

Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals

By: Natalia Shaw



Natalia Shaw

Boozhoo, Natalia Shaw nidizhinikaaz. Hello, my name is Natalia and I am an Anishinaabe and Chicana graduate student in the Master of Science program in Environmental Science & Policy at Northern Arizona University. I graduated from the University of Redlands in Southern California with a bachelor's in Environmental Science. I currently study water availability in the Canyon de Chelly watershed and how water availability influences cultural vulnerability, especially for traditional agriculture. I am also a current lead instructor for the Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals (ITEP) and an alumnus of the ITEP internship program.

With growing concern for the health of our landscapes and integrity of our cultural resources, we look to our native youth as the present and future protectors of the vast ecosystems that span Indian Country. The passing down of knowledge to numerous generations and engaging Native youth of varying ages within the environmental sciences can ensure that our future land managers reflect the same cultural values that are keystone to our tribal communities.

Based out of Northern Arizona University, ITEP has served as a catalyst amongst tribal governments, federal agencies, and universities to support the protection of natural resources. In addition to this goal, ITEP has also formed an Environmental Education Outreach Program (EEOP) that aims to interest Native youth in environmental careers and help schools improve literacy in STEM through culturally relevant education. EEOP offers several opportunities for Native youth to explore environmental careers, one specific highlight being their summer internship program.

As an undergraduate student I had the opportunity to apply for an 8 week summer internship through ITEP-EEOP. That summer, my host site was the Santa Ynez Chumash Environmental Office in Santa Ynez, California. During my internship I was introduced to writing quality assurance documents for the Environmental Protection Agency, zero waste programs, water quality monitoring, and working with community members on environmental education. This internship provided me the opportunity to work alongside staff with varying job roles, which opened my eyes to the variety of job opportunities within tribal environmental offices in addition to the need for qualified native professionals to fill these roles. The following summers I was excited to re-apply for the internship and had the opportunity to work for the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe's Natural Resources Department in Kingston, Washington and for the Central Arizona Project in Phoenix, Arizona. Throughout my internship experiences, I focused on a variety of topics, from air quality education to tribal water rights. This diversity of topics allowed me to develop a number of skills that could be transferred to any career, but especially within the sciences, skills that I continue to practice as a graduate student. Beyond the skills I received, I left my internships understanding the challenges that tribal nations must overcome in practicing self-determination over the management of natural/cultural resources, in addition to meeting some of the people that are currently working towards solutions through community engagement, application of culturally relevant knowledge, and enforcement of community values.



Natalia working with a group of students



For more information visit:
<http://www7.nau.edu/itep/main/Home/>

Contact:
Mansel Nelson, ITEP EEOP Project Director
Mansel.Nelson@nau.edu