

## **Felicia Garcia (Psychology, '14)**

As a Native American, this particular project is compelling to me because it is so relevant to my life. I grew up on a reservation, and most of my peers that I grew up with did not succeed academically and even fewer went on to pursue higher education. I used to attribute the lack of academic achievement on my reservation to a lack of commitment or lack of persistence among my peers. However, over time and with the help of everything that I have learned at Willamette, I recognize that there are larger structural forces at fault. The use of Indian mascots is an example of the inequality that Natives face in modern society. Native peoples are often left out of the media, and the very few representations we have consist of stereotypical images in western movies or sports team mascots. I can't imagine that seeing these negative stereotypes used over and over again is creating confidence among Native youth. I am interested in this project because I would like to see higher educational achievement among Native Americans, and I think that taking small steps toward reducing racial inequality is key. By helping communities to phase out mascots, we are taking steps toward reducing racial inequality, and in effect taking steps toward increasing confidence and therefore educational achievement among Natives.

The Chemawa partnership program has prepared me to participate in this project because I have developed the ability to facilitate discussion with new people through the tutoring experience. I also feel that the Chemawa program has prepared me to be enthusiastic about this particular project. I have never been very active in the Native community at Willamette, but the Chemawa program has really inspired an interest in the empowerment of American Indians.

I am equipped to participate in this project because I have taken two sociology courses about racial inequality, and I am also in the research methods for psychology course. In the lecture portion of the course we learn about the ethics of research and how to conduct psychological studies. In the lab portion we learn how to apply these skills—for the majority of the semester I have been working with two other students on developing and conducting a study. Given my focus of study in psychology and sociology, I would like to use my skills in research methodology to gather, organize, and present relevant background information. I would be interested in all elements of the project, but taking a leadership role in researching would be most exciting to me.

As mentioned above, I am very passionate about increasing educational achievement in Native American communities and empowering Native youth. After college, I would like to work for Teach for America to take an active role in increasing educational achievement among marginalized groups. This project directly relates to my goals because I am interested in combating race-based inequalities in education and eliminating these mascots could be an important step in empowering Native youth and combating racism in our society.