



Hello (Yá'át'ééh)! My name is Savannah White, I am Diné (Navajo), and I am in my third year here at Arizona State University (ASU). I'm majoring in Nutrition with a concentration in Dietetics and a minor in Mathematics. My mentor at ACE is Valerie Harris, whose research focuses on the incidence of cancer among wild animals, the role that the environment plays in this, and how differing cancer rates in animals may give insight into the development of cancer in humans.

It's undoubtedly true that my Diné community is deprived of opportunities in the science field. Fortunately, I was selected to intern for ACE last semester continuing into this semester. When I found out about this opportunity, it was so exciting for me. It's great that an institution as big as ASU, the largest public university in the nation, was reaching out to me for this opportunity. Growing up in the Phoenix metropolitan area, I didn't meet other natives besides my family. In school, I was surrounded by people of all races and ethnicities except my own. It wasn't until late high school and then coming to ASU that I was able to connect with my Diné community. Before then I was known as that "Navajo girl" and felt alone and even ashamed of my cultural background. Academically, I felt that I had to push myself harder than everyone else to just be smart enough and noticed. I see that the outreach at ACE recognizes the disproportionality of opportunities for minoritized students, and I'm thankful that they decided to reach out to indigenous students at the university for their projects.

Cancer is also an area that hits home for me personally. Since beginning school at ASU, my closest family members have been diagnosed with the terrible disease. My mom was diagnosed with a rare form of cancer and passed on about a year ago. I was by her side when I could be and it took her over really fast. She went to ASU when she was my age but didn't finish because she had to take care of her family, so she always instilled in me the importance of doing my best in school. I also come from a family that has suffered from alcoholism, drugs, mental illness, physical abuse - you name it. These are very real things that many tribal communities face whether living on the Rez or not. My mother always kept education in my mind as something I could lean on to lead both my sisters and myself out of this continuous damaging cycle.

I've been working with my mentor and fellow intern (also Navajo) on things I didn't expect to tackle so soon in my college career. I've researched hundreds of animal species, learned to code as a beginner, read incredibly interesting research papers, explored what makes a high-quality science poster, and learned about the projects my mentor and others involved in cancer research have done. Recently, I was also able to join a conference call with students who are across the country, working in the same program on projects like mine.

After my internship, I know I will use my experience of these areas in my future career. My dream is to improve my community's health and wellness, on and off the reservation, through nutrition. I hope to create ways of combatting our rates of long-term diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer. I see myself becoming a dietitian, doing research specific to Indigenous populations, making efforts to reduce food deserts, and putting more grocery stores on the Rez. There are so many pathways in nutrition and I'm glad I branched out into working on cancer research. I appreciate the space and opportunity ACE has given me to advance academically as well as professionally and reach my goal of one day being in a position to help my community.