

# Southwest Environmental Health Sciences Center: Supporting Indigenous Scholars

**Danny Sestiaga** (Fort Yuma Quechan) was born and raised in Fort Yuma, Arizona. Danny is a winter 2018 graduate of the Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health with a Master of Public Health in Health Services Administration. He interned with the Southwest Environmental Health Sciences Center (SWEHSC) through the summer and fall of 2018 as a part of his degree requirement. While with SWEHSC, Danny took the lead on an upcoming asthma research project with a tribe in the Southwest. He also assisted in developing a Haury Challenge Grant project to help transition community college students in environmental science related degrees to The University of Arizona. Now that he has graduated, Danny's goal is to be a part of and oversee the transition of management of his tribe's health services from the IHS to the tribe itself. He wants play a role in helping his tribe offer culturally competent and relevant health care to citizens. Danny believes that his multicultural background has contributed immensely to his success. He believes that wanting what is best for your people, knowing where you come from, and never losing sight of that can play a considerable role in your academics.



Danny Sestiaga

Danny's advice to students:

*"Don't forget where you come from. You're going to have problems, but by being here and trying your hardest, you're going to be successful. In a sense, you being here is your ancestors' wildest dream. We, as Indigenous folks, are taught to be resilient; we are resilient people. We are unique in the way we believe and our characteristics. I think that in the grand scheme, at the university, our experiences and the things we have gone through as a people are validated, and I think that it is something we should not lose sight of. You deserve to have a seat at the table. Also don't be afraid to ask for help."*

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**Kyle Harvey** (Diné) was born and raised in Rabbitbrush, New Mexico. Kyle works as a Program Coordinator for SWEHSC while also pursuing a Master in Higher Education. Kyle applied to work with SWEHSC because of the Center's focus on environmental justice within tribal communities. In his position, Kyle will be working with a tribe in the Southwest to develop an asthma research project and he will also be working with the San Carlos Apache Tribe to assist in coordinating a research project to address their ongoing issue of trash burning, and how it has been affecting the health of their community. Another project that Kyle will be assisting with is the development of the newest volume of the *Indigenous Stewards Magazine*. Kyle's long-term goal, once he finishes his education, is to become involved in educational policy to understand how education systems within tribal communities can better support students, Indigenous epistemologies, and the background the students come from. Kyle also attributes his culture with motivating him to pursue higher education. He says that one of the biggest things is remembering where he came from and always remembering that he is Diné first and that he needs to give back to his community in some way.

Kyle's advice to students:

*"Follow your passions; what makes you emotional. Also be a bit critical of the people you surround yourself with because there is always going to be people that will want to take advantage of your perspective and once they get what they want then they won't want anything else with you. Always ask questions; be a learner. If and when you get to the point of being an expert, stay humble."*



Kyle Harvey  
Photo by: Amanda Cheromiah



**Cheyenne Grabiec** (Diné) was born and raised in Massachusetts but calls Crystal, New Mexico his home. He interned for SWEHSC for two years through the Undergraduate Biology Research Program’s Environmental Health Science Transformative Research Undergraduate Experience. Since graduating in winter 2018 with a Bachelor of Science in Psychology, he is now working full-time as a SWEHSC Outreach Coordinator. Cheyenne’s main role at SWEHSC is to take the lead in developing and publishing the newest edition of the *Indigenous Stewards* magazine. He will also assist in moving forward the various tribal projects that SWEHSC is currently engaged in. Another task that Cheyenne is taking on is helping to develop an Indigenous Inquiry Framework to be shared with researchers across campus to get them engaged in collaborative projects with tribal communities. Cheyenne’s long-term goal is to pursue a Master of Legal Studies and find a career in either tribal government or education.



Cheyenne Grabiec  
Photo by: Amanda Cheremiah

Cheyenne’s advice to students:

*“Step outside your comfort zone. There are abundant opportunities that will help you discover your passions, but you have to be willing to put yourself out there. Just start somewhere and have confidence in yourself and your abilities to pursue your goals. Find a mentor. Mentors have the ability to shape you and work with you step by step to lead you in the right professional direction. They will give you the opportunity to work on your own and learn from your successes and your mistakes. Allow yourself to be challenged and you will come out much stronger, smarter, and wiser because of it. Finally, take time to reflect on the people and places that have helped you get to where you are. Giving back to the community, educators, or mentors that helped you along the way will help you realize just how far you’ve come.”*



**Tierra Edison** (Diné) was born and raised in Window Rock, Arizona. She is an intern at SWEHSC through the Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health. She is a first-generation college student pursuing a Bachelor of Public Health with a focus in Health Promotion. She hopes that by receiving her degree she can pave the road for her younger siblings and show them what hard work and dedication can get them. In her work at SWEHSC, Tierra will be assisting in teaching one of the tribes in the Southwest on how to utilize the International Study of Asthma and Allergies in Children (ISAAC) tool, a tool used in childhood asthma research. As an intern Tierra will also be assisting the SWEHSC team in various capacities to help move the other tribal projects in process forward. Upon finishing her undergraduate degree, Tierra’s goal is to obtain a Master of Public Health so that she can be a voice for Indigenous communities and make an impact. Growing up, Tierra saw the hardships and adversity that her community faced and she hopes that with her education, she can help her community overcome those hardships and adversity.

Tierra’s advice to students:

*“There will be multiple challenges along the way and times when you want to give up, but remember that college is temporary. The transition from high school to college is not an easy route, but with all that being said, the opportunities that come from having a college education are unparalleled. You will walk away with numerous social, professional, and educational skills that will catapult you into endless opportunities that can help the community. The ability to have options will open doors for you that you would never have suspected. In order to obtain these opportunities, you just have to be willing and have the courage to step through those doors.”*



Tierra Edison