

## From Rez to Researcher, and Everything in Between

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We, Native Americans, are impacted the most by poverty, low educational attainment, and limited access to educational opportunities. As a result, we are the least represented population and the least likely to graduate from college. Native American students, including myself, who persist to graduation, often struggle with complicated issues of identity, cultural conflict, and cultural integrity. We also face obstacles such as institutional barriers, campus climate issues, and racism. In this presentation, I will discuss my journey from the Seneca Cattaraugus reservation, located in western New York, to my current academic position at Northern Arizona University. This will include the obstacles and successes along my journey and how I came to be one of only two Native Americans to graduate with a PhD in chemistry in 2013. In addition, I will discuss how my family, culture, and training influenced my research interests in the areas of vaccine development, health disparities among Native Americans, and mentoring.



**Bio:** Dr. Naomi Lee is a tenure-track Assistant Professor in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry at Northern Arizona University. She is also an affiliate faculty of the Southwest Health Equity Research Collaborative (SHERC), the partnership for Native American Cancer Prevention (NACP), and the Center for Materials Interfaces in Research and Applications (iMIRA!). Her research focuses on novel vaccine development using self-assembling peptides and virus-like particles (VLPs). Dr. Lee also applies her expertise in biomedical research to improve the health care of Native Americans through health disparities research, STEM education, and mentoring.

Dr. Lee received a B.S. in biochemistry from Rochester Institute of Technology. She also completed an M.S. and Ph.D. in chemistry from the University of Rochester. After completing her doctoral degree, Dr. Lee was a postdoctoral fellow at the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS) From 2015-2018, Dr. Lee was an NIH Institutional Research and Academic Career Development Award (IRACDA) postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Molecular Genetics and Microbiology at the University of New Mexico. In addition, Dr. Lee was also accepted into the NIH-funded Native Investigator Development Program through Washington State University and the University of Colorado Denver.

Dr. Lee is involved with various scientific and professional societies including the American Chemical Society (ACS), Society for Advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS) and the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES). In 2012, she was honored with the AISES lifetime Sequoyah fellowship, sponsored by her tribe, the Seneca Nation of Indians. Dr. Lee was also awarded the 2018 AISES Professional of the Year award. Dr. Lee continues to be involved in mentoring programs aimed at increasing the representation of Native Americans in STEM. Finally, in 2009, Dr. Lee joined the Army National Guard. Currently, she is a Captain assigned to the 850<sup>th</sup> Military Police Battalion in Phoenix, AZ. Prior to this assignment, Dr. Lee was responsible for training, advising, and counselling hundreds of junior officers in the Army National Guard OCS program in both Aberdeen, MD, and Santa Fe, NM.