

BRIDGE PROGRAM TO NATIVE AMERICAN STUDENTS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Since 1992, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has continuously funded a project at New Mexico State University (NMSU) under the grant title: “ Bridges to the Future: Associate to the Baccalaureate Program at New Mexico State University”. The project title is: “Bridge to Native American Students in Community Colleges” (abbreviated: Bridge Program). This program collaborates with regional community colleges which have relatively large enrollments of Native American students and includes: UNM-Gallup; Dine’ College at Tsaile; AZ; Dine’ College at Shiprock, NM; and, San Juan College at Farmington, NM. Collectively, these institutions enroll over 5,700 Native American students. This is the largest concentration of Native American students in higher education in the USA. The Bridge Program seeks to offer opportunities and interventions that promote the transfer of Native American students to baccalaureate degree programs in the biomedical sciences (biochemistry, chemistry, biology, molecular biology, microbiology, computer science, environmental sciences, etc.) at four-year, research-intensive universities, including NMSU. Since 1992, 157 of 223 students (70.4%), who have participated in this program, have transferred to a four-year, research-intensive university. Of the 141 students who have transferred, 67.4% have completed B.S. degrees in a basic biomedical science discipline within ten semesters of transferring. These statistics compare with an average 16% transfer rate for all students (no ethnic distinction) in USA community colleges and a 47% completion rate of the B.S. degree by all students in a college or university in the state of New Mexico. Moreover, 40.3% of BS degree earners in the Bridge Program have entered graduate schools where 24 have earned graduate degrees (19 MS degrees, 5 PhD degrees, 6 PhD candidates in progress). Native American students who participate in this program compete far above national and state averages. Thus, this program ranks among the most successful programs that address the higher educational needs of Native American students in the biomedical science disciplines.

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