Navajo scholars who attended the Summer Internship for Native Americans in Genomics June 10 to 16 at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign included, Nánúeaa Garrison, far left, Lee Bitsol, back row, left center, Krystal Tsoosie, first row, left center, and Katrina Claw, first row, far right. (Courtesy photo)

Genomics and Natives is topic at summer program

CHAMPAIGN, ILL. - Native and non-Native scholars working in genomics and bioethics research gathered June 10-16 at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign for the Summer Internship for Native Americans in Genomics.

Ripan Malhi, assistant professor of anthropology, said the summer program was started because of the lack of Native American scientists in genome sciences.

Kim TallBear, Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate-Dakota, an assistant professor in environmental science at the University of California-Berkeley, said, "As an indigenous person, I think it's important for us to democratize science. Western science tells us that it's objective and neutral, but it's not."

"Who gets to do science? Who gets studied? Which research questions are asked? From whose cultural perspective? Who has access to which benefits? There is nothing neutral about this," she said.

Lee Bitsol, Navajo, program director of the Department of 4600, the clinic where the summer intern class was held, said, "The summer intern class was designed to provide a bridge between Native American students and the genomics field. It's a unique opportunity to raise the profile of Native American scientists in the field." 

NMSU, Nez will assist student organizations, go on recruiting trips, and must maintain her grade point average as well.

One of her goals is to start a music club where members can share songs, dances and have fun.

Nez is also interested in helping to increase the number of Native students at NMSU and wants to promote Native student organizations like the Native American Business Students Association.

Navajo Tech, church group vaccinate livestock in Eastern Agency

CROWNSPT - From July 25 to 29 veterinarians and volunteers from across the United States helped Navajo Technical College provide vaccinations to over 3,000 sheep and goats for elderly in the Eastern Agency, according to an NTC news release.

The students and volunteers from as far away as California and North Carolina worked at Standing Rock, Dalton Pass, Crownpoint, Lake Mary, and other locations.

LAS CRUCES, N.M. - Dana Nez, a junior from Tohatchi, N.M., was recently selected as the 2011-12 Miss Native American New Mexico Student. Nez is studying graphic design at St. Edward's University in Austin.
Lee Bitsui, program director of the Department of Genetics at Harvard Medical School, noted that the summer program was timely as the importance of the ethical, legal and social implications of genetic/genomic research garnered international attention with the settlement of the Havasupai case last year.

These issues are sometimes ignored in research with Native people, he said.

"I tell my non-Native colleagues at Harvard and beyond that we’re not anti-science," Bitsui said. "We merely want research conducted on our terms."

Duke University’s Jessi Bardill, Cherokee, said, "We reserve the right to resist and right to benefit from scientific research."

Nánba’ Garrison, Navajo, from Stanford University, said, "The Navajo Nation placed a moratorium on genetic research studies in 2002. Learning the concerns of the Navajo Nation and other Native people encouraged me to understand the risks and benefits of genetic research."

She said she is working with other scientists to develop a genomics resource guide that will help Native people understand these issues.

"Once we’re better informed, we can make decisions about participation in genetic studies without the fear of exploitation," she said.

Miss Native American New Mexico State University, according to an NMSU news release.

Miss Native American NMSU is not a beauty pageant but a search for a student ambassador who can educate others about Native American cultures and help support Native students on campus, according to the release.

Justin McHorsey, director of NMSU’s American Indian Program, said when selecting a winner, judges mainly consider the contestant’s knowledge of her traditional culture and her public speaking abilities.

Nez won over this year’s judges by singing Navajo lullabies and playing a Native American flute.

Her flute playing also impressed Albino Lujan, a performer from Taos Pueblo who visited NMSU during American Indian week earlier this year.

Lujan was so impressed that he gave Nez one of his own flutes.

"It was a blessing and a privilege to have an elder recognize me as a fellow flute player. I was so deeply honored by that gift," Nez said.

She now carries her flute everywhere she goes in case the mood strikes her to play.

Nez is majoring in geology and after obtaining her bachelor’s degree, plans to do graduate research about how Native American stories, history and cultural knowledge can be tied to the geological record.

As Miss Native American New Mexico State University, Nez says she is proud to represent Native Americans at a national level.

Vaccinations and deworming were provided to livestock, whose care included driving them through a feeder and holding them individually for vaccinations.

A number of visitors also worked with farm animals, such as cows, sheep and goats.

Auburn and New Mexico State University veterinary students had the opportunity to work with the horses and cattle.

Many of the visitors worked through the Christian Veterinary Mission organization.
Wind project holds promise for tribe

Clash over cash