The CPD welcomes Erica Ficklin, one of the Association of University Centers on Disability's Diversity and Inclusion research fellows. She is working under Dr. Eduardo Ortiz to learn more about the perception of disability among Native American communities in Utah.

“The main premise of it is that disability may be defined differently [among native cultures],” Ficklin said. The researchers will approach the issue with open-ended questions like, “If a person has a disability, what qualities would they have?”

It’s pioneering research into a topic that has barely been studied, Ficklin said. “There hasn’t been a lot of research about disabilities within the native community. This is part of the reason that we’re starting so broad.” In addition, she said, the research that has been done in the past has been stigmatizing. “The tribes don’t have to allow research that they feel is particularly harmful.”

According to the AUCD Diversity & Inclusion Toolkit website, Native Americans are being diagnosed with a disability at six times the rate of the general population.

Ficklin and Ortiz will employ culturally appropriate methods to study the issue, which will also be the subject of Ficklin’s master’s thesis.

The project will last through September 2018.