

Sarah Suzuki '07

*Wesleyan-Dana Summer Experience Grant Recipient,
Summer 2006*

1. Provide a brief overview of the organization for which you will intern or program/project you are developing.

The Native American Women's Health Education Resource Center is concerned primarily with promoting Native American rights, especially in regards to health, the environment, civil liberties, and political empowerment. The Resource Center is located on the Yankton Sioux Reservation in Lake Andes, South Dakota, and often acts as a political center for many of the tribes throughout the country. Besides doing non-profit work that benefits the local Yankton Sioux tribal population, the Resource Center also lobbies for women's rights in Washington D.C. The Resource Center works with Sioux tribal nations throughout the country in order to garner political power and currently has a case on the Supreme Court docket. While the organization has numerous on-going projects, the overall goal of the Resource Center is to empower the Sioux tribal peoples.

2. Briefly provide details of the internship or experience, including responsibilities and tasks.

I will be assigned to one long-term project in which I will assist in political lobbying by communicating with other Sioux tribal peoples as well as with government representatives. I will develop and refine this project over the course of three months with the aid of other interns as well as with the organizers at the Resource Center. I will be "on-call" at least once a week, during which time I will be available for one full night at a shelter that houses women threatened by domestic violence. Because of my background in English and writing, I will be writing health brochures and reports that then get published for the benefit of the Sioux tribal communities. The skills I have developed in writing over the past five years will enable me to contribute to publishing educational material, newsletters, and written information on the web as befitting the organization's needs. These publications are largely concerned with environmental activism, AIDS education, teen preventative health, and the advocacy of preserving the Dakota language. In addition, I will work closely with Resource Center's organizers to expand my knowledge of Native American politics and historical issues through reading and direct outreach (i.e. discussing the issues directly with other Native Americans). The intern program will thus provide a multi-layered exchange between myself and the other interns as well as with the Native American Resource Center organizers, political representatives, and the Native Sioux peoples throughout the country.

3. How will this experience enhance or broaden your career goals?

My interest in the welfare of Native American tribal nations goes back to my early adolescence, when I discovered the academic work of my grandfather, Dr. Peter Suzuki. My grandfather, a second generation Japanese American, was interned during World War II and separated from his parents and siblings. Years later, when he went on

to become a professor, my grandfather found himself pursuing ethnic studies, comparing the similarities and differences of the government's treatment of interned Japanese Americans with that of Native Americans. As a teenager, I often found myself reading the work that he published, puzzling over the historical injustice that has led to the current state of social affairs for Native Americans. It had always been my hope that in college I would be able to bring my interests to fruition by cultivating an enriched understanding of our present day society.

I am currently an English major at Wesleyan University and have spent my time here trying to apply my knowledge of English and writing along with my interest in people to social activism. I have tried my best to take advantage of the curriculum in order to enrich my understanding of our society. Thus far I have greatly enjoyed taking critical race theory as well as those dealing with ethnic studies. Many of the classes that fall outside of these categories have emphasized a direct application of English to social theory. Following freshman year, I was accepted into an internship at World Book Publishing in Chicago, where I learned how to edit and use technology in order to publish both electronic and printed material. However, having an internship with a for-profit company made me crave a career path where I would be able to contribute to a social cause that I found to be more meaningful. During my sophomore year, my work as a writing tutor year proved to be a valuable experience in teaching me how to work with people at a personal level in the task of writing. I also found great pleasure in working with people as a Residential Advisor. Inspired by my classes at Wesleyan, I sought out a volunteer opportunity at the Winnebago Reservation in Nebraska during winter break. While I was there, I realized precisely how complex the social issues are facing the Native American tribal peoples. In the spring semester of my sophomore year I organized several race-based and ethnicity-based Residential Advisor programs focusing on the gender and class disparities in the United States. While those experiences taught me how to apply my interest in social causes within the university, I am eager to learn how I can use both my education in English and my interest in activism towards progressive social initiatives.

In the future, I would like to be in a service-oriented career that would combine my interest in ethnic studies with the writing skills I have been able to cultivate at Wesleyan so as to further social justice. This experience with the Native American Women's Resource Center will allow me to directly apply those skills to a non-profit organization. The non-profit career sector is potentially one of the perfect places wherein I may be able to combine all of my interests in a meaningful way, thereby refining my career trajectory following graduation. My communications with the staff at the Resource Center have led me to believe that it is a well-organized group of people who are fiercely determined to enact social progressivism. I have an intense interest in working with people and believe that I have the skills to approach their projects both creatively and enthusiastically. For the first time, I feel that I will be able to really apply the skills I have been able to develop at Wesleyan while also challenging myself to consider the possibilities within the service sector.