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**PERSPECTIVES FROM STUDENTS IN THE NATIVE AMERICAN SUMMER
RESEARCH INTERNSHIP PROGRAM**

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The aim of this study is to explore the perceptions of American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) undergraduate students by examining Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) experiences and identifying potential challenges or barriers to visualizing careers in science and health. This study is important because it provides narratives from AI/AN people, who have been historically marginalized in research.

Methods: Focus group discussions about health disparities in AI/AN communities and access to biomedical science education and employment were run with AI/AN undergraduates from the United States of America who were participating in an internship program at the University of Utah during Summer 2018.

Results: The main themes touched on were lack of education and resources, limited academic mentorship, and misconceptions about health disparities in AI/AN communities. Students identified forces that work to limit indigenous representation in the biomedical workforce, which included limited exposure to quality education, lack of support and encouragement from academic advisors, lack of mentorship, navigating the cultural significance of the human body in settings where the body is used for medical instruction, and being disconnected geographically from their land and community. Students expressed that it was difficult to maintain both a scientific and tribal identity, highlighting the violent history that western-led research efforts have had with AI/AN people and the misconceptions about indigenous individuals and their health.

Conclusions: It is vital that AI/AN people have a more proportionate rate of biomedical professionals and physicians because these healthcare professionals will provide more culturally competent care for AI/AN people than the general population.

Keywords: American Indian/Alaska Native; Health; Biomedical professions; Undergraduate education; USA

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