



Student Newsletter

Spring 2016

CAIR Interns Attend Pacific Rim International Conference on Disability and Diversity

By Alexis McKinley

The Pacific Rim International Conference on Disability and Diversity was held on April 25th-26th at the Hawaii Convention Center in Honolulu, Hawaii. CAIR interns and students Amanda Cassaro, Dakota Kelly, Tisimpsha Key, Alexis McKinley, and Shalene Yazzie with Dr. Priscilla Sanderson (CAIR Co-Principal Investigator & Lead Director for Community Engagement-Outreach) and Tara Chico (Co-Director for Community Engagement and Outreach).

CAIR provides us with many opportunities to connect with different culturally diverse communities, like American Indian tribes. Those relations give us the experience to learn more about how people exhibit resilience through a cultural lens. We have been so fortunate to connect with diverse individuals, including those in Honolulu, Hawaii. Of course, going to Hawaii is a great and fun chance of a lifetime, but what was very beneficial was learning about how the indigenous people of Hawaii demonstrate resilience compared to American Indians.



Dr. Sanderson introducing CAIR at the Pacific Rim Conference.

The experience at the Pacific Rim International Conference was not only valuable to us as CAIR interns but as future public health professionals. It's easy to stand up in front of peers in a classroom and give a presentation on sexual health issues, mental health issues, or the need to promote healthy eating, but to talk about these topic in front of a professional forum was on a higher level of anxiety. Fortunately, with much practice, we felt prepared to give our presentations to the forum and answer any questions they had. For me, participating in the conference was a test of how comfortable I was to present my implementation findings, without hesitation, as well as a preparation for future presentations at other conferences.



Amanda Cassaro (left) and Shalene Yazzie (right).

Before we made our way to Hawaii, us CAIR interns and students spend many hours preparing our presentation for the conference. We wanted to show the other organizations and health professionals the high standard we hold for ourselves by providing a well-prepared presentation. Our presentation consisted of an introduction of CAIR by Dr. Sanderson, which transitioned into presenting our own individual projects we developed, implemented, evaluated during our internship, and finished with an interactive group activity with Dr. Lisa Hardy's Wellness Mapping lead by Tara Chico. With a lot of practice and critical, beneficial critique for one another, we were confident and ready to head into the conference.

Participating in the PACRIM Conference as an undergraduate developed my skills in public speaking, networking with other organizations, and a desire to share my work with others in my field. Being able to harness these skills will help me when presenting at conferences in the future. What I enjoyed most about the conference was the genuine engagement and interest in our projects as undergraduates. Most of the professionals at the conference either obtained a Master's or Doctorate Degree. Seeing that they were interested in our work as undergraduates solidified our passion to make a difference in the public health field. Another aspect I enjoyed was the cultural use between American Indians and Hawaiian Natives. We saw this when attending different presentations, and we saw how significant culture plays a role in the lives of indigenous individuals.

The impact the conference had was positive because we learned more about the culture of Native Hawaiians, developed skills that helped us grow as young professionals, and overall learned how well we work with one another. After the conference, we were fortunate enough to go to the Polynesian Cultural Center where we explored the Polynesian culture by attending a Luau, see multiple dances, and eat delicious food. Then enjoy the beach and sun before heading home. Overall, we enjoyed our time at the PACRIM conference because we not only got to enjoy the beach and relax, but we learned that many people are interested to know more about American Indians and what we are doing to make a positive impact in their communities.



(Left to Right) Tisimpsha Key, Shalene Yazzie, Alexis McKinley, Dakota Kelly, & Amanda Cassaro with Hawaiian Luau Dancers.