

High school students from across Michigan visited Northern Michigan University in Marquette recently for the College Prep Medicine Wheel Academy. The academy was the brainchild of two women in the NMU Center for Native American Studies: faculty member Adriana Greci Green and director April Lindala.

They realized there were limited opportunities for Native American high school students in the region to obtain an in-depth campus experience (unlike middle school students who attend a summer leadership program at NMU). They also recognized that there was little Native American representation in the health sciences, particularly nursing.

The two-year program was funded by the NMU Wildcat Innovation Fund and the NMU College of Arts and Sciences. Several partners from Marquette General Health System, along with faculty and students from the university's School of Nursing and Clinical Sciences Department, contributed to the success of the program.

“We have been hearing very positive and enthusiastic feedback from the youth that visited with us and their chaperones, as well as from the faculty who participated,” said Greci Green. “We are grateful to the NMU students who ran the workshops, mentored these high school students and shared their own personal passions about their chosen fields. It was engaging, informational and fun. I don't think the youth were ever bored or disinterested; tired, perhaps, but definitely into it. We also had community participation in the karaoke/drum social and some special time at the fire site with my colleague Kenn Pitawanakwat, who brought it all back to center.”

NMU nursing professors Julie Higbie and Katie Menard shared their expertise and introduced academy participants to curricula in three programs: bachelor of science in nursing, licensed practical nurse and surgical technology.

“This was a great opportunity for us to communicate directly to potential students information about career opportunities, ideal high school courses to take and a bit about college life,” said Higbie, who spent 23 years as a hospital nurse. “If students are looking for a lifelong career in health care that can take them anywhere their dreams can imagine, then nursing is the job for them.”

Menard said, “I enjoy the fast paced, constantly changing, patient-centered environment of nursing. I have a passion for what I do and feel lucky to be able to share the knowledge I have gained with future nurses.”

Participants in the College Prep Medicine Wheel Academy, such as high school senior Niim Reinhardt from Gwinn, said it opened their eyes to the variety of health-related career choices available.

“I now know that health care doesn't always have to mean being a doctor or nurse,” she added. “There are many people that go into fields like speech, physical therapy and hearing. This is a great way to introduce the health field to those who aren't interested in it only because they know nothing about it. It's also a great way to get more background information on the career you choose because you actually get to see what it is that those people do for a living and that influences your choice a lot.”

Betsy Trudeau, a senior at Hannahville Indian School, said, “It made me want to be a doctor even more. My favorite part of the program was when I got to watch an open-heart surgery at the hospital during my shadowing. I also learned about the perfusionists and what role they have in the operating room. I would suggest this program to other students who are interested in the health field, only because there aren't many opportunities to go and visit inside a hospital and to meet the people we did.”

When asked if the program changed their viewpoints about the health field, Manistique junior Felicia Reid wrote, "I learned more about what I would like to work in medical field and how competitive it is." One student commented in the anonymous survey that the best part of the program was being at the Center for Native American Studies fire site and learning more about Anishinaabe culture.

The next session of the College Prep Medicine Wheel Academy will take place in mid-May of 2010. Anyone interested in learning more should call the NMU Center for Native American Studies at 906-227-1397.