

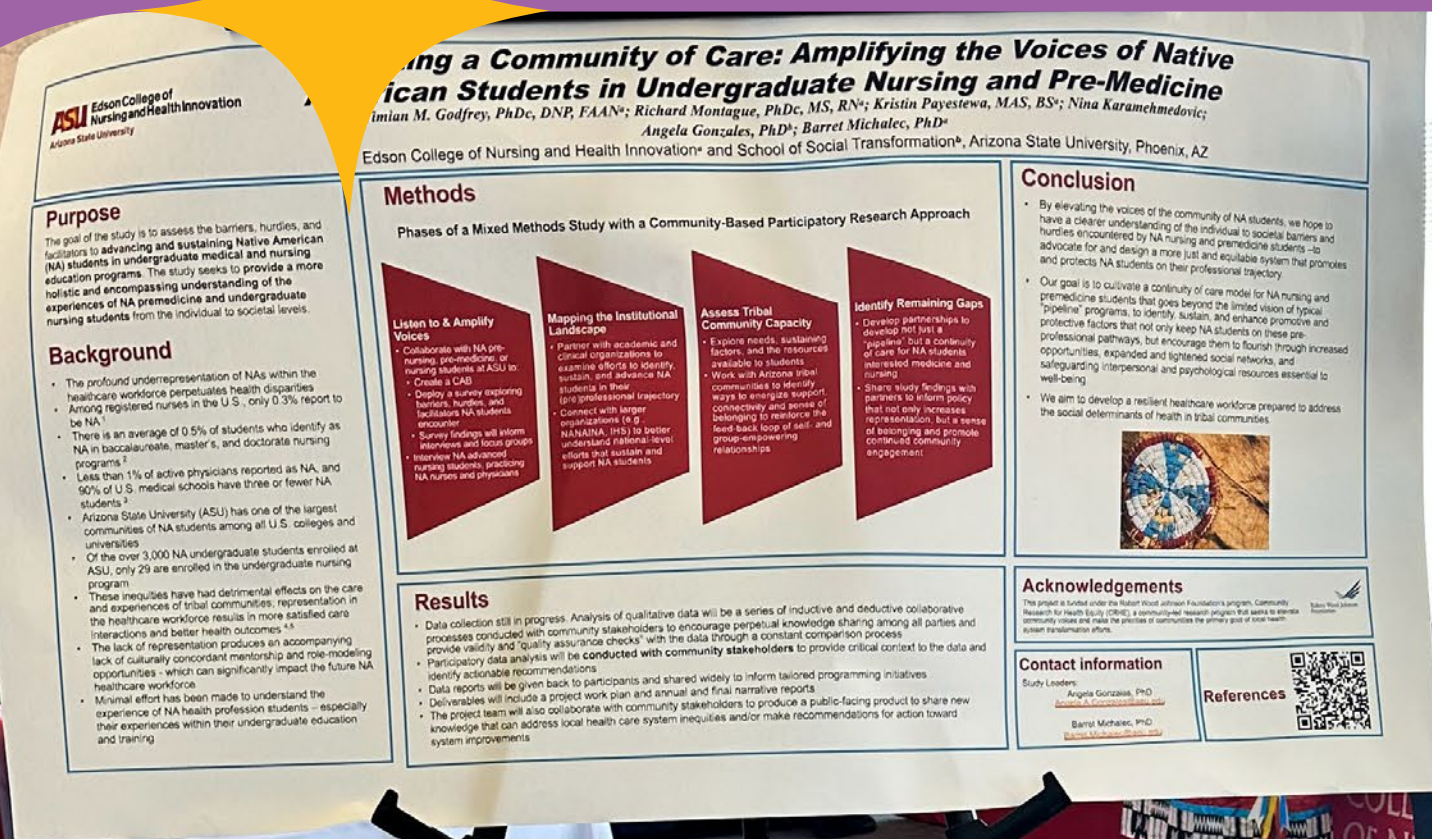
Carrying Our Ancestors With Us

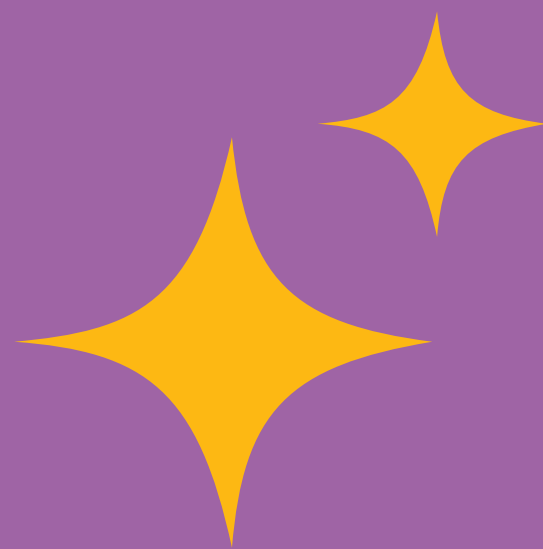
What Indigenous Students
Need to Thrive on the Path
to Nursing and Medicine

Community Leading the Way

The United States is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse, but the country's health care workforce hasn't kept pace, leaving American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) patients far less likely to see providers who share or understand their lived experience.

AI/AN people account for **less than 1% of those holding nursing or medical degrees**, highlighting a pronounced **underrepresentation** compared to other demographic groups.





This study, **led by indigenous researchers from Arizona State University**, asked 50 AI/AN medical students, nursing students, active doctors and nurses, and pre-professional pathway (e.g., premedical, undergraduate nursing, etc.) program leaders what stands in the way of Indigenous representation in health care and what helps students to pursue and complete their education.



What Did This Research Reveal?

Across interviews, **participants consistently identified elements of the hidden curriculum—particularly aspects of “(extra)curricular capital”—resources, information, and opportunities that carried more weight and value in application stages and through respective health professional development pathways that were crucial to success, but often invisible (i.e. not explicit), unknown or even unavailable to them specifically.** These included certain preparatory programs, tutors/counselors, and shadowing opportunities, among others.

In addition, AI/AN participants pointed to **their communities and ancestors as the deepest sources of motivation** that kept them on their educational path.



Why Do These Findings Matter?

Integrating elements of community, kinship, and traditional practices into the academic environment, combined with explicitly addressing elements of the hidden curriculum (specifically, aspects of (extra)curricular capital), can enhance the participation of AI/AN individuals in nursing and medicine.

Continued efforts to expose various elements of the deeply nested hidden curriculum of health professions education can help to demystify the educational process.

Similarly, by purposely and intentionally fostering an authentic sense of community and belonging, educational institutions can create a supportive atmosphere that resonates with AI/AN cultural values, **thereby equipping Indigenous students with additional tools and support to navigate these “hidden” aspects of health professions education and academia in general.**

How the Research is Shaping the Future

Researchers are working collaboratively with leadership at the University of Arizona College of Nursing and the Indians in Nursing: Career Advancement Transition Scholars (INCATS) program to identify opportunities to **integrate Indigenous content, strengthen partnerships with tribal colleges and universities, and create more supportive pathways for Indigenous students and communities.**





Additionally, researchers are working directly with Arizona State University's Edson College of Nursing and Health Innovation, Shufeldt School of Medicine and Medical Engineering, and American Indian Studies program to purposely facilitate the advancement AI/AN undergraduate scholars interested in medical and nursing professions.

Listening to Native Voices



“I prayed a lot, a lot of prayers for, I’m having a hard time, I need the motivation, determination, the perseverance. I think it’s instilled in me, and I think it’s what our ancestors had as well.

We have a responsibility to continue to press on for them and for our future generations as well. Having that deep down in me is what was the drive to just keep moving. You can’t stay still. So sticking with it, consistency, don’t always get it right, but just got to keep on trying.”

— Interview with Indigenous medical student participant





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