

## **Blanca Gutierrez (American Ethnic Studies and English, '14)**

This project, by focusing on mascots, addresses larger issues of tribal sovereignty and social justice. Having been involved with Chemawa Indian High School, I am invested in anything that would impact the students (which this does in an indirect way). Part of this investment also stems from my commitment to social justice and what that looks like for everyone. This project is important because it really is an opportunity to teach and learn about how these issues affect many people instead of just creating further animosity or division. Collaborating with professors and OIEA members will not only help me network with great educators, but will also allow me to learn from their experiences.

In August I interned at Chemawa. It was something new for everyone involved. It was a huge personal challenge because I was forced to deal with students who were very confrontational, unresponsive, and disrespectful (for many reasons), although there were also students who were very supportive of me and the other interns. We met a lot of different students, and we had to learn how to interact with all of them and the administration. I believe that this is a very important skill that applies to this project when interviewing communities.

I led one of the Community 101 sessions this year. These replaced the diversity lecture that incoming freshmen attend during Opening Days. Conversations about identities and differences are difficult, especially with people you don't know. It was important not to attempt to cover everything about oppression and why we had to be aware of it -- in only an hour. It's not reasonable to expect people to change their point of view in such a short amount of time, so I approached this with a serious-lightheartedness. Humor is a useful tool to create a comfortable atmosphere and to help get my point across, which was to keep an open mind and not make any assumptions about others.

My goal is to become a teacher and possibly to become involved in educational policies. What better way to become a great teacher than learning how to listen and work with the schools—both administration and students? I believe that participating in this LARC project would help me understand more about the various differences between schools, what they have in common, and the relationships they have with the larger educational system. Presenting best practices to school district representatives would also provide the opportunity for me to familiarize myself with the education system's political environment.

Another of my personal goals is finding a way to talk about difficult topics and realities with everyone. I'm an AES major because this sort of work is important to me, and it's important to the development and health of our communities, nation, and everyone in general. The activity-based workshops planned for the school officials would allow me to practice these discussions in very important and powerful spaces where change can be institutionalized.