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Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF) - Summer, 2023 Application


*Unrecognized Existence: the Tuscarora Nation of North Carolina's Experience with  
Sovereignty and Government Recognition*

**Project Goal(s) or Aim(s):**

I intend to learn about attitudes toward state and federal recognition from Tuscarora people living in North Carolina. Through the use of oral history interviews, I aim to gain an understanding of their lived experiences and how this shapes their worldviews. I hope to give an opportunity for a diverse array of Tuscarora people to share their perspectives and create a well-rounded collection of their thoughts. Additionally, I plan to strengthen the knowledge of the history of the Tuscarora Nation of North Carolina and how it affects their struggle for recognition today in an amalgamated creation. I want this project to be something that the Tuscarora people can look at proudly as a representation of their perceptions and as a tool for non-Tuscarora people to use to further their learning on the heterogenous experiences within North Carolina Natives.

**Project Background and Significance:**

The potential importance of this project is that it would give voice to members of the Tuscarora Nation of North Carolina during a time when the erasure of the tribe is all too common. Although the Tuscarora people have influenced the cultures of other North Carolina tribes, most notably the Lumbee, they are not given the respect that is warranted ("Our History - Tuscarora Nation of North Carolina" 2023). The Tuscarora Nation of North Carolina is not state or federally recognized, a unique classification for North Carolina tribes. This lack of recognition leads to more invisibility for tribal members and an absence of their inclusion in tribal coalition projects throughout North Carolina. Additionally, much of the research and public discourse surrounding the Tuscarora within North Carolina stops after the



Tuscarora War in the early 1700s led to many members migrating to New York (Martin 2016). The stories of those who remained, their fight against assimilation, and their modern efforts of cultural revitalization deserve similar coverage. By using oral histories, members of the tribe would be allowed to share their family histories, their opinions on topics related to the Tuscarora people, and an opportunity to further preserve the tribe's culture and struggle for sovereignty.

I will guide my project with Linda Tuhiwai Smith's Indigenous Research Agenda and the Oral History Association's *OHA Principles and Best Practices*. Smith's framework prioritises the community's wants and needs while conducting the research for the ultimate goal of self-determination (Tuhiwai Smith 2012, 133). By incorporating input from tribal members at various stages of the project, I will engage in community-based research. I will use the Oral History Association's guidelines to ensure my research is ethical, considerate, and accessible ("OHA Principles and Best Practices" 2009).

### **Methods:**

The first two weeks of this project will be crucial as they will include narrowing down the potential participants, scheduling the oral history interviews, and conducting pre-interviews. Centering this time for working with participants on schedule will leave less room for scheduling conflicts once the interviews begin. The pre-interviews will give space for participants to learn more in-depth about the project and ask questions about their participation. This will also enable me to hear from the participants what they hope to personally get out of the project and any input for the best execution of the final product. Participants will be found through my connections to tribal members, as well as through the UNC Carolina Indian Circle and American Indian Center networks. Additionally, popular social media groups for the North Carolina Native community, like NCNAYO and Triangle

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Culture, will be utilised to ensure a wide range of perspectives can be brought to the project.

Next, I will begin doing general research on participants to gain background knowledge before conducting the interviews. Because the interviews are dependent on the schedules of the participants, I do not have an exact timeline of when they will take place. However, I plan to finish them promptly to leave room for follow-up interviews, if they are needed.

Throughout my time conducting the interviews, I will further research the Tuscarora Nation of North Carolina's struggle for sovereignty, in both the legal and cultural spheres. This will include research through the UNC Digital Collections Repository, the NC Department of Administration's public documents, the Wilson Library Special Collections, and through consultation with other Tuscarora researchers within North Carolina. After conducting the interviews, they will be transcribed and documented alongside abstracts and field notes for each recording. Following the completion of the transcriptions, I will share them with participants and confirm they are satisfied with the direction of the project through post-interviews. I will also begin collecting any photos/videos that participants are willing to share and conducting follow-up interviews if any elaboration is needed on specific concepts. Finally, I will combine all the research by constructing the digital exhibit. This will include highlights of common themes found throughout the interview, varying perspectives, and brief descriptions of participants. The site will also include an overview of Tuscarora history within North Carolina, with a special focus on the Tuscarora War, the full interviews, and a timeline for their recognition struggle.

### **Preliminary Work and Experience:**

My experience as a Lumbee person has helped prepare me to conduct these interviews to a great degree. My knowledge of the tribe and the complicated Lumbee/Tuscarora history will allow for insider research that may help participants feel more comfortable expressing their

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opinions on the complex issues we will cover. Additionally, I am a third-semester intern with the Southern Oral History Program at the UNC Center for Study of the American South. This internship has taught me the most useful methodologies for oral histories and has given me training in ethical practices. Through the internship, I have worked on the Carolina Pride Alumni Network's *The Story of Us* project as an interviewer and transcriber and have conducted my interviews separate from this project. My most relevant coursework is AMST 210: This Place Called "The South." The class covers various populations in the American south, including Native populations. This class, taught by the director of the Southern Oral History Program Dr. ██████████ has greatly bolstered my research and writing skills.

**Final Products and Dissemination Plan:**

This project will culminate with a digital exhibit highlighting moments in the interviews and showcasing the history of the Tuscarora Nation of North Carolina to give context to the interviews. The full interviews and transcriptions will furthermore be available on the website. Ideally, the exhibit will include photographs and videos from participants and ones found through my independent research that enhance the learning experience for the general public audience. The exhibit will be shared with the Tuscarora Nation of North Carolina, Carolina Indian Circle, the UNC American Indian Center, and the Center for Study of the American South so it can be further disseminated to interested parties.

**IRB/IACUC statement:**

This proposal requires IRB approval as it involves interviews with human subjects. Total word count: 1115



## Bibliography

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Tuhiwai Smith, Linda. Essay. In *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Dunedin, N.Z.: Otago University Press, 2012.