

American Indian Student Initiatives

By: Micaryn Begay



AISI installed solar panels throughout the Navajo Nation over the 2020 spring break

American Indian Student Initiatives (AISI) is a student run organization at the University of Arizona designed to help reduce environmental injustices in Native American communities. AISI focuses on building alliances with Indigenous communities, organizing direct actions, and raising public awareness. The organization initially started in 2019 during the Southwest Tribal Climate Change Summit in Idyllwild, California. During the summit, college students were asked to identify climate strategies and solutions in advancing tribal resilience in the Southwest with environmental researchers. Students from UArizona decided to form an organization to create initiatives and raise awareness amongst Native communities. They were inspired to build resilience within their own Native communities with the foundational support of Climate

Science Alliance and their advisor Dr. Len Necifer. The students of this program are affiliated with Native American tribes who seek to initiate effort to create future agents in addressing their tribes' environmental issues.

The first project of AISI was a solar grid electric installation on the Navajo Nation in partnership with the GRID Tribal Alternatives. Seven undergraduate students at UArizona involved with AISI volunteered during Spring Break 2020 to install a solar panel for a family located in Encino, New Mexico. The student volunteers gained knowledge and understanding of renewable energy efficiency and Navajo energy policies as they assisted with the project. AISI seeks to organize future projects working with Native communities in the surrounding Tucson area. Lastly, AISI offers their members the opportunity to improve their environmental based knowledge and networking skills through volunteer opportunities, workshops, and conference travel support. AISI hopes to continue the solar projects for upcoming Spring Break sessions to raise awareness about the environmental conditions and solar effects within the Navajo community.

Dynnika Tso (Diné) grew up in Cameron, Arizona on the Navajo Nation in a traditional hogan without access to electricity or running water. Ms. Tso is a first-generation college student entering her second-year at UArizona seeking to obtain a Bachelor of Science in Public Health with an emphasis on environmental health. She aspires to pursue a medical career within underserved Native American communities with a background in environmental health science research. Her decision to pursue this particular journey was influenced by her cultural upbringing and the health disparities within her community. Ms. Tso is the founder and president of the AISI organization. She believes that environmental health research is needed for Native communities due to the fact that many families do not have access to electricity or running water.



AISI President Dynnika Tso



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