

NMSU Alumni Association Outstanding Graduate
College of Health, Education and Social Transformation
Tylerann Thomas

Raised in Thoreau, NM, Tylerann Thomas started her NMSU journey as a high school sophomore taking dual-credit classes, first earning an Associate of Science and a Nursing Assistant Certificate in 2019 and then an Associate of Arts in 2020. She appreciated NMSU's connections to Indigenous communities, and she "wanted to continue at NMSU because it's the best college in the state." Now Tylerann is graduating with a Bachelor of Public Health. She's a Crimson Scholar with a 4.0 GPA and made the dean's list for five semesters.

An online student from the beginning, Tylerann says that living five hours away from main campus has been both a challenge and the best way to earn her degrees. Although she doesn't "have the things that the main campus offers at her fingertips," she often joins activities on the NMSU-Grants campus. Additionally, she keeps up with main campus happenings by following all things NMSU on social media.

Tylerann started as a nursing major; however, because of COVID she realized her passion for securing access to healthcare and reducing food insecurity for Indigenous people. She saw how significant disparities in access to basic necessities (such as water and electricity) and the prevalence of chronic underlying illnesses allowed the pandemic to wreak havoc on the Navajo Nation. Witnessing this, Tylerann decided she wanted to work with Indigenous communities to advocate for change at both the individual and policy levels.

She jumped at the opportunity for an internship at the New Mexico Social Justice and Equity Institute (NMSJEI) in Gallup, NM, that allowed her to explore serious, real-world issues such as missing and murdered Indigenous women. Being part of collaborations with professionals within the Indigenous communities and reservations is what Tylerann is most proud of during her time at NMSU. For example, she worked on environmental justice issues during her internship, which included helping NMSJEI's director with a case study examining how proximity to uranium mining sites affects babies.

Another example is her participation in a forum for the communities around Gallup to discuss bringing wind energy to the area. Tylerann provided information, took notes, and served as a resource for both the communities and the company involved. As a member of the Indigenous community, Tylerann could frame questions in a way that elicited a useful exchange of information and provided a comprehensive understanding in the community.

Dr. Isabel Latz notes that Tylerann is not only "an incredibly committed student," but she cares about the progress of others, wanting to hear about the development of her fellow students, "actively listening to their concerns, asking insightful questions, and offering advice."

Tylerann intends to continue her public health studies, but she first wants to carry on as a vigorous advocate for healthy Indigenous communities and be part of the policy changes necessary to create a more equitable society.