

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."

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

