

# Through Their Stories



WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY  
**Native American Health Sciences**



“We acknowledge the land we occupy today as the traditional homelands of the Spokane Tribe of Indians. We take this opportunity to thank the original caretakers of this land.”

## ▶ A Letter from the Director



Allin wata kachun qanpaq!  
Greetings, I am Naomi M. Bender, PhD, Indigenous Quechua (Peru). Since October of 2018, I have had the humble honor and distinct privilege of serving as the director of Washington State University's Native

American Health Sciences (NAHS) and, since 2021, the Center for Native American Health (CNAH). Our office for NAHS and the CNAH is located on the WSU Health Sciences campus in Spokane along the Spokane River and serves students, faculty, staff, and communities across the WSU system's five campuses, the Pacific Northwest, and nation. We currently serve 51 Native American Health Science students and just over 150 Native American pre-health students. We also support the Indigenous health education of all students in the colleges of medicine, nursing, pharmacy and pharmaceutical sciences and in allied health sciences, across the WSU system.

As we are located on the WSU Spokane campus, I take this time to offer up my hands in gratitude and thank the Spokane Tribe of Indians, who are the original caretakers of the land our campus occupies today. Without them and their continued sacrifices, we would not be able to continue to do the work of educating our future leaders and the health care workforce who we hope will improve the equitability of care for people across Washington state, the nation, and world.

I also want to take this opportunity, to humbly thank the WSU Native American Health Sciences Tribal Advisory Board, which is made up of tribal leaders and members of tribal nations from across Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana. Our board members commit their time, wisdom, and service to advising on the work we do at WSU NAHS, advancing our mission of Native American Health. We at WSU and NAHS, are grateful for all you do.

It is with great enthusiasm I share with you our fourth annual WSU NAHS newsletter. This edition is full of unique and uplifting stories, voices, and pathways representing some of the WSU NAHS students, community members, and shared programs we had the privilege to serve and work alongside in 2022. As our mission, programs, and center grew over the past two years, so did our team, and you will get to read about them here. In the late summer and fall of 2022, four new NAHS team members were hired to help continue to grow and sustain the work of expanding the number of Native Americans in the health care workforce, developing and teaching Indigenous curriculum to both Native and non-Native students and health care professionals, and moving the dial toward prioritizing Native health in community partnerships and research initiatives. We have already witnessed the vast talents and skills they all bring to the work we do at NAHS and the CNAH, and they are excited to help advance and sustain new programming to include the Indigenous Healing Perspectives Certificate, Indigenous health simulation, a new hybrid Native health summer program, and other work ahead!

The work we do together with all of you would not be possible without the continuous partnerships, donations, and commitments you provide that help advance the educational equity of our current and future health workforce and the health and wellness of Indigenous peoples in our communities. We are grateful to every one of you and your organizations, tribal nations, institutions, agencies, families, and communities, who work with us to accomplish our mission and who see that we are all in this together. And we encourage you to come spend time with us at the Center for Native American Health, have a cup of tea or coffee, and share in story.

Here's to another blessed year ahead at WSU NAHS and the CNAH! Go Cougs!

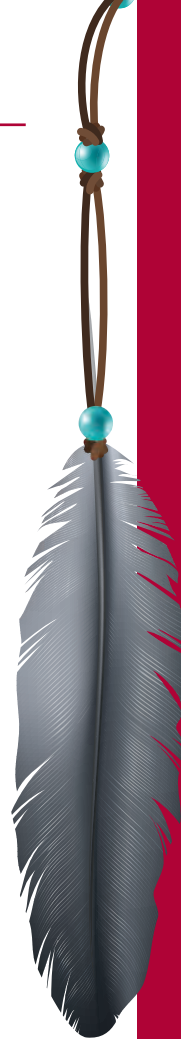
*Naomi Bender*

Dr. Naomi Bender, PhD  
Director, Native American Health Sciences

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WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY  
**SPOKANE**



## 2022-2023: 236+ Strong

Currently **54** Native students at WSU Health Sciences

Approx. **182** Native pre-health/health/sciences students at WSU system-wide

**30+** Committee Appointments

*Indigenous Certificate Cohort  
Indigenous Healers Cohort*

**11** Grants & Funding Projects

**30+** Partnerships

**3** National Pathways for Health and Education initiatives

**7** Research Projects

**13** Pathways/Programs

**30+** Health initiatives across the Pacific Northwest

**20+** Recruitment Events

**70+** Virtual Presentations across the Pacific Northwest and Nation



## Goals

- Expanding the number and type of educational program pathways
- Development of community tribal health-based initiatives
- Growth of WSU NAHS staff, outreach, partners, funding, and programs

## Needs

- Additional staffing
- Pathway program funding
- Funding to support Center for Native American Health

## Organizational Chart



**Kirk Schulz, PhD**  
President, WSU



**Daryll DeWald, PhD**  
VP, WSU Health Sciences  
Chancellor, WSU Spokane



**NAHS Tribal  
Advisory Board**



**Naomi Bender, PhD**  
Director, Native American  
Health Sciences



**Lonnie Nelson, PhD**  
Assistant Director of  
Special Projects



**Wilber James, MD**  
Assistant Director  
Mentoring/Student Success



**Jerry Crowshoe**  
Assistant Director Student  
Programs & Services



**Christina Brelia**  
Office Manager



**Open Position**  
Indigenous Simulation Lead



**Janelle Whipple**  
Programs & Student  
Services Coordinator



**Carrie Gigray**  
Indigenous Clinical  
Simulation Educator



**Irene Lee Cheng**  
Work Study, NAHS Director &  
Center Support



**Jasmine Birch**  
Indigenous Health  
Simulation Assistant



**Open Position**  
Research & Projects Assistant  
(Student Position)



**Hanna Smith**  
Work Study, Health Pathways  
& Center Support



▶ We are proud to welcome several new staff members to the Native American Health Sciences team.



## Christina Breliia

Office Manager

Christina Breliia was born in Simmern, Germany, and raised in Darmstadt, Germany. Her father retired from the Army in the '90s, and she and her family moved to Spokane, Washington, to be close to her father's family. Both Breliia and her two brothers were first-generation college students, with Breliia earning her bachelor's degree in organizational management at Whitworth.

Breliia has a decade of experience in health care, having worked on all of Valley Hospital's patient care floors, as well as in radiology and the emergency room. After graduating from Eastern Washington University with her MBA, she worked as an activity director and a program manager for The Arc of Spokane Community Centers an organization that supports adults with disabilities. Breliia joined WSU as the graduate program coordinator for the College of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences and has since transitioned into her role with Native American Health Sciences. In her free time, Breliia volunteers for various nonprofits and performs on stage. She says, "I was gifted with 15 bad voices in one and have a natural talent for karaoke."



## Jerry Crowshoe

Piikani Nation (Blackfoot Confederacy)

Assistant Director, Student Programs & Services

Jerry Crowshoe is an enrolled member of the Piikani Nation (Blackfoot Confederacy) from Brocket, Alberta, Canada, who grew up on the Spokane Indian Reservation in Wellpinit, Washington. He graduated from Eastern Washington University with a bachelor's degree in developmental psychology and from Gonzaga University with a master's degree in community counseling.

Crowshoe has worked as a mental health counselor with the Kalispel Tribe's Behavioral Health Program for many years, providing one-on-one counseling services to youth and adults. He has traveled throughout Indian country, providing training and technical assistance on various topics such as positive youth development, suicide prevention, trauma-informed care, and healthy relationships. Crowshoe has also served as a mental health professional and the program support services director for the Healing Lodge of the Seven Nations, an adolescent treatment center where he used various therapeutic techniques to help residents with their personal growth. Before joining WSU, Crowshoe served as the prevention program manager for the Spokane Tribe of Indians and coordinated prevention activities to address substance use and bullying.

In his spare time, Crowshoe remains active in the community coordinating youth powwows and the Gathering at the Falls Powwow at Riverfront Park in Spokane. He enjoys traveling to powwows and visiting his family in Canada with his wife and four children.



## Carrie Gigray

Simulation Center Education Coordinator

Carrie Gigray was born in Idaho and raised in rural towns throughout Idaho and Washington. Her path to academia was not a traditional one. After completing an associate's degree in paramedicine in 2006 at the College of Southern Idaho, she continued to further her emergency medical services career by becoming a preceptor, instructor, and simulationist while working toward becoming a critical care flight paramedic. Her work allowed her to travel around the Mountain West in Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and Utah.

In 2019, Gigray received a bachelor's degree from Idaho State University, followed by a master's degree in health care simulation and stepped into academia as a simulation education specialist for the WSU's College of Medicine. Today, Gigray serves as the Native American Health Sciences' first Indigenous clinical simulation educator. She is passionate about Interprofessional simulation-based education to improve the health of Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC), queer, and other marginalized communities.

"Regardless of our situation, I was taught to treat others humanistically, through the lens of the person who comes behind you, including mother earth," says Gigray. "This foundation has helped me recognize my unique opportunity and human responsibility to use my privileged voice to be an ally and agent of change."



## Janelle Whipple

Santee Sioux Nation/Isanti Dakota

Program & Student Services Coordinator

Han Mitakuyapi, cante' waste' nape ciyuzapi. Hello, I would like to greet you with a good handshake. Wakiyan Ska Win de miye de ga. Wakiyan Ska Win is my Dakota name. Wasicua Janelle Whipple emakiyapi My English name is Janelle Whipple de ga Isanti Makoce hematanhan. I am from Isanti Land/Santee, Nebraska.

Janelle Whipple is a proud enrolled member of the Santee Sioux Nation of Nebraska. She serves as the programs and student service coordinator for the Native American Health Sciences center. Whipple's educational background consists of an associate degree in liberal arts from the Nebraska Indian Community College; a bachelor's in general studies with an emphasis in history, Native American studies, and sociology from the University of Nebraska Omaha; and a masters in tribal governance and administration from the University of Minnesota Duluth. She is currently a second-year student in Gonzaga University's Doctor of Philosophy in Leadership Studies program.

Whipple notes that while she looks "good on paper," her academic journey was extremely difficult for various reasons. This experience has inspired her to become a mentor and advocate for Native American students and a role model for younger generations. "I want to be the person that students can learn from to help them navigate their academic journey so they have an enriched and rewarding experience" says Whipple. "I just want to help encourage those younger generations that if I can do it, they can do it."



*Pictured: Na-ha-shnee students creating bath bombs*

## ▶ Expanding Horizons

Isabella Kreissler is quick to respond when asked what part of the Na-ha-shnee experience was her favorite. The aspiring pediatric cardiothoracic surgeon notes that practicing sutures on bananas and fake skin was by far the most fun. That and the anatomy lab. After all, it really is tough to pick a favorite during the two activity-packed weeks.

As she reflected on her experience, Kressler shared that “this program has changed my perspective on and knowledge of a lot of medical professions.” She adds, “Careerwise it hasn’t totally changed what I was originally wanting to pursue, but also gave me a few more options to consider looking into.”

The Na-ha-shnee STEAM Institute is a summer program designed for students like Kreissler, 9 through 12th graders interested in the health sciences or science, technology, engineering, art, and math (STEAM) fields. This year, 15 students came to the WSU Spokane campus to engage in hands-on learning activities, tours, and, of course, a good dose of fun.

Led by WSU faculty, staff, and students, as well as tribal elders from the surrounding community, the program is a collaborative effort. Students spend time learning from each other and hearing from community, tribal, and health care leaders. “To learn from all these health care workers, students and elders who told their stories was just an honor and an amazing experience,” said student Annalayah Sanders.

This summer marked Na-ha-shnee’s 27th year on the WSU Spokane campus. From creating bath bombs and lip balms in the College of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences compounding lab to participating in a surgery simulation in the College of Medicine Virtual Clinic Center, students experience a wide range of activities that help introduce them to the health sciences field and to the possibility of seeing themselves as future health sciences professionals.

Learn more at [spokane.wsu.edu/nativehealth/nahashnee](https://spokane.wsu.edu/nativehealth/nahashnee)



“ I haven't really had a solid plan as to what I want to do after high school, so I participated in this program to get a better understanding of what my options are. I also really wanted to have this experience of being away from home for two weeks so I could see how I would do. Because of this program, I'm now looking into going into dentistry. Doing all those fun activities really showed me how fascinating dentistry is to me. Now I have some kind of direction to be heading in. ”



*Laurel Woodard*



“ My favorite lesson was when we did the CPR training and first aid training. I liked it because it taught me what to do in case of a future emergency. I was not expecting to meet so many people that I enjoyed hanging out with. I made friends that I feel like I will know for a lifetime. ”



*Lucy Ashby*



“ I applied for this program because I wanted to do a program centered around STEAM. I also came because I wanted to practice being far away from home. I didn't expect there to be so much culture involved. I feel like I got more than I came for. ”



*Caden Pourier*





## Sara Mills

Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation - San Poil and Entiat bands

Passionate about writing, Sara Mills came to college thinking she would study creative writing. However, on the day she needed to declare a major to get her schedule, she blurted out “human development” instead.

“I couldn’t tell you at the moment what I was thinking, but after that, it all fell into place,” says Mills.

A first-generation student, Mills wasn’t sure exactly where her college career would take her.

“I’m from a really small town, and there weren’t a lot of options presented to me. I just knew that I was going to go to college, and I wasn’t sure what that looked like,” says Mills.

Fast forward four years, Mills graduated from WSU Pullman with dual degrees in psychology and human development, along with a certificate in family studies.

Mills maintained a stellar academic record, graduating in 2021, while managing the all new restrictions and isolation the pandemic brought to so many students. She stayed connected by participating in WSU’s Tribal Nation Building Leadership Program, a cohort program designed to support Native students in their journey through college. Mills credits this program in helping her feel less isolated during the pandemic.

These experiences inform her current research focus on evaluating the role belongingness plays in the retention of Native American students in undergraduate programs. As she embarks on her second year in the prevention science program at WSU Vancouver, Mills is particularly curious about the experiences of Native students within the WSU system.

“I want to look at the system and help create those supports, making it more accessible and less challenging for other people,” she says.

Mills says she hopes her research can amplify voices not typically represented in research. “A lot of times, especially with Native people, we get boiled down to just a number within the system. You see a lot of negative, deficit-lens statistics,” she says.

“I didn’t want to contribute to that as a researcher. If I am going to help people, I want to be with them, on their side, not just taking from them.”

“I want to look at the system and help create those supports, making it more accessible and less challenging for other people.”

## Ashlin Parsons

Cherokee

When asked about what led her on the path to pharmacy school, Ashlin Parsons is quick to share the story of her paternal grandmother whose career as a nurse spanned 50 years.

“She was the person who motivated me to learn,” says Parsons. “Ever since I was little, I remember her saying, ‘Anything that you learn is yours, and no one can take away your knowledge or your experiences.’ That’s something I have always held with me.”

Her grandmother’s stories of saving lives in the ER and helping care for people in her community inspired Parsons. “I heard those stories, and I was very interested in being able to give back to the community in my own way in a career that would be very parallel to hers.”

But Parsons hasn’t taken the traditional path to health care. Instead, she joined the Air Force at 17 and became a Korean linguist. After six years of service, she enrolled in a community college in Oklahoma. It was there that she started to explore other options.

She had a cousin who went to pharmacy school and encouraged her to explore becoming a pharmacist. So, she began with a simple Google search for the top ten pharmacy schools in the United States. Washington State University showed up on the list.

“I chose to come to Washington because I was interested in attending WSU specifically,” says Parsons. “Washington is a place I have always really wanted to live, and it is a place where the military never really sent me.”

After visiting campus, talking with a few alumni, and getting accepted after applying for early admittance, Parsons decided to join the Cougar Community. “I am pretty grateful and glad that I made that choice,” says Parsons, “because I am absolutely loving it so far.”

One of Parsons’ favorite experiences to date has been supporting a research team that works closely with the Puyallup Tribe on research related to pain management and cannabis.

“It gives me the fulfillment of helping another tribal community which is something I am all about,” says Parsons. “When I thought about pharmacy, I didn’t really think of the research side of the house, even though that is something I am very interested in. So being given that opportunity has been, hands down, my favorite part of being at WSU.”



“It gives me the fulfillment of helping another tribal community, which is something I am all about.”



## ▶ The Enduring Legacy of Dr. Robbie Paul

When Dr. Roberta “Robbie” Paul (Nez Perce) arrived on the WSU Spokane campus in 1995, things looked much different than they do nearly 30 years later. Born and raised on the Nez Perce Reservation in Craigmont, Idaho, Paul was a recent graduate from Eastern Washington University with a master’s degree in psychology when she stepped into the role of Native American coordinator for recruitment and retention for the College of Nursing.

Without hesitation, Paul dove headfirst into building programs, supporting native students, and strengthening relationships with area tribal leaders, all with the goal of increasing the number of Native nurses and nursing students. When describing how she built and sustained programming, Paul stresses the importance of building solid partnerships with others. “It begins with relationships,” she says. “Relationship, relationship, relationship and communicate, communicate, communicate.”

One of Paul’s enduring programs that continues to this day is the Na-ha-shnee STEAM Summer Institute. Initially, the program was designed for students to learn more about nursing, but its curriculum has since expanded to incorporate other health sciences disciplines and general science, technology, engineering, art, and math (STEAM). (You can read more about Na-ha-shnee on pages 6-7). Since its establishment, over 500 Native students have come to the WSU Spokane campus for educational activities. The original program was six days long, but now students visit campus for a full two weeks.

Initially, the program was grant funded, making its fate uncertain. However, “I had very strong allies in the College of Nursing that helped a lot,” says Paul. “They really did support me, and I appreciated that.”

“  
I was a cheerleader and mentor, keeping them on track and making sure that they connected with the right folks on campus.  
”

## Growing and Evolving

In 2007, Paul was appointed director of the WSU Native American Health Sciences program. The expanded program aimed to serve not just nursing students, but also students in the pharmacy, nutrition and exercise physiology, and speech and hearing sciences programs. She continued to build strong connections with internal units and leaders across the WSU system, including the WSU tribal liaison and WSU Pullman's Native American Programs. She also worked to strengthen and expand the Native American Tribal Advisory Board, housed initially within the College of Nursing, to encompass tribal education directors, regional tribal leaders, and Native health care providers.

That same year, Paul received a Doctor of Philosophy in Leadership Studies from Gonzaga University. Her dissertation focused on historical trauma and healing, along with in-depth research of five generations of her family and their experiences in Indian boarding schools. This research underpins a book that Paul has since written, which is currently under review. She has also curated an exhibit of family artifacts that will eventually be housed at the Nez Perce National Historical Park and she regularly speaks to educate others about trauma and healing.

## Mentoring the Next Generation

In Paul's 21 years of service to the institution, she has provided continuous and unwavering support and mentorship to Native students. "I was a cheerleader and mentor, keeping them on track and making sure that they connected with the right folks on campus," she says.

Regardless of a student's desired path, Paul was committed to ensuring that they got to where they wanted to go. During her career, she helped to graduate 65 Native American nurses at the bachelor's level, eight at the master's level, eight with a doctor of nursing practice degree and two with a PhD in nursing, along with two Native American doctor of pharmacy students. She keeps in touch with many of the students she has supported over the years and is even in contact with some of her former students' children, who are also pursuing careers in health care.

So, what next? For Paul, recruiting more Native American faculty must be a priority for WSU to help further the institution's vision and commitment to Native communities. That and the continuous building of collaborative relationships. "It's a two-way street," says Paul.

*Pictured: Na-ha-shnee students preparing food in the Center for Native American Health*



## ▶ Focusing on Native Student Success

Since its creation in 2007, Washington State University's Native American Health Sciences program has supported the academic careers of Native American students. The program has grown substantially in the past 15 years and with it, so has the number of Native American students attending WSU who are pursuing degrees in the health sciences. Although NAHS is housed on the Spokane campus, the program serves students, staff, and faculty across the five WSU campuses and tribes across the Pacific Northwest. NAHS faculty and staff assist students through teaching, scholarship, research, and community-driven initiatives. Additionally, through the contributions of generous donors, NAHS is helping meet the financial needs of students through the Native American Health Sciences Fund and the Robbie Paul, PhD, Scholarship for Native American Students.

### The Impact of Receiving a Scholarship

Frances Katherine Ward, a member of the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakima Nation, is in her second year of WSU's nursing program and is a recipient of the Udall Foundation scholarship for Native American Health Sciences. Ward chose to pursue a degree in nursing after participating in the Na-ha-shnee STEAM Institute twice in high school and decided to attend WSU. She selected WSU not only for the evidence-based practice in its curriculum but also because of its focus on research, specifically its Native American and Indigenous research. Ward has enjoyed being part of WSU and appreciates the sense of belonging she has felt since her first year. An essential aspect of her education is to blend Indigenous knowledge and traditional healing practices with Western medicine.

When Ward graduates this spring, she aims to work in a cardiovascular ICU and eventually pursue a graduate degree to become a nurse practitioner so she can provide the highest level of care to Native Americans in rural areas.

“

The impact of receiving this scholarship is significant because it granted me more time to focus on my studies. This is important because, ultimately, my goal is to serve my community as a competent nurse.

”

*Frances Ward (Pipian)*



You can also make an impact on WSU's Native American health sciences students.

Visit [spokane.wsu.edu/nativehealth/give](https://spokane.wsu.edu/nativehealth/give)

The **Native American Health Sciences Fund** provides transformational opportunities for Native American students and aids them in their academic success by providing scholarship support; emergency funding; healing equipment such as stethoscopes, blood pressure cuffs, and scrubs and scholarly, research, and professional development opportunities, while also providing a culturally holistic-centered space for our communities to engage.

The **Robbie Paul, PhD, Scholarship for Native American Students** was created to honor the legacy and leadership of Dr. Robbie Paul to help undergraduate, graduate, and professional Native American students enrolled in the health sciences at any of WSU's campuses. When needed, this fund prioritizes students with the highest level of unmet financial need.

Together, we can work towards a brighter future for young Native American health care professionals.

*This fall, the Center for Native Health installed a mural of images provided by tribal elders and members of the Spokane Tribe of Indians, thanks to a generous gift from the Avista Foundation.*



## THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS

- Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians
  - Association of American Indian Physicians
  - Avista
  - Bank of America
  - BIPOC Health Careers Ecosystem
  - Coordinated Care of Washington
  - Empire Health Foundation
  - EWU Area Health Education Center
  - Kaiser Permanente
  - Lonnie Nelson, PhD, WSU College of Nursing, and Susan Collins, PhD, WSU College of Arts and Sciences
  - Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board
  - OHSU School of Medicine Northwest Native American Center of Excellence
  - Portland Area Indian Health Service
  - Providence
  - Spokane Tribe of Indians
    - Margo Hill, JD
    - Melodi Wynne, PhD
    - Warren Seyler
  - STCU
  - University of California Davis School of Medicine
  - University of North Dakota Indians Into Medicine Alumni
  - WSU Colleges of Medicine, Nursing, and Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, and WSU IREACH
  - WSU Native American Programs
  - WSU Native American Health Sciences Tribal Advisory Board
- We are grateful for our partnerships with university Native American pathway programs to support Indigenous people across the nation.*



## Hanna Smith

Colville Tribal Member

Some of Hanna Smith's earliest memories were going to therapy sessions with her sister, who is just 16 months older than she is. "My passion for helping people with disabilities started when I was little," says Smith. "As far back as I can remember, I have always been an advocate for people with special needs."

Upon graduating high school, Smith had plans to become a special education teacher, a path that she thought would give her the ability to advocate for those with special needs. But after a few classes, she didn't feel like it was for her, and she began considering other career paths. Then her mother suggested speech therapy.

Smith transferred to WSU Spokane and, despite doing her coursework online due to the pandemic, she decided by the end of her junior year that she had made the right choice. After graduation, she opted to stay at WSU, pursuing her master's degree in speech and hearing sciences. As she tackles her coursework and clinics, Smith notes how much she enjoys watching her classmates and clients grow. "It is just so fun to see a client's smile. It makes me think, 'oh my gosh, I am so excited to go to school tomorrow.'"

Smith is passionate about serving communities like the one she and her sister and brother grew up in. Last year, Smith was part of WSU's Stevens County Mentorship Program, where college students engage and mentor 7th, 8th, and 9th-grade students from Chewelah, Valley, Mary Walker, and Wellpinit school districts. The experience solidified her decision of wanting to end up in a rural community and serve those who have been traditionally underserved.

In addition to her work with the mentorship program, Smith has also served as a student employee for the Center for Native American Health Sciences for over two years, supporting Native and non-Native students through the center's many programs. "I think it is extremely important that we get more Native Americans to enter the health care field to serve our community and our reservation," notes Smith. To that end, Smith encourages students like her to bet on themselves. "It's the best bet you will make in your entire life."

“As far back as I can remember, I have always been an advocate for people with special needs.”



## Robert Jackson

Comanche

If there was ever a living definition of a life-long learner, Robert Jackson would be it. But before he became a student in WSU's Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) program, Jackson served in the Marine Corps and was an entrepreneur and a consultant for several decades before diving headfirst into health care.

"Clearly, I am an eclectic and unusual student, that's for sure," says Jackson.

At age 49, Jackson decided to return to school to start his new career path. But he wasn't alone. Several of his children joined him, and now all four are currently studying for or are in health care roles. "They all just followed me into this thing," says Jackson. "It was a crazy deal!"

But for Jackson, it just felt right. He knew he wanted to take care of people and follow in the footsteps of some of his family. Jackson's aunt, for example, was responsible for opening a one-room clinic on the reservation close to where he grew up. "She inspired me a long time ago," he says. "I just didn't know it was going to take this long to find its expression."

After caring for his mother during her battle with cancer and at the suggestion of a friend, Jackson applied to WSU's bachelor of nursing science. He has since graduated and is now in the college's DNP program. Between late-night work shifts and classes, Jackson often relaxes and studies at the Center for Native American Health Sciences, a resource he says he could not be more thankful for.

Jackson is keenly aware of the limitations that those living in rural communities face when it comes to accessing care. He also emphasizes that the health care needs of Native people are unique. "The views of medicine, the views of healing, and the views of people are different," he notes. To that end, Jackson sees an opportunity to become certified so he would be able to provide telehealth options to those living in underserved communities.

Beyond a rewarding career, it is enthusiasm for the care of others that seems to drive Jackson. "Somebody asked me, 'Bob, you are still going to school! What are you doing?' I said, 'Because part of me wants to give people hope and show them not to give up.'"



“Somebody asked me, ‘Bob, you are still going to school! What are you doing?’ I said, ‘Because part of me wants to give people hope and show them not to give up.’”



*Top row, left to right: Tannon Tom, Paige Priest, Ánna Smith, Megan Sheldon, Courtney Todd, Kelsee Furagganan, Kendra David, Patty Hill, Aurora Martinez, Dylan Brockmeyer, John Baker Jr.  
Bottom row, left to right: Mary Plascencia, Sam Rosenthal, Ally Tsosie, Jenalle Pana, Ashley Wyn, Kylie Kulbeth, Viviana Vega, Regan Mukpik*

## ▶ Reimagine IndianS into MedicinE (RISE) Summer Academy

INMED Reimagine IndianS into Medicine (RISE) Summer Academy is a six-week summer program for American Indian/Alaskan Native students to prepare for the medical school application process. Washington State University is one of three universities working in partnership with the Northwest Native American Center of Excellence to support and expand the number of Native American physicians in the workforce through this program.

Participants in RISE gain exposure to medical school faculty, leadership, students, and coursework to help them become more competitive applicants to medical school. The program is offered at no cost to students. This year, 13 extraordinary students participated in the program.

Visit [spokane.wsu.edu/nativehealth/rise](https://spokane.wsu.edu/nativehealth/rise) to learn more.

Thank you to all partners involved in developing and implementing the RISE program: OHSU Northwest Native American Center of Excellence, UC Davis, WSU College of Medicine, Native American Health Sciences, and the Center for Native American Health supported by the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board.

## In Their Words

Through RISE, I have been able to learn a significant amount about the process of applying for and getting into medical school. I have learned a great deal about medicine itself and the field I am entering into. I have also been able to learn how to combine my heritage with my profession and how that can be an incredibly useful tool.

**Kylie Kulbeth**

*Descendent of the  
Minnesota Chippewa Tribe*

I am pursuing a medical degree to serve my community with culturally sensitive care, which we all have a claim to. My passion centers on the idea that in order for my people to heal, we need to revitalize the traditions that colonization tried to eradicate. I look forward to ensuring that my tribal community has equitable access to health care, all while also ensuring that the systemic issues that negatively impact communities are addressed.

**Viviana Vega**

*Pomo, Cloverdale Rancheria  
Band of Pomo Indians*

I want to be an advocate for members of my community and help provide them with reliable health care. I also hope to improve the quality of care that is received.

**Jenalle Pana**

*Navajo*

My family and I have always received poor medical care and faced a lot of discrimination when seeking care. I witnessed several of my family members die because they were too scared to access medical care. I want to change how minorities are treated when they seek medical care.

**Mary Plascencia**

*Caddo Nation*

I want to help heal people spiritually as well as through traditional medicine, including robotic surgery if necessary. I want to combine my research experiences with the clinical facet of medicine to help tribal members, as well as the general populations in the US, and countries in Alkebulan (Africa) and Latin America with Indigenous people.

**John Baker Jr.**

*Eastern Band of Cherokee*



## Jasmin Birch

Iroquois and Sioux

“I didn’t really have an idea that women could be doctors until later in life,” says Jasmine Birch, a third-year medical student with WSU’s College of Medicine. “I wanted to be a nurse for a really long time, and then once I realized women could be doctors, I decided I just wanted to do that instead!”

Birch grew up in the Spokane area and attended WSU Pullman for her undergraduate degree. It would seem natural then that the aspiring physician would eventually come back to WSU when the time was right to begin her medical school journey.

“Coming back [to Spokane] for medical school was the best because I was able to come back home and once again have my family around,” she says. “It’s fun being at the hospitals here, because I volunteered in these places when I was in high school.”

In addition to her love of medicine, Birch has another passion: cars. She became interested in them during her undergraduate years and even served as a technician for a Toyota dealership for a few months after college. “I think that is what sparked my interest in surgery,” says Birch, whose focus is now trauma surgery. “Having something go wrong, then replacing it so that it works again.”

Birch became involved with the Native American Health Sciences program in her first year of attending WSU Spokane. Alongside Dr. Naomi Bender, she explored the reasons for distrust of Western medicine among Native Americans. Birch also supports the program’s simulation space to educate students about culturally inclusive medical practice. To Birch, the program “speaks to WSU’s mission to serve the entire state of Washington and not leave anybody out.”

“I wanted to dive in and really bring light to a lot of the issues that Native people are facing when trying to go get healthcare or trying to find a provider who is willing to work with them with their more holistic approaches to medicine,” says Birch.

“I wanted to dive in and really bring light to a lot of the issues that Native people are facing when trying to go get healthcare or trying to find a provider who is willing to work with them with their more holistic approaches to medicine.”

## Raven Burns

Tlingit

A fourth-year medical student and self-described “brain guy,” Raven Burns wasn’t sure at first if college was for him.

Growing up in Bremerton, Washington, surrounded by family and friends, Burns enjoyed the beautiful outdoors of the Puget Sound region and was considering a career in the trades. But upon graduating high school, he thought, “Why not give it a go!” He became the first in his family to attend college.

Burns entered his undergraduate program at the University of Washington with an interest in the health sciences, driven partly by an Advanced Placement psychology course he took in high school. He started as a biology major, knowing it could pave the way for other options. Then a friend told him about the neuroscience program. He decided to apply.

The courses proved to be invaluable. “When I got to medical school and we had lectures on neuroscience topics, I kind of already knew what was going on. I still use some of that knowledge today when I am in the clinic.”

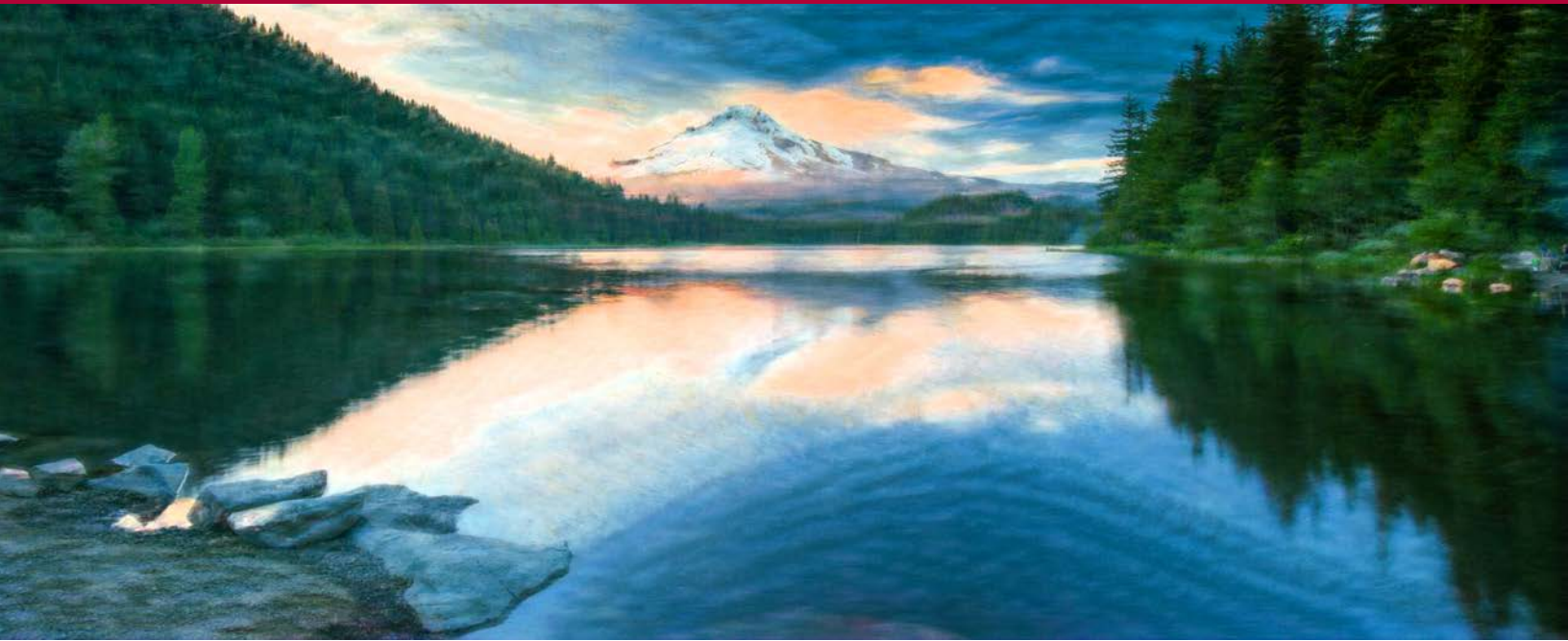
Another significant influence in Burns’ journey to medical school was volunteer work. Despite limited medical knowledge, he realized that he enjoyed patient care and working to help people get healthy. “I knew at that point that that was something I wanted to pursue, and that is what got me into medicine.” He would later apply to attend WSU’s College of Medicine.

Burns was interested in attending WSU because of the research with Native people and the fact that there was support and connection with the surrounding tribal communities. “That tie and opportunity to work more closely with Native peoples drew me to working with Washington State University,” says Burns. Today, Burns works with Dr. Lonnie Nelson on research that directly impacts tribal health. “He’s been a great mentor,” he said. “I love working with him and talking with him.”

To Burns, mentors— particularly those who share your cultural background or pathway— can be powerful influencers in success. “If they were able to do it, then there is some pathway or guidance that you can get, so you also get to that spot and then pass it to those who will be behind you,” he says.



“That tie and opportunity to work more closely with Native people drew me to working with Washington State University.”



*Pictured: Wy'east (also known as Mt. Hood)*

## ▶ Wy'east Pathway Program

Envisioning oneself in medical school can be challenging. The journey may feel long and insurmountable. However, the Wy'east Pathway program aims to make that journey a little less difficult for American Indian Alaska Native (AI/AN) students.

A nod to the traditional Multnomah name for Mount Hood, the Wy'east post-baccalaureate pathway program provides a holistic, culturally specific framework for AI/AN students who want to attend medical school. The tuition-free program supports not only students' ability to improve their academic skills but also sets them up for success in the medical school admissions process. Scholars receive a monthly stipend throughout the program.

A component of the RISE program, Wy'east built on the early success of Oregon Health & Science University's 10-month pathway program.

The program is grounded in three core objectives:

- To build upon scholars' knowledge in core topic areas through rigorous coursework and MCAT preparation
- To amplify scholars' strengths and resilience by imparting tools, skills, and resources that facilitate academic and personal self-efficacy and success
- To promote scholars' sense of cultural connectedness and community through immersion in a rich Indigenous community, Indigenous coursework, and cultural activities

Today, three medical schools participate in the program, including the WSU Elson S. Floyd College of Medicine. The College of Medicine joined the program in 2020 and selected two aspiring AI/AN physicians to attend. The college will continue to pick four students per year over four years for this program, with the hope of having them matriculate to the College of Medicine upon completion. WSU NAHS and the Center for Native American Health work alongside the three medical schools to facilitate the Wy'east program and directly support the WSU Wy'east scholars throughout their post-baccalaureate program.

## Meet Wy'east Participant Aurora Martinez



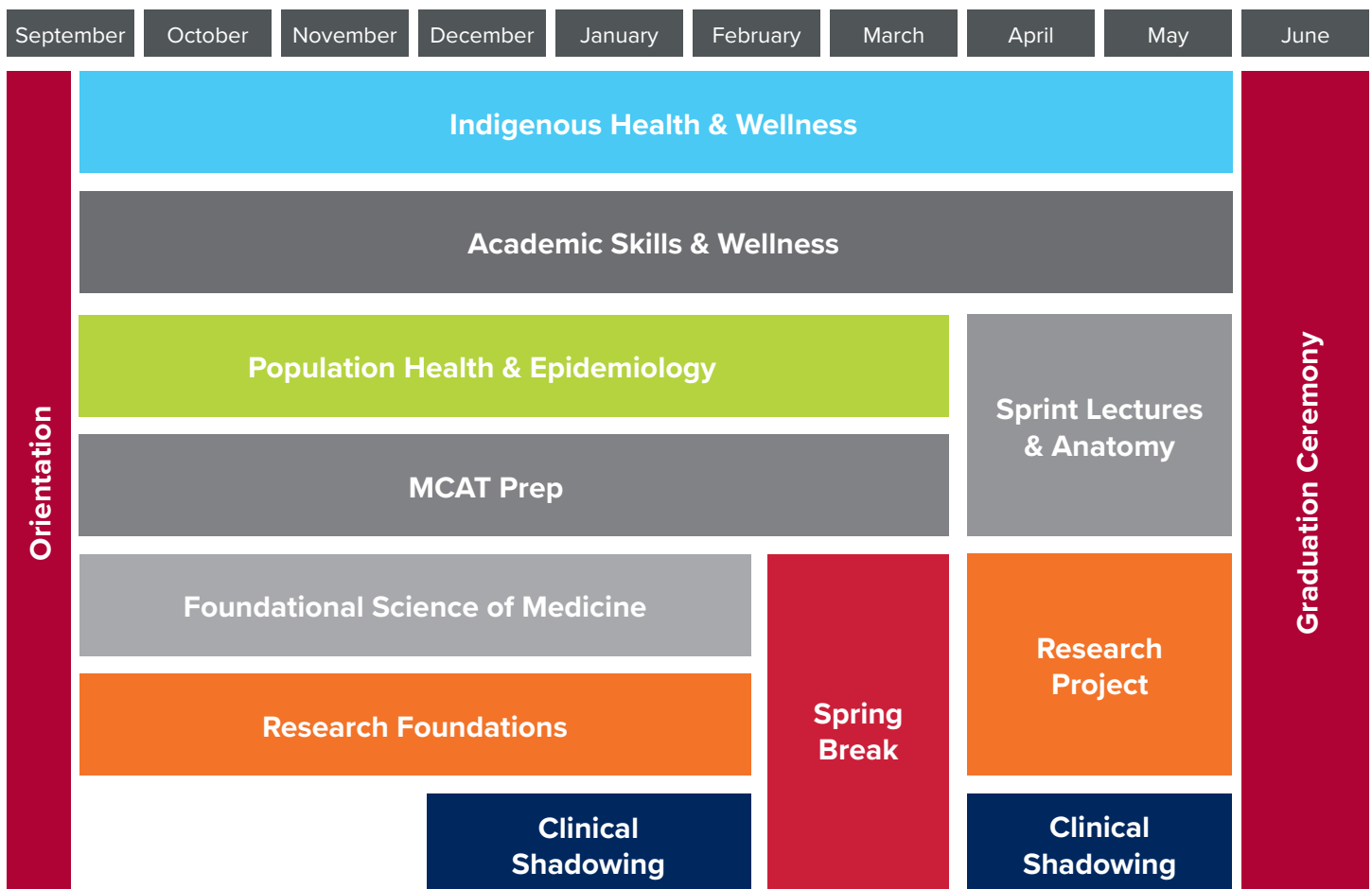
Hello, my name is Aurora Martinez, and my traditional name is Sqwemey7ileshecut. I was born and raised in western Washington near Everett. I come from the Samish Indian Nation in Anacortes, Washington.

I received my bachelor's degree in kinesiology with a pre-health care focus from Western Washington University and my master of Health Administration from West Coast University. I participated in the 2022 Summer RISE Program before entering into the Wy'East Program with the opportunity to attend the WSU Elson S. Floyd Medical School in 2023.

I am interested in helping those who are underserved. I hope to help people have positive medical experiences and feel listened to. My passions currently include pediatrics and gastroenterology.

The community that WSU has is amazing, especially for Indigenous individuals, and I am excited to join this community. I am also excited about the various opportunities that can come from being in a school that emphasizes serving rural and underserved communities.

## Wy'east Pathway Overview



## ▶ Indigenous Healers' Retreat

*By Carrie Gigray and Dr. Naomi Bender*

Since time immemorial, our Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and healing have been part of who we are as Native peoples. The Indigenous Healers' Retreat in April 2022 was a weekend that celebrated and honored these ways. It did so by gathering almost 70 tribal community health care healers, leaders, and elders and members of regional tribes, along with WSU Health Sciences students, faculty, staff, and the Indigenous Healers' Cohort.

The retreat took place upon the traditional homelands of the Spokane Tribe of Indians where the WSU Health Sciences Spokane campus currently sits and within the Center for Native American Health. It was sponsored by the Empire Health Foundation and facilitated by the Indigenous Healers' Cohort, which began in December 2020 under the direction of Dr. Naomi Bender, director of WSU NAHS and the Center of Native American Health. She envisioned the cohort as central to developing the first Indigenous health education simulation setting in higher education in the region and the nation. Bender and Indigenous health leaders in the cohort saw ways in which Indigenous perspectives of health, healing, and community should be part of the health education curriculum outside the classroom and within clinical practice settings. This arose from the belief is that there must be a space, voice, and now time where the balance of Western medicine with Indigenous perspectives of health and well-being are at par and where culture as medicine is valued.

The goal of the retreat was to celebrate, honor, and share the extensive work of the Indigenous Healers' cohort, whose members had met virtually every 8 to 12 weeks for two years due to the pandemic. This was also the first time that cohort members could collaborate in person and see the newly developed clinical simulation space they had helped to design. It was a time for healers and the community to connect and grow together through culturally centered ways of knowing and doing, specifically through Native protocol. In addition—thanks to a generous, \$250,000 gift received from Bank of America—cohort and community members used the retreat as an opportunity to discuss the development and design of an expansion of the Indigenous clinical simulation space that will be completed later in 2023.

On the first day of the retreat, participants toured the student and community wings of the Center for Native American Health, the Indigenous clinical simulation

exam room, and the more than 1,000 square foot of space allocated to the simulation center expansion. We also created an opportunity for small-group dialogue by providing a large blueprint of the expanded simulation space and asking for participants' cultural and professional perspectives on the vision for the design. In addition, we shared specific best practices for simulation design and implementation.

The retreat also provided an opportunity for elders from both plateau and coastal Salish tribes to share in oral history and stories. We shared meals and cultural practices and gave thanks for the opportunities that lay ahead. On the final day of the retreat, we gave an inclusive, online presentation of the center and its goals and demonstrated an Indigenous simulation to community stakeholders in Washington and across the nation. The intent was to show that this type of simulation can help determine how to initiate processes that dismantle racism and biases among health professionals and systems that often perpetuate negative health outcomes in Indigenous people. It was also meant to provide an opportunity for respectful communication, cultural humility, and knowledge toward holistic care, three qualities that are pivotal to changing Indigenous health outcomes.

We highlighted a simulation developed by Dr. Terry Maresca of the University of Washington to increase cultural sensitivity and understanding of miscarriage in Native American populations. For many who were present, it was the first time they had seen a simulation, let alone an Indigenous simulation. Other Native American physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses, pharmacists, tribal health care administrators and educators from across the state—who represent tribal nations from across the U.S.—also shared their work of serving tribal communities and their hopes and goals for this center's work.

Overall, the retreat provided time to gather, share, learn, and provide guidance to WSU NAHS and the Center for Native American Health. It is with community that we do—and will continue to do—this work.







*Pictured: Student with Dr. James in the Indigenous simulation space*

## ▶ Educating the Next Generation of Healthcare Professionals

Washington State University's Native American Health Sciences program is set to launch its unique Indigenous Healing Perspectives Certificate in 2023. Regional Indigenous health leaders and educators will teach the online educational program, with a curriculum designed to enhance current and future health care professionals' knowledge and proficiency when working in health care or other settings that serve Indigenous communities.

The non-credit-bearing certificate is completely online and can be completed in nine months by adult health care professionals or students who are enrolled in post-secondary programs within the health sciences.

Those interested in learning more or enrolling in this program can visit [spokane.wsu.edu/native-health/certificate](https://spokane.wsu.edu/native-health/certificate)

# Indigenous Healing Perspectives Certificate Courses



## Introduction to Native American Health & Patient Care

with Naomi Bender, PhD and Jerry Crowshoe, MA

Throughout this course, students will learn about Native American history and immerse themselves into Native mindsets on health, wellness, life, and healing. Students will become familiar with native lifestyles and ways of communicating, increasing their understanding of how Native communities view and access Western medicine and their ability to communicate with Native communities.



## Native American Health Trends: Trauma and Mental Health

with Jerry Crowshoe, MA

This course provides an overview on historical occurrences (including historical and generational trauma) that impact the mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical health of American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) people. This course also provides information on how mental health components directly impact the patient-provider relationship, and tools to strengthen relationship to increase and sustain the engagement of AI/AN patients.

*Pictured: Two students practicing wrapping wounds*



## Native American Health Policy, Law, & Advocacy

with Margo Hill, JD, MURP

This course focuses on the history, traditional and current practices, and health implications of the Native American population. Emphasis will be placed on understanding the federal obligation to tribes and tribal sovereignty, the behavioral response, and resulting health issues. The course will also examine current health practices and current research with the Native American population.



## Native American Health Perspectives

with Melodi Wynne, PhD

In this course, students will gain cultural competence through openness to varying perspectives, cultivate cultural humility to nurture listening skills, and increase their capacity for a strength-based world view of Native American communities.

**This program's development is supported by a generous gift from the Empire Health Foundation.**





WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY  
**SPOKANE**

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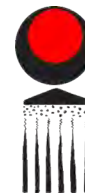
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