



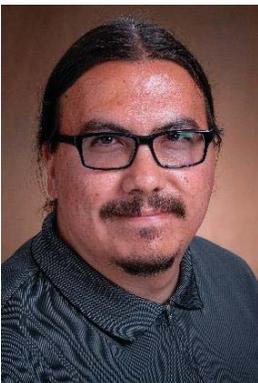
Established Program to  
Stimulate Competitive Research

(FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE)

### Full Circle: A Journey of One Student

(FARGO, ND)

Growing up, he asked why and how things worked. He recalls traveling with family, driving over bridges and having his interest piqued. “Why was this long structure able to float over a large body of water? Why does it stay like that?” Those questions and many others are what Austin Allard credits with driving his choices to select a career in engineering.



While in high school on the Turtle Mountain reservation, Allard participated in the NATURE program (Nurturing American Tribal Undergraduate Research and Education), which introduced him to different types of STEM fields, including math, science and engineering. From the professors who helped teach the classes, “they got me thinking I could do this because they presented the information in a fun way,” Allard noted. When he expressed interest, his high school teacher, Ms. Renee Aalund, got him in contact with one of the visiting professors. That created an opportunity for him to work on a research project with a professor, Dr. Eakalak Khan, in civil engineering. On weekends, Allard would travel to NDSU to work with Khan on immobilized yeast cells that could filter out waste water.

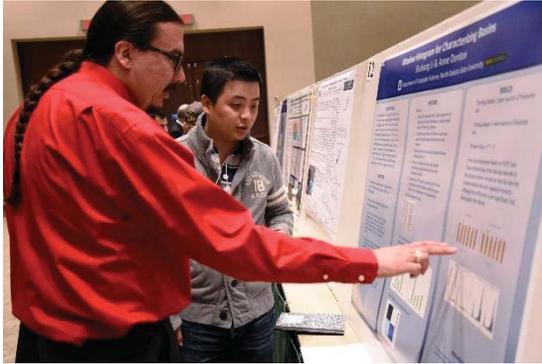
Allard was intrigued.

“I was always good at school,” Allard recalled, “but I didn’t know what I wanted to do. Most people don’t. But going through NATURE and seeing the different options available, and having professors available and presenting it in a different way, made it really nice.” The mentorship when he was younger and not really sure, he noted, was critical to trying to take the next step.

Allard relates the next stage of his journey: Being a shy introvert by nature, he took a leap of faith and enrolled at NDSU. Once there, he became an active member of Native American Student Association (NASA) and American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) as well as the Gold Star Marching Band. NATURE was such a pivotal component in piquing Austin’s interest in pursuing engineering that he also continued as a student mentor during his time at NDSU. He managed to corral enough extra time during the week to study and earn his bachelor’s and master’s degrees in civil engineering.

With the encouragement of mentors, he then voyaged south to obtain a doctorate degree in the same field at Texas A&M University. After consuming what he humorously referred to as a “lion’s share” of knowledge, Allard returned to his home state to assist with ND EPSCoR’s mission to aid aspiring American Indian scientists, engineers, and mathematicians in attaining undergraduate and advanced degrees in their chosen fields. He was also involved with the Pre-Engineering Education

Collaboration (PEEC) and worked with tribal college students transitioning to the university to help build the technical and emotional skills needed to graduate with an engineering degree.



This fall, Allard took the next step in his career, and it's one that has brought him full circle, back to his hometown of Belcourt, ND. He began teaching at Turtle Mountain Community College as the Pre-Engineering Instructor, helping students understand the fine points of Statics, Mechanics and Materials and Differential Equations. Adding to the full circle concept? His former teacher, Aalund, is now a colleague at TMCC.

“My goal is now to get more students interested in engineering or other STEM programs,” Allard said. “Programs like NATURE got me interested, and it can help other students who may be unsure about their future. I had mentors who were always there for me. Now, I want to help other students.”

NATURE has been funded by ND EPSCoR for over 20 years, one of the many programs that help students and researchers throughout the state. The North Dakota Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (ND EPSCoR) has a mission to increase research competitiveness in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) throughout North Dakota. EPSCoR was founded in 1978 by the National Science Foundation for states like ND that have traditionally lacked strong research efforts, to allow them to compete more successfully for merit-based grants/contracts from several federal research agencies that support STEM research.

*(Photo: top, Austin Allard; bottom, Allard talking with a student at annual ND EPSCoR conference.)*

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