

American Indian Science and Engineering Society

by Ace Charette

The American Indian Science & Engineering Society

AISES is a national organization whose mission is “...substantially increasing the representation of American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, First Nations and other Indigenous peoples of North America in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) studies and careers.” As an organization composed of various tribal representations, college, and pre-college chapters and a multitude of professionals working in STEM industries across the U.S., this organization is poised to connect any Native student seeking to support tribal nations and individuals in a variety of ways. Whether interested in forestry management, agriculture and food production, computer science, accounting or robotics, AISES provides a range of professional connections and networking opportunities to engage Native American students and professionals. Whether professional members serve as advocates for Native Americans in urban centers or directly developed Native nations, the importance of their work goes without saying given that the numbers of American Indians in STEM are so small that their presence generally is not represented in survey data compared to other ethnicities.

The UA Chapter

This student organization facilitates STEM-related experiences at the UA to foster a sense of community and provide experiences that develop students’ professional skills. Perhaps the largest events of the year are the AISES national and regional conferences. The UA Chapter spends the year raising funding to pay for travel, hotel,

and conference expenses so that as many students as possible can gain the opportunity to connect with other like-minded students across the country and learn from STEM leaders who are making changes in Native nations by applying their expertise in meaningful ways.

Given that this club is run and operated by current UA students, leadership opportunities exist for students looking to be involved. By collaborating with other leaders, seeking input from the general chapter and devising ways to connect one another to the many resources that the UA has to offer, these leadership skills can be applied once students enter the STEM workforce.

The Southern Arizona Professional Chapter

Professionals working in prestigious industries such as Raytheon and IBM serve as mentors and professional connections to the AISES UA Chapter by reflecting on their experiences as students and

advising about how students can prepare for similar professions as their own.

Putting It All Together

Given the many layers of support that exist through AISES, it is unsurprising to see the members who are the most involved with this organization find success at many levels. In the time that I have served as a co-advisor, I have seen a UA freshman student presenting research at the AISES National Conference; a Raytheon professional directly advising the UA chapter on leadership and fundraising strategies; and graduate students securing opportunities that allowed them to apply their skills directly to supporting their tribes. Through all of this, I have also seen friendships flourish that I hope will last a lifetime as students continue to grow academically and professionally in their chosen fields. Seeing so many wonderful students succeed in these ways brings me great satisfaction for the work that they do.

From a Student’s Perspective

My experience with AISES has been a huge part of my college experience. The people I have met and the experience itself was the most rewarding. Presenting at the National AISES Conference in Phoenix, Arizona was one of the most inspiring moments in my life. I was able to present on my experience, meet some of the audience who were inspired by my story, and discuss how I helped other students with their adversities and how to succeed in college. I knew that if I could get through that and succeed at my public speaking that I was prepared for anything. My AISES family really helped me along my college journey and really helped shaped who I am today. I am so grateful to have the AISES Chapter in my life. I had such a great time with the UA AISES members and meeting other new and inspiring people. I continue my journey with the WINS Internship Program in Washington D.C and will be working with the National Science Foundation under the Doctorate’s of Geosciences. I have to thank everyone who helped me with the process and now I am aspiring to continue on this journey.

- Cydney Walters