oriented. I started questioning whether I wanted to do medicine. I continued with my education over the last year and a half, and realized a work-life balance is extremely important to me. The requirements to be a doctor nowadays, especially with a residency, they have insane hours. Just being a doctor in general is 50 to 65 hours per week and that isn’t work-life balance. Work-life balance is important to me because I want to have a family and pursue hobbies. Medicine is demanding. Although, there is a very clear path into becoming a doctor because it provides structure.

With the help of NACP and exposure to research, I started to shift because I considered research as something I wanted to do. Since working in the lab down at the University of Arizona Cancer Center (UACC), made me consider pursuing a MD-PhD. I don’t think I would be able to feel fulfilled in my career goals; I wouldn’t be able to feel like I have accomplished something, unless I had done something for my people. I didn’t want to just do good for myself; I wanted to do good for my people.

That was really what became my “why” of wanting to pursue medicine because it is a very easy and direct way to help your people. But, again, I could not see myself being a doctor full-time
and research started becoming a more and more attractive option. I would be fully satisfied pursuing an MD-PhD.

**What was your experience with NACP?:**

Absolutely amazing! They matched me with a research team that fit my interest. Although I did enjoy my previous lab, it wasn’t specific to biochemistry.

With NACP, they are very welcoming. I didn’t know how important it was to have other people, who were also doing research or who were doing the same thing as you. It is nice to have that connection with other people. It doesn’t feel like they’re putting you on your own, which is one of the best things I can say about NACP.

The support that Margaret and Tiffani gave was always really good. They were always saying “Oh what are you doing? What are you up to?” I only have positive memories when I am with NACP. The support structure that they give is absolutely fantastic and the fact that we get to do it as a nice little cohort of Native Americans is a very rewarding experience.

**Tell me about the NIH (National Institute of Health) MARC (Maximizing Access to Research Careers) Program:**

The MARC program has a very specific goal directed for minorities who choose to pursue a PhD. It’s this idea that we can lift up minorities into the realm of research because they are the ones in need of this type of support. It’s NIH funded, they provide support, a stipend, and pair us with a mentor.

They do a lot more in terms of direct support. The first summer, you do research in a lab, you do a poster presentation with UBRP as well. They actually send us to national conferences throughout the year. In addition, we take a course on writing and minority health disparities colloquium. In the second year, during the summer, they require you to travel. They have one specific requirement and that’s that you have to pursue an REU. With an REU, another requirement is that it can’t be in-state. You are required to apply to at least 7 other locations. I know one [student] is going to Switzerland, one is going to Berkley, one of them is going to the University of Washington, Albert Einstein College of Medicine; all over the place. So, my program really wants you to spread your wings.

**What advice would you give to Native American undergraduates (Incoming Freshmen) who are just starting at a university and interested in research?**

My dad always told us to apply ourselves. I took that to heart. I think that’s what really motivates me because I know if I put in enough application, I can chase anything I want.

Therefore, if you want to pursue research find a program like NACP or something oriented towards Native Americans because they can address your needs as a Native American. I
also recommend MARC because I think it is more available at more campuses and its NIH-funded. They can more accurately address the needs and concerns that you will have as someone who is trying to pursue a research career. That is the first big advice that I would give.

The other big thing is ground yourself. This is just something I’m realizing now. It is extremely important to have a good support structure and I don’t think I would be here if I didn’t have that. I really recommend exploring at least a few labs, maybe 2 or 3. You may even want to explore more one lab if you really want to find somethings that’s right for you. If you’re going it on your own, really try to explore your laboratory options. It’s super important to find a lab where you’re comfortable in. Explore your options and really think about you’re long-term career goals.

Having friends is also super important. It was really hard for me to make friends because I didn’t know who would be able to understand me and understand my culture. That’s why I started turning to NASA a lot more. The Native American Student Affairs here on campus is very supportive. My successes here were driven by the fact that I had a larger support structure from friends.

The third piece of advice is: don’t give up. There have been many times that I even wanted to give up because things get hard. In short, apply yourself, try to have a great support structure and if you don’t have it try to create it, and just don’t give up.
Kaitlyn Haskie is a Diné woman from the Navajo tribe. Kaitlyn grew up in Lukachukai, AZ where she was immersed in her culture. In the Navajo tribe, it is not uncommon for those pursuing higher education to hear the affirmation, “come back and serve your people.” Those words resonated with Kaitlyn, creating a sense of duty to her people and her culture. Presently the medical community lacks Native American professionals. There is a great need for Native intermediaries to help bridge the gap between western and Indigenous medicine. Kaitlyn’s goal is to become one of those mediators, as a Doctor of Medicine. She has been actively pursuing this goal through her undergraduate education in Applied Indigenous Studies and Microbiology at Northern Arizona University, where she graduated in May 2018. Kaitlyn will continue her studies at Duke University in the School of Medicine’s Master of Biomedical Sciences Program.

Caleigh Curley is a member of the Navajo and Hopi tribes and her family is from Ganado, AZ. Caleigh is a fourth year student at Northern Arizona University (NAU) who graduated in May 2018 with her Bachelor of Science degree in Biomedical Science with a minor in Chemistry. After graduation, Caleigh moved to Phoenix, AZ to participate in the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Summer Internship Program. During this internship she plans to work on medical school applications and volunteer at a pediatric clinic.
Darrien Fuller is Prairie Band Potawatomi and Navajo. Darrien is from Shonto, AZ, and graduated from Northern Arizona University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Public Health with minors in Biology and Indigenous Health Studies. Darrien is in Tucson attending the Post-Baccalaureate Research and Education Program at the University of Arizona (UA PREP). As a UA PREP scholar she will gain the experience necessary to apply to PhD programs. Her goal is to pursue a degree in Epidemiology and use her knowledge for the benefit of tribal nations.

Alison Watson is a member of the Navajo Nation from Chinle, AZ. She obtained her Bachelors of Science degree in Biology with minors in Chemistry and Anthropology from Northern Arizona University (NAU) in Spring 2018. Alison is attending the Graduate Summer Transitional Enrichment Program (GSTEP), which is affiliated with the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Consortium (UROC) at the University of Arizona (UA) in Tucson. GSTEP is a prestigious opportunity to conduct research with a UA mentor and prepare for graduate studies at UA. She will apply to various Public Health programs for epidemiology and infectious diseases at different institutions. Her overall goal is to receive a MPH degree and PhD degree in microbiology.
Calsey Richardson graduated Fall 2017 from Northern Arizona University (NAU) with a Bachelor of Science degree in Biomedical Science and Chemistry. She joined Dr. Catherine Propper’s endocrinology research team in September 2015 and worked in the laboratory for over two years. Calsey's current research project is micro-injecting MCF-7 breast cancer cells into zebrafish larvae and then using different imaging software to analyze data. She was accepted into the Post-Baccalaureate Research and Education Program (PREP) at the University of Arizona (UA) in Tucson. This program will help her acquire a new set of skills within research and allow new opportunities to arise for her future. As a passionate researcher, her main goal is to pursue a PhD degree in Genomics at University of Washington (UW) for herself and her son. NACP is one of her main supporters and Calsey said, "My experience with NACP has been very positive and motivating.”

Deionna Vigil is Tewa from Nambe Pueblo, NM. She graduated Spring 2018 from Fort Lewis College (FLC) with a Bachelor of Science degree in Cellular and Molecular Biology. She spent a summer at NAU conducting research in Dr. Monroy’s lab. Deionna is currently interning at the National Institute for Neurological Disorders and Stroke. She plans to attend professional school once completing her internship. Deionna's ultimate goal is to provide care for indigenous women.
Kamia Yazzie was born and raised in Tuba City, AZ and a descendant from the Bighorse family. She graduated Spring 2018 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Public Health. Kamia plans to apply for a graduate program to obtain a Master's degree. Her long-term goal is to be within the Maternal and Child Health field.

Aaron Thomas graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Biochemistry and Molecular & Cellular Biology. Aaron has had multiple mentors during his time at the University of Arizona, namely Josie Gin-Morgan, a pre-health advisor at the U of A. Aaron was a member of the NACP program in 2012 and gained his research experience at the Montfort laboratory. He will be taking the MCAT at the end of May and plans to apply to medical school this June. His immediate future plans are to conduct clinical research this summer at the Minneapolis Heart Institute Foundation and obtain a research position. Some of Aaron’s long-term goals are to become a physician, return to the Navajo Nation, and work with communities to improve the health of the Diné People. He also wishes to serve as a role model for future generations of Diné students pursuing higher education.
Monique Scott is a member of the Navajo Tribe. She grew up in St. Michaels, AZ and is a first-generation college student. Monique graduated Spring 2018 from Northern Arizona University (NAU) with a Bachelor of Science degree in Public Health. She is working with the Hospital Elder Life Program at the University of Utah Hospital in an effort to help prevent dementia in the elderly. She is excited to work with this program and use all the knowledge and skills acquired during her time at NAU and NACP to improve the health of the community. After gaining more work experience in the Public Health field, she plans to obtain a Master's of Public Health degree to help underserved and underrepresented populations.

Melanie Begaye graduated from the University of Arizona College of Nursing – Master’s Entry to the Profession of Nursing (MEPN) program in August. Melanie’s mentor is Dr. Mary Koithan from the College of Nursing. Melanie has been working with Dr. Koithan for the past three years. Their focus was on community outreach and health disparities on the Tohono O’odham Nation. After Melanie becomes a Registered Nurse, she plans on working at an area hospital to gain nursing experience. She will continue to work with the UA College of Nursing and act as a student mentor for the Arizona Nursing Inclusive Excellence (ANIE) program. Eventually, she wants to return home to the Navajo Nation and work as a nurse in one of the many hospitals. Melanie’s goal is to promote holistic well-being and traditional healing.
Carmella Kahn earned her Doctorate of Public Health (DrPH) with a concentration in Maternal and Child Health. Her NACP mentor was Dr. Margaret Briehl and Dr. Louise Canfield. This August, she will be teaching at Diné College. Carmella will be an instructor for their Bachelors of Science in Public Health.

Felina Cordova-Marks earned her Doctorate of Public Health (DrPH) degree from the University of Arizona. Her dissertation is titled “The Hopi Caregiver experience” looking at family caregivers providing care to a family member with cancer, chronic disease, disability or elderly. Her NACP mentor was Dr. Louise Canfield. Felina will be continuing with medical school and would like to combine her degrees in medicine and public health to work at the NIH, CDC, or IHS.
Carl Haskie is a recent graduate of Northern Arizona University (NAU) with a Bachelor of Science degree in Environmental Engineering. Carl is from Lukachukai, AZ. He was a member of the Bridges to Baccalaureate program at NAU and worked in Dr. Ingram's lab from 2014 to 2015. From that experience he was able to strengthen his lab skills. Carl conducted research on Uranium concentrations in sheep bone, meats and tissues all under the supervision of Dr. Ingram and Andee Lister. He is currently, interning with the company Freeport-McMoRan where he is providing assistance in the ongoing remediation efforts at historic uranium mining sites on the Navajo Nation as well as technical support and guidance for environmental projects and programs assigned site for the Environmental Department. Through the help and guidance of NACP and the Bridges program at NAU, Carl reached his academic goals.

Lyle Becenti graduated from Northern Arizona University in Fall 2017 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Biomedical Science with a minor in Chemistry. He is currently the Training Core Program Assistant for the Partnership for Native American Cancer Prevention (NACP). He was accepted into the NAU Master of Public Health (MPH) program with an Indigenous Health track. After completing the MPH program, he plans to apply to the University of Arizona College of Medicine and achieve his goal of becoming an endocrinologist. It gives him the potential to advocate for the Navajo community and express his passion to alleviate health disparities, such as Type II diabetes.
Announcements and Upcoming Events

STUDENTS
• NNHTR conference - August 8-19, 2018
• NAU first day of school - August 27, 2018
• UA first day of school - August 20, 2018
• AISES conference - October 4-6, 2018
• SACNAS conference - October 11-13, 2018
• ABRCMS - November 14-17, 2018

FACULTY AND STAFF
• End of grant year - August 31, 2018

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